

In an interview with Al Jazeera

US, Europe defending Zionist crimes despite rights advocacy claims: *Pezeshkian*

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian was interviewed by Al Jazeera English to discuss international, and regional developments last week in New York on the sidelines of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly. Pezeshkian gave a comprehensive interview to the news channel, addressing questions on the Zionist regime's escalating crimes in Lebanon, the solution to the Palestinian issue, negotiations to resolve the nuclear dispute, and the expansion of relations with Western countries and cooperation with neighboring states. The partial text of the interview is as follows:



A photographer documents damage in a building that was hit by an Israeli airstrike in Beirut's southern suburb, Lebanon, on Sept. 30, 2024. ● Hassan Ammar/AP

Al Jazeera: How do you see the current tensions between Israel and Hezbollah unfolding, and what are the potential consequences of this escalation? Do you think it will lead to a wider conflict, and if so, what steps could be taken to de-escalate the situation?

Pezeshkian: What the Zionist regime is doing in the region is, in fact, genocide. Unfortunately, European countries and especially the US are defending these crimes committed by the Zionists. They claim to be champions of human rights and international law, but in no law is it permissible to kill children, women, the elderly, and the young, or to destroy hospitals. These laws are meant to ensure that those who engage in warfare do so with those who are also fighting, not with innocent civilians. The world sees that the US and some European countries are supporting the Zionist regime's crimes, and it's truly heartbreaking for me to accept that we live in a world where innocent lives can be taken with impunity. The Zionists want to expand the war in the Middle East to ensure their own survival, given that they failed to achieve their objectives in Gaza. They thought they could destroy Hamas in a week, but it's been a year now, and they've failed to achieve any of their goals. The Zionist regime has only achieved one thing: destroying an entire city and its people, cutting off their access to water, food, and medicine, while the self-proclaimed defenders of human rights remain silent.

As Muslims, we feel a sense of responsibility towards this issue, and Islamic countries must take a united stance against these crimes and not allow the Zionist regime's atrocities to continue in Lebanon.

How will Iran balance its support for regional allies with avoiding direct confrontation with Israel and the US?

I think that if Islamic countries were united in their condemnation of the crimes against Muslims in the region, and if they refused to allow American and Zionist bases to carry out these attacks with impunity, the US wouldn't be able to support the regime so easily and provide it with weapons. We Islamic countries are to blame for our lack of unity and cohesion. We're to blame for not standing up for the rights of Muslims in the region and instead fighting among ourselves. This is a major problem. We need to resolve our differences, and regional peace and stability can be achieved through our cooperation and solidarity. We don't need Americans or other countries to come and create peace in the region. Why should we fear each other and take sides against each other? This is a problem we have, and we need to resolve it among ourselves, with Muslims and Islamic countries, and reassure each other that we'll support each other. We'll work together, and the growth and development of each country will guarantee the growth and development of other countries. If we establish these connections correctly, outsiders will leave the region, and we can create peace and security ourselves.

How do you assess the issue of Israel's infiltration into Iran's security infrastructure, which led to the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran?

It's not difficult to evaluate. Given their infiltration and the tools at their disposal, it's unlikely that

they haven't created the groundwork for such incidents in all our countries. It's unclear whether they haven't done the same in other Islamic countries, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, or Turkey, to be used at a later time.

We must understand that the technological tools available today are in the hands of the powerful, and if they so desire, they can extract information, cause explosions, or wreak havoc on these countries. We must realize that the electronic devices we use, including pagers and mobile phones, can be manipulated and used to control or assassinate us. This is exactly what happened, and it was revealed that the claims of international organizations and individuals who advocated for human rights, humanity, and dignity were lies.

This is what we've come to understand, and now we must be cautious about the tools they provide us, which can be used for espionage and are carried by us ourselves. It was proven that the pager and mobile phone used by martyr Ismail Haniyeh were compromised, and they could easily manipulate them to do as they pleased. From now on, we'll try to minimize the use of these tools in our country, especially among sensitive individuals, and use our own domestically produced devices whenever possible.

You officially accused Israel of assassinating Ismail Haniyeh and considered it a breach of Iran's national security, vowing to respond. Why has there been a delay in this response?

We'll announce the timing of our response when the time is right. It's not as if they can do as they please, whenever and wherever they want. What we will do,

when we will do it, and what measures we will take will not be announced. We'll decide the course of action.

The Zionist regime doesn't mind creating chaos in the region to escape the predicament they're in, but they won't do it alone. They have a strong supporter like the US, which claims to advocate for democracy, human rights, and human dignity.

Many of Netanyahu's actions are aimed at creating war and chaos in the region to escape the disaster that has befallen him. We'll try to thwart their plans through political means, taking action at the right time and place to prevent them from achieving their goals. The Zionists did this because, on the day of my inauguration, my focus was on unity with Islamic countries. My goal was to involve all citizens in governing the country. My approach was not to consider anyone in our country a foreigner. They were upset about this, as they want to create divisions and disputes within our government and the Islamic Republic. Our approach would have foiled their plot, and that's why they did what they did on the day of my inauguration, trying to create a dispute that would prevent us from continuing on our path of peace and security, both domestically and internationally.

That's why I think that on the very first day that the inauguration process was taking shape, they intentionally created a controversy that would prevent us from pursuing a path of peace and security, both within our country and with our neighbors and the world at large, and that we would fall into the trap they had set for us, leading to the very outcome they had anticipated.

Do you think the American and

Israeli goal of cutting off your support for your allies has been achieved?

The problem is not us. Are other Islamic countries satisfied with the situation in Gaza? If they are, then we'll respond. If Muslims in various countries, such as the UAE, Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, and others, are satisfied with the existence of Zionists and their crimes, then we'll be alone in our support. If that's the case, we'll fail, as long as Muslims are alone in this struggle.

It's possible that the Zionist regime will attack other countries tomorrow, Lebanon today, and Saudi Arabia tomorrow, or any other place they desire. If we're alone, that's the situation we'll face.

We have no interest in getting involved in this process unless we believe that a Muslim has a duty to defend Muslims and human rights. If a Muslim exists in the region and sees Muslims being massacred, and they remain silent, then their Islam is questionable. So, we're not alone if we're truly Muslims. If Islamic countries have this view, they should remove the name of Islam from themselves, so we and other Muslims can understand our duty.

From your perspective, what is the solution to the Gaza issue?

The first step is for Islamic countries to come together and reach a common language and perspective. We must agree that anyone who attacks the Islamic community is an aggressor and must be held accountable internationally. We must not allow them to easily attack Islamic countries and Muslims, and then sit back and watch, saying "what will Iran do?" As Muslims, when an innocent Muslim is killed, a woman, child, elderly person, or young person,



The Zionists want to expand the war in the Middle East to ensure their own survival, given that they failed to achieve their objectives in Gaza. The regime has only achieved one thing: destroying an entire city and its people, cutting off their access to water, food, and medicine, while the self-proclaimed defenders of human rights remain silent.

Displaced Palestinians walk past tents pitched on the beach, west of Deir al-Balah, Gaza Strip, on Aug. 20, 2024.

● ABDEL KAREEM NANA/AP