

# *Inside the PA*



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**Editor's note:**

**Welcome to the fifteenth 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**

**" The Koran is our constitution."**

—A Hamas member, leading a chant of the Islamic majority of the new Palestinian Legislative Council.

**This Week in the PA**

- *In Cairo, Palestinian strongman Dahlan meets Egyptian officials*
- *In Gaza City, PA panel probes killing of PRC commander*
- *In Gaza City, Hamas holds first Cabinet meeting*
- *In Gaza City, Palestinian farmers demand compensation for bird flu*

**NEWS DIGEST**

1. BACKGROUND: DIFFERENCES IN PALESTINIAN DAILIES
2. PA PLAYS UP ISRAELI ATTACKS; IGNORES CAPABILITIES
3. HAMAS AGENDA: ISRAEL MARKS MAIN CHALLENGE
4. NEW GOVERNMENT, SAME CHAOS
5. DAHLAN: OUT OF GOVERNMENT, STILL IN POWER

### **Background: Differences in Palestinian Dailies**

The Palestinian Authority contains three dailies published in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Two of the newspapers are directly owned by the PA and a third is heavily controlled by the Palestinian leadership. Still, the newspapers are quite different in their coverage and approach.

The best-selling daily in the PA is Al Quds, published in Jerusalem. Accurate circulation figures are hard to come by, but Palestinian sources agree that Al Quds sells as many newspapers as the other two dailies combined. Al Quds operates more like a commercial enterprise than its competitors.

During the era of Yasser Arafat, Al Quds published a photograph of the PLO leader virtually every day on the front page. When Arafat died, Al Quds began doing the same thing for his successor, PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas.

But over the last two months, Al Quds has been promoting the new force in the PA – Hamas. Front page coverage of Hamas, particularly that of the new prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh, is the usual fare for Al Quds. But Haniyeh does not garner anywhere near the attention and respect as had Arafat and Abbas.

Al Quds, the target of several PA raids in the 1990s, has also played down stories of Palestinian internecine strife. The newspaper buries the stories of most Palestinian shootouts in the Gaza Strip on the inside pages of the newspaper. Indeed, Al Quds has been very careful not to come out first with controversial stories, including the outbreak of bird flu in the Gaza Strip.

In contrast, Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida have reflected an approach one would expect of newspapers published by those in power in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They have provided greater coverage of internecine strife in the Gaza Strip. But the coverage remains superficial, with few details on the identities of Palestinian killers of their compatriots.



**Al Quds. March 30, 2006**

### **Israel's Olmert at the wheel: 'Just another bulldozer.'**

Indeed, Al Hayat Al Jadida covers internecine strife in a manner similar to the Soviet press of the 1970s. Gun battles between Fatah and PA police are termed "unfortunate incidents" without elaboration. Often, the newspaper will publish a solitary photograph of Fatah gunmen without more than a line of explanation.

Al Ayyam has been the most authoritative of the three newspapers when it comes to PA affairs. The newspaper has been the only one to consistently question the new Haniyeh government. It has also reported on an Israeli decision to sever security relations with the PA. The article quoted an Israeli military spokesman by name, an unusual measure by the PA media.

The Hamas-led government has revised the priorities of the two PA-owned dailies. Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida still cover Fatah extensively. But the coverage of the Cabinet and Palestinian Legislative Council has resulted in a major focus on Hamas politicians.

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.

**PA Plays Up Israeli Attacks; Ignores Capabilities**

The Palestinian Authority-controlled media have given extensive front page coverage to Israeli artillery strikes on Palestinian missile launch pads in the northern Gaza Strip. But the PA media have provided extremely little coverage of Palestinian missile strikes on Israel. Most of the coverage is brief and simply attributes missile strikes to a Palestinian group.

An exception was a page two article in Al Quds on March 30 that reported an Islamic Jihad announcement that it had deployed and fired the Soviet-origin Grad rocket – a variant of the Katyusha. The article contained details on the growing Palestinian missile and rocket capabilities almost never found in the PA press.



**Al Ayyam. April 2, 2006**

**Israeli PM Olmert directs U.S. Sec. of State Rice  
in laying the wall with '1,000 faults.'**

Jihad declared that it has obtained "many" Grads and deployed them in the Gaza Strip. According to this group, the Grad measures 2.8 meters, weighs 66 kilograms and has a caliber of 122 mm.; its 17-kilogram warhead is capable of a range of between 18 and 30 kilometers. A Jihad spokesman, Abu Abdullah, said the Katyushas would be launched

toward Israeli targets.

"These rockets, God willing, will provide the means for liberating the villages adjacent to the Gaza Strip," Abu Abdullah said. He explained that Jihad has sought to produce the Grads in the Gaza Strip – Jihad engineers are studying the rocket in an attempt to develop similar weapons.

The Grad could replace the current Palestinian projectile, the Kassam-class, short-range missile. So far, the Kassam has reached a range of 12 kilometers.

### ***Hamas Agenda: Israel Marks Main Challenge***

Hamas formally took power on March 29 as Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas swore in 24 Cabinet ministers.

Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh told a news conference that his government would cooperate with Abbas. But he then explained what cooperation would entail: Hamas would not negotiate with Israel but would not stop Abbas from doing so.

"It's his prerogative and we have no problem with that," Haniyeh said.

The new Hamas government has 24 ministers – 10 from the Gaza Strip and 14 from the West Bank. Nineteen are Hamas members and five are independents; one is a woman and one a Coptic Christian.

Formation of the Hamas government has resulted in international warnings of aid cutoff. Indeed, Canada has announced a suspension of aid, which would not include humanitarian assistance. Much of the PA's \$1.9 billion annual budget comes from foreign donors.

Judging from the PA-controlled press, there has been little indication of a serious aid cutoff. Both the European Union and Arab League states continue to report pledges of aid to the Palestinians.

The PA Agriculture Ministry has reported foreign aid to fight bird flu in the Gaza Strip. Last week, the EU sent a high-level delegation to the Gaza Strip to develop areas abandoned by Israel – termed "liberated areas" – in September 2005. PA officials told the delegation that the PA lost \$6.5 million in March because of the Israeli closure of passages from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank.

Kuwait has pledged tens of millions of dollars to build 1,000 housing units in the northern Gaza Strip. The project, near Beit Lahiya, was meant to include a school and two mosques and should have already begun. But PA officials said Israeli artillery attacks to stop Palestinian missile gunners in the area have delayed the project.



**Al Quds. March 28, 2006**

### **Haniyeh: 'What does a vote of confidence include?'**

The United Arab Emirates has signed a contract to build 3,000 housing units in Rafah. The deal was reported to be worth \$100 million and was not affected by the entry of the Hamas government.

Indeed, PA dailies are filled with want ads for personnel who are able to facilitate aid programs for the Palestinians. A leading group has been Islamic Relief, a British Muslim group. Amideast and the United Nations have also been advertising for personnel. Many of the jobs require work in the Gaza Strip, from which hundreds of Westerners fled in March amid a spate of abductions by the ruling Fatah movement.

The Palestinian Legislative Council meeting on March 28 highlighted Hamas's agenda. Hamas responded to the vote of confidence in the new government with cries of "Death for the sake of Allah is our most lofty aspiration." Hamas legislators were led in chants such as "Allah is our goal," "The Koran is our constitution," and "Jihad is our path."

Later, PA Deputy Prime Minister Eddin Al Shaer outlined the agenda of Hamas's new government, which he stated would be topped by the need to confront Israel. As education minister, he said he would stress what he termed the Palestinian "right of return" to what is now Israel. Palestinian control of Jerusalem and the need to free Palestinian detainees would also be priorities for him.

In an interview with Al Quds on March 28, Al Shaer also pledged that the Palestinian curriculum would stress religion and resistance against Israel. He cited as another challenge the need to form ties with the European Union and other countries.

### ***New Government, Same Chaos***

In January 2006, Hamas ran in legislative elections on a platform to end the armed chaos in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Hamas politicians promised that gunmen would not be allowed to walk through the streets or shoot their weapons.

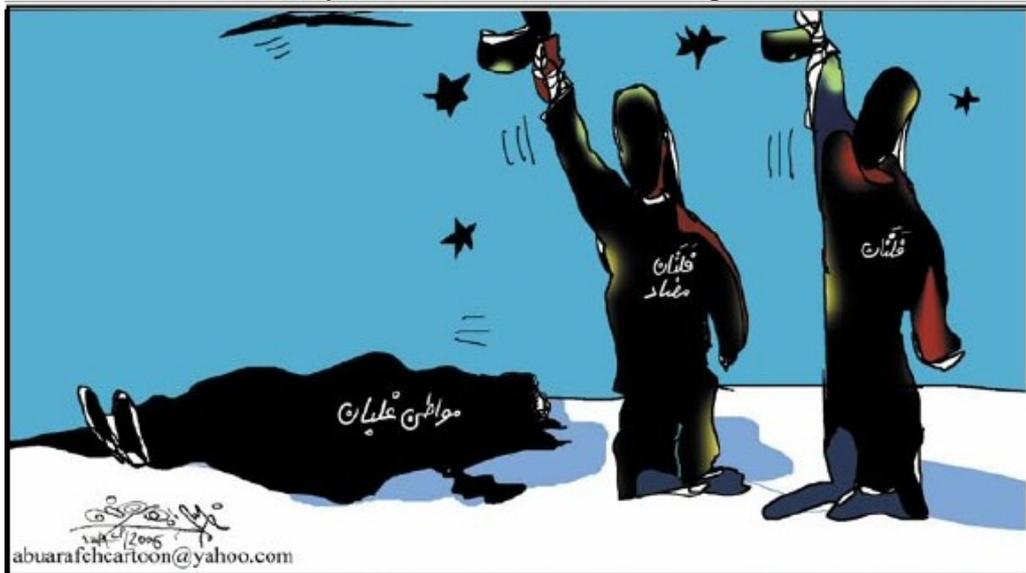
The first test of the Hamas government of this pledge came on March 31 when Palestinian Authority police clashed with Fatah gunmen in Gaza City. The Fatah-aligned Popular Resistance Committee, whose commander was earlier killed in a car bombing, attacked PA forces and tried to storm the house of a leading security commander. Four people, including two bystanders, were killed in the shootout.

The PA-aligned media covered the violence gingerly. But columnist Hani Habib in the PA-owned Al Ayyam ventured to challenge the new Hamas government. His column was entitled: "New Government, Same Armed Chaos."

Al Ayyam was the only Palestinian daily to focus its edition on internecine violence. In a one-page spread on April 2, the newspaper reported on Fatah gunmen who stormed an

Interior Ministry office in the West Bank city of Nablus and of Fatah gunmen who closed the market in the southern Gaza town of Rafah.

The PRC claimed that PA security forces colluded in the car bombing in which commander Abu Yusef Abu Quka was killed on March 31. At first, the PRC blamed Israel, but within hours, the blame was placed on the PA, particularly Mohammed Dahlan, regarded as the Fatah security commander in the Gaza Strip.



**Al Quds. April 1, 2006  
Armed chaos and the dead Palestinian citizen.**

During Abu Quka's funeral, PRC gunmen opened fire toward the home of Fatah leader Samir Mashrawi. PA Preventive Security Apparatus forces surrounded Mashrawi's house. Later, PRC gunmen clashed with the PSA officers. Three people were killed and 34 others were injured.

The PRC, which also contains former Hamas members, has been the most violent of the Palestinian militias. On March 27, PRC fighters abducted a member of the PA Military Intelligence in the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanoun.

The following day, 10 Palestinian students were injured when a grenade exploded in Beit Hanoun. The grenade was hurled during a high school student brawl.

The response by the Hamas government was mild. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh termed

the shootout "a dangerous situation" and said PA security forces would try to "pull civilian gunmen off the streets." He did not elaborate. "I want to stress the need not to slide toward civil war," he told PA television on March 31. "Let us not direct our arrows at each other."

But the PA decided not to arrest anybody. Instead, PA Interior Minister Said Siyam announced the formation of a committee to investigate the Abu Quka killing, a method often used by his predecessor, Nasser Yusef.

"We will ensure that nobody is above the law and demand an end to the instability and armed chaos," Siam said on April 2. "We are giving the security forces all the authority and power to investigate this ugly crime and also the three killings and other casualties that followed."

PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas did little better. Abbas's spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeina, issued an appeal on the PA official Wafa news agency "for calm and for gunmen to withdraw from the street."

### ***Dahlan: Out of Govt., Still in Power***

Formally, Mohammed Dahlan is one of 132 legislators and part of the opposition. Actually, Dahlan remains one of the most powerful people—and one of the wealthiest -- in the Gaza Strip. He continues to control an estimated 2,000 security officers from the PA Preventive Security Service, which he founded and commanded until 2004.

Despite his being out of power, the Palestinian Authority media have given Dahlan significant coverage. On March 31, PA newspapers reported that Dahlan was in Cairo and met Egyptian intelligence chief Gen. Omar Suleiman.



**Al Ayyam. March 30, 2006**

**A Palestinian tries to sort out such events  
as Olmert's election and the eclipse of the moon on the same day.**

A statement by Dahlan's office in Gaza City and published in the PA-owned Al Ayyam reported that Dahlan and Suleiman discussed relations between Fatah and Hamas. Dahlan was said to have told Suleiman that Fatah would become a "constructive opposition" to the Hamas-led government.

The meeting was also said to have covered the Israeli closure of passages from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank. Another topic was the result of the Israeli elections on March 28.

Dahlan has spent much of his time touring the Arab world. He has been in consultation with Arab senior officials, particularly those close to the United States. The tone of Palestinian media coverage suggests that Dahlan was aiming for a major political comeback.