

# ‘A Time Of Painful Birth And Major Transformation’

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- Strategize!

Above photo: Palestinians breaking down the border fence with Israel from Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023. Stringer/APA Images.

## A Senior Hamas Leader Reflects On October 7 And Its Aftermath.

**In an exclusive interview with Mondoweiss, senior Hamas leader Mousa Abu Marzouk discusses Operation Al-Aqsa Flood’s goals and accomplishments, international Palestine solidarity, and what comes next after a year of Israeli genocide in Gaza.**

Editor’s Note: Mousa Abu Marzouk is a Palestinian politician and senior member of Hamas who served as the first chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau from 1992 until 1996, and deputy chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau from January 1997 until April 2013, where he was succeeded by the late Ismail Haniyeh. Abu Marzouk has been a key figure in Palestinian politics and within the Hamas movement for decades, and continues to play a central role in the group’s politburo.

The following interview was conducted via email between September 27 and October 3, 2024. The questions and answers are copied below exactly as they were written, except for minor typographical corrections.

**Mondoweiss Editors: Let’s start with the basics: What is the Hamas movement? How did you join it?**

Mousa Abu Marzouk: The Islamic Resistance Movement “Hamas” is an Islamic Palestinian national liberation movement, whose goal is to liberate Palestine and confront the Zionist project. Its reference point is Islam in its premises, goals, and means.

We were a group that managed the Palestinian work of the Muslim Brotherhood headed by Dr. Khairi Al-Agha, and I was his deputy. This group was in different countries in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Europe, and South America, and I was the official in the United States. When the Intifada began in 1987, the Gaza leadership added work in the national framework to the educational reform work and led the Palestinian Intifada under a new name, the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas. So did the leadership of Palestinian work outside Palestine and perhaps at the same time, with harmony and harmony, as did the West Bank leadership. So my brothers consider me among the founders of the movement and the Islamic Resistance Movement.

**How is the Hamas of today different from when you joined? What is Hamas’s message to the world today?**

Before its launch, Hamas was a group of Palestinians working within an educational, reformist, charitable, and relief organization, and did not participate with the national action factions in their resistance efforts, or their political work. This was for objective reasons, the most important of which was the difficulty of maintaining a presence in Palestine which was in a stage of construction and growth, and abroad due to dispersion among Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon. The work between Palestine and Jordan was handled by the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, but when the Palestinian Intifada began, Hamas bore its burden with the various Palestinian factions, although all worked in the name of the unified leadership of the PLO, and Hamas worked under the leadership of the PLO.

Hamas' message to the world is that we seek freedom for our people, and we seek to liberate our land that was usurped from us by force and by international resolutions, and from which our people were expelled. We want to return to our land and our property. We only want justice and freedom. We know the citizens of the powers and goals of the Western countries and their dominance over international politics, especially the United States, and the extent of their support for our Zionist enemy sitting on our land and occupying all of our land, and therefore we agreed to the national vision adopted by the Palestine Liberation Organization, with an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and Jerusalem as the capital of this state with the right of return. We seek with all the national community to liberate from occupation and establish this Palestinian state, and we call on the world that has ordered us with this right to help us achieve it and we consider that this goal can only be achieved by resistance and forcing Israel to leave.

**Could you describe to us what the “Al-Aqsa Flood” Operation that Hamas launched on October 7 was? What was its purpose, and do you think Hamas was successful in what it aimed to achieve?**

Operation Al-Aqsa Flood is a purely military operation carried out by a military group from the Al-Qassam Brigades, consisting of an estimated 1,200 elite soldiers. Their objective is to confront the Gaza Division, which has been stationed around the perimeter of the Gaza Strip, imposing a strict siege since 2007. Hamas has called for the participation of the resistance in the West Bank, abroad, and from countries in the Axis of Resistance to achieve several key goals:

1. Establishing an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.
2. Protecting Jerusalem and its holy sites from being Judaized or destroyed.
3. Liberating our prisoners from Israeli occupation prisons.
4. Breaking the siege on Gaza.
5. Ensuring that our people live freely and with dignity, determining their own future through elections in which they can choose their leadership and destiny.

But the surprise that Hamas leadership did not anticipate was that the Gaza division of the Israeli army collapsed within a few hours, despite their possession of the most advanced weapons, including tanks, armored vehicles, aircraft, electronic devices, and espionage capabilities. They collapsed within hours, while we only had modest light weapons and dilapidated transport vehicles. However, we had strong men, training, high morale, a just cause, violated rights, missing freedom, and a desire to push back the oppression. This led to chaos we did not expect, entering the settlements and going further, reaching Sderot Rahat, and a radius of 40 kilometers away from the Gaza Strip. This chaos caused many people and factions to cross the separation line and capture both civilians and military personnel, as you have seen. Some even began carrying possessions from

the settlements. In truth, all this chaos was the result of the Gaza division's rapid collapse, something that Hamas did not expect.

As for the objectives that were achieved, they were far more than we anticipated, and here are some of them:

1. The Palestinian cause returned to the forefront, and the entire world became aware of our cause and our rightful demands for a state, freedom, and a future.
2. The whole world came to realize the true nature of Israel—its barbarism and its goal to exterminate Palestinian people—and its aggressive ambitions. This led to resolutions from the United Nations General Assembly, the International Court of Justice, and the International Criminal Court, along with global condemnation against Israel.

**In an October 13, 2023 interview with the New Yorker, you said that on October 7 you were just as surprised as everyone else by the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation, and you said that you were taken aback by its military success. On October 7, as the events were still unfolding, what was your initial prediction of the nature of the Israeli response? Did your predictions on that day differ from what actually happened in the subsequent months?**

The October 7<sup>th</sup> operation halted Israel's project of regional dominance after it was shattered by just a few hundred Al-Qassam fighters. Israel can no longer claim that it protects the region and the Gulf against Iran, and thus all efforts to integrate it into the region have failed as a result of this operation.

As for the goals set by Hamas, they have been solidified on the ground, and the national project is now closer to realization, while the Zionist project is further from execution, despite the balance of power and the American support for Israel. Yes, Israel was taken by surprise by the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, which was planned and executed by the Al-Qassam Brigades without the involvement of the political leadership. As I mentioned before, the real surprise was in the fragility of the Gaza Division and the inability of the Israeli army to address the weakness and rapid collapse of the division, followed by chaos that terrified the Israelis and sparked existential fears. This led to an irrational Israeli response, going beyond all bounds, as they sought to annihilate and displace the Palestinian people, by any means, beyond the borders of historic Palestine, whether to Sinai or elsewhere.

As for whether my predictions on that day differed from what happened in the following months, the truth is I did expect such an Israeli response, given my understanding of the Zionist background and the fanatic Jewish mentality. I have read the Old Testament several times and studied the history of the Zionist movement, though I did not expect the U.S. to be so brutal in supplying Israel with the lethal weapons that kill in this manner and to protect them in all international forums. While I know American society well, politicians are something else entirely.

**Did you have greater expectations for the West Bank and its participation in the Al-Aqsa Flood moment? Were you hopeful for a more widespread uprising in the West Bank in support of Gaza?**

Yes, I did expect greater participation from the West Bank, but there are two reasons that prevented this. First, the policies of Mahmoud Abbas and his corrupt authority, and second, the settlers' aggression, their plans, and the protection they receive from the army. However, we still expect much more in the future.

**After a year of genocidal Israeli war against the Palestinian people, many Palestinians who support the resistance think that Gaza should not be expected to continue to bear the cost of resistance alone. How do you respond to this?**

This is true, but Palestinians in other regions must take responsibility because Palestinians have no option but to resist the Zionist project to achieve their goals of establishing an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

**What is the future of the resistance after the genocide? Gaza has been decimated and many expect that its role in resistance will be deeply curtailed in the coming years. The West Bank is witnessing rampant settlement expansion alongside a brutal military campaign against armed resistance groups in the northern West Bank, while the Palestinian Authority continues to serve as a subcontractor for the occupation.**

**So what potential is there for Palestinians to advance their liberation struggle with all of these internal constraints?**

Your description is accurate but look back a hundred years. After every setback for the national movement and resistance, the people produced new elements to confront the Zionist movement. After the 1927 revolution came the 1936 revolution. Thirty-six years later, there was the 1947 war, followed by the fedayeen operations, then the formation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Liberation Army. After 1984 and PLO's exit from Lebanon, the First Intifada started in 1987, then the second in 2000, followed by wars in 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021. The Palestinian people are ready to pay the price, even sacrificing their children to defend their religion and homeland.

**Almost one year into the genocide, we have seen a failure on the part of the international community to stop the war and the killing of innocent civilians. Meanwhile, Palestinians have criticized the response of Arab countries and leaders for not doing enough to stop the bloodshed.**

**What do you make of the response of the International community and Arab leaders? What were your expectations, and how have they measured up to reality?**

You must understand that U.S. policy is responsible for all this in the Middle East. It adopts Israeli policies, even if they contradict the American administration's directions. It supplies them with all types of weapons and protects them in the UN and other international forums.

The countries in the region are divided into two categories: one possesses wealth and money, but that money is kept in American banks, allowing the U.S. to control these countries. The second group depends on international aid, which is also controlled by the U.S. Hence, the response of the region's governments aligns with the U.S. will.

Additionally, other countries in the world do not want to confront the U.S. As for Europe, it is complicit with the U.S. in all these crimes. The countries outside of U.S. influence, such as Russia, China, South Africa, and Iran, have performed well on the international and legal levels. We are grateful to these countries, and the Palestinian people appreciate their efforts and thank them for their positions.

**Back in July, in the midst of the genocide, Hamas and Fatah signed a unity agreement in Beijing. You were there for the ceremony, and in your speech, you said, "We are committed to**

**national unity.” When the agreement was signed, many Palestinians reacted the same way they have to other reconciliation talks and agreements over the past two decades that have ultimately led nowhere: with skepticism and bated breath. Many people viewed it as largely symbolic.**

**Aside from the agreement in Beijing, what is being done between Hamas, Fatah, and other Palestinian political parties to achieve national unity and a path forward for Palestinians? And what strategic role do you see reconciliation playing in the midst of this genocide?**

The Palestinian people are facing a way of extermination, and every living being in Gaza is a target for the Israeli army. The army has destroyed all signs of life, including educational institutions, the health system, and more. In the West Bank, Palestinian land is being stolen, and settlements are expanding like a malignant cancer. The occupation authorities are tightening their grip on our people in the 1948 territories, aiming to displace them. Therefore, we see that unity is a prerequisite for victory, and its absence is a weakness within the Palestinian body. This is why we have been working for years to mend the divide. Our strategy is based on unity, and we have made concessions, reaching several agreements. However, two parties have consistently drawn a red line on unity and caused its failure: the U.S. administration and the Israeli occupation.

Beijing has been keen to help the Palestinian people, and we signed the Beijing Declaration. We are working with Palestinian factions to implement it, but the U.S. administration and the Israeli occupation are obstructing its implementation and threatening Fatah and the Palestinian Authority.

**What should be the goal of the international solidarity movement for Palestine? Is the objective of calling for a ceasefire still meaningful given that most of Gaza has been destroyed, or should the solidarity movement’s demands shift?**

We extend our appreciation to the international solidarity movement with Palestine for their humanity and their efforts in confronting war criminals, despite the daily pressures they face. The situation even reached the point where American pilot Aaron Bushnell set himself on fire in protest against Israel’s genocide and the Biden administration’s stance on the war. We, along with our people, are deeply grateful to him and his family, as well as to all the free individuals standing in solidarity with our cause.

Stopping the genocide is a central goal, and efforts must continue in this direction. The Israeli occupation army commits massacres daily, without a single day of pause, making this the current priority. Additionally, it is imperative to work on breaking the siege imposed on the people, as hundreds of thousands are homeless, winter is approaching, and there is no clean water, electricity, or any semblance of normal life. Therefore, breaking the siege to allow the entry of essential supplies for the residents of Gaza is crucial. Furthermore, Israeli war criminals must be pursued so they do not escape justice, as they are pushing the Middle East and the world towards a third world war that will harm every human being on the planet. Stopping them is in all our interests.

**In his speech to the UN General Assembly this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on Hamas to surrender and vowed to continue its genocidal assault on Gaza until Israel achieves “total victory.” What is your response to this?**

Netanyahu wants Hamas to surrender, but we are a resistance movement defending our people, and we will not surrender. We will continue our resistance. Even if we assume Hamas surrenders, the enemy will continue the genocide because its problem is with the Palestinian people, not with

Hamas. Look at what they are doing in Jerusalem and the West Bank, areas where Hamas does not have a strong presence, yet hundreds have been killed.

As for the agreement, we agreed, but Netanyahu continues to sabotage it. The mediators have witnessed that Hamas's position is sound, and the problem lies with the Israeli occupation.

**What are Hamas's plans for the next few years in Gaza? What are Hamas's political objectives for the "Day After" in Gaza, both if a ceasefire agreement is reached and if an agreement is not reached?**

Hamas is an integral part of the Palestinian people. It won by a landslide in the last free elections. We are committed to achieving the Palestinian people's goals of freedom, returning to their occupied lands, and ending the Israeli occupation. This goal remains central to Hamas until it is achieved.

For the day after, Hamas will work with all Palestinian political components to form a national unity technocratic government, non-factional, with the primary goal of providing relief to the people, addressing the aftermath of the war, and rebuilding the devastated sector for a limited period. It will then prepare for the Palestinian elections, and everyone must respect the results of these elections.

Meanwhile, we will work diligently to address the war's effects. There are tens of thousands of orphans, thousands who have lost limbs, and hundreds of thousands without homes or shelter, in addition to the other tragedies our people are experiencing. Certainly, there is a central role for the world in helping to overcome this humanitarian disaster. We are people who have been under aggression since 1948 without any fault except for their greed for our land.

**The U.S. has publicly supported Israel's stated aim of destroying Hamas and maintains its position that Hamas is a terrorist organization. Do you think there is a future for Hamas to be accepted as a political actor and as part of the leadership of the Palestinian people? And how much have the events of the past year influenced that possibility?**

Hamas remains, and the Israeli occupation army failed to eliminate the movement. However, it exploited the goal of eliminating Hamas to kill civilians and destroy Gaza. We view the U.S. administration as a key partner in the war on our people. Biden personally led the war council, and Blinken formed a political protection wall for Netanyahu, pushing to prevent food and water from reaching Gaza's people. Additionally, the bombs falling on the heads of children, women, and the elderly are American-made.

What matters to us is the acceptance of the Palestinian people. We derive our legitimacy from the Palestinian people, not from the U.S. administration or external parties. We defend our people for their independence, freedom, and dignity, so they are not beholden to anyone.

**As we speak, Israel's bombardment on Lebanon continues, and the death toll there is climbing. Despite what is at stake for Hezbollah and Lebanon, the "support front" has vowed to continue its fight with Israel until the genocide is over. Meanwhile, other groups like Ansar Allah in Yemen have used their modest military capabilities and their own means to put pressure on Israel to stop the killing.**

**Do you think that Hezbollah and the broader “axis of resistance” has done everything it could to support Palestinians? Or do you think they could have done more earlier on in the genocide?**

We have been, and continue to be, subjected to a genocide by a group whose ancestors were subjected to genocide by Europeans, especially Germans, in World War II. This is deeply ironic because our people did not harm them. Those who were victims of genocide should stand against it, not practice it on the weak.

In this war, we thank everyone who has stood with us, regardless of the level. The support fronts have taken a heroic stance in confronting the occupation and defending the Palestinian people. Today, Lebanon is also under attack because of its humanitarian and moral stance.

The discussion should not be about whether the support fronts could have done more, but rather about those who watch the genocide of our people and either remain silent or participate. They are the ones who should review their humanity and values, knowing that Israel’s evil will eventually reach them all.

**Many have speculated that Iran and the “axis of resistance,” who say they did not know about Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, were not happy about the timing of the October 7 attack because the “axis” was not ready to get into this fight. This seems to be the case given that Hezbollah’s “support front” has been comparatively restrained, indicating that Hasan Nasrallah [did] not want to invite wider destruction to Lebanon.**

**Why did Hamas pick its operation to happen now? Was the Al-Aqsa Flood operation a way of forcing the “axis of resistance” to commit to the Palestinian cause more fully?**

The Al-Aqsa Flood Operation is linked to the Palestinian cause and is a self-made decision by the Palestinian resistance. It is not directed at anyone but the Israeli occupation.

We see before our eyes the extremist Israeli government adopting a policy of resolving the conflict. We feared for the liquidation of the Palestinian cause as settlements spread rapidly, Israel changes the status quo in Jerusalem, and it wants control over the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Christian and Islamic holy sites in the city. The tight siege on Gaza has lasted for more than 17 years, and there are many thousands of prisoners in enemy prisons, some of whom have been detained for over 40 years. Normalization has begun to reach central countries in the region, which is why we acted to change this reality by targeting the military brigade of the army that imposes the siege on Gaza.

**What can the past year tell us about the future of Palestine and the broader region? Where do we go from here? Where does Gaza go from here?**

We are in a significant historical phase, and today, history is being made. What came before October 7 will not remain the same after it. This is a time of painful birth and major transformation, and these changes will not remain confined to Palestine but will extend to the region and even the global system.

This is an opportunity for every individual and force to have a place in these transformations and be remembered by history for being on the right side—on the side of oppressed peoples.

**Do you have a message for the international community and for the supporters of Palestinian liberation around the globe?**

My message to the international community is that one of the motivations behind the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation was the international community's failure to prevent the occupation from liquidating the Palestinian cause. Our position has been validated because the international community has watched our extermination for a year and has done nothing practical or effective to prevent it. After a year of genocide, we still see Netanyahu speaking at the UN. Therefore, we say that your silence on Netanyahu will create others like him among you, and when that happens the suffering will reach everyone. There is still time for you to take humane and ethical positions that are in your interest as much as they are in ours.

To the free people supporting the liberation of Palestine, the Palestinian people are watching your actions, and we see that you pose a real threat to the occupation. Continue your struggle, continue exposing the occupation, highlighting its crimes, and putting pressure on it and its supporters. Make them outcasts wherever they go, and sever the ties between your governments and the Israeli government. Ensure that your activism becomes more effective because the children of Palestine need your action.