

Division for Palestinian Rights  
***Chronological Review of Events Relating to the  
 Question of Palestine***  
 Monthly media monitoring review  
 March 2006

***Monthly Highlights***

- IDF raid Jericho Palestinian Authority prison, take select prisoners. ([14 March](#))
- Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Cabinet sworn in by PA President Abbas. ([29 March](#))

**1**

Islamic Jihad's top military commander, Khaled Dahdouh, 45, was killed in a car explosion in the Gaza Strip. Two other people were wounded, according to hospital officials. Palestinian sources said the Israeli air force was responsible for the attack, but IDF denied involvement in the explosion. (*AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters*)

Israeli forces shot and critically wounded a 27-year-old Palestinian, Bilal Al-Najjar, from the Al-Fawwar refugee camp, south of Hebron, before arresting him. Israeli forces also arrested a 14-year-old child in the Old City of Hebron. (*Wafa*)

A 48-year-old Israeli settler from "Migdalim," south-east of Nablus, was shot and killed at a petrol station at the entrance to the settlement. Witnesses said the shooting had been carried out by two Palestinian gunmen, who fled the scene. Hours later, another Israeli was critically wounded in a drive-by shooting near the "Karni Shomron" settlement, east of Qaqilya. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for the first reported shooting incident. (*AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post, Reuters, Ynet*)

A Qassam rocket, launched from the northern Gaza Strip, landed in an open area near a kibbutz in southern Israel, causing no injuries or damage. The IDF responded by firing artillery at the area from where the rocket had been launched. (*Ynet, [www.idf.il](http://www.idf.il)*)

The IDF said it had arrested overnight a "wanted" Hamas member in the village of Ni'lin, west of Ramallah, and a "Tanzim" operative in Ramallah. (*[www.idf.il](http://www.idf.il)*)

In East Jerusalem, Israeli police arrested a newly-elected Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), Mohammed Abu Tir, and an associate on suspicion of conducting illegal political activity. Mr. Abu Tir had allegedly attempted to recruit hospital employees to take part in illegal activities. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

The director of the PA Lands Authority, Atef al-Khudari, was released after being held for two hours by kidnappers who had demands concerning a plot of land, the official said. (*AP*)

Following a meeting with her Austrian counterpart Ursula Plassnik in Vienna, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni reiterated that Israel would not transfer money owed to the Palestinian Authority. "We decided not to transfer the money to the Palestinians ... because we cannot be sure the money won't go to terrorist organizations," Ms. Livni said. Ms. Plassnik said the European Union could see "no reason" to change its stance, which was to "support the economic development" in the Palestinian territories. (*AFP*)

David Shearer, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Jerusalem, said in an interview that stocks of wheat, sugar and cooking oil were dwindling in the Gaza Strip and could begin to run out within days unless Israel reopened the main Karni (Al-Muntar) crossing for goods. He said the humanitarian conditions of Palestinians had deteriorated because of Israel's closure of the crossing and other security measures, adding, "This is getting to precarious levels." Israel closed the crossing for 21 days between 15 January and 5 February and again on 21 February after an unexplained explosion in the area. (*Reuters*)

**2**

An Israeli was stabbed by a Palestinian north of Jerusalem, Israeli security sources said. (*Ha'aretz*)

A Qassam rocket launched from the Gaza Strip landed in southern Israel. (*Ha'aretz*)

The IDF arrested five Palestinians in Hebron and Nablus and detained a 15-year-old in Tubas. (*Wafa*)

Mourners and militants attending the funeral of Islamic Jihad's top military commander in Gaza City, Khaled Dahdouh, demanded revenge against Israel. (*AP*)

Some 20 Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades gunmen fired shots in the air outside the PLC building in Ramallah to demand a greater role in decision-making

for Fatah, witnesses said. (*Reuters*)

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz ordered the Karni (Al-Muntar) crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel to remain closed. The passage had been closed since 21 February. (*Ha'aretz*)

The agriculture sector in the Gaza Strip was on the verge of collapse because of repeated Israeli closures of the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing, the Palestine Economic Development Company, which manages the greenhouses evacuated by Israeli settlers, said. (*AFP, Wafa*)

Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told reporters: "We will use an iron fist against any attempt to renew terror activity anywhere. There are no restraints on security forces to use any means necessary to stop terror attacks." (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

"Russia can present to the world a fairer and transparent vision of the Palestinian problem, as opposed to those whose positions are based only on the interests of Israel," Hamas Political Bureau Deputy chief Moussa Abu Marzouq said. (*AFP, RIA-Novosti*)

The Palestinian Ambassador to the Russian Federation, Bakir Abdel Munem, said, "Hamas ties the question of recognizing Israel as a State with the necessity to end the occupation of the Palestinian territories. At the same time, I think that Hamas may revise its stance in the interests of the entire Palestinian people." (*ITAR-TASS*)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni travelled to London for talks with Prime Minister Tony Blair, which were expected to focus on the EU funding for the PA. A UK Foreign Office spokesman, speaking on condition of anonymity, said future decisions on funding "will be taken in light of what decisions Hamas takes." (*AFP*)

PA President Mahmoud Abbas said he intended to transfer broad security powers to the future Hamas-led PA Cabinet, including the national defence branch, preventive security, the civilian police and civil defence. (*Ha'aretz*)

PA President Abbas met with Israeli Labour Party Chairman Amir Peretz. "Peretz started a diplomatic process with meetings in Morocco and Jordan, in an effort to form an axis in order to strengthen Abbas and make things easier for him in light of the victory of Hamas in the elections," a Labour spokeswoman said. PA President Abbas told reporters after the meeting, "We need calm to reach the final status negotiations because we and the Israelis are sick of wars. Israelis and the Palestinians need to view terror as the central factor impinging upon the future of the region."

Mr. Peretz said, "We have no war with the Palestinian people ... we are against collective punishment." (*Ha'aretz, Wafa*)

PA President Abbas told the *Al-Hayat* daily: "We have received indications of a certain Al-Qaeda presence in Gaza and the West Bank." A Hamas spokesman said that the group had no knowledge of such presence. (*AFP, Xinhua*)

Families of Israelis killed in suicide bombings petitioned the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in the US to have the nomination of the Palestinian film "Paradise Now" for the Oscar for Best Foreign Film withdrawn. (*AP*)

Defence for Children International said that since the start of 2006, over 230 Palestinian children had been arrested by the IDF, bringing the total number of children in Israeli custody to almost 400. ([www.dci-pal.org](http://www.dci-pal.org))

Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev said, "I don't agree with Hamas' decision not to recognize Israel, yet I affirm the necessity of respecting the Palestinian people's will." (*Wafa*)

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said that during his forthcoming visit, Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman would "come to salvage the peace process and restore the final settlement negotiations and endeavour to bring a halt to the ongoing Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people." (*International Press Centre (IPC)*)

In an interview with *Mayak* radio in the Russian Federation, PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh said: "[We] hope that the programme to train our military staff in Russia will resume." Regarding Israel's right to exist, he said: "We want Israel first to acknowledge our rights, allow our refugees to return, release imprisoned Palestinians, and acknowledge Palestine as a sovereign State with its capital in East Jerusalem." (*RIA-Novosti*)

The Russian Federation's Middle East Envoy, Alexander Kalugin, told *VTV*: "We're not going to put forward demands. We'll seek to convince [Hamas] that now is the time to take responsible decisions." ([www.ynetnews.com](http://www.ynetnews.com))

Hamas had been invited to South Africa for talks with officials, Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said. South African Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad said in a statement, "The proposed meeting [with Hamas] will take place within the context of ongoing efforts by South Africa under the presidential initiative to share our experiences in the transition from apartheid to democracy with both Palestinians and the Israelis." Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev expressed concern "that giving legitimacy to an unreformed Hamas could stifle the possibility that the movement will transform itself from a terrorist organization to a political party." (*AP, Ha'aretz, Pretoria News, Xinhua*)

3

Palestinian militants fired five rockets into Israel from the Gaza Strip; one person was treated for shock. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility. The IDF shelled the northern Gaza Strip. (*Ha'aretz*)

IDF troops shot and killed a 15-year-old Palestinian boy and wounded a second person in the Ein Beit Ilma refugee camp in Nablus. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

Talks were held in Moscow between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and a delegation from Hamas headed by Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal. "We conveyed to the Hamas officials the Quartet's position that the agreements laid down in the international mediators' statement in January 2006 must be fulfilled and Israel's right to be a partner in [peace] talks must be recognized, and violence renounced in addressing political issues," Mr. Lavrov said after the talks. "The Hamas delegation gave us firm assurances that its main aim is regional peace and preventing an explosion of the situation that would lead to an impasse. The obvious priority is to solve the most acute socio-economic problems of the Palestinian people.... The Hamas leaders said they would honour earlier agreements, including the [Road Map](#) and the Arab Peace Initiative ... but insisted [that] the moves must be reciprocal." Mr. Lavrov said. "We have agreed to continue contacts with the Hamas leadership, including after it has established the new line-up of the Parliament and ... Government," he added. He cautioned, however, that "there is a long way to go to resume the peace process." "They are ready to create a mechanism of international oversight [over the PA budget]," Mr. Lavrov was quoted as saying. No further details were provided. "Hamas confirmed its willingness not to withdraw from the March 2005 inter-Palestinian agreement on a ceasefire on the understanding that Israel will also refrain from use of force," a Foreign Ministry statement added. (*AP, [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru), RIA Novosti*)

After calling the Moscow negotiations "constructive and open," Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal said that any international aid would go to the Palestinian people and would be used to "bring life in Palestine to normal". "I want to say here in Moscow that if Israel declares readiness and shows commitment to withdraw from the lands occupied in 1968, ensure the return of refugees, dismantle settlements, demolish the [separation] wall, and release prisoners, our movement will make steps toward peace," he said, adding "We want peace in the region, but a peace based on justice and the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, this peace should be founded on the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territories and the end of the occupation." (*RIA Novosti*)

Speaking to reporters prior to his meeting with a Hamas delegation, Foreign Minister Lavrov said there was a "need for Hamas having been elected to a political body to transform itself into a political party and to be sure that the military wing of Hamas becomes a legitimate part of the Palestinian

security structures. We don't expect that Hamas will do all this and change itself overnight.... It will be a process", adding "I don't think Hamas will have ... any future if Hamas doesn't change," he added. Visiting Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashal said, "Our visit to Moscow is an important step to be heard by the international community... No preconditions have been set ahead of the visit.... We want peace for the region, but it can be secured only with the end of the occupation." "Hamas is fully ready to go forward as much as possible. Everything now depends on Israel's policies," he told *AFP*, adding "We don't intend to recognize Israel." The Hamas delegation will also meet Russia's lawmakers and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II. (*AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, RIA Novosti*)

"We believe parliamentary and party contacts with Hamas are premature at this point," said Konstantin Kosachev, Chairman of the Russian Duma International Affairs Committee, adding "Hamas is not a party so far; it is a movement, which has to make major changes to its political and ideological platforms to start contacts with other parties and parliaments." He said that although technically Russia did not recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization, its assessments of the movement's activities did not differ much from those of its Quartet partners. (*RIA Novosti*)

"We have to retain the international front that Israel has built up over the principles we have set out," Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told a Kadima Party conference. "In recent days, I received messages from Russian President Putin, which talk about restrictions of their contacts with Hamas and support for the principles we laid before the Palestinians and which have the support of the Quartet." (*Ha'aretz*)

Vice Premier Shimon Peres said he did not see any problem with meeting with PA President Abbas. He said he was in contact with Mr. Abbas, but declined to state whether the two planned to meet, *Israel Radio* reported. A top official in the Prime Minister's Office said that "no minister or Kadima member will meet with Abbas without the permission of Acting Prime Minister Olmert." (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Council of Europe Secretary-General Terry Davis described the Russian authorities' decision to invite a Hamas delegation to Moscow as quite constructive. A dialogue with Hamas members does not necessarily mean support for the movement's stand, he said. Mr. Davis said he did not rule out that a Hamas delegation could be invited to Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg, but so far no negotiations had been held on the matter, he said. (*Interfax*)

Following talks between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas, Russian President Vladimir Putin briefed French President Jacques Chirac, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi on the meeting. (*AFP*)

4

The Palestinian Legislative Council was forced to postpone its first scheduled session in Ramallah after Fatah gunmen threatened to storm the building and beat the newly appointed speaker, Aziz Dweik. A new session was set for 6 March. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

In a telephone call, President Putin briefed US President George W. Bush on Russia's latest Middle East initiatives, including the talks in Moscow with Hamas, the Kremlin said in a statement. "Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush agreed to continue coordinating on these and other current international issues, particularly during the upcoming visit of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Washington," the statement said. (*AFP*)

Fatah legislators met to decide on Hamas' invitation to join a coalition Government. Party officials said Fatah PLC members decided to reject the invitation for three reasons. Among the reasons was Hamas' failure to recognize past peace agreements with Israel. The officials also said they needed time to rebuild the party after their electoral defeat. (*Reuters*)

In Cairo, Arab foreign ministers, meeting ahead of an Arab summit in Sudan later this month, called on the international community to respect the Palestinian people's choice in electing Hamas to lead them. An Arab League official said the Arab ministers also called on the world to "desist from taking prejudiced positions and imposing biased conditions when dealing with the elected leadership." (*Reuters*)

5

In a closed meeting in northern Jerusalem, Hamas launched a programme for political and educational activities in East Jerusalem, including a decision to create a "Jerusalem Committee". Hamas parliamentary representatives in the city said that it would operate as an "alternative Orient House", as one Hamas member called it. The Committee would deal with issues related to land, house demolitions, education and the Al-Haram Al-Sharif. It planned to open offices at which East Jerusalem residents could get help with issues outside the jurisdiction of Israeli law. The event was attended by Hamas activists, representatives from Jerusalem's churches and Fatah members of the outgoing PLC. (*Ha'aretz*)

During a 40-minute telephone conversation, Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert told Russian President Putin that Russia's talks with Hamas in Moscow had hampered international efforts to isolate the group, according to a statement from Mr. Olmert's Office. He told Mr. Putin that it had been a mistake to invite the group before it changed its policies and accepted international demands to recognize Israel and renounce violence. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert, in a speech transmitted by satellite to a Washington conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), said that Israel would not wait for an agreement to determine its borders. Israel "will take the initiative if we find that the Palestinians are not ready, are not prepared, or not mature enough to be able to make the necessary adjustments within themselves in order to be ready for this challenge," he said. (*AP*)

6

Two teenage Palestinian brothers were killed in central Gaza when an explosive device went off, Palestinian police said. The Israeli military said it was not involved in the blast, which took place 4 kilometres from the Israeli border. Police said their initial investigation showed that the two brothers, aged 15 and 16, were playing in a small valley when a suspicious object exploded. It wasn't clear if the teenagers were handling the object or had stepped on it, police said. (*AFP*)

The IDF arrested seven armed Palestinians in raids across the West Bank. Two Hamas militants were arrested in Bethlehem and another group member was arrested in the village of Sillat al-Daher near Nablus. Later, the IDF said that four "Tanzim" members were caught in the village of Beit Rima near Ramallah. During a search operation, the IDF found an M-16 rifle in one of the houses. (*Ha'aretz*)

Gunmen opened fire on a vehicle in the West Bank, moderately wounding an Israeli Arab man, officials said. An Israeli police spokesman said the shooting took place in an area south of Hebron under Palestinian control. (*AP*)

Two Qassam rockets hit Israel's southern Negev, causing no damage or injuries. In response to the attacks, Israeli artillery fired back at launching sites in the northern Gaza Strip. (*Ha'aretz*)

An IDF aircraft fired missiles at a Peugeot van in Gaza City in which senior Islamic Jihad militants Munir Sukar and Ashraf Shaluf were travelling according to Israeli security services. The strike that killed both men also killed bystanders Raad Al-Batash, 8, Mahmoud Al-Batash, 15, and Ahmed A-Susi, 24. The mother of Raad and Mahmoud suffered light wounds. Eight other passers-by in Al-Shijaiyya neighborhood were also wounded, and Mr. Sukar's aunt, who lived nearby, died of a heart attack apparently brought on by the strike. (*Ha'aretz, Wafa*)

At least four Palestinians, including a child, were killed and several others wounded during an Israeli raid east of Gaza, medical sources said. The Ministry of Health identified two of the victims as Moneer Sokkar and Ashraf Shallof. Witnesses said an Israeli drone pounded a Peugeot vehicle, with at least one missile killing four and injuring at least 10 pedestrians in the Al-Shijaiyya neighbourhood east of Gaza City. They added that the child was one of the pedestrians while the three others were in the targeted vehicle. (*Wafa*)

Fatah PLC members walked out of the first working session of the new Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) meeting when the Hamas-dominated PLC refused to strike from its agenda a debate on nullifying laws passed by its predecessor. The Council continued the debate without the Fatah lawmakers, who hold 45 of the 132 House seats, and voted to cancel a series of presidential decrees which had been ratified by the outgoing

parliament in January. Fatah legislators said they would lodge an appeal with the Supreme Court. (AP, DPA)

Hamas is seeking to cancel a series of key appointments and proposals made by PA President Abbas and ratified by the outgoing Council at its last session held after the 25 January elections. (DPA)

Avi Dichter, key security adviser to Acting Prime Minister Olmert, said Israel would evacuate isolated West Bank settlements and unilaterally draw its own border with the Palestinians if Mr. Olmert's Kadima Party won the 28 March election. (AP)

*Ha'aretz* published details of emerging plans for proposals to halt the current trickle of about 7,000 Palestinian workers and traders allowed into Israel each day, to bar Palestinian travel between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and to gradually cut off the current supplies of power, water and fuel to Gaza from Israel. The paper said that under the proposals, Israel would allow the Palestinians to complete long-frozen projects to build their own air- and seaports in Gaza and start running their own imports and exports, rather than shipping through Israeli ports and crossings, as at present.

(*Ha'aretz*)

PLC Speaker Aziz Dweik told *Die Welt*, "A referendum would be a precondition for such a fundamental shift [the recognition of Israel].... If Israel starts to recognize our rights then we will begin with the recognition of Israel." (DPA)

In Stockholm, James Wolfensohn, the Quartet's Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, said aid to Palestinians must continue but could bypass a Hamas-led Cabinet unless it renounced violence and recognized Israel. "In the event there is no resolution ... any support that goes [to Palestinians] will have to find an alternative route," Mr. Wolfensohn told reporters. He said that the Quartet would await the result of the Israeli election on 28 March and future policy decisions by Hamas before deciding how to handle continued aid to Palestinians. "When we know what that is, the international community will have to adjust and try to find ways in which the Palestinian people can survive," he said. "We have to avert a humanitarian disaster," he added. Sweden has contributed 40 million kronor (US\$ 5.1 million) to the Quick Impact Programme launched by Mr. Wolfensohn to generate economic development in Gaza after Israel's withdrawal. (AP, *The Jerusalem Post*)

Hamas vowed to make efforts to solve the Palestinian prisoner issue. Hamas made the pledge during a demonstration held by Palestinian prisoners' families outside the International Committee of the Red Cross office in Gaza. The demonstrators urged the Government to work swiftly for the immediate release of their family members in custody. Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas, Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar and former Prisoners Affairs Minister Sufian Abu Zayda attended the gathering. (*Xinhua*)

A Hamas official in Gaza, speaking on condition of anonymity because the movement did not want formally to respond to the statement by Al-Qaida's Ayman al-Zawahri in support of Hamas that was aired on *Al-Jazeera* the day before, said, "Hamas believes that Islam is completely different to the ideology of Mr. al-Zawahri", adding, "Our battle is against the Israeli occupation and our only concern is to restore our rights and serve our people. We have no links with any group or element outside Palestine," the official said. (AP)

In Ramallah, PA President Abbas received a message from Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, delivered by the Russian Federation representative to the Palestinian Authority, Alexey Pogodin. The message discussed the results of the visit of a Hamas delegation to Moscow. (Wafa)

PA President Abbas met with the EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, Marc Otte, and discussed with him the latest developments in the Palestinian territory and the efforts made to form the new Government. (Wafa)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, in her first appearance before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, said that it was in Israel's interest to prevent a humanitarian crisis. Ms. Livni said that the worse the situation in the Palestinian Authority got, the more flexible the international community would be towards Hamas. Therefore, Livni added, Israel was considering working with humanitarian organizations assisting the Palestinian population. (*Ha'aretz*)

The World Bank announced that it had approved a \$42 million aid package to meet the immediate financing needs of the PA. ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org))

7

Israeli security forces arrested two armed Palestinian teenagers at the Qalandiya crossing. (*Ha'aretz*)

The IDF arrested two Palestinian teenagers in the Gaza Strip and 14 other Palestinians in West Bank cities. (Wafa)

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said in a press release that the previous day had been a sad one for the children of Gaza, after five children were killed by an explosive device and by an Israeli air strike. UNICEF called for all efforts to be made to protect youngsters from violence and to guarantee their rights to education, health and play. ([www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org), UN News Service, Wafa)

The IDF briefly closed the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip after Palestinian workers protested against security checks, IDF sources and witnesses said. (AFP)

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz told *Israel Army Radio* that if Hamas resumed suicide bombings in Israel, "No one is immune, [including] Ismail Haniyeh." He said the practice of targeted assassinations "is correct and will continue." "Mofaz's statements represent a clear and formal terrorism," Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri told reporters. (AP, *Xinhua*)

The armed wing of Hamas will not disband or join the PA security forces, a Hamas spokesman was quoted as saying. However, he noted that a year-long ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians was still in effect and indicated that Hamas would continue to respect it. (AP)

Acknowledging the IDF's failure to stop the firing of Qassam rockets into Israel, senior IDF officers told *The Jerusalem Post* that Israel would have no choice but to launch a massive ground operation into the Gaza Strip in the near future. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

PLO Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat demanded that Israel resume financial transfers to the PA. "These are not Israeli funds but these are taxes and surtax, which the Palestinian people pay for everything exported," he added. (*Xinhua*)

PA President Abbas said, "We reject unilateral solutions and a State with temporary borders." (AFP)

Vice Premier Shimon Peres said, "I believe that we in Israel must support [PA President Abbas] because we cannot give up on the 50 per cent of [Palestinians] who are moderate and say all of them are extremists." (*Reuters*)

"I do not see why we should impose sanctions when their brunt will be borne by the poor Palestinian people," French President Jacques Chirac said during his visit to Saudi Arabia. ([www.arabnews.com](http://www.arabnews.com))

French Foreign Ministry spokesman Jean-Baptiste Mattei told journalists, "We condemn the practice of extrajudicial executions, [which are] contrary to international law, and the operation carried out in Gaza which caused the deaths of three young Palestinians." (DPA)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said during his visit to Canada, "It is important that Hamas does not rule out the possibility of restarting the negotiation process. The leadership of the movement is considering the possibility of taking a position in support of the [Road Map](#). They are concerned by the fact that Israel has made numerous reservations concerning the Road Map that essentially prejudice final status issues" "We wanted to talk with Hamas so that they listened to the voice of peace," he told a news conference after a meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. "The talks will continue, but we have already heard that Hamas is ready to support the Road Map." ([www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru), RIA



Canadian Foreign Minister Peter MacKay said in a statement, "Any assistance to a new Palestinian Government will require that Government's commitment to the principle of non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the ... [Road Map](#) for Peace." (AP)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert said that his Kadima Party "won't invest in the coming years the same sums we once invested in construction and infrastructure development in areas over the Green Line". (AP, Ha'aretz)

A USAID report estimated agricultural losses in the Gaza Strip due to the closure of the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing at more than \$450,000 per day.

The Palestine Economic Development Company, which manages the greenhouses left behind by evacuated Israeli settlers, had lost more than \$120,000. (Reuters)

"We are willing to maintain and develop our friendly relations with Palestine," Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhao Xing told a press conference.

"China ... will earnestly consider future Palestinian requests for assistance." (AFP)

Hamas legislators said they would prevent the reopening of the Jericho casino on religious grounds. (AP)

8

Two Qassam rockets were fired into the western Negev; no injuries were reported. (Ha'aretz)

Eleven Palestinians were arrested by Israeli troops in Bethlehem, Nablus and Qalqilya, PA security sources said. (Wafa, Xinhua)

Israeli troops arrested in Jericho a 23-year-old Islamic Jihad militant who had been released from a PA prison on 9 February, together with 38 other militants. (AFP)

Israeli Labour Party Leader Amir Peretz said that a pledge to remove all unauthorized West Bank settlement outposts within a year would be a condition for the party joining a future coalition Government. (Ha'aretz)

PA President Abbas told reporters: "There has to be a change in Hamas' political views. It is now in the Authority and it should deal with all the Palestinian commitments made before the international community ... [this] should be gradual." (Xinhua)

Salah Bardawil, PLC Hamas faction speaker, said, "Hamas can't recognize a State that occupies our lands and keeps turning it into cantons and plans to confiscate it." He said that Hamas would not be committed to any of the signed agreements with Israel, adding "We managed to convince the Russians on two major issues. The first is that it is our right to resist the military occupation of our lands, and the second is that the Russians, as well as the world, have to respect our people's democratic choice." (Xinhua)

PA security sources warned that Israel was likely to step up targeted assassination attacks on senior members of Islamic Jihad and Hamas. (Xinhua)

Fatah and Hamas were scheduled to resume talks on a coalition Government. Mushir al-Masri, a spokesperson for Hamas, told reporters that the group wanted the Foreign Affairs, Interior and Finance portfolios. (AP, Xinhua)

John Dugard, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, suggested in a report that "the [Road Map](#) be revised to take account of present realities and the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice." He also said that the Road Map, which envisaged an end to the conflict by the end of 2005, was "hopelessly out of date." He also mentioned in his report that Israeli settlers were able to terrorize Palestinians with impunity, intimidating children on their way to school and destroying farmers' trees and crops. (AFP, BBC, Reuters, Ha'aretz)

German Foreign Ministry spokesman Martin Jaeger told a press conference that Germany always "condemned terrorist atrocities against Israel and recognizes Israel's right to protect its citizens. In our talks with our Israeli friends, we ask them to think about the consequences of their actions in terms of the peace process. Of course, we call on our Israeli friends to avoid any worsening of the situation there." (AFP, AP)

In an official statement circulated by the General Consulate of the United Kingdom in Jerusalem, the Foreign Office said that "Israel has the right to defend itself, but any actions it takes must be in accordance with international law and should be proportionate." The statement added that "We have repeatedly expressed our concern about Israel's policy on targeted killings, particularly the number of civilian casualties." (Wafa)

PA President Abbas will visit Vienna next Tuesday for talks with the Austrian EU presidency, according to an official announcement. (DPA)

PA President Abbas and Janez Drnovšek the visiting President of Slovenia agreed to open a Slovenian representative office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and a Palestinian diplomatic office in Slovenia. (Wafa)

9

Settlers assaulted and wounded Ghazala Barada'i in Hebron. She was heading home in the Jaber neighbourhood of the city when a group of settlers harassed and assaulted her. She was taken to a hospital. Meanwhile, settlers uprooted some 50 olive trees near the Yatta town of Hebron. (Wafa)

Israeli security officers arrested 14 "wanted" Palestinians in a raid in the West Bank. Eleven Palestinians, including three brothers, were arrested in the cities of Tulkarm, Nablus and Bethlehem. Three others were arrested in Hebron. (Ha'aretz, Wafa)

A Qassam rocket was fired from the northern Gaza Strip at the Israeli western Negev region, causing no injuries or damage. The IDF responded by firing artillery at the rocket launching sites. (Ynet)

Four members of a Palestinian family were wounded when an Israeli artillery shell hit their apartment in the northern Gaza Strip. (Wafa)

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights reported that eight Palestinians had been killed by IDF troops during the past week. (Wafa)

PA Deputy Minister of Economics Nasser Saraj anticipated that "In a few days, there'll be a flour shortage, and if that happens there'll be a conflagration here" due to the closure of the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing. The crossing was closed on 21 February. "We've reached marginal levels for flour and other staples in the Strip," he said. Flour, rice and sugar would run out by the end of the week. The closure also caused significant economic damage to Gaza Strip farmers and businessmen. Owners of greenhouses were losing about US\$ 500,000 per day during the peak of the harvest season. (Ha'aretz)

Israel reopened the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing, allowing trucks carrying food to enter the Gaza Strip, but trucks were still not allowed to leave for Israel; that was expected to resume by the weekend. Salim Abu Safiyah, Director of Security at Palestinian crossings, said the "opening will be only for five hours per day ... not enough to make up for the long closure time and the shortage in foodstuffs in the Gaza Strip." More than 500 tonnes of produce grown in the Gaza Strip greenhouses had to be destroyed a week earlier because of the closure. (DPA, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

Palestinians have been complaining in recent months that IDF soldiers at the Taysir checkpoint in the West Bank's Jordan Valley delayed their passage on purpose and without concrete reasons. According to Palestinians, the troops denied passage to trucks carrying farm produce farther into the West Bank, directing drivers to a distant checkpoint. Farmers said that following intervention by Ha'aretz, trucks with produce could now enter the West Bank through the Taysir checkpoint, but civilians were still being delayed for as long as two hours without reason. The delays included sending passengers back for hitherto unnecessary documents and taking away ID cards and not giving them back for hours. (Ha'aretz)

In an interview (to appear in its entirety in Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post on 10 March), Acting Prime Minister Olmert said that, if elected, by 2010 he "would get to Israel's permanent borders, whereby we will completely separate from the majority of the Palestinian population and preserve a large and stable Jewish majority in Israel." He envisioned the borders to include "Gush Etzion," the "Jerusalem envelope," "Ma'ale Adumim," the

“Ariel region” and the “Jordan River as a security border.” He pledged to build the “E1” section (between “Ma’ale Adumim” and Jerusalem) within the next four years. Six months ago, he had confirmed that Israel had frozen its building plans due to American pressure. Mr. Olmert said that if he won the March elections, he would not meet with PA President Abbas, saying, “If the Government is a Hamas one, what political purpose can it serve?” (AFP, AP, Ha’aretz, The Jerusalem Post)

Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat urged Mr. Olmert to return to talks with the Palestinians. “Unilateralism and [dictating] will only add to the complexities and will not solve problems.” (AP)

Addressing the Conference of Palestinian National Water Supplies Council, outgoing PA Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia said Israel still prevented Palestinians from accessing their right to water supplies. He said Israel prohibited Palestinians from digging new wells in the northern and western basin of the West Bank, causing serious suffering for the Palestinian people. (Wafa)

PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh said that a Hamas delegation would visit Saudi Arabia seeking political and economic support. He also said that the delegation would ask Saudi Arabia to help formulate a positive Arab position towards Hamas during an Arab summit to be held in Khartoum in late March. (Reuters)

Leaders of Fatah and Hamas announced that they had failed in their second meeting in a day to agree on how to form a national unity Cabinet. Meetings had been held in Gaza City between Azzam el-Ahmad, head of the Fatah bloc in the PLC, and his Hamas counterpart, Mahmoud al-Zahar, and between PA President Abbas and Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh. Mr. Ahmad said, “There are still differences in our views, mainly on the political programme of the new cabinet and also on accepting the letter of commission that [President Abbas] handed to [Ismail Haniyeh].” He said that one of the major issues that Hamas still refused to accept was the declaration of independence that the PLO made in 1988, in Algeria. In a meeting with Mr. Haniyeh, Mr. Abbas indicated that he was ready to grant Hamas an additional two weeks to form a Government, according to his spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeina. (AFP, DPA)

## 10

Israeli forces arrested at least 15 Palestinians in the West Bank: 2 in Nablus, 4 in Bethlehem, 7 in Qalandiya, and 2 in Ramallah. (Xinhua)

Four Qassam rockets were fired at Israel, causing no injuries or damage. Palestinian police officers discovered and neutralized two Qassam rockets ready for use in the northern Gaza Strip. (The Jerusalem Post, Ynet)

An anti-tank rocket was fired at an IDF vehicle near the border fence between Israel and the northern Gaza Strip. There were no injuries. (The Jerusalem Post)

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz ordered the army to impose a full closure on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the Jewish Purim holiday, from Saturday night until 15 March, due to fears of terrorist attacks. No Palestinian workers and merchants would be allowed to enter Israel. (AFP, AP, DPA, Ha’aretz, The Jerusalem Post)

PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh submitted to PA President Abbas a draft document outlining his proposals for the next Government’s programme as the two held talks in Gaza City, according to a senior Palestinian official. (AFP)

In an interview with The Jerusalem Post, Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert said, “Whoever is involved personally and directly in terror is a target.

We haven’t forgotten that [PA Prime Minister-designate] Haniyeh was an aide to Sheikh Yassin, and Mr. Yassin was targeted because he was involved in terror. ... So if Haniyeh commits acts of terror, he is opening himself up to the possibility of being targeted. I hope he doesn’t.” (AFP)

A Hamas delegation led by Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal held talks with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saoud al-Faisal and intelligence chief Prince Muqrin bin Abdul-Aziz in Riyadh. “They affirmed that political and financial aid to the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian people would continue... We did not go into numbers, but they promised excellent support,” delegation member Ezzat El-Resheq said. (AFP, BBC, Reuters)

At an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers held in Salzburg, Austria, Austrian Foreign Minister and current EU President Ursula Plassnik said “Following the election victory of Hamas, we face a new and difficult situation on the ground in the Middle East, which calls for careful evaluation and monitoring. Business as usual is not an option in these circumstances; when Hamas won the elections, we made our message very clear both in the European Union and within the international community. This message has not changed... Our aim is non-violence including the laying down of arms, recognition of Israel’s right to exist and fulfilment of the existing agreements.” During the same meeting, EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner told reporters, “We want to remain a reliable partner for the Palestinian people, but we will not go soft on our principles... Money will not flow to the new Authority unless it seeks peace by peaceful means.” ([www.eu2006.at](http://www.eu2006.at), AFP, AP, DPA)

## 11

Five Palestinians in Hebron were shot and wounded by Israeli soldiers with rubber-coated metal bullets. (IPC, Wafa)

A Qassam rocket landed south of the Israeli town of Sderot. A 13-year-old girl was treated for shock. Another rocket landed in an open area in the western Negev. (Ha’aretz, Ynet)

Palestinian officials said that PA President Abbas had told Hamas that its response to his call to follow his peace agenda in government was too vague, and that he had given the group two more weeks to clarify its position before presenting an administration to the Palestinian Legislative Council for a confidence vote. (Reuters)

PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh said that most of the ministers in a new PA Cabinet would be “technocrats, independents and experts” drawn from outside the PLC. Hamas spokesman Salah Bardawil said the group had sent letters to all parties outlining its political programme.

“We gave them two days to evaluate and study this programme,” Mr. Bardawil said, adding that a final round of talks with representatives from all parties would be held on 13 March. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Independent Palestine, a party led by human rights activist Mustafa Barghouti, were expected to join the Cabinet, according to Mr. Bardawil. (AP, Reuters)

Quartet Envoy James Wolfensohn said in a meeting with his staff that he was unlikely to agree to remain in his post beyond 30 April if he did not receive a new mandate spelling out Quartet policy and his role in it once a Hamas Government was in power. Mr. Wolfensohn said he had agreed to the Quartet’s request to extend his work another month, through April, to avoid giving the wrong signal by shutting down his office just after the Israeli election on 28 March. “It would be irresponsible to shut down the office three days after the Israeli vote ... But I also think it would be irresponsible to keep it open further without a clear Quartet decision on policy toward the Palestinian Authority in the current circumstances,” he said.

An official close to Mr. Wolfensohn said that he had been frustrated by the US Administration’s inability to ensure that Israel would keep its promises of improved access in and out of the Gaza Strip for people and goods. The Israelis, citing security concerns, had scrapped their agreement for a regular bus convoy for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to travel to the West Bank. (The New York Times, Reuters)

## 12

Three Qassam rockets landed in Israel’s western Negev area: one in an open area, causing no injuries or damage, and the other two damaged greenhouses. (Ynet)

Israeli soldiers arrested two Palestinians carrying an explosive device weighing 15-20 kgs. at the Beit Iba crossing, west of Nablus. (Ha’aretz,

Ynet, [www.idf.il](http://www.idf.il))

Israeli settlers uprooted a number of olive trees on over 200 dunums of land owned by Palestinians in Hebron. (Wafa)

In the proposed platform submitted to PA President Abbas on 10 March and published today, Hamas said that armed resistance was a legal right and a method of achieving Palestinian rights. On the past agreements with Israel, the platform said, "The cabinet would deal with the reality resulting from previous accords reached between the PA and the [occupying] State.... It is the right of the new Cabinet to reconsider these accords on the basis of respecting international law and to implement them in order to protect the rights and interests of our Palestinian people." Hamas also said it would "consider a mechanism for negotiations" if Israel recognized the Palestinian people's national rights and withdrew from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. (DPA)

Israeli Vice Premier Shimon Peres held unannounced talks in Jordan with PA President Abbas, the Prime Minister's Office confirmed. (AFP)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told reporters en route to Indonesia: "We are looking at ways to even increase our humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people during this period of time, but there are important choices that the Palestinian people face concerning the [Road Map](#) and the Quartet requirements." (Reuters)

13

Israeli forces arrested 13 "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank: two "Tanzim" militants in Bethlehem, three Hamas members and an Islamic Jihad member in Qabatiya, south of Jenin, a Palestinian in Jenin, five Palestinians in Ramallah, and another in Khirbet Qaliya. (Ha'aretz)

The IDF arrested five Palestinian infiltrators from the West Bank and another five near the Kissufim crossing trying to cross the Gaza Strip border fence. (Ha'aretz)

Israeli settlers wounded three Palestinians in Hebron, including two women. (Wafa)

The US Government planned to curtail contacts with Fatah and other parties if they joined a PA Cabinet led by Hamas, diplomatic sources said. (Reuters)

A senior State Department official said on condition of anonymity that some of the \$50 million that the United States had asked the PA to return might be reprogrammed for use by other organizations, including the UN. This could occur even if Hamas refused to meet the condition set by the Quartet. (International Herald Tribune)

Speaking to reporters after a meeting with Austrian President Heinz Fischer in Vienna, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak urged both Israel and Hamas to accept the need for direct talks, saying, "There have to be changes by both sides to be able to conduct negotiations after the formation of the next [Palestinian] Government." On the issue of the EU aid to Palestinians, Mr. Mubarak said, "If this aid is cut off, we have to brace ourselves for effects on the whole [Palestinian] people and [for] terrorism [to] increase." (AP)

"Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced to his Palestinian counterpart Nasser Al-Kidwa the payment of \$10 million in emergency aid," the PA Foreign Ministry said. (AFP)

France confirmed that President Chirac would meet PA President Abbas on 17 March. (Xinhua)

14

Six imprisoned senior Palestinian militants surrendered to the IDF following a 9 1/2-hour siege of a Jericho prison by IDF troops. The prisoners had been held there under United States and British supervision, until the two countries withdrew their monitors. The siege ended with two Palestinian policemen killed and several others wounded. The IDF also arrested 250 Palestinians, primarily policemen, but most of them were expected to be freed shortly. In addition to PFLP leader Ahmed Saadat, accused by Israel of ordering the killing of Tourism Minister Rehavam Zeevi in 2001, and other PFLP prisoners, the IDF also seized Fuad al-Shubaki, a member of Fatah's Revolutionary Council, who had allegedly financed an illegal weapons shipment to the PA several years ago. (BBC, Reuters, AP, DPA, Ha'aretz)

Some 15,000 Palestinians marched through Gaza City to protest the Jericho raid. Some entered the British Cultural Centre in Ramallah, set fire to the British Council office in Gaza City, and broke into an office used to teach English and smashed furniture. A crowd also gained access to an empty European Union office in Gaza City, smashing windows and replacing the EU flag with a militant banner. "There are no red lines; any European is subject to kidnapping and killing," shouted PFLP militants, firing in the air. "We will have a very powerful response not only for the Israelis but also for the British and Americans who withdrew their protection," the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades warned. After a Red Cross official and a Swiss national were kidnapped and two French female aid workers with Médecins du Monde were taken hostage, the Red Cross and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) temporarily withdrew their foreign staff from the area. Gunmen fired on a jeep carrying UN officials and also on a convoy of foreigners being evacuated. There were no casualties, PA security sources said. Three foreigners and a translator were also kidnapped at gunpoint from a hotel and PFLP militants kidnapped an American citizen who was rescued by PA security forces. The Gaza City police chief said PA security forces would be ordered to open fire on anyone attempting to abduct foreign workers. (AP, AFP, BBC, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post, [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org))

Israeli bulldozers broke ground to start work on a police station near the "Ma'aleh Adumim" settlement, part of the frozen "E1" project to connect the enclave to East Jerusalem, Channel 2 TV reported. (Reuters)

Israel closed the Al-Muntar (Karni) cargo crossing between the Gaza Strip completely, citing unspecified security warnings. (AP)

Israel is preventing some 2,000 Palestinians who had left the Jordan Valley from returning to the area in an effort to keep them from demanding their land back. (Ha'aretz)

The following statement was issued by the Spokesman for the Secretary-General:

"The Secretary-General is deeply concerned at today's violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in which several people, including Palestinian police officers, have been killed, and a number of international personnel have been kidnapped. He calls for an immediate end to the violence, respect for civilian lives, and urgent steps to restore calm. The Secretary-General also calls for the immediate release of those who have been kidnapped and full respect of the safety of international personnel on the ground."

(UN press release SG/SM/10374)

In a statement to the press made by the Security Council President after a closed-door briefing by Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari, the Council called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and take urgent steps to restore calm and to release those who had been kidnapped in the aftermath of the IDF siege of a Jericho prison. Mr. Gambari said that the UN had evacuated all international staff from the Gaza Strip, restricting staff movement in the West Bank. Other international organizations took similar measures. (AFP, UN News Centre)

The Permanent Observer of Palestine to the UN, Riyad Mansour, said the "clear aggression" displayed by Israel needed to be unequivocally condemned by the international community. "It is the business of the Security Council to tell the Israelis that they cannot conduct themselves in this manner," Mr. Mansour said. (AFP)

UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said in a statement to the House of Commons: "It is the prime responsibility of the Palestinian Authority to ensure the personal security of the United States and United Kingdom [Jericho prison] monitors ... these conditions have not been met and we have



terminated our involvement with the mission today, March 14.” US State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack said the US had been in touch with both sides to urge calm. “We want to see this resolved as peacefully as possible,” he said, adding that the monitors had been withdrawn out of concern for their safety. (*AFP, Ha'aretz*)

In the British House of Commons, Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague said that the UK and US monitors' safety was paramount, but questioned whether sufficient consideration had been given to the consequences of their sudden withdrawal. Labour MP Gerald Kaufman warned the Israelis about creating “their own do-it-yourself ghetto behind a wall encroaching deeply into Palestinian territory” and maintaining illegal Israeli settlers. Continuing those actions, together with “pre-election stunts” like the Jericho episode, meant the “chances for peace will be impossible and support for Hamas will rise still further,” Mr. Kaufman said. (*BBC*)

“President Abbas strongly condemns this Israeli attack and holds the American and British sides fully responsible for any harm that befalls [Ahmed] Saadat and his colleagues,” Mr. Abbas said in a statement. “We call for an immediate stop to the military operation in Jericho and are still bound to the agreement reached in 2002 between the Palestinian Authority on the one hand, and the US and Britain on the other,” PA Spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said. PA President Abbas had contacted Quartet leaders, Mr. Rudeineh said. “We demand that the US Administration immediately intervene to prevent [IDF] from attacking Jericho Central Prison,” he added. PA President Abbas said he would ensure that six senior inmates would remain in jail if Israel withdrew its forces, Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Beilin indicated. (*AFP, Ha'aretz, Wafa*)

Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa said that Israel had coordinated its operation to capture Ahmed Saadat with the United Kingdom and the United States, who withdrew monitors from the Jericho jail ahead of the raid. Mr. Moussa said he was in touch with Arab and international leaders, including UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to “bring [a] swift and complete end to this dangerous and strange (Israeli) intervention.” (*DPA, Reuters*)

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal urged Palestinians to rally at the Jericho jail and warned Israel against harming PFLP leader Ahmed Saadat. “Israel assumes complete responsibility for its actions, and the PFLP's retaliation will be severe if Israel assassinates its Secretary-General,” Maher Taher, one of the group's leaders, said. “This operation, which is a violation of international agreements, is a clear message to the world. The Americans and British who promised to provide adequate protection for the prison turned out to be doing the enemy's work,” said another PFLP leader, Jamil Majdalawi. (*AP, AFP, Xinhua*)

The European Coordinating Committee of NGOs on the Question of Palestine condemned the Jericho prison raid. ([www.palestinesolidarity.org/](http://www.palestinesolidarity.org/))

PA President Abbas met Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel in Vienna for talks on ways to continue financial aid to the PA after Hamas' election victory. “There will be one law, one Legislative Council,” he said, adding that he was speaking with Hamas to find a “shared point of view.” (*AFP*)

Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert pledged to annex the “Ariel” West Bank settlement. “The Ariel block will be an integral part of Israel, whatever happens,” he said. “By the end of the year we plan to finish the security fence,” he added. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said after meeting his Syrian counterpart: “Russia and Syria are doing and will continue to do all that is necessary to ensure that the activities of Hamas are heading towards the principles formulated by the international community ... towards the steps laid down by the Quartet of international mediators.” (*Reuters*)

UNICEF said that it was short of money needed to help young Palestinians eat, attend school and shield themselves from pervasive Middle East violence. In a [report](#) to donors, UNICEF said it urgently needed US\$ 6.3 million to address “a sharp deterioration in the humanitarian situation” in the Palestinian territories. (*Reuters*)

## 15

Three Palestinian youths were injured as settlers opened fire on them in Nablus. Witnesses said settlers also threw a bomb towards the Palestinians Boys' High School in Orta. Medical sources said two of the Palestinians had shrapnel in their faces while the third had a metal bullet lodged in his left leg. (*Wafa*)

A Qassam rocket landed in an open field in western Negev. No injuries or damage were reported. Another two Qassam rockets fired from the Gaza Strip landed near Sderot and west of Kfar Aza. An armed Palestinian trying to enter Israel was caught near the Kissufim crossing. Security forces said the West Bank closure would be extended until 18 March. (*Ha'aretz*)

IDF soldiers arrested 11 Palestinians in the West Bank cities of Jenin, Hebron, Bethlehem and Qalqilya. (*Wafa*)

Israeli border guards shot dead a Palestinian in Ramallah. An IDF spokesman said Palestinians threw three Molotov cocktails at border police. Palestinian security sources identified the man as Khaled Issa Atia, 19. He was killed by a single bullet to the right shoulder. Palestinian security forces said four young stone throwers were also wounded in the same incident. In the Gaza Strip, Hamas member Mohammed Abu Assi, 19, was killed when explosives he was handling blew up, according to medical and security forces. (*AFP*)

Palestinians released the last four foreigners seized a day earlier to protest the Israeli raid on the Jericho prison. The four included a South Korean journalist, two French citizens and a Canadian, who were escorted by Palestinian security officials into the headquarters of the Palestinian Preventive Security Agency in Gaza City. A total of 11 foreigners had been seized after the Jericho raid. (*AP*)

Israel released most of the Palestinians it had arrested in the raid on the PA's Jericho prison. After screening 327 detainees, the army decided to keep about 40 for further interrogation. Among them were the six men on Israel's wanted list who had been the specific target of the operation. The six men were transferred to a Shin Bet facility and were being interrogated separately. A British lawyer representing PFLP leader Ahmed Saadat complained that she was being prevented from meeting with her client. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israeli officials said they were determined to put the Palestinian prisoners seized from the Jericho jail on trial for the killing of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavan Zeevi, but would first have to overcome some legal hurdles. Justice Minister Tzipi Livni said, “I have no doubt that they will stay with us for a long time.” (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

PA President Mahmoud Abbas cut short a European tour and returned to the West Bank. He visited the Jericho prison attacked by the IDF, calling the raid an “unforgivable crime” and an insult to the Palestinian people. Palestinians held a strike, closing shops across the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the Gaza Strip, schools opened, but most students left early. Nablus residents observed a general strike. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

European Parliament President Josep Borrell said he had met with PA President Abbas for brief talks to voice support for “the majority of Palestinians who still support a negotiated solution to the conflict.” He described Mr. Abbas as a “man who has tried to achieve peace through negotiations since the 1970s.” He denounced the violence following the Israeli attack on the Jericho prison, describing it as “deeply worrying.”

Mr. Abbas had promised to return to Strasbourg, probably at the April session, according to Mr. Borrell. (*DPA*)

The EU condemned the widespread violence in the West Bank, but said that it would not affect urgent aid granted to Palestinians in February before a Hamas-led Government took office. EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said, “The €120 million is there. ... We want to meet the challenges of the Palestinian people.” She also said that the EU would “leave the door open” to the possibility of continuing financing to the PA, but reiterated that any long-term EU aid would depend on how the Hamas-led Government would act. (*Ha'aretz*)



British Prime Minister Tony Blair defended the decision to remove the US and UK monitors from the Jericho jail, saying that it had come after careful consideration and months of warning about problems at the jail. "The idea that this was ... uncalled for or not thought through is simply wrong," he told the weekly House of Commons Question Time. PA President Abbas acknowledged that the US and Britain had told the PA of their intention to withdraw their observers from the Jericho prison, but said that no specific date had been set for their departure. He indicated that the Israelis had had prior knowledge of the departure of the US and British monitors and that "Israeli tanks were at hand to carry out the operation immediately after the observers' departure." He added, "... they did not coordinate with us and caught us by surprise..." *The New York Times* website carried a copy of a recent [letter](#) on the subject from the US and UK Consuls General addressed to PA President Abbas. (DPA, Ha'aretz, The New York Times)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was quoted by the daily *Vremya Novosti* as saying that he expected Hamas to move closer to meeting international demands within two weeks – including setting up foreign aid monitoring and recognizing Israel. He warned against international attempts to isolate Hamas, saying they could lead to chaos. Palestinian Ambassador to Russia Baker Abdel Munem said at the talks in Moscow that he did not rule out the possibility of talks between Hamas and Israel. "Hamas holds a pragmatic position on this issue, and understands what is going on," he said. (Ha'aretz, RIA Novosti)

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mikhail Kamynin called on Israel and the PA to do everything possible to prevent the situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from spiralling out of control. Mr. Kamynin said Russia remained committed to resolving the conflict through the Quartet and the Security Council. (RIA Novosti)

King Abdullah II of Jordan called Israel's Jericho prison raid "an unfortunate escalation" that posed a threat to the future of the peace process and to security in the region. He said it "created tension and lessened the chances for an adequate climate to forge ahead with the peace process." He urged Hamas "to deal with regional and international realities." Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit warned Israel against "adopting unilateral measures, using force and obstructing Palestinian security men [from] carrying out their duties." He also called on all Palestinian groups to exercise self-restraint. (Ha'aretz)

In a [statement](#) before the US Foreign Relations Committee, James Wolfensohn, Quartet Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, said that the Quartet had failed to make clear what he should do, now that he was effectively banned from having contacts with a future Palestinian Government to be led by Hamas. "The Quartet itself must continue, but the role of a disenfranchised leader of that Quartet does not seem to me to be a particularly attractive thing to spend your life doing ... so I am considering [leaving] – but have not yet decided," he said. Mr. Wolfensohn's aides said he might leave his post at the end of April 2006. (Reuters)

PA Senior Ministry of Finance official Jihad Al-Wazeer said that the PA had started paying overdue salaries to an estimated 140,000 workers and security personnel. He added that it was unclear where he would get the funds to cover the March payroll. (Reuters)

Israeli State Prosecution opposed the resumption of construction in the "Matityahu-East" neighbourhood in the settlement of "Upper Modi'in." However, it would allow buildings that had already been completed to be inhabited. The State's stand was presented at a High Court hearing on a petition submitted by Peace Now against illegal construction. (Ha'aretz)

In a [report](#), the World Bank warned that the cutting off of international aid would devastate the Palestinian economy and that three quarters of the Palestinians would live in poverty by 2008. The economy would contract by 27 per cent and income levels would drop by 30 per cent this year alone. Unemployment would reach nearly 50 per cent by 2008. (AP)

Indian Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahamed said that Chinmaya Gharekhan, Special Envoy to West Asia, was to leave shortly to have discussions with the Hamas leadership. Mr. Gharekhan would also visit Israel. (Hindustan Times)

## 16

An Israeli soldier was killed in a fierce gun battle after IDF troops surrounded two houses in Jenin. The battle between the troops and the Palestinians left one Israeli soldier dead and forced five Palestinians to surrender. The Israeli soldier was identified as Sgt. Ido Shapira, 20. In Nablus, two Israeli motorists were wounded after gunmen fired shots at them near a settlement. (AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post)

IDF troops arrested 24 Palestinians overnight in the West Bank cities of Jenin, Qalqilya, Nablus, Bethlehem and Hebron. (Ha'aretz, Wafa)

The IDF raided the town of Jenin and surrounded two hideouts, demanding the surrender of five Palestinians who were members of Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. A gunfight erupted, and an Israeli soldier was killed. The military was checking the possibility that he had been hit by Israeli gunfire. (AP)

The PLO Executive Committee, headed by President Abbas, denounced the Israeli attack on the Jericho prison and the capture of the Secretary-General of the PFLP, Ahmed Saadat, and Maj.-Gen. Fuad al-Shubaki. [Chief] Negotiator Saeb Erakat told reporters, "What happened in Jericho and the crimes against the Palestinian people ... is a pre-planned scheme to destroy the Palestinian Authority. This is the basis of Israeli policy. The international community continues to deal with Israel even though it is a State above the law." Mr. Erakat spoke after the PLO Executive Committee had discussed Mr. Saadat's capture, and had held Britain and the United States responsible and called on them to work with Israel to return the captured prisoners. (AFP, Wafa)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni rejected criticism by PA President Abbas against Israel following the 14 March raid on the PA's prison in Jericho.

Ms. Livni said, "The responsibility for Abu Mazen's [Mr. Abbas] powerlessness lies with Abu Mazen; it is not always Israel's fault - it mainly depends on the man's actions and shortcomings," Livni said. She emphasized that Israel's raid in Jericho had not been coordinated with Britain and the United States. "The Palestinians did not meet the [2002] agreement's terms in all matters related to conditions at the prison," she said. (Ha'aretz, [www.ynetnews.com](http://www.ynetnews.com))

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that the US had never been responsible for security at the PA's Jericho prison. She said that under a 2002 agreement between the US, the UK, Israel and the Palestinians, security at the prison was the responsibility of the Palestinians. "I want to make it very clear that the role of the United States and [the] role of Great Britain ... was to inform the parties, as was required by the agreement of 2002, that monitors could no longer maintain their monitoring position in the prison and that they would be leaving," she said. In a telephone conversation a day earlier between Secretary Rice and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Mr. Lavrov said they had agreed on the "need to see the Palestinians and the Israelis show restraint" and that the Quartet should make an "additional effort" to ease tensions. (AFP)

After three days of discussions, the United Nations Security Council dropped a statement condemning the latest violence in the West Bank and Gaza after Qatar, a Council member, requested on behalf of the Palestinian Authority that the statement include a demand for the release of the prisoners detained by Israel and a condemnation of the Israeli attack on the prison. (DPA)

Israeli State Prosecutor Eran Shandar, after a meeting with the Attorney General's Office and Justice Ministry officials, ruled that there was no obstacle to the trial, in Israel, of the five jailed Palestinian PFLP members seized in the raid on the Jericho prison. "Taking into account past

agreements with the Palestinian Authority and the circumstances, they can be tried in Israel," a Justice Ministry spokesman said, adding "They should preferably be judged in a civil rather than a military court. A final decision on whether to proceed to trial will be taken after the completion of the inquiry." (AP)

The Quartet met in Brussels to discuss how to extend aid directly to the Palestinian people and bypass the Palestinian Authority. Officials also said that the Quartet had affirmed their line that any Hamas-led Government must recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept past agreements or lose international assistance. (AP, Reuters)

In a telephone conversation, French President Jacques Chirac discussed with PA President Abbas the Israeli raid on Jericho and the reprisal against foreigners. Mr. Chirac praised Mr. Abbas' efforts to convince Hamas to renounce violence and accept interim peace accords with Israel, Mr. Chirac's Office said in a statement. (AP)

In Ramallah, PA President Abbas received the United States Consul General in Jerusalem, Jacob Walles. President Abbas briefed Mr. Walles on the Israeli raid on the Jericho prison and the arrest of Ahmed Saadat and Fuad al-Shubaki, among others. Mr. Abbas told Mr. Walles that the captured prisoners should immediately be handed over to the Palestinian Authority. (Wafa)

Hamas ended coalition talks after failing to secure a single party as a partner, but said it would form a Cabinet on its own. The new Cabinet, to be presented to the PLC next week, must also win the approval of PA President Abbas. The main sticking point in Palestinian coalition talks had been Hamas' refusal to recognize the 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence. Hamas PLC member Mushir Al-Masri said that the talks marked the final round of negotiations. However, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which had been considered a likely coalition partner, said that it had not found common ground while Fatah said it would not join a Hamas Cabinet. Mr. Al-Masri said Hamas would present a Cabinet of independents, technocrats and Hamas politicians to the PLC on 20 March, adding that Hamas would reserve the posts of Foreign Minister, Interior Minister and Finance Ministers for its own members. (AP)

David Shearer, Head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said that all the aid agencies planned to return to their posts in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. "We're letting emotions calm down and once they do, we'll look at redeploying again. Grant Leaity, Programme Coordinator in the Gaza Strip for Médecins sans Frontières, said his team planned to return after the weekend. (The Jerusalem Post)

At the weekly security meeting of the Defence Ministry in Tel Aviv, Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz decided to open the Kerem Shalom crossing in southern Gaza, as a replacement for the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing, closed due to security reasons. As it was expected that the "Karni" crossing would remain closed for at least another several days, Mr. Mofaz decided to transfer humanitarian equipment to the Palestinians in Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing, which will open on 19 March. The Defence Ministry pointed out that dozens of trucks can pass through the Kerem Shalom crossing daily, enabling Palestinian agricultural exports to Israel reach their destination. (Ynetnews.com)

PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh said in an interview with CBS News that he was never personally involved in ordering terrorist attacks against Israel, adding that he would discourage children from carrying out suicide bombings. Mr. Haniyeh said he was hopeful he would sign a peace deal with Israel. (CBS News, Ynetnews.com)

PA Minister of [National] Economy Mazen Sonokrot said that he had called off a showcase PA-backed conference for overseas investors after Israeli authorities made a last-minute decision not to allow Arab participants to attend. Cancellation of the meeting, widely promoted in the Arab world and scheduled to take place in Bethlehem next month, was seen as exacerbating Palestinian economic isolation in the wake of Hamas' election victory. Mr. Sonokrot said that the Israelis had informed him that the denial of access for the investors was for political reasons. In a letter to 146 investors who had planned to attend, Mr. Sonokrot said that the April gathering for Arab investors had been cancelled "due to the recent escalation of the political situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip". A larger conference planned for October, to which Palestinian officials had hoped to attract western investors, was also postponed. (The Financial Times)

17

The IDF shot and killed a Palestinian girl and wounded her aunt while they were riding in a taxi near Jenin. Soldiers said the driver had not followed orders to stop. A subsequent investigation concluded that the soldiers had violated the rules of engagement. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

In a letter published in The Financial Times the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Alvaro de Soto, said, "The bulk of UN workers delivering assistance to the Palestinian people are in fact Palestinians and their work was not hampered by the temporary withdrawal of international personnel because of abduction threats, and they are already returning". (The Financial Times)

US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch, who attended yesterday's meeting of the Quartet in Brussels, said Hamas had yet to give any sign that it was ready to shift policy and seek peace with Israel. While some EU officials had taken heart from assurances from PA President Abbas that Hamas would pursue a gradual policy shift if given time, Mr. Welch said, he had seen no signs that Hamas was ready to adopt past Palestinian commitments on seeking peace. He also declined to join criticism of Israel's seizure of Jericho prisoners, saying, "I'm not going to say we anticipated Israel's action. But one of the reasons we had this agreement in the first place was that these [prisoners] were dangerous people and Israel had a concern about them". He added, "That said, none of this was coordinated in advance with any party". He also rejected suspicions that London and Washington had arranged the withdrawal of the monitors with Israel. Mr. Welch said the Quartet was continuing talks on how to channel essential aid to the Palestinians. He expressed confidence that the US, which had sent some \$1.5 billion in aid to the Palestinians in the past decade, would be able to continue humanitarian assistance while ensuring that no funds went to a Hamas-led Cabinet. (Reuters)

In protest at unilateral Israeli moves, several top Fatah officials have asked PA President Abbas to resign, dissolve the PA and return responsibility for the Occupied Palestinian Territory to Israel. Senior Fatah officials said the idea of scrapping the Authority had been debated for the first time the previous day by the Fatah Central Committee. The discussion highlighted frustrations within Fatah following Israel's seizure of a Palestinian leader in the Jericho prison raid. A senior Fatah official said Mr. Abbas' top aide, Tayeb Abdel-Rahim, had sparked the debate, winning support from several members. Others were opposed. "Abdel-Rahim said at the meeting [that] Abbas must consider resigning and dissolving the Palestinian Authority if Israel continues with its attacks and unilateral measures," said the official. Mr. Abdel-Rahim was quoted as saying, "Why should we accept blow after blow to President Abbas, whom the world claims to support?" (Ha'aretz)

Japan has pledged to provide food aid to the Palestinians. ¥660 million in aid would be channelled through the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNRWA, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said. (Wafa)

18

During his meeting with Alvaro de Soto, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, PA President Abbas urged the United Nations to press Israel to release the Palestinians it had seized from a prison in Jericho days ago and to open the Gaza Strip crossings, according to PLO Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat. (Wafa, Xinhua)

19

A Qassam rocket exploded in the southern Israeli town of Sderot, claiming no victims. Earlier, three more rockets had been fired at Israel, one exploding in the Ashkelon industrial zone and the others falling into the sea. The Israeli Air Force bombed an uninhabited area to the north of the Gaza Strip. (AP)

PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh presented the following list of the members of the Hamas PA Cabinet to PA President Abbas: Ismail Haniyeh: Prime Minister and Minister of Sport; Nasser Eddin Al-Shaab: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Higher Education; Mahmoud Al-Zahha:

Foreign Minister; Said Siam: Interior and Civil Affairs; Omar Abdel Razik: Finance; Ziad Zazza: Public Affairs; Bassem Naim: Housing; Naib Rajoub: Religious Affairs; Mariam Saleh: Women; Tannous Abu Ita: Tourism; Fakr Turkman: Welfare; Samir Abu Isa: Planning; Alla Al-Arag: Economy; Abdel Rachman Vedan: Transportation; Jamal Houdari: Communication; Ahmed Halbi: Justice; Mohammed Agha: Agriculture; Yusef Regka: Information; Abdullah Abu Subah: Culture; Wafi Kavhe: Regional Affairs; Aisa Jabari: Local Authorities; Khaled Abu Arafa: Jerusalem Affairs; Mohammed Barghouti: Labour; and Atef Odwan: Minister of State. PA President Abbas said, "Within 24 or 48 hours we will hold a meeting of the PLO Executive Committee to brief its members on the latest developments. Later, we will convene the Parliament for a vote of confidence in the Cabinet. (AP, *The Jerusalem Post*)

"We will not participate in a Hamas cabinet," PFLP leader Jamil Majdalawi announced. (AFP)

Palestinians seized by the IDF in the Jericho prison raid and suspected of killing Israeli Minister Rehavam Ze'evi would be put on trial in Israel, acting Prime Minister Olmert told *Ekho Moskv* radio. (AP)

John Ging, the Gaza Strip director of UNRWA, told reporters: "Every day is taking us closer to a humanitarian crisis. Flour and wheat are not the only products in short supply. There is a shortage of sugar, oil and many of the other basic commodities. If the borders remain closed, then everything will begin to become a crisis in itself." (AFP)

"The Kingdom invariably supports the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian Government," the Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal told reporters after talks with visiting Austrian President Heinz Fischer. The fact that "Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections, which were conducted in compliance with European and international demands, will not make us halt our financial and material aid to the Palestinian Government and people," the Foreign Minister said. (AFP)

Representatives of Israel, the PA and the Quartet met and reached a temporary agreement allowing humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip from Egypt, via the Kerem Shalom crossing. A further meeting, scheduled for 20 March, would be attended by Egyptian, Israeli, US and PA officials. (AP)

## 20

Nine Palestinians were wounded in firefights with PA police when Palestinian gunmen stormed PA Government buildings and briefly took over a power plant and blocked a road in the Gaza Strip. Some of the gunmen, affiliated with Fatah, had recently been admitted to the security forces but had not been paid. Others were jobless and demanded employment. Palestinian security forces called in more support to help remove the gunmen from the plant, the main provider of Gaza's electricity. (AP, *Ha'aretz*, *The Financial Times*)

The IDF wounded four Palestinians in Hebron and Nablus and arrested 20 in the West Bank. (Wafa)

A Palestinian suspected of collaborating with Israel was shot dead by gunmen in Nablus. (AFP)

An IDF soldier and a Border Police officer were wounded during a raid on the Qalandiya refugee camp in the West Bank. The two men were slightly wounded when street clashes broke out with local Palestinians while IDF troops were searching for Palestinian militants. The IDF soldiers arrested two wanted "Tanzim" militants in the refugee camp. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israel will not tolerate Palestinian rocket fire from the Gaza Strip on the town of Ashkelon, acting Prime Minister Olmert said. According to a statement released by the Prime Minister's Office, the IDF was not restricted in its actions against Palestinian attacks. (AFP)

The Israeli authorities briefly reopened the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing into the Gaza Strip to allow aid to be brought into the territory. (AFP)

"The permanent borders of Israel must be fixed and I want to build up a consensus on this subject through dialogue," acting Prime Minister Olmert told *Army Radio*. "There is already a consensus over the idea that Gush Etzion, Ariel and Ma'aleh Adumim should become an integral part of Israel," he added. (AFP)

The Council of the League of Arab States strongly condemned the Israeli aggression against the Jericho Central Prison and the capture of detainees. (Wafa)

Saudi Arabia called on private and public institutions worldwide to condemn strongly Israel's "policies and arbitrary practices", the Saudi Press Agency SPA reported. In a statement to SPA following a Cabinet session, Saudi Minister of Culture and Information Iyad Madani said that the Government condemned Israeli occupation forces for storming Jericho city, besieging its jail and arresting prisoners. (DPA)

Jordan's King Abdullah II, after talks with French President Jacques Chirac in Paris, called on the international community to support the Palestinian people. At a joint news conference, the King said that the peace process was going through a period of "expectancy", pending the formation of a Palestinian Government by Hamas and Israeli elections due on 28 March. "All parties have a responsibility to create an environment favourable to a peaceful settlement" leading to a peaceful two-State solution, he said, adding, "The large majority of Palestinians and Israelis want peace".

President Chirac suggested that PA President Abbas could be in charge of distributing European aid to the Palestinians after the formation of a Hamas-led PA Cabinet. "We must not punish the Palestinian people economically. They have enough problems and difficulties," President Chirac said. Earlier, the King had spoken of his fears of a religious war in the Middle East and urged the creation of a Palestinian State in the next two years. (AFP, AP)

After meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo, Terje Rød-Larsen, Special Envoy for the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 [on Lebanon], warned that the Middle East was going through one of its most critical periods, citing the crises in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and the Palestinian territories and the US-Iranian standoff over Tehran's nuclear programme. On the Arab-Israeli conflict, Mr. Rød-Larsen said that a new Israeli Government to be formed after parliamentary elections later this month "will be decisive for the course of events" both in Israel and the Palestinian territories. (AP)

In Washington, Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain said that a Hamas-led Palestinian Government had no alternative but to deal with Israel. "They will be obliged to do that because the Palestinians, as a Government, deal with Israel," the Crown Prince told reporters after meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. "How can they deal with Israel if they don't recognize Israel?" he asked in an exchange in Arabic. (AP)

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh called on Hamas "to go ahead with the peace process according to the Arab peace initiative presented at the Beirut summit." (AFP)

Former US President Jimmy Carter said, "Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories and Palestinians must live in peace and dignity." In an article published in *The Guardian*, President Carter wrote, "I have seen despair evolve into optimism. Even now, we need not give up hope for permanent peace for Israelis and freedom for Palestinians", adding, "The pre-eminent obstacle to peace is Israel's colonization of Palestine." (*The Guardian*)

The EU presented UNRWA with a check for \$78 million in urgent aid, following a meeting of EU foreign ministers. Future European aid hinged on "commitments the [Hamas] Government enters into, and its deeds," said EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner. She said it was "crucial how the new Palestinian Authority positions itself on the questions of violence, of recognition of Israel, and standing by previous agreements." (AP)

WFP asked Israel to allow food shipments to reach the tens of thousands of people in the Gaza Strip who depend on food aid to survive. (UN News Centre, [www.wfp.org](http://www.wfp.org))

In the last four years, the United Arab Emirates had provided substantial financial support, through its Red Crescent Society, to families of

Palestinians, militants as well as civilians, who had been wounded or killed by IDF forces, according to Red Crescent documents. The Secretary-General of the society, Sanaa Darwish al-Kitbe, said the goal of its Palestinian programmes was to "influence the negative atmosphere. By building homes and helping people to have a better life ... you are creating some hope in the middle of all this suffering, allowing young Palestinians to concentrate on the positive and move away from extremist views and actions." (*The New York Times*)

At the World Water Forum in Mexico City, experts said that at the height of tensions, Israelis and Palestinians maintained contacts over their sparse water resources, but without peace, both sides risked being left high and dry. Shimon Tal, the Israeli Government's Water Commissioner, underscored that without water, neither side in the Middle East conflict would survive. Fadel Kawash, head of the Palestinian Water Authority, said, "In the Middle East, water is a political issue", adding, "The meetings continue, but it is not possible to implement all the agreement for political and security reasons. Israel's occupation of the West Bank, checkpoints, the confiscation of land, arrests, the demolition of homes and the wall – all these present a major obstacle to development projects, especially in the water sector". He said that the Palestinian Authority had to buy water for its growing population while Israel was pumping increasing amounts of water from underground sources. (*AFP*)

21

Israeli police forces arrested 10 Palestinians driving toward central Israel in a van packed with explosives, foiling a potentially devastating bombing. The 15-minute chase included helicopters and heavily armed police commandos on motorcycles and brought Israel's main highway to a standstill for more than an hour. Police said one of the suspects, from the village of Yamoun, was an Islamic Jihad member who had carried out previous bombings. (*AP*)

The IDF arrested eight Palestinians in West Bank cities. In Tulkarm, Israeli troops positioned at Al-Karama border crossing arrested Said Abu Kheit, 29, and Feras Hanoun, 27, who were on their way home, security sources said. In Nablus, Israeli soldiers arrested five Palestinians. In the meantime, the IDF intensified, for the fifth consecutive day, its stranglehold on Palestinians in Beita town, south of Nablus. They imposed a curfew and arrested Majed Hamail, 28. Witnesses indicated that basic goods were running out in the town and that some people's health was deteriorating because Israeli soldiers were blocking access to hospitals. (*Wafa*)

IDF soldiers operating in the Al-Askar refugee camp near Nablus shot four Palestinians who were throwing firebombs. Two of the Palestinians were seriously wounded and the two others suffered light wounds. A short time later, IDF troops fired at two armed Palestinians. Meanwhile, IDF soldiers arrested a Palestinian youth at the Hawara checkpoint south of Nablus. The youth was carrying two knives and three firebombs. In the past 24 hours Israeli security forces also arrested 250 Palestinians working in Israel without legal permits. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israel has reopened the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing, the main gateway for Gaza's imports and exports, for a second straight day in an attempt to alleviate a food shortage in the area. The Palestinians hoped to bring into Gaza 100 trucks carrying food and medicine, about 20 of them carrying wheat. The director of the Palestinian border authority, Salim Abu Safiah, said, "I hope that the Israelis will stick to their promises and will open Karni totally in the coming days". He added, "Gaza is suffering with the shortage of foodstuffs." (*AFP, AP*)

The PLC Fatah bloc decided on a partial boycott of today's Palestinian Legislative Council session until it terminated its debate on a resolution of its last session on 13 January. (*Wafa*)

In Ramallah, PA President Abbas received the EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, Marc Otte. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Mr. Otte said that he had held two meetings, the first with the President and the second with the President's adviser, to set up future work plans. He stated that the EU would not stop humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people, adding that the EU was looking forward to a full partnership with the Palestinians. He said that the EU was examining the policy of the new Cabinet regarding issues of top importance. (*Wafa*)

In a report, the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies said that 63 per cent of the Israelis polled were willing to make concessions on Jerusalem within the framework of a peace agreement with the Palestinians. However, 54 per cent of the Israelis willing to make concessions opposed any compromise over the Old City. Only 36 per cent of the Israelis polled were not willing to give up any part of the city. The poll of 500 Israeli Jews had a margin of error of 4 percentage points. (*AP*)

22

The IDF killed a "wanted" Islamic Jihad militant during an arrest operation in the West Bank city of Jericho. Troops had entered the Aqwar Jaba camp to arrest three "wanted" men from Islamic Jihad, an IDF spokesman said. The soldiers surrounded three houses and called on the suspects to come out. Two of the men emerged and were arrested, but the third did not, the army said. (*Ha'aretz*)

Armed Palestinians threw three explosive devices at IDF soldiers close to a Nablus refugee camp. No one was wounded and no damage was reported. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Israel opened a second crossing into the Gaza Strip, following international pressure to alleviate a shortage of staples and relief supplies in the Strip. Kerem Shalom was opened to allow humanitarian aid, mostly food and drugs, from Egypt into Gaza, Israeli and Palestinian border authorities said. A total of 180 Egyptian trucks were expected to enter Gaza Wednesday. The first truck, carrying flour, had already passed through the crossing. (*Ha'aretz*)

Egypt sent food shipments to the Gaza Strip to help alleviate a shortage of flour and other basic goods suffered by the Palestinians due to Israel's closure of the main commercial crossing into the Strip. Palestinian security officials and witnesses said that an Egyptian army truck, laden with flour, entered the Strip through the Kerem Shalom crossing, whose opening for emergency food shipments had been agreed at US-hosted talks two days previously. The officials said that at least 50 truckloads of flour, sugar and rice from Egypt would be allowed into the Gaza Strip. (*Reuters*)

The PLO rejected Hamas' governing platform, but PA President Abbas said he would present Hamas' proposed Cabinet to Parliament nonetheless.

"There will be no constitutional crisis, God willing," Mr. Abbas told reporters after the PLO's Executive Committee met at his request. "There will be meetings soon with Parliament so the Government and its programme can be presented to it." In Gaza, Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said that the PLO Executive Committee had no right to interfere in the formation of a Government. "We are awaiting the next step from President Mahmoud Abbas and we are confident he will respect the will of the Palestinian people and present the Government to the legislative council," Mr. Abu Zuhri said. "The Executive Committee demands [that] the Hamas Government amend its political programme," Yassir Khaled, a member of the PLO Executive Committee, said. Mr. Zuhri rejected the demand as "unacceptable and illegal". "The PLC is the only authority" that can pronounce on the programme of government, he said. (*AFP, Reuters*)

In the Gaza Strip, Palestinian Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh said in a statement that he was calling a special session of the PLC on 25 March to vote on the new Hamas Cabinet. (*AP*)

Deputy Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council Hassan Khreisheh said that it had been decided, during a meeting between PA President Abbas and PLC Speaker Aziz Dweik, to hold a Palestinian Legislative Council session on 27 March to endorse a Cabinet of 24 ministers formed by Hamas.

"We received an application from [PA Prime Minister-designate] Ismail Haniyeh for the session to be on Saturday. But we found it difficult to hold it on Saturday, so we decided [that] the session will be on Monday," Mr. Khreisheh said. The vote, the final step in installing the Hamas Cabinet, had been expected to take place after the Israeli election next week. The Cabinet would then be sworn in by Mr. Abbas on 30 March, according to Mr. Khreisheh. (*AP, AFP*)

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Meshaal, in an interview with *Reuters* in Abu Dhabi, said that the group would continue to pursue "armed resistance" against Israeli occupation. (*Reuters*)

PLC members had unanimously voted to form a committee to investigate the Israeli raid on the Jericho prison on 14 March. The committee was to



submit its findings to the PLC within 10 days. (*Al-Jazeera*)

PA President Abbas told *Ha'aretz* that he had proposed secret peace talks with Israel and believed a deal could be reached within a year. In an interview at the muqataa in Ramallah, he said he had suggested the idea to US officials and Israeli Vice Premier Shimon Peres. As head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Mr. Abbas said he would conduct the talks with the Israelis. He also said Hamas would not stop him from negotiating with Israel. An Israeli senior official said, "It's a two-headed Government: he [Mr. Abbas] says one thing and the Hamas Government does another." US President Bush has not responded to Mr. Abbas' suggestion. Mr. Abbas said, "I can promise that you have a partner for this peace. On the day after the (Israeli) elections, you will find us ready to sit in negotiations with no prior conditions." (*AFP, BBC, Ha'aretz*)

Palestinians had asked Canadian authorities to arrest former IDF chief of staff Moshe Ya'alon upon his arrival in Canada for war crimes as head of the Israeli military during the intifada. Israeli Ambassador to Canada Alan Baker, former Justice Ministry legal adviser and an authority on international law, told *Army Radio* that Canadian officials would not interfere with Mr. Ya'alon's planned visit. "The law in Canada is different from the British law", Mr. Baker said, adding that Canadian regulations were much more stringent regarding the grounds for disqualifying entry or arrest on arrival. (*Ha'aretz*)

Outgoing PA Foreign Minister Nasser Al-Kidwa will join the Palestinian delegation at next week's Arab Summit in Sudan, diplomats said, in a sign that a new Hamas-led Government would not be in place by then. The delegation to the two-day summit, which opens on 28 March, will be led by PA President Abbas and will include Farouk Kaddoumi, Secretary-General of Fatah and head of the PLO Political Department, Palestinian and other Arab diplomats said. "Participation won't be in the interest of Hamas, as it may be forced to offer concessions it's not yet ready for," one Arab diplomat said, adding, "It is not necessary to put Hamas on the spot at the summit." Said another, "It is better to give [Hamas] more time to prepare in detail its political programme." (*AFP*)

In Rome, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi stressed the European Union line that EU aid to needy Palestinians must not end up helping extremist organizations. Mr. Berlusconi made the comments in meetings at his office with visiting Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. (*AP*)

UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Koning AbuZayd said in an interview after a three-day visit to Brussels that the humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory would become serious if salaries were not paid as a result of Israel's halting of tax revenue transfers. "Half of the payroll is for security people who have arms... There could be more breakdown of law and order." She also said, "For the first time ever, we in UNRWA ran out of fuel, and the bakeries in Gaza ran out of flour." (*Reuters*)

The Director of UNRWA operations in Gaza, John Ging, stated that he was "struggling to be optimistic" upon his return from a visit to the "reopened" Karni commercial crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip on Tuesday morning. He explained that "the situation on the streets of Gaza was worse than it had been the day before, as the half-hour opening of Karni on Monday afternoon had absolutely no impact on the developing humanitarian crisis", adding "I sincerely hope that today's opening of Karni is the beginning of a return to normality; for Gazans, this is the first rationing of bread in living memory". ([www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org))

Initial tests conducted on dead chickens from the Gaza Strip indicated that the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu had spread to Gaza, the first outbreak of the disease in the Palestinian territories, the Israeli Agriculture Ministry said. (*AP*)

## 23

The IDF killed two Palestinians in the Gaza Strip who were planting a bomb along the border fence with Israel, north of the Kissufim crossing. After soldiers in a watchtower spotted three Palestinians placing a bomb near the fence, a tank opened fire in their direction, and an air force aircraft also fired at them. Two of the three were killed, but the third escaped unharmed. Palestinian sources identified all three as Islamic Jihad members. (*AFP, AP, DPA, Ha'aretz, Reuters, Wafa*)

Palestinians launched an anti-tank missile at an Israeli force patrolling along the border fence with the southern Gaza Strip, causing no injuries or damage. ([www.idf.il](http://www.idf.il))

The IDF arrested 18 "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank: two Islamic Jihad members and a Fatah member in Nablus; three Hamas members and a "Tanzim" member in Tulkarm; a Palestinian in Far'un, south of Tulkarm; two "Tanzim" members in Ramallah; two "Tanzim" members in the village of Beit Rima, north-west of Ramallah; two "Tanzim" members and two PFLP members in Dir Asana, north-west of Ramallah; a Hamas member in Bethlehem and a PFLP member in the village of Abu Dis, north-east of Bethlehem. ([www.idf.il](http://www.idf.il))

Hamas leader Mohammad Nazzal said, "Hamas will not participate in the Arab Summit in Sudan [to be held on 28 and 29 March] because some Palestinian parties have delayed the measures related to the presentation of a Hamas Government to parliament." (*Reuters*)

Israeli Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said, "I have presented a political plan whose main issue is an attempt to determine permanent borders for Israel during my term of office.... In the context of this plan, communities in Judaea and Samaria [the West Bank] will be moved to join and consolidate existing settlement blocks inside the fence which will constitute the future permanent border. I want to make this clear, so that no one is in any doubt: I intend to implement this plan. Anyone who does not wish this plan to be implemented will not be in my coalition." (*AFP*)

PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat commented on Israel's proposed unilateral plan to set Israel's final borders. "This policy is dictated by the Israelis and this is a bad policy. After the elections, whatever party wins, I'm sure that they will not come back to the negotiating table. This policy will not bring security, but more problems and more troubles." (*AFP*)

United States officials informed the Israeli Foreign Ministry that the US Administration had decided to halt funding for an infrastructure development project of the Palestinian Authority and to provide Palestinians with only humanitarian aid. The new policy was implemented to ensure that US aid did not reach a Hamas-led Government and to prevent US officials from having to make contact with representatives of a terrorist organization. (*Ha'aretz*)

PA President Abbas received UN Special Envoy Terje Rød-Larsen in Amman. At the muqataa, Mr. Abbas received Sisa Ncwana, the Representative of South Africa to the PA. He briefed both Mr. Rød-Larsen and Mr. Ncwana on the latest developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. (*Wafa*)

## 24

In the West Bank, six Israelis and five Palestinians were arrested in Bil'in at an anti-wall demonstration. Rubber bullets were fired at stone-throwing anti-wall protestors at Beit Sira, west of Ramallah. Near Nablus, the IDF arrested a masked Palestinian carrying homemade explosives.

From the Gaza Strip, a Qassam rocket was fired, landing in Zikim in the Negev, while another landed in the sea. No injuries were reported. (*Ha'aretz*)

In an [interview](#), Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz spelled out his vision for the future borders between Israel and a State of Palestine. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

In an interview with *Yediot Aharonot*, Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert said that he could not base his policies on overtures from PA President Abbas when a Hamas-led PA Cabinet was set to take power. "I know him and we were very friendly, but I cannot base my attitude toward the

PA on the sympathy I have for a certain individual.” Asked if he could promise the Palestinians a viable State despite his pledges to build up a settlement corridor east of Jerusalem, slicing into the West Bank, he said, “I can promise this, without giving up on the settlement blocks, but only if they accept the basic conditions set by the international community.” (AFP)

Israeli Chief of Staff Dan Halutz said that a Hamas-led Government in the PA would not necessarily lead to more terror attacks. Hamas “will want to prove that their image is unjustified, and they will try to restrain themselves,” he said. He advised adopting a wait-and-see attitude to the new PA Government. (Ha'aretz)

Incoming PA Finance Minister Omar Abdul Razeq voiced confidence the Palestinians could cope if the traditional sources of aid dried out. He also said that the new Government would be ready for contacts with Israel to ease the everyday living conditions of Palestinians. (AFP)

Israel and its allies were dropping their campaign to curb the activities of UNRWA. Sources said Israel was in dire need of reliable international bodies to deliver increased humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population. Sources cited Israel's desire to maintain stability in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and avoid being forced to assume responsibility for the welfare of the Palestinians if the UN agency was forced to leave. (Forward)

PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said that a Palestinian investment fund would remain under the control of PA President Abbas. Mr. Abbas also planned to set up a new presidential agency to oversee border crossings between the Palestinians and Israel, according to Mr. Erakat, who said he had been designated the agency's chief. (AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni appealed to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan for international assistance to help the Palestinians fight the recent outbreak of the bird flu. Mr. Annan said he would call on the World Health Organization (WHO) to lend support to Palestinian agriculture and health officials to fight the flu. (The Jerusalem Post)

PA Agriculture Ministry officials confirmed an outbreak of the bird flu virus at a second farm in the Gaza Strip, in Rafah. A total of 80,000 birds were to be culled both in Rafah and Gaza City, where the virus was first detected. Farmers planned to demonstrate after being told that they would not be compensated for the destruction of their poultry. Ministry officials said samples of the dead poultry had been sent to Israel for testing, while Israel had delivered to the PA poison for culling the poultry. (Ha'aretz)

The regime of restriction of movement imposed by Israel on the Palestinians has effectively created four different types of enclaves. (Ha'aretz)

25

Several Palestinians and an American volunteer in the West Bank filed complaints with Israeli police, accusing settlers of violence towards Palestinians in the Hebron area after three people were wounded in two separate incidents. Activists in the area said they thought the settlers were from the settlement of “Susia”. (Ha'aretz)

The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) reported that the IDF had put up a notice at the Qalandiya checkpoint announcing that from 27 March only holders of a permit to enter Israel would be allowed to cross the checkpoint to the West Bank village of Al-Ram. By restricting Palestinian access, the ISM press release said, Israel had effectively annexed the village, minus its West Bank residents, to Israel, cutting it off from the rest of the West Bank. The restriction would also cement the annexation of East Jerusalem, the report said. (ism-media-group, Wafa)

PA President Abbas said he would use his “constitutional powers” against the new Hamas Cabinet unless it altered its political programme and honoured all agreements with Israel. In a letter to PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh, Mr. Abbas stressed that the democratic choice of Hamas did not authorize it to overturn the political and legal positions of the PA and the PLO. “Once your Government assumes its responsibilities, I ask you again to ... make the necessary corrections to your programme,” Mr. Abbas said in his letter. PA Secretary-General Tayeb Abdel Rahim said that Mr. Abbas' demands “included recognition of the PLO as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinians, as well as recognition of the PA's Basic Law and the ‘Declaration of Independence’.” Mr. Haniyeh was quoted by Reuters as saying, “We do not seek to cause a constitutional crisis.” He also said, “I have good relations with Abbas and any disputes will be resolved in a manner that serves the interests of the people.” (BBC, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

26

A Palestinian teenager was shot to death in the central Gaza Strip near the border with Israel, according to PA Interior Ministry officials. An army spokesman said soldiers saw someone crawling toward the security fence near the Bureij refugee camp, and shot him. The boy was identified as 16-year-old Hamad Hamdan of Deir-el-Balah in the southern Gaza Strip. In a separate incident, troops shot and wounded an armed Palestinian in Al-Yamoun village near Jenin, Israel Radio reported. The man was evacuated by a Palestinian ambulance and his condition was not immediately known. (Ha'aretz)

Three Qassam rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip. One landed in the sea, the second in an open field near the industrial zone of Ashkelon and the third near the fence on the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel. No damage or injuries were reported. (Ha'aretz)

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz presented the steps that Israel would take with regard to the border crossings: (1) the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing would be reopened in both directions, allowing goods to enter the Gaza Strip from Israel and allowing Gaza Strip farmers' produce to go to Israel; (2) the Kerem Shalom crossing, where the borders of Israel, Egypt and Israel meet, would remain open to goods entering the Gaza Strip. Mr. Mofaz had complained about security lapses in the Rafah crossing, which was being managed by the Palestinians under EU supervision. (Ha'aretz)

PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh said Hamas wanted to end the crisis with Israel, saying, “We don't seek a whirlpool of blood in this region. We want rights and dignity for this [Palestinian] people, and to put an end to this decades-long complicated situation.” He also said, “The presence of Hamas in power is the beginning of resolving the crisis, if they want to.” Asked if Hamas would hold talks with Israel, Mr. Haniyeh said the decision was out of their hands. “The problem is with [Israeli Acting Prime Minister] Olmert, with Kadima. He said he will not have any contacts with the Palestinian Government.... The problem is not with us.” (AP)

PA President Abbas said he was not threatening to bring down Hamas but insisted that the group must adopt more moderate stances to avoid a stalemate with his authority. “I only told them that there is a political programme that differs from that of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian President and that will hinder our work in the near future.” (Ha'aretz)

Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert said he planned to get US backing before pushing forward with his plan to withdraw from much of the West Bank, maintain control of major settlement blocks and draw Israel's final borders by 2010. (AP, BBC)

PA Foreign Minister Nasser Al-Kidwa said that three draft resolutions had been adopted by the Arab Foreign Ministers to be presented to the Arab Summit in Khartoum on 28 March. The three drafts were on reactivating the Arab Initiative for Peace, Arab sanctions against companies helping to build the wall, and financial support for the PA should support from donors come to a halt. Mr. Al-Kidwa also said that Hamas would have a problem reconciling itself with the Arab Summit position on Israel. (AP, Ha'aretz, Wafa)

PA President Abbas held talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at the resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh. The two leaders discussed preparations for the Arab League Summit, stressing the importance of supporting the Palestinian cause. (Wafa)

27

IDF troops injured five Palestinians and arrested 16 others in the cities of Hebron, Tulkarm, Nablus and Bethlehem. (Ha'aretz, Wafa)

IDF troops killed a Palestinian and wounded two others firing rocket-propelled grenades into Israel from the northern Gaza Strip. The three Palestinians are members of the Islamic Jihad. In a separate incident, Israeli aircraft fired two missiles at a car carrying four members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in Gaza City, wounding one of the men and a bystander. IDF tanks fired at suspected “terrorists” at the Beit Hanoun

(Erez) crossing. (*Ha'aretz*)

An IDF appeals court rejected a request for bail by PFLP leader Ahmad Saadat, who was taken from the Palestinian Jericho prison on 14 March. "This is an illegal court and I won't attend it," he said. The session was called by Mr. Saadat's lawyer to challenge his seizure, along with four PFLP comrades. (*AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters*)

Israeli authorities decided to close the Al-Haram Al-Sharif (Temple Mount) to visitors. Police officials said that they had received warnings of planned attacks to coincide with the Israeli elections. There would be a significant increase in the number of policemen deployed in East Jerusalem and around Al-Haram Al-Sharif. (*Ha'aretz*)

PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh laid out his Government's programme in a speech to the PLC. On the peace process, he said: "Our Government will be prepared to hold dialogue with the international Quartet about the ways to end the conflict and install calm in the region ... [we] will spare no effort to reach a just peace in the region, putting an end to occupation and restoring our rights." On previous agreements: Hamas would adopt "an extremely responsible attitude" which would "serve the best interests of the Palestinian people." On the US: "We believe it is necessary for the United States to revise its policy with regard to the Palestinian people ... [and] stop supporting the occupation and its policy of double standards..." On Israel: Hamas would continue to assert "the right of our people to defend themselves in the face of the occupation, [to achieve] the elimination of the settlements [and] the apartheid wall, and the right to continue to struggle for ... an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. On foreign aid: "The Palestinian people should not be punished for exercising their right to choose their leaders in free and democratic elections." "The Government will seek to speak to all countries ... to ensure the continuation of aid..." All aid received would be spent "in complete transparency." The approval of the new Cabinet was rescheduled for 28 March. (*AFP*)

The new Hamas Cabinet was ready to talk to international mediators about solving the Middle East conflict, but would not succumb to economic pressure to soften its agenda, PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh said. He said, "The Government ... is ready for dialogue with the Quartet," and "the European Union has provided a lot of aid to our people, and supported our right to freedom. We are interested in a strong relationship with Europe." Mr. Haniyeh said he also expected the EU to review some of its policies in the region, and exert more pressure on Israel. Hamas is listed as a terrorist group by the United States and the EU. In an interview with *The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, PLC Speaker Abdel-Aziz Dweik said that Hamas would recognize Israel only if it withdrew from all of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In that case, he would want the Government to "go to the people and ask them their opinion in a referendum," implying that Hamas would accept the results if the people approved. (*AP*)

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said that the EU would not "turn our backs on the Palestinian people, too many of whom live in dire poverty. The EU respects their democratic choice but can only work with those who seek peace by peaceful means." She also announced that she would attend the Arab League Summit to be held in Khartoum on 28 March. (*AFP*)

US State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack said the following about PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh's offer to start dialogue with the West: "I think what the Hamas Government needs to do is meet the conditions laid out by the international community. The Quartet was very clear in what those conditions are. The onus is now on Hamas. That said, I would expect in the coming days and weeks that we're going to be working very closely with the Quartet as well as the EU, talking about how we might provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people and that's where our focus is now. But in terms of dialogue, Hamas needs to meet the conditions laid out by the international community."

(*US Department of State*)

In Cairo, on his way to attend the Arab Summit in Khartoum, PA President Mahmoud Abbas asserted that the Palestinian political issues were under the responsibility of the President of the Palestinian Authority and the PLO Negotiations Committee, *MENA News Agency* reported. He said that the PLO had accepted UN Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) as well as the Oslo Accords, adding that the incoming Government should commit to them. Later, Mr. Abbas arrived in Khartoum where he warned of the gravity of Israel's unilateral solutions, rejecting Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert's unilateral plan of disengagement from the West Bank and isolating Jerusalem. He also said that Israel's intention to turn the Qalandiya checkpoint into a crossing was "very dangerous". As for the threats to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Mr. Abbas said that the threats should be taken seriously as "they set fire to Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1968". (*Wafa*)

*Channel Thirteen* broadcast an interview by Charlie Rose with Syrian Arab Republic President Bashar Al-Assad in which he expressed Syria's support for the Palestinians and its desire to achieve a just peace in the Middle East. (*Channel Thirteen*)

**28**

Israeli forces shot dead a 21-year-old Palestinian, Samer Farhat, in Al-Yamun town, west of Jenin, after storming the town and besieging his house. (*IPC, Wafa*)

Israeli soldiers opened fire on houses in the Al-Fawwar refugee camp, south of Hebron, wounding four Palestinians. The soldiers arrested 20 Palestinians during the operation. Also, Israeli forces arrested four Palestinians in Nablus, two in Tammun, south-east of Tubas, and one in the Al-Aza refugee camp in Bethlehem. (*Wafa*)

A Katyusha rocket was fired for the first time by Islamic Jihad militants from the Gaza Strip at Israel. The rocket landed near a kibbutz in southern Israel, causing no casualties or damage. (*AFP, AP, Reuters, Ynet*)

An Israeli father and his 16-year-old son, both Bedouin shepherds, were killed when a Palestinian device exploded near the Nahal Oz Kibbutz in southern Israel. Responsibility for the incident was claimed by Islamic Jihad, but medical sources said that the deaths were a result of the Bedouin shepherds having handled an unexploded rocket. In a separate incident several hours later, two Bedouin children were killed and a third critically injured when an unexploded bomb they were playing with went off in a military training zone in the south of Israel. Israeli police spokesman Mickey Rosenfeld said the incident was being investigated, but that there was no reason to think that it was linked to militant activity. (*AFP*)

The PLC in a vote of confidence approved the new Hamas-led Cabinet of Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh. Seventy-one of the 132 PLC legislators approved the Government, while 36 opposed it and 2 legislators abstained. Mr. Haniyeh said the incoming ministers would be sworn in by PA President Abbas the following day. (*DPA*)

In Khartoum, Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa opened the annual meeting of Arab leaders. The host, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, in his opening speech praised the Palestinian elections and denounced Israel and the Western countries that had threatened to cut off aid in response to the victory by Hamas. (*AP*)

The following are excerpts of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's message to the 18th Arab Summit in Khartoum, delivered by Under-Secretary-General Ibrahim Gambari:

"...

"The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is also at a critical stage. I respect the decision of the Palestinian people in January's parliamentary elections, whose conduct was a credit to Palestinian democracy. I hope that the new Government in the Occupied Palestinian Territory will address the Palestinian people's aspirations for peace and statehood, which have been powerfully articulated by President Abbas. The affirmation by the new Palestinian Cabinet of the Arab Peace Initiative would be a first and welcome step towards the reaffirmation of Palestinian commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the [Road Map](#).

Just as the Quartet and the Security Council have recently reiterated the importance of these principles, we must remind Israel, in light of the continued creation of facts on the ground, that peace cannot be imposed unilaterally, or achieved durably outside the regional framework of the

Middle East peace process. If a two-State solution is to remain the goal, as it must, both sides must be committed to the principles governing such a solution and the way to achieve it.

"For its part, the United Nations will continue to work for an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and a settlement of the conflict in accordance with Security Council resolutions. Until that goal is achieved, the Organization will discharge the mandates entrusted to it by the Member States to assist the Palestinian people. We will also press for the easing of the severe closures in Gaza and the West Bank, which the United Nations carefully documents, and which cause severe hardships and humiliations. And we will remind all our partners that the Palestinian people should not be punished for the way they exercise their democratic rights, and that their precious institutions remain the foundation for building a Palestinian State that can live side by side in peace with a secure Israel and all its neighbours...."

(UN News Service, UN press release SG/SM/10390)

Israelis are voting in an election billed as a referendum on the future of the West Bank, with the leading candidate, Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, promising to pull back from most of the territory and draw Israel's final borders by 2010. Israelis are expected to give a green light to Mr. Olmert's proposal to separate from most Palestinians after 39 years of military occupation. (AP)

In Khartoum, PA President Abbas said it was "regrettable" that the Palestinian people were being punished by Israel and many in the West for their democratic choice of Hamas in legislative elections. In a statement distributed to delegates attending the 18th Arab Summit, Mr. Abbas also appealed for an increase in aid for Palestinians and called for a resumption of peace talks with Israel. Mr. Abbas also called for the formation of an Arab delegation to meet with the Quartet. A resolution was expected to be adopted by the Arab leaders promising continued funding for the Palestinian Authority, maintaining its promise of US\$ 55 million a month. (AP)

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, who attended the opening of the Arab Summit in Khartoum, said that the EU would stand by the Palestinians but that the EU could only work with a Palestinian Government "that seeks peace by peaceful means." She said, "We will have to judge the new Palestinian Government that will be formed and approved.... It will be very important what they say and what they do, and we will react according to that". She said that although the Palestinian elections were "fairly contested," any new Government would have to renounce violence, accept the right of Israel to exist and stand by agreements already signed between Israel and the Palestinians. (AP)

Without much coordination among them, the Palestinian Authority, the IDF and the Palestinian local councils are renovating, upgrading and improving roads in the West Bank in response to the transportation problems created by the IDF barriers and the diversion of Palestinian vehicles to secondary roads. Unlike the plan that the Israeli defence establishment had submitted to the World Bank and the donor countries - which entailed two separate road systems in the West Bank, one for Israelis and one for Palestinians - the current decision does not call for closing roads to Palestinian traffic. Palestinian transportation would be allowed to access - via IDF checkpoints - about 20 per cent of the roads in use by Israelis in the West Bank, military sources said. (Ha'aretz)

PA Prime Minister-designate Haniyeh criticized the United States for its cold response to Hamas' call for dialogue with the West. Mr. Haniyeh said at the Palestinian Parliament in Gaza City, "Regrettably, the US administration is always hasty in making its decisions and reaffirms its bias towards Israel and against the Palestinian people." Mr. Haniyeh urged the Americans "to be more rational and less erratic and not to issue preconceived statements and judgments on a Palestinian Government elected through the ballot box." (Ha'aretz)

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Israeli forces arrested three Palestinians at a checkpoint east of Tubas. (Wafa)

The IDF arrested two "Tanzim" operatives and another "wanted" Palestinian in Odala, south of Nablus. ([www.idf.il](http://www.idf.il))

An explosive device was detonated on a road near the "Mevo Dotan" settlement, south-west of Jenin, causing no injuries or damage. ([www.idf.il](http://www.idf.il))  
Five Qassam rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip at Israel. Four of them landed in open fields in the western Negev and another landed inside the Gaza Strip. There were no injuries or damage. (Ynet)

Following the continuous launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel, the IDF responded by firing artillery at the open areas in the northern Gaza Strip from which the rockets had been fired. ([www.idf.il](http://www.idf.il))

Israeli soldiers seized a Palestinian teenager wearing an explosive belt at a checkpoint east of Nablus. (Ha'aretz, Ynet, [www.idf.il](http://www.idf.il))

The Elad settlement organization took control of two large Palestinian compounds in the East Jerusalem neighbourhoods of Silwan and A-Tur. (Ha'aretz)

In a ceremony held in Gaza City, PA President Abbas swore in the new Hamas-led Cabinet. The Cabinet ministers took their oath at two ceremonies held simultaneously in Gaza City and Ramallah, connected by video link, as Israel's ban on the travel of Hamas leaders between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank continued to be in effect. Mr. Abbas presided over the 10-minute ceremony in Gaza City. At a news conference in Gaza after the ceremony, PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said that his relations with Mr. Abbas would be based on "cooperation and harmony, [and] on the supreme interest of the people," adding that they would together confront "Israeli aggression against the people" as well as internal chaos. (AP, Wafa)

After the swearing-in ceremony, PA Prime Minister Haniyeh said, "If the Authority Chairman, as the elected President, wants to get the negotiations [with Israel] moving, we have no objection to that. If what Abu Mazen [Mr. Abbas] presents to the people as a result of negotiations serves its interest, then we too will redefine our position." (Ha'aretz)

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw made a statement on the swearing-in of the new PA Cabinet, saying, "I want the UK to continue to deliver that aid [to the Palestinians]. But the British public will need to be assured that our funding is not going to terrorists or those who support terrorism." ([www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk))

In a speech to mark the Kadima Party's victory in the general election, Israeli Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said, "In the coming period, we will move to set the final borders of the State of Israel, a Jewish State with a Jewish majority.... We will try to achieve this in an agreement with the Palestinians.... It is time for the Palestinians to change their ethos, to accept compromise as soon as possible. If they manage to do this soon, we will sit and work out a plan. If not, Israel will take control of its own fate, and in consensus among our people and with the agreement of the world and US President George Bush, we will act." (AP)

Referring to the Israeli election at the Arab League summit, under way in Khartoum, PA President Abbas said, "This result will not change [anything] as long as the agenda of Olmert himself does not change and he does not abandon the question of unilateral agreements". Incoming PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh told *Al-Jazeera* that he also opposed Mr. Olmert's withdrawal plan. "Such a plan definitely won't be accepted by the



Palestinian people or the Palestinian Government,” he said. *(AP, Reuters)*

The following statement was released by the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General:

“The Secretary-General congratulates Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and the Kadima Party on winning the highest number of seats in yesterday’s Israeli general election, and encourages him, as soon as the Government is formed, to pursue actively the peace process, and work for the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

*(UN News Centre, UN press release SG/SM/10395)*

In the final statement adopted at the end of the two-day Arab League summit held in Khartoum, leaders renewed their commitment to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, called on “the international community to respect the will of the Palestinian people in choosing their leaders and not to interfere in their internal affairs,” and rejected unilateral Israeli measures aimed at “ending the peace process.” The leaders, however, did not accede to Palestinian requests for a funding boost and kept the monthly allocation at US\$ 55 million adopted at last year’s summit in Algeria. *(AFP, AP)*

US officials said the United States had ordered its diplomats and contractors not to have any contacts with Palestinian ministries once a Hamas-led Government was sworn in. The directive, distributed to US officials in the region by e-mail, bars them from having contacts with Hamas-appointed Government ministers, whether they are members of Hamas or not, as well as with those who work for them, according to officials. Contacts will still be permitted with PA President Abbas, his personal office and non-Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. An official said the ban on contacts would apply even to independents and technocrats in the new Hamas Government because they had been “invited to join the Government by a Hamas prime minister” and were “in that position as a virtue of a vote of confidence by a Hamas-led PLC.” *(Reuters)*

The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly ended its second annual session with a [call](http://www.europal.eu.int) to the future Israeli and Palestinian Governments to respect past commitments regarding the peace process. *( www.europal.eu.int )*

Canadian Foreign Minister Peter MacKay said in a [joint statement](http://www.fac-aec.gc.ca) with International Cooperation Minister Josée Verner: “The Palestinian Legislative Council has approved the formation of a Hamas-led government. The stated platform of this government has not addressed the concerns raised by Canada and others concerning non-violence, the recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the [Roadmap](http://www.fac-aec.gc.ca) for Peace. As a result, Canada will have no contact with the members of the Hamas cabinet and is suspending assistance to the Palestinian Authority.” *( www.fac-aec.gc.ca )*

Deputy Russian Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov, attending the Arab League summit in Khartoum, Sudan, held a [meeting](http://www.mid.ru) with PA President Abbas. Mr. Saltanov stressed that Russia would continue an active dialogue with all the concerned parties in the interests of the peace process, and would act on the basis of the positions agreed on by the Quartet, both within the Quartet and through bilateral contacts. *( www.mid.ru )*

Japanese Middle East Envoy Tatsuo Arima held two meetings with PA President Abbas in Khartoum on the margin of the Arab League summit. Mr. Arima said his Government would continue to monitor the new PA Cabinet’s policy in determining future assistance, as humanitarian support would continue. *( www.mofa.go.jp )*

In a joint statement, the heads of 12 Churches in the Holy Land urged the incoming Israeli Government in a joint statement not to pursue its pledge to fix Israel’s borders unilaterally. “We urge the elected Israeli leadership to demonstrate courage and wisdom by resuming the peace process with the Palestinians. At the same time, we urge the Palestinian leaders to send a clear message of peace to the Israeli citizens as well,” the statement said. Among the signatories to the statement were Greek Patriarch Theophilos III and Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, the Vatican’s chief representative in the Holy Land. *(AFP)*

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Israeli forces arrested eight “wanted” Palestinians in the West Bank: an Islamic Jihad member in Shuweika, north of Tulkarm; a “Tanzim” operative in Duheisha, south of Bethlehem; two wanted “Tanzim” operatives in Ramallah; an Islamic Jihad member in Bir Zeit, north of Ramallah; two “Tanzim” operatives and a wanted Palestinian in Tulkarm. *( www.idf.il )*

Two Qassam rockets were fired at southern Israel from the Gaza Strip. One of them landed on a soccer field in a kibbutz south of Ashkelon. One person sustained slight injuries and several people suffered from shock. The IDF responded by firing artillery at the rocket launching site. *(Ynet, www.idf.il)*

Palestinian sources said an Israeli navy ship opened fire on Palestinian fishing boats and on open fields in the northern Gaza Strip. *(Ynet)*

Four Israelis were killed when a Palestinian suicide bomber exploded in a car at the entrance to the settlement of “Kedumim” located west of Nablus. *Al-Manar* TV in Lebanon broadcast a claim of responsibility by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. *(Ha’aretz)*

A Palestinian suicide bomber blew himself up at the entrance to the “Kedumim” settlement in the northern West Bank. The bomber was the only one killed, settlers said. The Israeli military said there had been an explosion in a vehicle at a gas station in the West Bank, and the driver had apparently been planning to carry out a suicide attack when his explosives went off prematurely. *(AP, Ha’aretz)*

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz ordered the IDF to augment arrest raids and targeted assassinations against terrorist groups in general and against Islamic Jihad in particular. *(Ha’aretz)*

PA President Abbas called Israeli Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to congratulate him on his Kadima Party’s victory in the Israeli elections.

Mr. Abbas also called Vice Premier Shimon Peres and Labour Party Chairman Amir Peretz. *(AP, Wafa)*

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said the Israeli Cabinet would decide on additional sanctions against the PA next week, beyond suspending the tax transfers. *(AP)*

Briefing the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Tuliameni Kalomoh [said](#): “If the prospect of a viable Palestinian State in the framework of a two-State solution is seen to dwindle because of unilateral Israeli actions, it will become even more difficult to persuade the Palestinians that there is anything to be gained from moving towards compromise.... The recently expressed interest of both Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and [Palestinian] President Abbas in negotiations should be seriously explored.” Under a pre-set format, several delegations addressed the Council, including Israel and Palestine, as well as the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. *(UN News Centre, UN press release SC/8680)*

The Quartet issued the following statement:

"The Quartet recalled its [statement](#) of 30 January and its call for the new Palestinian Government to commit to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the ' [Road Map](#)' .

"The Quartet welcomed President Abbas' call for the new Palestinian Government to commit to a platform of peace and, having carefully assessed the programme of the new Government approved on 28 March, noted with grave concern that the new Government has not committed to the principles spelled out on 30 January.

"The Quartet recalled its view that future assistance to any new Government would be reviewed by donors against that Government's commitment to the principles outlined above. The Quartet concurred that there inevitably will be an effect on direct assistance to that Government and its ministries.

"The Quartet encouraged continued humanitarian assistance to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian people. The Quartet noted in that context the importance of improved movement and access.

"The Quartet reiterated its commitment to the principles outlined in the Road Map and previous statements, and reaffirmed its commitment to a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict leading to two democratic States living side by side in peace and security."

(UN News Centre, UN press release SG/2110-PAL/2043)

PA Finance Minister Omar Abdul Razeq told reporters, "We were expecting [the Quartet] to make the distinction between [a] political stance and economic and humanitarian issues. We are expecting dialogue, not threats through the media." (AFP)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice [told](#) reporters on her way to Berlin: "Our review of Palestinian assistance programmes is drawing to a close.... And I would expect to be able to look at some decisions pretty soon.... But the principle is very clear: We're not going to fund a Hamas-led Government.... We are going to see what we can do to increase humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people and what mechanisms we can use to do that to make certain that the money is not indeed supporting the Hamas-led Government." Asked what sorts of decisions had to be made, Ms. Rice said, "Level of aid is one of the questions.... We're trying to be as generous as possible to the Palestinian people because we know they have severe humanitarian needs. And we said on the first day that we were not going to cut off food assistance or refugee assistance or medical assistance to Palestinians." Asked about the Kadima Party's plan to unilaterally set Israel's borders, she said, "Of course everyone would like to see a negotiated solution. That's what the [Road Map](#) is all about. I would note that the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza was supported by the United States and ultimately by the international community. So I think it depends on what is being discussed here and that turned out to be a coordinated unilateral withdrawal. So I wouldn't on the face of it just say absolutely we don't think there's any value in what the Israelis are talking about." ([www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov))

Jordanian King Abdullah II told visiting James Wolfensohn, the Middle East Quartet's Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, that it was "imperative that the world community would continue to provide assistance needed by the Palestinian people, specifically in view of their dire economic conditions." (AP)

South African President Thabo Mbeki told Parliament: "We are likely to make a meaningful contribution to the peace process through constructive engagement with all the people of Palestine, including Hamas.... Any intended engagement with Hamas must, in the first instance, be premised on the recognition and unconditional acceptance of the reality that the people of Palestine have freely and democratically elected Hamas to represent their interests." PA President Abbas was expected to meet with President Mbeki in Cape Town and to address Parliament on 31 March. (AP)

The Netherlands would not maintain contact with the new Hamas-led PA Cabinet, but would continue to meet PA President Abbas and his aides, the Dutch Foreign Ministry announced. (AFP)

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) said in [a report](#) that the environmental impact of the former Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip was limited and should not constrain Palestinian land-use plans. ([www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org))

Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Israel and the Diaspora marked "The Palestinian Land Day", taking to the streets in protest against Israel's continued land-grab policy. "We have declared before, and we reiterate today, that we refuse all Israeli settlement activities in our lands," PA President Abbas said. (Wafa)

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Two Palestinians were killed in Gaza City in clashes between gunmen and PA security forces after a top commander of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) died in a car explosion. The PRC accused PA security personnel of carrying out the killing. PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh appealed for calm and said the Government would launch an investigation. (AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz blamed the PA for the "Kedumim" settlement bombing and ordered the IDF and other security services to escalate their activities. The IDF tightened its closure on Nablus. The IDF raided the Hebron home of the suicide bomber and arrested his brother. David Baker, an official at the Israeli Prime Minister Office, told Ha'aretz, "The PA, consistent with its revolving door policy, cut this terrorist loose, which brought about last night's attack." Mr. Mofaz ordered the military to step up its targeted assassinations of Islamic Jihad militants, after the group had fired a more sophisticated type of rocket into Israel earlier in the week, security officials said. (Ha'aretz)

PA President Abbas told reporters in Cape Town: "We condemn [the 'Kedumim' bombing] and we do not think it will help the peace process.... We as Palestinians want to live in peace and stability and security, side by side with Israelis." Incoming PA Information Minister Yusuf Rizqa told AFP, "The occupation is the cause of this type of martyrdom operation whose aim is to fight the occupation." (AFP, AP)

PA Prime Minister Haniyeh wrote in a column in *The Guardian*: "No plan will ever work without a guarantee, in exchange for an end to hostilities by both sides, of a total Israeli withdrawal from all the land occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem; the release of all our prisoners; the removal of all settlers from all settlements; and recognition of the right of all refugees to return... On this, all Palestinian factions and people agree, including the PLO, whose revival is essential so that it can resume its role in speaking for the Palestinians.... The message from Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to the world Powers is this: talk to us no more about recognizing Israel's 'right to exist' or ending resistance until you obtain a commitment from the Israelis to withdraw from our land and recognize our rights." ([www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk))

