



ALM Exclusive

In shift, a top Hamas official floats Israel recognition

In an interview with Al-Monitor, senior Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzouk suggested the militant group would adhere to the Palestine Liberation Organization's stance on Israel.



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December 13, 2023

DOHA, Qatar — A [senior Hamas official](#) suggested the Gaza-based militant group would recognize Israel as a step toward ending the long-running divisions between the Palestinian factions.

Speaking to Al-Monitor in his Doha office on Monday, Mousa Abu Marzouk struck a careful tone on Israel some two months after his group carried out the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust.

"You should follow the official stance," Abu Marzouk said. "The official stance is that the [[Palestine Liberation Organization](#)] has recognized the state of Israel."

The internationally recognized umbrella grouping of most Palestinian factions, excluding Hamas and Islamic Jihad, formally recognized Israel's right to exist and renounced terrorism in 1993. In exchange, Israel accepted the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people.

Hamas, considered a terrorist organization by Israel, the United States and the European Union, has long called for armed resistance against the Jewish state and has only ever tacitly accepted its existence.

Past reconciliation attempts between Hamas and the secularist Fatah, which makes up the largest faction of the PLO, have broken down over the militant group's refusal to disarm, abide by Oslo-era agreements and accept coexistence with Israel.

"We are seeking to be a part of the PLO, and we said we will respect the PLO's obligations," Abu Marzouk said when asked to clarify Hamas' position on Israel. He added that Israelis should have their rights "but not at the expense of others."

Abu Marzouk, once a permanent resident of the United States, spent nearly two years in a New York federal prison on suspicion of terrorist activity before he was deported to Jordan in 1997.

The 72-year-old now lives in exile in the Qatari capital of Doha, where he heads the group's international office. Experts say it's unclear the degree to which Abu Marzouk and other members of Hamas' Qatar-based political bureau speak for the hard-liners in Gaza who masterminded the Oct. 7 attacks.

Over the course of the hour-long interview, Abu Marzouk defended the Palestinian militant group's cross-border incursion in which Hamas fighters killed 1,200 people in Israel, most of them civilians, and took some 240 people hostage.

Abducting women and children was a mistake, he said. Then why not immediately release them? "Israel is relentlessly shelling Gaza." When pressed on the atrocities, Abu Marzouk claimed falsely that only "Gaza civilians and other Palestinian factions" who breached the border fence were to blame. He dismissed the overwhelming evidence of Hamas' sexual violence during the operation as "mere lies."

Israel's retaliatory offensive against Hamas has killed more than 18,600 people in Gaza, a majority of them women and children, health officials in the militant-run enclave say. Some [1.9 million people](#) — more than 85% of the population — have

been displaced amid the fighting, according to the United Nations. Israel says its air-and-ground war, now in its third month, has killed more than 5,000 Hamas fighters.

When asked what Oct. 7 achieved for the people of Gaza, Abu Marzouk said, "Many goals," including putting the Palestinian cause back on the international agenda. "Everyone is talking about a Palestinian state," he said.

Abu Marzouk said Hamas was still seeking statehood based on the pre-1967 boundaries. The Gaza-based group in 2017 unveiled a policy document accepting the formation of a Palestinian state based on the borders that existed before Israel occupied east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the Six-Day War of 1967. The document, however, stopped short of explicitly recognizing Israel or endorsing a two-state solution.

Abu Marzouk's comments come as the United States and Israel clash over plans for Gaza's future governance, although both agree Hamas can never return to power in the coastal enclave of some 2.3 million people. US national security advisor Jake Sullivan is visiting Israel this week to discuss the duration of the war and Israeli plans for its aftermath.

The Biden administration has said a reformed Palestinian Authority, which is led by 88-year-old President Mahmoud Abbas, should administer the Gaza Strip ahead of negotiations on the long-sought two-state solution.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opposes the PA's return and says Israel will not "repeat the mistake of Oslo," referring to the 1993 agreement that established the PA and was intended to pave the way for Palestinian statehood.

For its part, the Ramallah-based PA, which exercises limited autonomy in the West Bank, has said it would only help govern Gaza as part of a wider peace plan to create an independent state.

Israel's stated goal is to eradicate Hamas, but regional officials, including Jordanian Foreign Minister [Ayman Safadi](#), warn that even if Israel prevails militarily, the group's ideology will persist.

It's also unclear what would happen to the many Hamas sympathizers with mid-level jobs in Gaza's government ministries. An effort to remove all of them could create an administrative vacuum, as the US government experienced with its de-Baathification campaign in Iraq.

Speaking at the Doha Forum on Sunday, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh called Hamas "an integral part of the Palestinian political mosaic." Shtayyeh earlier told Bloomberg the militant group could join the PA as a junior

partner in a future Gaza government. Fatah lost legislative elections to Hamas in 2006, and the militant group violently wrested control of Gaza a year later.

Asked about Shtayyeh's comment, Abu Marzouk said elections should determine whether the Fatah-dominated PA returns to the Palestinian enclave. "But we will refuse any corrupt person that comes to administer the Gaza Strip," Abu Marzouk said, declining to elaborate.

Abbas called off legislative elections in 2021 — the first scheduled vote in 15 years — citing a dispute with Israel over voting in east Jerusalem. Critics believed it was an excuse by the aging Palestinian leader to avoid another election that could see Fatah lose to its rival Hamas.

Were a vote held today, Hamas would likely win. A new Palestinian poll indicates Hamas has only grown in popularity following its attack on Israel, and 90% of respondents said Abbas must resign.

In the West Bank, where the PA's financial woes, corruption and security cooperation with Israel had already made it deeply unpopular, 44% of Palestinians said they supported Hamas — up from 12% three months ago. In Gaza, 42% said they backed Hamas, up from 38% before Oct. 7.

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