



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

September 23, 2009

Hamas' smile attack for the West: Ken Livingstone interviews Khaled Mashaal, a case study



Ken Livingstone, extreme anti-Israel pro-Hamas left winger
(Photo from Wikipedia, September 22, 2009).

Overview

1. Khaled Mashaal, head of the Hamas political bureau in Damascus, was recently (September 17, 2009) interviewed by Ken Livingstone for the *New Statesman*. The interview, **laced with vicious anti-Israel propaganda**, represented the Palestinians as the victims of Israeli oppression, and aimed at Western readers, it evaded clarification of Hamas' extremist ideology. Khaled Mashaal called on the international community and the Arab world to exert pressure on Israel, expressed Hamas' willingness to open up to the rest of the world and sought "to establish good relations and conduct constructive dialogue with all those concerned with Palestine."

2. Ken Livingstone, who conducted the interview, is extremely left-wing and overwhelmingly biased against Israel. He was Mayor of London until 2008 and a Labor MP until he was expelled from the party in 2000. He prefaced the interview by saying that peace could only be achieved in the Middle East through Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, which he said meant dialogue with Hamas, claiming it represented the majority of Palestinians. His questions and the way he conducted the interview were clearly biased in favor of Hamas and made it easy for Khaled Mashaal to market his ideology and policies to British readers.

3. Throughout the interview Khaled Mashaal used the soft rhetoric familiar from his and other Hamas spokesmen's interviews with the Western media. Hamas spokesmen express their willingness for a sovereign Palestinian state to be established within the 1967 borders and to cooperate with the international community, obscuring or concealing the movement's ideology, **which seek the destruction of the State of Israel and openly adopt the option of terrorism**. When speaking to Palestinian audiences, Hamas spokesmen make their true positions clear, as was made evident three days after the interview.¹

4. The interview was criticized by the British Foreign Office. **Ivan Lewis**, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, expressed regret at the line taken by Livingstone, saying that "[i]t is...particularly regrettable that he learned the wrong lessons from history **by handing a propaganda coup to the leader of a terrorist organization**" (British Foreign Office website, September 20, 2009).

The main points of the interview

5. The most telling questions were the following:

i) **Why do you think Israel is still imposing the blockade on Gaza?** Livingstone blatantly exaggerated "the difficult humanitarian situation" in the Gaza Strip, claiming that it was being "blockaded" by Israel, and that the Gazans were trapped in the largest jail in history. He asked Khaled Mashaal what part the United States, the European Union, Britain, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority played in the "blockade," and Mashaal answered that it never would have succeeded without the "collusion of regional and international powers." For the blockade to be lifted, he said, international

¹ On September 20, 2009, senior Hamas figure **Ayman Taha** was interviewed by the Ma'an News Agency. He said that what was required of the United States was to end the "Israeli occupation" and stop the building in the settlements. He made it clear that Hamas's position was **that the "occupation" was to be ended in stages**: first the **occupation of the "1967 territories,"** and then all the **"1948 territories"** [i.e., the destruction of the State of Israel in stages]. He added that the United States had to work "at least" to end the "occupation" of 1967, which it had not done so far (Ma'an News Agency, September 20, 2009).

law and the basic rights of the Palestinians had to be respected, including the right to live with dignity and free from persecution. [Note: Khaled Mashaal asks for international law to be respected while heading a murderous terrorist organization which systematically violates international law by deliberately killing Israeli civilians and which does not hesitate to brutally attack the Gazan civilians who oppose its rule.]



Selling candy in the Gaza City market before Eid al-Fitr (Wafa News Agency, September 22, 2009).
Photos and reports from the Gaza Strip do not support Khaled Mashaal's bleak descriptions.

ii) **What are the ideology and goals of Hamas?** Khaled Mashaal represented the Palestinian people as victims of the "colonial project called Israel." After a long description of Palestinian suffering, he said that Hamas was struggling to end of the "occupation" and restore "Palestinian rights," including the "right" to return to their homes. [Note: When speaking to their Palestinian target audiences, Hamas spokesmen make it clear that by "rights" they mean the establishment of a Palestinian state in all of Eretz Israel, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.] Livingstone asked if Khaled Mashaal was "committed to the destruction of Israel." Instead of answering a direct question, he said that "What is really happening is the destruction of the Palestinian people by Israel; it is the one that occupies our land and exiles us, kills us,... We are the victims, Israel is the oppressor, and not vice versa." He claimed that the issue of recognition of Israel was an excuse, because Israel refused to recognize the "rights of the Palestinians," who were the victims of Israeli "oppression."

iii) **Why does Hamas support military force in this conflict?** Khaled Mashaal referred to **military force** as the "option" used by the Palestinian people because "nothing else works." [Note: At no point in the interview did either Livingstone or Mashaal make it clear that by "military force" they meant lethal, indiscriminate terrorist attacks including rocket fire and suicide bombing attacks targeting **Israeli civilians**. However, the word "terrorism" was never mentioned by either Livingstone or Mashaal.] He claimed that the Palestinians preferred to resolve the conflict with Israel through peaceful means. He claimed that if the "occupation" were to end and the Palestinians were able to "exercise self-determination" in their "homeland," there would be no

further need for the use of force. **[Note:** That is, if Israel were to evaporate of its own free will, as Mashaal demands, there would be no need to employ “military force,” i.e., terrorist attacks, against it...] Mashaal added that the nearly 20 years of peaceful negotiations had not restored “Palestinian rights.” **[Note:** He was careful not to mention that the “peaceful negotiations” were accompanied by mass-casualty suicide bombing attacks in the major cities of Israel. The objective of the attacks, led by Hamas, was to sabotage any possibility of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement by killing as many Israeli civilians as possible.]



**Hamas uses “military force:” a direct rocket hit on a house in Sderot
(Photo by Zeev Tractman, December 21, 2009).**

iv) **Do you wish to establish an Islamic state in Palestine in which all other religions are subordinate?** Mashaal said that Hamas was a “national liberation movement” which saw no conflict between Islamic identity and its political mission. He claimed that Hamas’ first priority was to end the “Israeli occupation” of the Palestinian homeland [i.e., to destroy Israel] and only then would the Palestinian people define what type of government the future Palestinian state would have. In a statement clearly intended to please Western audiences, he said that Hamas did not believe Islam could be imposed on people, but that Hamas would campaign, in “a fully democratic process,” for “an Islamic agenda.” **[Note:** Representing Hamas, which has enforced a totalitarian regime on the Gazans, as planning to employ the democratic process, is an absurd fabrication meant to mislead the Western target audience. The nature of the Hamas-style “democratic process” is all too evident to the residents of the Gaza Strip, who are personally experiencing Hamas’ imposition of Islamization on all facets of their lives.]

v) **Was Operation Cast Lead (“the bombing and invasion of Gaza,” according to Livingstone) the [Israeli] response to repeated breaking of the ceasefire by Hamas and the firing of rockets into southern Israel?** Khaled Mashaal claimed that Hamas “fully abided by the ceasefire” between June and December 2008, while Israel only partially observed it by not fully opening the crossings. He also claimed that toward the end of the ceasefire Israel “resumed hostilities.” [Note: A deliberately incorrect representation of the facts. During the six months of the Hamas so-called “lull in the fighting” the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip fired 223 rockets and 139 mortar shells into Israeli territory, most of them during the last six weeks. The lull arrangement, which was systematically violated by the Palestinian terrorist organizations, expired with the announcement made by Hamas and the other terrorist organizations that it would formally expire on December 19, 2008. Once the announcement had been made, Hamas and the other organizations began a series of rocket attacks against Israel which peaked on December 24, when 60 rockets and mortar shells were fired, most of them by Hamas, at the Israeli cities of Sderot, Ashqelon and Netivot, and other towns and villages in Israel’s western Negev. On December 24 the Palestinians opened fire, and not for the first time, at the Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings, through which supplies flowed from Israel into the Gaza Strip. [Note: Those important crossings between Israel and Gaza Strip have always been a preferred target for Hamas and the other toes.] In addition, Khaled Mashaal made no mention – and Ken Livingstone was careful not to pressure him – about the ongoing rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip which disrupted the lives of hundreds of thousands of Israeli civilians in the south between 2000 and 2009, the basic cause underlying Operation Cast Lead.]



Hamas prepares for escalation after the so-called “lull in the fighting” (Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades website, December 18, 2008).

vi) **Does Hamas have a “road map” for a peaceful settlement?** [Note: A question intended, through association, to elicit a Hamas alternative to the American

Road Map.] Khaled Mashaal answered that a peaceful settlement would have to begin in a ceasefire agreement between the two sides based on a full Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967. Only when the Palestinians were free, he said, and back on their land, would they be able to determine the future of the conflict. **[Note:** He made no mention of where his “road map” led and what would happen after Israel withdrew to the 1967 lines. Livingstone was careful not to pressure him regarding this inconvenient point.] Playing to the Western audience, Khaled Mashaal claimed that Hamas had no problem with Jews and Christians and that “for many centuries Christians, Jews and Muslims coexisted peacefully in this part of the world.” **[Note:** Hamas’ rhetoric includes anti-Semitic motifs, as evidenced by its charter. The issue of what will happen after the Israeli withdrawal, which Khaled Mashaal deliberately did not relate to, was made clear by Ayman Taha, who said that **once the “1967 occupation” had ended, it would be necessary to bring to an end the “1948 occupation.”**]