

REPORT

20 November 2012

Meshaal confirms, “Netanyahu requested ceasefire”

The head of Hamas’s Political Bureau has claimed that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu requested a ceasefire through the Americans, Europeans and Egyptians. Khaled Meshaal was quoted as saying that Netanyahu asked several parties to mediate with Hamas to reach an end to Israel’s military operation. Predictably, a senior Israeli official denied Meshaal’s claim.

“Israel is ready for a ground operation in Gaza,” said the anonymous official, “and it wants to overthrow Hamas.” He accused Hamas of trying to save face and appear victorious before its people and the Arab world. A reader of Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth wrote in to suggest that the Israeli government is “tormented by how to emerge from the Gaza operation with a sense of victory”. If true – and it probably is, given past experience – then the official’s claim about Hamas reflects Israel’s own need to “save face” after much hard-line rhetoric over the past week.

Meshaal acknowledged that the Israelis are ready and able to carry out a ground operation in Gaza, but he insisted that the occupation forces “know that it would not be a picnic”. The possibility of young Israeli conscripts going home in body bags is not something that any Israeli commander or politician will relish.

Speaking at a press conference in Cairo, Meshaal said that the people of Palestine may not like the idea of a ground operation but they do not fear it. “Our fighters do not have much in the way of weapons,” he added, “but they have a strong will.” He noted that the Palestinian resistance in Gaza has an Operations Room, of which he is very proud. “Nevertheless, the side which started the war should stop it on our conditions.”

Commenting on the reaction of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and the lands occupied in 1948 (Israel), Meshaal said: “I am proud of what our people have done. They will be doing the same as the people of Gaza soon.”



On Fatah and national reconciliation

The Hamas leader described the national split between Hamas and Fatah as “the work of Satan” and called the two groups “brothers”. He expressed his hope that reconciliation will be possible through the efforts of the new Egyptian government. “We hope to unite on the grounds of resistance and principles, not around concessions.”

Meshaal said the latest aggression presents an historic opportunity to achieve unity; that Fatah and Hamas are brothers; and that they should unite with one point of reference and adhere to the national constants and resistance. There should be a new Palestinian programme in the light of the Arab Spring.

He called for a strategic reassessment by Palestinians and Arabs that is consistent with the new realities in the region and that they should raise the level of their political demands and aspirations to match the spirit of the Arab Spring.

A new beginning

Mr. Meshaal appreciated the apparent sympathy of the Egyptian regime, noting that Prime Minister Hisham Kandil’s visit to Gaza last week was a sign of the change in Cairo, just as the visit of the Tunisian delegation reflected positive changes in Tunis. He called for the Arabs to review all the previous reconciliation initiatives and said that he had spoken to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. “The situation today under the new Egyptian and other Arab regimes is different,” he said. “The Arabs now own their decisions.”

Calling on free people around the world to stand with the Palestinians in Gaza, Meshaal condemned the support given to Israel by Western leaders. “How can they back Israel as it kills women and children in the name of ‘self-defence’?” he asked.

Addressing those in the West he said, “Your future interest in the region will be guaranteed by the people of the region; by the legitimacy of the region.”

His comments were made before the announcement that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is breaking off from Barack Obama’s Asian tour to visit “Jerusalem, Ramallah and Cairo” in an effort to broker a ceasefire. America, of course, is no neutral honest broker in this asymmetric conflict, and it has already been noted that Mrs Clinton is going to Ramallah and not Gaza, the target of the latest aggression. The democratically-elected Hamas ministers are,



it seems, still personae non gratae, even though their agreement is, by definition, essential for a ceasefire to work.

Sinai and the Rafah Crossing

When questioned about the Rafah border crossing, Khaled Meshaal pointed out that discussions about its status and opening times were ongoing before the latest Israeli aggression. He hopes that it will operate like any normal crossing between two countries so that the Palestinians can stop using tunnels to smuggle basic necessities like food.

With regards to the suggestion that Palestinians could move from Gaza to Sinai, Meshaal said that Sinai is Egyptian territory and is not a viable alternative for Gaza. The war against the Palestinians will not, he insisted, succeed in driving them from Gaza, their own land of which they are proud.

