



The full text of Khamenei.ir's interview with Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah

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Masseer Especial Journal, which belongs to Khamenei.ir, has conducted an interview with Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary-General of Lebanon's Hezbollah, which is published for the first time. The following is part one of the interview:

I would like to start the interview by asking you how the situation in the region was, at the time when the Islamic Revolution became victorious. How was the situation in the West Asian region? Particularly given that one of the important dimensions of the Islamic Revolution is its regional and international implications, what changes occurred in the regional equations following the Islamic Revolution and what events have we witnessed? With the Islamic Revolution gaining victory, what took place in the region in general and in Lebanon in particular?

In the name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful. First, I would like to welcome you. If we go back to the past and observe the developments, we will find that, very shortly before the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, a very significant incident took place in the region, namely the withdrawal of the Arab Republic of Egypt from the Arab-Israeli conflict and the signing of the Camp David Treaty. This event—due to the important and effective role of Egypt in the aforementioned conflict—had a very dangerous impact on the region as well as on the Arab-Israeli confrontation over the issue of Palestine and the future of Palestine.

After that incident, in the first place, it seemed that the confrontation was going on largely in favor of Israel. This was mainly because other Arab countries and Palestinian resistance groups were not able to confront major powers without the help of Egypt at that time. So, firstly, the occurrence of such an incident led to the emergence of a deep division among Arab countries.

Secondly, you remember that at the time, there was a US-led Western bloc opposing the USSR. Therefore, there existed a split in our region: the gap between the countries associated with the Soviet Union—that is, the Eastern bloc—and the countries depending on the United States, the Western bloc. Accordingly, we could see a deep divide among the Arab countries in the region, and this gap had devastating consequences for the nations and of course, also had

an impact on the Arab-Israeli conflict. At the time, the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States essentially affected our region and its developments.

In the case of Lebanon, it should be said that Lebanon is also part of this region, and thus, it has been severely affected by its developments, including Israeli actions, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the divisions in the region. At that time, Lebanon faced domestic problems as well, and was suffering from the civil war. The Israeli enemy occupied parts of southern Lebanon in 1978, that is one year before the Islamic Revolution, and then created a security zone called the "border strip" on the Lebanese-Palestinian borders. The Israeli enemy, through this security zone, continued its daily aggression against Lebanon, its cities, villages and people. Indeed, we faced a very serious problem: the Israeli occupation in parts of southern Lebanon and its daily aggressions. Israeli warplanes and their artillery bombed southern Lebanon; abduction operations and multiple explosions by the Zionist regime continued in its worst form, and people were displaced following these brutal acts. These events also took place between 1977 and 1979; that is, not long before the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

Did they use the Palestinian presence in Lebanon as the pretext?

Yes; the Israelis objected the existence of Palestinian resistance and operations carried out by Palestinians. However, this was just an excuse because Israeli's runs of aggressions in southern Lebanon began in 1948, when Palestinian resistance was not present in southern Lebanon. Palestinian resistance set base in southern Lebanon in the late 60s and early 1970s, especially after the events in Jordan and the arrival of Palestinian groups from Jordan in Lebanon.

It was in those circumstances that the Islamic Revolution of Iran gained victory. This victory came at a time when an atmosphere of despair was dominant in the Arab and Muslim world and concern for the future was widespread. Egypt's withdrawal from the Arab-Israeli conflict and the signature of the Camp David Treaty, the imposition of a humiliating political process on the Palestinians and Arabs, as well as the weakness of the rulers of the Arab countries all provoked the despair, grief, hopelessness, disappointment, and worry for the future at that time. Therefore, the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in such an environment, revived the lost hopes in the region and among the nations to begin with, particularly the Palestinian and Lebanese people.

This victory (the victory of the Islamic Revolution) also brought about the resurgence of the hopes of a nation that had been cornered by the existence of Israel. Because the position of Imam Khomeini (Q.S. - May his spirit be blessed) regarding the Zionist project, the necessity of the liberation of Palestine, and standing shoulder to shoulder with Palestinian resistance groups was clear from the beginning. Imam Khomeini (r.a) believed in supporting the people of Palestine, liberating every inch of the land, and obliteration of the Israeli entity as a usurping regime in the region. Therefore, the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran created a growing hope for the future and increased a hundred fold the moral and motivation of the supporters of the resistance as well as the resistance groups in the region.

The victory of the Islamic Revolution also created a balance of power in the region. Egypt fled the fight against Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran entered. Therefore, the balance of power in the Arab-Israeli conflict was restored, and for this reason, the resistance project in the region entered a new historical phase. This was the starting point for the Islamic movement and jihad in the Arab and Muslim world and among Shi'as and Sunnis alike.

Imam Khomeini (Q.S.) introduced several mottos regarding various subjects such as the question of Palestine, Islamic unity, Resistance, facing and confronting the United States of America, stability and sustainability, trust and confidence of nations in God and in themselves, revival of faith in one's own power when confronting the arrogant powers and towards the realization of victory. Undoubtedly, these mottos had a very positive and direct impact on the situation in the region at that time.

In addition to the general atmosphere created by the Islamic Revolution and the new spirit that Imam [Khomeini (r.a)] inspired in the hearts of the people of the region, resurrecting the resistance, what memory do you specifically have of Imam Khomeini and his stances regarding the resistance in Lebanon and by Hezbollah?

Yes, in the year 1982. If we want to talk about it, we should consider the liberation of Khorramshahr in Iran. The Israelis were deeply concerned about the war between Iran and Iraq, or Saddam's imposed war against Iran. For this reason, after the liberation of Khorramshahr, the Israelis decided to attack Lebanon. Of course, this action had its own root causes, and there was a profound connection between the victories in the Iranian front and the Israeli aggression against Lebanon. This was how the Israelis entered Lebanon, Beqaa region, Mount Lebanon Governorate, and Beirut suburbs. At that time, a group of scholars, brothers and fighters had decided to form the Islamic Resistance and establish the Islamic-Jihadi foundation of [the movement of] Resistance, corresponding to the aftermath of Israeli invasion.

By then, Israel had not penetrated in all of Lebanon and had only reached about half of Lebanon—that is 40% of Lebanon's total area. 100,000 Israeli soldiers entered Lebanon. They brought with them American, French, English and Italian multinational forces on the pretext of maintaining peace. Meanwhile, there were militias in Lebanon who were involved with and collaborated with the Israelis. By pointing to these facts, I mean to picture how very, very bad the situation was at that time.

Subsequently, a group of scholars (ulema), believers, and Mujahid brothers decided to launch a new movement for Jihad in the name of Islamic Resistance, which shortly afterwards was renamed "Hezbollah." The formation of this front coincided with the decision of Imam Khomeini (Q.S.) to send Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) forces to Syria and Lebanon to oppose and confront Israeli aggression. Initially, the intention was for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps troops to fight alongside Syrian forces as well as Lebanese and Palestinian resistance groups. But after some time the scope of Israeli attacks became limited, so this was no longer a classic battlefield, and the need for resistance operations by popular groups was felt more than ever.

It was at that time that Imam Khomeini (QS) replaced the mission of direct confrontation by the IRGC and Iranian forces, who had come to Syria and Lebanon, by offering help and providing military training to Lebanese youth, so that they—i.e. the Lebanese youth themselves—would be able to deal with the occupiers and carry out resistance operations. This is the first [of Imam Khomeini's positions].

Therefore, the mission of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps forces in Syria, as well as the Lebanese Beqaa region—in Baalbek, Hermel and Janta, that is, where there were training bases—was changed to providing military training to the Lebanese youth. They taught the Lebanese youths the methods of warfare and provided them with logistic support. The mere presence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Lebanon at that time gave the Lebanese youth and Resistance groups a purpose and a high spirit to stand up to Israel.

As I said earlier, it was decided that a large group would be formed and nine representatives were selected on behalf of the pro-resistance brothers, including the martyr Sayyid Abbas al Moussawi (r.a), to pursue this important issue. Naturally, I was not among these nine people, because at that time I was young, about 22 or 23 years old. These 9 people travelled to Iran and met with the officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran. They also had a meeting with Imam Khomeini (QS). During their meeting with Imam Khomeini (r.a), while offering him a report on the latest developments in Lebanon and the region, they presented their proposal for the formation of an Islamic resistance front. They said to Imam Khomeini (r.a): "We believe in your guidance, your authority (wilayah) and your leadership. Tell us what we need to do."

In return, Imam Khomeini (r.a) insisted that their duty was to resist and stand against the enemy in full force, even if you have limited means and are in smaller numbers. This is while Hezbollah had a smaller number of members then. He said: "Start from scratch: trust in the Almighty God, and do not wait for anyone in the world to help you. Rely on yourself and know that God helps you. I see you victorious." It was an amazing thing. Imam Khomeini (r.a) regarded this path as auspicious, and thus, the meeting during which our brothers met with him, laid the foundation stone for the formation of the Islamic resistance front, under the auspicious title of 'Hezbollah', in Lebanon.

At that time, our brothers told Imam: "We believe in your guidance, authority and leadership, but in any case, you are very busy, and you are at an old age, and we cannot allow ourselves to continuously disturb you about different issues and problems. For this reason, we are asking you to name a representative to whom we can refer on various issues." Then he introduced Imam Khamenei (May God continue his oversight), who was the president at the time, and said: "Mr. Khamenei is my representative." Consequently, the relationship between Hezbollah and Ayatollah Khamenei (May God protect him) began from the very early hours of the establishment and foundation of this group; we were always

in contact with him in different times, we met with him frequently and gave him reports on the latest developments and he always praised the resistance.

I remember the issue of several Hezbollah martyrdom-seeking members. You know that the first experience of a martyrdom-seeking operation took place in Lebanon, and was conducted by our brothers. The brothers sent a video file—before publicizing it in the media—containing oral testaments of those fighters seeking martyrdom, who had carried out a major martyrdom operation in Lebanon, and had shaken the invaders to their core. This video was played for Imam Khomeini, and he watched it and discussed it. The testaments were very beautiful and full of enthusiasm, mysticism and love. After watching the testaments, Imam Khomeini (r.a) said: "These are young [chivalrous] people. All of them were young." He then said: "These are the true mystics." The fact is that the Imam was strongly affected by the testaments.

Imam Khomeini's collaboration, support for, and attention to the resistance and Hezbollah of Lebanon continued until the very last day of his auspicious life. I remember about one or two months before the passing of Imam Khomeini (r.a), when he was ill and rarely met with domestic officials and even less with foreign officials, I went to Iran as a member and an executive official of the Hezbollah council and met with Ayatollah Khamenei, late Ayatollah Rafsanjani and other Iranian officials, and asked if I could have a meeting with Imam Khomeini. I was told that he is ill and does not meet with anyone. I asked them to try and they agreed to do their best. Then I went to the office of Imam Khomeini (r.a) and put in a request for an appointment. At the time, one of our friends among Imam Khomeini's household, Sheikh Rahimian (May God protect him)—who paid particular attention to the Lebanese—shared the matter with the late Sayed Ahmad Khomeini (r.a), and I was informed on the second day to get ready for a meeting. Naturally, we were all surprised. I went to meet Imam Khomeini (r.a) and nobody else was there, not even Sayed Ahmad; not even any of the Foreign Ministry's officials or IRGC staff, who would usually attend the meetings, were there. Sheikh Rahimian accompanied me to Imam's room but then went and left me alone with Imam. I was overwhelmed and awed by his presence.

Imam Khomeini was sitting on a high chair and I sat down on the floor. Awestruck by his grandeur, I could not say a word. Imam asked me to get closer. I went closer and sat next to him. We spoke and I handed to him a letter I had brought with me. Imam answered the questions I had shared with him regarding the developments of that time in Lebanon, then smiled and said: "Tell all our brothers not to worry. My brothers and I in the Islamic Republic of Iran are all with you. We will always be with you ". This was my last meeting with Imam Khomeini (r.a).

I wish we had time to hear more extensively from you about that time. Thanks again for the opportunity you gave us. You said that, Hezbollah was formed and began its activities during a very difficult time. You correctly mentioned that Iran itself was dealing with an invasion of its borders. In Lebanon, the Zionist regime periodically attacked the people and committed murder and plunder, and in any case, Hezbollah began its work in such a difficult situation. You also said that Imam Khomeini referred you to Ayatollah Khamenei to be in touch with him. I would like to ask you to point out some of the important pieces of advice that Ayatollah Khamenei (May God continue his oversight) gave you after the passing of Imam Khomeini, and let us know the measures that he guided you to take during his presidency. What we mean to make clear, when we reach the time of Imam Khamenei's leadership, is the history of why Hezbollah was very pleased and reassured with his election as the leader of the Islamic Republic. What has happened that made you feel that way?

From the very first moment of our relationship with Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei, I call him, in my own words, Mr. Leader (السيد القائد). So let me use the same word, the Leader, to refer to him. My brothers had a Hezbollah Council within Hezbollah, with 7-10 members—changing at each stage. The members of this council always met with the Leader during his presidency. What I wish to say about that time, almost 7 years of Ayatollah Khamenei's presidency before the passing of Imam Khomeini...

Was there a specific person to go between Hezbollah and Ayatollah Khamenei?

I get back to this point. The fact is that the Leader particularly valued Lebanese groups and provided them with sufficient time. I remember meetings that sometimes lasted for 2, 3 or even 4 hours. He listened carefully to what we

had to say. Our friends and brothers also described the issues for him in details. As you know, at the time, they were not all on the same wavelength, and our brothers had different views. The Leader listened to all the comments, views, and opinions. Naturally, there was no Arabic language problem either, because he was fluent in Arabic and spoke it well. He spoke Arabic beautifully.

Nonetheless, he preferred to be accompanied by an Arabic translator; He usually spoke in Persian, but had no need for translation when the Lebanese spoke in Arabic. His full mastery of Arabic language contributed greatly to his deep understanding of the problems and the views of our Lebanese brothers. The important point is that, despite having full authority from Imam Khomeini, the Leader tried to play the role of a guide, and helped us make the decisions ourselves. I always remember that in every meeting, at that time and after being appointed as the Leader, whenever he wanted to comment, he would indicate 'my suggestion is'. For example, he had reached a conclusion, but he would ask us to "sit down, consult with each other, and make the correct decision.

Indeed, the Leader at that critical stage managed to play an important role guiding the group in cultivating Hezbollah leaders and commanders intellectually, scientifically, and mentally, so that our brothers could make decisions confidently and by relying on their own capabilities even during the most difficult situations. He would make comments but he would refer to a Persian proverb that said: the expediency of a country is recognized by its owners. His Eminence would say: you are from Lebanon and thus have a better command of your affairs. We can only make a few comments and you can apply them, but it is you who will make the final decision. Do not wait for anyone to make decisions on your behalf. Therefore, the role of the Leader in the training, growth and swift development of Hezbollah was very significant.

In the first years, our brothers went to Iran two or three times a year—that is, they would travel to Iran about every 6 months—to learn about the Iranian officials' viewpoints regarding the developments in the region, as at that time, developments in the region were taking place very rapidly. Naturally, at that time there was also the war; the 8-year imposed war against Iran and its implications for the region. Therefore, our brothers constantly needed to exchange information, consult with and get support from Iran. At that time, if our brothers were faced with an immediate and urgent problem, they would send me to Iran. Because I was younger than the others, and there was no systematic protection, or anything similar in place for me. I was alone, carrying a bag with me. This means that my trips to Iran, since I was not well known, were not complicated and there was no security threat around me.

On the other hand, I was acquainted with Persian language more than my other brothers in Hezbollah, and for this reason, they preferred me to travel to Iran. From the very beginning, there was compassion and affection between me and my Iranian brothers. My brothers in Hezbollah would tell me: you like Iranians and the Iranians like you too. So you should travel to Iran. On behalf of my brothers in Lebanon, I met with the Leader for one to two hours. Even when all issues had been discussed and I was prepared to leave, he would say: "Why are you in a hurry? Stay, and if there's anything left, let's discuss it". That stage was very important for Hezbollah, because Hezbollah had focused on fundamental issues, fundamental approaches and fundamental goals. They made a collection of varying opinions, but we eventually managed to compile a single united book. Now I can say that we have a unified viewpoint in Hezbollah. Different perspectives have been unified and consolidated due to the events and experiences that we have gone through, and thanks to the guidance, advice, and leadership of Imam Khomeini (r.a) while he was alive and of the Leader after the passing of Imam Khomeini.

I wish there was more time to listen to your memories at length...

You will at some point say 'I wish'... [laughs]

Anyways, our time is very limited. Putting that period a side, now let's talk about 1989, when Imam Khomeini passed away to the mercy of Allah, and our people and every devotee of the Islamic Revolution were mourning. Those moments were naturally critical moments for both our country and the devotees of the Islamic Revolution. Please explain briefly what the state of your affairs was, at the time when Ayatollah Khamenei was chosen as the successor to Imam Khomeini? Also tell us more about the events that you encountered at that time, after Imam Khomeini's passing away, in the regional and international arena.

We had a very critical period at that time, because that era coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the beginning of American unilateralism and the end of the Cold War. At the same time, we saw that the Zionist regime started talking about peace negotiations, and on the other hand, the Islamic Revolution was in a particular situation. Obviously, the Americans had plans for the post-Imam Khomeini (r.a) era. We would like you to talk about those circumstances and describe them to us, and about how the Leader responded to the important developments that took place at regional and international levels?

As you know, during the lifetime of Imam Khomeini, members of Hezbollah of Lebanon and the supporters of the resistance, had close ties with him, both intellectually and culturally. However, Hezbollah members were also emotionally and passionately dependent on Imam Khomeini. Like many Iranians who fought against Saddam's war on Iran, they really loved Imam Khomeini (r.a). Members of Hezbollah of Lebanon regarded him as an Imam, a leader, a guide, a Marja', and a father. I have never seen the Lebanese love anyone so much. Consequently, the demise of Imam Khomeini on that day brought about a mountain of sadness and grief to the Lebanese; a feeling definitely not less intense than the sadness and grief of the Iranians. This was the emotional connection between the Lebanese and Imam Khomeini (r.a).

But on the other hand, there was a major concern at that time, and it was that the Western media were constantly talking about the post-Imam Khomeini era (r.a), claiming that the main problem was this man and that Iran would collapse after him and a civil war would break out; that there would be no substitute for the leadership of the country. In this regard, a very intense psychological warfare had started in those years, in the last year of the glorious life of Imam Khomeini (r.a), [particularly in the light of other incidents including the dismissal of Late Ayatollah Montazeri and other issues]. For this reason, there were concerns. At that time, we were being told that your source of support—i.e. the Islamic Republic of Iran, upon which you rely and in which have faith—will start a downfall and collapse after the passing of Imam Khomeini. That was for the second issue.

The third issue, regardless of the psychological warfare, was our lack of information about the situation after the passing of Imam Khomeini (r.a). We did not know what was going to happen after him, and what turn the events were going to take; so we were worried. We were following up on the events after the death of Imam Khomeini (r.a) on television, and when we saw national security and the calm in Iran as well as the glorious presence of the Iranian people at his funeral, we regained some confidence and peace of mind.

We were reassured that Iran would not go towards a civil war, nor would it collapse, and eventually the Iranians would choose a suitable leader in a reasonable and sincere atmosphere. We, like all Iranians, were waiting for the decision of the Assembly of Experts on this matter. The fact is that the election of Ayatollah Khamenei as the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Assembly of Experts was unpredictable for the Lebanese. Because we did not know Iranian figures properly and we did not know if there was a better, more knowledgeable and more competent person to replace the Leadership. We only knew the Iranian officials that we were in touch with. Electing Ayatollah Khamenei for this responsibility, surprisingly and unusually, made us feel happy, fortunate and confident.

In any case, we passed through this stage. We started our relationship and this relationship continued. After a short time, we traveled to Iran and offered our condolences for the passing away of Imam Khomeini (r.a) and we met with the Leader. He was still at the Presidential office and received people there. We pledged allegiance to him in person and directly. Our brothers told him: "During the lifetime of Imam Khomeini (r.a) you were his representative in the affairs of Lebanon, Palestine and the region as well as the President of Iran, so you had time [for us]. But now you are the leader of the Islamic Republic and all Muslims, and therefore, perhaps you do not have enough time as before. So, we would like to ask you to appoint a representative, so that we do not disturb you continuously." At this moment, the Leader smiled and said: "I am still young and I have time, God willing. I pay special attention to the issues of the region and the resistance and therefore we will remain in direct contact with each other. "

Since then, unlike Imam Khomeini (r.a), he has not appointed any representative to refer to about our issues. Naturally, we did not want to bother much, and did not require much of his time. Especially because in the first years, the early years of the establishment of the movement, he was involved in everything. The principles, goals, foundations, criteria, and guidelines that we had, provided a solution to every issue. All of this was a divine blessing; the blessing of guidance was quite clear and we did not need to constantly refer to him. So, we continued to do the same as the Leader had told. This should answer that part of your question about our relationship with Ayatollah

Khamenei after his election as the Leader and the authority for Muslims [wali amr al muslimin] after the passing of Imam Khomeini (r.a).

But regarding the events that happened, it should be noted that the events after the passing of Imam Khomeini (r.a) were, naturally, very critical and dangerous. At that time, the important issue for us was to continue the path of resistance in Lebanon, an issue that the Leader had emphasized from the outset. The Leader provided the officials of the Islamic Republic with many recommendations and words of advice, to attend to the Resistance in Lebanon and the region, saying that, just as during the lifetime of Imam Khomeini (r.a), when we followed this path with the thoughts, methods, principles and culture of Imam Khomeini (r.a) on our agenda; today I persist on this path and insist on the need for it to continue.

Therefore, as a blessing from the Almighty God, there was no change in the position of the Islamic Republic in its support for the resistance in the region, especially in Lebanon, not even in the face of changes within ministries and official entities in Iran as well as some differences in their political policies. Therefore, not only such a change did not happen, rather things went on in a better way; because these stances were strengthened after each president's and each official's term and this happened as a result of direct attention by the Leader to Hezbollah of Lebanon and the resistance in the region.

Now we can enter the discussion on the events that took place. Where would you like me to start from? I am ready. I mean, we can now address the political events; because we have already elaborated on our relationship with the Leader and how we kept working with him after the passing of Imam Khomeini (r.a).

The most important issue for us at that time, i.e. during the leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei, was the issue of domestic problems of Lebanon. At that stage, as you know well, there were some problems between Hezbollah and the Amal movement, and the Leader paid special attention to this matter. Hence, the most important thing that happened to us during the early years of Ayatollah Khamenei's leadership was the resolution of discords between Hezbollah and the Amal Movement. This blessed resolution, was brought about as a result of special guidance and advice by the Leader, as well as contacts between the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the leaders of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, including the current chairman of the Lebanese parliament Mr. Nabih Berri and Syrian officials. Subsequently, Resistance groups in Lebanon got united and this was accomplished thanks to the Leader and his strong emphasis [on unity].

The Leader opposed any issue, any conflict or dispute among Lebanese groups and constantly stressed the need for extensive relations between them as well as achieving peace by any means necessary among them. These efforts took years to bear fruit. That is to say, it took 2 or 3 years for us to pass through that stage. The foundation of the close relations between Hezbollah and Amal that we see today were laid by the guidelines of the Leader, and today the relationship between Hezbollah and Amal is not strategic, but beyond strategic. Through the resolving of the problems between Hezbollah and the Amal Movement and the cooperation between the two, we were able to continue the resistance and attend to defending Lebanon and the south of Lebanon. The achievement and the great victory of 2000 against the Zionist regime were realized as a result of this unity. In 2006 and during the 33-day war of the Zionist regime on southern Lebanon, this unity helped us again, and we were able to resist during the "Tammūz War" and impose a defeat on the enemy. Today, political victories in Lebanon and the region continue to be achieved. One of the fundamental factors of Hezbollah's political, national, and military power is this coherence, unity and friendly relations.

I recall that at that time, after the martyrdom of Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi (r.a), our brothers chose me as the secretary-general. Later, we met with the Leader. He brought up some issues, saying: "If you want to make the heart of Imam Mahdi (May Almighty Allah Speed His Reappearance) and also the hearts of all the believers happy, you have to work hard to preserve the calm in your country. You have work with each other, especially Hezbollah, Amal, Allama [scholar] Fadlallah and Sheikh Shams al-Din." At that time, Sheikh Fadlallah and Sheikh Shams al-Din were both alive and the Leader strongly stressed reinforcing internal unity in Lebanon. His emphasis was on maintaining unity among the Shi'as, as well as between Shi'as and Sunnis and other Muslims. He also emphasized on the necessity of unity among Muslims and Christians and would insist on it during internal meetings; that is [he promoted] an open door policy for all Lebanese. This was the second issue. The primary issue was the relationship between Hezbollah, Amal and the domestic situation of the Shias. Another important issue that he emphasized was the open door strategy of

Hezbollah towards other Lebanese political groups, despite religious, political, and ideological differences. The realization of this important project was also on account of his wise leadership.

There was an emphasis on continuing the resistance, confronting belligerence and determination to liberate southern Lebanon. That's why the Leader also focused on the issue of resistance and its progress. He always insisted that resistance should progress, grow, and ultimately take back occupied lands. Hence, he always diligently encouraged the Resistance to persist on the path it had taken. You know that at that time there was a problem that some resistance groups, other than Hezbollah, had got entangled with internal political affairs, and thus, they had been gradually distracted from the mission of resistance. This would make the resistance limited to Hezbollah and the Amal Movement—chiefly Hezbollah. Even inside Hezbollah, there were some of our brothers who were inclined to get involved with domestic politics. But the Leader always emphasized the need to give priority to the mission of resistance and Jihadi tasks.

. Imam Khamenei's prediction of Oslo Accord and Netanyahu's error

One of the important events that took place in the region at that time was the formation of a process of reconciliation through Arab-Israeli negotiations, which is referred to as the "peace process". This trend was shaped after Arab-Israeli negotiations. Recall that in 1993 an agreement was reached between Mr. Yasser Arafat and the Israelis, represented by Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres; an agreement that was finalized under the auspices of the United States. This agreement was eventually named the "Oslo Accords". This was naturally a very dangerous issue, and had a negative impact on the Arab-Israeli conflict. The danger was that, according to the agreement, the PLO recognized Israel and thus effectively a Palestinian group—not an Egyptian one like Anwar Sadat—abandoned the lands of 1948, the lands occupied by the Zionist regime during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War. Also, in that agreement it was mentioned that the topic of the negotiations would be East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the issue of other parts of Palestine is already done. This was a major fault.

On the other hand, the agreement opened the way for many other Arab countries to begin negotiations and reach an agreement with Israel, eventually normalizing relations with Tel Aviv. This was a very dangerous issue. At that time, the Leader, and the Palestinian resistance groups including Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine opposed the Oslo Accords. The Commander in Chief and some Palestinian groups opposed the deal. So did Hezbollah and the Lebanese groups. We rallied against this agreement, but were shot, and we had martyrs for the cause in Beirut's Southern Dahieh.

In any case, it was a turning point and a very dangerous period. We pondered over what reaction to adopt against the Oslo accord. Should we deal with it politically and through the media, and call on the Palestinians to resist and insist on their rights? The emergence of this issue (the Oslo Accords and the ensuing phase) led to the expansion and consolidation of relations between Hezbollah and Palestinian groups, including Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, and also strengthened the path of resistance in the occupied territories of Palestine. Remember that at that time, a major martyrdom-seeking operation was carried out by Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants in the heart of Tel Aviv and Quds, and shook the Zionist authorities to their core. It was after that operation, that an extraordinary meeting took place in the Egyptian city of Sharm El Sheikh with Clinton and Yeltsin, the then Russian president in attendance. Many countries in the world also attended this meeting. Meanwhile, the late Syrian president Hafez al-Assad rejected participating in the meeting.

The fact is that the meeting finally declared war on three groups: first Hezbollah, second Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, and third Islamic Republic of Iran due to its support for resistance in the region. Despite its large sphere, the meeting did not manage to introduce fear in the ranks of Hezbollah and other resistance groups in the region, especially since at that time, the position of the Leader regarding the resistance—that is continuing the Resistance and persisting on the path— was absolutely straightforward and resolute. Therefore the Oslo accord brought about a series of events; events that were very crucial and hazardous for this procedure.

We also had the Madrid conference.

The Madrid conference was before the Oslo Accord. It was then that the talks started. The important point here is that the Leader has a deep insight and exact understanding of the future. I believe that his accurate perception of the future is part of his unique abilities, derived from his deep faith in, submission to, and relationship with the Almighty God, rather than having an only rational aspect.

At that time, certain talks started called the Israeli-Syrian negotiations. The Syrian President of the time was Hafez al-Assad and the Israeli Prime Minister was Yitzhak Rabin. The talks between them were initially secret and later made public. They would meet in the United States and under Clinton's supervision. Representatives of President Assad and Rabin's cabinet met with each other in the United States, and they were about to come to an agreement. At that time, it was said that Yitzhak Rabin had agreed to return the occupied Golan to Hafez al-Assad.

Accordingly, there was an assumption in the region that Israel and Syria were coming to an agreement. This atmosphere existed in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and the entire region. I remember that at that time some would ask us "if an Israeli-Syrian agreement is reached, what will you—that is Hezbollah—do? If Syria and Israel come to an agreement, what stance will Hezbollah take? If such an agreement is made, what will be the fate of Hezbollah and the Islamic Resistance groups?" We organized several meetings to discuss the matter, and plan for the future. We thought then that an agreement was already made between Assad and Rabin. It was not only Hezbollah but all Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians assumed that the agreement had been finalized. We organized internal meetings to discuss the future. We talked about political, military, artillery issues and even the name of the group. Some raised the question whether or not to keep the name "Hezbollah"? Or if we should adopt a new name to fit the new phase? Some of our brothers were on the U.S.'s black list and there was this debate whether to keep them in Lebanon or make it for them to leave Lebanon? For example, Martyr Hajj Imad Mughniyah was on that list. So we compiled a collection of various suggestions.

Did Hezbollah not have a communication channel with Hafez al-Assad to be informed of his decision?

The point is that all the available data and information assured us that the Israeli-Syrian negotiations would result in an agreement. At that time, Hafez al-Assad's main demand was to take back the Golan, and that would withdraw from the June 4, 1967 borders; and Rabin had agreed to meet those demands. Eventually we went to see the Leader. He was very patient with us, because during this visit, we mentioned all the issues raised and the suggestions offered by different people. He listened to all of our words in that meeting which was held with some Iranian officials in attendance, and while all Iranian officials—and all officials unanimously and with no exception—believed that the Syrian-Israeli talks were over, His Eminence said: "It is good that you consider the worst-case scenarios and probabilities and plan to face them; but I tell you this will not happen, and there will be no peace treaty between Syria and Israel, so discard whatever you have written and prepared. You should continue to resist, and double your efforts to increase your weapons, facilities and human resources. Do not worry; because there will be no peace treaty between Syria and Israel." All those present in the meeting, including the Iranians and the Lebanese, were astonished by the firm remarks of Ayatollah Khamenei. His Eminence did not say that, "I consider it unlikely" or that, "there might be other possibilities". Not at all. He resolutely declared this will not happen. He said strongly and firmly: "Forget it and put it away; continue to do what you were doing in a better and stronger way than before."

Anyway, we were surprised. We returned to Lebanon, and we continued to work based on the Leader's point of view. Only two weeks after our visit to the Leader, a big ceremony with more than 100,000 people was held in Tel Aviv, wherein Yitzhak Rabin was giving a speech, when someone from among extremist Jews opened fire at and murdered Rabin. After Rabin, Shimon Peres was elected prime minister of the Zionist Regime. He had a weak personality, because he was not perceived by Israelis, in terms of historical and military background as well as trustworthiness, as competent as Rabin.

Subsequently, large operations were carried out inside occupied territories, namely Tel Aviv and occupied Quds, which shook the foundations of the Zionist Regime's power. After that, the Sharm El-Sheikh summit—that I mentioned—was held. Then, in 1996, Israel attacked Lebanon in an operation called Operation Grapes of Wrath and marked the unprecedented genocide in Qana—a tragedy later known as Qana Massacre. In response, we resisted against the Israelis and became victorious. Shortly thereafter, that is in 2 or 3 weeks, elections were held in the Zionist Regime,

during which Shimon Peres was defeated and the Likud party replaced the Labor party as the dominant party, and Benjamin Netanyahu became the Prime Minister of Israel. After coming to power, he said "I do not adhere to any of Yitzhak Rabin's and Shimon Peres's commitments with regard to Syria and the negotiations with Hafez al-Assad". Therefore, the Israeli-Syrian negotiations ended. We are talking about the year 1996 and now in 2019, where does the peace process stand? It is in its worst status.

As you pointed out, in that atmosphere, there was a feeling that an impending compromise was going on, and meanwhile, the Palestinian people were being slaughtered. Did other countries contact you to encourage Hezbollah to follow the movement? Did the countries which favored this compromise contact you in this regard? Did they send a message to encourage you to accept to compromise with Israel?

There was no direct contact with Hezbollah. They had no hopes in us; because they knew about our wisdom, willpower, faith and determination. But in general, some Arab countries pressured Lebanon. They pressured the Lebanese government and people to compromise with Israel. They threatened that Israel would destroy Lebanon if they did not accept to compromise, and the Arab world would turn away from Beirut. There were such pressures, but there was no significant contact; because they knew what our stance was and we saw how they have absolutely no hopes in us. This was God's blessing for us.

Some raise the question why the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon cannot accept any of the projects offered by the US and the Zionist Regime for compromise--from Oslo to the Deal of Century? The question is raised why Iran and Hezbollah do not provide the prerequisites to end these conflicts? Another point about Palestine is that some imply that the Palestinians themselves are interested in some form of compromise. What is your opinion about these questions? On the other hand, we see that some Arab rulers and figures are pretentious in their support for the Palestinian cause and standing for the Palestinian aspirations. What are the indicators for identifying the true representatives of this movement and thinking?

Regarding the first part of the question, I would say all the offered projects for the Palestinian cause violated the rights and the interests of the Palestinians. They say, according to the Oslo Accord, the lands usurped in 1948 are not included in the negotiations. That means two-third of Palestine is to be regarded outside the negotiations. Well, this is a major act of oppression; that is, in its basis and foundation, it is a major form of oppression. Then, they do not even give them the remaining one-third of Palestine. They do not even say that they would give the West Bank to the Palestinians and only negotiate on East Quds. At that time, even as for the Gaza Strip, the Zionists acted passively on the issue of Gaza. Shimon Peres said "I dream of a day when I wake up and I am told that Gaza has gone under water". This was their territorial viewpoint.

In the case of Quds, in all the offered proposals, the Americans and Israelis never agreed to give back East Quds to the Palestinians. Even during the last negotiations in Camp David between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak, the matter of Quds [Jerusalem] was brought up, and the Israelis said: "Of Jerusalem, whatever is on the ground, for you; but what remains underground of Jerusalem is for us". As for the Palestinians who were expelled from their homes, the Israelis have explicitly stated that they would not allow them to return to their lands. This is while millions of displaced Palestinians were living in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and other countries of the world dispersedly. Would any wise man accept such a thing?

Even if we accept the above-mentioned proposals which are based on the two-state solution, a question is raised: which Palestinian state? A state with no national sovereignty, no borders, no sky or coast, no airport, etc. What kind of a state is this? Thus, the proposals that have been presented on the question of Palestine since long ago—from the Madrid negotiations to the bilateral talks and the Deal of the Century—indicate that the situation has become worse day after day. Let's talk about the Deal of the Century. Recently, Jared Kushner spoke about the Deal of the Century, and explicitly said that according to this plan, Jerusalem (Quds) is for Israel. He announced that major Zionist settlements in the West Bank would be part of the occupied territories. Therefore, there is basically no discussion of a two-state solution; that is, one that includes a true Palestinian state. Even the Palestinians themselves do not accept such plans.

Accordingly, we gradually come to the conclusion that, firstly, if you see that the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah of Lebanon and other resistance groups do not agree with the proposals on the Palestinian question, it is because all these proposals are very oppressive to the Palestinian nation as well as to the Islamic Ummah, overall. Secondly, the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian people won't accept these plans. Today, it is absolutely clear that there is a complete consensus among the various Palestinian groups and parties in response to the Deal of the Century. It is not that some of them accept and others reject the proposal. The Fatah and Hamas as well as other movements, despite their disagreements, have no doubts about rejecting the Deal of the Century, and are on the same page with this regard. The Palestinian nation, both inside and outside the borders of the country, reject the Deal of the Century. Thus, opposition to this plan is not confined to Iran and the resistance groups in the region. Rather, Palestinians themselves oppose the Deal of the Century.

On the other hand, we must have a thorough understanding of the positions of Imam Khomeini (r.a.), the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah and the resistance groups against the Zionist regime. The fact is that Israel is not a problem only for the Palestinians; rather, the stabilization of the sovereignty of Israel is a threat not only to the Palestinians, but also to all Arab and Islamic countries. The stabilization of this regime is a big threat to Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and even the Islamic Republic of Iran. Israel has nuclear weapons and more than 200 nuclear warheads. The regime has always sought to expand its dominance over the whole region. There is another important point that we have learned from Imam Khomeini (r.a.) and also Ayatollah Khamenei, which is the fact that Israel is not a regime independent from the US; rather, it is regarded as a U.S. arm in the region. Who is after warmongering in the region? Who conducts invasion and aggression? Who meddles into other countries' affairs? Hence, the existence, survival, power and promotion of Israel—either through peaceful or non-peaceful means—is a major security threat for all the countries in the region, from Iran to Pakistan, and even for the countries of Central Asia and Turkey.

Therefore, those resisting Israel today, are in fact defending the Palestinian people and their rights, of which they have been divested, and they are also defending themselves, the sanctities and defending Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and other countries. Israel will not withdraw from the 'Nile-to-Euphrates' goal and this goal has always been presented as a Torah dream Israel has been trying to realize. Israel is a military base in the region that serves the interests of the United States. We all know that the United States wants Iran to return to the pre-revolutionary times, i.e. a monarchy, just like Saudi Arabia, so that whenever it demands oil, Iran would give oil and whenever it demands oil prices be dropped, it gets realized. You saw that Trump personally declared that he took \$450 billion from Riyadh. Trump openly announced that receiving this \$450 billion was much easier for him than receiving \$100 from an illegitimate booth somewhere in New York. He wants Iran to be like Saudi Arabia; in fact he wants all countries in the region to be just like Saudi Arabia. Who is Saudi Arabia relying on? On the monarchists in the region as well as the Israeli entity that possesses nuclear weapons and threatens countries of the region.

Accordingly, the important strategy emphasized by Imam Khomeini (r.a.) was that if we want to have a safe region, live in permanent peace, defend our national sovereignty and integrity of lands, and if we want all countries of the region to enjoy national sovereignty and true freedom, none of them is possible to achieve as long as there is an Israeli entity. They seek to fixate the Israeli entity by means of peace treaties.

Today, who is the vanguard of supporting the aspiration of a Palestinian government and leading it?

Today, there is no question that Ayatollah Khamenei (May God Continue His Oversight) bears the flag of the Palestinian cause. Today, no one doubts that the Islamic Republic of Iran, with its determination, will and power, is the vanguard and the main nucleus and main pivot that steers the Resistance movement.

Israel and its authorities announced in 2000 that they would leave southern Lebanon and tried to pretend it was voluntary. Did they voluntarily leave or were they forced to leave Southern Lebanon?

The Israelis wanted to retreat from southern Lebanon due to the significant financial and human forces' damage imposed on them by the Resistance. There is no doubt that it was the Resistance and their operations that forced Israel to leave southern Lebanon. In Lebanon, no one has any doubt about it; that is to say, everyone acknowledges it. Had it not been for the Resistance's daily operations, Israel would have remained in southern Lebanon; there is no doubt about it. Of course, the Israelis, even when they were under the most extreme pressure from the Resistance, tried to gain a concession from the opponents and to impose their prerequisites on Syria and Lebanon. At that time,

Lebanon as well as Syria—whose president was Hafez Al-Assad—rejected granting any concession to Israel. This helped the Lebanese government a lot, since Syria had a significant influence on the Lebanese government and helped it to reject Israel's conditions. Here, I would like to add a point about the talks between Yitzhak Rabin and Hafez Al-Assad: one of the factors contributing to the discontinuation of the Israeli-Syrian negotiations process at that time was the stance Hafez al-Assad's took; because when the Israelis came to the June 4 borders, Hafez Assad insisted to take back the Lake Tiberia. He said that it belonged to Syria and had to be returned to Syria. This was one of the factors that led to the discontinuation of Syrian-Israeli negotiations after the death of Yitzhak Rabin and under the rule of Shimon Peres.

Now let's go back to the issue of southern Lebanon. We were saying that the Israelis tried to receive concessions from Syria and Lebanon and impose their prerequisites on them. The Syrian and Lebanese governments also expressed their opposition to this issue. Hezbollah and the Resistance in Lebanon also rejected it. On the other hand, Hezbollah Resistance continued its operations until the Israelis came to the conclusion that their remaining in Lebanon was costly and they could not gain any concessions from Lebanon. So they decided to leave Southern Lebanon without any prerequisites. Also note that at that time, there were domestic pressures in the occupied lands on the part of settlers on the Israeli regime to leave Syria, especially because the families of the Israeli military and the families of the dead were demanding Israel not to stay in Lebanon. More interestingly, they had set July 2000 as the date for leaving Lebanon, but the intensity of the operations of the Resistance forced Tel Aviv to withdraw from Lebanon and thus, with complete humiliation and precipitation, the regime's military forces left southern Lebanon. This occurred by God's grace.

I'd like to ask another question and I'm willing to close this discussion here. Ayatollah Khamenei said a few years ago, that Israel won't survive to see the next 25 years.

Before coming to that, we need to finish the topic of the year 2000 victory. I remember a very important memory of Ayatollah Khamenei. You remember I said that in 1996 his Eminence had said no peace treaty would be achieved between Syria and Israel. In 2000, a few months before Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, and in accordance with our plans, we traveled to Tehran to meet with Ayatollah Khamenei and the Iranian officials. We—that is the Hezbollah council—traveled to Iran. On that trip, we also were accompanied by the military commanders of the Resistance for the first time. Nearly 50 commanders of the Resistance traveled with us.

At that time, we thought that Israel would not retreat from Lebanon in 2000. We were not sure, but we assumed it was unlikely that Israel would retreat in 2000, because we believed that Israel would not accept to retreat without imposing some prerequisites. We said to the Leader: "It is unlikely that Israel will withdraw from southern Lebanon. It seems that Israel will stay longer in Lebanon and we will need more time and more operations to make Israel withdraw with no preconditions." Then he asked: "Why do you think this is unlikely?" We responded: "Because this measure would be a major threat to Israel. Israel withdrawing from south Lebanon with no preconditions represents obvious resistance and this will be considered the first obvious victory of Resistance, naturally affecting Palestine and Palestinian nation's domestic developments; something that would pose a strategic threat to Israel and would signal to Palestinians the message that the main path is that of resistance and not negotiations. A message that told them: negotiations took your lands and sanctities away from you, but resistance liberated Lebanon and south Lebanon." It was then that the Leader stated: "I recommend you to seriously assume that Israel will leave Lebanon and you will be victorious. You continue your activities and plan for the future based on this assumption. Plan on how to face Israel's retreat from Lebanon on military, field work, media and political aspects." We were surprised to hear these words, because we all believed that Ehud Barak—who had just won the election— would not act on his promise of retreat, because his conditions had not been met and particularly that he had not achieved security commitments either. That is to say, neither the Lebanese government, nor the Syrian government and nor Hezbollah of Lebanon had made security commitments to Israel. Thus the question was that, how would it be possible that Israel would retreat? This seemed unwise and illogical.

Even more important than that, following the meeting, in the evening, we went to the Leader's home with our brothers from the Resistance, including the late Hajj Imad Mughniyah. Our brothers were those from the resistance, fighting on the front lines of the battle and could be martyred at any moment. After entering the Leader's house, we and our brothers went to a great hall where prayers were performed. At the time, our brothers were wearing military uniforms, with keffiyehs worn around their necks, and looked a lot like the Basijis on the Iranian fronts. We were only supposed

to perform congregational prayers with the Leader, and to offer our greetings before ending the ceremony. The Leader performed the prayers and after finishing Isha, he rose to greet his Lebanese brothers.

Then the Leader told his companions to move away. Then he said to me: "I am here to listen to you". At this moment, one of our brothers came and kissed the Leader's hand. Some of the brothers began to cry, and some of them were so impressed that could no longer stand on their feet. They slowly came forward. One of the brothers kissed the Leader's hand, and when the second one bent down to kiss his feet, he did not allow it. He went back and told me: "Tell them to sit down and calm down so we can talk." A speech was not planned for that ceremony. I asked my brothers to keep calm and I started translating the Leader's speech for them. Among the issues he addressed—which I believe emerged from his spiritual vision and not simply from political analysis, rather from something deeper— was that he said: "You will be victorious by the grace of God. Your victory is much closer than what some people think. "He pointed to me because we had said that Israel's withdrawal in such manner was unlikely. Pointing with his left hand, like this, he said: "Each and every one of you will see with your own eyes that you will be victorious."

After that we returned to Lebanon. At that time, we carried out large operations and, of course, many members of the Resistance were martyred. May 25 came, and Israel's surprising, unexpected and undignified retreat from southern Lebanon began. Also several were martyred during our progress towards the border. It was here that both predictions of the Leader of the Revolution were realized. First, the victory of the Resistance happened very soon, only a few months after that meeting; and second, all the people who were present at the meeting with the Leader and participated in the frontline operations, lived on to witness the great victory with their own eyes.

The question I wanted to ask before was that Ayatollah Khamenei said a few years ago that Israel would not see 25 years from now. [Meaning, there will be no Zionist Regime in 25 years.] There were interpretations of this sentence. Some people considered it to be definitive, and they started counting the days until it comes true. On the other hand, the front of Arrogance began to scoff at some of the interpretations of the statement. You have stood against the Zionist regime at different times and experienced various battles against this regime. Given your experiences, when you heard this statement from Ayatollah Khamenei, what was your perception and feelings about it?

First, I was not personally surprised by the remarks made by Ayatollah Khamenei, because we had heard similar statements in our private meetings in the previous years, especially in 2000, after the victory over the Zionist regime. We paid a visit to Ayatollah Khamenei a few months after the victory, and he was very delighted of the victory. We spoke about the future. At that time, he said: "If the Palestinian people, the Resistance in Lebanon, and the nations of the region perform their duties appropriately, and we continue this path, then certainly Israel cannot last for a long time in the region." At that time, he mentioned something less than 25 years.

So when I heard the Leader's 25 years remark, I concluded that he has given Israel extra time. That's why I was not surprised. On the other hand, it should be mentioned that the Leader's statement on Israel is absolutely serious. According to our experiences, some of which I already mentioned, we believe that the Leader is a person endorsed by Allah, the Almighty, and that what His Eminence states sometimes emerge from some other source—as it happened in the 33-day war. It should be noted that all data, investigations and information show that such an event (the elimination of Israel) will occur, but the realization of this matter is not unconditional, and it would happen under certain conditions. Therefore, if we resist and continue on the path we have taken, factual and field conditions indicate that Israel will not be able to remain in the region in the next 25 years.

We have done a lot of research and studies on the Israeli regime; trying to find answers for the following questions: what are the foundations of this regime? What are the hidden factors that have led to the existence of this regime? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this regime? Therefore, this shows that the Resistance has always exploited research as well as the power of logic and thinking based on existing facts.

Although there has been a revolutionary spirit in the fight against Zionism, this does not mean that the fight lacked research and rationality. I do not know the hidden dimensions of the Leader's words. Based on field studies and real investigations, we can clearly say that Israel cannot survive, because the existence of Israel in the region is not a natural existence; rather, its existence does not match the nature of the region. This entity has been imposed on the region cannot and hence cannot become normalized and turn into a normal issue.

Moreover, even if the Arab monarchs, emirs and rulers want it, all the nations of the region oppose the existence of Israel and firmly reject this illegitimate entity [against their rulers' will]. The elements of weakness are ample in the

Israeli entity, so the likelihood of the collapse of this regime is very high. I refer to two examples of Israel's apparent weakness: first, Israel's power is now heavily dependent on the power of the United States. Consequently, if anything happens to the United States of America—like what happened to the USSR, from the collapse of its economy to internal problems and discords and natural disasters or any other incident that might get the U.S. busy dealing with its problems and lead to a reduction of Washington's influence in the region, you will see that the Israelis will get their stuff and evacuate in the shortest possible time. Therefore, their destruction does not necessarily entail a war.

Israeli regime's existence in Palestine depends on the U.S.'s spiritual, psychological, military and economic support. If the U.S. gets busy with its own problems, Israel will have no chance to survive and there would be no need for a war with that regime. This is just one example, truly foreseeable.

Everyone knows that the United States allocates an annual amount of \$3 billion to Israel. Meanwhile, Israelis enjoy US \$10 billion worth of US banking facilities per year. A part of U.S. taxpayers' money is spent on Israel. Moreover, the most advanced technologies are transferred to Israel; Washington's support for Israel is completely obvious. One of the most important reasons behind the humiliated stances taken by Arab regimes towards Israel is their fear of the United States, not fear of Israel itself. If a day comes when some Arab regimes and Arab armies free themselves from pressures by the U.S., their stances towards Israel will be different. Even the armies and the regimes themselves [will take a different stance].

Let me make another example: the governments of the world usually build armies for themselves, but it is said that Israel is an army made for the regime. In the world, a country's army might collapse, but that country will stand. For example, after the U.S. war on Iraq, the Americans dissolved the Iraqi army, but Iraq remained and did not disappear. There are countries in the world that do not have an army or have a weak army; however, Israel is a regime that cannot survive without a strong army; if its army is defeated, or if the truth of the Israeli army—that is its weakness and instability—is disclosed to the settlers and they realize that this army is incapable of supporting them, you will see the Israelis will get their stuff and flee.

My dear brothers! Israel has many lethal weaknesses. That is why I believe that in the shade of a national will power against the survival of this regime, regional and international events will take place in this regard. I am among those who strongly believe in the new generation and God willing, this generation will enter Palestine and perform prayers in Quds, and there will be no Israel.

• Imam Khamenei's secret letter delivered to Hezbollah by General Soleimani

The 33-day war was a good test to see how powerful Israel is and how powerful Hezbollah and the axis of Resistance are as opposed to it. At some point, the Israeli army attacked several Arab countries and defeated them in a 6-day war. In the 33-day war, the Zionist army's attacks on Hezbollah's sites as well as on the innocent people in southern Lebanon were severe, but these attacks ultimately failed, and it seems that this war and the resulting victory became a turning point in the history of the region. What is your analysis of this war, and the defeat that Israel suffered as it failed to achieve its goals. In other words, what directions will it lead Tel Aviv to?

We can discuss it more broadly and refer to the aftermath of the 9/11 and the emergence of Neo-Conservatives in the U.S., i.e. the George Bush era; because the war on Lebanon was part of the same project and a bigger plan. It was at this point where the importance of the leadership role of Ayatollah Khamenei in the region became increasingly evident. George Bush and his associates used the 9/11 incident as the excuse to attack the countries of the region; fir they had the intention of conducting such attacks even prior to the 9/11. They chose to target Iraq on the pretext of possessing weapons of mass destruction. However, after the 9/11, they had to go to Afghanistan first and then move to Iraq.

So an American project opened in the years 2000 and 2001. Washington believe that the peace process in the region between Arabs and Israel had declined. The Resistance achieved a major victory in Lebanon, and consequently Israel retreated from southern Lebanon. Iran also became more and more powerful both in terms of its domestic affairs and in the whole region. This was a great victory for Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and even Palestinian resistance groups. Iran was also becoming more power day after day both domestically and regionally. After seeing these events, the U.S. decided to have an extensive military presence in the region so that, firstly they could pursue their interests, by gaining dominance over the oil resources and natural resources of the countries; secondly, they could impose a solution on the region that would benefit Israel and fixate its existence.

To achieve this goal, they needed to eliminate any obstacle. These obstacles Resistance in Palestine, Resistance in Lebanon, the Syrian government, and Iran. This was the project they were pursuing. All documents and evidence prove that. Well, after the 9/11, they had to go to Afghanistan, because the determining part of the neo-cons and George Bush's project included encircling Iran and isolating it. The U.S. troops based in Pakistan, their forces in the Persian Gulf countries and the Persian Gulf waters as well as their forces based in Syria and the some neighboring countries were deployed to Afghanistan and then Iraq to complete the encircling of Iran.

Naturally, before isolating Iran and attacking it, the Americans would need to completely dominate over Iraq, destroy the Resistance in Palestine and Lebanon, and then put an end to the life of the Damascus government; that is, [destroy] Iran's friends in the region and those countries the U.S. regarded as Iran's strong allies and arms in the region. They also sought to annihilate those who would resist humiliating peace with Israel, because peace with Israel was one of the conditions for isolating Iran and attacking it. That is to say, the first goal was to expand the direct military presence, and then to overthrow the countries, to destroy the resistance groups, to establish an Arab-Israeli peace, and to form a single Arab-Israeli front led by Washington to attack Iran and overthrow the Islamic Republic and take over the country. This was the U.S. project.

Thus, the first step was the war in Afghanistan, and the second step entailed the war in Iraq. I will tell you about the third phase and what happened. After the occupation of Iraq, if you remember, Colin Powell, who was the U.S. secretary of state at that time, went to Damascus with a long list of U.S. conditions, and met with Bashar al-Assad. He wanted to exploit the environment of fear that had been created following the U.S. attack on the region to impose his conditions on Assad regarding the Golan Heights, Palestine, Palestinian Resistance, Hezbollah of Lebanon, etc. Anyway, it was a long list [of conditions]. Despite the U.S.'s threats, Bashar Assad refused to surrender to them.

So the Americans failed and moved to the next phase. At that time, the elections of the Palestinian Legislative Council were scheduled. The U.S. assumed that the Palestinian Authority, headed by Mahmoud Abbas, would win the election, and that Hamas and other resistance groups would be defeated. Washington presumed that the PA would win and then begin to disarm the Palestinian Resistance and commence the process of reconciliation with Israel. But what happened? A major surprise; Hamas took to the Legislative Council by winning the vast majority of the votes. After that, the U.S. took their next step, which entailed a military strike on Lebanon. At that point, the 33-day war and the Resistance of Hezbollah took place.

The goal of the United States was to eliminate Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine, and then to attack Hezbollah in Lebanon. For after achieving their goal, they had plans to go to Syria after in order to overthrow the government of Damascus, and after that make peace with Israel and normalize relations between Israel and the Arabs; and afterwards to encircle Iran and isolate it. Naturally at that time, the victory over the Palestinian Resistance and Israel's victory over Lebanon's Hezbollah and the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's government could have been a major achievement for George W. Bush by which he could attain more victories at congress as well as presidential elections.

In late 2006, when mid-term congress elections were around and George Bush needed to win two third of the seats, an imminent American writer told me—and of course late he wrote it—: In order to succeed in congressional elections and even presidential elections, George W. Bush desperately needed to enter the electoral campaign like a cowboy, carrying three bloody severed heads: the head of the Resistance in Palestine, the head of Hezbollah's Resistance and Bashar al-Assad's head. If Bush succeeded in winning these three heads, he could win two-thirds of congressional votes for his party and, at the same time, he could guarantee a war against Iran." The main purpose of what would happen was, in fact, to end the Palestinian issue and provide the preliminaries for a war against Iran. I am going to

elaborate on this topic and I hope there will be an opportunity to explain this matter to the Iranian nation so that they will properly realize the fact that the ultimate goal of the conflicts and disputes in the region is not only Palestine, but the ultimate goal is to restore the U.S.'s domination over Iran, over its resources and facilities and to bring it back to what it was during the reign of the Shah.

Well, at this stage of history of the developments in the region, Iran's position, and the positions held by the Leader were of high importance. First, in the spiritual sense. Well, the U.S. entered the region. Obviously, there is neither the Soviet Union, nor the socialist front; rather there is only one domineering, arrogant, and merciless power in the world called the United States. This power decided to launch a military war in the region and entered the region with its armies and military equipment. All but a few were frightened and startled. Here, we remember the stances taken by the Leader regarding the U.S.'s invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq. Ayatollah Khamenei travelled to different provinces of Iran and reassured the Iranian people, the nations of the region as well as resistance groups, and delivered speeches wherein he strengthened the spirit of resistance and never surrendering to the U.S.'s historic and severe attack on the region. This was indeed a very difficult mission. I remember that after the invasion of Afghanistan and prior to the occupation of Iraq, I traveled to Iran to meet with the Leader.

I told him that some concerns had risen in the region. See what outlook he adopted. He turned to me and said: "Tell all our brothers not to fear; rather, the coming of the Americans to the region signals achieving freedom in the future." I was surprised to hear this statement. He pointed with his finger this way and asserted: "The Americans have reached the peak but with their invasion of Afghanistan, their decline has started. If the Americans truly believed that Israel and other Arab regimes and their mercenaries in the region were capable of supporting the interests of Washington, they would have never deployed their armies and navies to the region. Thus, this military act taken by them is a sign of their defeat and the failure of their policies in the region. Had they not failed, they would not need to take such measures. When the Americans come to the conclusion that they must act directly in order to achieve their interests in the region, this is a sign of weakness, not power. When any army, no matter how big and powerful, moves thousands of miles and goes to an area where there are living nations, such an army will surely be defeated and collapse. Therefore, the U.S. coming to the region marks the beginning of their fall and decline, not the beginning of a new era for them."

Ayatollah Khamenei recurrently reiterated this point, putting it in different words on different occasions. However, he told me this very clearly and obviously, and I quoted him and we discussed this issue together. Anyway, it was the year 2006 when we took up the path of resistance. If you remember, on the very first day of the war, the Leader issued a statement wherein he endorsed the Resistance and stressed the need to resist and fight against invaders. This measure on his part was very valuable for us, our nation, and our combatants; because we are talking of a tough battle wherein we witnessed bloodshed, martyrs, and wounds.

When we saw that our wali e-amr, our leader, our frontrunner, and our marja' encouraged us to resist, our spirit and motivation increased manifold and we powerfully engaged in a war against the invaders. After a short time and only within 4 or 5 days—that is when Israel had bombed all places it knew, the Americans assumed that we were in a weak position, we were scared and it was our time to surrender. At that time, the Americans spoke with Sa'd al-Hariri, who is now the Lebanese Prime Minister. Al-Hariri was not the prime minister then, he was the head of a parliamentary fraction to which the prime minister of the time, Fouad Siniora, was inclined. Al-Hariri contacted us and reported that the Americans—that is the negotiator was the U.S. government—are ready to stop the war on southern Lebanon if three conditions are met.

The first condition was that Hezbollah releases two Israeli prisoners it had captivated. The second condition was that Hezbollah becomes completely disarmed and turns into a [merely] political party. The third condition was that Hezbollah agrees with the deployment of multinational forces to the south of Lebanon. That is, neither the international forces affiliated with the U.N., as you call international organizations of the United Nations. At that time multinational forces had already entered Iraq. These forces were not afflicted with the U.S. Security Council, rather they belong to the U.S.

The goal was to make us accept that multinational forces be deployed to Lebanon, to the Lebanon-Palestine border, the Lebanon-Syria borders as well as in airports, coasts, and the Lebanese entrance and exit gates. That is, an international occupation and an American occupation. Naturally, we rejected these three conditions and continued to

fight. At that time, Condoleezza Rice visited Lebanon. What did she tell the Lebanese? She talked of the determining battle and that Hezbollah would definitely be defeated and destroyed, and made the famous remark that "the region was going through the pain of giving birth to a new Middle East". This is the "New Middle East" we were talking about.

Despite all this, the resistance stood and became victorious. Therefore, the first round of the U.S. project failed in light of the results of the Palestinian elections. The second round failed in Lebanon; that is the plot to destroy Hezbollah miscarried. Consequently, the third round also miscarried; because it was planned that after the destruction of Hezbollah, the war would go to Syria, and Israel and the U.S. would attack the ruling government in Syria. This did not happen, either. These were the first, second, and third failures that the United States faced.

With regard to Iraq, the Leader's position was absolutely clear. He insisted that the United States should be recognized as an occupier in Iraq. All official stances taken by the officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran also indicated the occupation of Iraq by the United States. After a while, public resistance began in Iraq. While it was assumed that the U.S. would stay in Iraq, dominate it and take control of it, in the end, Washington had no option but to leave Iraq as a result of the armed and sincere resistance in Iraq—not a resistance like that of the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda or takfiries— as well as a mighty political stance and the emergence of a national willpower in that country. Henceforth, the United States left Iraq, albeit in the light of an agreement. When the U.S. withdrew from Iraq, I explicitly stated that this was a great achievement and victory for the Iraqi resistance, but unfortunately nobody celebrated this great victory of the Iraqi people. This great victory of Iraqis during which the United States was forced to leave Iraq in 2011 should have been celebrated.

Eventually, all U.S. projects in the region miscarried at this stage: all-American projects from 2001 to 2011, or the "New Middle East" project failed. The United States failed to win control of the region in order to bring about a disgraceful peace deal with Israel, normalize the Arab-Israeli relations to eradicate the Palestinian question, destroy resistance movements, dominate over countries, and isolate and invade Iran. How did this happen? Here we see the role of the Leader, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as its allies and friends in the region. They were the ones who foiled these plots.

Naturally, the Al-Saud and the rulers of many Arab and Persian Gulf countries were an integral part of the United States' plan in the region and they were in some way a means for implementing the American plots. Israel was the U.S.'s most important means for realizing its plans in the region. However, those who stood up to the U.S.'s plots and conspiracies were the Islamic Republic of Iran led by Ayatollah Khamenei, Syria led by President Assad, the Resistance in Lebanon and their allies, the Resistance in Palestine and their allies, sincere political and national leaders in Iraq—headed by the religious clergy in holy Najaf—, and Islamic and national groups in the region.

But who played the most important role, empowered others, and supported them? The Islamic Republic of Iran and Ayatollah Khamenei's position, stances and determination. We were at the heart of the events that took place between 2001 and 2011—that is during a decade—and their obvious outcome was the defeat of the U.S.

I will close this part of my speech with a memory of Ayatollah Khamenei (May Allah protect him). In the 33-day war—which actually lasted 34 days, but is called the 33-day war—the Lebanese people were naturally very worried, at the beginning of the war, about what they was going to happen. What happened? Even some Lebanese officials contacted Saudi authorities, asking Riyadh to intervene as a mediator and end the war in southern Lebanon. The Saudis replied to the Lebanese officials by saying: "No one will interfere. There is a U.S., international and regional consensus that Hezbollah should be eradicated and crushed. Hezbollah has no way but to surrender or be destroyed." Obviously, our decision was to fight back and there was a strong willpower for fighting and a spirit of Karbala ruling the whole of Hezbollah. This quote by Imam Hussain (a.s.) was always in front of our eyes that: "Beware that the humiliated man, son of the humiliated, has pressured me between the sword and surrender in humiliation. Never to humiliation!

We were faced with the two options of war or a humiliated surrender, and we chose war over the other. In the early days of the war, our dear friend and brother, Hajj Qasim Soleimani, contacted us. He came to Damascus, contacted

Beirut and said that he needed to meet with us. We asked him: How do you want to do it? We said to Hajj Qasim Soleimani: "The Israelis are bombarding all the bridges, roads, and cars, and you cannot reach us."

This dear friend of ours told us that he needed to get to us, because he had an important message from Ayatollah Khamenei to deliver to us. We arranged the situation, so eventually Hajj Qasim came to Beirut's southern suburbs during the early days of the war. He said that when the Leader (May Allah protect him) was in Mashhad, he called on all the officials of the Islamic Republic—including the current and former presidents, the current and former foreign ministers, the current and former defense ministers, the current and the former IRGC commanders, and other officials to hold a meeting together.

Hajj Qasim explained to me that during the meeting, the war against Lebanon and its objectives as well as the question as what the war would lead to were examined. From the outset, the Islamic Republic of Iran considered the war on Lebanon to be part of the United States' plan in the region and not an issue separate from that plot. Hajj Qasim said that all of the participants in the meeting unanimously agreed that the Islamic Republic of Iran had to stand alongside the Lebanese resistance, Lebanese government and people, as well as alongside Syria; because there was the threat that the war would be spread to Syria and therefore, Iran needed to use all its political, financial and military capabilities to help the front of Resistance win. Hajj Qasim further said that once the meeting was over and Maghrib and Isha prayers were performed, the audience were about to leave when the Leader asked them to stay longer, saying: "I have words with you." This happened after the first meeting; that is, the first formal meeting.

Afterwards, Ayatollah Khamenei turned to Hajj Qasim and said: "You write what I say, then go to Beirut and give it to that [particular] person. He will discuss the matters with his friends and brothers, if he deems it proper." After describing the events, Hajj Qasim started reading the Leader's words for me. Among his words, the Leader had said: "The captivity of Israeli soldiers by the Lebanese Resistance was a hidden divine grace; because the operation forced Israel to enter Lebanon, in respond to your action. The Israelis and the Americans were preparing themselves to attack Lebanon and Hezbollah late summer or early fall 2006, and so you would have been caught by surprise, while you were not ready for a war. Therefore, the captivity of the Israeli military forces by you was a divine blessing that brought about progress in time; so the war did not happen when the United States and Israel had planned it; it happened when they were not ready for it and they were just getting prepared, while you were already prepared for it. That is to say, it happened at a time when there was no source of being caught by surprise.

This statement of the Leader was later confirmed and verified great figures. For example, when I referred to it in the media, the eminent professor Mohamed Hassanein Heikal acknowledged it in separate programs on Al Jazeera channel at that time. Meanwhile, one of the great American writers, Seymour Hersh, confirmed the matter. I should point out that when I raised the issue in the media, I did not attribute it to the Leader.

Another point that Ayatollah Khamenei had referred to in that message was that he had said: "This war is very similar to the Battle of the Confederates, which happened during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h.). This war will be very difficult and frustrating, it will threaten your existence; you are obliged to be patient in this war." In this part of his message he had quoted the Quranic verse "and hearts almost reached the throat ... you started to think of God with suspicion; [the Quran; 33:10]." The Leader had also said: "you should place your trust completely in God." Also, the third part of his message read: "You will be victorious in this war." I had heard a similar sentence before—I do not exactly remember if it was before or after that—but someone narrated Ayatollah Behjat (Allah's mercy be upon him), as telling us: "Be sure, and be certain that you will win the war, God willing."

But the interesting and important point in the Leader's message was that he had said: "you will win the war, and after that you will become a regional power to the point that no other power will be able to confront you." At that time, I laughed and said to Hajj Qasim: "We will turn into a regional power? If we manage to survive the current battle and maintain our existence, we have made a great achievement." Then, I commented jokingly: "My dear brother! We do not want to become a regional power." But anyway, Ayatollah Khamenei's letter on that day created some sort of

assurance in me. From that day on, I was sure that we were going to win the war and after that, we were going to become a regional power; which actually happened.

Did his Eminence recommend any duas and supplications during the 33-day war?

During the early days of the war, I received a letter from the Leader, which I still keep. At that time, I also received a letter from my brother and friend, Mr. Hejazi. Mr. Hejazi advised us in his letter to recite some supplications, but I do not exactly remember if he had attributed the recommendations to Ayatollah Khamenei. I do not remember that very well, but I remember that the supplication "Jowshan" was recommended by the Leader—as far as I recall now.

The supplications "Jowshan Saghir" and "Appeal to Imam Mahdi (God's greetings be upon him and may God hasten his reappearance)" as well as "Ziarat Ashura", besides that well-known supplication were among the recommendations in this regard. But in general, I would like to refer to my experience on knowing the leader.

We would naturally recommend the same to our brothers. These are among the sources of strength for Hezbollah in the wars. Supplicating to God and relying on Him has always been part of our schedule, and the Leader always emphasized it. Ever since we knew the Leader, he always insisted on spiritual matters: that is, the need for trust in and reliance on God, the Almighty. He recited in all meetings: "If you help God, He will help you and make you steadfast (in your faith); [the Quran; 47:7]." He always stressed that what the Almighty God says is no joke; His words are explicit and this is God's promise. God will surely fulfill His promise. He has always insisted on trust in God's promises. Even now, at times, he specifically focuses on this matter in his statements. He particularly emphasizes on reciting Duas, supplicating to God, and asking for His assistance.

I remember at times we felt exhausted, because we faced very difficult phases and the situation was frustrating. In one of the meetings, His Eminence told me: "whenever you feel exhausted, in face of threats and difficulties, find a quite a place, get in and close the door. So for a short while—a few minutes, 15 minutes or 30 minutes—speak with God with your own words; there is no need to recite a supplication. With the same language you use to speak with others, speak with God; talk to Him about your sorrows and pains, and ask Him to help you. Don't all of us believe that the Almighty God is always present, witnessing everything, and capable of doing anything? The Almighty God knows all our needs and there is no barrier between Him and us. He will welcome us at any time, and He will hear us, by any language we speak. If you do so, you will see that the Almighty God will grant you power, will and energy, and He will open all His doors to you." Since then, we have acted based on the Leader's recommendation and we have seen its fabulous results.

Several questions remain, and we don't have much time left. There are two issues that we won't discuss here: the enemy's efforts to create divisions between the Shias and Sunnis, and the issue of Islamic awakening. In addition, during the last seven to eight years, we have witnessed the emergence of an important event in the region: an event that has had very strategic effects in the region; and that is the events and crisis in Syria. In your opinion, why was Syria chosen for the implementation of the plots in this region, and what were the dimensions of this crisis? Another question I' like to ask is why, despite the heavy costs, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah got involved in the Syrian crisis? What would have happened if they hadn't engaged in this affair? What were the presumed repercussions that led Iran and Hezbollah to assume their engagement in Syria as essential?

This is related to our discussion about regional transformations from 2001 to 2011. We said that the end was marked by the U.S.'s withdrawal from Iraq, their defeat in Lebanon, their failure in Syria, their defeat in Palestine, and therefore, the miscarriage of the U.S.'s plans in the region. After 2011, this situation—failures of the U.S.'s plans—is still ongoing. This is an important and historic phase in the life of the region, the life of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei (May Allah protect him); for in the early 2011 the Leader referred to it as the phase of "the Islamic awakening"; which is called the "Arab Spring" in the region.

I would like to speak about the Islamic awakening in the region before starting the debate on Syria. The Arab Spring, the Islamic Awakening, or massive popular uprisings in the region first erupted in Tunisia, later took place in Libya and Egypt, and then happened in Yemen. These incidents were followed by conflicts in Syria. Briefly, based on what was happening at that time we concluded that after the U.S.'s plans and attacks miscarried, Obama tried to compensate for the defeat.

The nations of the region became awakened and began to take action in hope of making changes. It was in this context that the Arab regimes found themselves at a disadvantage. A great opportunity was provided for the nations to overturn the regimes. My inference and many others' conclusion was the same as what the Leader had suggested since the very beginning. He had said that "these national movements are genuine national movements." The Tunisian movement represented the Tunisian people and their national will, the Egyptian movement represented the will of the Egyptian people, the Libyan movement represented the will of the Libyans, and the Yemeni movement was the same. All the slogans that these movements were chanting and the goals they were trying to accomplish rose from their popular and national views and interests.

Thus, we saw the true impact of Islam and the Islamist movements in this great movement and the awakening of the nations. That's precisely why the Leader called it the "Islamic awakening." But what was the main problem with this Islamic awakening? The problem lied in the lack of a leadership and unity. You see, the Islamic Revolution in Iran was a massive popular revolution, but what made this revolution successful and strengthened it after the victory was the existence of a leader, Imam Khomeini (r.a.). Another factor that led to the victory of this revolution was unity among all the people, authorities, and scholars who unanimously supported Imam Khomeini (r.a.).

Therefore, at that time there was a unified nation and a leader who outlined the policies and strategies for the orderly progress of the affairs. So the problem that existed in these countries (revolutions)—except in Syria which I will discuss later—was the lack of a reliable and united leadership. There existed many leaders and many parties with no unity among them: they had disagreements. When they wanted to negotiate with each other, their disagreements emerged. This also affected the people, so the people were divided, too. It even led to civil wars in certain regions.

The Americans and some countries of the region entered the scene to take possession of and defeat the national movements in different countries. Here, the U.S. played an important role. France also got involved in North Africa. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates joined in fiercely to eliminate the Islamic Awakening—the Arab Spring—and eliminate popular uprisings. They were trying to achieve their goals by mobilizing their media power and supporting military coups in the region. We all know how the situation unfolded in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. But in Yemen, the situation is different. They tried to take possession of the popular uprising in Yemen for their profit, but a large part of the Yemeni nation, with national and political resistance, continued to support dear the brother Al-Sayyid Abdul-Malik al-Houthi and the Ansar Allah movement, and stood against the foreigners until an unjust war was imposed on them: the war which continues to this day.

Now we get to the case of Syria. What happened in Syria had nothing to do with the "Arab Spring" or "the Islamic Awakening". What happened in Syria was the implementation of the plot of the U.S., Saudi Arabia and some countries in the region to block the achievement of the movement of Resistance; particularly, because at that time the popular revolution in Egypt had made Israel very worried about its future in the region.

At that time, the Israelis held big conferences in which they spoke of the strategic atmosphere. They were even considering re-establishing some military battalions and sending them to the Sinai borders. This shows how worried and frightened Israel was about the changes in Egypt.

After they lost hope in turning the Syrian government into their ally, their desirable goal to pursue in Syria was to overthrow the government and the ruling system. What many do not know is that before taking actions to overthrow the Damascus government, much effort was made so that President Bashar al-Assad would lead the Syrian

movement to another direction. The Saudis worked on this issue so hard that even "Malik Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz" personally went to Damascus, despite the fact that he had boycotted Syria. The Qatari government also worked hard to achieve this goal. Turkey and a number of other Arab countries, including Egypt, during the ruling of Hosni Mubarak, also tried to push Syria into joining the opposing front. By giving political and enticing financial promises to Assad, the U.S. and their allies tried to push Syria to another direction, the so-called "Arab moderation", which we actually call "Arab surrender."

Nevertheless, President Bashar al-Assad and other Syrian leaders consistently emphasized their firm support for the Resistance, believing that the Arab-Israeli conflict persisted. Bashar al-Assad believed that there would be no peace in the region without resolving the issue of the occupied Golan, and compensating for the unaccomplished rights of the Palestinians.

=All in all, what happened was that the Americans failed to make Damascus comply with them; Washington knew well that Syria had a pivotal status within the framework of the Resistance. If we want to explain the precise role of Syria with regard to the Resistance, we should mention the Leader's description of the country. He stated: "Syria is the pillar of Resistance". Today, without Syria, Lebanon's resistance will be marginalized. Without Syria, Palestinian resistance will be marginalized, because Syria is one of the main components of the body of Resistance in the region. Some believe that Syria is like a bridge for the Resistance, but I believe that this country is more than a bridge, because Syria is one of the main components of the body, intellect and culture as well as the thinking and will of the Resistance in the region. This fact was proved especially after the 33-day war. Syria's position, Syria's support, and Syria's stability were threatened during the 33-day war: [the plot was that] while the United States is present in Iraq and the borders of Syria, Israel would expand the scope of the war and attack Syria and launch a massive war against Syria. But Bashar al-Assad did not back down, and resolutely and sovereignly continued to support the Resistance during the 33-day war.

After the end of the 33-day war, the Israelis did some research and eventually concluded that in order to end the Resistance in Lebanon and Palestine, they first needed to abolish Syria and they planned to do so. Since they could not take over Syria through their policies, they opted for a military option. If they had been able to create a military coup by penetrating the Syrian army, they would have done so, but they could not. After this failure, the Americans and Israelis abused the freedom of expression in media and political space of Syria and pushed the transformations to a direction which created chaos and internal conflicts in Syria. Since the very early days of the anti-government protests in Syria, I saw first-hand that President Bashar al-Assad organized meetings with the leaders of opposition leaders and tried to meet their demands.

But, afterwards, the demonstrations turned into military operations, just like what happened during the occupation of Daraa. The Americans, Saudis and some other countries in the region sent al-Qaeda, ISIS and Al-Nusra Front Takfiris from all over the world to Syria so they dominate over Syria and put an end to the Syrian state. To serve the interests of whom? To serve the interests of the US and Israel. To serve the interests of the powers who look forward to extinguishing the Palestinian issue; to serve the interests of the powers who want to encircle, isolate and attack Iran. This is the truth. Therefore, the Syrian issue was by no means a problem of people seeking a certain type of election or reform, because Bashar al-Assad was ready to discuss any option that the people wanted. But others quickly took actions to occupy the areas and hit the Syrian army, security forces and Syrian institutions to overthrow Bashar al-Assad through a military solution.

They opened the borders and many ships came carrying loads of military weapons. Joe Biden himself says that tens of thousands tons of weapons and ammunition were delivered to Syria. The U.S. spent hundreds of billions of dollars in this country. What for? To realize democracy in Syria?! ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra were seeking to establish democracy in Syria? Were those who regarded the elections as the worst sin, considered voters in the elections as pagans, and killing them as legitimate, seeking to organize elections for Syrians? The answer was clear; and today, it

has been proved that what happened in Syria did not have anything to do with elections, reforms or democracy-related matters; because Bashar al-Assad was willing to negotiate these issues. But they [the West] were in a hurry to overthrow the Syrian government and dominate the country.

• What hastens the collapse of the Saudi regime is its officials' actions

As I've mentioned in some media outlets, one and a half years after the start of the Syrian crisis, around 2012 or 2013, Malik Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz sent a special envoy to Bashar al-Assad. Saudi Arabia sent a message to Assad, declaring that if he withdrew from the Resistance and ended his ties with Iran, the war on Syria would be stopped and a solution to the takfiri groups would be found, and Assad would be recognized as President, forever. The Saudis told Assad, "we are demanding neither reform nor anything else, and we are willing to pay hundreds of billions of dollars to reconstruct Syria". Therefore, the goal was completely different from the demands of the nations in the Arab Spring. The goal was to rob Syria off its historical status, to rob off its rights and to draw it out of the Resistance movement, to prepare the grounds for the obliteration of the Palestinian cause, for the stabilization of U.S.'s position in Iraq, and the isolation and encirclement of Iran. Well, since day one, our understanding of the war was this. I hope that the brothers in Iran will help disperse the information on these facts. Some U.S. officials and Syrian opponents said that if they could dominate Syria, they would immediately enter Lebanon to get rid of Hezbollah. Others said they would go to Iraq. So, the issue was not just Syria.

When the president of the United States, Donald Trump, acknowledges that Obama, Clinton and the CIA created the terror group ISIS and sent it to Syria, was the terrorists' goal to establish democracy in Syria and the election, or they sought to destroy this country? That's why we clearly knew from the first day that the goal of the war on Syria was not related to such matters. The goal of this war was to overthrow the Syrian government, destroy the Syrian army, and expand dominance over Syria, so that Syria would yield up its rights and grounds would be prepared for the destruction of the Palestinian issue, the normalization of relations with Israel, and the elimination of all the aspirations and dreams of the nations of the region. We agreed on this conclusion in Lebanon, for example in Hezbollah, and there was not even one single different opinion among the members of Hezbollah regarding the goals of the war against Syria. Even Ayatollah Khamenei—who is also approved by God and enjoys great historical insight and awareness, as well as the characteristics of the famous and exceptional leadership—believed in the principle that the Syrian issue was not a matter of democracy, reform, and so on.

I pointed out in some gatherings that there were people suggesting that Iran had ordered us to enter Syria, but this is not true. We decided to enter Syria because we felt seriously threatened by the situation in Syria and Lebanon. There was the risk that the war would soon be drawn into our towns and villages. We were willing to engage in the war, but after all, it required permission and support—and the former, i.e. permission, was more important.

I paid a visit to the Leader, I explained my data and inference about Syria and its transformations, and I presented my own arguments. I learned that his view about the events in Syria was much clearer and deeper than our view. His positions with regard to Syria and its transformations were clear from the very beginning. He said that this was a plot for overthrowing Syria, and it targeted Syria, the status of Syria with relation to the Resistance and the Palestinian issue, the Resistance movement, and also the Islamic Republic of Iran; because after they finish with Syria, they would attack Lebanon, Iraq and Iran. This is what actually happened. They came to Lebanon and occupied a part of Al-Baqaa, and if they had been able, they would have occupied more areas. But we and the Lebanese army stood up to them and besieged them in mountainous areas.

You saw in Iraq, Takfiri terrorists were quickly transported from the east of Euphrates in Syria to Iraq, and they dominated the province of Al Anbar over a very short period of time. This province accounts for over a quarter of Iraq's total area. They also subjugated Mosul, Saladin, and other parts, reaching an area 20 kilometers from the city of

Karbala and 40 kilometers from Baghdad. This means that we actually saw over the past years, what Ayatollah Khamenei had judged at the beginning of the Syrian events. There, the reason for the Leader's firm position as to side with Syria was revealed. The Islamic Republic of Iran adopted this position, and we, too, taking this position, went to Syria and fought there. The Syrian government, people and army resisted the plots. A large portion of the Syrian population supported the government and resisted. We have always said that after God's grace, this was the resistance and endurance of the Syrian government, people and leaders that led to the victory of Syria. Hezbollah of Lebanon, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iraqi friends, and Russia were the arms that assisted Syria, and the main task was carried out by the Syrian government, people and army. If the Syrian leaders surrendered, if the Syrian army collapsed, or if the Syrian people stopped supporting the government and the army, we would not have achieved anything in the big war in the Levant. We only assisted them.

So, now we are here. I will finish this part of my talk by mentioning anecdotes of my visit to Ayatollah Khamenei and the spiritual capacity of this dear and honorable Sayyid. After the Syrian crisis began in 2011, a US-led international coalition entered this country, and all the countries of the world believed that Damascus would collapse within only two months. All the Arab countries believed this. Even some of our friends also believed that. So, we also felt a little worried, even though we didn't really believe that. The dimensions of the matter were not clear for us, and we were very worried. At that time, some countries like Turkey and Qatar, with which we were in contact prior to the Syrian crisis, sent us messages. At that time, Mr. Davutoğlu who had a political responsibility came to Lebanon.

Did this happen before the Istanbul summit or after that?

No, it was after the events and before the Astana meetings. Astana meeting was held after Davutoğlu's visit. I am currently talking about the transformations in the first and second years of the Syrian crisis, especially in the first year. The Turkish leaders sent us messages that "We are willing to give you a guarantee. You stand back and do not count on Syria, because we guarantee you that Damascus will fall in two or three months." Many brothers in Iran were also influenced by this atmosphere. At a meeting with the Leader and a number of Iranian officials, we learned that some Iranian authorities were also influenced by the atmosphere formed in the region. But in that meeting, contrary to the views and opinions of all the countries of the world, the experts of the region, and even a number of Iranian officials, the Leader turned to me and said: "We have to make Syria and Bashar al-Assad win, and they will eventually win."

Meanwhile, all the world said a different thing. After about 2 years, the signs of the realization of this prediction by the Supreme Leader of the Revolution were also revealed. Now that we reached this point, we are possibly witnessing a major and historic victory in Syria. Imagine for a moment that ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front and their American allies had become victorious in Syria and had subjugated this country, what would have happened to Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran? And what would the fate of the nations of the region have been? What would the fate of Palestine and Quds have been? In the case of the victory of the Takfiris, the deal of the century would have come about long ago, and it was enacted by this day. If today Ben Salman told the Palestinians to accept minor things they were given, what would have happened to Quds and Palestine? Therefore, if we want to know the importance of the victory that was achieved in Syria, we must reverse this question and ask: if we had not won and had been defeated in Syria, if they had won, what would be the situation in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, and the whole region? When we answer this question, we understand the importance of what the fighters have accomplished in Syria and the significance of their resistance.

You repeatedly emphasized that the rulers of different countries contacted Bashar al-Assad, giving him various promises of the financial and political kind, and even guaranteed his remaining in power, but he eventually refused to accept these promises. What was the reason for Bashar al-Assad's persistence and resistance against these promises, and what caused him to endure so much pressure?

It was mainly because Bashar al-Assad did not trust the American and Arab parties. On the other hand, Assad knew their experience; because they all consider granting concessions. Yet, he himself is not a man who would give concessions in exchange for the essential and national principles. Bashar al-Assad believed that offering any concession in exchange for national principles would be risky for Syria's existence, national sovereignty, and its status in the region.

Before Syria faced this situation and Iran, Hezbollah and Syria itself and the government of Dr. Bashar al-Assad opted for this solution, were other alternatives investigated to see if other options were available or there was basically no other way from the beginning?

Our initial option was negotiation, and a political settlement was our priority. The Syrian government, our brothers in Iran, and we in Hezbollah made numerous contacts with the Syrian opposition and invited them to negotiate for deciding on a political settlement, but the opposition strongly rejected political negotiation and discussion and believed that the Syrian government would fall within two to three months. I remember that some influential parties in the Syrian opposition told us that we intended to revive the dead! They said that the Damascus government was done with and they would not accept to negotiate with such a government. This was their mistake in calculations because they absolutely refused to negotiate a political settlement. But their even bigger calculation mistake was that they engaged in military action too soon, which was their main objective in Syria. As I mentioned earlier, their goal was not to establish democracy in Syria or to implement reforms in this country. Their main goal was to overthrow the Damascus government, hit the Syrian army and, change the equations in the country. Yes, that's right; there was no other option when the Syrian government and its friends and allies opted for an armed resistance option.

An important matter that has always been emphasized by Ayatollah Khamenei is the policy of approximation of Islamic denominations and that members of different Islamic denominations should be able to coexist peacefully and should by no means be hostile toward each other. Meanwhile, we see some movements that add fuel to the fire of religious disputes, under the influence of the propaganda and policies of the foreigners—who are enemies of both Shias and Sunnis. What is your view about the policy of approximation of Islamic denominations promoted by Ayatollah Khamenei, and also emphasized by Imam Khomeini (r.a.)? What has this policy achieved? And what issues, do you think, can threaten this policy at the moment?

Firstly, this is one of the fundamental principles raised by Ayatollah Khomeini (r.a.) under the title of Islamic unity, solidarity among Muslims, the closeness of Islamic denominations, and the proliferation of the spirit of convergence, cooperation and coordination among all Muslims. The Islamic Republic of Iran has always favored this policy. After taking up the responsibility of leadership, Ayatollah Khamenei, too, continued this policy forcefully, always stressing it. The truth is that this is also the policy of the original Islam of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the Quran. Unity among Muslims, the policy of approximation of Islamic denominations, is an Islamic logic that all Muslims should heed.

Much effort has been made in this regard. Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, extensive relations were developed among Islamic parties and Muslim scholars across the region and even the world. Moreover, many congresses and conferences were held during these years to promote the policy of approximation of Islamic denominations. Undoubtedly, the attitude of Imam Khomeini (r.a.) and also Ayatollah Khamenei toward the Palestinian cause has played an important role in gathering all Muslims under one single flag, i.e. the centrality of the Palestinian cause.

Much effort has been made in this regard. If we look for the good results and the achievements of the policy of approximation of Islamic denominations, we will find them in recent years; because the most dangerous incident since 2011 was the U.S.-Saudi project aimed at creating faith and tribe related sedition and divisions between Shias and Sunnis in the region. This is more dangerous than what happened in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Bahrain. I remind you of four years ago; now we are in the fifth year. When the aggressive U.S.-Saudi coalition took military action against

Yemen, the Friday Prayers' Imam of the Great Mosque of Mecca (Masjid ul-Haram) announced during the Friday Prayers sermons that the war on Yemen was a Sunni-Shia war. The Saudis tried to present the Syrian war as a religious and ethnic war, too. A lot of efforts were made in the media and huge amounts of money were spent to make the different wars in the region look like sectarian and tribal conflicts. All these attempts failed. The Shias rejected this rationale. Many Sunni scholars and Sunni figures rejected this rationale. This has been one of the results of this policy pursued over the past 30 years.

Relations between the Shias and Sunnis, the efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the positions held by Imam Khomeini (r.a.) and Ayatollah Khamenei created solid relationships in the Muslim World, so that the Islamic world was able to nullify the biggest sedition aimed at creating an internal war between Shias and Sunnis. Naturally, we should continue this policy, although we have successfully passed this stage, and we have overcome many risks so far.

I believe that the United States and Saudi Arabia suffered a tough defeat in their efforts for causing sedition in the region and thus failed to make Iraq's events seem like a Sunni-Shia battle. We saw that Sunnis, Shias, Iraqi nomads—including Shias and Sunnis—all stood against ISIS, and prior to that, they had resisted the occupation by the United States. In Syria, too, the people, including the Syrian army, the popular forces or the allied forces, who fought against ISIS, Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups were mostly Sunnis. That is, those who fought in Syria were mostly Sunnis, fighting alongside Shias and members of other Islamic denominations.

Therefore, based on what has happened so far in Yemen or other countries, I strongly believe that the division-provoking project has miscarried, which means that the Islamic Ummah has been largely spared of the risk of being afflicted with religious sectarian conflicts. We should continue this strategy to strengthen this achievement. Enhanced relations, cooperation, support of the Palestinian cause, resistance to the U.S. and defense of the nations of the region can lead to increased unity and solidarity among Muslims.

Sometimes, the adversaries of the Palestinian nation, the Islamic Revolution, and the Resistance movement propagate the idea that the people of Palestine are Sunnis. They also attribute other characteristics to the Palestinian nation so that under the influence of the propaganda, the Iranian people become skeptical toward the Palestinians. They try to create the ambiguity that 'why should Iran support a Sunni nation?' But we have always seen that Ayatollah Khamenei has stressed and stresses that the Palestinian cause represents the most important matter of the Muslim world, and he has never adopted a Sunni-Shi'a perspective with regard to Palestine.

This position by the Leader has existed since the occupation of Palestine by the Zionists, and this is the position taken by all scholars, jurists (Faqihs) and religious authorities (marja's) in Najaf and in the holy city of Qom and among all Shias of the world. Even beyond this, our great scholars and marja's, who are said to be traditionalists and not revolutionary—if it is appropriate to say this about them—support the Palestinian cause, accuse the usurper Israel and provide assistance to Palestine; all of them have issued written permissions to grant part of the religious donations and Imam's share to the Palestinian Resistance. This is a great action. You know that our marja's are generally cautious about spending the Imam's share, but they allow Imam's share or some of it to be allocated to the Palestinian Resistance. Now, who were the members of the Palestinian Resistance? The members of the Palestinian resistance are Sunnis, not Shias; many were not even Islamist, for example, they were inclined to nationalist or leftist parties. Our marja's did not include any prerequisite for assistance and authorized part of the Imam's share to the Palestinian Resistance so that Palestine would be liberated. This means that there has been a great insight and awareness.

As for the question of Palestine, as Ayatollah Khamenei has pointed out on many occasions, if we search the whole world, looking for a matter that has remained intact, and its legitimacy is completely clear in terms of legal, religious, moral, and humane principles, it is the matter of Palestine. The enemies are trying to distract us from the Palestinian cause, using all the tools at their disposition and various weapons. This is an effort that has been made in previous years, i.e. when they sent Palestinian suicide bombers to Shia areas to carry out terrorist operations. That's why I said on Quds Day a few years ago: "Why do you send Palestinian people? Why do you hire them to kill our women and children? If you are seeking to distract us from the Palestinian cause, then kill us everywhere: by every door, in every mosque and hussayniyah. We are the Shia of Amir al-Mu'minin, Imam Ali (a.s.), and we won't let go of Palestine, the

Palestinian nation and the holy institutions of the Islamic Ummah in Palestine." These efforts in theory and practice are known. Undoubtedly, it is a matter of the Truth and Islam, so the Islamic Republic of Iran, we and all Muslims must take actions for this cause, based on their religious and divine duty.

Given the importance of this matter, I would like to ask two questions. First, the general view of Ayatollah Khamenei is clear about the approximation [the policy of approximation of Islamic denominations], and he initiated a movement of approximation at the beginning of his term of leadership. I would like to ask you to give some more concrete examples of his actions and views on the unity of Shia and Sunni and the approximation dialogue. For example, it is indicated that he has announced as forbidden (haram) to disrespect Sunnis sanctities, and so on. Secondly, some pretend that the issues that have occurred in different Islamic countries like Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and Bahrain over the past years have been based on the disagreements between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and others have entered into conflict, on their behalf. How much can this be true?

As for the first part of the question, the formation of the "Congress on approximation of denominations", holding several conferences and gatherings in Iran, the special attention the Leader gave to these gatherings and his insistence on attending them and speaking to the audience and the Muslims of the world are some of his measures for promoting approximation. We also constantly observed during the conferences on Islamic unity in Iran that the Leader presented himself among the Shia and Sunni scholars and met with them, ignoring all the security and non-security considerations. The main reason for this attitude is his emphasis on the necessity of spreading the culture of unity among Islamic communities and Muslim scholars. His Eminence endorsed gatherings that bring about unity among scholars.

We, in Lebanon, have the "gathering of Muslim scholars", which is one of the good and successful experiences for unifying the Islamic denominations. A large number of Shia scholars and Sunni scholars are present at this Islamic gathering. Whenever our brother organizers traveled to Iran for the gathering of Muslim scholars and met with the Leader, his Eminence praised the formation of such a gathering and emphasized the necessity of promoting it in other Islamic countries. In recent years, he has taken some brave positions. In these years, we have seen that many efforts were made aiming to disunite and divide Shias and Sunnis, and unfortunately, some Wahhabi and Takfiri movements, as well as some Sunni-attributed satellite channels such as Safa and Wesal, have tried to takfir (denote excommunication to) the Shia, attributing big lies to Shias. They attributed certain beliefs to Shi'ism that the Shia do not hold at all.

On the other side of the spectrum, some satellite channels are attributed to the Shia community, figures and groups that have nothing to do with Shi'ism, and none of the current notions, such as 'the Islamic Ummah', 'the global Arrogance', 'Autocracy and Tyranny', 'freedom', and 'defending sanctities' are important to them. The only mission of these satellite channels is to divide Shias and Sunnis by using insulting words to criticize the opposite community. That is what the Leader referred to as the "London-based Shiism".

The type of activities of the satellite channels attributed to each community-- either Shia or Sunni-- shows that they are both conducted by one single force. For instance, we see that some channels attributed to Shias use insulting words for certain wives of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) or his companions. The Wahhabi channels then broadcast some of these cases. This means that each of these channels plays a complementary role in arousing sedition and sectarian conflicts between Shias and the Sunnis. Naturally, this had a dangerous impact on Muslims. I have discussed it with some major Sunni scholars in Lebanon and other countries like Syria and Egypt, who similarly believe that this is very dangerous. We believe that only one person can solve this problem and stand up to this wave. Because it requires bravery and a high position so that a sovereign position can be taken for it, in other words, so that the sedition is completely defeated.

While meeting with the leader some years ago, I mentioned these issues and the names. He also stated: "It is true; what is happening is very dangerous. One of the worst things is insulting the prominent figures of the denominations,

and we need to adopt a strong position with regard to this event."

I remember that some years ago the Leader traveled to the province of Kurdistan and had a speech in the city of Sanandaj. In that meeting, he emphasized the fact that insulting Sunni figures was haram (forbidden). Nevertheless, shortly after his speech, the so-called Shia satellite channels started disparaging Sayyida Ayesha, and accused her of things that the Shia had never mentioned before. This was an event that could have caused big sedition in the countries of the Muslim World.

Afterwards, some of the religious scholars addressed a letter to the Leader of the Revolution, asking an *istifta'* about the law applicable to insulting prominent figures of the Islamic denominations. The Leader's response was so powerful and explicit that it had a significant impact on Arab and Islamic countries. I assure you that the speech of the Leader in Sanandaj and then his assertive answer to the scholars' *istifta'* [enquiry] about the actions of the channels attributed to the Shias and the Sunnis blocked the way to sedition and made futile the efforts of those who tried to arouse conflicts. Moreover, by God's grace, at that time many honorable *Marja's* in Qom and in Najaf issued separate declarations, explicitly announcing that the real position of the Shia community is the same as what Ayatollah Khamenei had stated.

As an answer to the second part of the question, I should say, the interpretation that the transformations in the region is indeed a Saudi-Iranian conflict, is a mistake. The conflict existed in the region even before the Islamic Republic was established; when the Soviet Union on one side and the United States of America and the West on the other side were in conflict. In addition, before the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran, there existed Arab-Israeli conflicts in the region. The Arab-Israeli conflict existed since 1948, before the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Therefore, Saudi Arabia's problem with many countries of the region and many resistance groups in the region dates back to the time before the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. This is a well-known fact. So when the Islamic Revolution became victorious in Iran, and the Pahlavi regime, as one of the best friends of the U.S., collapsed, the Islamic Republic was established in Iran and started supporting the Palestinian cause, the resistance groups and the underprivileged in the region. From the very first moment, Saudi Arabia declared hostility to the Islamic Republic. Of course, Imam Khomeini (r.a.) extended the hand of friendship to all Arab and Islamic countries from the very early days of the Revolution. Despite this, since day one, Al Saud found that the existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran was a threat to the interests of the United States, Israel, the tyrannies and autocrats, as well as the mercenaries of Washington and Tel Aviv in the region. For this reason, Saudi Arabia became an enemy of the Islamic Republic.

They say, when in the war against Iran, they sided with Saddam, they paid \$200 billion to support Saddam. At that time, however, oil was cheap. I remember a few years ago, one of the Saudi princes, Nayef, said that if Saudi Arabia had been able to pay more money to Saddam at that time, it would have done so. Therefore, Saudi Arabia was the initiator of hostility, war, and conspiracy against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Whereas, Iran had extended a hand of friendship to it. Saudi Arabia's problem with Iran basically derived from the same reasons that had hampered Saudi Arabia's relations with other countries which supported the Resistance in Palestine and the region. This is a fact. There is no such thing as a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the region.

Regardless of the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia always opposed the resistance groups even before the victory of the Islamic Revolution. So our problem with Saudi Arabia is not related to the positions of Iran. Saudi Arabia's opposition to Palestinian resistance throughout history also has nothing to do with Iran. For example, when there was a great deal of hostility between Saudi Arabia and Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, the Islamic Revolution in Iran had not been in place, yet. Therefore, the controversy during the era before the establishment of the Islamic Republic has its own clear reasons. When the Islamic Revolution of Iran became victorious and the Islamic Republic started attending to the affairs of the Islamic and Arab Ummah, then Saudi Arabia started showing enmity to Iran. This is the reality.

At the end of the discussion on Saudi Arabia, I would like to point out that recently the Supreme Leader, referring to the fact that some are equipping Saudi Arabia with missiles and nuclear weapons, said "we are not upset, because soon this equipment will be at the disposition of the Islamic fighters". How do you evaluate this statement of the Leader?

The ruling regime in Saudi Arabia is an old regime; very old and aged. Perhaps this regime, for natural reasons, is going through its final era. The Al Saud family has inflicted all kinds of oppression on others during the last 100 years and looted the property of their own nation. Corruption is rooted in every part of this regime, and suppressing freedom in this country has reached its highest level. In addition, the monopoly of power within the members of the Saudi family has peaked in the last 100 years.

But what will precipitate the end of this regime is the performance of its current officials, which is completely different in terms of both appearance and method of action, with that of the former officials of Saudi Arabia. For example, the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman launched a war against Yemen, and now we see that he is committing horrible crimes in that country. Undoubtedly, the adoption of such a decision, namely, the war on Yemen and committing crimes against civilians, will have a negative effect on the future of the Saudi regime. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's apparent interference in the affairs of various countries is among other factors that will affect the future of this regime. For example, in the countries of the Arab world, we see that Saudi officials interfere in every country and try to show themselves as sided with the nations.

In the past 40 years, we have seen that Saudi Arabia has tried to present itself as a friend of all countries and all nations, pretending to be a good state which helps others. However, we hear for the first time that the slogan "Down with Al Saud" resonates in many Arab countries. For the first time, we see that political and national groups, as well as governments, are openly opposed to Saudi Arabia's crimes and interference in Arab countries. Saudi Arabia's involvement in countries such as Bahrain, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan can be seen. Even in Libya, where there is a military conflict now, at least one of the parties involved says that Saudi Arabia and the Emirates are conspiring to destroy Tripoli and Libya.

Today, in many Arab and Islamic countries, many personalities as well as parties, movements, scholars, and governments abhor Saudi Arabia's attitude and oppose it. Add to this the Saudi stance on the question of Palestine, and in particular the so-called Deal of the Century. Saudi Arabia's humiliation, indignity, and disgrace before Trump will normally undermine Saudi rulers' dignity and power. The Saudis have always shown themselves to be independent of others, to be honorable and to be servants of the Holy Shrines. Trump's recent trip to Saudi Arabia and what he says at celebrations today is worth considering. Look at Trump's recent remarks on Saudi Arabia. "I called the king of Saudi Arabia and told him I love him," he says. He says he told the king of Saudi Arabia: "You have a lot of money and we have paid a lot of money to support you. You must pay for the support." He says he has gained a huge amount from Riyadh, much easier than earning \$100 from a New York store. Look at Saudi Arabia, its media, its officials; absolute silence! Even their friends in the world, their media in the world did not speak a word. This is the ultimate humiliation. Trump makes similar remarks to ridicule and humiliate Saudi Arabia. The Americans laugh at the Saudis and ridicule them.

This is while if a person from the Muslim world made similar remarks about the Saudis, they would be furious.

Definitely. They might even cut off diplomatic relations with the leaders of that country and accuse them of disbelief [kufr] and sentence them to capital punishment! I cannot but say that Saudi Arabia has never experienced such humiliation, vanity, weakness, humiliation, and scandal in its history. That's precisely why I think the current Saudi rulers will not stay in power for a long time. Divine and historical traditions and the nature of affairs indicate that they cannot endure for long.

. How did we defeat the U.S. in its ISIS project?

Over the past few years, we have witnessed popular uprisings in some Islamic countries, including Yemen, where the people rose up. We also witnessed popular uprising in Bahrain, but in all of these cases, Saudi Arabia, with its interventions, has been trying to suppress these popular uprisings in the region which seek the establishment of Islamic and anti-Zionist governments. As you know, Ayatollah Khamenei has always emphasized the role of the people in creating a general movement to confront Zionism. That is, even if certain measures are taken by the Resistance movement, he still focuses on the people of the region, and he always raises hope that the people will rise up. Even in the case of Palestine, when some of the Palestinian leaders sign inappropriate agreements for a compromise, he says that the Palestinian people are opposed to this. Accordingly, given his emphasis on the role of the people, how do you evaluate and analyze the role of the people in the developments of the Islamic world in the perspective of Ayatollah Khamenei and based on the meetings you have had with him?

What we heard from the Leader (May Allah protect him) on public occasions, in public meetings or private meetings, was that he emphasized on massive popular movements in all matters. He always emphasized that if you had a certain organization, this organization should always be at the heart of its supporters and the people, and no organization or party should be separated from the involved people; the true power is the power of the people's presence. Of course, this is what we saw during the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. We have also had such an experience in Hezbollah in Lebanon. Our power as Hezbollah in Lebanon is not only due to military capabilities, but also due to the popularity that this group has gained among various grassroots groups.

In Palestine, too, those who are fighting against Israel's aggression and conspiracies—including the Deal of the Century—are the people of Palestine. The Palestinian resistance movements were able to resist, fight and take strong positions thanks to the support of the Palestinian people. Today in Yemen, without the presence of the people and the popular support of Ansar Allah, could Ansar Allah, under the leadership of dear brother Sayyid Abdulmalek Al Houthi, be able to enter the fifth year of battle and continue to fight? In many Yemeni cities, like "Saada" and "Sana'a", we see massive popular presence, while there are many problems, including war and the spread of cholera and other diseases and the siege of Yemen. Yet, all the Yemeni people, men and women, old and young, take to the streets in every occasion, and this popular presence has given the Yemeni army and popular committees the power to resist Saudi-American invasion.

Another example is Iraq. Who stood up against ISIS? In Iraq, people stood up against ISIS terrorists. In Iraq, those who were able to resist ISIS, were the Iraqi people and the Popular Mobilization Force, after the fatwa of the Marja'iah [religious leadership] and support of Ayatollah Khamenei and the Islamic Republic of Iran. If the Iraqi people hadn't supported the Popular Mobilization Forces, the army and the Marjaiyah, resistance against the Takfiri terrorism and defeating it would not have been possible. It's the same in all arenas. So the matter of the nations is a fundamental matter.

Now what has actually been the main factor that has been able to keep the Palestinian cause alive—after decades of conspiracy and deceiving—and has defeated the U.S.'s plans and plots against the Palestinians, one after the other in the region, has been the popular support and not the positions of the governments. The popular stance, the uprising of the nations, their attention to the issues, their involvement, their sacrifices, and their resistance has always been the cause of victory. We say in Lebanon's literature: "The nation and resistance are like the sea, that is, like water and fish." The fish cannot survive out of the water, and this means no resistance movement can resist and win outside the circle of the nation and widespread popular support.

You referred to Iraq; well, we have witnessed very important events in Iraq over the past recent years, and we can say that during this period, two important incidents took place; the first event was the occupation of Iraq by foreigners after the fall of Saddam, and the second was the formation of ISIS terrorist group. After the formation of this terrorist group, Iraq was severely invaded and significant parts of the country were occupied by the members of

this group. But, both the American occupiers and ISIS occupiers finally had to leave Iraq. What role did the Islamic Republic of Iran play in the shifts in Iraq? What were the macro-level policies of the Islamic Republic regarding these events and its role in preserving the unity and integrity of Iraq? In recent years, some events also took place in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region that we would like you to talk about, as well.

Firstly, since the start of the occupation of Iraq by the United States of America, the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Leader (May Allah protect him) was quite clear towards the occupiers. The Islamic Republic of Iran rejected the occupation of Iraq by the United States. Even before the U.S.'s invasion of Iraq, Iran's position was clear. After the occupation of Iraq by the United States, the Islamic Republic of Iran, with a clear position, called for the withdrawal of the U.S. from Iraq so that the Iraqi people can themselves manage their country. This was a great political stance.

Secondly, after the occupation of Iraq by the U.S., the Islamic Republic of Iran made many efforts to unite Iraqi parties, movements and various groups, so that they form a unified position against the occupiers. Meanwhile, the Americans at that time were trying to take advantage of the internal disagreements in Iraq to stabilize their occupation. Therefore, the second attempt (of IRI) was to coordinate the positions of Iraqi leaders, groups and parties, who had intellectual, political, religious, tribal, and regional differences. In order to achieve this important goal in Iraq—namely to unite different parties—the Islamic Republic of Iran established good relations with all Iraqis, including Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Shias and Sunnis.

Thirdly, the Islamic Republic of Iran supported the stance taken by the religious Marja'iah [religious leadership] in Najaf, Ayatollah Sistani (May Allah protect him), the eminent Marja'iah [religious leadership] of the Shias, because the positions of the Marja'iah [religious leadership] in Najaf were very important and had a significant impact on shaping the central and crucial events. For example, after the occupation of Iraq, the U.S. sought to impose a new constitution on the country, to which the Marja'iah [religious leadership] objected and declared that the Iraqis should decide on the constitution and agree on it. This is just one example of the cases when the Marja'iah [religious leadership] intervened.

Among other important factors was that the Islamic Republic of Iran's support strengthened and inspired the Iraqi resistance groups who resisted the American occupiers. The position of the Islamic Republic of Iran was explicit; they regarded the resistance in Iraq as legitimate and the natural right of the Iraqi people. They believed the Iraqis had the right to engage in armed resistance against those who had occupied their land. Eventually, the U.S. couldn't achieve its goals in Iraq.

Moreover, in one of the stages, along with the honorable Marja'iah [religious leadership] in Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran worked hard to prevent conflicts among members of different denominations in Iraq. At that time, the takfiris who had entered Iraq, were seeking to cause conflicts between the Shias and the Sunnis by suicide bombings in Shia community areas, such as their mosques, Hussainiyehs, the shrines of the immaculate Imams (a.s.) including the shrine of Imam Hussain (a.s) and the shrines of Imams Askariin (a.s.) in Samarra. Most of the suicide bombers were from Saudi Arabia and their car bombs were also sent to them by Saudi Arabia's Intelligence services. So although Riyadh endeavored to create religious schism in Iraq, the efforts of the religious Marja'iah [religious leadership] in Najaf and the Islamic Republic of Iran prevented tribal conflicts and a civil war—even if some struggles and contests occurred.

As a result of political resistance and political effort on the one hand, and armed resistance on the other hand, the U.S. found it impossible to stay in Iraq. During the premiership of Nouri al-Maliki, they sought to sign an agreement to withdraw from Iraq, and eventually the signing of an agreement between Baghdad and Washington led to the decision

of withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq. Naturally, the U.S. wanted to stay in Iraq for longer. During the negotiations for the agreement, they tried to maintain about 50,000 troops of the total 150,000 U.S. forces in Iraq, but the Iraqis refused to accept. [The Americans were bargaining by diminishing the number]: they accepted to leave 30 thousand, 25 thousand, 20 thousand, and finally, 10 thousand of their forces in Iraq, but still the Iraqis opposed; obviously, not all the Iraqis, but this was the view of the public in general. The Iraqi government rejected the granting of diplomatic immunity to American troops and military forces. Consequently, Washington under President Barack Obama concluded that there was no choice but to leave Iraq.

Yes, the Americans retained their embassy in Iraq and a large number of embassy protection forces, as well as some of their consulates, but their open military presence was over, and the American military bases were closed down and America's military retreat from Iraq was announced. This was a great victory for Iraq and the Iraqi people. Another incident occurred when ISIS inflicted calamity and pain on the Iraqi people. Everyone knows about ISIS. ISIS took advantage of its presence in Syria, at the east of Euphrates and the Badia (the Syrian Desert). You remember that this group then occupied 40 to 45 percent of the territory of Syria. ISIS's leaders were Iraqi, indeed, the main leaders were Iraqi, and they paid special attention to Iraq, and therefore they were counted on. The United States of America and some countries in the region, and more than others, Saudi Arabia, were behind-the-scenes players of what ISIS did in Iraq. We all recall that when ISIS arrived in Mosul, Diyala, Anbar and Salah al-Din, many satellite channels affiliated with Saudi Arabia and some Persian Gulf countries reported on the event as a major victory. ISIS dominated a number of Iraqi provinces and facilities in a short time. The Iraqi forces collapsed and ISIS was on the verge of entering Karbala and even Baghdad. The situation was very dangerous. Even ISIS had reached only some hundred meters to Samarra, and it had become a threat to the shrine of Imams Askariin (a.s.).

In the early days, the Islamic Republic of Iran rushed to aid Iraq. Iraq's religious Marja'iah [religious leadership] decided on certain positions, and Ayatollah Sistani issued the fatwa of jihad kafayee. The Iraqis became prepared to rise up but they needed assistance for managing and commanding, weapons and facilities. At that time, a significant part of the war armaments and facilities of Iraq had been robbed by ISIS. The Iraqis said that many of their firearm warehouses were empty. We remember that in the early days, dear brother Hajj Ghasem Soleimani and the brothers from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps went to Baghdad to organize resistance groups rooted in Iraq and coordinate them with Iraqi government forces. Mr. Nouri al-Maliki also cooperated very well. Resistance to ISIS began. After a few days, Hajj Qasem came to Lebanon and met with me. He asked us to send about 120 Hezbollah members to Iraq to command operations. He said that combatants weren't needed because there were so many combatants in Iraq, but commanders were needed for operations in different areas. So we sent a large number of our brothers to Iraq. The borders between Iran and Iraq were opened so that weapons were provided via the border areas and that there would be no need to send them from Tehran and distant places. Importing armaments started, providing arms for the Iraqi army and the Popular Mobilization Forces set off, and the fight began.

All Iraqis know the reality. We said that the Islamic Republic of Iran rushed to aid Iraq, while taking firm positions. Rejecting ISIS's dominance, the Islamic Republic started fighting against the Takfiris openly and unhesitatingly, and assisting Iraq. The best commanders in the Guard Corps went to Iraq to help the Iraqis. All of the facilities of the Iranians were provided for the Iraqi people. Everyone knows that the Leader's stance on helping the Iraqi people and Iraqi forces to impose a defeat on ISIS was that there was no red lines that would prevent the Islamic Republic of Iran from offering the aid.

Praise be to God, thanks to the religious Marja'iah [religious leadership] of Iraq, the fatwa of jihad Kafayee, the firm positions of the Leader, the valuable aids provided by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the direct involvement of the Revolutionary Guards' brothers and especially the Quds Force, the measures taken by the Popular Mobilization Forces and the Iraqi forces as well as the national unity and solidarity of the Iraqis, in particular, among the Shias and Sunnis and Kurds in confronting ISIS, after a few years, a great victory was achieved in face of ISIS. This achievement would not have been made without the historic and great positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Leader, the

positions of the religious Marja'iah [religious leadership], the actions of the Popular Mobilization Forces, the Iraqi government and the Iraqi forces.

Recently, you warned of the re-emergence and reactivation of ISIS.

I highlighted two issues, which the Iraqi Prime Minister, Adel Abdul Mahdi, also referred to. The threat posed by ISIS—which is called the “Caliphate State”—is persisting in Iraq. Of course, there is no government under this name now. They formed a government between Syria and Iraq, which was a large government; that is, at some point, their government was larger than what was left of the Syrian and Iraqi governments. The ISIS government ended. The ISIS army, that is the big military infrastructure of ISIS, ended. However, the group's major leader is still alive, and there are naturally questions about his fate as well as the role of the United States in this matter.

Many of ISIS leaders are still alive, and have been saved from the east of Euphrates and various battlefields. ISIS has small groups that are based in different parts of Syria, Iraq and other parts of the region. They carry out anti-security activities: they engage in suicide attacks, bombings, they kill people; and these are the threats we have to counter. This means that if the ISIS and its security infrastructure are not completely eliminated, ISIS will remain as a threat to Syria and Iraq, as well as to Iran, Lebanon and the entire region.

Based on our information, the Americans have taken some parts of ISIS to Afghanistan. Now the question is whether the members of this group will act against the Taliban in Afghanistan or against the countries of Central Asia. The case is open. A part of ISIS was transferred to North Africa. In the future, it will not be surprising if ISIS is used to exert pressure on China, Russia and other countries, because the U.S. resorts to such methods. Another issue, I called attentions to, is related to Trump, the U.S. and Iraq. Trump insists on the U.S. forces remaining in Iraq. The warning I gave was that Trump is trying to fulfil his electoral promises, sometimes succeeding, and sometimes not.

He might not succeed, but he is trying to fulfil his promises. For example, during his presidential campaigns, Trump promised to transfer the U.S. embassy from Quds to Tel Aviv, which he did. He promised to recognize Quds as the eternal capital of Israel, which he did. He promised to retreat from the nuclear deal, which he did. He promised to intensify sanctions against Iran, and he did so. Well, he also made some promises that he failed to realize. For example, he could not build a wall between Mexico and the United States because he failed to gain the Congress's approval and the funding. Yet, he is still striving to fulfill this promise.

So this man strives to fulfill his promises. Well, one of the promises he made, which he insisted frequently, was that the departure of the U.S. from Iraq during Obama's administration was a mistake, and that the U.S. should stay in Iraq. This means that he does not want to leave Iraq, although this is not what the Iraqis want. The second issue is that he says, "Iraq's oil belongs to the U.S., because we spent \$ 7 trillion to free Iraq from Saddam Hussain,"—in his words —“and this should be paid back to us”.

He says, “we need to exploit Iraq's oil and sell it to get our money back”. When asked how, he said, "we would send the U.S. Army to dominate the oil fields, encircle the oil fields and prevent Iraqis from exploiting these fields. We would use their oil for years and then we will deliver it to them". Can Trump do this? Maybe not, but he will try to do so. Therefore, I warned that the Iraqis should be vigilant about the plots and dangers of this man who has focused on their oil. Just as he is focusing on Saudi's capital and is plundering it, he also seriously considers looting Iraq's oil. What can prevent Trump is the Iraqis' vigilance, their willpower and their diligence.

Trump's overnight trip to Iraq apparently infuriated him.

Exactly. He says 'we sent our military forces, we had casualties, we spent a lot of money, and now we have to travel to Iraq overnight. That's right.

Since the early days following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the U.S. officials were angry with Iran. Well, the Shah regime was obliterated, so they lost the regime which was dependent on them, and was their biggest base in the region. Since forty years ago, the U.S. has been faced with resistance on the part of the leader of the

Revolution, the Iranian people and the Muslim nations that support the Resistance movement against the Front of Arrogance. Therefore, Americans are very angry with Iran.

You probably remember the famous quote by martyr Beheshti which was derived from a verse of the Holy Qur'an: "The U.S.! be angry with us, and die of this anger." In this situation, Ayatollah Khamenei states that U.S. is declining in West Asia and Islamic countries, and this power will go away, and the nations of the region will become victorious. I would like to learn about your opinion on this analysis of Ayatollah Khamenei; and what proofs do you think support it?

Firstly, what Ayatollah Khamenei has said about this issue is based on experience, information and concrete realities in the region. One of the hallmarks is the withdrawal of the United States from Iraq, despite the fact that the U.S. had entered Iraq to stay forever, and not to leave it. The United States was unable to stay in Iraq and had to return to the country under the pretext of ISIS. This country cannot remain in Iraq. If the Iraqi authorities and people make the determination to dismiss U.S. forces, they will succeed to do so in a few days. The United States is not strong enough to stay in Iraq against the will of the Iraqi people. Well, this was the first sign and example.

The U.S. was also defeated in Syria. Even eight months ago, Trump announced that the U.S. forces settled in east of Euphrates had plans to retreat. But other officials persuaded him to let the forces stay for six more months. He recently wanted to pull the U.S. forces out again, but he was told that this should not be done, because the departure of the United States was like a major defeat for the U.S., and it would disappoint Washington's friends in the region. So he decided to let the U.S. forces stay; however, they could possibly leave Iraq any moment. In a telephone conversation with Mr. Erdogan, he said: "the U.S. is leaving Syria; Syria is left for you to do whatever you want with it." This infuriated Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Therefore, the Emirates embarked on immediately reopening its embassy in Damascus. Well, this was about Syria.

In Yemen, too, it was not only Saudi Arabia that was defeated; rather, the United States also suffered a defeat. The United States became frustrated and despondent in Yemen. Today, the United States cannot impose what it wants on the countries of the region, except in some cases like dealing with the craven among the Al-Saud. The United States is unable to impose its demands on many countries in the region. Washington cannot defend its interests. Remember that 20 years ago, the U.S. went to Somalia and could not stay in that country even for a year, and eventually they left it, humiliated. The United States has become too weak to stay in and dominate over the region; its power is declining day after day. This has happened in the wake of the nations' awareness and confidence. The obvious manifestation of this failure is that the United States has been trying to encircle the Islamic Republic over the past 40 years, and to overthrow its Islamic system, but it has always failed. They say 'we are not seeking to overthrow the Islamic Republic, we just want Iran to change behavior and method', yet they failed.

The Islamic Republic continues to adhere to its values, principles and positions, even though 40 years have passed, and its policy has been quite clear since Imam Khomeini (r.a.).

Pompeo came to Lebanon, and met with Lebanese officials. Then, during a press conference, he said to the Lebanese people, "you have to be brave and fight against Hezbollah". Nevertheless, he did not receive one single positive answer. When Pompeo came to Lebanon, even those who are our rivals told him: "We cannot confront Hezbollah and it is not acceptable for us to cause a civil war in Lebanon." This means that the U.S.'s demands and decisions are not even accepted by its friends. These are not our friends, they are our rivals. The reason is that, firstly, we are strong, and secondly, our opponents know that pushing toward a civil war negatively affects Lebanon in general. Therefore, they rejected to confront Hezbollah.

Even now that Trump and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, are seeking to impose the Deal of the Century on Palestine, we see that the entire Palestinian nation reject this plan. From Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to Fatah, the Liberation Organization, and Mahmoud Abbas are against the Deal of the Century. Mr. Abbas accepts to compromise, negotiate and give concessions, but he says: "this type of contract and compromise is not even acceptable to me; because it is so disgraceful and insulting that no Palestinian can consent to such a plan." Even in the last meeting of the Arab League foreign ministers, despite the fact that many of the participants were not honest, they stated in a declaration: "We cannot accept political solutions against international agreements and laws." This means they oppose the Deal

of the Century. They said this publicly; but why? Because they know that their nations will not accept the Deal of the Century, even if a person like Trump supports this plan.

Hence, there are plenty of signs indicating the defeat of the U.S. Moreover, now we see the current leaders of the U.S.—namely Trump, Bolton, Pompeo—have no respect for others. They don't consider diplomacy; and they are greedy, arrogant and haughty. Therefore, they humiliate their friends and allies and damage their relation with them. Their behavior toward the Europeans, the tensions in their relation with Russia and China are examples of these behaviors. Nobody knows to which direction they are leading the world. If you ask the public opinion whether they think the U.S. is a reliable government, you will get a negative answer. Now the U.S. leaves all treaties and agreements; it seeks to impose its demands on the international community. This kind of behavior has disrupted and weakened America's image. Therefore, the signs of the U.S.'s defeat are very clear in many countries.

One of the signs of this major U.S. failure in the region is, in my opinion, the situation of Hezbollah and Lebanon today. I traveled to southern Lebanon two days ago and went as far as the frontier with the occupied Palestine and visited the area. There was a time when the Zionist forces would enter the Lebanese territory whenever they wished, and even advanced up to Beirut in 1982, committing many crimes and killing many people and even many Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. In short, they did whatever they wanted to and committed any crime with impunity. During the 33-day war, they attacked from air and ground. Two days ago, I saw the Lebanese people live in peace and security in the area, and they were not at all worried about being attacked by the Israeli enemy. I saw there, that now it is the Zionists who have built walls to protect themselves. All this shows that Hezbollah, which grew and evolved over the course of about 35 or 40 years, has become a great power today, against the will of the Zionists and the U.S. So much so, that it has given Lebanon a special credibility and this is a national pride and power for Lebanon. Those scenes show that during these years, the U.S.'s plan to completely eliminate the resistance movement has completely failed, and today, the Israelis consider themselves defeated in this region.

That's right. At least since 1982, when the Zionist aggressors invaded Lebanon, this was part of an American project for Lebanon and the whole region. Since then, every U.S. plan and project has failed in Lebanon. These failures occurred in 1982, then in 1985, and later in 2000, 2005, and 2006, and finally in the current period. Today, the U.S. cannot impose their will on the Lebanese people and their attempts have failed, by the grace of God. The same is true about the Israelis. As you have seen and said, southern Lebanon is in peace and security, which is unprecedented for the past 70 years; that is, since the creation of the Israeli usurper and cancerous regime. You know that southern Lebanon and the border with the occupied Palestinian have always been insecure. The Israelis carried out military invasions and bombarded it. They crossed into the region, kidnapping army men, security forces and even ordinary people.

They ridiculed the Lebanese. For example, in the 1967 war, when Israel sent separate army units to the Sinai, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan, Israeli war minister was asked if an army unit had been sent to Lebanon. He replied: "No, it is not necessary. It's enough to send a music band to occupy Lebanon."

That is the extent they disparaged Lebanon. That period ended by the grace and help of God the Almighty. Today, in southern Lebanon, they do not dare bombard, kidnap, kill, or even trespass. They are very cautious and constantly in fear; because they know that in the event of any aggression, the resistance gives them a decisive answer, which in our view signifies observing the rule of the game and the conflict.

Southern Lebanon has always been frightening [for Israel], and today northern Palestine is the same. Colonialists, settlers, and Israelis in northern Palestine—and not the people in our towns and villages—are scared. This time, it is the Israelis who are building walls and defensive lines, when before, they were always in an offensive position. We were always in a defensive position, but today, we are in an offensive position. It is us who threaten them today; that we will one day enter the occupied Palestine by the grace of God. Hence, thank God the equations have changed, and this has been achieved in the wake of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, through the leadership of Imam Khomeini and the Leader (May His Oversight Last), constant support, and unwavering positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran alongside Hezbollah and the resistance groups in the region.

The image of Hezbollah and the Islamic resistance of Lebanon—in the minds of most people who are not familiar with it—is the image of a military organization. They think Hezbollah is just a military organization. In addition to its

defensive and military dimensions to protect Lebanon and to undertake the responsibilities it has defined for itself in that regard, what services has Hezbollah offered to the Lebanese people? We have heard a lot about the progress that Hezbollah has made in science. Besides, there has also been progress in terms of education and literacy rates in that region, especially as compared to before the formation of Hezbollah. These facts have been little publicized. Please tell us more about it. Given the emphasis placed by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution on the progress and investment in the scientific fields of Iran, do you feel you are among the addressees of this remarks?

Naturally, we consider ourselves to be the addressee of these words too, and believe that this is part of our duty, and we work towards this goal. Regarding Hezbollah, from the very beginning, we were concerned with this issue, but today it has become more important and we are paying more attention to it. Hezbollah is not just a military organization, but a popular movement. This group is a popular movement rather than a [political] party, but it is called the Party of Allah. Hezbollah acts like a national and popular movement. In addition to armed resistance and military activities, Hezbollah engages in various activities. Hezbollah has religious activities, and has scholars and missionaries in religious seminaries who carry out promotional activities in different areas. This is a great change. If today you look at the number of religious students in Lebanon compared to the past, you will realize that the proportion of the Lebanese population who are students of religion is significant. If we include our brothers in the holy cities of Qom and Najaf al-Ashraf too, it will make for a spectacular number. This is unprecedented in Lebanon's history. Regarding religious activities, in many towns and villages of Lebanon, there was not a mosque before. But today, there is no village in which there is not a mosque. There are also mosques in different parts of cities. For example, in Southern Dahieh, even though hundreds of thousands of people live there, there were only 3 or 4 mosques; but today, praise be to Allah, there are mosques in most of its neighborhoods.

Today there are seminaries in different regions. Seminaries for women, as well as cultural, scientific, and religious studies institutions for women can be found in different regions. Organizing religious ceremonies during Muharram and the holy month of Ramadan, organizing Qur'an recitation gatherings, and holding Muharram processions—which are getting more traction year after year—are among other religious activities of Hezbollah. People are keener on religious occasions and activities in Ramadan and the nights of Qadr.

Beside religious activity, Hezbollah has academic and educational activities. We have the strongest student organizations in universities. The most powerful student organizations at universities are those affiliated with Hezbollah and include both boys and girls; they have a significant presence in universities. They have a strong and active presence at universities among university professors, and school teachers in middle schools and high schools. Hezbollah Group is one of the strongest and largest student and educational groups in Lebanon's schools. They carry out the same activities as those carried out by Hezbollah student organizations at universities.

Therefore, there are cultural, intellectual, media, political, and scientific activities. In the official examinations, we see that girls and boys who are members of Hezbollah, always rank top and are successful in government and official examinations. We have diverse cultural and social activities for different groups. For example, we have a large division called "Women's Councils" in Hezbollah. Women's societies are found in all villages. They communicate with all women; organize cultural classes, and ceremonies on religious and political occasions; provide social aid, and govern women's affairs in different places. We also have a division for teenagers called "Imam Mahdi (as) Scouts". This organization, in terms of the number of male and female members, is the largest Scout organization in Lebanon. This is another cultural, intellectual, religious, social and, of course, recreational activity.

We have schools under the name of Imam Mahdi (as) Schools, from kindergarten to secondary school, in different regions, including Beqaa, Beirut and the south. A few years ago, we also set up a University of Religious Education. This university has diverse colleges. We also have a radio station. Al Nour radio is one of the strongest radio channels in Lebanon. Al-Manar TV station also belongs to us; in this field, the range of our activities go beyond television. There are also some institutions of social and service activities in Lebanon that belong to Iran, but are run by Hezbollah brothers. For example, the Martyr Foundation, the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, and others. These institutions provide services to the families of martyrs, disabled war veterans, and underprivileged families. We take care of many poor families in need, and a large number of orphans.

Another important area of activity is medical care. We have hospitals, surgery, and therapeutic clinics. We also have a large civil defense organization that helps emergency patients. All of this is supervised by Hezbollah, and not the

Lebanese government. All these institutions provide people with health, medical, social and financial services. We have an extensive institution called Imam Kazim (as) Qard al-Hasan [interest-free loan] Institute, which is known as the " Bayt al-mal of Muslims"; but called the Imam Kazim (as) Qard al-Hasan [interest-free loan] Institute. This institution has branches in most districts and has given tens of thousands of interest-free loans to the people. This is also one of the important and well-known matters in Lebanon.

In addition to all the service centers mentioned, Hezbollah also runs other institutes, such as "Constructive Jihad," which basically helps people in agriculture. We provide a great deal of assistance in this regard. I may have forgotten some other things. Among other important issues is the participation of Hezbollah in municipal elections. Today, Hezbollah is present in most municipalities and many of the heads of municipalities are among our brothers. These municipalities also particularly serve the people. So, if you go to different cities of Lebanon today, you'll see the situation there is quite different compared to 10, 20 or 30 years ago.

Well, we get to the participation of Hezbollah in parliamentary elections and the presence of our members in the parliament. Naturally, the number of Hezbollah members of Lebanese parliament does not reflect the true size of this group; that is, this number is not proportionate to the true size of Hezbollah. Because, we tend to form a coalition and hand over several seats to our allies so that they also have a strong presence in the parliament. Our representatives serve the people of their regions in the parliament. We participate in the government and have ministers, and we hold ministries such as the Ministry of Health which are naturally to provide services. The current health minister is among the most active ministers of the government. Therefore, apart from the military dimension, Hezbollah is also politically, socially, and culturally active. We have institutions that are active in communications, and even poetry, literature, painting, and music.

But what the media usually concentrate on is the military dimension, since the most important action by Hezbollah since 1982 was defeating Israeli occupiers and achieving the first manifest Arab victory. This was a huge and great action. That is why Hezbollah's military dimension is often highlighted. Also, Hezbollah went to Syria to fight against the Takfiris and against a project of foreign domination over the whole region. As a result, its military dimension has been wide and essential. However, other activities of Hezbollah continue strongly; even though they are sometimes not adequately portrayed in the media.

I was listening to your speech on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution; I noticed you pointed out some of the problems the Lebanese people face such as the problems with electricity. When we come to Lebanon sometimes, we see the problem of electricity is very serious, and in fact, it is a concern for the Lebanese people. I heard that Saudi Arabia is one of the obstacles. Please tell us about the needs to solve this problem in Lebanon, the government's lack of serious action to solve the problem and how it is Hezbollah's concern.

We follow these cases. Not just Saudi Arabia; the main problem is the United States. For example, what disrupts cooperation between the Lebanese government and the Islamic Republic of Iran? Threats posed by the U.S. Some in the Lebanese government are afraid of the U.S. and their sanctions against Lebanon. Otherwise, a few years ago, delegations from Iran came to Lebanon with offers of help and loans. But they are afraid of U.S. threats and sanctions. The U.S. block [cooperation between Iran and Lebanon]. The U.S. prevents Lebanon from cooperating with not only Iran, but also with Russia and even China. For example, the Lebanese government can buy weapons and use Russian military equipment and armaments, but it does not do so because the U.S. has threatened the Lebanese government saying: "If you buy arms from Russia, we will cut all our aid to the Lebanese army." Well, China has plenty of opportunities and is willing to cooperate with Lebanon. But why do Lebanon's doors not open to China? The main reason is the U.S. threat of sanctions. The United States now does not threaten Lebanon of occupation and does not send military forces to it. Because they know that if they enter Lebanon, they cannot occupy and dominate this country. The U.S. knows that in this case, their experience in Iraq would be repeated in Lebanon; as it has already had such an experience in Lebanon in the past. But now the United States resorts to sanctions. When they threaten a country with banking, foreign currency, and trade sanctions, the other party gets scared and back off.

But in any case, we are pursuing in the government, along with the officials, the issues concerning Lebanon and the Lebanese people to the extent of the authorities' capabilities. To this date, the U.S. has supported Israel in the south, preventing the Lebanese from extracting oil and gas in southern Lebanon; because Israel has threatened [them]. Naturally, we are also threatening [them]. But the companies come looking for a guarantee, and the United States penalizes any company that comes to extract oil and gas in that region, of course, if any company dares to come in the first place. So, the main problem is the United States. Of course, Saudi Arabia is also pushing to prevent serious cooperation with the Lebanese government. For example, Lebanon needs to work with and interact with Syria now, but some Lebanese government officials who count particularly on the relations with the United States and Saudi Arabia do not try that, although the interests of Lebanon require to do so.

Lebanon is an interesting example for those who think cooperation with the United States can solve their problems, and sometimes complain, asking why the Islamic Republic does not resolve its issues with the U.S. government to help resolve its problems. Well, Lebanon has no political problems currently with the United States, and has a good political relationship with it; but the main obstacle to Lebanon's progress is the United States. I read somewhere you said "we are superior to the Zionists in three areas." One of the areas you mentioned was in intelligence and information. Well, it's said that the intelligence system of the Zionist regime is one of the most advanced information systems.

Even during the reign of previous regime in Iran, when they wanted to organize very high levels of intelligence training, they either sent SAVAK agents to the occupied territories, or they brought some trainers from Israel to hold courses in Iran and strengthen Iran's intelligence systems. Now, you have said that you are superior to Israel in terms of the intelligence system. Based on the points I mentioned and that there are people who might not accept your remark, what explanation do you have in this regard?

I do not remember saying that we are superior. That is, I do not remember saying that we are superior to them. I said we have some information about the situation of Israel that helps us defeat it. We cannot claim to be superior to Israel in terms of intelligence. It is not true. They have some capabilities both technically and in terms of their services. Currently in Lebanon, the services of the U.S. and the services of the European and Arab countries are all at the disposition of Israel. They are technically powerful, and their drones are always flying in our skies, but we do not have such superiority. What I said was that in the past, we had no information—or very poor information—about Israel. But now our strength is that we have much information about Israel, and we know about its bases and barracks, the strengths and weaknesses of its army and its capabilities. We can collect this information by use of various methods. What we need to be able to strike the enemy is this amount of information that we have today, but it is not correct to say we have superiority.

So I would like to ask a question related to the point you mentioned, and then you could continue your words.

That we managed to launch a psychological war against the enemy and affect the enemy's people showed that my information and the news and issues I was talking about were true and real. The Israelis said: "Wow ... they have got so much intelligence."

One essential point in the context of military confrontation with the Zionist regime is an intelligence surveillance over the enemy, and to use this intelligence in various fields, both in defense of yourself and in planning attacks against the enemy. How much intelligence surveillance has Hezbollah currently gained?

We have an excellent intelligence surveillance that is unprecedented. Hezbollah obtains the necessary intelligence using various methods. The most important intelligence is what we need for any future war or confrontation, or to face any possible threat from Israel. We have an excellent intelligence surveillance and keep track of every development on the enemy's side. We track the intelligence about the developments related to the enemy, whether obtained through public or confidential methods. But the important thing is to analyze this intelligence; that is, it is

important that we evaluate and investigate the intelligence, even when obtained through public means, in order to arrive at a conclusion. This is important.

Hezbollah's strong point is that it always examines ideology, culture, traditions, customs, weaknesses and strengths as well as the developments related to Israel. This always puts Hezbollah in the context of what goes on within this regime; so that we know how they think, what they like or dislike, what affects them and what problems they are facing. We also know what political, religious and partisan divisions and discords exist within this regime and what the differences between the personalities are. We also evaluate the enemy's political and military commanders and possess such information. This increases our power to a great extent, and helps us face and confront the enemy through various strategies.

Throughout what you said, you made some remarks about Ayatollah Khamenei on different occasions. I would like to ask you a bit more specifically, considering that you have been in contact with Ayatollah Khamenei for nearly forty years; what are his most prominent personality traits in your opinion? Especially since you have naturally known other important personalities, what makes him singular in comparison?

Firstly, whatever I say in response to this question, I might be accused of bias out of the passion and love that I have for him. Because of this, it may be said that I have brought these issues forward out of affection and love for the Leader. But, realistically and far from the emotional aspects, I have to say that after this extensive experience I have found the Leader possessing exceptional character traits. Sometimes you talk about someone and say that they have good characteristics, of which one or more are excellent and extraordinary. But regarding the Leader, I have to say that he has many exceptional characteristics. For example, his intense sincerity towards God, Islam, Muslims, the underprivileged and the oppressed is an awesome and remarkable devotion. Perhaps this is one of the indications that he is approved by God. This sincerity is very deep and uncommon. When I speak of sincerity, I do not just mean his personality; I have lots of evidence for this. This sincerity lies in his intrinsic personality, in his leadership and in his authority, and does not stop at a certain limit. He always preferred the interests of Islam, Muslims and the public over any other issue.

For example, one of the most prominent features of the Leader is his piety and righteousness. This is a well-known matter. Recently, the U.S. embassy in Baghdad and elsewhere has been trying to attack the Leader's personality. But, idiotically, they have focused on an aspect of his character that nobody would believe their words. For example, they propagated that the Leader's personal wealth reaches \$200 billion.

One of the distinctive features of the Leader is his moral character and his personality traits. Whenever we meet him, we can see humbleness in his face. Every Lebanese who has travelled to Iran and met with the Leader, in private or in public, has been amazed by his humbleness and modesty. Here in Lebanon, we see that even the head of a small municipality in a small area, is not as humble as the Leader before the people and his visitors.

Others feel that rather than an Imam, a Leader, and a sovereign, they are meeting a loving, caring and affectionate father. Regarding his modesty, and paternal behavior, I told you before that whenever we expressed our views, he would weigh in by saying "my suggestion is ...", and asked us to evaluate it for ourselves. This is one of the signs of the modest, kind and paternal behavior of the Leader. This behavior is fatherly because it teaches us how to mature, and make decisions, and it is kind because he does not want to put us in a difficult position and force us to decide.

Another one of his characteristics, is his extensive political and historical knowledge. The Leader knows our region, despite the region and its developments being very complex. I am referring to the West Asia region, also known as the Middle East, and in particular Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and of course specifically Lebanon. The issues in the region are extremely complicated and even many regional politicians and thinkers make mistakes in analyzing the situation. Meanwhile, we have found every analysis by the Leader to be accurate and reasonable over the past 40

years. Every stance he has made towards the countries of the region, even countries where their own people have been unable to analyze their own issues, has been correct. This is extraordinary.

One of his distinctive features in my opinion, is his absolute trust in the Almighty God. We are not talking about someone who has isolated himself to pray or someone who is active in teaching or in scholarly activities and claims to trust God absolutely. The real test is to have a responsibility as important as that of the Leader, to lead the Islamic Republic, lead the Ummah, confront the U.S., the imperialists on Earth, and the arrogant powers, and to support the oppressed and the underprivileged, go to the most difficult battles, and say I trust in God, and really do have trust in God. That is the difference. This is the true faith in God and the ability to nurture it in others. What is meant is not just claiming to have this trust, but to create and nurture it in the hearts and minds of others like the Hezbollah of Lebanon. It is in the shadow of this trust that progress, consciousness, endeavor for the sake of God, and victory will be achieved. It is through this trust that the Iranian nation and the Iranian youth have stood against the U.S. and faced challenges. If the Leader himself had not achieved such a great level of trust in God, he could not pass it on to others.

In the intellectual realm, today there are very few Muslim thinkers in the Muslim world. There is a difference between a thinker and an educated person. We have many Muslim scholars who have written many books and delivered many lectures, but there are not many Muslim thinkers, the like of the martyr Motahhari, or the martyr Sayyid Baqir Sadr who are among the thinkers of the Muslim world. Today, the number of Muslim thinkers in the Muslim world is very small. There is no doubt that someone who listens to the Leader's speeches, reads his books and listens to his statements and advice, especially during the month of Ramadan, when he meets with different groups, realizes that he is a great Muslim intellectual leader. Perhaps there is no other thinker in the Muslim world of his stature. That is, no Muslim intellectual is currently comparable to him.

Regarding the subject of jurisprudence and fiqh, naturally, the Leader's scientific character, and his status among scholar has not been adequately presented. I do not claim to be a scholar, but I know many knowledgeable and mujtahid brothers who are scholars themselves and have attended the Leader's fiqh classes, and have given solid testimonies about his mastery of Islamic law, and his command of jurisprudence and fiqh. When providing testimony regarding his authority in fiqh, this testimony has gone through testing, investigation, and serious scientific examinations, and not based on an emotional stance or the like.

Today, the struggle continues. Who is conducting this struggle, and its requirements, including science, knowledge, thought, and real identification of the issues in every political, economic, social, cultural, military and security dimensions? Who is conducting this struggle which requires deep insight and courage? One may have insight, but lack the courage and spirit of sacrifice with his soul, life, and blood. Which leaders possess all these features all together? This was a summary of the Leader's characteristics. Although, if one wants to study his exceptional and distinctive features, one would learn about many of them.

You pointed out his courage. In your opinion, what was the most courageous decision by Ayatollah Khamenei regarding the issues of the region?

You know that after the events of September 11 in the U.S., George Bush and the neoconservatives in the U.S. were outraged. They misused the anger of the American people as a pretext to break every legal boundary and international norm. On that day, George Bush declared that the world is either with us or against us. He sent U.S. troops to Iran's neighbors. We are not talking about U.S. troops deployed to, [let's say] Brazil. We are talking about forces deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq, and countries surrounding Iran and its neighboring waters. Bush did this to show his blunt and fierce hostility.

Anyone standing in his way, he would try to destroy. Many in the region were in a state of great fear and horror; because they thought that the U.S. would come and take over the region. I remember, at the time articles were written claiming the region would enter an American era for 200 or 300 years, and no one can stand up to the United

States and defeat it. Who stood up to the United States? The Leader. This stance does not only require historical wisdom, political knowledge, piety or sincerity. It also requires a great deal of courage. He stood against the only arrogant imperialist superpower in the world; a fuming superpower that does not abide by any rule. He stood up to them, not in a subdued state, but taking an attacking posture. In conclusion, the person who has led the fight against the American project in the region over the past years has been the Leader.

When we were talking outside of this interview, you described the decision to get involved in Syria also as a very courageous decision.

Of course; there is no doubt that all of these decisions have been courageous. But you asked me about the most courageous decision. The most courageous decision was to stand against the stupendous, fierce and utterly mad tornado of the United States, and to reject any kind of kneeling or surrender to this tornado and ultimately vanquish it.

About the book "Certainly, Victory Comes with Patience" that you also referred to, during the ceremony marking the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution; please tell us if you remember an interesting point or remarks from this book.

First of all, when this I received this book before its final edition, I read it the same night. It was sunset when I received this book. That night, I read it with great enthusiasm. I first read the introduction written by the Leader in his own handwriting. An introduction in Arabic, which is obviously, also in Persian alphabet. I was surprised. I knew that the Leader is fluent in Arabic, but the text I read was of the highest level of rhetoric and was very eloquent and expressive. I do not think that today, any Arab native could write a text of such beauty and eloquence in Arabic. This was the first thing I noticed at the beginning of the book.

Likewise, what was said in the introduction of the book, regarding its language and expression was very significant. Because I had heard from a brother, Dr. Azarshab that: "This text – i.e. the Arabic text – is written by the Leader, and I have only made simple modifications to it ". The text of this book is a great and very important text in Arabic literature and rhetoric. Many Arab literary figures, not scholars, but literary figures, cannot write a text with such excellent rhetoric and eloquence.

Another feature is a clear, detailed description of the events. The Leader has narrated the events beautifully, in a way that many of them are new to the Arab world, although this may not be the case for the Iranians; because there is of course a Persian version of this book. I had read some books about the Leader's memories and his life; a collection of many books. But this was the first time I read a book in Arabic written by the Leader himself, which includes extensive details. It was very effective. And, of course, the amount of oppression, pain, suffering and solitude that the Leader and other brothers endured became apparent to the people. But anyway, he narrates his personal recollections, and not those of the others, who are not the subject matter here. Obviously, the Iranian nation, religious leaders, officials, and even those who took up responsibilities later suffered a lot and made many sacrifices for the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

In your meetings with the Leader, what language are the meetings held in?

I speak Arabic and he speaks Persian. But sometimes, at the beginning of the meeting, he asks some questions in Arabic. For example, he asks about how we are, and about our families and brothers in Arabic. But he continues in Persian. Indeed, it was an agreement at the beginning of his leadership and even during his presidency, but mostly during his leadership. Because I understand Persian. But some of my brothers in the Council understood Persian to a certain degree. So, they used to bring an interpreter to the meetings with the Leader. He said in the beginning that we should rely on an interpreter. At a meeting where the Leader, the Lebanese and some Iranian brothers were present he said: "We will not rely on an interpreter from now on. The Iranians must learn Arabic to understand what you say, and the Lebanese must learn Persian, so they do not need an interpreter." Since then, there has never been an interpreter present at any of our meetings with the Leader.

Clearly, you have many memories of your meetings with the Leader. These memories are related to politics, military discussions, etc. some of which have been explained. Now, at the end of this conversation, if we ask you to share

with us one memory that is very sweet and interesting for you, of the many memories that you have, which one would it be?

(Sayyid Hassan laughs) Now, we need to search. They are all good memories. (Sayyid Hassan laughs) It's difficult to choose one. You know that in the 1990s, i.e. in 1997 or 1998, we were going through a difficult period because of all the hardships, challenges and many dangers and we were very tired. We were in a very difficult position, both domestically in Lebanon, and in our foreign affairs, and the issues related to Israel and our neighbors. Naturally, at that time, I was young. My beard was completely black, and the burden I had on my shoulders was beyond my capacity. I sometimes travelled to Iran. To the Leader I said: "Our Leader! What do I do?" "At that time, the Leader answered:" You are still young and your beard is still all black. What complaint should I make about fatigue, with all my beard grey?" He said: "It is natural for anyone to face challenges, difficulties and dangers, sometimes coming from enemies and sometimes from friends. Often, the hardships coming from friends are heavier than those from the enemies, and it causes more pain. Well, ultimately there are limitations in many things. Sometimes a man gets tired mentally and needs someone to guide him and show him the way forward. Sometimes a person needs someone to hold his hand; sometimes he needs someone to calm him down and give him spiritual and moral relief; sometimes he needs someone to increase his strength and reinforce his determination. Well, for all the things we need, we have God the Almighty and do not need anyone else. We have God the Almighty. God the Almighty, through His Kindness and Compassion, has allowed us to call Him and talk to Him at any time and place."

These words were all by the Leader, stated without any formalities. He continued: "For that reason, whenever you feel tired or overwhelmed, I recommend the following. Enter a room alone, and for 5 or 10 minutes or a quarter of an hour, talk to God the Exalted. We believe that God is present, hears, sees and knows, and He is capable, rich and wise. That is, God has everything we all need. So talk to Him, and for this purpose, there is no necessity to read the Prophet's (PBUH) or the infallible Imams' invocations. No, in your own language, say what weighs on your heart and minds, using your everyday language. God will hear and see, and He is generous, benevolent, forgiving, merciful, and the source of guidance and knowledge. If you do this, God gives you peace, confidence and power, and takes your hand and leads you. I say this from experience. Try it and see the result. "

Then I told them that God willing, I will follow his advice. Since then, I have done this occasionally and seen the blessings of this advice and guidance from the Leader. No matter how great the hardships, if we resort to this means, the doors of the great divine blessing will open to us. This was the most important thing we did during the 33-day. Whether I, or my brothers, we each sought a secluded corner, and we would resort to God the Exalted and ask for guidance, support, determination, power, courage, and so on. God the Exalted is so generous.

Thank you very much. At the end of this conversation, I would like to ask your Excellency if you would like to say a few words in Persian to the Iranian people.

It's hard for me. I speak in Persian in our private meetings, but because it is for the media, I have to be cautious.

We cannot thank you enough for the amount of time you dedicated for us, several hours both yesterday and today. We are grateful, and God willing, this interview will be a source of blessing and goodwill for the Iranian nation and the Islamic Ummah. May Allah keep you in good health; you are a source of pride for all Muslims.

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