

Division for Palestinian Rights

## Chronological Review of Events Relating to the Question of Palestine

Monthly media monitoring review

January 2007

### Monthly highlights

- Suicide bomber kills at least three people in the southern Israeli city of Eilat. ([29 January](#))
- Ceasefire between Hamas and Fatah is brokered by Egypt. ([30 January](#))

1

Palestinian gunmen kidnapped Jaime Razuri, a Peruvian photographer working for *Agence France-Presse (AFP)* in Gaza, while militants were seized and freed in separate abductions that sparked new violence between rival factions. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the abduction of Mr. Razuri. In northern Gaza, tension between rival Palestinian factions flared when Fatah militants kidnapped 10 Hamas gunmen, while Hamas members abducted seven Fatah gunmen, sources from both factions said. All the kidnapped gunmen were later freed after both sides agreed to swap captives. The abductions had sparked gun battles between the factions, which wounded three Palestinians caught in the crossfire, including a boy, Palestinian rescue workers said. (*Reuters*) Israel began easing restrictions at checkpoints in the West Bank as promised by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at a summit with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas on 23 December. An Israeli military spokesman said that roadblocks were not being lifted altogether for the time being. "These measures mainly concern an easing of severe checks at various crossing points and not, at this stage, the removal of military barriers," the spokesman said. (*AFP*)

2

Israeli forces arrested nine Palestinians in the West Bank: three in the Aida refugee camp, north of Bethlehem, two in Beit Fajjar, south of Bethlehem, and four in Birqin, west of Jenin. Off the shore of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, Israeli naval forces arrested three Palestinians fishing on their boat in a permitted area. (*Wafa*) Palestinians attacked the main Kami cargo crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel with mortar fire, slightly wounding an Israeli truck driver. (*AP, Ynetnews*) Hamas accepted an Israeli offer to free 450 Palestinian prisoners in the second stage of a deal for the release of captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. Palestinian sources said that under the terms of the proposal, Hamas would give Israel a video showing that Mr. Shalit was still alive, and in exchange, Israel would release an as yet undecided number of women and minors held in its jails. Mr. Shalit would then be transferred to Egypt and then to Israel. At the same time, Israel would release 450 Palestinian prisoners. Finally, after about two months, Israel would release additional prisoners. Israel would be authorized to decide how many and which prisoners to free at that final stage. (*Ha'aretz*) PA President Abbas said that everything possible would be done to obtain the release of *AFP* journalist Jaime Razuri, during his meeting with French and Peruvian diplomats, and expressed confidence that the photographer would be freed soon. (*BBC*)

3

Ala Mohammed Ainaya, a member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, was shot dead as he was leaving his house in Jabalya in the Gaza Strip. A woman bystander was killed and 12 other people were wounded in the ensuing gun battle, hospital and PA security officials said. Hamas gunmen kidnapped five Fatah members, according to Fatah officials speaking on condition of anonymity. (*AFP, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post*) Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh had decided to cut short his tour of Arab nations and returned to the Gaza Strip, his aides said. (*AP*) PA security officials told *AFP* that they had advised United States and European nationals to leave the Gaza Strip because of a threat of further abductions. Johan Eriksson, spokesman for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), told *AFP*: "In our view, this does not change the situation from what it has been in the past two years. At the moment we are staying put." (*AFP, The Jerusalem Post*) "Gilad Shalit is not going to be freed tomorrow. There is not going to be a dramatic announcement [at the forthcoming Egyptian-Israeli Summit]," Prime Minister Olmert's spokeswoman Miri Eisin said. "It will be discussed, but unfortunately we are not at that point yet." (*AP*) A \$27.25 million reconstruction project, financed and implemented by the United Arab Emirates' Red Crescent Society in the Jenin refugee camp, was officially declared complete. The project included 456 new residential units, educational and health services, and other amenities, in addition to the restoration and maintenance of 4,000 houses demolished by Israeli forces. (*Emirates News Agency*)

Javier Solana, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (EU), [welcomed](#) the appointment of Colin Smith as new Head of the EU Police Mission in the Palestinian Territories, code-named EUPOL COPPS, which provides support to the PA in establishing sustainable and effective policing arrangements. Mr. Smith has significant police experience, notably in Northern Ireland and more recently as Commander of the police development mission of the United Kingdom in Iraq. ([www.consilium.europa.eu](http://www.consilium.europa.eu))

4

Four Palestinians were killed and 25 wounded, including a photographer for a local news agency, when IDF undercover troops entered the West Bank town of Ramallah on an arrest raid. During the raid, a battle with Palestinian gunmen ensued in the centre of the city. Residents threw stones and firebombs at the soldiers. None of the Israeli troops was wounded in the exchange. Four armed Palestinians were arrested in the raid. During the raid, bulldozers and armoured personnel carriers were seen driving through Ramallah's central square, clearing cars out of the way and turning some over on the pavement. At one point, an Israel Air Force helicopter had fired, witnesses said. (AP, Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA), Ha'aretz)

Three Palestinian farmers were wounded by Israeli fire in Beit Lahia, in northern Gaza, near the border with Israel, medics said. An army spokeswoman said that Israeli soldiers had seen two people approaching the border fence between Gaza and Israel, had called on them to stop, and when the men did not heed the order, had fired at their lower bodies. (AFP)

An armed Hamas member was killed and two others wounded when Hamas and Fatah gunmen clashed in the Jabalya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. Hospital sources identified the deceased as 26-year-old Aymaan Sbeeh, saying that he was a member of Hamas' Auxiliary Forces. PA Deputy Prime Minister Nasser al-Sha'er urged all parties to exercise restraint. (Xinhua)

Col. Mohammed Ghayeb of the PA Preventive Security Service was killed at his home in Beit Hanoun in a gun battle, which lasted much of the day and also killed four of Mr. Ghayeb's bodyguards and a Hamas gunman. About three dozen people, including eight children, were also wounded. (AP)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, speaking at a trade union meeting in Tel Aviv, said that there was "a rare opportunity to talk with moderate Palestinians", calling for support for PA President Abbas, *Israeli Army Radio* reported. She said, "We currently have a rare opportunity to talk with moderate Palestinians because the whole world can now clearly see the division between the moderates and the extremists," adding, "We must support the Palestinian President, Abu Mazen (Abbas), and negotiate with him". (AFP)

PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said that there had been "tangible progress" in talks over the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. "There is tangible progress on this issue," Mr. Haniyeh told reporters in Gaza upon returning from a trip abroad. "The Israelis had rejected the exchange (of prisoners) and now they accept it," he said. (AFP)

Later during the day, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert would meet Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at the Sharm el-Sheikh resort in Sinai, and Egypt had already floated the possibility of holding a subsequent regional summit, with the participation of the leaders of Jordan and the PA. The Prime Minister's Office said that it viewed this idea favourably. "We have no fundamental problem with a summit, and if they raise the idea during the Olmert-Mubarak meeting, we will discuss it and consider it," a source in the Prime Minister's office said. (Ha'aretz)

At a joint press conference in Sharm el-Sheikh after his meeting with President Mubarak, Prime Minister Olmert apologized for any civilian casualties during the Ramallah raid and said that the operation had been intended to protect Israel from terrorist attacks. "Things developed in a way that could not have been predicted in advance," he said. "If innocent people were hurt, this was not our intention." Mr. Mubarak condemned the raid and said, "Israel's security cannot be achieved through military force but by serious endeavours toward peace." (AP)

About 20 Palestinian journalists gathered in downtown Ramallah to protest the kidnapping of Peruvian photographer Jaime Razuri in the Gaza Strip earlier this week and called for his release. Mr. Razuri works for the French news agency AFP. The journalists held signs reading, "We demand that the Palestinian Authority protect journalists." (AP)

Moussa Abu Marzouk, Deputy Chief of Hamas' Political Bureau, confirmed that captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit was still alive. He said that the Palestinians were ready to provide Israel with a videotape of Mr. Shalit if Israel would release Palestinian women and a "considerable" number of detainees. (DPA)

Liu Jianchao, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said that Israeli Prime Minister Olmert would visit China on 9 January to mark the 15th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Israel and to discuss the situation in the Middle East. (AP)

5

IDF troops entered the village of Attil, near Tulkarm, and detained two Palestinian militants. In the city of Nablus, IDF troops clashed with Palestinian gunmen.

Palestinian sources said that three members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades had been injured. (BBC, Reuters)

A religious leader known for his anti-Hamas views was killed in a drive-by shooting outside a mosque in the Maghazi refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. (AP)

Three Qassam rockets were fired into Israel's southern Negev region. Only one of the three rockets caused damage when it hit a house in Sderot. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attacks. (Ha'aretz)

Israeli tanks crossed into an open area east of the Jabalya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, for the first time since the 26 November truce, after Palestinians fired two rockets from the area, Palestinian security sources said. The armoured vehicles remained in the area, but there were no reports of exchanges of fire. An Israeli army spokesperson denied any incursion had been carried out in the area. (AFP)

A Fatah security man died of wounds he had sustained in a battle against Hamas militants the previous day, medical officials said, raising the death toll to eight in the bloodiest single battle in weeks of factional fighting in the Gaza Strip. The bodyguard had been wounded in an assault by Hamas gunmen on the home of a top Fatah security official. The official, Col. Mohammed Ghayeb, and six other bodyguards were killed during the attack. (AP)

Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh told a news conference in Gaza City following his meeting with President Abbas: "We have decided to appeal for calm and for the withdrawal of all the armed men from the streets, and to continue the dialogue." He added that he had decided to set up an inquiry into the recent inter-Palestinian clashes, and that both leaders had endeavoured to stop the incitement campaign in the media. (BBC, Ma'an News Agency)

PA President Abbas condemned the IDF operation in Ramallah in a press statement, saying it "proved that the Israeli calls for peace and security are false." He demanded \$5 million in damages for the raid. Israel's National Infrastructures Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer condemned the timing of the Ramallah raid. "Such an operation I think did not need to have been done on the same day that there is a visit of the Israeli Prime Minister to a country in which we have utmost strategic interest," he told *Israeli Public Radio*. (AFP)

In an interview with *Xinhua*, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said, "I want to draw a distinction between substance and procedure. The substance is that I believe in the vision of a two-State solution. There ought to be a Palestinian State that lives alongside the State of Israel in peace and security for the Palestinians and for the Israelis. And in order to achieve this, Israel will have to pull out from a large part of territories now administered by the State of Israel. And we are ready to do it. ... A year ago I believed that we may be able to do it on the unilateral basis. However, it must be said that the experience we had in Lebanon and Gaza is not very encouraging. ... We pulled out entirely from Gaza and we returned back to the international border. And every single day they are shooting Qassam rockets on Israelis," Mr. Olmert added. He stressed that under the present circumstances, it would be more realistic to achieve the two-State solution through negotiations instead of a unilateral pullout. (Xinhua)

"There will be no dialogue in the shadow of killing and terrorism practiced by Hamas," said a Fatah statement released in the Gaza Strip. "Said Siyam [PA Minister of the Interior and Civil Affairs] is responsible for the execution and the cold-blooded murder to which our martyrs in Jabalya were subjected." (AP)

The United States would provide \$86.4 million to "assist the Palestinian Authority presidency in fulfilling PA commitments under the Road Map to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism and establish law and order in the West Bank and Gaza," a US Government document obtained by *Reuters* said. Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) member and Hamas spokesperson Mushir al-Masri accused the United States of assisting the "revolution" against the Hamas-led PA Government.

"We demand that President Abbas reject this American policy which only increases the rift in the Palestinian nation," he said. (Reuters, The Jerusalem Post)

6

Israeli troops shot and wounded two Palestinians as they were walking near the security fence in the northern Gaza Strip. IDF sources said that soldiers had identified a group of some 10 men walking close to the fence and opened fire on their lower bodies when they ignored calls to stop. (Ha'aretz)

Five Hamas members were abducted in the Gaza Strip, and the house of a Hamas MP was torched in the northern town of Jabalya. In the West Bank, masked gunmen seized the director of the Interior Ministry office, Ibad Suleiman Ghidhan, outside the Ministry headquarters in Ramallah. He was found an hour later with three bullet wounds in his legs and taken to hospital. In Nablus, masked gunmen abducted Deputy Mayor Mehdi Hambali of Hamas from his car, security sources said. Also in Nablus, unknown gunmen shot at Hamas member Marwan al-Kaddoumi, 50, outside his home, security sources and medics said. Mr. Al-Kaddoumi, a lecturer at Al-Najaf University, received five bullet wounds in his legs and was in serious condition in hospital. (AFP)

Three members of a pro-Hamas family in the Gaza Strip were killed by gunmen from a rival clan considered to be Fatah supporters, witnesses and family members said.

Hamas' radio station in Gaza said that one of the dead had been a member of the Executive Force. (AP)

PA President Abbas declared Hamas' militia in the Gaza Strip illegal. Mr. Abbas' office said that the decision had been made "in light of the failure of existing agencies and security apparatuses in imposing law and order and protecting the security of the citizens." In his decree, Mr. Abbas reiterated his past offer to integrate the Hamas force into existing security units. Hamas responded by announcing plans to double the size of the paramilitary unit to 12,000, compared to a force of some 18,000 allied with Fatah. PA Interior Ministry spokesman Khaled Abu Hilal described Mr. Abbas' decision as "a green light to those who seek to

shed the blood of the Executive Force members" and said that the unit would "deal firmly" with anyone who attacked the unit. (AP)

The Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* reported that PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh had brought \$20 million into the Gaza Strip on his return from a Hajj pilgrimage through Egypt, with Egyptian knowledge and permission. According to an unnamed customs official, Mr. Haniyeh declared the sum to the Egyptians, in accordance with Egyptian law, and was then allowed to continue his trip into Gaza. (DPA)

7

Israeli troops carried out a large-scale arrest raid in Nablus, surrounding a building and detaining at least four people, Palestinian security officials said. About 20 army jeeps drove into the city before dawn, and the sound of explosions and gunfire could be heard across the city for several hours, residents said. The army said that the operation had thwarted a suicide bombing planned in the coming days. It confirmed four arrests, including two masterminds of the attack, and said it had confiscated two explosives belts. The bomber, a 16-year-old Palestinian boy, had been arrested previously, military officials said. (AP)

Israeli sources said that Israeli forces had arrested four Palestinians in Tulkarm, two in Ramallah, one in Bethlehem and one in Hebron. (Ma'an News Agency)

Jaime Razuri, a Peruvian photographer working for the French news agency AFP, who had been kidnapped outside the agency's office in Gaza City on 1 January, had been freed. No one had yet claimed responsibility for his abduction. (AFP, Reuters)

Israeli Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh said that the defence establishment was considering allowing Palestinian workers from the Gaza Strip entry into Israel within the overall framework of humanitarian relief for the Palestinians. "This isn't just easing up, but ... alongside our war with Hamas and terrorism through military means, we are also taking economic and policy steps," Mr. Sneh said. (Ynetnews)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel told German television station ZDF: "Given the talks between Prime Minister Olmert and the Palestinian President Abbas, we now perhaps have a unique chance to move forward." Ms. Merkel said that US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would visit the region "at the end of next week," adding, "Afterwards we will see what the Quartet can do." (AFP)

8

Israeli forces arrested overnight 21 "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank. (www.idf.il)

In Ramallah, a store owned by a Hamas sympathizer was burnt and at least four others vandalized overnight. Unknown gunmen opened fire on the office of independent PLC member and former Finance Minister, Salam Fayyad, without causing injuries or damage. In the neighbouring town of Al-Bireh, unknown gunmen tried unsuccessfully to kidnap the mayor, Omar Hamayeh, of Hamas. Meanwhile in Nablus, Hamas Deputy Mayor Mehdi al-Hambali was released unscathed two days after he was kidnapped by unknown gunmen. (AFP)

A Qassam rocket fired from the northern Gaza Strip landed in Israel's western Negev region, causing no injuries or damage. The Al-Quds Brigades, Islamic Jihad's armed wing, claimed responsibility for the attack. (Ynetnews)

Five Hamas members, including three who belonged to its Executive Force, were kidnapped in the northern Gaza Strip town of Jabalya. (AP)

Complaining about a "political stalemate" in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz presented the Labour Party Knesset caucus with a new diplomatic plan aimed at providing the Palestinians with a "realistic diplomatic horizon". The plan called for stabilizing the security situation for the first six months. This would include the release of captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, the evacuation of unauthorized West Bank settlement outposts, and the stabilization of the ceasefire, to be followed by six months of talks on a final-status agreement. The sides would then take 18 months to implement and finesse the final-status arrangement. Mr. Peretz said that his initiative was a diluted version of the Road Map and also contained elements of the Arab peace initiative. (DPA)

In a statement released in the Gaza Strip, Hamas accused PLC Member Mohammed Dahlan (Fatah) of running a "putschist movement": "We place the responsibility for each drop of Palestinian blood spilled personally on Dahlan," it said. "We firmly warn against any assaults on Hamas leaders, members of its armed wing or its Executive Force", it added. (AFP)

Syrian Information Minister Mohsen Bilal said: "The continued Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights and of Palestinian and Lebanese territory as well as foreign interference in the internal affairs of countries in the region, are the real causes of the Middle East crisis." (AFP)

"The continuation of Palestinian-Palestinian conflict will have a negative effect on the Palestinian cause and end Palestinians' hopes for establishing an independent State," MENA quoted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as saying. (AP)

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a speech in Parliament: "Both Hamas and Fatah must come to their senses and evaluate the situation... We call on them to end this meaningless feud between brothers and unite in the name of a strong and prosperous Palestine." (AFP)

9

Five previously kidnapped Hamas gunmen were released, but their vehicles came under fire as they left the scene. At least two of the Hamas men were wounded, Hamas officials said. Three members of the Executive Force were also hurt when Fatah gunmen fired a rocket-propelled grenade at their vehicle, they said. Fatah denied any role in the shootings. (Reuters)

A Hamas militant died of wounds sustained in fighting last week, medical officials said. (AP)

IDF soldiers shot and wounded a 17-year old Palestinian near the Israel-Gaza Strip fence. (Wafa)

At least 25 Palestinians were arrested by the IDF in Hebron, Tulkarm, Jenin and East Jerusalem, PA security and local sources said. (Wafa)

In the West Bank, Israeli authorities arrested Fawaz Damra, the former Imam of an Ohio mosque, who had been deported the week before by US authorities for his ties with Islamic Jihad, the Shin Bet said. (AP)

The Fatah Central Committee warned against any destructive and dangerous acts perpetrated against the Fatah Movement, stressing that it would not abandon the policies of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its international commitments, following a meeting in Ramallah chaired by PA President Abbas. (Wafa)

Abu Mujahid, spokesman for the Popular Resistance Committees, said: "Gilad Shalit is in good health and is being treated according to Islamic standards of dealing with prisoners of war... We are ready to keep him for years so long as our demands are not met." (AP)

Israel opened a new passage for goods in the West Bank, as part of goodwill gestures promised by Prime Minister Olmert to PA President Abbas, the IDF announced. The newly built passage in the Jordan Valley would allow direct transportation of agricultural produce from Jericho and elsewhere to northern Israel, a military spokesman said. (DPA)

Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz called for a halt in the construction of a section of the separation wall in the Hebron area, until conclusive research about its environmental impact could be done. (Ha'aretz)

Israel's Interior Ministry statistics showed that the settler population in the West Bank grew by nearly 6 per cent in 2006, more than four times the rate of increase for 2005. The statistics showed that there were 268,379 Israelis living in the West Bank at the end of 2006, compared with 253,748 in 2005, a 5.8 per cent increase. The religious settlements of "Upper Modi'in" and "Upper Beitar" had the greatest growth. Approximately 4,000 residents moved to "Upper Modi'in" in 2006, making it Israel's biggest settlement in the West Bank, with a population of 35,000. "Ma'aleh Adunim" was considered the largest settlement in 2005, with a population of some 33,000 residents. "Upper Beitar" gained about 2,000 new residents in 2006. In 2005, the settler population had grown by 1.4 per cent. The figures did not include Israelis living in Arab East Jerusalem. (Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post)

The IDF strategic assessment for 2007 warned of the possibility of a conflagration with Lebanon and Syria in the coming year. The assessment was based on the IDF's working plan for the year, which took into account the lessons learned in the 2006 Lebanon war. Brig.-Gen. Amos Yadlin told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee that the IDF had identified a decline in regional stability in the Middle East, giving rise to the possibility of hostilities involving Lebanon, Syria, the Palestinian Authority and Iran. (Ha'aretz)

10

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal said that Hamas acknowledged the existence of Israel as an established fact. He said that Israel was a "reality" and that "there will remain a State called Israel, this is a matter of fact". The problem was not Israel's existence but the failure to establish a State for Palestinians, Mr. Mashaal said. (Reuters)

In Beijing, during talks with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said that Israel was willing to resolve the Middle East issue through peaceful negotiations. Negotiations must be based on the peaceful co-existence of the "two countries", Mr. Olmert said. Premier Wen said, "History and reality have proven that force cannot settle the Middle East issue but only increase estrangement and animosity". He added, "China is ready to contribute to the Middle East peace process and to dialogue between the Arab world and Israel". (Xinhua)

Speaking in Cairo after a summit between Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and King Abdullah II of Jordan, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said

that the two Governments were working on a joint initiative to stop the main Palestinian parties, Hamas and Fatah, from fighting each other in the streets of Gaza and the West Bank. "It is a direct Egyptian and Jordanian attempt to deal with the Palestinian factions, calling on them to be reasonable so that they will reach an internal agreement," Mr. Aboul Gheit said of the joint initiative. Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdul-Ilah al-Khatib said, "The outcome of the internal Palestinian fighting is devastating and will damage the region severely," adding, "We have to work in every possible way to avoid it from happening and stop it immediately." Both Foreign Ministers agreed that there was a common desire among Egypt, Jordan and other Arabs to reach an agreement for the Palestinians that would pave the way for the resumption of peace talks with Israel based on the Road Map. (AP)

PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh called on Palestinians to work to prevent internal violence from exploding into an all-out civil war. "We stress the necessity of sparing the Palestinian people any internal confrontations and to avoid using weapons as a medium for dialogue and to focus on dialogue only to solve our differences," he said before a Cabinet meeting, adding, "The differences exist, they are there, but this does not mean that they should be solved by gunfire." (AP)

PA Prime Minister Haniyeh held Israel and the international community responsible for the fighting between Hamas and Fatah. "We blame the Israeli occupation, [and hold] the sides that lay siege to the Palestinian people and those who intervene in our internal affairs responsible" Mr. Haniyeh said. (Xinhua)

Rafik Hussein, Chief of Staff to PA President Abbas, told reporters in Ramallah that "national dialogue will resume next week" and expressed hope that Hamas and Fatah would finally be able to agree on a national unity government. "The President wants a dialogue for two weeks only, not more. We need results and not just an endless dialogue," Mr. Hussein also said. (DPA)

"[Hamas] lost the Palestinian street, which sees what they have become. A bunch of murderers and thieves who execute Palestinians only because they are Fatah members," Mohammed Dahlan, a Fatah leader in the Gaza Strip and a PLC member, said in an interview with Ha'aretz. (AFP)

Security Council experts met to discuss a draft statement on the Middle East submitted by Indonesia, a new member of the Council. Ambassador Rezlan Jenie said the day before that his aim in presenting the draft was "to try to build up a positive momentum towards the future." The US called the draft "unbalanced" because it blamed Israel for recent incursions without mentioning Palestinian attacks. (AP)

PA President Abbas had been invited to visit Germany "as soon as possible", the PA President's Bureau Chief Rafik Hussein said. The invitation was delivered by Germany's Special Envoy to the Middle East, Horst Freitag, during a meeting with President Abbas in Ramallah. (DPA)

Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos called for a new full-scale Middle East peace conference, saying, "The objective remains the same – proceed without delay to peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians by dealing with issues of a final statute based on a two-State solution." (AFP)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in an interview with La Stampa that US President Bush "agrees with us on the fact that the Quartet should take back its leading role". "The Quartet, as is known, is paralyzed in the face of recent developments, but it remains the most effective institutional possibility for coordinating international efforts in the region," Ms. Merkel also said, adding that US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would see during her upcoming trip to the region if conditions were right for a Quartet meeting. (Reuters)

## 11

An Israeli unmanned aerial vehicle crashed near Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip due to technical failure, the IDF said, denying that it had been shot down by Palestinian militants. Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing, had announced earlier in a statement that its fighters had downed the drone. (Xinhua)

The IDF arrested tens of Palestinians, preventing them from reaching their work places and universities in the West Bank. (Bahrain News Agency)

Ha'aretz published a report on the restriction of movement of the Palestinians in the West Bank. The newspaper examined roadblocks in Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Nablus areas, where the IDF said that restrictions had been eased, only to find out that slight changes had been made to make life easier for the people living in the areas. At other roadblocks, no changes had been made at all. During a meeting with PA President Abbas in December 2006, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert agreed to take a series of steps to improve the life of Palestinians, including the transfer of withheld tax revenues and lifting roadblocks in the West Bank. (Ha'aretz, Xinhua)

Israel's High Court of Justice fined two construction companies a total of NIS100,000 (\$24,000) for continuing to build in the "Modi'in Illit" settlement in violation of a court injunction. About a year ago, the Court ordered suspension of unauthorized construction for the settlement on private Palestinian land, but the companies began building a new road there. According to documents found by Ha'aretz, a new settlement extension called "Haftziva B" was being built on the Bil'in village land, purchased by dealers through dubious powers of attorney, then rezoned as State land and leased or sold to settlers' building companies. The construction of the separation barrier prompted the purchasers to hastily fix facts on the ground, the paper said. Peace Now, which petitioned the High Court on the issue, is demanding that all of the illegally built buildings be demolished. (AP, Ha'aretz)

Thousands of Fatah supporters rallied in the West Bank to commemorate the movement's anniversary. Speaking to the crowd, PA President Abbas appealed for an end to violence between Fatah and Hamas and criticized shooting into the sky. "Gunfire into the air is rejected. Gunfire against the friend, the neighbour and members of other factions is rejected too," Mr. Abbas said. (AP, Reuters)

"No change has been made on the movement's policy towards recognizing Israel," Ismail Radwan, a Hamas spokesman, told reporters in Gaza. Mr. Radwan said that Khaled Mashaal's remarks the previous day had been misunderstood as he did not mean to force the Palestinians to recognize Israel by calling it an existing fact. (DPA)

The Palestinian prisoners who drew up and signed the cross-party prisoners' National Accord Document, called for a day of fasting in protest against internal Palestinian fighting. The prisoners launched an immediate call for unity. (Ma'an News Agency)

Gush Shalom, an extra-parliamentary organization in Israel, issued a statement condemning the Israeli Government's endorsement of an additional 1,000 residential units in the "Har Homa" settlement, located south of Jerusalem. The statement said that the residential units in "Har Homa", "to be erected on long and narrow, knife-like ridge", were aimed at "cutting the Palestinian inhabitants of Tzur Baher off from their neighbours in Bethlehem". (Ma'an News Agency)

A two-day international conference, entitled "Madrid+15", and sponsored by private peace foundations rather than Governments, opened in Spain to commemorate the 1991 Madrid Conference. The conference brought together foreign ministers from Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and experts from the UN, US, Russia and the Middle East. Messages from former US President Bill Clinton, former Soviet Union President Mikhail Gorbachev and former US Secretary of State James Baker III were read out at the opening session. The aim of the conference was to show that, while there were "undeniable differences between the parties in relation to the Middle East conflict, they are not unbridgeable," said Emilio Cassinello, director of the Toledo for Peace, one of the organizers. (AP, [www.madrid15.org](http://www.madrid15.org))

Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Amr Moussa told the "Madrid+15" conference, "I invite the participants of this meeting to urge for an urgent international conference for a peace settlement, this time with the United Nations." "The peace process should not be considered secondary to the fight against terrorism. It must come first," he said, urging Israel to "work to be a full member of the Middle East society of nations". European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner added her voice to the calls for a new conference, stressing that "a reinvigorated Quartet has to play a key role." (AFP)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that plans for a meeting of the Quartet had been indefinitely postponed owing to a scheduling conflict and he hoped to hold the meeting on the sidelines of the Lebanon reconstruction conference in Paris at the end of the month. "I am pushing now for a Quartet meeting to take place as soon as possible", Mr. Ban told a news conference. (AFP, Reuters, Saudi Press Agency)

"The meeting of the Quartet, planned for the end of this month, should be an opportunity to work with all the parties on a long-term calendar aimed at organizing a peace conference (on the Middle East)," French Minister for Relations with Parliament Henri Cuyt told the Senate. "Nonetheless, given the gravity of the current crisis in the Palestinian territories, the urgent priority today is to encourage the emergence of a solid Palestinian interlocutor, capable of restarting negotiations with Israel," he said. (AFP)

## 12

After Friday prayers, thousands of Hamas supporters in the Gaza Strip protested the anti-Hamas statements the day before made by Fatah legislator Mohammed Dahlan. (Reuters)

Asharq al-Awsat reported that Mohammed Rashid, former adviser to the late PA President Yasser Arafat, was mediating between Hamas and Fatah alongside independent PLC member Ziyad Abu-Amr. (Ha'aretz)

## 13

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, said: "We will talk about... how to accelerate progress on the Road Map, how to work toward a political horizon. ... I am not coming with a proposal. I am not coming with a plan," she had told journalists accompanying her during a

stopover in Ireland. Ms. Livni said: "I do believe that talking with the Palestinians today what are the best steps that we can take to make... the political horizon more concrete... is something that we have to do." Israeli officials said that Ms. Livni and Ms. Rice had discussed the possibility of creating a Palestinian State with temporary borders following the line of the separation wall. (*Ha'aretz*, [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov))

Imprisoned Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti said that the ceasefire with Israel was in the Palestinian national interest. He also stated that Palestinian prisoners held in Israel would stage a hunger strike if clashes continued between Fatah and Hamas. (*Ha'aretz*)

Envoys of PA President Abbas had made significant progress in secret meetings with Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal to end Palestinian infighting and prepare new coalition talks, senior PA officials said. (*AP*)

PA President Abbas told reporters after talks with King Abdullah II of Jordan: "In view of the difficult Palestinian circumstances and the ongoing efforts to arrive at a compromise regarding a number of issues, it will be difficult to hold a meeting with Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh in Amman in the near future." (*DPA*)

Some 80,000 PA civil servants and security personnel, who had been on strike since September 2006 over unpaid salaries, agreed to return to work, PA officials said.

The employees would immediately receive one month's salary, with the remainder of the arrears being paid out over the next six months. Deputy Prime Minister Nasr al-Sha'ir said that the agreement was the "first of a number of accords on matters linked to the formation of a government of national unity that should be announced in the near future." (*AFP*)

14

Following his meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Ramallah, PA President Abbas told reporters: "We... noted to [Secretary] Rice our decision to end any temporary or transitional solutions including a State with temporary borders... In order to give the political process an opportunity it deserves and to regain credibility and confidence of the peoples in the region, [Israel] immediately should halt all colonial activities in the Palestinian Territory, stop the construction of the Annexation and Expansion Wall, put an end to siege and closure imposed on our people and land, release the prisoners from Israeli jails, and stop the Israeli policy of incursions, arrests and collective punishment." Ms. Rice said: "I have heard loud and clear the call for deeper American engagement in these [Middle East peace] processes. On the subject of the proposed \$86 million US grant for PA security forces, she stated: "It's a part of an international plan, this is not a US plan; and secondly, that it is a classic train-and-equip programme that... will unfold over a period of time." "I don't think we need to skip any phases of the Road Map," she said in a subsequent interview with Israel's *Channel 10*. (*Wafa*, [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov))

During a meeting with Secretary of State Rice, King Abdullah II of Jordan said that without tangible, specific steps to activate the implementation of the Road Map in the near future, the cycle of violence would widen. (*Petra*)

15

Israeli forces killed two Palestinians near the Israeli-built border fence on the Gaza Strip frontier, Palestinian ambulance workers said. The IDF said troops had opened fire at "two armed terrorists crawling towards the fence" under the cover of darkness in the northern Gaza Strip. The gunfire detonated the explosives the two men were carrying, the IDF statement said. (*Reuters*)

A missile launched by the military wing of Islamic Jihad, the Al-Quds Brigades, landed near the southern Israeli town of Sderot. No injuries were reported. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas-led forces had arrested six gunmen who had stormed into an UNRWA office in Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip looking for foreigners to kidnap, a spokesman for the Executive Force said. (*Reuters*)

The IDF wounded a Palestinian near Bethlehem and arrested 12 others in Bethlehem, Nablus and Jenin, PA security and local sources said. (*Wafa*)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced, following her meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, that her talks during her visit to the Middle East had dealt with laying the groundwork for "a political horizon that will lead to a Palestinian State." She said that she would soon meet Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and PA President Abbas "to have discussions on the broad issues of that horizon, so we can work on the Road Map and try to accelerate the Road Map to move to a Palestinian State." Prime Minister Olmert told Knesset members of the Kadima party that "a three-way meeting with [PA President] Abbas" was to be organized "in a short time." Chief Palestinian Negotiator Saeb Erakat denied there was an agreement on holding the trilateral meeting. However, he said that the Palestinian leadership "does not oppose such a meeting in principle." (*AP*, *Ha'aretz*, *Xinhua*)

Israel's Housing Ministry published newspaper advertisements inviting bids for the construction of 44 homes in the "Ma'aleh Adumim" settlement in the West Bank. (*AP*)

A senior Israeli official told *AFP* on condition of anonymity: "Over the past two weeks, the army has lifted more than 40 roadblocks in the West Bank." (*AFP*)

An adviser to PA President Abbas denied earlier reports that preparations were underway for a meeting between Mr. Abbas and Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal. "The debate was about Abbas paying a visit to Damascus to meet with Syrian officials," Nabil Amr told *Voice of Palestine* radio. (*Xinhua*)

Islamic Jihad released a statement, threatening to fire "100 rockets" as an immediate response to any IDF activities in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank. (*Ynetnews*)

16

Two Qassam rockets launched from the Gaza Strip landed in Israel's western Negev. There were no reports of injuries or damage. (*Ynetnews*)

Two Palestinian civilians were wounded by Israeli fire in the northern Gaza Strip. According to witnesses, the army fired a rocket from just inside Israel and a drone fired a second one into the Jabalya area, from where Palestinians had launched a home-made projectile at Israel. (*AFP*)

Israeli forces arrested 14 Palestinians in the West Bank, including a 45-year-old woman and her 21-year-old daughter in Bethlehem. (*Ma'an News Agency*, *Wafa*)

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert toured new crossing terminals along Israel's West Bank separation barrier, calling on the military and civilian officials in charge of the crossings to cut down the time it took Palestinian civilians and merchandise to enter Israel. Mr. Olmert said that 44 of 160 West Bank roadblocks had been dismantled, and that was only the first stage. At the Ephraim crossing, a nine-month-old facility that is now the main terminal for Palestinians coming into Israel from the northern West Bank, Mr. Olmert, when told that trucks were typically held at the crossing point for 45 minutes while their contents were scanned, said that the time should be cut to 15 minutes. In keeping with Israel's separation policies, Mr. Olmert also said that Palestinians should be encouraged to "create places of employment where they live" rather than in Israel, so that they would not be dependent on Israel for work. (*AP*)

Israeli Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh said during a visit to Hebron that laws were not being enforced sufficiently and promptly in the city, especially with regard to Israeli settlers. "We cannot allow the fact that people live in cages because someone is harassing them in an area we control," Mr. Sneh said, adding that a ministerial committee set up on 14 January to deal with settlers' law violations in Hebron would have its hands full. (*Ha'aretz*)

Commenting on the Israeli proposal of recognizing a Palestinian State within temporary borders and leaving the final ones to be negotiated later, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told reporters, "My own view, and I frankly have been telling people this, (is) that if we get to that point, it seems to me that it may be more difficult to negotiate a provisional State than just to go to the end game" of final borders. "We're not there yet, and we'll see." (*AP*)

A scheduled PLC session – the first in four months – was cancelled because the Deputy Speaker believed he would not get a quorum of at least 67 out of 132 lawmakers. A dozen Hamas legislators were away on a trip to Indonesia and 41 PLC members were in Israeli prisons, including 37 from Hamas. (*AP*)

Médécins du Monde-Greece donated €40,000 in medical aid to the PA Ministry of Health. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

17

Maj.-Gen. Yair Naveh, head of the IDF Central Command, postponed a ban on Palestinians riding in cars with Israeli license plates in the West Bank "until further evaluation", two days before the restrictions were to go into effect. The IDF had cited security reasons for the ban, saying some of the suicide bombers who had entered Israel from the West Bank in recent years had been transported by Israeli citizens, whose Israeli license plates allowed them to cross roadblocks without being checked. Human rights groups said that the order was part of a wider discriminatory scheme to create separate road systems for Israeli settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank. Aid organizations also came out against the order, saying it would hamper humanitarian work in the West Bank. The IDF gave no reason for the postponement and declined to comment further. "The order... creates a legal codification of something that can be seen as apartheid," posing a legal problem for the IDF, said Michael Sfard, legal counsel for Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights organization that filed a court challenge to the decision. The High Court of Justice was scheduled to hear the case on 12 February, although Mr. Sfard said it might be postponed after the IDF announcement. (*AP*)

Fatah's chief negotiator left Damascus, where negotiators had reported significant progress in the talks between Hamas and Fatah in recent days, and it was not clear whether a new round of talks would be held. (*AP*)

In Berlin, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the end of a visit to six countries in the Middle East.



At a [press availability](#), Mr. Steinmeier thanked Ms. Rice for providing a new impulse into the search for a solution. Mr. Steinmeier and Ms. Rice reiterated their desire to revive the Middle East Quartet and announced that it would meet in Washington in early February to prepare a summit between Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and PA President Abbas and build momentum towards the resumption of peace talks. "It is a question of what political prospects we can offer the people in the region", Mr. Steinmeier said following his meeting with Ms. Rice. He called on Europe and the US to take joint and resolute action to achieve a peaceful solution in the Middle East. (<http://eu2007.de>, <http://www.state.gov/>)

The Turkish Red Crescent announced that it would send 4,000 tons of flour to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, *Anatolia* news agency reported. Turkey had earlier sent 6,000 tons of flour. ([www.anatolia.com](http://www.anatolia.com), *Xinhua*)

18

IDF troops shot and killed Mohanad Ghandour, 32, an armed Palestinian in Nablus, local hospital staff said. Local residents said that Mr. Ghandour was a member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. The army said that troops had spotted an armed man during an operation in Nablus' Old City and had shot him but said that the man did not fire at its forces. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israeli police blocked some 150 Peace Now activists near Hebron protesting against the residents of a Jewish neighbourhood following a "cursing settler" incident. Ruti Tirosh, one activist said, "This is not a neighbourly spat. This is a political attempt to expel Palestinians from their land." She added, "We planned on visiting the (Palestinian) family that was insulted, to apologize." (*Ynetnews*)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, scheduled to hold talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, earlier briefed German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin, announcing that the US, German and other diplomats would convene a Middle East session early next month in Washington. Ms. Rice updated Ms. Merkel on her Middle East tour, saying that the US and its allies were closely focused on reviving the stalled peace process. She said that the Quartet meeting would come before a US-backed meeting in the Middle East with Ms. Rice, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and PA President Abbas. In Britain, Ms. Rice was to meet with Mr. Blair and British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett (*AP*)

PA President Abbas would meet with Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal in Damascus on 20 January to try to reach an agreement on forming a national unity government, an Abbas aide said. Negotiator Ziad Abu Amr, an independent lawmaker with ties to both Hamas and Fatah, said that the two men would try to put the finishing touches to a deal at the planned meeting. (*AP*)

Mohamed al-Hendi, an Islamic Jihad leader, said that the line-up of a Palestinian national unity government would probably be announced in Cairo next week, following PA President Abbas' scheduled visit to Syria the coming weekend, Egypt's official news agency *MENA* reported. (*Xinhua*)

Israeli Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh had formulated a new peace plan together with Defence Minister Amir Peretz. He is one of several leading officials, including Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, to recently articulate new ideas for re-energizing peace efforts. "Two years are enough to conclude a detailed agreement,"

Mr. Sneh told an academic conference in Natanya Academic College. He said, "We should discuss, maybe for six months, the principles, and move forward about the details of final status agreement." He appealed for urgent action, saying that the timing was favourable because moderate Arab States wanted to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "We have an opportunity, but I don't know for how long will it last," Mr. Sneh said. "We have to do it very, very quickly." (*AP*)

The Hamas-led Government projected the largest-ever budget for 2007, acting PA Finance Minister Samir Abu Aisheh said. The budget would amount to \$2.56 billion, an increase of about \$500 million from 2006. Mr. Abu Aisheh said that 25,000 workers had been added to the public sector payroll since Hamas took office in March 2006. (*Ha'aretz*)

19

A 10-year-old Palestinian girl died in a hospital in Jerusalem, three days after being injured during an incident involving Israeli border police. The child, Abir Aramin, was the daughter of Palestinian peace activist Bassam Aramin. She came from the West Bank village of Anata where Israel was building a section of the wall. Palestinians said that she was with two other girls when an Israeli border police vehicle drove past. Stones were thrown in the direction of the police, who responded with tear gas and stun grenades. The girl was hit in the head. (*BBC*)

Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz had withdrawn his approval of the construction of 100 housing units in the northern Jordan Valley settlement of "Maskiot." There had been strong criticism from the US, the EU as well as members of the Labour Party after Mr. Peretz approved the construction three weeks earlier.

(*Ha'aretz*, *Ynetnews*)

MK Yisrael Katz (Likud) submitted a bill calling on Israel to annex the Jordan Valley, in response to Defence Minister Amir Peretz's decision to freeze a plan to establish a new settlement there, *Israel Radio* reported. Mr. Katz said that the Jordan Valley was Israel's eastern security zone and must be strengthened and settled. Dror Etkes, coordinator of Peace Now's settlement division, said that Mr. Peretz' reversal [retracting his approval of the construction of 100 housing units after criticism from the US and Europe] showed that the Government was incapable of formulating a long-term policy on the settlement issue. (*DPA*, *Ha'aretz*, *Ynetnews*)

Israel had released a promised \$100 million in frozen tax funds and transferred the money to PA President Mahmoud Abbas, an official in Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's office said. The funds were part of the customs duty and value added tax Israel collected for the PA under partial peace accords. The funds represented a sixth of the total collected on behalf of the PA since the elections in January 2006. An Israeli official said the money was for use in humanitarian efforts and to boost Mr. Abbas' security force. PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said that the funds would be channelled towards humanitarian projects. (*BBC*, *Ha'aretz*, *Ynetnews*)

PA President Abbas said that he would go for early elections if the latest round of coalition talks with Hamas failed. He also said that it was time for Hamas to make up its mind whether it wanted to establish a government acceptable to the West, by moderating its platform and sharing power with Fatah. He added, "Elections does not mean we want to throw Hamas into the sea. Hamas has been elected and can be elected again." (*AP*)

EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana said he hoped that a meeting of the Quartet on 2 February would kickstart the stalled Middle East peace process. "We would like very much for a process which is political in nature to get started," adding that the meeting would "probably be the most important push that will be done by the international community in that direction. He also said that for that to happen, unity among Palestinians was "very important" and that the violence between Fatah and Hamas should stop. (*DPA*)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice returned to Washington after a Middle East tour and made it clear that she wanted to return in February to push for peace negotiations. On 2 February, Ms. Rice was scheduled to meet with Quartet members, including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, as well as her counterparts from the Russian Federation and the EU. She said there would be "a very important effect on the entire region" if progress in the Middle East peace talks was achieved. (*AFP*)

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said that the Indonesian people and Government were still concerned about the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. "Indonesia is concerned about security conditions in Palestine and Lebanon. Indonesia continues to expect the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestine State in the near future." The President made his remarks when opening a three-day meeting of the International Forum for Islamist Parliamentarians held in Jakarta and attended by delegates from 28 countries. (*Xinhua*)

20

PA President Abbas met with Syrian President Bashar Assad, who expressed support for a Palestinian government of national unity. (*Ha'aretz*)

21

Three mortar shells landed near the border fence in the central Gaza Strip and a Qassam rocket struck an open area near the Negev town of Sderot. No injuries were reported in either attack. The Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for both attacks. (*Ha'aretz*)

PA President Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal met in Damascus. Mr. Abbas said that although their three-hour meeting had been "fruitful," he did not rule out calling early elections. "Early elections are an option if a national unity government is not formed." He also said, "We will continue our meetings and dialogue in the near future to reach an agreement that ends the siege on the Palestinian people," he said. Mr. Mashaal said that there were "points of disagreement between us, but we will sort it out through dialogue." Talks were scheduled to take place in two weeks. (*Ha'aretz*)

The Israeli Cabinet approved the "Gaza Envelope" plan to fortify all homes and buildings located within 7 kilometres of the border with the Gaza Strip. The fortification would give residents a sense of security, according to Cabinet members. (*Ha'aretz*)

A senior Palestinian official in the Gaza Strip said that Hamas had agreed to cede the post of Interior Minister to an independent, and the Finance Ministry would go to Salam Fayyad, another independent. (*Ha'aretz*)

EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana urged Israel to freeze settlements in the West Bank and stop the construction of

the security barrier, saying that they would obstruct lasting Arab-Israeli peace. "I had the opportunity to make a tour along the eastern part of Jerusalem and go to Abu Dis and its surroundings. You get really very shocked every time you go and see the situation worsen. The wall is more extended and the settlements are more extended," he told reporters in Amman. "All these things have to first freeze and then to begin to see how they can be resolved in order to get the process moving again," he added. (Reuters)

During a [press conference](#) after a meeting with German Chancellor Angel Merkel in Sochi, Russian President Vladimir Putin said, "Our ongoing talks will focus on achieving a peace settlement in the Middle East based on the Road Map that has been recognized by all sides. We support the Federal Chancellor's efforts to hold a meeting of the Quartet of mediators as soon as possible in order to propose a comprehensive solution to bringing lasting peace to the region." ([www.kremlin.ru](#))

The IDF admitted that the 44 dirt obstacles it claimed to have been removed from around West Bank villages had not actually existed. On 16 January, the IDF had announced that it had removed 44 dirt obstacles blocking access roads to West Bank villages, fulfilling a promise of Israeli Prime Minister Olmert to PA President Abbas. The admission confirmed a statement made recently by UN agencies operating in the Occupied Palestinian Territory that most of the barriers were not removed, because they had not existed for months. (Ha'aretz)

22

An explosion ripped through the office of the Dubai-based Arabic satellite television *Al Arabiya* in Gaza City, causing no injuries. The newsroom was empty when an explosive device placed outside detonated, police said, destroying the outside door of the office of the station and damaging some walls inside. An official at the station said that anonymous callers last week had threatened to harm employees and burn the station following a tape aired of PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh.

Riham Abdulkarim, Bureau Chief of *Al Arabiya* in Gaza, held the Government of Hamas responsible of the explosion. Hamas had said Mr. Haniyeh's comments were broadcasted in a way that took his words out of context and vowed to pursue legal action against the station if it did not apologize to him. (Ha'aretz, Wafa) PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said, "We are not against opening dialogues even with the Americans. Our only problem is negotiations with Israeli occupiers on account of experiences of unsuccessful talks in the past." A day earlier, he had accused the US of working with Israel to topple the Palestinian Government. (Xinhua)

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner told reporters she was "heartened" by a continuing ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and a recent meeting between PA President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert. Her comments followed a visit to the region by EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana who said he was convinced there was a new "political will" to end violence in the region. (DPA)

Some 30 Palestinians, detained in two separate groups in Baghdad by Iraqi security forces, had been released, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said. "Most of them are very scared," Astrid van Genderen Stort of UNHCR told AP in Geneva, adding that the agency was concerned about what had happened. However, she was unable to give further information about the incident. (AP)

Addressing the annual Herzliya Conference, Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz presented a diplomatic plan. "It is clear that a diplomatic plan must be put in place, because the standstill is working against us. The three-stage plan would include, at the first stage, a comprehensive ceasefire, an agreement for trading prisoners, coordination between Israeli and Palestinian security forces and the removal of illegal outposts established by Israel after March 2001. In the second stage, Israel would launch negotiations with the "Palestinian President" on a permanent agreement. These talks would last approximately six months and at their conclusion an international conference would present its achievements. The third stage, expected to last at least 18 months, would include detailed negotiations on the permanent peace accord. Mr. Peretz also said,

"I view any Palestinian element recognizing the State of Israel as a partner for negotiations, even if it is Hamas." Referring to footage of settler abuse recently aired on television, he said that Israel's gestures to the Palestinians were meaningless in the face of abuse inflicted by a settler on her neighbours in Hebron. (Ha'aretz, Xinhua, Ynetnews)

Col. Adnan Aldameri, a Palestinian police chief in the West Bank, said that crime in the West Bank was up 60 per cent in 2006, blaming poverty and increasing brazen militants. Coordinating problems with Israel were hampering crime fighting, he added. Israel still controlled large areas of the West Bank, and Palestinian police had to coordinate to move from place to place, a time-consuming process. (Ha'aretz)

The provisional EU Council [conclusions](#) on the Middle East peace process reiterated that the "ultimate goal should be an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel and its other neighbours in peace and security". Among other reactions to the latest developments, it welcomed the extension of the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM) for three months and encouraged Israel to consider transferring all withheld PA tax and customs revenues through the TIM. ([www.europa.eu](#))

A report released by Binkom-Planners for Planning Rights, a human rights organization, stated that some 250,000 Palestinians had been closed off from the rest of the West Bank by the separation wall. The report said that there were 21 such enclaves and that 8,000 Palestinians lived in "seam enclaves" stuck between the Green Line and the wall. The report also said that despite the Israeli High Court of Justice's ruling on the wall's route, it was still very much dictated by the settlements' needs. (Ynetnews)

Settlers and right-wing activists began planting about 15,000 fruit seedlings around the outposts in the West Bank as part of a forestry project. The purpose was to "tighten the grip on land in Israel," according to a member of the "Hassidei Meir," the organization implementing the project. (Ynetnews)

A survey conducted by the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion said that 60 per cent of Palestinians favoured holding new PA elections, with 25 per cent opposed.

Some 35 per cent supported President Abbas while 26 per cent supported Prime Minister Haniyeh. The poll also indicated that 76 per cent of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory believed that the security situation had become worse since Hamas took over the PA last year. ([www.pcpo.ps](#), Ynetnews)

23

Palestinian journalists imposed a daylong news blackout to protest an explosion at the Gaza City offices of the *Al Arabiya* satellite news station. (Ha'aretz)

Israeli settlers abducted a 16-year-old Palestinian boy in Hizma, north-east of Jerusalem. They beat him and attacked him with knives before he was released unconscious. (Ma'an News Agency)

Palestinian gunman held a French diplomat and his two accompanying bodyguards from a restaurant in Nablus, according to a spokesman for the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. The French Foreign Ministry confirmed the abductions soon after they were announced. A Ministry official said that the French consulate in Jerusalem was working to free them. He declined to give any details about the hostages. Weapons carried by the bodyguards initially raised suspicions that the men were undercover IDF soldiers, the spokesman said, adding that all three were likely to be released shortly. Palestinian security officials confirmed that three people had been taken away, but had no other details. (DPA, Reuters)

Forty masked Palestinian gunmen blew up Al-Waha complex, a vacant resort, in the Gaza Strip, claiming that they belonged to Al-Qaida and that the holiday complex was owned by Fatah PLC member Mohammed Dahlan, its manager said. "They destroyed the large wedding and conference room with several huge bombs. They planted bombs in some of the rooms, destroying the southern part of the resort," said Yousef Sari, manager of the resort. He said the gunmen told the guards: "Al-Qaida has arrived in Gaza and we will destroy every place owned by Dahlan and bomb him, too." Officials close to Mr. Dahlan denied that he had any stake in the resort. Palestinian officials have denied any Al-Qaida presence in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, and PA President Abbas and security officials have said that they were working hard to prevent the group from establishing a foothold in the territories. In a separate incident, unknown gunmen shot and wounded Thiab Abu Eida, a Fatah member who runs a post office in the northern Gaza Strip, local residents said. (AP)

Palestinian factions were to meet to press ahead with efforts to form a national unity government as the relative calm of the past two weeks had been broken by renewed violence in the Gaza Strip. The cross-faction talks were to resume at 6 p.m. in Gaza City, according to a statement from the umbrella group of Palestinian factions. This fresh round of negotiations came amid renewed optimism after a meeting between PA President Abbas and Hamas Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal in Damascus two days earlier. (AFP)

In a statement issued by the Spokesperson of the Presidency, PA President Abbas denounced the attacks launched by Iraqi militias against tens of Palestinian refugees in the neighbourhood of Al-Karrada in Baghdad. The statement said that President Abbas had made contacts with Iraqi officials to end the crimes against Palestinians in Iraq. (Wafa)

PA President Abbas said that he would not demand that Hamas recognized Israel as a precondition for the establishment of a national unity government.

"However, I am demanding that the Government adhere to the agreements of the PLC and the decisions reached by the UN," he said. (*Ynetnews*)

US President George W. Bush, in his [State of the Union address](#), said, "With the other members of the Quartet ... we're pursuing diplomacy to help bring peace to the Holy Land, and pursuing the establishment of a democratic Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security." ([www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov))

24

A Palestinian was killed early morning by IDF fire near the Gaza border fence. The IDF reported that three Palestinians moved along the fence, sparking suspicion among the troops, who called on the suspects to halt and then opened fire. Khaled al-Najjar, chief of emergency at Al-Aqsa Hospital confirmed that Mahran Abu al-Maseer, 17, was killed and two other Palestinians, both 15, were injured and detained by the soldiers east of Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip. (*AP, Reuters, Xinhua, Ynetnews*)

Three Palestinians were wounded in armed clashes between Fatah and Hamas supporters in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. (*AFP, AP*)

Maher Hajja, 15, was shot in abdomen by Israeli forces as he tended his sheep near Burqa, north-west of Nablus. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A 15-year-old Palestinian shepherd was shot and injured in the abdomen by Israeli soldiers north-west of Nablus. Also, a Palestinian youth in the Qalandiya refugee camp, south of Ramallah, who threw stones at Israeli forces was shot and injured by Israeli soldiers. East of Gaza City, Israeli special forces opened fire on a group of Palestinian national security forces, moderately injuring two. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces arrested 11 Palestinians in Bethlehem and two others in Qalqilya. (*Wafa*)

Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip claimed responsibility for launching five home-made rockets at Israeli targets overnight. The Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of Islamic Jihad, launched two rockets at an IDF airbase east of Al-Qarara village in the southern Gaza Strip. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades launched three rockets at the Israeli villages of Erez and Netiv Ha'asara, north of the Erez crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli settlers vandalized a cemetery and smashed car windscreens in the village of Awarta, south of Nablus in the northern West Bank. Dozens of settlers accompanied ultra-orthodox Jews from Jerusalem who entered the village cemetery under military escort overnight to visit biblical tombs. An IDF spokesman said that the military was looking into the reports. (*AFP, Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip, including Fatah and Hamas, agreed to resume dialogue and set the agenda for it. "A drafting committee, composed of 11 members, was named and will meet this evening to set the foundations and principles of the political programme of the national unity government," Salah Zidane, a negotiator from the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, told *AFP*. (*AFP, Xinhua*)

Spokesperson for the Palestinian Presidential Guard Wael Dahab said that there were some 600 Palestinians stranded on the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing. (*Wafa*)

King Abdullah II of Jordan, in an interview with *Asharq Al-Awsat* in Amman, said that "the game has changed after the Lebanon war, and the players have changed, and everyone, foremost among them Israel, should realize that unless we resolve the conflict in Palestine this year, everyone will pay the price." "Israel should realize that a just solution that ensures the restoration of legitimate Palestinian rights and that results in the establishment of a fully sovereign Palestinian State on Palestinian land, living in peace and security alongside Israel, is the only guarantee of peace and security in the region", the King added. (*Petra, Reuters*)

At a press conference at the conclusion of a two-day visit to the United Arab Emirates as part of his regional tour, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said, "The Middle East is already riddled with destructive violence in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, as well as with the visible and potential sectarian rifts. ... With the Palestinian issue taking a new turn, the looming rift in the region, if not checked, could possibly extend to the Gulf region and to the whole world. ... All the leaders whom I have recently met and talked with expressed their deep concern over the deteriorating situation in this region." "Our current mission of bringing harmony and peace to the region and the whole Muslim world has to be initiated in a responsible, pragmatic, forceful and sincere manner," Mr. Musharraf added. (*WAM*)

In a statement, the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement expressed support for the Palestinian people and leadership in rejecting the establishment of a Palestinian State with provisional borders. "The so-called provisional State would in essence only be an entity under the domain and control of Israel as the occupying power rather than a sovereign and independent State," the Bureau said. (*Wafa*)

25

Israeli troops shot dead a 17-year-old Islamic Jihad member, Fadel Balawneh, as he tried to run away from a building in Tulkarm the army was surrounding. The Israeli army accused him of being involved in building rockets and plotting bomb attacks against Israelis. (*Reuters*)

Israeli forces arrested two Palestinian women in Hebron, 15 Palestinians in villages near Hebron, and four others in other parts of the West Bank, including two in Bethlehem. Israeli forces also arrested six Palestinian youths in Nablus. (*Ma'an News Agency, Wafa*)

The Al-Quds Brigades launched a home-made projectile towards the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA President Abbas [told](#) the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting: "Our hand remains outstretched to start the negotiation process. Fear and despair must be replaced by hope and forgiveness. Nothing is more important than peace ... for our children." Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni responded: "There is a Palestinian State at the end of the process, but the terrorism must be dismantled," she stressed. "This is a step-by-step process but it gives a political horizon." ([www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org))

PA President Abbas met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos to discuss efforts aimed at reviving the long-stalled peace-making efforts. Saeb Erakat, who accompanied Mr. Abbas, said that the meeting had been detailed. "They had a very in-depth discussion that covers various different issues. ... She was very much interested to know the development and she was very interested in finding out about our economic situation," Mr. Erakat said. Ms. Merkel told reporters that she had wished Mr. Abbas success in his efforts to form a unity government, but said it was "very important for international acceptance" that the Government respected the principles of the Road Map peace plan. Ms. Merkel also said that the EU could play a constructive role supporting the peace process, but added, "Europe should not overestimate its role." (*AP*)

In remarks at a session featuring Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres at the World Economic Forum, PA President Abbas said, "The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the most serious conflicts that require a solution. I am fully convinced that despite all the difficulties, an atmosphere conducive to the resumption of the peace process exists." "We have the Road Map. A Road Map that includes the Arab initiative as well as President Bush's vision regarding the two-State solution. ... What is required now, in all honesty, is for us to trace the beginning and the end of this peace process," Mr. Abbas said.

Ms. Livni said that Israel's negotiations with Palestinians must stick to the vision of two States, side by side, as the only way to achieve peace in the region. She said, "A Palestinian State is not an illusion. It's feasible, it's there, it's achievable." She urged the international community to support moderates in the Middle East and told Mr. Abbas, "Compromising with extremists will not promote anything." Mr. Peres said that Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians had agreed to create a 500-kilometre-long "valley of peace" common economic zone. He underlined that a huge market could develop in the Arab world over the next decade and appealed for investment. "It can lower the tone and the flames of Muslim resistance and do it very quickly," Mr. Peres said. The economic zone would include cooperation on water, agriculture, joint airports and tourism, he said. (*AFP, AP*)

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, PA President Abbas, Israeli Vice Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni listened to video statements from youths in Ramallah, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem mobilized by the One Voice initiative, urging the leaders to conclude a peace agreement without delay. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat and Israeli Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh told a media briefing at the World Economic Forum that a peace accord was necessary to build an alliance of moderates in an increasingly polarized region. "It may take six months to conclude these principles and another 18 months to conclude and iron out the details," Mr. Sneh said. "There is no need of mediation. ... We can do it directly. It is the best way. But we need international as well as regional backing and support," he added. Mr. Erakat said that Israel and the Palestinians wished for "direct, bilateral negotiations" and that third party involvement was needed only in regional terms. "We need her [US Secretary Rice's] help in making sure that everyone in this jungle is ready to build a road out. ... No one can negotiate on the part of the Palestinians and the Israelis," Mr. Erakat said. (*Reuters*)

Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari [briefed](#) the Security Council on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question." (*UN News Centre, UN press release SC/8943*)

Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Vitaly Churkin told reporters following the Security Council briefing on the Middle East:



"There was a strong feeling that there were some signs of hope, which should be fully taken advantage of by the international community... Maybe not in such a long run, this process could culminate in an international conference, which needs to be well prepared, but which would bring about a long-awaited settlement of the situation in the Middle East." (AP)

At a donors' conference for Lebanon held in Paris, British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett announced \$48 million (€37 million) in aid to UNRWA to assist Palestinian refugees. (AFP, [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk))

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Hamas operatives killed a wounded Fatah fighter in the Jabalya refugee camp, Fatah officials said. The attack came hours after a roadside bomb had been detonated in the same area as a squad of Hamas militants drove by. One militant was killed and seven were wounded, Hamas and hospital officials said. Hamas blamed Fatah for the bombing. A Hamas official, on condition of anonymity, said that during the night, Fatah gunmen had kidnapped seven Hamas members, while Hamas had seized four Fatah members believed to be behind the roadside bombing. Fatah said six of its men had been kidnapped. (AP, *The Jerusalem Post*) Shots had been fired at the Gaza City home of PA Foreign Minister Mahmoud Al-Zahhar, PA security officials reported. (AP)

PA President Abbas told reporters in Davos about the efforts to form a national unity government: "This does not need more than two weeks, maximum three weeks... If we fail to achieve a national unity government that allows us to lift the siege, I will call for early elections." He said he expected to hold talks with the United States and Israel within a month on the framework for establishing a Palestinian State. (Ha'aretz)

PA President Abbas is scheduled to discuss his efforts to form a national unity government and developments in the Middle East peace process when he meets Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero in Madrid. (Ha'aretz)

The PLC issued a statement to mark the one year anniversary of the 2006 PLC elections. The statement expressed support for the formation of a national unity government, urged greater unity and deplored the spilling of Palestinian blood. (Ma'an News Agency)

The United States Agency for International Development is assisting in the removal of a hazardous solid waste dump in Tal El Sultan neighbourhood in Rafah through its \$25,000 emergency assistance programme, the agency said in a press release. ([www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov))

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Hisham Youssef, Chief of Staff to Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa said that the body expressed its "regret and discontent at the assassinations and kidnappings on the Palestinian front which could lead to dire consequences." "It is irrational and unacceptable that the Palestinian factions are distracted from freeing the occupied territories by plunging into deadly infighting which benefits only the Israeli occupation forces," he added. (AFP)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned of a great threat to the Middle East if talks between Israel and the Palestinians were not pursued, after meeting with King Abdullah II of Jordan in Berlin. She added that there was an opportunity to make progress at the forthcoming 2 February meeting of the Quartet. King Abdullah said, "We need to take advantage of this opportunity to push Middle East peace." At the World Economic Forum in Davos, senior Israeli and Palestinian officials called for direct talks in the hope of reaching a peace deal within two years. (AFP, Reuters)

Palestinian security forces, who had not been paid for most of the past year, were to receive a month's salary, according to Rafiq al-Husseini, a senior aide to PA President Abbas. The salaries would be paid using the tax dollars that Israel collected on the PA's behalf, which Israel had frozen after the election of Hamas. Under an agreement, US\$100 million was turned over to Mr. Abbas on 19 January. (AFP)

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Pope Benedict XVI appealed for peace between the divided communities of Lebanon and called for an end to the fighting raging in the Gaza Strip. He appealed for an immediate end to the violence in the Gaza Strip. (AFP)

Fatah and Hamas both accepted a Saudi Arabian invitation to hold unity talks in Mecca. "We welcome the invitation by His Majesty King Abdullah and the Government appreciates this generous position, which comes as an attempt to resolve Palestinian internal differences," according to Taher An-Nono, spokesman for the PA Foreign Ministry. Ahmed Abdul Rahman, a senior Fatah official said, "We are ready to go to the Kingdom and to start talks." A date was to be set for the talks. (Ha'aretz)

The Head of the PLO Political Department, Farouk Kaddouni, said that the PLO would not accept a State within interim borders as Israel had suggested. He also said, "International forces should come to the occupied Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip to end the Israeli occupation." (Ma'an News Agency)

Many politicians, clergy and representatives of civil society took part in a demonstration in Ramallah, protesting against the ongoing factional fighting in the Gaza Strip and elsewhere in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. An independent member of the PLC, Mustafa Barghouti, who attended the demonstration, said, "The ongoing fighting and chaos in Gaza and the West Bank harms the reputation of the Palestinian people, harms the justice of their national cause, and poses a threat to civil peace and national unity." He also said that the Gaza events were a result of a failure of the efforts so far to establish a national unity government and called on the people to exert pressure on the different parties to cease internal fighting immediately and begin the formation of a national unity government. (Ma'an News Agency)

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Five people died overnight in the Gaza Strip in continuing clashes between rival factions. In Gaza City, Hamas gunmen attacked the headquarters of security forces closely associated with Fatah. Fighting between Hamas and Fatah had left close to 30 people dead since 25 January. PA Information Minister Youssef Rizka of Hamas warned that the two sides were close to civil war. (BBC)

A suicide bomber killed at least three people when he blew himself up in a bakery in the southern Israeli city of Eilat. The explosion ripped through the Lehamin bakery in a residential area at about 9.40 a.m. Authorities said that one other person was wounded in the attack. Three Palestinian groups – Islamic Jihad, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and a group called the Islamic Brigade – said that they had carried out the attack. Islamic Jihad named the bomber as 21-year-old Mohammed Faisal al-Saqaq from Gaza City. The attack was meant to help bring an end to weeks of Hamas-Fatah infighting, the group said. (BBC, Ha'aretz, *The Jerusalem Post*)

The IDF arrested 26 Palestinians from various areas in the West Bank. *Israel Radio* said that the arrested Palestinians were members of various Palestinian factions. Palestinians sources said that several Israeli military vehicles had broken into Qalqilya early morning, ransacking several houses. (Ma'an News Agency) The An-Nasser Salah Addin Brigades, the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committees, fired a home-made projectile at the Israeli town of Mivtahim, located east of the Gaza Strip. (Ma'an News Agency)

The following is a statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on the suicide bombing in Eilat, Israel:

"The Secretary-General condemns in the strongest possible terms today's suicide bombing at a bakery in Eilat, Israel, which killed three people and wounded another. Such acts of terrorism are a violation of international humanitarian law and can never be justified. The Secretary-General sends his deepest condolences to the families of the victims of this attack.

"The Secretary-General is also alarmed at announcements that further attacks against Israeli civilians are being planned. He calls for swift action by Palestinian security forces to bring to justice those responsible and prevent further attacks."

(UN News Centre, UN press release SG/SM/10862)

Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz instructed security forces to step up operations against the terror infrastructure in the wake of the Eilat bombing. According to *Israel Radio*, Mr. Peretz said that Israel would do everything it could to preserve the Gaza Strip ceasefire declared several months ago but would not stand aside and permit attacks against Israelis. "We will take the necessary steps. This is certainly an escalation," he said. Israeli Prime Minister Olmert vowed that Israel would "continue in our ongoing and unending struggle against terrorists and those who send them." Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said, "Israel has shown extraordinary restraint in order to give the Palestinians an opportunity to fight terror and stop the attacks. Unfortunately, the Palestinians failed to stop them" (Ha'aretz)

Fatah spokesman Ahmed Abdul Rahman condemned the bombing in Eilat, saying, "We are against any operation that targets civilians, Israelis or Palestinians." Yasser Abed Rabbo, spokesman for PA President Abbas, said, "We reject these acts and we do not believe that they are in the interest of the Palestinian cause." (BBC, Ha'aretz)

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Alvaro de Soto strongly condemned the attack, saying, "It was an attack on ordinary people as they went

about their daily lives. It can have no justification. I feel deeply for those killed and I share the pain of their families. I send them my deepest condolences.” (BBC)

White House Press Secretary Tony Snow read a statement, saying, “The United States strongly condemns the terrorist bombing in Eilat today, which resulted in the death of at least three civilians.” It also condemned “those Palestinian terrorist groups, including Hamas that condone these barbaric actions.” The statement

went on to say “the burden of responsibility for preventing terrorist attacks rests with the Palestinian Authority Government. Failure to act against terror will inevitably affect relations between that Government and the international community and undermine the aspirations of the Palestinian people for a State of their own.” (AFP, [www.whitehouse.gov/news](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news))

The German Presidency of the EU “condemned this attack in the strongest terms,” according to a statement by Foreign Ministry spokesman Jens Ploetner. “This attack is very clearly an attempt to destroy the hope for progress in Israeli-Palestinian relations,” he said. EU members Spain and France also added their voices, with Madrid expressing its “most forceful condemnation.” French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy said in a statement that “nothing can justify such an act of hatred.” (AFP)

*Israel Radio* reported that Egyptian security forces arrested a would-be suicide bomber in north Sinai, who had a note for his parents saying that he intended to carry out a suicide attack inside Israel. (Ha’aretz, *The Jerusalem Post*)

The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Mohammad Hussein issued an edict at a news conference in Ramallah banning internal fighting. “He who receives orders to kill should refrain from doing that. Spilling blood is forbidden,” he said. (Ha’aretz)

The Al Quds Brigades, the military wing of the Islamic Jihad, have announced responsibility for the launching of two home-made projectiles at the Israeli town of Kitzovim. (Ma’an News Agency)

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that between 10 and 23 January 2007, the crossings between the Gaza Strip and the outside world continued to operate on a less than satisfactory schedule. The Rafah crossing had been open only 11 per cent of the scheduled hours. The Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing, for goods between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, operated on only half the scheduled hours and not at full capacity. The Erez crossing, the only pedestrian crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel, remained closed to all Palestinian workers, except traders holding special permits and emergency humanitarian cases. (Ma’an News Agency, [www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int))

Palestinian lawyer Mustafa Al-Azmouti said 14 Hamas-affiliated ministers and members of the PLC would be tried before the Israeli military court of Salem. Those officials are from the northern West Bank governorates and include Finance Minister Omar Abdur-Razeq, and Jenin Mayor Hatem Jarar. (Ma’an News Agency)

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Israeli planes bombed at dawn a tunnel near the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing. No casualties were reported. A statement from the Israeli army said that they had targeted a tunnel intended for use by armed Palestinian groups to carry out “terror attacks” inside Israel in the “immediate future.” The aerial attack was authorized by the political echelon, the army said. (BBC, Ha’aretz, Ma’an News Agency)

A truce between the two main Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, came into effect at 0300 (0100 GMT), after being announced by PA Foreign Minister Mahmoud Al-Zahhar (Hamas). Mr. Al-Zahhar announced the nine-point ceasefire agreement flanked by Fatah representatives, after talks between Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh and a senior aide to PA President Abbas. Egyptian diplomats brokered the ceasefire which came after days of mediation. The two sides agreed to “pull all gunmen from the streets and remove checkpoints ... return all security forces to their positions and end all forms of tension.” Meanwhile, several firefights have broken out and a Hamas member had been shot dead by Fatah members. The shops, especially in downtown Gaza City, began to reopen. (BBC, Ma’an News Agency, Reuters, Xinhua, Ynetnews)

The following statement was issued on 30 January by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

“The Secretary-General has noted today’s announcement of an agreed ceasefire in Gaza, and commends Egypt for its continuing efforts to calm a volatile and worrying situation. He calls for all parties to abide by the terms of the ceasefire and to move quickly back to the process of national dialogue in the pursuit of national unity.”

(UN press release SG/SM/10864-PAL/2068)

PA Foreign Minister Mahmoud Al-Zahhar said that Egypt had suggested that a national army, representing all Palestinians from all political backgrounds and spectrums, be formed. The various Palestinian factions have welcomed the suggestion. Jamal Nazzal, one of Fatah’s spokespersons, said, “We are calling on everybody to unite their efforts to have the security bodies united under one leadership, no matter who the leadership be. What is important is to have one security body.” PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh called for reform of the security services in accordance with national criteria and far from partiality. (Ma’an News Agency, Xinhua)

PA President Abbas, after talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo, declared again the Auxiliary Forces under Hamas-led Interior Ministry as “illegitimate and illegal” and that “part of the force will be integrated into the regular Palestinian security forces.” According to the *MENA News Agency*, Messrs. Abbas and Mubarak held talks to discuss developments in the Palestinian arena and ways of reviving the peace process. Talks also focused on efforts by Egypt and other Arab countries to stop Palestinian infighting. (Xinhua)

Palestinian sources said Ahmed Qureia, former Prime Minister, would head the Fatah delegation following Saudi Arabia’s invitation to host a meeting of Palestinian factions. Khaled Mashaal, Hamas Political Bureau Chief, would head the Hamas movement. A meeting date was to be set in February. (Xinhua)

PA President Abbas condemned the suicide bombing in Eilat saying that it “does not benefit” Palestinians. After talks with President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo, he told reporters that he did not expect the bombing to disrupt the two-month-old ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said he planned to maintain the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and would not respond to the Eilat bombing with broad military offensives. (Ha’aretz, Ynetnews)

Japan said it “strongly condemns” the Eilat bombing, according to a Japanese Foreign Ministry statement. It “strongly urges the Palestinian Authority to take all the necessary measures to prevent suicide bombings from recurring and to control the extremists. Japan also calls on the Israeli Government to keep exercising its utmost self-restraint in dealing with this incident.” (AFP)

The Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, told Israeli Vice Premier Shimon Peres, who was visiting Doha, that Israel must talk to Hamas and that peace with the Palestinians would affect Israel’s relationship with the entire Arab world. Mr. Peres told the Emir that Hamas were the ones who would not talk to Israel. (Ha’aretz)

Russian Federation President’s Special Representative for the Middle East and Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov said that Russia fully supported lifting the economic blockade from the Palestinian Authority and was counting on the Quartet to make that decision. (Reuters, [www.interfax.ru](http://www.interfax.ru))

Some 700 Palestinians were stranded at the Iraq-Syria border, living in inhumane conditions in no-man’s land after fleeing the violence in Iraq, according to UNHCR spokesperson Jennifer Pagonis. A group of 356 have been living there since May and a second group of 340 were stuck on the Iraqi side of the border. (Ha’aretz, [www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int))

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Gunmen wounded a member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in a drive-by shooting in Gaza City. (Ha’aretz)

The IDF arrested 19 Palestinians in Jenin and Nablus. (Wafa)

“Last night, we started to implement the [ceasefire] agreement between Fatah and Hamas and the hostages on both sides have been exchanged,” said Ismail Radwan, a spokesman for Hamas. “Dozens of hostages have been released on both sides,” confirmed Fatah spokesman in the Gaza Strip, Tawfiz Abu Khousa. But while he said that the general atmosphere had improved, he complained that the Hamas-controlled Executive Force was causing “tensions and not helping the restoration of confidence” between the groups. (AFP)

The British House of Commons International Development Committee said in a report: "The international community's policy of isolating a democratically elected [PA] Government is questionable under conditions of ongoing conflict... The withholding of revenues by Israel and the boycott of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority by existing donors has led the Hamas Government increasingly to look elsewhere for financial support." ([www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk))

Prime Minister Olmert's office confirmed that the Government was looking into moving a stretch of its separation wall deeper into the West Bank but denied a report in *Ha'aretz* that the Prime Minister had already approved the new route. According to *Ha'aretz*, it would include the settlements of "Na'ale" and "Nili" and enclose some 20,000 Palestinians behind the barrier. Saeb Erakat, PA Chief Negotiator, said that the Israeli move "undermines everything we're doing to revive the peace process." "The wall is the continuation of unilateralism and dictation, and destroys the prospects of any real negotiations," he added. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

PA Minister of Health Bassem Naeem said that Prime Minister Haniyeh was expected to embark on a regional tour in March. (*AP*)

Malaysia's ex-premier Mahathir Mohamad announced he was forming an unofficial war crimes tribunal to focus on victims of abuse in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He said, "There will be people who take this thing seriously. This is not a show." (*AFP*)

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and his Indonesian counterpart, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, said like-minded Muslim countries hoped to gather soon to address festering conflicts in Iraq, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Lebanon. "The time has come for action," Mr. Musharraf said at a joint press conference. "There is no room for complacency because things are moving so fast, deteriorating so fast." (*AP, Kyodo*)

President Bush authorized the release of \$86 million to support the PA security forces. "The idea is to build the legitimate security forces, to help provide law and order in Gaza and the West Bank, fight terror, and to facilitate movement and access especially in Gaza," said Gordon Johndroe, National Security Council Press Secretary. "Our funds will be utilized exclusively for non-lethal supplies and training," he said. Hamas condemned the US decision as interference in Palestinian's internal affairs by "funding particular sides." "The US policy aims at colonizing the people and creates internal fighting to boost American presence in the region," said the statement. (*AFP, www.whitehouse.gov, Xinhua*)

A group of senior British MPs held private meetings in Ramallah with prominent Hamas members of the Palestinian Authority. (*The Independent*)

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