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Gaza Cease-fire Continues to Break

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak told Israel Army Radio, "[If] we have to, we will hit Hamas again." And Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert promised a "harsh" and "disproportionate" response to the renewal of rocket fire into Israel during his Sunday address to the cabinet.

Israel's *Haaretz* newspaper reported that a cease-fire may be signed as early as February 4 in Cairo. The paper reported that both Egypt and Israel are engaged in negotiations with Hamas, but that Israeli defense officials have told Egyptian leaders that Israel rejects the Egyptian-Hamas proposal for a new cease-fire lasting a limited time.



As sporadic breaks in the cease-fire occurred, Taher al-Nunu, a spokesman for the Hamas-controlled government, told reporters on February 2 that Hamas endorsed the killing of Israeli collaborators in Gaza during last month's hostilities, but he denied that Hamas had attacked members of the rival Palestinian faction, Fatah.

"The government differentiates between violations of the law and those acts undertaken by the resistance during a time of war to protect itself from the danger of collaborators," government spokesman Taher al-Nunu told reporters. "The government will show no mercy to collaborators who stab our people in the back, and they will be held accountable according to the law.... If any collaborator is sentenced to death, we will not hesitate to carry it out."

The French Press Agency (AFP) reported that the al-Nunu statement was issued in apparent response to complaints by Palestinian human rights groups and victims who had accused the Hamas authorities of attacking dozens of members of the rival Fatah party, whom they had accused of collaborating with Israel.

Also planned for February 2, according to the Egyptian Ministry of Information newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, was a meeting between Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and (Fatah Party) Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, whose agenda included discussing developments in talks with Hamas.

CNN reported that the newspaper quoted Abbas' personal representative, Nabil Shaath, as saying that Abbas had changed his schedule — canceling a trip to Europe — to go to Cairo because there was "a tangible opening in the Cairo talks regarding the cease-fire, national Palestinian reconciliation and opening the [Gaza] border crossing."

Meanwhile, Iran's state television reported on a February 2 meeting in Tehran between Khaled Mashaal, head of the Hamas political bureau who lives in self-imposed exile in Syria, and Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. According to Iran's state television, Mashaal credited Iran with playing a "big role" in helping Hamas achieve a "victory of Gaza's people" during Israel's recent



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offensive in Gaza. AP reported that Mashaal said the "people of Gaza ... have always appreciated the political and spiritual support of Iranian leaders and nation" and that "Iran has definitely played a big role in the victory of the people of Gaza and is a partner in that victory."

Mashaal did not elaborate on how he interpreted the heavy destruction of Gaza's infrastructure and the deaths of 1,300 Palestinians, but only 13 Israelis, as a victory.

During a meeting on February 1 with Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, Mashaal said Hamas opposes international efforts "that would deprive the Gaza people of weapons" and asserted that the Gaza Palestinians have a "right to resist and access weapons to achieve our rights." Finding an end to the smuggling of weapons into Gaza has been a linchpin of efforts to settle the conflict supported by Israel, the United States, and others.

While Hamas is officially considered to be a terrorist organization by the governments of the Canada, the European Union, Israel, Japan, and the United States, Iran recognizes the group as the legitimate Palestinian government. According to the U.S. State Department, Hamas is funded by Iran, Palestinian expatriates, and "private benefactors in Saudi Arabia and other Arab states." Most Western governments have been backing Abbas, regarding his Fatah group as the more moderate of the rival factions vying for control of Palestinian interests.

Also on February 1, Palestinian President Abbas, speaking at a news conference in Cairo in preparation for a Monday meeting with Egyptian President Mubarak, issued a critical statement directed at Hamas: "They ... have taken risks with the blood of Palestinians, with their fate, and dreams and aspirations for an independent Palestinian state."

AFP reported that Abbas also accused Hamas of trying to smash the Palestine Liberation Organization and said he rejected talks with any group which did not recognize the PLO, saying: "Today [Hamas] emerge[s] upon us with a destructive project, which we have heard before ... and which has gone to the rubbish bin of history. They must admit clearly ... that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and after that (there can be) dialogue."

Representatives of Hamas were also scheduled to travel to Egypt on February 3 to meet with Cairo's intelligence chief Omar Suleiman. Egypt has been trying to broker a lasting peace agreements between the rulers of Gaza and the Israelis.

In Jerusalem, a senior Israeli defense official told AFP that his nation was demanding an end to fire from Gaza and arms smuggling into the coastal strip, explaining: "Israel does not negotiate with Hamas. Israel demands two conditions — the total cessation of fire and an end to arms smuggling. Israel is only holding talks with Egypt on this issue."

In understanding the two forces contending for control over the destiny of Palestinians, the overt terrorist bent of Hamas has been widely recognized. However, while Fatah Party leader and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has taken a softer approach than Hamas, his history is nevertheless troublesome.

Fatah (Arabic for "Conquest") was once headed by the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) Yasser Arafat. Officially, the PLO and its military arm, the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), were formed at the Arab-Cairo Summit in 1964. Following Israel's victory in the 1967 six-day war, the PLO began sending hundreds of recruits to terrorist training camps in the Soviet Union and other communist nations, and in 1974, the Soviet Union invited Arafat to open a PLO office in Moscow. It was the beginning of a long association between the PLO and the communist world. In a 1980 speech in Beirut, Abu Iyad, Arafat's



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deputy, declared: "We, the members of the Communist Party and of the National Movement, are fighting together in the same foxhole."

Years later, as Arafat cultivated a more moderate image, his apologists in the West insisted that he had reformed and become a peacemaker, as evidenced by his having signed the Oslo Declaration of Principles and the Cairo Agreement between Israel and the PLO. Arafat's defenders cited the PLO's arrests of, and gun battles with, Hamas and Hezbollah radicals as proof of the PLO's moderation.

However, Arafat's PLO continued to network with the Middle East's most radical groups. A case in point was the Tehran terror summit of April 2001, at which, according to Reuven Paz of the Institute for Counter-Terrorism, "Palestinian participants included Palestinian Authority (PA) minister in charge of Jerusalem affairs Faisal Husseini and Palestinian National Council head Salim Za'noun (Abu Adib), one of the founding generation of Fatah and for many years the main link between Yasir Arafat and Islamic fundamentalist circles."

During the Lebanese civil war in the 1970s, Arafat aligned the PLO with the communist and "Nasserist" (after Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser) Lebanese National Movement (LNM). A comprehensive description of the PLO's connections with other radical Islamic or communist (or both) organizations would make up an article all its own.

Upon Arafat's death in 2004, PLO Secretary-General Mahmoud Abbas was selected chairman of the PLO. Abbas became president of the Palestinian National Authority on January 15, 2005 on the Fatah ticket. Abbas was one of the founding members of Fatah in 1957, along with Yasser Arafat.

Abu Daoud, one of the terrorists believed to be responsible for the 1972 Munich Olympic attack that killed 11 Israeli athletes, noted in his autobiography, *Memoirs of a Palestinian Terrorist*, that Abbas was responsible for securing the funding for the terrorist operation.

Abba's past undermines the claim that his Palestinian organization is as moderate as it is generally portrayed in the press. It may *seem* to be the voice of moderation in contrast with Hamas, but that is like saying that a Mafia family that has gone "legitimate" by investing in legal businesses is more "moderate" than a gang of Colombian drug traffickers or the notorious Chinese triad gangs.

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