

**HAMAS WOULDN'T HONOR A TREATY, TOP LEADER SAYS  
ABU MARZOOK SAYS HE'S OPEN TO A NEW ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP**

By [Larry Cohler-Esses](#) Forward April 19, 2012, issue of [April 27, 2012](#).

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**Varied:** In an exclusive interview, Abu Marzook discussed his own political future, relations with Israel, the Hamas Charter and the impact of the Arab Spring on his organization.

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**CAIRO** — Any agreement reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority will be subject to far-reaching changes if Hamas comes to power in a democratic Palestinian state, a top Hamas leader told the Forward in an exclusive and wide-ranging interview.

Mousa Abu Marzook, considered Hamas's second-highest-ranking official, said that his group would view an agreement between Israel and the P.A. — even one ratified by a referendum of all Palestinians — as a hudna, or cease-fire, rather than as a peace treaty. In power, he said, 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.

“We will not recognize Israel as a state,” he said emphatically. “It will be like the relationship between Lebanon and Israel or Syria and Israel.”

The exchange was but one part of an unprecedented five-and-a-half-hour discussion conducted over two days between Abu Marzook and the Forward, the first-ever in-depth exchange between a senior Hamas leader and a Jewish publication.

Abu Marzook, deputy director of Hamas's political bureau, for the most part used the opportunity to expand on [long-standing Hamas positions](#). Contrary to some media reports, he indicated no new flexibility that would move Hamas closer to accepting [conditions](#) laid down by the so-called Quartet of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations for his group's participation in the now moribund Middle East peace process. Abu Marzook did not, however, foreclose the possibility of a more accommodating relationship with Israel in the future.

Quite apart from the content of Abu Marzook's remarks, several veteran observers of the hard-line Islamist group viewed the fact that the interview took place as a larger signal of change now roiling the organization.

“I think the mere fact of his speaking to you, independent of what he said, is almost more important than the specifics,” said Shlomi Eldar, who has reported on Hamas from Gaza for Israel TV's Channel 10 and other media outlets since 1991. “Even granting such an interview is far away

from what he thought two or three years ago.... What [Abu Marzook] really wants is for Jewish Americans to convince the Israelis that Hamas is not like an animal.”

Gershon Baskin, an Israeli peace activist who has acted as a liaison between Hamas and senior Israeli government officials, including in the process that finally freed Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, termed the interview an “historic landmark.”

“The amount of time he gave you is amazing,” Baskin said.

But David Makovsky, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, focused more on the actual content. “Unfortunately,” he said, “it's a validation of those who believe Hamas has a far way to go before it becomes a legitimate Palestinian interlocutor.”

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**LISTEN TO ABU MARZOOK SPEAK ABOUT THE PEACE PROCESS:**

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In a number of cases, Abu Marzook — who is one of three prime candidates in upcoming internal elections for Hamas's top leadership spot — offered words that differ on a practical level with the organization's actual stance or behavior. The discrepancy could cut either way: In his call for a hudna with Israel, Abu Marzook sounded almost beseechingly dovish, even though his underlying conditions and details suggested a considerably more hard-line stance. On the other hand, his defense of Hamas's right to launch operations targeting civilians compared with the absence of such attacks in recent years within Israel's pre-1967 boundaries. Over the course of the two-day discussion, amid a lunch of salmon and Nile River fish the first day and takeout pizza the second, Abu Marzook expounded on a variety of topics, ranging

from the Holocaust, American Jewish solidarity with Israel, and the impact of the Arab Spring on his organization, to anti-Semitic passages in the Hamas Charter.

But Abu Marzook appeared to speak most passionately when touting his proposal for a hudna — an idea he first proposed in 1994.

“Let’s establish a relationship between the two states in the historic Palestinian land as a hudna between both sides,” he said. “It’s better than war and better than the continuous resistance against the occupation. And better than Israel occupying the West Bank and Gaza, making all these difficulties and problems on both sides.”

Pressed regarding concerns that Hamas’s goal during a hudna would remain the destruction of Israel as a state, and that a truce would give Hamas time to build up its arms toward that end, Abu Marzook said: “It’s very difficult to say after 10 years what will be on both sides. Maybe my answer right now [about recognizing Israel] is completely different to my answer after 10 years.”

But asked if, offered guarantees for his physical security, he would be prepared to go to Jerusalem to negotiate with Israel for exactly the kind of hudna he seeks, Abu Marzook replied bluntly, “No.”

Hamas has rejected negotiating with Israel directly. Abu Marzook said that under a previous understanding with Fatah, the faction controlling the P.A. in the West Bank, Hamas allows the P.A. to negotiate with Israel, despite its objections to the process. But Abu Marzook repeated his organization’s demand that any result must be approved in a referendum that includes all Palestinian refugees, not just those in the West Bank and Gaza. “All of the Palestinians should vote about this,” he said.

He also made clear that such an agreement must include the unqualified right of Palestinians to return to land in what is now Israel.

From there, it only got more complicated. Abu Marzook described an agreement that would be treated almost as a “**Rashomon**” document — seen by the P.A. as a peace treaty, but by Hamas as a mere truce agreement.

“When we reach the agreement, our point of view is, it’s a hudna,” Abu Marzook emphasized. This is not just a matter of semantics. Like the classic Akira Kurosawa film, in which each party observes the same event but sees it in radically different and ultimately irreconcilable ways, Fatah and Hamas envision radically different relationships with Israel, based on the same document.

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## LISTEN TO ABU MARZOOK SPEAK ABOUT ‘THE PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ZION’:

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For Fatah, a peace treaty with Israel encompasses mutual recognition, diplomatic exchange, trade, commerce, movement of peoples across borders and regional cooperation. It also includes a non-militarized Palestinian state and a limited Palestinian right of return.

And Hamas’s hudna vision?

“What’s the relationship between Israel and Syria and Lebanon right now?” Abu Marzook asked.

That answer — closed borders, barbed wire, no trade, no commerce, no diplomats, and arms build-ups on each side, to the best of each side’s respective abilities, in preparation for a possible war — might not matter much, so long as Fatah remained the party ruling a new Palestine state. But both Fatah and Hamas agree that their new state will be a democracy. So the question was unavoidable: What will become of any peace treaty Israel negotiates with the P.A. under Fatah if and when Hamas comes to power?

“Rabin signed the Oslo Accords,” Abu Marzook recalled, referring to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s solemn ceremony with Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, on the White House lawn in 1993. “And when [Israeli opposition leader Benjamin] Netanyahu came [to power], he disagreed about the Oslo agreement,” leading to numerous changes in the accords.

Asked if a final peace treaty between Israel and a Palestinian state would not bind Hamas if it came to power later, Abu Marzook replied: “No. I don’t think any kind of treaty can ‘stuck’ anybody in the future. Just read history.”

Abu Marzook offered his views at a moment of unprecedented and far-reaching change in the Arab world, and within his own organization. The Arab Spring is one year old, and Hamas, classified as a terrorist group by the U.S. government, is today, numerous experts say, the latest stage on which the Arab world's revolutionary drama is playing out.

The tidal wave that pitched out dictators in Tunis and Cairo has pushed the staunchly militant Palestinian group from its longtime home in Damascus, where the Spring's surge has run blood red.

Hamas leaders have disavowed the Syrian regime's slaughter of its own citizens and scattered across the region, some resettling in the Persian Gulf, others in Jordan and some in Gaza, where democratically elected Hamas officials rule a rump territory still under Israeli siege.

But Abu Marzook has come to Cairo — the Arab Spring's still bubbling crucible. He has settled into a large three-story mansion some 90 minutes outside the city, in a newly developed, upper-class planned community known as New Cairo. The neighborhood's wide, still unpaved streets look almost deserted but for construction crews, and are lined with numerous half-built homes, their scaffoldings still mounted in place and mounds of rubble piled in front of them. It's quiet; a far cry from Cairo's tumult. Security, a major consideration for a man in Abu Marzook's position, is no doubt an easier proposition in this tranquil corner of a country still in midrevolution.

Inside his sparsely furnished home, with its large, airy rooms and marble floors, Abu Marzook works amid a retinue of bodyguards and aides. No women are in sight. At the end of the second day of the interview, he cheerfully offered his business card and invited follow-up questions via phone or email. But first, he wrote a new phone number at the top of the card. Disregard the four Damascus phone numbers still printed under his name, he said.

It is almost certainly not the first time he has had to improvise business cards. Abu Marzook's has been a peripatetic life. A calm, soft-spoken man of 61, Abu Marzook struggles haltingly in rusty English — a language he once spoke daily while pursuing a master's degree in construction management at Colorado State University; a doctorate in industrial engineering at Louisiana Tech, in Ruston, La., and living several years in Falls Church, Va., where his primary work through the early 1990s was raising millions of dollars for Hamas.

"They called him 'the genius,'" said the journalist Eldar, whose new book, "Getting To Know Hamas," is to be published in Israel in May. "In 1989 and 1992, he saved Hamas during periods of crisis. His fundraising built up Hamas's infrastructure in Gaza because he had the financial connections with the Islamic funds around the world, especially in America and Europe."

Indeed, during this earlier period, Abu Marzook was the top director of Hamas's political bureau, not its deputy director. Within the movement, he was known as the favored protégé of Hamas's revered founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Born in Rafah, a southern Gaza city near the Egyptian border, to parents who hailed from a village near Hebron in the West Bank, Abu Marzook was picked by Yassin at an early age as a prize pupil meant for greater things. With Yassin's support, he attended college at Ain Shams University in Cairo and went on to graduate school in the United States — in part, to gain worldly knowledge of the West that would help a movement with few in its ranks who had this background.

Ostensibly, Abu Marzook's fundraising, based in the United States and run from his home outside Washington, went to support Hamas's huge network of social services in Gaza and, to a lesser extent, in the West Bank. Israel alleges (and he denies) that some of his fundraising went to support terrorist actions, as well. Hamas' sprawling enterprise of medical clinics, orphanages, schools and social service agencies made up the overwhelming bulk of the group's work in the occupied territories, as it does today. At the time, such fundraising was not explicitly illegal. The U.S. government did not designate Hamas as a terrorist group until 1995. The popular gratitude and deep social roots that Hamas and its precursor group accrued through years of providing such service to Palestinians made it a formidable force when it launched its first attacks against Israel, during the first intifada, in 1988. Until then, Israel had quietly encouraged the religious movement as a rival to Fatah and other militant PLO groups, then seen as the Jewish state's primary enemies.

Citing arguments that Islamic law prohibits ceding Muslim lands to nonbelievers, Hamas resolutely opposes the Oslo Accords and the halting efforts made by its bitter rival, the PLO,

and by Israel toward a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. From the start of the Oslo process, the group backed up its opposition with terrorism, launching a campaign of bombings and eventually suicide bomb attacks, targeting civilians in cities across Israel. Since its inception, Hamas claims to have killed 1,365 “Zionist soldiers”— a statistic likely to include combatants and non-combatants, as the group has stated in the past that it views all Israeli Jews as combatants.

In 1993, Abu Marzook left the United States for Jordan, where he joined other leaders of Hamas’s “outside” wing to set up the group’s political headquarters in Amman. Jordan’s ruler, King Hussein, had long cultivated close, if careful, ties with Jordan’s affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Hamas, which was established as the Islamist movement’s Palestinian branch, was offered offices in the Jordanian capital to set up its political operation right next door to Israel.

But after Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, Israeli officials pressed Hussein hard to expel the group. The United States also pressured Jordan, and so, for that matter, did the PLO, which had come to view Hamas as the biggest internal threat to its hold on power.

In response, Hussein, who preferred to keep potential enemies close, offered a concession: He threw out Abu Marzook, who returned to the United States in 1995.

But on his arrival, Abu Marzook was instead detained when a terrorism watch list at immigration turned up his name. A search of Abu Marzook’s carry-on bags found what looked like evidence of substantial offshore and American bank accounts. And a strip search of his wife yielded an address book with hundreds of names, including several people whom American authorities regarded as Middle East extremists. Soon after his detention, Israel asked Washington to extradite Abu Marzook to stand trial in Israel on terrorism charges.

Abu Marzook eventually spent a year-and-a-half in Manhattan’s Metropolitan Correctional Center as his attorney, [Stanley L. Cohen](#), fought a no-holds-barred, high-profile battle against his extradition. In the end, after initial decisions against him, it was Abu Marzook, weary of sitting in jail, who instructed Cohen to desist in his appeals; he’d go to Jerusalem, he decided, and face the Israelis in what promised to be a trial of the century.

Then, the government of Israel shifted. U.S. Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk cabled Washington that the recently elected Netanyahu government was uncertain it wished to take on the case. A late-night meeting between Washington’s envoy to Amman and King Hussein produced a way out: Hussein agreed to take back Abu Marzook.

Abu Marzook returned to Jordan in 1997, expecting to be hailed as the hero of Hamas who had faced down Israel and won. Khaled Meshal, a Hamas activist with roots in Kuwait, was expected to quickly return the keys to Abu Marzook’s office as chief of Hamas’s political bureau, which Meshal had managed on an acting basis.

But then, in September 1997, Netanyahu singlehandedly, if unintentionally, upended Abu Marzook’s triumph: He approved [a Mossad hit on Meshal](#) that went terribly wrong when the Israeli hit team was captured while trying to escape. To extricate the team, Netanyahu was forced to give up some 70 Palestinian detainees, including the most prized prisoner of all: Yassin. He also had to save Meshal’s life with the antidote to the toxin the agents had administered.

Abu Marzook’s star was not just eclipsed, it was sunk. “The day they tried to kill [Meshal] was the day Meshal the leader was born,” the well-connected Amman journalist Ranya Kadri told author Paul McGeough in his book, “Kill Khalid,” a history of the botched hit. “The man who died that day was Abu Marzook. Nobody wanted to talk to Abu Marzook after that — it was Meshal, Meshal, Meshal.”

Since then, Abu Marzook, though still a top player in Hamas, has served as deputy director to Meshal. The two are colleagues and rivals. On at least three occasions, Abu Marzook has stood as a leadership candidate to retake the top position in secret elections held by the Shura Council, Hamas’s clandestine policymaking body. Meshal has emerged each time, victorious.

But in January, to widespread surprise, [Meshal announced his resignation](#). No one knows whether the Shura Council will accept the resignation when it meets sometime soon, on a date that remains secret. There are now considered to be three top candidates for the coveted post of political director: Meshal, Abu Marzook and Ismail Haniyeh, who was elected prime minister of the P.A. in 2006 and has been the effective chief of Gaza since then. The contest

comes amid signs of sharply increased tensions between Meshal, the “outside” leader, and Haniyeh, now leading his own government in Gaza.

Asked if he is, indeed, a candidate, Abu Marzook explained that the process in Hamas was not like a bid for the U.S. presidency, in which a candidate throws his hat into the ring.

“Nobody announces himself as a candidate,” he said. “Someone else should announce a person for a post.”

But asked if, like the Civil War general, William Tecumseh Sherman, he would refuse to run if nominated and refuse to serve if elected, Abu Marzook laughed heartily and said, “No, I’m not that man.”

For Israel’s current leaders, the question of who ends up running Hamas is deemed moot. “None of this is relevant for Israel, because the government says they don’t want to hear from Hamas,” Eldar said.

Meanwhile, Israeli officials routinely denounce efforts by the Fatah leaders who control the P.A. to consummate a reconciliation agreement with Hamas, arguing that as a terrorist organization it is an unsuitable partner. But just as routinely, Israeli hard-liners dismiss negotiating with the P.A. at all, since it controls only the West Bank while Hamas rules in Gaza, outside its orbit.

A series of meetings between Fatah and Hamas leaders has ended in repeated announcements of an imminent agreement to bring the two groups and their rump governments back together. But the agreement has yet to be implemented, and Abu Marzook indicated with a resigned air that this would not happen very soon. “There’s some difficulties in the West Bank and some difficulties in Gaza, and we are working together to solve these,” he said.

If Abu Marzook’s appeal for a hudna sounded more dovish than his plan’s actual details, his rhetoric regarding Hamas attacks on Israel tacked in the opposite direction: considerably more hawkish than the reality.

The last suicide bombing attributed to Hamas took place in August 2004, almost eight years ago — an attack on two buses in Beersheba that killed 16 people. Since then, however, Israel claims to have thwarted terrorist attacks sponsored by Hamas in Israel proper. The group has also continued to launch attacks — some fatal — against Israeli Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank.

Since Israel’s 2008–2009 military offensive in Gaza, which it dubbed Operation Cast Lead, Hamas has also ceased launching rockets from Gaza into southern Israel.

Until March, the Hamas government in Gaza had for the most part sought to stop other groups from firing such missiles, as well. Then, on March 9, Israel launched a targeted killing in Gaza of a militant from another group whom Israel charged was planning a terrorist attack against it. That provoked a [fusillade](#) of some 200 rockets fired into Israel by others, which Hamas officials did nothing to stop. This, in turn, brought on escalating Israeli retaliations, until Egypt brokered a cease-fire agreement.

The exchange resulted in the deaths of 25 Palestinians, most of them militants but several civilians; no Israelis died.

Abu Marzook was at pains to knock down suggestions in numerous media outlets that Hamas is preparing to abandon armed resistance against Israel in favor of mass popular resistance against Israeli rule.

A February 6 [article](#) by Time magazine correspondent Karl Vick about the “mainstreaming” of Hamas was one object of his disdain. In it, Vick played up comments by Meshal, who, at a November reconciliation meeting with Fatah leaders, praised the popular protests of the Arab Spring last year in Egypt and Tunisia as packing “the power of a tsunami.”

“The new government emerging in Cairo may be dominated by Islamists,” Vick wrote hopefully, “but it has pushed both sides to make up and adopt the nonviolent strategy against Israel, complete with negotiations.”

For Abu Marzook, the November meeting in Cairo meant something “completely different.” At the meeting, he said, the groups involved asked, “What kind of [activities] between us we can share together?” And mass civil resistance, it was decided, was one in which all could participate.

“We accept that,” he said. “[It] can now make reconciliation easier.” But giving up both the right and the opportunity to conduct military operations? “It doesn’t mean that,” Abu Marzook stated flatly.

Indeed, a careful look at the original Agence France Presse report from which Vick drew Meshal’s comments reveals some important remarks the Time correspondent left out. “Now we have a common ground that we can work on,” Meshal said then. But he added, “As long as there is an occupation on our land, we have the right to defend our land by all means, including military resistance.”

“ Hamas is not going to voluntarily surrender what they see as a strategic and tactical option,” Baskin, the Israeli peace activist, said. “That would be in their eyes like surrender. So they say the option remains on the table. But what they tell people in the West who are engaging them is, ‘Watch what we do, not what we say.’”

Speaking in a different context, about the effects of the Arab Spring, Abu Marzook himself offered an additional consideration.

“ Hamas before the [2006] election is not the same as after they are elected,” he said, “because 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.”

Still, in a long exchange about terrorism, the Hamas leader resolutely defended his organization’s past acts of violence targeting civilians. He asserted that Israel, under the rubric of collateral damage, had killed thousands more Palestinian civilians than vice versa. He dismissed the notion that it made some moral difference that Israel generally issues statements of public regret for the deaths of civilians it hits in pursuing what it characterized as military targets, while Hamas leaders often publicly celebrated the group’s successful actions targeting civilians.

“You cannot compare between the civilians killed by Israel and the civilians killed by the resistance,” Abu Marzook said. The Israeli numbers, he stressed, “were huge, really huge.... The action’s the action. You killed 17 children here. And there are 16 civilians killed in Israel. If you evaluate what the Israelis said or what the resistance said — okay, you can compare between just the talk. But in reality, the Israelis killed more than 1,000, and they said, ‘We are sorry.’... The killing is killing.”

At some points, Abu Marzook seemed to claim that the Hamas leaders who publicly celebrated such killings — who have included Meshal himself — were not speaking for the organization, or that Hamas had not itself directed and planned the actions or, at least, had not planned them as civilian hits.

“There’s no one speaker [within] the resistance,” he said. “Everybody talks about their actions, and you can make what you want of those speakers. They make it as [if this is] the policy of the resistance. And this is not right. Our policy is... against targeting any civilian.”

On those occasions when civilians die in such actions, “there is no planning” for this, he claimed, “because it’s very difficult to make something like this to be perfect.... When you killed his brother or his [fellow Palestinian] civilians, he wants to retaliate. It’s very difficult to say anything bad to him.”

Mouin Rabbani, a Jordan-based Middle East contributing editor to Middle East Report who follows Hamas closely, expressed surprise at such distancing remarks.

“I’m surprised he didn’t repeat their traditional justifications,” he said.

In the past, Rabbani said, Hamas had expressed interest in reaching an understanding with Israel whereby each side would undertake to avoid hitting civilians or civilian infrastructure targets. “In the past, among other arguments, they’ve justified their actions by claiming every Israeli is a soldier. It’s very uncommon for them to basically disavow these actions.”

“Why am I here?”

This was not an existential plea to the cosmos. It was, rather, the first question I put to Abu Marzook at the start of the interview: Why had he agreed to a request by a Jewish news organization to talk with him in-depth in a lengthy and probing exchange?

“We don’t have originally something against the Jew as a religion or against the Jew as a human being,” he said. “The problem is that the Israelis kicked out my family. They have occupied my land and injured thousands of Palestinians.... I have to differentiate between the

Jew who did this problem to my people and [American] Jews like you, who never did anything bad to my people.”

Abu Marzook waved away the contention that, in fact, most American Jews strongly support Israel as a Jewish state — in many cases, quite actively — and sympathize with their fellow Jews there. Speaking of Americans in general, he said, “Those people who have sympathy for the Jews [in Israel], it’s because of their history with the Jews. If you look carefully at what happened to the Jews in Moscow or Madrid, in Spain or in Germany or Poland, that’s very bad.... Anyone who historically his father or grandfather did something like that [to the Jews], he should be ashamed.”

This made Abu Marzook’s comments the next day in defense of [the Hamas Charter](#) all the more surprising. The charter, a lengthy, multi-part founding document composed in 1988, contains several sections that have been widely condemned as anti-Semitic.

The first such section cites a hadith, or saying of the Prophet Muhammad:

“The Day of Judgment will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Moslems, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him. Only the Gharkad tree would not do that because it is one of the trees of the Jews.”

The second section cites passages from “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” an early 20th-century forgery now widely attributed to the czar of Russia’s secret police, that depict world Jewry as a nefarious international force through Western history. The passages cited hold “world Zionism” as responsible for, among other things, the French and communist revolutions, the control of media and finance worldwide, and the machinations of “secret societies,” including the “Freemasons, Rotary Clubs, the Lions in different parts of the world” that have been formed “for the purpose of sabotaging societies and achieving Zionist interests.”

Abu Marzook said that the charter does not govern his organization.

“We have many, many policies that are not going with the charter,” he said. “But when you talk about ‘change the charter,’ there are many Hamas people talking about changing the charter. That’s a debate inside Hamas, because there are many, many policies against what’s written in the charter.”

Asked specifically about changing the passages on Jews, Abu Marzook acknowledged no such amendments existed. But he defended the hadith as being taken out of context. The passage, he said, did not apply to all Jews — just those in Palestine.

As for the Protocols, “The Zionists wrote it, and they said, ‘No, we didn’t.’ [It’s] linked to Zionists,” he said.

Informed that the document was, in fact, a forgery, Abu Marzook appeared nonplussed. “Really? This is the first time I know [about this],” he said.

For a Hamas leader who had lived and studied in the West to respond in such a manner seemed a stunning reflection of a movement that remains deeply insular and parochial, even as it now seeks wider legitimacy.

Abu Marzook spoke hopefully of the influence of the Arab Spring as a boon to his movement. The rise of fellow Islamist groups in Egypt and elsewhere could help bring the issue of the Palestinians to the fore, he said, even if, in the short term, Muslim Brotherhood groups, now responsible for governing, emphasized domestic concerns.

He alluded to the debate that the Arab Spring has sparked within Hamas itself, including discussion of converting the group fully into a political party that eschewed its own separate militia or guerilla arm, as has occurred with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. “There are some people in Hamas thinking [that] way,” he said. “But personally, I’m against any kind of political party, because Hamas is a political party and a resistance. You can’t divide this.”

But asked how the Arab Spring’s themes of civil resistance and demands for openness, transparency and democracy might influence Hamas, Abu Marzook looked puzzled. His group operates in areas, such as the occupied West Bank, in which it remains an illegal organization, he noted. And its status in several Arab countries also makes open operations impractical. He declined even to offer a dollar figure for its operating budget.

**Might Hamas, for example, consider opening a window on debate within the secretive Shura Council, a body that will soon select a new leader even though no one, including its purported constituents, knows who its members are and how they will vote?**

**“This is not the interest of people in any way,” Abu Marzook replied.**