

To my beloved leaders of Hamas!!!

This week commemorates a quarter of century that I have spent with Hamas, and before that, with the Islamic Brotherhood. I was a young man. Now I am in my forties. White hair has taken over my head. I have nothing left in this world except the good deeds with which I will meet my God.

I have loved this movement with all my heart, and I have given my life to it. I have experienced it and I lived through its activities, be it in journalism, politics or administrative.

I traveled along its narrow paths...

I accompanied and lived with its great, high ranking leaders such as Sheik Ahmad Yassin and Dr. Abdul Azziz Rantisi and Ismail Abu Shanab and Ibrahim Al Maqgneh. I have debated with them political issues and issues relating to the homeland. I carried its name in my heart for five years while I was in jail.

I worked as its chief writer in my newspaper, The Homeland, and in my newspaper, The Message. I defended its principles and its ideas, but not from a narrow partisan perspective. I always saw that the dress of my national homeland was larger.

I became the spokesman for its government and then spokesman for its prime minister. I was put in the jails of the Palestinian security services because I believed in freedom of speech, I believed in constructive criticism and I wrote about everything, even about President Arafat, may God bless him, who chastised me several times.

I saw Hamas while it was growing and while it was standing on its feet. I saw Hamas while it was growing and its house was expanding to include thousands of young men who were pure believers who loved the homeland and loved to work diligently for this homeland.

I, myself, worked diligently day and night to give advice, on paper and in person. I used to see in Hamas my dream of a free homeland and a good life, my ambition for freedom and independence. In spite of this, I respected and

appreciated all the other Palestinian forces that had left their fingerprints on Palestinian history, especially Fatah, which has a long heritage of resistance.

I maintained a good relationship with all... Hamas became my tent. I spent a lot of time with Hamas, more than I spent with my wife and children. I was intent on seeing this movement progress and, through this movement, its project will advance and bear fruit. I saw it move from stage to stage and from one phase to the next, from Dawa and charitable work and jihad to governance and politics.

It was a very rich experience with a lot of problems and challenges. And every experience has its successes and its mistakes, its negative points and its positive points. So, has Hamas assessed its rich experience in an objective, professional manner that will guarantee that it will be able to overcome its mistakes, avoid making more mistakes and learn from what has happened?

Hamas today has become a big, broad movement with strong roots, with its name reaching every satellite, radio and newspaper. It became the highlight and important link to all the political phases and a very strong player in the mid-line of the Palestinian field.

This phase is the most difficult, demanding broader thinking, more tolerance and a far-sighted vision that will light our path. There is no doubt that the passing of years, with their many conflicts and speedy changes from one stage to the other, have tainted Hamas's white color.

Hamas did not change its ideas, its mode of work or its beliefs _ a situation that has left it characterized by traditionalism and lethargy in responding to speedy changes in the area.

The period of governance and moving into politics was an extremely tense period that forced Hamas to confront a lot of complicated issues... Hamas had several paths and several visions... Hamas got extremely confused and experienced a lot of surprises because of an absence of planning and absence of readiness for the rapid changes that were taking place.

Hamas tried to adapt, but it was difficult. It was not easy to escape the narrow cloak of organizing to the wider cloak of governing. It was not easy to escape from the thoughts of being in the opposition to the thoughts of

being the government, especially since the movement hadn't come to terms with the challenges of politics.

It was not easy for Hamas to carry a burden that didn't fit its political and organizational capacity. So it stumbled a lot in spite of its attempts to rise again more than once and in spite of its attempts to adapt to local and international reality. The difficult challenges it faced were much bigger than the movement.

Hamas found itself in a complicated conflict with all sides, without exception – the president, Fatah, the security apparatuses, the international community. Then the point came where the military step was taken, which deepened the crisis for Hamas on all sides and with the different forces and factions and the PLO.

Then came its conflict with the journalists and the media and the NGOs. Hamas was consumed in side battles which it should not have fallen into. It should not have wasted its energy, which should have been saved for its national liberation project. It should not have fallen into the trap of confronting all sides at once. Maybe Hamas believed that it could change the local and international dynamics through its power in the street and through its control over the authority and control over the parliament.

However, it did not realize that politics have special, detailed considerations that are different from military force and popular marches. These considerations are based on mutual benefits. These considerations are based on creating alliances and understanding when to attack and operating in an intelligent, cautious, tactical manner. The problem is that Hamas's lack of political flexibility made it lose a lot of what it should have easily gained. It has lost a golden opportunity to consolidate the ideology of political Islam.

Additionally, political change was forced upon Hamas. It was forced to respond hastily, and its rushed response lacked planning and vision. Hamas lost the offensive and initiative. Hamas could have won Fatah and the Palestinian forces and even the presidency to its side and to its program had it been clever in marketing it in a wider, more flexible framework that is non-factional

It did not need to surrender its principles. Hamas could have led the Palestinians with the skill of a captain, like a skillful sailor and the captain of

a ship. It could have found ways of seizing opportunities that had fallen into its hands, but it was too rushed and because it thought that it could carry out its reforms exclusively through decrees or governmental rulings. The situation was more complex than this and had Hamas had a broader vision it would have move gradually into governance, it would have taken slow steps as Erdogan in Turkey has done, where he entered government and parliament and the presidency without conflict, without violence and without bloodshed.

Has the picture changed?

Today the picture has changed and Hamas has become the venue for differences and debate inside the Palestinian arena. It has become a venue for criticism from all the Palestinian factions, human rights groups and the media. I would have liked for Hamas to achieve its objectives... toward giving the best model in governance and administration. I would have liked it to be a comfort for everybody by unifying people around our national goals. But please believe me that I am today worried that this young party will be lost in the traffic jam of conflicts that have increased all around it. I am worried that it will be lonely, alienated in the field without an ally or friend. I am worried about the growing internal enemies and hostility. I am worried about its decrees. I am worried about its loss of supporters who chose it to represent their hopes and dreams and I am worried about its increase in its mistakes and stumbles. I am worried because I love it more than Antar loved Ablah.

I do not want to flagellate my movement. What I want is for it to reform its path and correct its mistakes. I take no notice of those who constantly accuse me of self-flagellation because I insist on speaking out. My thoughts stem from my conscience and vision of a homeland and from the homeland to the movement and not the other way around.

I believe that the reality is that truth is the property of everybody and should not be put in a hiding place or tunnel of one particular faction. I believe that constructive criticism builds and raises – but hiding mistakes only makes things much worse.

The movement needs deep introspection. The movement needs a true objective review of everything that has happened. The movement needs an assessment in order to correct itself and to correct its path. The rush of daily

events has stolen the movement's ability to have a far-sighted vision and has stolen from the party the moments in which it can enjoy deep thinking and planning for what is to come. Therefore our pain and worries have increased and attacks on us have increased.

An open letter:

Hamas has become today an open book. Everybody has started talking about everything. Its leaders, its resistance, its media. It is no more a book of secrets. Therefore I see it as my right to speak out. This time I write my letter in the open because I wrote a lot of secret letters before and research and suggestions and opinions. I do not know if they received any acceptance or not. They say that there are a lot of conspiracies and plans to bring down Hamas and the government and they talk about the group of coup d'état makers, they talk about Dayton's plan and other things.

I understand the impact, but what I'm interested in more than anything else is how we will confront, plan and distance ourselves from hallucinations that have no basis in order to live in reality, with all its facts, numbers and information, that is far from exaggeration and suspicions. How do we get out from these suspicions and doubts to the wider reality that we can work on in the sunlight and where we can find our wisdom and our expertise? How do we think in a scientific, professional way, away from the media slogans and chanting that closes our minds off from real rhythms? What we need most is pure moments that will get us out of this static that besieges us and prevents us from seeing the vision of others, prevents us from seeing half of the Palestinian cup.

The determining factor has given Hamas more than it can take. I can see that what Hamas did in its military takeover of the Gaza Strip is unjust. I consider it a strategic mistake that has burdened the movement with more than it can bear. Hamas could have dealt with this crisis like a skillful doctor that does no harm. It is true that it solved a security problem. But it produced a thousand other political problems that Hamas could have done without. Look at today: instead of Hamas expanding in its international relations which started during the national unity government, the movement has become alienated and besieged in a narrow strip. The suffocation around it has increased, the siege around it has increased and the suffering of the people has increased. It lost the unity government that was its gate to

national partnership and a way of sharing its burdens that it now it must bear alone.

The separation between the West Bank and Gaza has deepened, the level of hostility between Hamas and Fatah has grown and Hamas is in a crisis with all other forces and factions. The security crisis moved to the West Bank and Hamas members there are suffering from hostilities and ruthless activities against them. The salary crisis has started and the problem of the crossings has emerged. The problem of the ministries between Gaza and the West Bank has also arisen. We have become confused in our own homeland. We have become distracted, torn, and worried about our future and fate. We live every minute of our lives under the sword of tension and in a cold war between Gaza and Ramallah. The newspapers have headlines about war between the sons of the same nation... Please God, where have we come and where are we heading and what catastrophe is waiting for us?

A difficult experience

Then the experience of Hamas came in ruling the Gaza Strip which is full of hurdles and confusion because of the heavy responsibilities and the new experience in governance. Hasn't Hamas learned from its experience during its tense time during the tense times of the Hamas government? Hasn't Hamas learned from the siege and the internal conflicts to stay away from unilateral rule? Wasn't there time to think and consider opening horizons instead of closing them?

I was sympathetic to my Hamas brothers and I was afraid they would fall into the Gaza trap. However, they have fallen into a bigger trap which has become a burden on us in every moment of our lives. We are exhausted and we could have spared ourselves all this pain during 24 hours we were busy with Gaza and its endless problems.

I was watching a television program on settlement expansion in Jerusalem and the takeover of houses in the old city of Hebron and I was feeling sad over where we've sunk from being sidetracked, lost in a desert that takes us nowhere.

I have to admit that Hamas does not have patience and tolerance and the gradualist policies that absorb enemies to deal with problems and crises

because it does not have a strategic vision that should equip it with a bigger vision to walk in crooked and bad roads.

Hamas has sunk in the details of the health strike. Hamas has sunk in the Friday prayers. Hamas has sunk in the school exam results and in the traveling for the Hajj. Hamas has drowned in the problems of the executive force and its confrontations with the public and hundreds of issues which should not have preoccupied its time away from its national project, its reform project, its change project, the project of removing and fighting occupation.

I wished my brothers in Gaza had a vision and solution to solve this crisis so that they would move on to other phases in their lives with wisdom, thinking all the time of the national interest over factional interests. When the movement initiates this, it will not look weak, but strong.

The national interest is the only interest that should remove the Palestinian state from paralysis and stagnation. I stated earlier that the passage of time is not in the interest of anybody and the Palestinian people are the ones that will pay the price for these illusionary battles.

What will we achieve at the end after the military takeover, after the stubbornness after the ongoing debate?

Dialogue another time?

Dialogue for the fourth, fifth and tenth time. Are we going to return to Mecca or meet in Cairo or Sana or Damascus or are we going to look for another capital that will collect our injured souls and treat our ills? I am sure it is very easy for us to solve all our issues here. Yes, here. If everybody concentrates on the national interest and leaves all narrow considerations we do not have to travel far, we do not need round tables or square tables, what we need are pure hearts and open minds. Just as there are people inside Hamas who are zealous for the homeland there are in Fatah as well the same kind of people and in both PFLP and DFLP and Islamic Jihad and all other forces, all these hands could walk together and remove us from this cycle of misery and unhappiness.

Wrong practices:

Every authority is the center of criticism, and its negative points are highlighted more than its positive points. How about if the reality we are living is Gaza, which is a problem itself politically, economically and socially? There are a lot of wrong practices that distorted the image of the movement and harmed it, whether they are the arrests or the attacks or confiscation of people's property. (In the West Bank the security apparatuses did more than this and crossed all red lines.) I would have hoped that the Hamas government would be stronger in confronting the breaches, but unfortunately these breaches kept reoccurring, becoming our capital in the bank of the homeland. I wondered about the beautiful picture of the movement, that picture which we have dreamt of presenting to our bruised people. For example, I saw that publishing the security documents in the irrational way we did was a lost opportunity to try to reform the security institution.

Defaming and exposing is not reform. On the contrary, the movement has lost an important winning card that could have supported its demands to reform this institution. We should have waited, we should have been tolerant. We should have studied the issue instead of rushing because what we did did not give any added value to the minds of the people. The Palestinian security establishment is well known to be corrupt for 10 years. What was important was how to reform this institution. What kind of program and what kind of plans did we have for such an effort? I have to admit that my brothers in the leadership of the movement find it very difficult to confess their mistakes. I tell my brothers among the leaders of Hamas that confessing wrongdoing is part of Islam's law and is considered among the high morals and is an indication of confidence and courage.

(Go back to the stories of Omar the Caliphate, Abu Obeida and to all the prominent disciples. We are not better than them.) The policy of offering excuses or the policy of escapism will not be for the benefit of the movement at all. Hanging mistakes has become the daily practice. Every problem has found an accused perpetrator. The movement is in bad need of developing a method of accountability and candor, since this is part of what God has decreed and it is what the Prophet Mohammed has decreed. When the Prophet Mohammed, God bless his soul, stood on the minbar and called on people to take rights from him, even though he doesn't make mistakes, he was indicating the positive aspects of open criticism and spreading it as a culture and not only an internal organizational behavior.

You are in need of three:

In brief the movement is in need of three things.

1. A political vision that will help it to escape its crisis in its relationship with the Palestinian people, the regional arena and the international arena.
2. The movement is in need of the culture of co-existence with others on the basis of cooperation and respect, which will help it to leave the crisis in its relationship with the factions, especially Fatah.
3. The movement is in need of consolidating the principles of the professional institution through outlining the decision making side and consolidating the principles of revisions accountability and treating mistakes.

Now with a little detail I say the following: the movement is in need of a mature, clear political vision that will allow it to escape the crisis of its relationship with the Palestinian Authority and with the regional players as well as in the international arena.

Hamas' confused political vision has created always a point of conflict and confrontation between it and the different sides, local and international. It stood as an obstacle in reaching political achievements because of the large scope of resistance work and because of its presence in the legislative power and executive power. In my opinion, Hamas could have advanced in consolidating the ideology of political Islam through mature governance.

Hamas is not asked to relinquish its rights and its principles for the Palestinian issue, but two things are demanded of it: a clear strategic vision that will combine resistance with political work and a flexible ability in tactics and political maneuvering. I admit that Hamas lacks political guile and is facing politics with rigid positions and empty slogans and many times prefers to escape from the political square towards the ideology of "resistance is our strategic choice," in spite of the fact that resistance is a tool not a strategy. It is a tool that serves the political objective, which Hamas has not achieved up to this moment.

2. The movement must deal with conspiracy theories that have nested in the mind for a long time. These theories, which kept it awake and made it believe that the whole world was against it (and the situation is not actually

like this) has created a lot of skepticism and doubts toward others. The presence of opponents to the movement and others is a natural thing in this universe. (Even prophets have enemies; God said “we created for every prophet an enemy from the criminals.”) And Hamas is not unique.

The important thing is how Hamas confronts the plans that are meant to weaken it and drag it away from its objectives. Unfortunately, Hamas confronted these through a muddled policy which was based on accusations, conflict and animosity towards others without putting practical, realistic plans and programs to confront all the challenges that were posed in front of it. Hence, every time it escaped one crisis it fell into another.

3. Hamas is in bad need of treating the complex of co-existence. This complex which stemmed from a narrow factional upbringing and through factional media has helped people distance themselves from this movement. Hamas has to pay attention to the fact that the people’s support for it and not only its members support for it and its good relations with the powers and factions is part of its successful mission. Unfortunately, Hamas lost a lot of forces that it could have won over with a little bit of wisdom and knowledge and good behavior. Hamas should realize that when it works unilaterally away from the other Palestinians it will only weaken its ability to carry the Palestinian project and it will increase its enemies. Hamas should never have lost a strong ally like Fatah. (In spite of all the negative points that are nesting in it).

The differences between the two parties should never have grown to the point of revenge and hatred, to the point of boiling point in the blood. Hamas is in need of a real revision toward how it looks at those outside its organizational circle. It should educate its members in the language of reconciliation and acceptance of others and cooperating with them. This is the healthy culture that guarantees that Hamas can grow and can increase its support and allies and I hope it will do that very quickly.

4. Hamas needs to filter and clean its media and remove it from its narrow factional objective. Hamas’ media is confrontational, is very aggressive and ruthless in its answers and it can be characterized by extremism and ruthless descriptions which are not part of the well known diplomatic norms (such as calling people traitors, heretics and accusing people of allying themselves with the enemy).

My letter is long. Hamas did not engage in the language of tolerance, pardon and reconciliation. Hamas' message touched upon everybody, the president, military, legislators and factions. This message has created a state of division and revulsion in a way that does not help Hamas weave good relations. This message is lacking in tolerance, pardon and reconciliation... Hamas' message could have been a magnet that attracted everybody to it, it could have been a message of reconciliation. Hamas has the right to defend its positions strongly without the need to hurt people or scandalize them without exaggeration or accusations against them. Hamas should understand that every criticism of it not mean that whoever says that criticism is an enemy.

The end:

I have reached the end of my words. I do not claim to have a monopoly on the truth. I do not want fame. What I wanted more than fame is to say truthful words that will penetrate the hearts of the loved ones in this movement, words that would penetrate to their minds demanding proper understanding. I hope that the leaders of the movement are not hasty in judging what is in this letter. This is not a place for irrational response, but is a place for studying and research according to Prophet Mohammed.

I will stay sincere to this movement. I will love it, but only under the umbrella of the wide nation, under the umbrella of the ideologies that bring people together and do not separate and repel. This movement will be an important symbol for the entire nation and part of its historical heritage. It will remain a warm heart and a sanctuary. Whatever is said about it its history will not be wiped out by the mistakes. Let us preserve it in its beautiful form a movement that gives for every heart and let it be a movement that is close to every mind. Whatever I have said correctly is from God. Whatever I have said wrong is from me and the devil.

Peace.