Top Hamas leader Musa Abu Marzouk, trying to market Hamas as pragmatic, tells an American-Jewish newspaper that Hamas would agree to a cease-fire (hudna) with Israel. On the other hand, he emphasizes that Hamas categorically refuses to recognize Israel, abandon terrorism ("resistance") or waive the "right of return."

The Jewish Daily Forward editorial dealing with Musa Abu Marzouk’s interview.
Introduction

1. On April 3 and 4, 2012, **Musa Abu Marzouk**, a senior member of Hamas' political bureau, was interviewed at length by the American-Jewish newspaper The Jewish Daily Forward, the first time he had ever spoken to a representative of a Jewish paper. He spoke with **Larry Cohler-Esses**, the assistant managing editor for news. The interview, which lasted five and a half hours and was conducted over two days, was held at the request of the Forward and took place at Musa Abu Marzouk's home in New Cairo, a new suburb of the Egyptian capital. Abu Marzouk moved there at the beginning of 2012 after he and other senior Hamas figures left the movement's headquarters in Damascus and he settled permanently in Egypt.

2. The interview was conducted in English (Musa Abu Marzouk lived in the United States for more than ten years), in an apparently relaxed, informal manner. The Forward noted that Abu Marzouk had made no conditions regarding the material to be covered. In our opinion, Cohler-Esses was well-prepared for the interview and asked tough questions which discomforted Abu Marzouk and pushed him into a corner. His answers raised questions which led the Forward to conclude, in an editorial published on April 23, that Hamas had to change "before it could be a partner for peace."

---

1. **The Jewish Daily Forward** is a left-leaning American-Jewish paper published in New York City. It has a relatively small circulation and appears in both an English and Yiddish edition.

The Main Issues of the Interview

3. In our assessment, Musa Abu Marzouk's objective in granting the interview was to market the idea to the American public and media that Hamas was pragmatic and moderate (following the attempts made by other senior Hamas figures, among them Khaled Mashaal, to make Hamas acceptable to the West and rid itself of its image as a terrorist organization). With Musa Abu Marzouk, the idea would have a greater impact because of his (exceptional) willingness to be interviewed by an American-Jewish newspaper and talk about a variety of subjects without imposing preconditions. It was also an attempt to intimate that Hamas made a distinction between Jews in general, including American Jews (against whom he claimed he had nothing), and the Jews living in Israel, whom he felt should be killed (See below).

4. Our impression is that to market the image of Hamas as moderate and pragmatic, Abu Marzouk used the concept of a hudna with Israel as the his preferred claim. The concept has already been proposed by Hamas several times, and refers to a Hamas agreement to a long-term ceasefire (hudna) with Israel in return for Israel's withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines. Abu Marzouk presented the idea to the Forward correspondent as possible and even preferable to other options, among them an Israeli-Palestinian Authority peace treaty (which, Abu Marzouk made it clear, Hamas would make sure to "shift away from" if it took power over the PA) or a continuation of the current situation of "continuous resistance [i.e., terrorist attacks] against the [so-called Israeli] occupation."

5. However, at the same time, Abu Marzouk incorporated Hamas' basic intransient stance throughout the interview (obvious to Cohler-Esses, who did not hesitate to confront him) which negated the pragmatic image he tried to project. Thus, Abu Marzouk emphasized that Hamas strongly objected to recognizing Israel and normalizing relations with it; would not permit the Palestinian Authority to sign a peace treaty based on the recognition of Israel; did not intend to abandon the path of "resistance" [i.e., terrorism]; insisted on the realization of the so-called "right of return" of the Palestinian refugees living outside "Palestine" and on holding a referendum in which they would be

---

3For further information about previous attempts made by Hamas figures to market the organization to the West as pragmatic, see the May 15, 2011 bulletin "Statements made by senior Hamas figures since the internal Palestinian reconciliation agreement attempt to present a moderate image while restating Hamas' refusal to recognize Israel or accept the International Quartet's conditions, continuing the "resistance" (i.e., terrorism), and drawing Fatah back into the cycle of violence" at https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hamas_e144.pdf; and the September 23, 2009 bulletin "Hamas' smile attack for the West: Ken Livingstone interviews Khaled Mashaal, a case study," at https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hamas_e083.pdf.
included as a condition for any agreement, which in any case would not include recognition of the State of Israel.

6. Similar positions have been frequently repeated by Khaled Mashaal, head of Hamas’ political bureau, and other senior Hamas spokesmen. Stripped of the rhetoric, they simply state that Hamas refuses to accept the conditions of International Quartet, according to which Hamas will recognize the State of Israel, honor previously-signed agreements and abandon the path of terrorism.

7. Another conclusion to be drawn from the interview is that Mahmoud Abbas is constrained by his political contacts with Israel. As far as Hamas in concerned, any arrangement reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority incompatible with Hamas ideology (regarding issues such as recognition of Israel and the so-called “right of return”) will be changed if and when Hamas comes to power.

8. Particularly interesting is Cohler-Esses’ confrontation of Abu Marzouk with the anti-Semitic sections of the Hamas charter (published in 1988). Abu Marzouk’s remarks revealed basic truths which he may not have intended to divulge: when Cohler-Esses quoted him a hadith (part of the Islamic oral tradition) appearing in the charter which calls for the killing of Jews, Abu Marzouk claimed that the passage did not apply to all Jews, “just those in Palestine” [i.e., Hamas only wants to kill Israeli Jews]. When asked about anti-Semitic sections in the charter quoting The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, he answered that the Zionists themselves had written The Protocols and then denied it. Told that they were a forgery, Abu Marzouk “appeared nonplussed. ‘Really? This is the first time I know [about this],’ he said.” (Note: It is difficult to know whether Abu Marzouk’s answer reflected pretended innocence or merely the ignorance typical of Palestinians and many Arabs who grew up nurtured on The Protocols and their myths.)

9. The following were the main issues of the interview as they appeared on the Jewish Daily Forward website, April 19, 2012 (ITIC emphases throughout):
A Ceasefire (Hudna) with Israel instead of a Peace Agreement

Musa Abu Marzouk during the interview (Jewish Daily Forward website)

10. The main theme of the interview was Hamas' readiness for a ceasefire (hudna) with Israel instead of a peace agreement based on the recognition of the State of Israel. Musa Abu Marzouk, who "appeared to speak most passionately when touting his proposal for a hudna - an idea he first proposed in 1994," said that Hamas would not agree to recognize the existence on the State of Israel on "historic Palestinian land," but would rather agree to a ceasefire (hudna). He said that relations between the future Palestinian state and the State of Israel would be similar to those between Israel and Lebanon or Israel and Syria today [that is, de facto non-belligerence but without normalization or recognition]. Abu Marzouk represented that "new relationship" with Israel as an alternative preferable to the current situation of war, the so-called Israeli "occupation" of Judea and Samaria and the continuation of the terrorist attacks ("resistance").

11. Cohler-Esses pressed Abu Marzouk, saying that there was concern that during the long-term [i.e., 10 years] ceasefire, Hamas' objective would remain the destruction of the State of Israel. He added that it would give Hamas the time to build up its arms toward that end. Abu Marzouk evaded the question, saying that "...It's very difficult to say after 10 years what will be on both sides" (See the Appendix for the meaning of hudna in the Islamic tradition).

12. Asked whether he would be prepared to go to Jerusalem to discuss a hudna with Israel, he bluntly answered "No." However, he did not reject out of hand direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, although Hamas itself objected to the peace process. Note: In our assessment, he meant that Hamas did not object to the PA's appeal to the UN in September 2011 as part of the internal Palestinian
reconciliation. That was on the condition that it did not entail recognition if the State of Israel or waiving the Palestinian refugees' so-called "right of return."  

**An Israeli-Palestinian Peace Treaty**

13. When asked if an Israeli-Palestinian "final peace treaty" would bind Hamas if it came to power later, Abu Marzouk answered, "No. I don't think any kind of treaty can 'stuck' [sic] anybody in the future. Just read history."

14. Abu Marzouk made it clear that Hamas would not accept a Palestinian Authority recognition of Israel as part of a peace agreement, even if such an agreement were ratified by a referendum of all the Palestinians. If such an agreement were signed, once in power, Hamas would "feel free to shift away from those provisions of the agreement that define it as a peace treaty and move instead toward a relationship of armed truce."

15. To back up his position that Israeli-Palestinian agreements were mutable, Abu Marzouk gave the example of the 1993 Oslo Accords, signed by Israel and Arafat. He claimed that Israel did not hesitate to change them and that once Benjamin Netanyahu became prime minister, he disagreed with certain provisions in it and changed them.  

16. Musa Abu Marzouk then linked Hamas' acceptance to any Israeli-Palestinian agreement to the realization of the Palestinian refugees' so-called "right of return." He made it clear that any agreement would have to include the "unqualified right of Palestinians to return to land in what is now Israel." [Note: Hamas means the "return" to Israel of about five million Palestinians, which would change Israel's demographic and political nature as a Jewish state.] Moreover, any such agreement, according to Abu Marzouk, would have to be ratified by a referendum of all the Palestinian refugees.

---

4Following the May 4, 2011 Hamas-Fatah reconciliation agreement, **Hamas leaders said of Mahmoud Abbas' proposed September 2011 appeal to the UN** that Hamas did not have high hopes for the move, which they called "empty talk" and "a political circus." However, they said, if the Palestinian Authority or Arab countries wanted to give Israel another chance, **Hamas would allow the appeal to the UN**, which would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, on the condition that it did not include either recognition of the State of Israel or waiving the Palestinian refugees' so-called "right of return." For background information see the May 15, 2011 bulletin "Statements made by senior Hamas figures since the internal Palestinian reconciliation agreement attempt to present a moderate image while restating Hamas' refusal to recognize Israel or accept the International quartet's conditions, continuing the resistance" (i.e., terrorism), and drawing Fatah back into the cycle of violence at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hamas_e144.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hamas_e144.pdf).

5Musa Abu Marzouk carefully avoided mentioning that it was Hamas which declared a war to the death on the Oslo Accords with the objective of preventing them from being implemented. Hamas then initiated a wave of terrorist attacks against civilians in cities throughout Israel which had considerable influence on the events leading to the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and to the collapse of the relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.
not only those living in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip (another condition intended to undermine an Israeli-Palestinian agreement which did not include the "right of return.")

Other Issues Mentioned in the Interview

17. Other issues in the interview included:

1) "Civil resistance" as opposed to "military resistance:" Musa Abu Marzouk said that the [reconciliation] meeting in Cairo [attended by Hamas, Fatah and the other Palestinian factions], had decided that "mass civil resistance" against Israel was a common platform in which they all could participate. Hamas accepted the idea, according to Abu Marzouk, to make reconciliation easier, however, it did not mean "giving up both the right and the opportunity to conduct military operations" [i.e., to continue along the path of terrorism] should the opportunity present itself.

2) The political change in Hamas after the elections: Musa Abu Marzouk noted that the Hamas movement before the 2006 election (in the Gaza Strip) "is not the same as after they are elected." He said that "as an opposition party, you can say anything, but no one expects you to do anything. But after election, you have to implement on the ground. And there are many, many difficulties when you implement anything on the ground." Reading between the lines, he might be suggesting that Hamas had become more pragmatic because of governmental restraints after winning the election.

3) Hamas' harming of civilians:

A) Regarding terrorism, Abu Marzouk defended Hamas' "military activities" [i.e., terrorist attacks] carried out against Israeli civilians (which resulted in the United States and Europe's designating Hamas as a terrorist organization.) He claimed that it was impossible to compare the "huge number" of civilians killed by Israel with the civilians killed by the Palestinians.6

B) Abu Marzouk developed the claim under the heading of "collateral damage," saying that "You cannot compare between the civilians killed by Israel and

---

6Musa Abu Marzouk tried to minimize the extent of the harm done to Israeli civilians and blur the basic difference between the harm done unintentionally to Palestinian bystanders during attacks against terrorists and the deliberate, premeditated, indiscriminate attacks on Israeli civilians. During the Palestinian terrorist campaign known as the second intifada, Palestinian suicide bombers killed 525 Israelis, most of them civilians (more than half of 1080 Israelis killed during the second intifada).
civilians killed by the resistance...The Israelis killed more than 1000 and they said 'We are sorry' ... the killing is killing."

C) Regarding the leaders of the terrorist organizations [the "resistance"], and among them the Hamas leaders who publicly celebrate the killing of Israeli civilians, Abu Marzouk claimed that "Our policy is...against targeting any civilian." [*Note: The claim is unrealistic, in that the policy and goal of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations is the deliberately harming of Israeli civilians. They admit and boast of that policy in their public statements, except those that are meant for Western ears.]*

4) Anti-Semitic articles in the Hamas charter:

A) Musa Abu Marzouk told Cohler-Esses that Hamas didn't "have originally something against the Jew as a religion or against the Jew as a human being," or against American Jews. The only problem he had was with Israelis, who "occupied his land," injured Palestinians, and "kicked out" his family.

B) Cohler-Esses, who was well prepared for the interview, pressed Abu Marzouk on the issue of the anti-Semitic sections of the Hamas charter (1988). He quoted from it twice: a hadith relating to a call by the prophet Muhammad to kill Jews, and two citations from The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.7

C) Musa Abu Marzouk replied that Hamas did not conduct its daily activities according to what was written in the charter. He claimed that "We have many, many policies that are not going with the charter" and that there were people within Hamas who were talking about changing it. (*Note: The Hamas charter clearly and explicitly reflects the movement's extremist Islamic ideology and to the best of our knowledge, no suggestion to change any of its articles has been

7The Hamas charter presents the Jews in a very negative light, as sentenced to humiliation and lives of misery for having angered Allah, rejected the Qur'an and "killing the prophets" (from the Sura Ali Imran, quoted at the beginning of the charter). It contains various anti-Semitic myths inspired by The Protocols (Article 32 of the charter), about Jewish control of the media, the motion picture industry and education (Articles 17 and 22). It repeats the anti-Semitic myth that the Jews were behind revolutions, including the French and Russian revolutions, and behind the world and local wars: "No war takes place anywhere in the world without [the Jews] behind the scenes having a hand in it" (Article 22). The charter demonizes the Jewish enemy, describes the Jews as behaving "like Nazis" and says that "The Jews' Nazism includes [brutal behavior towards Palestinian] women and children and terrifies the entire [population]" (Article 20). For a complete analysis of the Hamas charter see the March 26, 2006 bulletin "The Hamas Charter" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hamas_charter.pdf.
made.) However, Abu Marzouk admitted that Hamas did not intend to change the sections dealing with the Jews.

D) Musa Abu Marzouk tried to minimize the importance of the sections dealing with anti-Semitism. Regarding the hadith referring to killing Jews, he claimed that the passage did not apply to all Jews, just those in Palestine [i.e., only Jews living in Israel had to be killed]. As for The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, he claimed that "The Zionists wrote it, and they said, 'No, we didn't.'" When Cohler-Esses told him they were a forgery, he was "nonplussed," saying, "Really? This is the first time I know [about this]..."
The Essence of the Islamic Term Hudna

1. The term *hudna* [هدنة] is taken from Islamic tradition and means an agreement or treaty which entails the cessation of all belligerent activities for a designated period of time under agreed-on conditions. The classic hudna in Islamic history was the Hudaybiyyah hudna between Muhammad and the Quraysh tribe in 628 AD. When Muhammad saw that his forces were inferior to those of Mecca, he agreed to a cessation of hostilities and signed a 10-year hudna. Two years later he attacked and occupied Mecca.

2. According to the tradition, the Muslim leadership can, under certain circumstances, announce a hudna during a war with infidels. A hudna is usually achieved and signed when the Muslim leadership is of the opinion that it will serve their interests and be beneficial because under current circumstances their force is not sufficient to overcome the enemy. That evaluation can change if conditions on the ground change. A hudna is limited in time from its inception, but the Muslims may violate it if they conclude that conditions for violating it are favorable to them. They can also not extend it when it has run its course if that serves their interests. Therefore, a hudna is considered a tactical move, an integral part of jihad against an enemy until the latter eventually surrenders.

3. The objective of a hudna is a temporary ceasefire for the purpose of improving the Muslims’ military might before renewing fighting. In that sense it is one of the stages of jihad and does not reflect a genuine willingness or fundamental commitment to find a solution to the conflict or preserve an armistice.