

Inside the PA



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Editor's note:

Welcome to the fourth 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

"We are the fathers of the young generation and the young generation regard us as their fathers."

—PA Chairman Abbas, envisioning himself as the successor to Yasser Arafat.

This Week in the PA

- *Gaza City, Palestinian groups declare end to 'lull' with Israel*
- *In Gaza City, PA and Israel fail to begin convoys to West Bank*
- *In Rafah, EU monitors flee Fatah attack on border terminal*
- *In Rafah, Palestinian abductors release 3 Britons*
- *In Ramallah, PA poll shows majority support for Al Qaida strike*
- *In Ramallah, 20 candidates drop out of PLC campaign*

NEWS DIGEST

1. PA SEEKS TO INCITE ISLAMIC BACKLASH
2. JIHAD WARNS OF INSTANT RESPONSE
3. FATAH MERGES LISTS FOR PLC ELECTIONS
4. PA CONCERNED OVER BUFFER ZONE IN N. GAZA
5. PA FINANCE MIN. URGES CONTROL OVER POLICE
6. PA OPENS FIRE AGAINST PEACEFUL PROTESTERS
7. PA PANICS OVER ABDUCTION OF BRITON

PA Seeks to Incite Islamic Backlash

The Palestinian Authority has again sought to incite an Islamic backlash against Israel.

The PA-owned media have warned of a so-called Israeli plot to destroy the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. The media said the plot would take place during the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

This is not the first time, the PA has warned of an Israeli plot to capture or destroy Al Aqsa. Similar warnings were issued in 2000 and 2003.



Al Quds. Dec. 23, 2005

Palestinians from Bilin confront Israeli bulldozers that seek to build West Bank security wall.

On December 27, the PA-owned Al Hayat Al Jadeeda quoted the Islamic movement as warning of an Israeli plan to destroy Al Aqsa. In a front page report, the newspaper quoted Islamic movement vice president Kamal Khatib as saying that Israel planned to exploit internecine Palestinian violence to destroy the mosque and build a Jewish temple.

"There is solid evidence of a strong movement within Israeli society that supports the construction of the so-called temple atop the ruins of Al Aqsa mosque," Khatib said in a statement. "The current period is crucial concerning Al Aqsa and Jerusalem in general since the construction of the supposed temple will be at the expense of Al Aqsa mosque."

Khatib warned Palestinians not to believe Israeli politicians who have dismissed the warning. He said Israeli politicians have sought to reassure Muslims that any threat against Al Aqsa was not serious.

The newspaper said the Islamic movement received a tip from Israeli police that "Jewish fanatics" have requested to visit Al Aqsa during Hanukkah. Al Hayat Al Jadeeda said police were considering the request.

Khatib said the Jewish groups that sought to destroy Al Aqsa and rebuild the temple have received the "care, support and security protection of official Israeli organizations." He did not identify the organizations.

The PA has been also preparing for the prospect of a major attack against the West. A PA-sponsored poll reported that 65 percent of Palestinians supported an Al Qaida attack against the European Union and the United States. The poll, conducted by the Norwegian organization FAFO and reported by Al Hayat Al Jadida on December 23, said 79.9 percent of Palestinians want the PA to adopt Islamic law.

Jihad Warns of Instant Response

At a news conference on Dec. 27 and covered in the PA-owned daily Al Ayyam on the following day, an Islamic Jihad leader, Sheik Khaled Jaradat, said the calm or Tahadiya declared by the Palestinian Authority in February 2005 came about as a result of the local and regional situation and would end because of Palestinian pressure. The Jihad leadership in the northern West Bank reiterated its right to respond to any Israeli violation of the so-called Tahadiya.

"We insist on our right to respond to any Israeli violation of the calm," Jaradat said.

Jaradat also called on the PA to release what he termed were political prisoners. He said a Jihad delegation met recently with PA Interior Minister Nasser Yusef and asked for the release of all political prisoners. Jaradat called the detention of Jihad and other prisoners a mistake. He said this weakened the PA.

Islamic Jihad has been the leading Palestinian terrorist group in the war against Israel. Jihad as well as the Fatah-aligned Popular Resistance Committees have taken responsibility for virtually all of the missile attacks from the Gaza Strip.

On December 27, PRC spokesman Mohammed Abdul Aal, also known as Abu Abir, said his group has obtained maps of Israel Army bases north of the Gaza Strip. Abdul Aal said the PRC's military wing, Nasser Salah Eddin Brigades, planned to carry out attacks deep into Israel. The PRC said its missiles have been upgraded and could now reach a range of 15 kilometers. Abdul Aal said the first missiles had a range of only three kilometers.

At a briefing, Abdul Aal said Palestinian missiles have achieved an accuracy of 80 percent. He said the missiles have caused considerable damage inside Israel.

For its part, the Jihad military wing, the Quds Brigades, reported an attempt to manufacture anti-aircraft missiles. A Jihad spokesman said the missiles were designed to strike Israeli fixed-wing and helicopters in the Gaza Strip.

On December 29, Al Ayyam quoted a Jihad website Nida Al Quds [Call of Jerusalem] as saying that the anti-aircraft missiles would be ready soon. The newspaper quoted Israeli military sources as acknowledging that Jihad has enhanced its rockets and missiles.

Fatah Merges Lists for PLC Elections

The ruling Fatah movement has announced a merger of rival lists for the Palestinian Legislative Council elections.

Former PA Civil Affairs Minister Mohammed Dahlan, a member of the Fatah Revolutionary Council, told a news conference on December 28 that jailed PLC member Marwan Barghouti would head the Fatah list. In a dispatch from the official Palestinian news agency Wafa, Dahlan said he hoped the united list would improve Fatah's chances at the polls.

Barghouti has been sentenced by Israel to five life sentences for participating in the killing of several people. The PA has called for his release.

Dahlan told the Ramallah news conference that Fatah was leading Hamas in the latest polls. He said his movement was the only that could "lead the Palestinian society towards democracy and prosperity."



Al Quds. Dec. 23, 2005

Alarm clock for Palestinian state breaks down.

At the same time, Dahlan expressed concern over the continuation of Fatah attacks on the Central Elections Commission in the Gaza Strip. He called on the Interior Ministry to impose law and order.

Earlier in the day, on December 28, Fatah gunmen had stormed CEC offices in the Gaza cities of Khan Yunis and Rafah as part of a campaign for PA jobs and salaries.

Wafa reported that CEC employees left the premises and the offices were closed. Wafa did not identify the gunmen as Fatah members. But PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas acknowledged the attacks on CEC offices. Abbas said he instructed the security forces to "strongly curb any assault against the CEC offices."

At the same time, the PA-owned media continued to prepare Palestinians for the prospect that elections would be canceled. On December 27, the PA-owned Al Hayat Al Jadeeda ran a column by Yahya Rabah that attacked the insistence by Fatah and other factions on holding elections.



Al Ayyam. Dec. 29, 2005

**Playing an oud entitled 'Palestinian elections':
'It needs only a little tuning.'**

Rabah warned that elections would not be held without an Israeli commitment to enable Palestinians to vote in Jerusalem. He also said elections would not solve the Palestinian war with Israel.

"They bury their head in the sands and scream 'elections, elections, elections,'" Rabah, regarded as a key propagandist for the PA leadership, said.

But Mustafa Barghouti, head of the Future List aligned to Fatah, has called for Palestinians to defy any Israeli ban on elections in Jerusalem. He said the elections were an opportunity for Palestinians to express their rejection of the Israeli occupation and said the elections in Jerusalem would force the Israeli police to go from "house to house and street to street."

PA Concerned Over Buffer Zone in N. Gaza

The Palestinian Authority has expressed concern that an Israeli military plan to create a no-entry zone in the northern Gaza Strip would restore Israeli control over the area.

PA statements and officials have warned of the Israeli plan to stop Palestinian missile attacks from the northern Gaza Strip. The plan called for the creation of a three-kilometer kill zone in the uninhabited northern Gaza Strip, where Jewish settlements had existed until the Israeli unilateral withdrawal in September 2005.



Al Hayat Al Jadeeda. Dec. 30

**Peres and Sharon play ping pong
over the kill zone in the Gaza Strip.**

PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas has condemned the Israeli plan. Abbas said in statements reported by the PA media on December 28 that Israel had no right to reoccupy the Gaza Strip under any pretext.

The most popular daily in the Palestinian Authority, Al Quds, said in an editorial on December 25 that the Israeli plan constituted collective punishment. Al Quds, in an editorial entitled "The Buffer Zone, a New Kind of Occupation," said Israel planned to reoccupy large parts of the Gaza Strip.

Al Quds said Israel was using its methods in southern Lebanon in the Gaza Strip. Israel maintained a security zone in southern Lebanon from 1985 until 2000.

The newspaper urged the international community to oppose the Israeli plan. Al Quds warned that international silence would lead to a new occupation, "but this time harder."

The PA-owned Al Ayyam reported on December 28 that Palestinian experts said the PA has lost tens of millions of dollars from the security zone in the northern Gaza strip. The experts warned of serious damage to both the PA and the Gaza economy by the no-entry zone, which they said comprised 10 percent of Gaza and included farms and orchards.

PA Finance Min. Urges Control Over Police

PA Finance Minister Salam Fayyad has released a report that urged a freeze on hiring of PA police and supervision over incentives paid to terrorists.

A candidate for the Palestinian Legislative Council, Fayyad told a budget conference in the Gaza Strip on December 24 that the PA could not afford to keep paying for additional security forces. He said the PA must also stop issuing pensions to people who never served in the PA police.

The police has at least 63,000 officers on the payroll. In testimony to the U.S. House International Relations Committee, then-U.S. security coordinator Gen. William Ward said up to two thirds of the police don't report to work.



Al Hayat Al Jadeeda. Dec. 26, 2005

Arab gives Santa Claus directions on how to get past Israeli roadblocks to Bethlehem.

Fayyad's remarks, reported in the PA media on December 27, said the public sector contains 135,000 employees. He said 45,000 people join the work force every year. "The PA can not absorb this," Fayyad said. In response to this, he called for budget cuts, saying the PA must ensure strict controls over the hiring of PA police and pensions.

The outgoing finance minister said the "military sector" must not absorb any more officers and maintain a ratio that does not exceed one employee to three pensioners through 2008. In addition, Fayyad urged that the PA impose a "strict definition" of who works for the PA security forces. The PA, he said, must not issue any pay raises in the "salaries of the military before this definition is made." He also recommended strict auditing procedures in managing the military.

Fayyad warned that the international community has linked donations to transparency. He said donor countries were willing to provide the Palestinians with \$3 billion in 2006 if the PA drafts an acceptable fiscal plan.

[On Dec. 30, Fatah gunmen attacked the Rafah border terminal in another effort to obtain jobs and money from the PA. More than 50 European Union monitors posted at the terminal fled. The monitors returned the following day.]

"The Palestinian people cannot afford to give up foreign assistance and therefore a balance should be made between what is required and what is available," Fayyad said. "External relations are important to obtain financial and political support."

Fayyad said the most important challenge to the PA was paying salaries to its employees. He said money for salaries comes from donor nations. "It is necessary to develop the private sector so it can contribute to ending unemployment and poverty in the Palestinian society," Fayyad said.

The PA-owned media have been wary of Fayyad and his Western background. In a column on December 24 in Al Ayyam, Hussein Hijazi said Fayyad could hardly speak Arabic and had sought to wrest budgetary control from the late PA Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Hijazi said Fayyad represented the traditional Left, which he said has proven incapable of

PA Opens Fire Against Peaceful Protesters

The Palestinian Authority has authorized the use of live fire against peaceful protests in the Gaza Strip.

Security forces as well as guards employed by the PA shot and wounded four farm laborers who protested against conditions on Dec. 26 in the southern Gaza Strip. The laborers were employed at greenhouses in the former Jewish settlement of Netzer Hazani in a \$33 million project financed by the international community.

The laborers had cut off water supplies to the greenhouses in protest of a PA plan to reduce by 50 percent the number of working days. The workers received 60 shekels a day.

At that point, PA guards opened fire in the direction of the striking workers. The workers were employed by the PA-owned Palestine Economic Development Company. Sami Abdullah told Al Ayyam that "armed guards" opened fire on 200 workers during a peaceful march protesting the intention of the company to dispense with the services of some of the workers."

The workers had been employed in the area for six years at Jewish settlements, Abdullah said. He said the work was vital to support their families.

Abdullah called on the PA to intervene and save the workers. He also called for a PA investigation into the shooting.

Amid Al Masri, executive director of the project, told Al Ayyam that the PA company employed security forces, private guards and members of the so-called Popular Army. The Popular Army was created by Fatah and financed by the PA to help patrol the former Jewish settlements and said to number about 5,000. Al Masri said some of the workers carried weapons and sought to sabotage the greenhouses. He said the company sought to make a profit and was not designed to absorb unemployed Gazans.

The PA-owned media have played down this and other incidents of internecine strife. On December 30, PA newspapers displayed a report on the bottom of the front page that told of an attack on a PA police station in Gaza City in which one person was killed and seven others were injured. The attackers were not identified in these reports.



Al Ayyam. Dec. 29, 2005

Kidnapped

On December 30, the three British nationals were released. A group termed Brigades of the Mujahideen-Jerusalem said it had abducted the three in an effort to bring European Union and U.S. pressure on Israel.

During the ordeal, PA newspapers published appeals for the release of the Burtons. The dailies portrayed the younger Burton as pro-Palestinian and even published a photograph of her in traditional Arab dress.

Foreigners have been frequently abducted in the Gaza Strip, held ransom for money and jobs from the PA. This time, the PA did not report any demands from the kidnappers.

Now the charge is made that the lack of action by the PA against those who instigated previous kidnappings encouraged others to carry out similar crimes of that kind."