

# Inside the PA



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**Editor's note:**

**Welcome to the fourteenth edition of "Inside the PA," a weekly on-line publication designed to provide an open-source and yet valuable insight into the workings of the Palestinian Authority. We will review important statements by senior PA officials and developments within Palestinian society as taken from the Palestinian and Arab media.**

**QUOTABLE**

"I will give you the chance to present your government to the Legislative Council for [ a vote of ] confidence."

—PA Chairman Abbas, as he removed the last hurdle on the way to a Hamas government

**This Week in the PA**

- *In Cairo, PA Chairman Abbas meets Egyptian Pres. Mubarak*
- *In Khartoum, Hamas agrees not to attend Arab League summit*
- *In Ramallah, Hamas expected to present government*
- *In Gaza City, PA destroys birds to prevent flu spread*

**NEWS DIGEST**

1. HAS THE CIVIL WAR BEGUN?
2. CLANS BECOME MAJOR FACTOR IN GAZA VIOLENCE
3. FATAH ACKNOWLEDGES IRANIAN AID
4. PA MEDIA DELAY REPORTING BIRD FLU
5. WHO'S REALLY BEHIND AL QAIDA: THE JEWS, OF COURSE

### *Has the Civil War Begun?*

Hamas has come under a series of increasingly strong attacks from Fatah gunmen in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Fatah attacks have targeted Hamas politicians elected over the last year. So far, one Hamas legislator has been seriously wounded. The Palestinian Authority-controlled media have reported attacks on the Hamas officials. But they have not identified Fatah as the source of the assaults.

The most serious attack came on March 24. Unknown gunmen opened fire on Palestinian National Council member Mohammad Abu Samra, who reportedly was seriously wounded.



**Al Hayat Al Jadida. March 24, 2006**

**Palestinian stuck between direction of PLO and Hamas.**

Abu Samra, 45, began as a member of the Islamic Jihad movement, and later joined Hamas. He had been by Israel to Lebanon; when he returned to the Gaza Strip he became a leading member of the Islamic opposition to the PA.

Palestinian security sources said Abu Samra was attacked – shot several times in the lower part of his body – while he was driving east of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. In 1992,

Last week, Kalkilya Mayor Hani Al Masri, a member of Hamas, was apparently subjected to an assassination attempt. On March 21, his convoy came under light arms fire as he left Kalkilya. Nobody was injured.

Hamas has blamed Fatah and elements in the PA for the attacks. This has raised tension between Hamas and the PA in Kalkilya and in the Gaza Strip.

In the West Bank city of Nablus, Fatah gunmen burst into Rafadiya Hospital and attacked a patient admitted for injuries. The gunmen also fired toward Palestinian security personnel on March 21.

What is clear is that Hamas and Fatah are already in a showdown. PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, who heads the Fatah movement in the Palestinian territories, has objected to Hamas's platform. In a letter by Abbas to Hamas Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniya on March 25, Abbas urged Hamas to change its platform to ensure international support of the PA. Fatah's Executive Committee went further and wanted Abbas to reject Hamas's agenda completely.

But Abbas stressed that he would not block the establishment of a Hamas government. A swearing-in ceremony for the government was scheduled for March 28.

"While I regret that you have not adopted what was included in the letter of designation -- a stance that prevented the formation of a national unity government -- I have decided not to

use the powers vested in me according to the basic law," Abbas wrote. "Instead, out of

respect for the spirit of democratic process, and to enable you to take the full opportunity to assume responsibility, I will give you the chance to present your government to the Legislative Council for [a vote of] confidence."

Abbas pledged to closely monitor the Hamas government. He also did not rule out the possibility of dissolving the government.

"I will closely monitor the government's performance and will continue to exercise my duties pursuant to the mandate granted to me by the people, and in accordance to the authorities vested in me by the basic law," Abbas wrote. "I will exercise my mandate and authority where and when needed to protect the higher interests of the Palestinian people."

The PA-owned media have expressed nervousness over the Hamas government. But they are trying to calm Palestinians, saying that Hamas would not be allowed to reverse the diplomatic gains achieved by the PLO over the last 12 years.

### **Clans Become Major Factor in Gaza Violence**

Leading clans in the Gaza Strip have acquired weapons for attacks against rivals and Palestinian Authority police. Virtually every major clan has formed its own security force to protect interests of the family. They often use the services of PA police officers who are members of the family groups.

As a result, clashes between clans and battles with Palestinian police have risen sharply over the last year. The battles stem from turf wars as well as disputes over honor.

On March 22, a Palestinian was killed and three others were injured in a gun battle in Gaza City. The shootout stemmed from the abduction of a police officer earlier that day.

Officials said the violence was the result of friction between a clan member and PA police. The incident began when a high school principal called police to stop a 16-year-old student from closing the school to mark the anniversary of the Israeli assassination of Hamas

founder Ahmed Yassin.

A police officer attempted to remove the student and his friends from the school. Within minutes, the student, identified as Salama Al Oweidat, pulled a gun and opened fire. Police overpowered Al Oweidat and arrested him.

However, shortly thereafter, according to officials, gunmen from Al Oweidat's clan arrived and abducted the first police officer who had arrived on the scene, identified as Ashraf Mansour. Police reinforcements arrived in Sabra neighborhood where the clan lived and a shoot-out ensued. One Palestinian was killed and three others were injured. By 3 p.m., Ashraf was released and so was Al Oweidat. The following day, the high school was torched by 50 students who belonged to Al Oweidat's clan.



**Al Ayyam. March 24, 2006**

**The Palestinian equation: 'No food means no peace.'**

"The arson took place against the backdrop of clashes between Palestinian police and a clan in the Gaza," the Palestinian Center for Human Rights said on March 23. "The fire was caused by burning tires placed by the students at the door of the principal's office and secretary's office. The fire burned the two offices and guards' room completely. In addition, other parts of the ground floor were damaged. The students left the school after taking a computer with them."

Officials said government offices and hospitals have been attacked as part of clan rivalry. At one point, they reported, the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanoun was closed for more than two weeks because of a clash between rival families.

Other injuries have come from shooting by clans at Palestinian weddings. On March 22, four people, including the groom, were injured when a friend began firing in the air. The shooter lost control of the gun during the wedding in Khan Yunis and several bullets struck the ground, ricocheted and struck guests.

The Palestinian Center for Human Rights has termed clan violence a leading element in the chaos in the Gaza Strip. The center has called on the PA to investigate.

On March 23, the Palestinian Center for Democracy reported that crime in the Gaza Strip has skyrocketed over the last two years. The group said "criminal" killings in the area went up from 56 in 2003, to 93 in 2004 and 156 in 2005. According to the Center, the PA has arrested 181 suspects. None of them has been executed for the killings.

### ***Fatah Acknowledges Iranian Aid***

The Fatah movement led by Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas has acknowledged funding and training from Iran.

Fatah military chief Zakaria Zbeidi said his group obtains funding, training and weapons

from Iran. Zbeidi said the assistance arrives via Hizbullah, the Lebanese group sponsored by Teheran.

"Without the assistance of our Hizbullah brothers, we would not have been able to persist with our struggle," Zbeidi said. "They give us funds, arms, training, and support."

Zbeidi was quoted in an interview on March 6 with the German Welt am Sonntag newspaper. The interview was reprinted on the same day in the Kuwaiti daily Al Rai Al

Aam.



**Al Quds. May 24, 2006**

**A U.S. soldier sizzles on the skillet of the 'new Iraq.'**

This was the second time a Fatah military commander reported that Iranian aid was coming to the Palestinian insurgency group. Earlier, a Fatah commander identified as Abu Mujahed said Iran has become a major contributor to the Palestinian war against Israel.

In the interview, Zbeidi said Iran has been a model for Fatah. He said Fatah also consults regularly with Hizbullah.

"We coordinate our operations with them," Zbeidi said.

Until 2005, Fatah's military wing, Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades had been regarded as the most active in the Palestinian war against Israel. In the West Bank, Zbeidi has coordinated Fatah missions with Islamic Jihad, another group sponsored by Iran.

In August 2004, Zbeidi denied reports of Iranian aid, but then added that such assistance was justified. "This rumor is incorrect," Zbeidi said two years ago. "But let us assume for argument's sake that the [Al Aqsa Martyrs] Brigades did receive Hizbullah's support. What harm does it do?"

In the interview to the German daily, Zbeidi said Fatah could not continue the war against

Israel without Hizbullah support.

### **PA Media Delay Reporting Bird Flu**

In Israel, the appearance of bird flu has dominated the front pages daily. In contrast, the Palestinian Authority waited until it acknowledged the problem.



**Al Quds. March 23, 2006**

### **Israel feeds Palestinian in the prison termed the Gaza Strip: 'Eat and shut up.'**

Until March 23, despite consistent reports in the Israeli media, there was no word of bird flu in the Gaza Strip. On that day, while the most popular Palestinian daily, Al Quds, failed to report on the issue, the embargo was broken by the PA-owned press. Al Ayyam published a front page story entitled "Bird Flu Reaches Gaza" along with a photograph of a chicken coop in Gaza. The story quoted Dr. Azzam Tabila, deputy agriculture minister, as saying that a definite case of the deadly H5N1 strain was reported at Hajr Dik near the Israeli "settlement" of Nahal Oz.

Tabila said 30 birds were infected on a farm that contained 35,000 chickens. He said no humans were infected but warned people to leave the area where the virus was found.

The PA deputy minister warned Palestinians to rely only on reports of bird flu from the PA. At a news conference in Ramallah on March 22, Tabila reassured Palestinians that the PA

contained enough expertise to fight the disease.

Al Ayyam ran another piece, from the official Palestinian news agency Wafa, that quoted the reaction of Palestinians in the West Bank city of Nablus to the outbreak of bird flu. The article quoted a range of Palestinians who deal with chickens, whether as consumers, restaurant owners or farmers and reported a high degree of awareness.



**Al Quds. March 25, 2006**

**'Wait a minute: The Israeli-Palestinian cooperation is against us?'**

On the same day, Al Hayat Al Jadida ran a lead story that quoted Israelis as reporting bird flu in the Gaza Strip. The PA statement appeared only on the inside pages.

The following day, the PA media expanded on the bird flu episode. Al Hayat Al Jadida published a front page story about the outbreak of H5N1, while stressing that the European Union prevented the import of chickens from Israel and Jordan. The newspaper reported the destruction of thousands of birds.

Al Quds, which the previous day ignored a PA news conference, dedicated its lead story to a headline: "Bird Flu Spreads from Israel to Communities in the Jordan Valley." The newspaper quoted Israeli rather than Palestinian sources in the report.

Al Ayyam and Al Hayat also reported Israeli-Palestinian cooperation regarding bird flu. For the first time, the PA media quoted the Israeli press on the outbreak of bird flu in the PA.

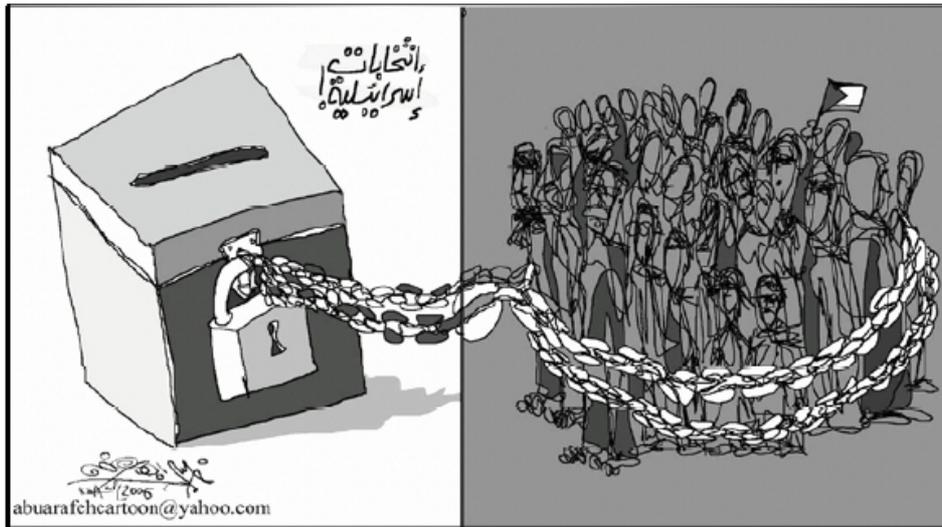
Al Ayyam said the PA was monitoring bird flu from Jewish settlements in the West Bank, citing the Bakaot settlement near the Palestinian village of Tubas. The newspaper also quoted a regional PA official as declaring a state of emergency in the central Gaza Strip.

By March 26, Al Ayyam was reporting massive concern over bird flu throughout the PA. The newspaper said thousands of people were calling the PA Agriculture Ministry for information on the disease. The report said people were becoming hysterical over the prospect that they would catch the disease.

### ***Who's Really Behind Al Qaida: the Jews, Of Course***

Al Quds is by the far the most popular newspaper in the Palestinian Authority. So when, editors agree to place an article on the front page, then there must be some thought behind the decision.

Consider the following article Al Quds ran on page one on March 23. The story from the German DPA news agency quoted a Saudi official as saying that "world Zionism" was behind Al Qaida. Salah Zahrani, chairman of the Saudi Consultative Council's security committee told a lecture in Riyadh that world Zionism has fueled Al Qaida attacks throughout the world.



**Al Quds. March 24, 2006**

**The Israeli elections mean the chaining of the Palestinians.**

The idea being promoted is this: the Zionists sowed confusion among the Al Qaida leadership when they killed Al Qaida's real leader, Abdullah Azzam. The Mossad killed him because he wanted to bring Islamic holy war from Afghanistan to Palestine.

Since then, world Zionism has supplied Al Qaida and deceived its membership into attacking Islamic countries. Zahrani pointed out that Al Qaida has never conducted a major attack against the Jewish state. He also said Saudi security forces have found a Mossad link with Al Qaida, which has received weapons supplies from Israel.