

ders with a long-term truce," Sheik Hassan Yousef, the top Hamas leader in the West Bank, told the Associated Press. He went on: "For us a truce means that two warring parties live side by side in peace and security for a certain period, and this period is eligible for renewal. That means Hamas accepts that the other party will live in security and peace." (*Guardian Unlimited* <[tinyurl.com/jnv74](http://tinyurl.com/jnv74)>)

In 2006, the elected Hamas-led Palestinian government repeatedly offered Israel a long-term truce on the 1967 borders. For example, the pragmatic Hamas prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh, said he would honour agreements with Israel 'that will guarantee the establishment of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital with 1967 borders.' (*Washington Post*, 26 Feb. 2006 <[tinyurl.com/jnv77](http://tinyurl.com/jnv77)>)

#### WHERE NOW?

On 8 January 2009, as the war in Gaza raged, a senior Hamas foreign policy advisor, Ahmed Yousef, said, accurately: 'For many years, we have proposed a long-term truce provided that the Israelis prove their willingness to withdraw, in accordance with international law, from all the territories occupied in the aftermath of their 1967 incursions.' (*Guardian Unlimited*, 7 Jan. 2009 <[tinyurl.com/jnv78](http://tinyurl.com/jnv78)>)

Mouin Rabbani, an analyst with the respected International Crisis Group, observed three years ago: 'It would be as naïve to take the above statements on faith as it would be foolish not to put them to the test.' ('International Crisis Group, 18 Jan. 2006 <[tinyurl.com/jnv85](http://tinyurl.com/jnv85)>)

Instead, Israel—with full US and British backing—has repeatedly rejected such proposals out of hand. The Hamas peace offers undermine Israel's plans for domination of the Occupied Territories, and therefore they are a threat that must be erased. The Western press obliges with selective amnesia.

Hamas must be judged on its record. It has largely kept the ceasefires it has agreed. (See JNV Briefing 'Hamas Ceasefires'.)

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# HAMAS HAS OFFERED PEACE

PALESTINE NEEDS A "PARTNER FOR PEACE"  
JNV Anti-War Briefing 116 (3 February 2009)

The impression given in the Western mass media is that the Palestinian political group Hamas is an irreconcilable fundamentalist force committed to the destruction of Israel. Israeli author Rachel Shabi describes a common perception in Israel: 'mention the civilian casualties in Gaza and the stock response is to blame Hamas, cast as a blood-thirsty, death-worshipping cult, a terror group that by definition forces Israeli soldiers to kill Palestinian children.' ('Comment is free', *Guardian*, 23 Jan. 2009 <<http://tinyurl.com/jnv71>>)

The reality, successfully suppressed throughout the British media, is that Hamas has for many years publicly offered a long-term truce with Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders. In other words, Hamas has for many years been in close proximity to the international consensus that Middle East peace can and should be based on an Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories.

#### JIMMY CARTER

The most high-profile offer came in April 2008, when former US President Jimmy Carter travelled to Syria to speak to Hamas leaders, including Khaled Meshal, generally seen as a hard-liner, and often described as the group's 'political leader'.

Carter told BBC Newsnight that Hamas would accept a deal on the 1967 borders and added: 'Hamas indicated... that if Israel is willing to have a mutual ceasefire and a renunciation of violence in Gaza and in the West Bank, they will accept it, and as a first step they would even accept just limiting that to Gaza.' ('Carter: Hamas will accept Israel', BBC News online, 21 Apr. 2008, <[tinyurl.com/jnv55](http://tinyurl.com/jnv55)>)



## HUDNA

On the same day, Khaled Meshal told reporters in Damascus that Hamas was willing to agree a ten-year truce with Israel on the 1967 borders, without formally recognising the state of Israel: “We agree to a [Palestinian] state on pre-’67 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital with genuine sovereignty, without settlements, but without recognizing Israel. We have offered a truce if Israel withdraws to the 1967 borders, a truce of 10 years as a proof of recognition.”

This statement, reported in *Ha’aretz*, Israel’s oldest and one of its most influential daily newspapers, was accompanied by this comment: ‘Meshal used the Arabic word *hudna*, meaning truce, which is more concrete than *tahdiya*—a period of calm—which Hamas often uses to describe a simple cease-fire. Hudna implies a recognition of the other party’s existence.’ (21 Apr. 2008, <[tinyurl.com/jnv56](http://tinyurl.com/jnv56)>)

## RIVALS

The same *Ha’aretz* report quoted Carter as saying that Hamas had agreed to accept a peace agreement negotiated by their rival, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

This was quite a concession, as Hamas began life as a rival to the secular nationalism of Abbas’s Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

After Israel took control of the Occupied Territories after the 1967 war, ‘In Gaza, Israel hunted down members of Fatah and other secular PLO factions, but it dropped harsh restrictions imposed on Islamic activists by the territory’s previous Egyptian rulers.’ A new movement led by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was nurtured precisely as a weapon against Fatah. Israeli Brig. Gen. Yitzhak Segev, governor in Gaza from late 1979, says now that he had no illusions about Sheikh Yassin’s long-term intentions. However, in Gaza, Segev observes: ‘our main enemy was Fatah’. Yassin’s group, which evolved into Hamas, was allowed by Israeli forces to physically attack Fatah, and Hamas leaders regularly met Israeli officials. (‘How Israel Helped to Spawn Hamas’, *Wall Street Journal*, 24 Jan. <[tinyurl.com/jnv61](http://tinyurl.com/jnv61)>)

More recently, in the two years preceding this announcement, Hamas had fought bloody street battles with Abbas’s Fatah security forces, culminating in the division of the Palestinian territories into

Gaza, controlled by Hamas, and the West Bank, controlled by Fatah.

Carter said in April 2008: ‘They [Hamas leaders] said they would accept a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders if approved by Palestinians... even though Hamas might disagree with some terms of the agreement.... It means that Hamas will not undermine Abbas’ efforts to negotiate an agreement and Hamas will accept an agreement if the Palestinians support it in a free vote.’

In other words, Hamas would allow their fiercest political rivals to negotiate a deal with their sworn enemy, and pledged to live with the result of a Palestinian referendum on the product of these talks.

## COMPLICATIONS

The history of Hamas truce offers goes back a long way. Efraim Halevy, a former Mossad operative turned mediator, who played a role in releasing Hamas founder Sheik Yassin from an Israeli jail, revealed on 23 March 2004, that: “[In 1997] Yassin brought up the idea of a cease-fire of 30 years between Israel and the Palestinians”. Also in 1997, Yassin told Associated Press that he would accept a 10-year truce if Israel would withdraw troops and settlers from all of the West Bank and Gaza. (Both stories, AP, 23 March 2004 <[tinyurl.com/jnv63](http://tinyurl.com/jnv63)>)

These offers weren’t exactly what they might first appear.

For example, Abdel Aziz Rantissi, a Hamas hard-liner, told Reuters on 27 January 2004: ‘... it is difficult to liberate all our land at this stage, so we accept a phased liberation. We accept a state in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. We propose a 10-year truce in return for [Israeli] withdrawal and the establishment of a state.’ (*Independent*, 27 Jan. 2004 <[tinyurl.com/jnv72](http://tinyurl.com/jnv72)>)

This was the idea of “transitional” or temporary truce to be honoured while Hamas continued in its efforts to take over the territories currently constituting Israel—as it believed the entire territory of the historical Palestine should form a single state (ruled according to its interpretation of Islam).

## ACCEPTANCE

Then, on 3 December 2004, came a new line: ‘Hamas has announced that it accepts a Palestinian independent state within the 1967 bor-