

Secretary-General Kofi Annan's interview on Aljazeera  
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Aljazeera: Welcome to Aljazeera and thank you for this interview. The Israelis are expanding the scope of their military operations in Lebanon and the war is entering its third week. Do you see any hope, any light at the end of the tunnel?

SG: I think that it is very important that we take every measure to stop this conflict. In fact, apart from what happened here in New York at the Security Council in the last few days, today I had a breakfast. I started my day with a breakfast with the permanent members of the Security Council to discuss precisely how one can accelerate measures to bring a solution to this conflict and for the Council to work together in a united way to expeditiously find a way forward. A way forward that will lead to a cessation of hostilities, a longer term ceasefire, a political framework that will resolve the problem once and for all, and deployment of an international force to the south to work with the Lebanese government and the Lebanese army to allow the government to extend its authority throughout the territory and implement Resolution 1559. So there is real pressure on, and I can sense that the members of the Council themselves sense the urgency and would want to do something.

Aljazeera: Mr. Secretary-General, you are talking about a cessation of hostilities of military operations and you talk about a ceasefire in the region. People are asking themselves what is really the difference between when diplomats and politicians are talking about cessation of hostilities and ceasefire. How can you define these two?

SG: You will recall from the beginning I insisted on a cessation of hostilities. That is a halt to the fighting. If you wish, it's a truce. A truce that can be declared by both sides, respected by both sides for certain duration. That can go on for any length of time that they want. To allow assistance to be given to the needy. To allow the wounded to be evacuated. To allow time for diplomatic action. Whereas ceasefire has to be negotiated and it can take a long time to negotiate a ceasefire. Of course, as you are negotiating a ceasefire the fighting and killing continue. And so when you want an urgent action for one to be able to do the kind of things that I am asking for cessation of hostilities is the best route to go. And then of course, you can negotiate your longer term ceasefire and others. So that is the difference that I would make between cessation of hostilities and ceasefire. Cessation of hostilities can be immediate. It can freeze their positions where they are. And, in fact, we had an example of that when the Israeli government announced that they would stop their aerial bombardment for 48 hours. That could have been a general cessation of hostilities throughout the territory with both sides respecting it.

Aljazeera: The Israeli Prime Minister said the military operations won't stop. The Israeli government has announced that it was going to stop or to halt these operations for 48 hours. Of course, that didn't happen. To what extent are you concerned about these steps that Israel has taken?

SG: I think I am concerned. I've all along been concerned that if we don't take urgent measures to stop the fighting it will escalate. Not only will it escalate, you cannot exclude the possibility of the conflict spreading further. And this is one of the reasons why -- right from the beginning -- I felt that if you could have a cessation of hostilities to continue the search for a political agreement. Everybody agrees that we should find a solution that will stand the test of time and not go back to the previous situation where we can have an explosion, if not next year, the year after. We should have a permanent political solution and a peaceful solution to the conflict. So in that the Council is working on and there have been contacts with the two parties. And I think it is possible. But what is important is that we try to get the parties to accept that we stop the fighting, we stop the impossible situation that civilians are placed in. When you look at the pictures on your televisions, on both sides, and we need to really taken measures to stop the suffering.

Aljazeera: When US President George Bush talks about what is happening in Lebanon and he says that he is trying to achieve a sustainable ceasefire, of course, he doesn't add immediate. To what extent are you concerned when he says sustainable but doesn't say immediate?

SG: I think that this debate started in fact when I was in St. Petersburg when I attended the G-8 where I called for a cessation of hostilities and there President Bush and the US administration have their positions that they would want to see the political framework for the agreement all worked out and the ceasefire and the deployment of the forces part of it. So I think we both want the same thing, but we have different approaches to it. I would prefer cessation of hostilities to stop the killing and then negotiate the political framework and ceasefire, which I think will take time. We have done some good work and I think the elements are there; from the seven point peace plan of the Lebanese government, the discussions Ms. Rice has had in Israel, and my own proposals to the Council. And so the elements are available and I think we should be able to come up with a comprehensive framework. Which should be shared with the parties which I hope they will buy into or accept, so that we can help them implement through the deployment of a multinational force that will support this agreement that the parties would sign onto.

Aljazeera: Looking at what President Bush is saying about what is happening in Lebanon and linking that to the war on terror, which is also the position of Israel. How do you see what is happening in Lebanon? Is it trying to destroy Hezbollah as the Israeli government says or is it a US umbrella for Israel to change the cards in the region?

SG: Obviously I don't want to speak for the US Government nor explain what President Bush or the administration meant. But I think what is important here is that there are several distinctions we need to make. Hezbollah may have been involved in activities that may be deemed terrorist activities, but Lebanon is not Afghanistan. You had a different situation in Afghanistan here there was an alliance between the Taliban and Al Qaeda. In the Lebanese situation, the government of Lebanon didn't authorize or approve the action that Hezbollah took. And if indeed, as I have argued in the past, the intention is to deal with those who abducted the two (leaders) or who were supposed to have committed a terrorist act, you focus on those elements. But the way the response

developed it looks as if the whole nations is no party to the conflict. The civilians are caught in the middle. And it seems to be a logic of we are fighting terrorists and therefore we are free to go into Lebanon where the people who committed those acts come from and do what we have to do. I think the response, as I have said, has been excessive, disproportionate, and we all see the results.

Aljazeera: Now, as you said about this balance, or lack of balance, between Afghanistan and Lebanon, seeing what the position of Hezbollah in the social fabric of Lebanon. Do you think Hezbollah is a terrorist organization, in regards to what you say about Afghanistan and Hezbollah in Lebanon?

SG: First of all, Hezbollah has an interesting situation in Lebanon. It is a political party with representation in parliament, with cabinet members in the government and also an armed wing. It is a group that offers quite a lot of social services to the communities. So it is quite different from the Al Qaeda that...one identified in Afghanistan and went after. So we are dealing with a completely different situation. And I think the differences and nuances ought to be appreciated as we move forward to try and resolve this issue. And of course, as we come up with principles for a political settlement we will need the agreement of both parties and on the Lebanese side, in particular, all the political groups, including Hezbollah, to agree to the proposals that will be put forward and their implementation.

Aljazeera: the image of the UN in the region is quite damaged and people are asking about the capabilities of the UN to stop any of this. I understand the differences between the secretary-General and the Security Council, is the organization able to offer anything immediate now to stop the war?

SG: I am in daily contact and constant contact with them and with the president of the council. I can say that they are really seized and very serious about finding a solution to the conflict. There are very serious discussions going on between the fifteen members of the council -- the French, the Americans, and the other members. And I suspect that, possibly in the next few days we will see an outline of a political settlement emerge. Parts of these elements are familiar to the Israeli government and the Lebanese government. But the council will need to firm it up and enshrine it in a resolution. Obviously, we will need to carry the parties with us. But I think they are very serious and we are going to see some real action in the next few days, I expect. As you know, I have been pushing very hard.

Aljazeera: when you says we have to wait another few days – there are other parties that are also saying that we have to wait for another few days...Do you think the humanitarian situation of the people of Lebanon can wait another day?

SG: When I say a few days I say that about the political agreement. I have pushed for the cessation of hostilities to stop the fighting so that we spare the civilians. In this conflict it is the civilians who are paying the price: women, children and unarmed civilians. And as my Humanitarian Coordinator points out, there is something wrong in

the war where more children are killed than armed men and soldiers. And so the idea of doing something urgently to spare the civilians, to protect the civilians, is something that I stand for and encourage. And last, at the meeting that I had with the Council this was very much the issue. The cessation of hostilities has to come as quickly as possible and need not wait for the detailed political agreement. And I hope the Council can take some initiative on that.

Aljazeera: Do you feel that the Israelis are paying any attention to the UN or its role?

SG: I think Israel, like all other states, is part of the international community. We live in a global community. And I think that one cannot ignore global public opinion forever. And I think there is a broad consensus around the world in global public opinion that the fighting and the suffering must stop. And I am sure the Israeli government is sensitive towards this, or should be sensitive towards this.

Aljazeera: Regarding what happened in Qana. You said clearly and openly that the Security Council has to condemn what happened in Qana and we know that the Security Council adopted a statement in which no one was condemned – in which Israel was not condemned. Did you feel at that moment that the Council had stopped short of it, or betrayed you?

SG: Their statement was weaker than I preferred, it was weaker than I had asked for. But as you know, the Council works on consensus. And here we interpret consensus almost to mean unanimity. Every member of the Council will have to agree. They negotiate and water down the text until everyone can vote for it. And this is what happened in this particular case. But I can assure you – I was in the Council chamber following the discussions – the vast majority of the Council members would have preferred stronger language.

Aljazeera: When the Council avoids using the language of condemnation as you called for in that meeting, do you think that the Security Council has broken the moral authority of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. What can the Secretary-General do to amend this damage to the image that is perceived in the region?

SG: You know the Security Council as a separate organ in the organization is its own master and master of its own deliberations. And I as the Secretary-General have my own voice and my own room for maneuver and action. I think I have spoken out and stated what I think ought to be done. What I believe is a correct position. And I will keep doing that. And it is not only the Secretary-General who has spoken. The High Commissioner for Human Rights has spoken. The Humanitarian Coordinator has spoken. So various elements and key parts of the United Nations have done their duty and spoken clearly. The Council because of its nature has not been able to act as promptly and perhaps not as effectively as we would like. But one should look at the total picture.

Aljazeera: Regarding the multinational force that is now being set up. Do you really think this idea of establishing a multinational force to go the south Lebanon with a not yet defined mandate; do you think this is a realistic plan? Are there any parties here that you think will send troops to go to south Lebanon?

SG: Many countries around the world are extremely concerned about what is happening in Lebanon. They feel for the Lebanese people and they would want to do whatever they can to assist. I have many governments that have indicated to me that depending on the mandate and what the troops are asked to do, they will be prepared to contribute troops. I think the objective here must be to strengthen the sovereignty of Lebanon. To support the Government of Lebanon. And to support the government of a free and independent Lebanon to be able to extend its authority throughout the country. So the force would work with the Government of Lebanon and the armed forces of Lebanon to extend that authority throughout the country, including in the south. And I see a force that will probably be on the ground for a reasonable period, maybe up to two years while the government strengthens its army and extends its authority throughout. During this period also I would hope the Lebanese would come to an agreement on disarmament of militia within its territory. In fact those discussions were going on before this conflict. It was part of the national dialogue. At the table discussing disarmament included Hezbollah. And I hope that during his period when the international forces and the international community is working to strengthen the government of Lebanon there will be a political agreement among the Lebanese that will lead to disarmament of all militia including Hezbollah which is already a political party and they can focus on their political activities. I think that if we come up with a political agreement, the council defines a basis for longer term solution which the Lebanese government signs onto, the Lebanese government in all its parts, signs onto and the Israeli government signs onto that multinational force will be there to implement an agreement accepted by the parties to support them in implementing, not impose anything on them, and in that spirit I think it ought to work. With that spirit I am sure we will get quite a lot of governments that will be prepared to participate in a peacekeeping force.

Aljazeera: I am sure that you understand that many parties in the region are saying right now that these talks are simply aiming to delay the deployment of this force and they are saying that the international community is helping Israel by giving it the time to carry out its military operation and then will say that this multinational force is not viable anyway.

SG: that is definitely not the intention of this secretary-General or of the UN. And I think the Security Council members are all very conscious of the need for urgency and in fact are to avoid this sort of accusation and to ensure that the civilians don't suffer unnecessarily. This is why I make a difference between cessation of hostilities and a ceasefire. If you have cessation of hostilities and you continue to work on a longer term ceasefire even if that takes time you have stopped the killing. So if that precedes discussions on a longer term ceasefire, the discussions on political elements of the agreement until you come to a conclusion you can't be accused of giving time to anyone to continue the fighting. But this is something that the council members are now very

conscious of. The European Union came up with a very good statement today, I don't know if you have seen it, but in that statement their position is identical to what I have been proposing. They call for an immediate cessation of hostilities followed by a longer term ceasefire and then of course a political agreement and all that.

Aljazeera: Mr. Secretary-general, do you think that a solution can be reach without involving Syria and Iran in regards to all what is being said about them both in this situation.

SG: Iran and Syria have to be part of the solution. I have no doubt about that. And I think that when the time comes they should be called upon to play a constructive part. I am in touch with both governments and they know that I have indicated that they should work with us in finding a permanent solution to this conflict. But I think in finding a permanent solution we should also bear in mind the need for comprehensive ceasefire in the region that covers both the Syrian and Palestinian track as well. And incidentally on the Lebanese issue, as part of the political package, the question of Shaba has also been posed and it is firmly on the table. And, of course, Israel will have its word to say because they are the ones occupying Shaba.

Aljazeera: We have three more minutes Mr. Secretary-General. I have two points. One is what Bashar Al Assad said to the Syrian military to heighten its alert. How do you see that? And then the link between Lebanon and Gaza. Do you see any organic link between what is happening in Lebanon and Gaza in terms of the problem or in terms of the solution?

SG: Obviously I have always been concerned about escalation of the violence, escalation between the current theatre of fighting. So I was concerned about what President Assad said but I hope that it does not necessarily mean that Syria will get involved in the conflict. And, indeed, this is one more reason why we need cessation.....