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Hamas seeks Israel's destruction despite French talks
 Denies Paris diplomat's claim terrorist group will recognize Jewish state

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By Aaron Klein

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JERUSALEM – A French diplomat told a newspaper this week Hamas agreed in talks with him to accept a Palestinian state in what are referred to as the pre-1967 borders – the Gaza Strip, West Bank and eastern sections of Jerusalem.

The diplomat also claimed Hamas would implicitly recognize Israel.

But Sami Abu Zuhri, a Hamas spokesperson, clarified in a statement to WND that his group would never recognize Israel and that a state in the pre-1967 borders as described to France would be "temporary" until Israel is destroyed.

Zuhri also said any temporary Palestinian state must include the "right of return" of Palestinian "refugees," or flooding Israel with millions of foreign Arabs, thus threatening its Jewish character.

Israeli officials long labeled the "right of return" as code for Israel's destruction by population genocide, with millions of Muslim Arabs overwhelming Jews.



Sami Abu Zuhri

France yesterday confirmed it had engaged in talks with Hamas despite the European Union's refusal to hold official dialogue with the terror group.

"These are not relations, they are contacts," French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner told Europe 1 radio. "We are not the only ones to have them. We are not charged with any kind of negotiation."

(Story continues below)



Kouchner was confirming a report in the Le Figaro newspaper that said Aubin de La Messuzière, a retired former French diplomat, had met last month in Gaza with Ismail Haniya, the deposed prime minister of the Hamas-led Palestinian government, and with Mahmoud al-Zahar, chief of Hamas in Gaza.

La Messuzière claimed Hamas told him the terror group would accept a pre-1967 Palestinian state and would implicitly recognize Israel:

"They assured me that they were ready to accept a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, which amounts to an indirect recognition of Israel," he said.

But Hamas' Zuhri clarified that a Palestinian state in the pre-1967 borders would be "temporary" until all of "Palestine" is "liberated."

"We clarify to these sides we accept a creation of a Palestinian state in 1967 borders as a temporary solution. Not including recognizing Israel and insisting on sovereignty over Jerusalem and right of return," said Zuri in an e-mail statement.

Zuhri said France's talks with his group "reflects the growing will of the EU to stop isolating Hamas, to recognize us and to talk about movement."

Zuhri told WND Hamas is "negotiating" with a number of other European countries besides France.

Hamas claims secret meetings with EU, Norway, Italy

WND first reported Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum's claim that France and EU parliament members met with Hamas, expressing an interest in establishing relations with the terrorist organization.

Barhoum said prior to Jimmy Carter's meetings with top Hamas leaders last month that he hoped the former president would encourage European officials to make public their purported desire to support his group.

Barhoum said a number of European countries recently met Hamas. He told WND that prior to Carter's visit last month Hamas "met a delegation from the European Parliament, and they are supporting the Palestinian legitimate rights and Palestinian democracy; and they emphasized their full support for

Hamas, because Hamas is the democratic choice for the Palestinians.

"There was a delegation from France, the government, and from Italy and Norway and from the EU parliament and from Carter," Barhoum said, speaking from Gaza. "All of these are supporting Hamas, and they have a plan to support Palestinian rights and interests."

The Hamas spokesman said there were "several meetings between Hamas and Europe, and they want finally to support Hamas."

Barhoum called Carter a "very important and serious person. We think (his) meeting with us will encourage others who are already sending messages to us."

Barhoum said "we in Hamas, all the time, want to meet more and more European officers, including France and Italy and Norway, in order to support Palestinian legitimate rights."

Barhoum would not name any of the EU officials he claimed met with Hamas.

The EU has denied any talks with Hamas.

The Italian government also denies its officials met with Hamas. But last August, Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi broke with EU official policy stating Hamas should be "helped so it works for peace."

"Hamas exists, and it is a very complex reality that we must help so it works for peace" Prodi told reporters, drawing fire from Italian Jewish groups.

Last July, Italy's Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema told the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera that Hamas is a "significant and substantial" part of the Palestinian people.

France's President Nicolas Sarkozy has stated he does not support Hamas' takeover of Gaza and has opposed talks with the terrorist group. But under the previous French administration, the country supported a Russian bid to initiate dialogue with Hamas officials.

It was previously reported Norway's deputy foreign minister, Raymond Johansen, last March met with Hamas leader Ismail Haniya, who was then prime minister of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, which was deposed last year.

A top source in Hamas said some of the meetings with European officials took place in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

The source previously told WND he held meetings in a European country with British and French diplomats. He said the diplomats expressed an understanding with Hamas' stated policy of accepting a cease-fire with Israel for up to 10 years.

In 2006, the Maan news agency, an independent Palestinian news outlet based in Ramallah and Bethlehem, quoted Hamas sources stating the terror group held meetings with European officials and with elements associated with the U.S. Democratic Party.

A Hamas source speaking to WND said the Democrat elements referenced by Maan were associated with Carter and with other "Democrat personalities" he refused to name.

The 2006 Maan report also quoted a Hamas source stating his group held meetings in a European country with representatives from the British and French governments.

The U.S. and Israel have been trying to isolate Hamas, which is classified by the State Department as a terrorist group. It is responsible for scores of deadly suicide bombings, and thousands of shooting attacks and rocket firings against Israeli civilian population centers.

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