

Date and Time: Friday, May 3, 2024 4:32:00PM EEST

Job Number: 223447128

Documents (100)

1. [*Hamas at 22*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

2. [*Kidnapped soldier on Hamas video*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

3. [*Hamas in shootout with Islamist group*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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4. [*15 Palestinians hurt in clashes with Hamas police*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

5. [*Israel, Hamas inch toward prisoner swap deal*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

6. [*Hamas clash with radicals kills four, injures 38*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

7. [*Eight killed, 80 injured in Hamas, radicals clashes*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

8. [*Pakistan : Israel , Hamas inch towards prisoner exchange*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

9. [*Hamas turns its attention to 'virtue'*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

10. [*Israel , Hamas in mutual gestures on prisoners*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

11. [Hamas bans women from riding motorbikes](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

12. [Hamas produces its first feature film](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

13. [Hamas enforcing strict Islamic morals](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

14. [A Hamas victory in 2010?](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

15. [Hamas raps Miss Palestine contest](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

16. [Gaza: Hamas tightens, then backs off, Islamic social strictures](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

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17. [A blind eye to Hamas atrocities](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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18. [Hamas is leading Palestinians down the road of carnage](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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19. [Hamas seen to score rare victory in soldier tape swap](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

20. [Israel -Hamas prisoner swap deal near: officials](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

21. [Israel -Hamas prisoner swap deal near - officials](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

22. [Hamas promises surprises at Monday anniversary rally. Mashaal complains Israel rebuffing some Schalit demands](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
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23. [Israel, Hamas Inch Closer To Prisoner Exchange Deal](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

24. [Gilad Shalit release: Hamas, Israel prisoner swap said to be imminent](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
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25. [Hamas mobilizes mass rally in show of strength, vows to continue struggle against Israel](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

26. [Hamas Shifts From Rockets To Culture War](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

27. [*Pakistan : ' Israel -Hamas prisoner swap deal near'*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

28. [*Releases a'triumph' for Hamas as video of captive soldier shown*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

29. [*Hamas bans women on motorcycles in Gaza Strip*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

30. [*International: Hamas rockets stop amid talks on Israel soldier*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

31. [*Hamas kid's Web site encourages suicide bombers in Europe*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

32. [*Mashaal: We can talk to Obama. Hamas chief denies reports of progress on Shalit*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

33. [*Hamas' Zahar tells Haaretz: Shalit swap deal still a long way off*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

34. [*Hamas officials hold talks on Shalit prisoner swap deal*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

35. [*Abbas accuses Hamas of splitting Palestinians*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

36. [*Up to 28 dead as Hamas attacks Al-Qa'ida allies; Gaza Strip Splinter group leader killed*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

37. [*Women in Gaza face Hamas crackdown Attempt to strictly enforce Islamic law*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

38. [*German mediator seeking prisoner swap between Israel , Hamas meets with militant group in Gaza*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

39. [*ISRAEL, HAMAS TO SWAP PRISONERS FOR VIDEO OF CAPTURED SOLDIER*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

40. [*Hamas Fights, Often Within Its Ranks, Over Gaza's Islamist Identity*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

41. [*Israeli PM's Office: Deal Yet To Be Reached In Prisoner Exchange Negotiations With Hamas*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

42. [Hamas tells Gazan schoolgirls to wear traditional clothes or be expelled](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

43. [In Hamas video, abducted Israeli sergeant says he is well](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

44. [Hamas to give proof Israeli alive Militants to trade video of Schalit in return for freeing 20 prisoners](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
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45. [Israel begins prisoner release for Hamas video](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

46. [Video of Israeli soldier held by Hamas is 'proof of life'](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

47. [Hamas feels religious pressure in Gaza Guardians of morality impose their views, in a challenge to government](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

48. [*Hamas travel ban may disrupt Fatah conference. Delegates not allowed to go to West Bank unless PA frees detainees, Gaza officials say*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

49. [*Hamas swaps video of captured Israeli soldier for Palestinian prisoners*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

50. [*Abbas insists on the right to 'resist' Israel Hamas lambasted at conference*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

51. [*Liberating Hopes Hamas must now free Gilad Schalit to end the stalemate and despair in Gaza*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

52. [*Schalit release likely in first half of 2010. Hamas expected to use boosted popularity after mass prisoner releases to gain votes in Palestinian elections*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

53. [*Hamas turns away from its rockets Sensing Gazans' fatigue, Palestinian group pushes a 'culture of resistance'*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

54. [*'They accused me of going without a headscarf and laughing in public'. PA female journalist says Hamas modesty squad tried to arrest her in Gaza*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

55. [*Hamas swaps video of Israeli soldier for prisoners*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

56. [*Hamas now fighting with art, not rockets Shifting policy, leaders are looking to cultural initiatives to win support*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Dec 31, 2009

57. [*Status of Schalit negotiations unclear after video release. Hamas spokesman says deal is near, but Netanyahu cautions release 'is still far away'*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

58. [*Schalit videotape likely to spur renewed calls for deal to gain his freedom. Women prisoners' release could delay final agreement, however, if it leads Hamas to raise its demands*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

59. [*For Israel, a low price to pay for a sign of life; for Hamas, a propaganda coup*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

60. [*Haniyeh cancels Mecca trip as hopes rise for Schalit deal. 'During the next few days the picture will become clear,' Hamas official says after talks with German and Egyptian mediators*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

61. [*International: Middle East: Hopes rise for release of soldier captured in Gaza as Hamas holds talks in Cairo: Shalit could be handed to Egyptian authorities: Israel would free initial 450 prisoners under deal*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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62. [Israel and Hamas deal: 20 prisoners for a video of Shalit Israel has agreed to release 20 female Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a video of Cpl. Gilad Shalit, who is being held in Gaza.](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

63. [Hamas: Swap of Shalit video for 20 women prisoners is first phase of an exchange agreement. Tape to be handed over Friday * Germans and Egyptians broker deal to provide Israel with 'updated and unequivocal proof' of Shalit's well-being * First release of Palestinian prisoners since Netanyahu became PM](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Dec 31, 2009

64. [Hamas releases video of captive Israeli soldier Young sergeant expresses love for family in footage handed over in exchange for Palestinian prisoners](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Dec 31, 2009

65. [U.N. finds proof of Gaza war crimes Israel and Hamas both targeted civilians, human rights report says](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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Dec 31, 2009

66. [Blocking the truth behind the Gaza war. How the Goldstone Commission understated the Hamas threat to Palestinian civilians](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by

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67. [Mediator to give Israeli response on prisoner swap](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

68. [German Mediator In Gaza For Prisoner Exchange Negotiations](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

69. [Israel to free 20 Palestinians for video](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by

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70. [In Gaza, Opportunities Fade As Feeling of Isolation Grows](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by

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71. [Afghanistan : Swapping Prisoners](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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72. [*Mashaal: We'll capture more Schalits until not even one prisoner is in enemy jails*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

73. [*One year after Operation Cast Lead: Everybody stronger but Gazans*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

74. [*Veiled anxiety*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

75. [*Three Christians, one Israeli elected to Fatah council*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

76. [*Israel moves closer to freeing captive soldier*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

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77. [Getting the interests straight](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

78. [The fractures of Palestine](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

79. [Professionals in Gaza fear 'very dark years' of isolation](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

80. [Israel swaps 20 prisoners for Schalit film](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

81. [SWAP OF PALESTINIAN PRISONERS FOR ISRAEL SOLDIER REPORTED NEAR SGT. SHALIT
KIDNAPPED FROM GAZA BORDER POST IN 2006](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

82. [Exchange begins for Shalit tape Israel releases 19 Palestinian women](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

83. [Shalit one step closer to home](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

84. [Israel To Swap 20 Palestinian Prisoners For Video Of Abducted Soldier](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

85. [ISRAEL ORDERS MORE DISCUSSIONS ON SHALIT PRISONER SWAP](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

86. [Signs of life](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

87. [Settlers beat, seriously injure female Israeli police officer over West Bank construction ban](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

88. [*Settlers beat and injure Israeli officer*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

89. [*Female Israeli police officer severely beaten*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

90. [*Israel to free 20 prisoners for proof Shalit alive*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

91. [*Israel Rejects UN Report On Gaza War Crimes*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

92. [*The Islamic republic of Gaza*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

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93. [Women free after Shalit video](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

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News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

94. [A glitzy premiere for first 'Hamaswood' movie in Gaza City](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

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Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

95. [International: Israel to free 20 female prisoners for tape of soldier](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

96. [Gaza militant groups agree to stop firing rockets into Israel](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

97. [Schalit prisoner swap could bring freedom for 'next leader' of Fatah Nearly 1,000 Palestinians may be released Middle East](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to

Dec 31, 2009

98. [*Israel bombs Gaza smuggling tunnels*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

99. [*Conclusions about Israel 's guilt in Gaza were voiced well in advance of a 'fact-finding' mission*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

100. [*Israel agrees to free Palestinian prisoners for Gilad Shalit video*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hamas

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jun 30, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

[Hamas at 22](#)

The Jerusalem Post

December 15, 2009 Tuesday

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Section: OPINION; Pg. 13

Length: 723 words

Highlight: Editorial

Body

Time flies when you're spilling blood. Has it really been 22 years since [Hamas](#) was established in Gaza as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood by Sheik Ahmad Yassin?

Tens of thousands of Palestinians packed a Gaza City square yesterday to mark the anniversary and heard Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh pledge, from behind a podium decorated daintily with orange, white and red flowers, that [Hamas](#) would never make peace with Israel.

Propagandists for the Palestinian cause are wont to refer to the territory as "an open-air prison for its 1.4 million residents." In truth, it's more a working model of what a [Hamas](#)-led Palestine would look like.

Granted there is plenty of desperation and misery in Gaza - much of it self-inflicted. [Women](#) may not be seen astride motorcycles. Couples strolling along the beach have been stopped by police and asked to produce proof of marriage. The freedom of Palestinian journalists to write critically about [Hamas](#) is limited, otherwise they might expose the campaign of abductions, unlawful killings, torture, and death threats against critics of the regime.

[Hamas](#) considers all of "Palestine" an Islamic trust and itself in a permanent state of war with the Jews. Beginning with the 2005 disengagement and dramatically intensifying after [Hamas](#)'s takeover of the Strip from Fatah in 2007, Israel has maintained a blockade.

Concrete and steel are embargoed - [Hamas](#) would use these for military purposes. But Israel does allow a constant flow of humanitarian goods to go in; 698 trucks last week - not counting a special convoy containing books and stationery donated by Qatar. Unlike prevailing conditions in some Organization of the Islamic Conference states, there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Still, as long as [Hamas](#) chooses war with Israel, we'd prefer that Gaza's civilian needs be met via its border with Egypt.

ALL IN all, it has been a decent year for [Hamas](#). Much of its leadership survived Operation Cast Lead by hiding in hospital basements. It did not find it too hard to replace tons of lost weapons - via smuggling tunnels beneath the Philadelphi Corridor - and reconstitute its cadre of commanders. In fact, it now has missiles that can strike Tel Aviv.

Egypt is plainly unable - perhaps unwilling - to stop the smuggling despite advanced equipment and training provided by the US.

[Hamas](#) also managed to keep Gilad Schalit's whereabouts secret from IDF intelligence for yet another year. And it continued to brainwash Palestinian children to hate.

Hamas at 22

The military setbacks suffered by Hamas during Operation Cast Lead were more than offset by a cornucopia of diplomatic benefits thanks to the Goldstone Report and post-war media coverage which accepted Palestinian assertions that most of the war's casualties were civilians and that Israel's use of force against Hamas was "disproportionate" and immoral.

Hamas continues to receive strong military backing from Teheran. On Sunday, its Damascus-based politburo chief, Khaled Mashaal, was hosted by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He urged Hamas not to go wobbling on Israel.

He needn't worry. It is unlikely that Hamas will experience a metamorphosis in 2010 and agree to end terrorism, accept Israel's right to exist and embrace the agreements ratified by the Palestinian Authority.

That is too bad. Because divided between Fatah and Hamas, the Palestinian polity is immobilized. The idea that Mahmoud Abbas will find the courage for genuine give and take at the negotiating table while Hamas breathes down his neck is risible. And if the Netanyahu government assents to a lop-sided prisoner release, Hamas's strength and Fatah's weakness will become even more pronounced.

Given that Israel is not prepared to seize the Gaza Strip from Hamas's clutches and that neither Palestinian elections nor a Palestinian unity government would solve the Hamas problem; and that moreover, Hamas in contrast to Fatah offers coherence and discipline, Nathan Brown of the Carnegie Middle East Center wonders if perhaps Israel should not explore a Machiavellian *modus vivendi* with the Islamists.

It is an approach some Israeli strategists, including ex-Mossad chief Efraim Halevy, would be prepared to consider if only Hamas would stop reminding us - as Haniyeh did at yesterday's rally - that "the liberation of the Strip is just a step to liberating all of Palestine."

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

Kidnapped soldier on Hamas video

Irish Examiner

October 3, 2009 Saturday

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Section: WORLD

Length: 467 words

Body

Defence Minister Ehud Barak said Sgt Gilad Schalit, taken captive by Hamas-linked militants in June 2006, appeared healthy. An official who had seen the video said the 23-year-old serviceman spoke lucidly about an event in his past.

He gave no further details, but Hamas officials reported on the group's website the soldier discussed an accident he had in the military before he was taken captive.

It was the first glimpse of Schalit since his capture. Before yesterday, the only signs of life had been three letters and an audio tape.

The Palestinian prisoners' triumphant return home to a flag-waving and cheering crowd, together with the video's arrival in Israel, gave hope to each side that a wider, long-awaited prisoner swap was in the offing.

Hamas is demanding freedom for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners as their price for Schalit, whose capture in a bloody cross-border raid has touched a raw nerve in a country where most families have loved ones in the military.

Yesterday's deal could also herald an end to a crippling, Israel-led blockade of Gaza, which has prevented the territory from rebuilding after Israel's winter war there.

Israel imposed the blockade after Hamas, a violent group backed by Iran and Syria, seized power in Gaza two years ago. Israel has made it clear that it will not ease the embargo before the serviceman is freed.

Hamas's prime minister in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, hailed the deal as a "triumph" for the armed Palestinian resistance against Israel.

Israeli media reported that the video would be aired publicly soon.

A Hamas website cites officials as saying the video was filmed on September 14, and shows Schalit, dressed in a military uniform, sitting on a chair and reading a daily newspaper published in Gaza.

Schalit demonstrates his good health by standing on the chair for five seconds before sitting down again, the officials said.

Kidnapped soldier on Hamas video

Israeli media, citing officials who had seen the video, confirmed that Schalit was seen with a newspaper dated September 14 - Hamas's proof the footage was taken recently.

Israel's Channel 2 TV said Schalit was reading from a text. The young man addressed his parents in the video and discussed the military accident, it reported. He also addressed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, without giving further details.

Channel 2 reported that Schalit appeared thin and close-cropped, and had dark circles around his eyes.

A spokesman for Netanyahu, Nir Hefetz, said that "although the path to Gilad's release is still long ... the fact that he is healthy and whole is encouraging." He also held Hamas responsible for the soldier's well-being.

About 200 people waving Palestinian flags greeted vans carrying 18 of the women into the West Bank. The prisoners, wearing the headscarves of devout Muslim women, blew kisses to the crowd.

Load-Date: October 3, 2009

End of Document

Hamas in shootout with Islamist group

Financial Times (London, England)

August 15, 2009 Saturday

London Edition 3

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Section: WORLD NEWS; Pg. 4

Length: 405 words

Byline: Vita Bekker in Tel Aviv

Body

Hamas, the Palestinian group that rules the Gaza Strip, battled Islamist radicals yesterday in a shootout that killed at least 13 people and wounded dozens more.

The clashes with Jund Ansar Allah, or Soldiers of the Followers of God, were the most serious challenge in months that **Hamas** has faced to its rule in the tiny seaside territory that it took over in June 2007.

The fighting took place in the southern town of Rafah, near the enclave's border with Egypt, according to Rafah residents and medical workers.

They said that civilians, including some **women** and children, were among those injured.

The battle came after Abdel-Latif Moussa, spiritual leader of the group, which affiliates itself with al-Qaeda, attempted to defy **Hamas** by declaring Rafah an "Islamic emirate" in which theocratic rule would apply.

Dozens of the faction's masked fighters, armed with automatic weapons, rocket-propelled grenade launchers and some with suicide belts, gathered at the mosque, according to witnesses. **Hamas** militants then raided the mosque, as well as the nearby home of Mr Moussa, damaging part of it.

Taher Nunu, a spokesman for **Hamas** in Gaza, said his organisation was engaging in an operation against "outlaws", blaming them for initiating the shootout and calling on them to surrender.

"This group began shooting at innocent people and civilians . . . it does not recognise law and order," he said.

Jund Ansar Allah is one of a handful of small extremist groups that have surfaced in Gaza since the **Hamas** takeover, trying to impose a stricter form of Islamic law than that of **Hamas**, according to Gaza residents.

However, **Hamas** officials have dismissed as "Zionist propaganda" allegations by Israel that groups in Gaza include non-Palestinian militants who had previously fought in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While Jund Ansar Allah claims to be inspired by al-Qaeda, no ties between the two groups have been confirmed, media reports say. A United Nations probe into Israel's actions during its invasion of the Gaza Strip at the turn of the year points to serious violations of international humanitarian law, the world body's human rights commissioner said yesterday, **Harvey Morris writes from the United Nations.**

Hamas in shootout with Islamist group

A report by Navi Pillay said that "significant *prima facie* evidence indicates that serious violations of international humanitarian law as well as gross human rights violations occurred during the military operations".

Load-Date: August 14, 2009

End of Document

15 Palestinians hurt in clashes with Hamas police

AlArabiya.net

August 13, 2009 Thursday

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Length: 757 words

Body

Around 15 Palestinians were hurt in the Gaza Strip on Friday in an exchange of fire between radical Islamists and Hamas police, emergency services workers said.

The clash took place when Hamas police confronted the Islamist dissidents, who had gathered at a mosque in the southern city of Rafah near the border with Egypt.

Islamist radicals from a Palestinian group called Jund Ansar Allah defied the Hamas rulers of Gaza earlier by declaring an "Islamic emirate" in the territory and staging a defiant display of arms.

Though the "Warriors of God" rallied only a few hundred men for their event at a Gaza mosque, it was the latest challenge to Hamas's nationalist brand of Palestinian Islam by groups espousing a pan-Arab militia aligned with al-Qaeda. Theocratic rule

Speaking before weekly prayers, Abdul Latif Moussa -- known to followers by the al-Qaeda-style nom de guerre Abu al-Nour al-Maqdessi -- announced the start of theocratic rule in the Palestinian territories, starting at Rafah.

"We declare the birth of the Islamic Emirate," declared Maqdessi, a heavily-bearded, middle-aged cleric in a red robe who was guarded by four black-clad, masked men with assault rifles. One wore what appeared to be an explosive suicide belt.

An audience of several hundred men filled the mosque with cheers and shouts. Al-Qaeda uses the historical term "emirate" to mean clerical rule across the Islamic world.

Ismail Haniyeh, who heads Gaza's Hamas government, denied in his Friday sermon that there were any non-Palestinian gunmen in the territory, as alleged by Israel which charges that veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have taken up residence.

"Such groups do not exist on the soil of the Gaza Strip ... there are no fighters in Gaza except Gazan fighters," he said.

Such "Zionist propaganda" from Israel was simply an attempt to turn the world against Hamas, he said.

Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri called Maqdessi's speech "wrong thinking" and in a clear reference to al-Qaeda added that his group "has no affiliation with foreign groups."

15 Palestinians hurt in clashes with Hamas police

Hamas's Interior Ministry was blunter, calling Maqdessi "mad."

Hamas .. a moderate movement

His group announced its existence in Gaza two months ago, after three of its members were killed in a border raid on an Israeli base in which gunmen rode on horseback.

Outside the mosque on Friday, nearly 100 masked fighters of the group in Pakistani-style dress, wearing their hair long, carried automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

Men of the Hamas armed wing and security forces took positions nearby.

The group accuses Hamas of oppressing them, including making arrests and confiscating weapons.

Hamas is an Islamist group described by its leaders as a moderate movement and by independent analysts as giving priority to Palestinian nationalist goals over international religious aims typical of al-Qaeda's network. Observers detect strains within Hamas ranks between pragmatic and more radical factions.

Hamas refuses to renounce violence against Israel but has condemned al-Qaeda bombings in other countries. It has made little public attempt to impose fundamentalist law or strict dress codes, but it is encountering more frequent challenges from groups who want more traditionalist Islam in Gaza.

Human rights groups last month criticized an order by a Hamas-appointed judge that women lawyers cover their hair, and a campaign by its religious affairs ministry to encourage the public to follow Islamic instructions.

Bloodshed

Maqdessi warned Hamas against implementing a decision to take over the mosque where he leads prayers for his followers: "If they approach the mosque they should know their days will be cut short," the grey-whiskered cleric said.

Maqdessi said his group would not initiate attacks against Hamas but "whoever sheds our blood, his blood will be shed."

He urged "everyone who has a weapon" to join the group and carry out decisions to be issued by the armed wing in coming weekly sermons. The group believes democracy is prohibited by Islam because it follows earthly law instead of God's word.

"Who are you afraid of? America? Britain? France? The European Union? You should fear only God," Maqdessi said in a warning to Hamas leaders seeking dialogue with the West.

Israel unilaterally ended its occupation of the Gaza Strip in 2005 and withdrew its forces. Islamist radicals began to surface in Gaza following the takeover of the Israeli-blockaded enclave by Hamas in 2007, when it routed the forces of the secular Fatah movement of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Load-Date: August 14, 2009

Israel, Hamas inch toward prisoner swap deal

The Daily Star (Lebanon)

December 12, 2009 Saturday

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THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Length: 1005 words

Byline: Daily Star Staff

Body

GAZA/OCCUPIED JERUSA-LEM: Sworn enemies Israel and Hamas seem equally eager to trade an Israeli soldier held in the Gaza Strip for Palestinian prisoners, but anxious to avoid political backlashes at home over the terms of any swap. Their dilemmas, fashioned by decades of conflict and symptomatic of the fear and lack of trust that will continue to shape the region.

Analysis

Allyn Fisher-Ilan and Nidal al-Mughrabi

Reuters

GAZA/OCCUPIED JERUSA-LEM: Sworn enemies Israel and Hamas seem equally eager to trade an Israeli soldier held in the Gaza Strip for Palestinian prisoners, but anxious to avoid political backlashes at home over the terms of any swap.

Their dilemmas, fashioned by decades of conflict and symptomatic of the fear and lack of trust that will continue to shape the region, explain why three and a half years after guerrillas snatched Corporal Gilad Shalit on the Gaza-Israel border, the Israeli soldier and some of the 11,000 Palestinians held in Israeli jails are still uncertain whether they might soon be released.

The 1.5 million people of the Gaza Strip are also watching keenly, aware that freedom for the Israeli soldier may be followed by Western pressure on Israel to ease a blockade that has blighted life in the coastal enclave since Hamas seized the soldier in 2006.

Behind-the-scenes talks mediated by Egypt, and more recently by Germany, have seesawed from optimistic assessments that a deal was close, to reports that the negotiations may have failed.

Israel knows that any deal will seem lopsided, as Hamas Islamists - releasing their only prisoner - demand freedom for hundreds of Palestinians.

Israel , Hamas inch toward prisoner swap deal

Hamas needs to bring home, or at least win freedom in exile for, big names and big numbers after losing over 3,000 Gazans, including hundreds from allied militant groups, in fighting with Israel since Shalit's capture, including in a war this year.

"The popular pressure is enormous and they are backing **Hamas** not to make concessions. **Hamas** has no choice but to stick to its demands," said Mustafa al-Sawaf, an Islamist writer in **Hamas**-ruled Gaza.

For his part, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces contradictory pressures over the captured soldier, whose case is a national cause celebre due largely to a compulsory draft for 18-year-olds that relies on a sense of motivation and solidarity. Thousands have held protests demanding his freedom.

However, Netanyahu also faces demands, especially from right-wing Israelis, not to pay too high a price for the soldier by releasing key figures **Hamas** wants freed but whom Israel accuses of masterminding suicide bombings that have killed hundreds of people.

Israel has "already surrendered" to **Hamas**, Israeli columnist Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the Maariv newspaper this week.

He charged that freeing too many prisoners "would encourage further violent conflict against Israel, and deal a serious blow to deterrence.

"Yet the shame is already a fact," Yemini added.

Israel, citing public demands that it protect its conscript soldiers at almost any cost, has set precedents showing a readiness to swap hundreds of the enemy for one of its own.

Among the most dramatic was in 1985, when it freed 1,150 prisoners for three soldiers held by Palestinian guerrillas in Lebanon.

That precedent, however, is one that weighs on Netanyahu today, analysts believe, since it backfired on the government.

Some militants freed in that swap played key roles in a Palestinian uprising that broke out two years later - and the Labor party was voted out of office the following year.

Analysts say that when a later Labor prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, was offered a swap in the 1990s for Ron Arad, an airman captured in Lebanon, he balked at repeating Labor's experience of the 1980s - but was then criticized by Israelis for failing Arad, whose fate remains a mystery to this day.

Still, since 2004 Israel has released more than 400 prisoners in two separate swap deals, for an Israeli businessman and the bodies of half a dozen Israeli soldiers.

Three months ago, Israel freed 20 **women** prisoners in exchange for a "proof of life" video of Shalit.

Samir Kuntar, reviled in Israel for a 1979 attack in which four members of a family were killed, went free in a 2008 deal with Lebanon's Hizbullah for the bodies of two soldiers.

Both Israel and the **Hamas** Movement are keeping the negotiations under wraps.

Sources in the Gaza Strip said the talks hit a snag a few days ago over some 50 names of leading militants whose freedom **Hamas** demands in exchange for Shalit, from a list said to top 400. Earlier Israel was said to have agreed to 160 names on the list.

An Israeli political source said that the army was concerned that militants previously released into the Israeli-occupied West Bank had managed to elude attempts to keep tabs on them.

Israel , Hamas inch toward prisoner swap deal

Controversial names on **Hamas**' list include Marwan Barghouthi, a leader of **Hamas**' secular rival Fatah whom Israel jailed for life for planning attacks that killed dozens.

In a twist revealing how the fate of the Gaza Strip is tied to poisonous internal Palestinian politics, supporters of Fatah Party leader and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas have had to deny Abbas is pressing Israel to keep Barghouthi, who has warmer relations with **Hamas** and could be a challenger to Abbas in elections next year.

Israel, and its ally the United States, also share a disquiet that Barghouthi could meld the diplomatic approach taken by Abbas toward Israel with the armed confrontation favored by **Hamas**.

Another prisoner Israel doesn't want to set free is a **Hamas** leader it blames for one of its worst suicide bombings, a 2002 attack that killed 30 in a Netanya hotel. Yet another, Ahmad Saadat, was charged with the 2001 assassination of an ultranationalist Israeli Cabinet minister.

"The deal is pending on Netanyahu's decision to agree to the full names in the **Hamas** list. So far there is no such decision and we have no indication that **Hamas** is going to make any further concessions," a diplomat familiar with the talks told Reuters.

Load-Date: December 14, 2009

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Hamas clash with radicals kills four, injures 38

AlArabiya.net

August 13, 2009 Thursday

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Length: 762 words

Body

At least four Palestinians were killed and more than 38 others injured in the Gaza Strip on Friday in an exchange of fire between radical Islamists and **Hamas** police, medical sources said.

The clash took place when **Hamas** police confronted the Islamist dissidents, who had gathered at a mosque in the southern city of Rafah near the border with Egypt.

Islamist radicals from a Palestinian group called Jund Ansar Allah defied the **Hamas** rulers of Gaza earlier by declaring an "Islamic emirate" in the territory and staging a defiant display of arms.

Though the "Warriors of God" rallied only a few hundred men for their event at a Gaza mosque, it was the latest challenge to **Hamas**'s nationalist brand of Palestinian Islam by groups espousing a pan-Arab militia aligned with al-Qaeda. Theocratic rule

Speaking before weekly prayers, Abdul Latif Moussa -- known to followers by the al-Qaeda-style nom de guerre Abu al-Nour al-Maqdessi -- announced the start of theocratic rule in the Palestinian territories, starting at Rafah.

"We declare the birth of the Islamic Emirate," declared Maqdessi, a heavily-bearded, middle-aged cleric in a red robe who was guarded by four black-clad, masked men with assault rifles. One wore what appeared to be an explosive suicide belt.

An audience of several hundred men filled the mosque with cheers and shouts. Al-Qaeda uses the historical term "emirate" to mean clerical rule across the Islamic world.

Ismail Haniyeh, who heads Gaza's **Hamas** government, denied in his Friday sermon that there were any non-Palestinian gunmen in the territory, as alleged by Israel which charges that veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have taken up residence.

"Such groups do not exist on the soil of the Gaza Strip ... there are no fighters in Gaza except Gazan fighters," he said.

Such "Zionist propaganda" from Israel was simply an attempt to turn the world against **Hamas**, he said.

Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri called Maqdessi's speech "wrong thinking" and in a clear reference to al-Qaeda added that his group "has no affiliation with foreign groups."

Hamas clash with radicals kills four, injures 38

Hamas's Interior Ministry was blunter, calling Maqdessi "mad."

Hamas .. a moderate movement

His group announced its existence in Gaza two months ago, after three of its members were killed in a border raid on an Israeli base in which gunmen rode on horseback.

Outside the mosque on Friday, nearly 100 masked fighters of the group in Pakistani-style dress, wearing their hair long, carried automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

Men of the Hamas armed wing and security forces took positions nearby.

The group accuses Hamas of oppressing them, including making arrests and confiscating weapons.

Hamas is an Islamist group described by its leaders as a moderate movement and by independent analysts as giving priority to Palestinian nationalist goals over international religious aims typical of al-Qaeda's network. Observers detect strains within Hamas ranks between pragmatic and more radical factions.

Hamas refuses to renounce violence against Israel but has condemned al-Qaeda bombings in other countries. It has made little public attempt to impose fundamentalist law or strict dress codes, but it is encountering more frequent challenges from groups who want more traditionalist Islam in Gaza.

Human rights groups last month criticized an order by a Hamas-appointed judge that women lawyers cover their hair, and a campaign by its religious affairs ministry to encourage the public to follow Islamic instructions.

Bloodshed

Maqdessi warned Hamas against implementing a decision to take over the mosque where he leads prayers for his followers: "If they approach the mosque they should know their days will be cut short," the grey-whiskered cleric said.

Maqdessi said his group would not initiate attacks against Hamas but "whoever sheds our blood, his blood will be shed."

He urged "everyone who has a weapon" to join the group and carry out decisions to be issued by the armed wing in coming weekly sermons. The group believes democracy is prohibited by Islam because it follows earthly law instead of God's word.

"Who are you afraid of? America? Britain? France? The European Union? You should fear only God," Maqdessi said in a warning to Hamas leaders seeking dialogue with the West.

Israel unilaterally ended its occupation of the Gaza Strip in 2005 and withdrew its forces. Islamist radicals began to surface in Gaza following the takeover of the Israeli-blockaded enclave by Hamas in 2007, when it routed the forces of the secular Fatah movement of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Load-Date: August 14, 2009

Eight killed, 80 injured in Hamas, radicals clashes

AlArabiya.net

August 13, 2009 Thursday

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Length: 812 words

Body

At least eight Palestinians were killed and more than 80 others injured in the Gaza Strip on Friday in an exchange of fire between radical Islamists and Hamas police, medical sources said.

The clash took place when Hamas police confronted the Islamist dissidents, who had gathered at a mosque in the southern city of Rafah near the border with Egypt.

Gaza Ambulance and Emergency Chief Dr Muaweya Hasanein told Al Arabiya that those killed in the clashes include two from Hamas and rest from the Islamist radicals.

"Eight of the injured people have very critical wounds in their heads as they were exposed to direct shooting inside the mosque," he said.

Islamist radicals from a Palestinian group called Jund Ansar Allah defied the Hamas rulers of Gaza earlier by declaring an "Islamic emirate" in the territory and staging a defiant display of arms.

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Load-Date: August 14, 2009

Pakistan: Israel, Hamas inch towards prisoner exchange

Right Vision News

December 13, 2009 Sunday

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Length: 899 words

Dateline: OCCUPIED-AL-QUDS

Body

OCCUPIED-AL-QUDS, Dec. 13 -- Sworn enemies Israel and Hamas seem equally eager to trade an Israeli soldier held in Gaza for Palestinian prisoners. Their dilemmas, fashioned by decades of conflict and symptomatic of the fear and lack of trust that will continue to shape the region, explain why three and a half years after guerrillas snatched Gilad Shalit on the Gaza-Israel border, the soldier and some of the 11,000 Palestinians held in Israeli jails are still uncertain whether they might soon be released. The 1.5 million people of the Gaza Strip are also watching keenly, aware that freedom for Shalit may be followed by Western pressure on Israel to ease a blockade that has blighted life in the coastal enclave since Hamas seized the soldier in 2006. Behind-the-scenes talks mediated by Egypt and, recently, by Germany have seesawed from optimistic assessments a deal was close, to reports the negotiations may have failed. Israel knows any deal will seem lopsided, as Hamas Islamists releasing their only prisoner demand freedom for hundreds of Palestinians. Hamas needs to bring home, or at least win freedom in exile for, big names and big numbers after losing over 3,000 Gazans, including hundreds from allied militant groups, in fighting with Israel since Shalit's capture, including in a war this year. The popular pressure is enormous and they are backing Hamas not to make concessions.

Hamas has no choice but to stick to its demands,' said Mustafa al-Sawaf, an Islamist writer in Hamas-ruled Gaza. For his part, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces contradictory pressures over Shalit, whose case is a national cause celebre due largely to a compulsory draft for 18-year-olds that relies on a sense of motivation and solidarity. Thousands have held protests demanding his freedom. But Netanyahu also faces demands, especially from right-wing Israelis, not to pay too high a price for the soldier by releasing key figures Hamas wants freed but whom Israel blames for masterminding suicide bombings that have killed hundreds. Israel has 'already surrendered' to Hamas, Israeli columnist Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in Maariv newspaper this week. He charged that freeing too many prisoners 'would encourage further violent conflict against Israel, and deal a serious blow to deterrence. Israel, citing public demands that it protect its conscript soldiers at almost any cost, has set precedents showing a readiness to swap hundreds of the enemy for one of its own. Among the most dramatic was in 1985, when it freed 1,150 prisoners for three soldiers held by Palestinian guerrillas in Lebanon. That precedent, however, is one that weighs on Netanyahu today, analysts believe, since it backfired on the government. Some militants freed in that swap played key roles in a Palestinian uprising that broke out two years later and the Labour party was voted out of office the following year. Analysts say that when a later Labour prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, was offered a swap in the 1990s for Ron Arad, an airman captured in Lebanon, he balked at repeating Labour's experience of the 1980s but was then criticised by Israelis for failing Arad, whose fate remains a mystery to this day. Still, since 2004 Israel has freed more than 400 prisoners in two separate swaps, for an Israeli businessman and the bodies of half a dozen soldiers. Three months ago, it freed 20 women prisoners in exchange for a 'proof of life' video of Shalit. Samir Kuntar, reviled in Israel for a 1979 attack in which four members of a family were killed, went free in a 2008 deal with Lebanon's Hizbullah for the bodies of two soldiers. Sources in Gaza said the talks hit a

Pakistan : Israel , Hamas inch towards prisoner exchange

snag a few days ago over some 50 names of leading militants whose freedom **Hamas** demands in exchange for Shalit, from a list said to top 400. Earlier Israel was said to have agreed to 160 names on the list. An Israeli political source said the army was concerned that militants previously released into the Israeli-occupied West Bank had managed to elude attempts to keep tabs on them. Controversial names on **Hamas**'s list include Marwan Barghouti, a leader of **Hamas**'s secular rival Fatah whom Israel jailed for life for planning attacks that killed dozens. In a twist revealing how Gaza's fate is tied to poisonous internal Palestinian politics, supporters of Fatah leader and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas have had to deny Abbas is pressing Israel to keep Barghouti, who has warmer relations with **Hamas** and could be a challenger to Abbas in elections next year. Israel, and its ally the United States, also share a disquiet that Barghouti could meld the diplomatic approach taken by Abbas towards Israel with the armed confrontation favoured by **Hamas**. Another prisoner Israel doesn't want to set free is a **Hamas** leader it blames for one of its worst suicide bombings, a 2002 attack that killed 30 in a Netanya hotel. Yet another, Ahmad Saadat, was charged with the 2001 assassination of an ultranationalist Israeli cabinet minister. 'The deal is pending on Netanyahu's decision to agree to the full names in the **Hamas** list. So far there is no such decision and we have no indication **Hamas** is going to make any further concession,' a diplomat familiar with the talks said. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Right Vision News. For more information on news feed please contact Sarabjit Jagirdar at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

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Load-Date: December 12, 2009

End of Document

Hamas turns its attention to 'virtue'

Guardian.com

August 10, 2009 Monday

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theguardian

Length: 960 words

Body

ABSTRACT

Ben White: Forced 'Islamisation' is raising concerns about government direction, as some point to Gaza's isolation as the root cause

FULL TEXT

A number of recent reports from Gaza have given cause for concern about the [direction the Hamas government is taking](#) with regard to social freedoms and a religiously driven "virtue" promotion campaign. Specific incidents, coupled with public declarations by high-ranking officials, suggest a trend of increasing, forced "Islamisation".

One high-profile case was the [ruling by Gaza's chief justice](#), Abdul-Raouf Halabi, at the end of last month, stipulating that **female** lawyers would be obliged to wear headscarves in court. [Although this will not affect many](#), it was the principle of the order that [disturbed both lawyers and human rights groups](#) in the territory. Seven organisations [issued a joint statement](#) expressing their "concern" and the context of "a series of infringements upon public and personal freedoms in the Strip".

This context includes [a young woman accosted by Hamas police](#) on the beach, who then roughed up her male companions. It has also meant [the harassment of shopkeepers](#) displaying mannequins and lingerie packets. The background is a "[virtue campaign](#)" organised by the religious affairs ministry, which, in the words of the **Hamas** deputy religious affairs minister, is intended to "keep [people] away from sin".

While the rare incidents of physical violence are condemned by senior **Hamas** leaders, there is no doubting the pervasive atmosphere and policy direction. Government ministers from different departments have met to discuss [a list of regulations to be implemented](#). [As a piece in al-Akhbar noted](#) two weeks ago, "**women** and the uses of technology seem to be the focus of the 'yes for virtue' campaign" whose purpose "according to Yousef Farhat, the general director of the public administration for preaching and guidance in the ministry, is to 'fight the non-ethical occurrences in Gaza'."

Since the PLC elections in 2006, and especially after taking control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, **Hamas** officials have insisted there will be no attempt to force a particular way of life on the 1.5 million trapped Palestinians. But the repeated stress on example and persuasion has sounded increasingly hollow - [as a human rights activist put it](#), **Hamas** denials "contradict what we see on the street".

Hamas turns its attention to 'virtue'

But why is this happening now? One answer is that these developments in Gaza are a consequence of the state of siege that the tiny territory has been under - a society that has been fenced-in, starved, and seen its very fabric torn apart by unemployment and wanton military destruction. [In the words of a Gaza human rights worker](#), isolation bred "extremism and dark ideas".

[Eyad Sarraj, a prominent Gazan mental health expert](#) and psychiatrist, noted that **Hamas** is focusing on the likes of "**women's** dress" and "segregation of the sexes, especially in public or in schools". Rather than prioritising "honesty or financial probity", the obsession is with "sex", because "these things are visible and people are easily intimidated because such issues address their traditional anxieties".

[Albert Memmi](#) wrote in *The Coloniser and the Colonised* the way in which the colonised can seek "refuge" in religion, offering individuals "one of the rare paths of retreat", and the group "one of the rare manifestations which can protect its original existence". It is similar to an [observation made by the director of Jerusalem's Women's Centre](#) for Legal Aid and Counselling to CNN, that in "societies suffering from long-term military conflict ... 'religion and traditions become more important' and are frequently 'used to oppress'".

The move towards a more firm imposition of conservative Islamist values comes as **Hamas** is making a keen effort to [reach out to the international community](#). The movement's leaders, both in Palestine and abroad, have repeatedly stressed **Hamas** would accept a two-state solution on the 1967 borders, and indeed, would respect a negotiated political solution should the deal be endorsed in a referendum by the Palestinian people.

Already hit by criticism in Gaza by Islamic Jihad about a theoretical willingness to negotiate with Israel, it is possible that **Hamas's** leaders are seeking to safeguard its credibility and among the radical jihadist groups by off-balancing improving international relations with a domestic hard line.

The trend in Gaza is also a reflection of the limitations of **Hamas's** political vision and the fact that within the **Hamas** "tent", there have always been those who place as high a premium on the transformation of society as they do on national liberation. With one eye on western perceptions, the new "cultural" - rather than military - resistance could be feeding into the Islamisation emphasis, with [Hamas seeking to maintain its distinctiveness](#) and shape public discourse.

There is still uncertainty about just how far the **Hamas** government will go in enforcing "virtue". For now, the choice of targets for the campaign and its enforcement are patchy. But with one minister saying that the [implementation of Islamic law is "inevitable"](#), the implications for freedoms and human rights are disturbing.

While the authorities in Gaza focus on "[preserving public morals](#)" and clampdown on dissent, [the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority](#) carries out [arrests of political opponents](#) across the West Bank and deploys US and Jordanian-trained forces to police Israel's occupation. [As one man told a BBC reporter](#) last week, "No **Hamas**, no Fatah - all no good". This is a viewpoint likely to be shared by increasing numbers of Palestinians in the occupied territories, in the absence of a unified leadership offering a programme of strategic sense and political integrity.

Load-Date: August 10, 2009

Israel, Hamas in mutual gestures on prisoners

Times of Oman

October 2, 2009 Friday

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Length: 660 words

Body

GAZA: Israel will free 20 Palestinian women from jail as early as Friday in exchange for a videotape from Hamas proving an Israeli soldier held in the Gaza Strip since 2006 is alive, officials on both sides said on Wednesday.

Egyptian and German mediators are continuing to work on a final deal to swap the soldier, Gilad Shalit, for hundreds of Hamas prisoners. The negotiations are part of international efforts to ease Israel's blockade of Hamas-run Gaza.

"It is important for the entire world to know that Gilad Shalit is alive and well and that Hamas is responsible for his well-being and his fate," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement.

Though Israeli law generally holds up prisoner amnesties by 48 hours to allow for court challenges by victims of Palestinian attacks, a woman identifying herself as one of those on the release roster said she had gone free on Wednesday evening.

"The guy in charge of (Israel's) Hasharon Prison told me they are releasing me as part of Shalit deal," Bara Malaki said by phone from her home near the Palestinian city of Ramallah.

She provided an identification number which corresponded to that published by Israel's Prison Service, where she was listed as having served a 10-month term for assaulting a policeman.

A Hamas spokesman in Gaza confirmed that Malaki had been released. Israeli officials had no immediate comment.

Shalit, now 23, was spirited into the Gaza Strip by Islamist militants who tunnelled into Israel three years ago in a raid in which two Israeli soldiers and two of the attackers were killed. An Israeli official said earlier on Wednesday the handover of the 20 women and the Shalit tape should take place on Friday.

He added that a German mediator had already seen the video and believed it genuinely showed Shalit during recent weeks -- and certainly after Israel's offensive in Gaza in December and January in which some 1,400 Palestinians were reported killed.

The video lasts about a minute, said Abu Mujahed, a spokesman for the Popular Resistance Committees, one of the Hamas allies that took part in capturing Shalit. "It shows Shalit alive and moving," Abu Mujahed said.

Israel , Hamas in mutual gestures on prisoners

Announcement of the pending exchange was the first major sign of progress in efforts to put together a deal between Israel and Hamas Islamists. But an Israeli official cautioned that "lengthy and difficult negotiations" were still ahead before any final swap.

One of the women set for release, Fatima Younis Zaq, gave birth in jail to a son, who is currently with her. An Islamic Jihad member, Zaq was arrested in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on suspicion of planning a suicide bombing.

At her family home in the Gaza Strip, relatives hugged and kissed, and her husband said: "We were so happy to get the news. We hope all other prisoners will be released." Zaq is the only Gaza resident due to be freed. The other 19 were from the West Bank, where Hamas's secular rivals from President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah party hold sway.

Netanyahu has faced mounting public pressure to win freedom for Shalit, who also holds French citizenship, in a deal that could involve releasing Hamas militants behind deadly attacks.

Palestinians view brethren held by Israel as heroes. A major prisoner release would be a boost for Hamas, an Islamist group opposed to peace with Israel. Israeli officials said none of the 20 women was directly involved in killings or serving a sentence exceeding two years.

A spokesman for Hamas's armed wing, Abu Ubeida, said four of the women belonged to Hamas and five to Fatah. Three more were members of Islamic Jihad and the rest came from other groups.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has not visited Shalit and only a few letters and an audio cassette from him have been sent to his family, which has waged a vocal campaign to get him freed. Israel holds more than 10,000 Palestinian prisoners. Hamas is negotiating for the release of hundreds of its members.

Load-Date: October 2, 2009

Hamas bans women from riding motorbikes

Guardian.com

October 7, 2009 Wednesday

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theguardian

Length: 271 words

Byline: Rory McCarthy, guardian.co.uk

Body

ABSTRACT

Move 'to preserve citizen safety' is latest sign of Islamisation campaign in Gaza

FULL TEXT

Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist movement, has banned banning **women** in Gaza from riding on motorbikes.

The ban, posted on the movement's interior ministry website, said it sought "to preserve citizen safety and the stability of Palestinian society's customs and traditions". Given that few **women** ride on motorbikes in Gaza the proclamation seems unlikely to have much effect, but it raises concerns that a new Islamisation campaign is under way.

Hamas won the Palestinian elections in early 2006 and in mid-2007 took full security control over Gaza after a near-civil war with its rival faction, Fatah. For the first three years that **Hamas** was in power in Gaza there was little sign of any effort to Islamise society. Instead the group focused on exerting its military control, confronting armed criminal clans and preventing Fatah from rebuilding itself.

However, since the summer there have been signs of a socially conservative campaign.

In July, a senior judge announced a dress code under which **female** lawyers would have to wear conservative robes and headscarves in court. Human rights groups said the decision was illegal and undermined personal freedoms.

Hamas patrols have also reportedly tried to prevent unmarried couples from mixing together in public and banned mannequins and the display of **women**'s underwear in shop windows.

Hamas remains firmly in control of the Gaza Strip, despite rising poverty and Israel's continuing economic blockade. However, some recent polls have suggested the movement's popularity is sliding.

Load-Date: October 7, 2009

Hamas bans women from riding motorbikes

End of Document

Hamas produces its first feature film

Hindustan Times

July 19, 2009 Sunday

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Length: 386 words

Dateline: Jerusalem

Body

Jerusalem, July. 19 -- **Hamas** has debuted in the field of feature film production this weekend when the action-packed thriller was being screened in Gaza to an exclusive crowd of celebrities.

The film, homage to a top **Hamas** operative, cost only 200,000 dollars to make and is being shown to segregated audiences of bearded men and veiled **women**. "It's Hamaswood instead of Hollywood. We are trying to make quality art that is Islamic and about the resistance, without provocative (sexual) scenes," The Jerusalem Post quoted Gaza's **Hamas** Interior Minister Fathi Hamad, as saying after the film's first showing Friday evening at Gaza City's Islamic University. Hamad doubled as producer, and the screenplay was penned by Mahmoud Zahar, the Gaza strongman seen as one of the architects of the group's violent takeover of Gaza two years ago. Despite his fierce reputation, Zahar, a physician, has always had an artistic streak, with three novels and two screenplays to his credit. The movie tells the story of Emad Akel, commander of the **Hamas** military wing, who was killed in a firefight with Israeli troops in Gaza in 1993. Akel, 23 at the time, was known as "the ghost" for his many disguises, including dressing up as a Jewish settler with a skullcap. In the early 1990s, he topped Israel's wanted list for his suspected role in killing 11 Israeli soldiers, an Israeli civilian and four Palestinian informers in a series of attacks. In the two-hour movie, titled "Emad Akel," there's plenty of action. The hero frequently leaps out of cars to open fire on Israeli soldiers, prompting bursts of applause from the audience each time. There's no romance, however, and the **female** actors all wear long robes and headscarves. The movie was shot over 10 months on a production lot that **Hamas** hopes will one day grow into a 200 million dollars media city. As part of its media empire, **Hamas** already operates a Gaza-based satellite television station, a radio station and a dozen news Web sites. Still, Gaza's isolation - its borders have been virtually sealed by Israel and Egypt since the **Hamas** takeover - are putting a damper on the nascent local film industry. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Asian News International. For more information on news feed please contact Surit Das at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

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Load-Date: July 19, 2009

Hamas enforcing strict Islamic morals

therecord.com

July 9, 2009 Thursday

Final Edition

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Section: FRONT; Pg. A8

Length: 387 words

Byline: Daa Hadid, The Associated Press

Dateline: JERUSALEM

Body

An attempt by Hamas police to detain a young woman walking with a man along the Gaza beach has raised alarms that the Islamic militant group is seeking to match its political control of the coastal territory with a strict enforcement of Islamic law.

The man she walked with and two of his peers were detained, beaten and ordered to sign statements promising not to engage in immoral activities, said the woman and one of the men.

The incident was the first known case of Hamas openly trying to punish a woman for behaving in a way it views as un-Islamic since seizing power two years ago. But it follows months of quiet pressure on Gaza's overwhelmingly conservative 1.4 million residents to abide by its strict religious mores.

Hamas officials in Gaza have publicly urged shopkeepers to take down foreign advertisements showing the shape of women's bodies and to stash away lingerie often displayed in windows. Officials search electronic shops to check if they are selling pornography on tiny flash drives.

Freelance journalist Asma al-Ghoul, 26, said she was spending time with a group of friends -- two women and three men -- on the northern Gaza shore.

Al-Ghoul swam, fully dressed, with a girlfriend, and then asked a male friend to walk her over to a nearby beach house rented by another couple she knew to shower and change.

Three male police officers showed up and waited for al-Ghoul in the beach house garden, said an eyewitness who asked to remain anonymous because of security concerns. They took her identity card and demanded she accompany them to a nearby station -- an order she refused.

An argument ensued and she was able to avoid detention and get her identity card back only after the homeowner contacted a senior Hamas official who intervened and spoke to the officers by telephone. The official, Taher Nunu, was not immediately available for comment.

However, al-Ghoul said her male friends were subsequently beaten by Hamas police.

Her story only became public after rights groups published excerpts on their websites.

Hamas enforcing strict Islamic morals

Her version of events was confirmed by two other witnesses, including Adham Khalil, one of the men who was detained. Khalil said he was beaten.

Hamas police spokesperson Islam Shahwan denied the incident took place but said Gaza residents "must preserve our customs and Islamic traditions."

Load-Date: July 9, 2009

End of Document

A Hamas victory in 2010?

The Jerusalem Post

November 18, 2009 Wednesday

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Section: OPINION; Pg. 13

Length: 915 words

Byline: FELICE FRIEDSON

Highlight: History can repeat itself if an optimistic stream is not introduced into the Palestinian psyche. The writer is president and CEO of The Media Line News Agency (www.themedialine.org).

Body

You cannot sit in Des Moines or Los Angeles or Washington for that matter, and think you know the streets of Ramallah, Gaza or Jerusalem.

In 2006, I wrote an op-ed suggesting that **Hamas** would win the Palestinian election by virtue of having studied the **women** of Gaza and the West Bank. Predictions that **Hamas** would "finish strong" in the polling were commonplace, but few, if any, shared the assessment that the faction would win outright. The **women** were a clear barometer, speaking openly and urgently against Fatah corruption and their reliance upon and respect for **Hamas's** social services.

At the time, the Bush administration was pressing hard in favor of facilitating elections, even though many analytical voices cautioned that there was a better-than-even chance that the result could complicate rather than improve the situation on the ground.

Now, the issue of elections is again before the Palestinian public: this time coming with Fatah and **Hamas** unambiguously bifurcated; the election date pushed-off to an as yet undetermined time; Mahmoud Abbas threatening not to stand for reelection; and leaders are openly suggesting that since the Palestinian Authority isn't accomplishing anything, it might as well be disbanded. So what's changed?

For one thing, the Fayad plan is resonating among Palestinians and throughout the international community. On the domestic front, frustration born of unfocused goals and unfulfilled expectations is showing signs of waning as hope replaces despair on the strength of the two-year timetable that seems both reasonable and within reach.

Economically, Salaam Fayad has brought a glimpse of hope to the Palestinians, built largely on the potential of private-sector entrepreneurs who are investing vast sums in projects that at once provide encouragement and complete the list of needed infrastructure and institutions Fayad has put into play. The absolute focus on a seemingly permanently-stalled peace process that is incapable of generating anything but despair is slowly being replaced by a cautious sense the prime minister described in another context as "a healthy sense of self-development."

This measured sense of optimism carries with it the need for Palestinians to boldly break from their sense of victimization. Reflexively shouting "occupation" is no substitute for the sort of self-sufficiency that is the

A Hamas victory in 2010?

underpinning of the policy switch that promises statehood when the infrastructure and institutions are in place, rather than when the state of negotiations permits. If ever.

BUT SINCE this is the Middle East, it would be negligent not to ponder the proclivity for missing the opportunity at hand. Prolonged West Bank-Gaza bifurcation is a deal breaker for statehood and is showing few signs of going away. The question of whether the inclusion of Hamas in a government will have a chilling effect on international cooperation is unclear, although an argument is being made that since the West has no problem with Hizbullah in Lebanon's government, why should Hamas in Palestine be a problem?

Yet, the problem grows if electoral results as in 2006 are in the cards. Can Hamas win? Of course. Palestinian pollster Dr. Nabil Kukali, of the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion, told The Media Line that while the numbers at the moment make a Hamas win doubtful, "elections are way off."

It's a sentiment reiterated by Lana Abu Hijleh, CHF's director for the West Bank and Gaza, who reminds that the women who tipped the election in 2006 were by-and-large voting their protests against Fatah corruption and in praise of Hamas social services. Lana looks to the streets, and suggests that the Abbas resignation is being viewed widely as "the result of a failing peace process," and that history can repeat itself if an optimistic stream is not introduced into the public psyche.

And as is always the case, the whole picture is not as it seems. Threats aside, Abbas is unlikely to step down, according to Dr. Feras Milhem, a legal expert from Bir Zeit University, because his departure would place Hamas member and Speaker of the Palestine Legislative Council Aziz Dweik atop the Palestinian Authority. This scenario trumps the optimistic view presented above and sets the stage for continued bifurcation, a sense of despair and a protest vote that results in dej^vu all over again a la 2006.

So while the question of whether Abbas is fed up with a motionless process or has simply set a strategy of threatening to withdraw is open for debate, another Hamas victory - while unlikely - is not beyond the realm of reality.

Kukali points out that "for almost 50 years the Palestinians have not survived without the Israelis economically or culturally... It's beneficial for them to live in peace and security."

Perhaps, then, it's time that the Palestinians test Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's frequent call for aiding Palestinian economic development. Perhaps it's time to see exactly what he has in mind instead of focusing on the red line of settlement building that was not in play during previous Israeli administrations.

The result could be additional progress on the Palestinian economic front, the encouragement of visible growth and more than a modicum of cooperation that has been missing from the picture until now.

The same voices that so accurately described reality on the 2006 streets can be heard on the 2009 streets. Perhaps Messrs. Fayad, Abbas, Netanyahu and Barack Obama should listen more carefully.

editor@themedialine.org

Graphic

Photo: PALESTINIAN PM Salaam Fayad. 'His plan for an independent state has brought a glimpse of hope to the Palestinians, on the strength of the two-year timetable that seems both reasonable and within reach.' (Credit: AP)

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

A Hamas victory in 2010?

End of Document

Hamas raps Miss Palestine contest

The Jerusalem Post

December 13, 2009 Sunday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 1

Length: 221 words

Byline: KHALED ABU TOAMEH

Body

Hamas has come out strongly against a plan to hold the first Miss Palestine beauty pageant in the West Bank on December 26.

Fifty-eight young Palestinian women will participate in the contest, the first of its kind since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority more than 15 years ago.

The winner will be picked by a panel that includes officials from the PA Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Culture.

The winner will receive a new car, a week-long trip to Turkey and NIS 10,000.

Salwa Yusef, director of Moda Trip, the organization that is holding the Miss Palestine contest, said that the event would take place despite the pressure and threats by Hamas.

"We will hold the contest unless the Palestinian Authority decides otherwise," she said. "We call on all those who are attacking us to give us a chance because we are seeking to send a message of civilization to the world."

The names of the candidates have not been made public to avoid exposing them to threats.

The women participating in the historic event are from the West Bank and Israeli-Arab communities. The 58 contestants, aged 18-22, were chosen from 200 women who presented their candidacy.

Apart from Hamas, several other radical groups have strongly condemned the planned beauty contest as a violation of Islamic belief, urging the PA to cancel it.

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

Gaza: Hamas tightens, then backs off, Islamic social strictures

Christian Science Monitor

October 25, 2009, Sunday

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Section: World; Pg. 10

Length: 816 words

Byline: Erin Cunningham Correspondent

Dateline: Gaza City, Gaza

Body

Like many high-schoolers in Gaza City, Diana Hawajiri often favors trendy jeans, a long-sleeved shirt, and a head scarf. But when she showed up after the summer break, signs posted at her government-run school announced that it was mandatory for all **female** students to wear the jalibab - a loose dress designed to shroud the **female** figure.

Diana complied. And though the decision was later rescinded, she still wears the garment to avoid criticism both at school and in public, she says.

The warnings appeared at the same time a similar **Hamas** government-sponsored campaign condemned Western-style clothing and other "vices." The government also issued a decree ordering **female** lawyers to cover their heads in court.

After a media outcry, **Hamas** backtracked on some measures - and denied any plan to implement strict Islamic law in the territory it has controlled since ousting Fatah fighters two years ago.

A move to bolster Islamic credentials?

But residents and human rights activists say there is a clear discrepancy between **Hamas**'s assurances and what is happening on the ground, signaling that the movement may be trying to bolster its Islamic credentials at home, where it has been under fire for failing to implement strict Islamic law, even as it pushes for recognition abroad.

Hamas, isolated diplomatically since it won Palestinian legislative elections in 2006, now rules the Gaza Strip amid a tight Israeli-Egyptian blockade. It is fighting to gain the international legitimacy it needs to open Gaza's borders and take part in any high-level negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders. But the movement's charter also calls for the establishment of an Islamic state in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

"There are people in the **Hamas** political leadership who understand very well the importance of public opinion," says Ariel Cohen, senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, a Washington-based think tank known for pro-Israeli stances. "They recognize that there are liberal elements of their non-Muslim support base - and **Hamas** would like to keep this support. But at the same, they are political Islamists."

Gaza's 1.5 million population is largely Muslim and conservative. But the enclave is also home to leftists, secular Fatah supporters, Christians, and even Muslims who oppose the institutionalization or imposition of Islam.

Gaza: Hamas tightens, then backs off, Islamic social strictures

According to the **Hamas** charter, "communitywide adherence to strict Islamic principles and armed resistance to Israeli occupation will grant Palestinians victory in the fight to regain their land."

A 'recommendation,' and armed patrols

While no one has been tried or imprisoned for "un-Islamic" behavior, many locals say they have adjusted their behavior so as to avoid trouble. This summer, for example, saw a spate of reports of young men being detained and warned by policemen about their "immoral behavior" after being caught with **women** who were not relatives. **Hamas**-appointed chief justice Abdel Rauf al-Halabi, who sparked the **female** lawyer furor, says the government is simply drawing from the territory's already Islamic character. "Palestinians in Gaza are already Muslim; they do not need Islamization," says Mr. Halabi. "I simply reminded them of a law ... that requires [**female**] lawyers to cover their heads and to dress in accordance with the professional nature of their positions."

According to Khalil Abu Shammala, director of the Gaza-based Al-Dameer Association for Human Rights, that law - passed during the British Mandate - is no longer valid. Mr. Shammala also says that despite government use of soft terms like "reminder" and "recommendation" regarding dress and behavior, armed patrols leave little room for interpretation.

"Everyone knows **Hamas** has the power," Shammala says. "And power doesn't recommend - it imposes. With the tools we know the **Hamas** government uses to control Gaza, if you receive a 'recommendation' from them, you won't take it as a piece of advice. It is an order."

Hamas is notorious for its heavy-handed and sometimes brutal security. While it ended Gaza's rampant crime and clan battles, it maintains its hold with a harsh mix of checkpoints, arrests, and patrols.

In August, at least 28 people were killed when **Hamas** took on an Al-Qaeda-inspired group that symbolically declared the Gaza Strip an Islamic emirate from a mosque in Rafah.

But successfully straddling international and domestic demands may reap **Hamas** a number of benefits, says Gaza-based political analyst Talal Okal. "The international community wants political solutions from **Hamas**, that's what is important to them," says Mr. Okal. "They want **Hamas** to recognize Israel and to renounce violence."

"If **Hamas** does this," Okal continues, "it will be so huge, the international community will likely let slide any social measures they implement at home. And **Hamas** knows this."*

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Load-Date: October 26, 2009

A blind eye to Hamas atrocities

The Australian

November 6, 2009 Friday

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Section: FEATURES; Pg. 14

Length: 1317 words

Byline: Robert Goot

Body

Even Richard Goldstone has denounced the bias in his Gaza report, says Robert Goot

THE UN Security Council is tonight debating the Goldstone report. Yet from the moment the UN Human Rights Council decided to establish a "fact finding" mission "to investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the occupying power, Israel, against the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in the occupied Gaza Strip, due to the current aggression", it was obvious that it was not intended to, nor would it be an impartial inquiry.

The terms of reference were crafted to ignore the hundreds of rockets deliberately aimed and fired by Hamas at civilians in Israel prior to the Gaza war, and to pillory Israel for defending its citizens.

Even the head of the mission, Richard Goldstone, has since denounced what he called a "one-sided mandate" that was "stacked against Israel". He was so repelled by the bias that he only accepted his appointment on the basis of a verbal assurance by the president of the UNHRC that the mission would also be empowered to investigate violations of international law committed by Hamas during the Gaza conflict.

It is now clear that in accepting this assurance Goldstone allowed himself to be deceived. On October 16, 2009, when the UNHRC resolved, without the support of a single western democracy from among its 47 members, to refer the matter to the UN Security Council, the text of the resolution was directed exclusively at Israel and made no mention whatsoever of Hamas. It closely reflected the wording of the original mandate that Goldstone himself had rejected.

Little wonder that Goldstone complained bitterly to the Swiss paper Le Temps that the recent UNHRC resolution "saddens me; there is not a single phrase condemning Hamas as we have done in the report. I hope the council can modify the text." Modifications were subsequently made, but there was still no mention of Hamas.

Not every member of the Goldstone commission seems to have been troubled by its biased mandate. Months before her appointment as a commissioner, Christine Chinkin went on the public record to accuse Israel of "collective punishment of Gaza's 1.5 million inhabitants" and "aggression" and to condemn Israel for "prima facie war crimes" in Gaza. Any reasonable person would see she was incapable of bringing an impartial mind to her task.

The actual evidence compiled against Israel in the 574-page Goldstone report is extraordinarily thin. None of the material contained in the statements of "witnesses" has been tested in any way. Much of it is second, third or

A blind eye to Hamas atrocities

fourth-hand hearsay. Palestinians who spoke to the commission knew that anything they said would ultimately get back to Hamas. Turning a blind eye, the Goldstone report merely notes that "those interviewed in Gaza appeared reluctant to speak about the presence of or conduct of hostilities by the Palestinian armed groups." Small wonder that Goldstone later conceded, "We had to do the best we could with the material we had."

The Goldstone commission was at best a preliminary "fact finding" investigation, not a court of law. Goldstone himself has complained that his report is being treated as conclusive when it was never intended that way, stating, "If this was a court of law, there would have been nothing proven".

He went on to say that his report was no more than a "road map" for real investigators, containing no actual "evidence" of wrongdoing by Israel, and that he "would not consider it in any way embarrassing if many of the allegations turned out to be unproved".

Yet Goldstone has only himself to blame for the widespread misapprehension that his report is determinative. Notwithstanding his attempts to suggest the contrary, many of the allegations against Israel are expressed as conclusive findings of fact.

The allegations against Hamas, in contrast, are perfunctory. Punches have been pulled and contrary evidence ignored. For example, in condemning Israel for the many civilian deaths in Gaza, the Goldstone report ignores or dismisses without reason photographs and video footage taken by Israeli forces during the Gaza operation showing Hamas gunmen using civilians as human shields and concentrating their forces in civilian areas.

Yet Hamas makes no secret of its policy of using Palestinian civilians as human shields. In 2008, Hamas spokesman Fathi Hamad went on the record to boast about his organisation's use of "human shields of the women, the children, the elderly and the mujahideen, in order to challenge the Zionist bombing machine".

Incredibly, the Goldstone commission considered this public admission of a war crime by a Hamas leader to be "irrelevant".

In stark contrast, Richard Kemp, a British commander in Bosnia and Afghanistan told the UNHRC that "the Israeli forces did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare." Kemp was comparing the actions of Israeli forces to those of NATO and other western forces in similar types of conflict. The Goldstone report interprets and applies the standards set by international humanitarian law in a way that no western or other military force accepts in practice.

The report describes the Israeli attack on Gaza's Islamic University and concludes: "These were civilian, educational buildings and the mission did not find any information about their use as a military facility." No mention is made of the fact that this same university was featured on Palestinian television in 2007 as a site uncovered by Fatah in which Hamas had established a weapons laboratory for new and improved Qassam rockets. The footage included a full display of the weapons cache found in the university at the time.

The Goldstone commission also condemns the destruction of several mosques in Gaza by Israeli fire, finding no basis for Israeli allegations that mosques were used as launching points for Hamas attacks and as weapons storage facilities. Publicly available evidence to the contrary is simply ignored, including videos and photographs taken by Israeli soldiers during the Gaza operation that show weapons stored in Gaza mosques and Hamas gunmen using mosques as firing platforms.

And the report blamed Israel for an attack on an UNWRA school in Jabalya, a false accusation that went across the world inciting violence against Israel and Jews, before the UN itself admitted that it was entirely false and that the school had not been shelled at all. The Goldstone report repeated the false allegation and omitted the retraction.

Although the death and destruction in the Gaza war was a tragedy that deserves a proper and impartial investigation, it was minuscule compared with that of other contemporary conflicts elsewhere in the world, which remain uninvestigated by UNHRC or anyone else. The Israeli government has announced that it will conduct an independent investigation under an eminent jurist. The investigation will be in addition to those that the IDF opened

A blind eye to Hamas atrocities

into over 100 allegations regarding the conduct of its forces during the Gaza operation, most of which have been found to be baseless. Some 23 criminal investigations are ongoing.

Goldstone was probably sincere in intending to conduct an impartial legal investigation into the Gaza operation. But the report that bears his name has been perverted into a crude polemic, a blunt political weapon to be wielded solely against Israel, as the subsequent UNHRC resolution makes plain.

As Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the UN, told The Washington Post last month, ``the fundamental problem with this particular report is it was hatched with a bias inherent in its mandate. It is as a consequence a product that largely reflects that imbalance".

Robert M. Goot SC is president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry.

Load-Date: November 5, 2009

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Hamas is leading Palestinians down the road of carnage

The Daily Telegraph (London)

August 26, 2009 Wednesday

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The Daily Telegraph

Section: FEATURES; WORLD STAGE; Pg. 20

Length: 829 words

Byline: Ron Prosor

Body

Earlier this month, Hamas launched a devastating bombardment of rocket-propelled grenades and machine-gun fire against a mosque in Rafah. The attack killed at least 22 Palestinians, including an 11-year-old girl. More than 100 were injured and the mosque, which belonged to a rival Islamist faction, the Jund Ansar Allah, was left riddled with bullets. The adjacent building was destroyed. Yet Hamas's disregard for the sanctity of a house of worship, and its contempt for the lives of neighbouring civilians, is unlikely to be the subject of any probing reports from Human Rights Watch.

It is no surprise to see Hamas brutalising the Palestinian population as it tightens its vice-like grip over Gaza. After all, it seized control of the territory in a bloody coup against the Palestinian Authority in June 2007, murdering rivals and hurling PA officials from the rooftops. Subsequently, it has ruthlessly and violently crushed any potential challenge to its power, whether from the Palestinian nationalists of Fatah, or from rival terrorist groups within the Islamist fold.

Meanwhile, it has imposed Gaza's rapid descent into fanatical freefall. As it hounded out the Palestinian Authority, Hamas opened Gaza's floodgates to a tsunami of extremism. Extremism breeds extremism, and the rise of rival Jihadist groups is a problem of Hamas's own making. Yet when it perceives such groups as a threat, or when ideological differences exist, it demonstrates its own barbaric methods of conflict resolution and law enforcement.

Brutality is at the heart of Hamas's practice and ideology, characterising its actions against both Palestinians and Israelis. Throughout its bloody history, the organisation has unleashed waves of indiscriminate terror against any attempt at progress. Yet, alarmingly, sections of the media are determined to whitewash and legitimise it. They are joined by various politicians, commentators and activists, who argue that Israel and the West must talk to Hamas, so implying that it is on the verge of a switch to moderation.

Yet Hamas has no interest in compromise or negotiation. The most vicious, genocidal anti-Semitism is intrinsic to its goals. Its charter includes the ominous vision that, "The Day of Judgment will not come about until Muslims fight the Jews and kill them. When the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Muslims, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him." This year, a senior Hamas figure, Fathi Hammad, stated: "We will not rest until we destroy the Zionist entity."

Hamas is leading Palestinians down the road of carnage

Meanwhile, Hamas continues a systematic process of religious radicalisation within Gaza. It reformulated the penal code, introducing medieval punishments such as public lashings, the severing of limbs and execution by stoning. New laws force schoolgirls to wear the hijab. Security forces make public harassment of women routine and oversee Gaza's descent into misogynistic, religious totalitarianism. It is absurd that any "progressive" should sympathise with a programme of theocratic oppression.

Israel's prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, is in London this week. He can point to the co-operation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority that has helped strengthen the Palestinian infrastructure in the West Bank. Legitimising Hamas and rewarding its militancy would threaten to destroy these seeds of hope. A combination of Israeli concessions and the responsible Palestinian leadership of President Abbas and prime minister Fayyad saw the West Bank Palestinian economy grow by 5-7 per cent in 2008. Since July 2007, the number of permanent security checkpoints in the West Bank has been reduced from 41 to 14. As Israel continues to implement measures to ease movement and trade, the rate of economic growth is predicted to double. In stark contrast, Hamas has, according to the veteran Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, led Gaza "down the drain in chaos and lawlessness".

Voices from the fringes will urge Mr Netanyahu to engage Hamas. He would do well to remind them of the menace that the organisation continues to pose. As Israel and the Palestinian leadership make continued efforts towards the social and economic progress essential to move forward, Hamas's brutality should serve as a warning to us all. Hamas is incompatible with compromise with Palestinians or Israelis. It threatens to lead the Palestinians down a dead-end road of division, carnage and self-destruction.

To avoid that tragedy, it is crucial to bolster the economic road map to peace. Mr Netanyahu reinforced that message when he met Gordon Brown yesterday. Economic progress is not a substitute for a political solution, but it will be a prerequisite. For that approach to succeed, it is vital that the international community, and in particular the wealthier Arab states, put their money where their mouth is, in defeating the extremism of Hamas and giving moderation a chance to flourish.

Ron Prosor is the Israeli ambassador

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Hamas seen to score rare victory in soldier tape swap

Times of Oman

October 5, 2009 Monday

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Length: 670 words

Body

JERUSALEM: The release of 19 Palestinian women prisoners in exchange for a brief video clip of a captured Israeli soldier has handed a much-needed victory to the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, analysts said on Sunday.

In the three years since Hamas captured the now 23-year-old Gilad Shalit, the group has endured two massive military offensives, long periods of near-daily Israeli raids and a crippling economic blockade enforced by Israel and Egypt.

But now Hamas can boast that for the first time since taking power of Gaza in June 2007 it has compelled Israel to release prisoners -- not as a gesture to encourage peace talks, but as the hard-won fruit of armed struggle.

"In the minds of Palestinians this is a great achievement and a victory for the will of the resistance," said Naji Sharrab, a professor at Gaza's Al-Azhar University. "There is no doubt that this is going to help Hamas internally." Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had released batches of hundreds of prisoners as a gesture to the Western-backed Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and his secular Fatah party during US-led Middle East peace talks.

But analysts said the latest deal made by right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu -- which saw the release of just 19 out of an estimated 7,200 Palestinian prisoners -- was far more significant.

"Palestinians knew that Israel was trying to improve the image of the Palestinian Authority and that's why (Olmert's government) released the prisoners," said Mukhaimer Abu Saada, another professor at Al-Azhar.

"With the Hamas deal they knew that Israel was not trying to improve Hamas's image but was doing so because of pressure."

Many experts expect the exchange will pave the way for a larger final deal involving the exchange of Shalit for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners whose release Hamas has demanded in more than three years of Egyptian-mediated talks.

Hamas seen to score rare victory in soldier tape swap

"This was very important for Hamas as a first step, and it will be a major victory when the process is completed," said Samir Awad, professor of international relations at Birzeit University in the occupied West Bank.

"During this entire period Israel tried to free the soldier by every means except negotiations, by violence. Now Israel has exhausted all other options and negotiations are the only way left."

Experts also attributed the breakthrough to the entry of German mediators over the summer and a public call from France for the release of Shalit, who holds French nationality. "This was also a message from Hamas to Europe. They hope to secure greater recognition in this way," Sharrab said.

The West officially blacklists Hamas as a terrorist group because of the scores of suicide bombings it has carried out and its commitment to the destruction of Israel.

Hamas has meanwhile been under mounting internal pressure since Israel's massive military offensive at the turn of the year that killed about 1,400 Palestinians and destroyed thousands of homes.

"No one can deny that Hamas's popularity has been declining in the Gaza Strip since the war because of the misery of the Palestinians," Abu Saada said.

The Hamas-run government has been unable to rebuild almost any of the thousands of homes destroyed during the war because of crippling sanctions which Israel has vowed to keep in place until Shalit's release.

"Looking at it another way, Hamas did not really lose anything," Abu Saada said. "What did they lose by giving a two-minute video in exchange for 20 prisoners?"

The video footage of Shalit was the first since his capture. Previously his family has received an audio recording and several letters.

Israeli officials stressed that Friday's swap does not herald Shalit's imminent release, but was meant as a confidence-building measure ahead of "decisive stages in the negotiations."

Hamas remained defiant, with the group's exiled leader Khaled Meshaal claiming his fighters were capable of "capturing other Shalits until there are no more (Palestinian) prisoners in the jails of the enemy."

Load-Date: October 5, 2009

Israel-Hamas prisoner swap deal near: officials

AlArabiya.net

November 22, 2009 Sunday

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Length: 605 words

Body

Israel has softened its terms for a prisoner swap with **Hamas** and the two enemies are nearing a deal to exchange hundreds of Palestinian inmates for an Israeli soldier held in the Gaza Strip, officials said on Monday.

A delegation from **Hamas**, the Islamist group that controls the Gaza Strip, crossed into Egypt for a planned meeting with Egyptian security officials in Cairo to discuss the deal that Egypt and Germany have been mediating. Officials close to the talks said Israel agreed to include in the exchange for soldier Gilad Shalit some 160 prisoners whose release it previously vetoed. But both sides have publicly avoided comment or sought to play down talk of an imminent deal.

Shalit was captured by Palestinian militants who tunneled into Israel from the Gaza Strip in 2006. Israel has linked any major easing of its blockade on the territory to the soldier's return home.

"The Shalit episode is about to be closed," one of the officials said.

Sources on both sides told Reuters there were hopes that a deal might be struck by the end of the week, when the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha begins. But one **Hamas** official sought to play down speculation that a deal was done.

"We stress that it is premature to talk about any results regarding the prisoner swap deal," **Hamas** official Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters.

"The information about an imminent prisoner swap agreement is an Israeli leak that aims to influence the feelings of prisoners and their families and to put pressure and influence on the ongoing indirect negotiations."

In Jerusalem, Israeli government officials declined to comment on prospects for a deal with **Hamas**, a group that has rejected Western demands to recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept existing interim Israeli-Palestinian peace accords.

"The efforts to win Gilad Shalit's release are continuing and taking place outside the media spotlight. We have no intention of commenting beyond this," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement.

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak told reporters the subject was too sensitive to discuss but said: "We have to anticipate and be prepared to carry out any possible and appropriate procedure to return Gilad home."

Israel - Hamas prisoner swap deal near: officials

Sign of flexibility

Sources close to the negotiations have said Hamas, in the first part of a deal, would hand over Shalit to Egypt and Israel would release some 350 to 450 prisoners.

In a sign of flexibility from Hamas, the sources said, the group had agreed that some would go into exile rather than return to the West Bank or Gaza Strip.

More prisoners would be released when Shalit was transferred from Egypt to Israel, while other prisoner releases could take several more weeks to complete.

Officials who reported that a deal is approaching said Arabs holding Israeli citizenship are among the 160 newly agreed prisoners slated for release. Israel had objected to including Israeli Arabs in an exchange.

Public pressure has been mounting on the Israeli government to show flexibility in a prisoner swap, even if it meant freeing militants jailed for planning some of the most deadly Palestinian bombings in Israel.

Amid the mounting speculation that a deal is near, Shalit's parents met on Monday Israel's chief negotiator in the indirect contacts with Hamas.

"Of course we are hoping and want to see Gilad at home after so many years ... To my regret I cannot discuss (this) today, and I don't want to. This is not the time for chatter but for action," the soldier's father, Noam Shalit, told reporters.

On Oct. 2, Israel freed 20 Palestinian women in return for a "proof-of-life" video showing the 23-year-old Shalit.

Load-Date: November 23, 2009

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Israel-Hamas prisoner swap deal near - officials

The Jordan Times

November 24, 2009 Tuesday

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THE JORDAN TIMES

Length: 615 words

Body

CAIRO (Reuters) - Israel has softened its terms for a prisoner swap with Hamas and the two enemies are nearing a deal to exchange hundreds of Palestinian inmates for an Israeli soldier held in the Gaza Strip, officials said on Monday.

A delegation from Hamas, the Islamist group that controls the Gaza Strip, crossed into Egypt for a planned meeting with Egyptian security officials in Cairo to discuss the deal that Egypt and Germany have been mediating. Officials close to the talks said Israel agreed to include in the exchange for soldier Gilad Shalit some 160 prisoners whose release it previously vetoed. But both sides have publicly avoided comment or sought to play down talk of an imminent deal.

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Israel - Hamas prisoner swap deal near - officials

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On October 2, Israel freed 20 Palestinian women in return for a "proof-of-life" video showing the 23-year-old Shalit.

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Hamas promises surprises at Monday anniversary rally. Mashaal complains Israel rebuffing some Schalit demands

The Jerusalem Post

December 11, 2009 Friday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 5

Length: 622 words

Byline: KHALED ABU TOAMEH

Body

Hamas on Thursday called on the Palestinians to expect "surprises" during next week's rally marking the 22nd anniversary of the founding of the Islamic Movement, sparking speculation that its leaders may exploit the event to announce a prisoner exchange agreement with Israel.

The rally, which is scheduled to be take place at the Katiba Square in the center of Gaza City Monday afternoon, is expected to draw tens of thousands of **Hamas** supporters. Past events have often been used as a show of popular support for **Hamas**.

Hamas representatives said this year's "celebration" would be different from past events because it would be held amid reports of an imminent prisoner exchange agreement with Israel.

This would also be the fist event of its kind since the IDF's Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip. **Hamas** is hoping that a large turnout would refute the claim that it has lost much of its credibility and popularity among Palestinians in the aftermath of the war.

A leaflet distributed by **Hamas** followers in the Gaza Strip on Thursday promised "fiery speeches, artist songs and hidden surprises" at next week's rally.

A special committee set up by **Hamas** began on Thursday to decorate streets, mosques and buildings with the group's banners and flags in preparation for the rally. In some parts of the Gaza Strip, **Hamas** supporters launched their own celebrations by holding street marches and motorcycle tours.

Khalil al-Haya, a senior **Hamas** official in the Gaza Strip, said that **Hamas** Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh would deliver an "important" speech at the rally. Asked if Haniyeh was planning to use the event to announce that **Hamas** has reached an agreement with Israel over the release of IDF soldier Gilad Schalit, al-Haya said, "There will be surprises during the rally." He refused to elaborate.

The **Hamas** official said that indirect negotiations with Israel were continuing with the hope of achieving an accord in the coming days or weeks.

He also accused the Palestinian Authority leadership in the West Bank of working to sabotage any agreement between Israel and **Hamas**.

Hamas promises surprises at Monday anniversary rally. Mashaal complains Israel rebuffing some Schalit demands

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal, who is currently visiting Yemen, said that Israel was to blame for the lack of progress in the secret negotiations because of its refusal to accept **Hamas**'s demands in full.

Mahmoud Zahar, the **Hamas** representative at the secret negotiations, said that Israel's refusal to release dozens of prisoners was hindering the signing of an agreement. He told an Egyptian newspaper that a deal was now contingent on a "political will" by both **Hamas** and Israel.

He said that a deal could be reached soon if Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu accepted **Hamas**'s demands in full. He also accused the US of seeking to obstruct a prisoner exchange agreement out of fear that such a move would bolster the movement's standing and undermine the Palestinian Authority and its leader, Mahmoud Abbas.

Meanwhile, sources close to **Hamas** told the Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Jareeda that the main dispute between Israel and **Hamas** centered around eight prisoners whom Israel was refusing to include in a deal.

The sources named the eight as Fatah's Marwan Barghouti, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's Ahmed Sa'dat, top **Hamas** operatives Ibrahim Hamed, Abbas Assayed and Abdullah Barghouti, as well as **female** inmates Amned Muna, Ahlam Tamimi and Qahera al- Sa'di.

The sources claimed that prisoners who are serving life terms have been exerting heavy pressure on **Hamas** to include them in a deal out of fear that such an opportunity would not recur in the foreseeable future.

Assayed, who masterminded the 2001 Netanya Park Hotel suicide bombing that killed 30 people, had even expressed his readiness to be deported to Syria in return for his release.

Graphic

Photo: Ismail Haniyeh (Credit: AP)

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

Israel, Hamas Inch Closer To Prisoner Exchange Deal

RTT News (United States)

December 22, 2009 Tuesday

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Body

(RTTNews) - Israel and Hamas have moved closer to a prisoner exchange deal that would secure the freedom of Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier abducted by Palestine militants in 2006, according to Israeli news agencies.

Israeli media reports indicated on Tuesday that Israel has responded to the Hamas offer for prisoner exchange and has forwarded a list of Palestinian prisoners it wants to deport to either Gaza or some foreign country as a part of the deal.

Gilad Shalit was captured by Hamas militants from Gaza in a cross-border raid in June 2006. Egypt has been mediating for his freedom in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. The previous negotiations on the issue, which were held just before the term of the last Israeli government ended, had concluded without result.

Israeli government has been under tremendous pressure for securing Shalit's freedom from within after Hamas recently released a proof-of-life video of Shalit in exchange for the freedom of 20 Palestinian women prisoners held in Israeli jails. Also, Germany recently joined the prisoner exchange negotiations as a mediator in a effort to hasten the release of the abducted Israeli soldier.

The development comes after two days of intense discussions by Israel's seven-member security cabinet on Sunday and Monday over the prisoner exchange deal proposed by Hamas. The deal calls for the release of some 1000 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, including some senior Hamas officials responsible for planning or carrying out violent attacks against Israelis.

After the security cabinet meeting, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said Tuesday that efforts were progressing to secure the release of Shalit. He, however, added that his government's priority was to secure Shalit release, though "not at any cost, but in every possible and appropriate way".

"This is a sensitive time and it would be wrong to expound upon the topic, but we, as those who sent Gilad, feel a responsibility to make every feasible and worthy move to bring Gilad home, though not at any price," he said.

It is understood that the negotiations were deadlocked over Israel's refusal to release some of the most dangerous Palestinian prisoners to the West Bank. Israel wants to deport them to either a foreign country or to the Gaza Strip, where they would be confined because of the ongoing Israeli siege on the Palestinian territory.

Officials involved in the talks have indicated that the first part of the deal under consideration requires Hamas to hand over Shalit to Egypt, as Israel releases between 350 and 450 prisoners. It would be followed with the release of some 650 more prisoners when the freed soldier is being transferred to Israel.

Israel , Hamas Inch Closer To Prisoner Exchange Deal

Israel is currently holding about 10,000 Palestinians as prisoners on various charges. Previous Egyptian-mediated negotiations between Israeli officials and **Hamas** militants on a prisoner exchange scheme have ended dead-locked after the two sides failed to agree on the number of Palestinian prisoners to be released in exchange for the release of Shalit.

For comments and feedback: contact editorial@rttnews.com

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Gilad Shalit release: Hamas, Israel prisoner swap said to be imminent

Christian Science Monitor

November 23, 2009, Monday

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Section: WORLD; Pg. 6

Length: 700 words

Byline: Ilene R. Prusher Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Dateline: Jerusalem

Body

Israel and Hamas appear to be moving closer to a prisoner swap in which Israel would release up to 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

A Hamas official who asked not to be quoted told the Monitor on Monday that Israel and Hamas would probably reach a deal by week's end. One of the Gaza newspapers closest to Hamas, al-Risala, reported that the swap was being delayed by disagreement over just one prisoner. Later in the day the family of Marwan Barghouti - a popular West Bank Fatah leader held by Israel since 2002 - claimed he would be released as part of the deal.

An prisoner exchange could provide a major boost to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been pressed by US officials and other international mediators to show he's working in earnest to reverse a near breakdown in Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. Similarly, the deal would bolster Hamas - and in Mr. Barghouti could provide a charismatic leader to succeed Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, who has said he will not seek reelection, and possibly bridge the Fatah-Hamas divide.

Palestinian political scientist Bassem Zubeidi says Hamas is insisting that Barghouti be included in the prisoner swap. If Hamas succeeds, he says, it would boost the credibility of the Islamist organization, which has been largely relegated to the tiny Gaza Strip since a violent falling out with Mr. Abbas's Fatah party in 2007.

"If that happens, it will be perceived as a good achievement on the part of Hamas, and it will show that Hamas is delivering and capable of doing things, while Abbas is a complete mess," says Dr. Zubeidi, a professor at Birzeit University in the West Bank. "He has done nothing in his years of talking to the Israelis, Hamas will claim, while there will be a chance for Hamas to appear jubilant and successful."

Barghouti convicted of murder

Mr. Barghouti is often chosen in polls as the most favored man to lead Palestinians in the future. A leader of the Tanzim, a militant organization that recruited suicide bombers during the second intifada, he was convicted by Israel in 2004 on five counts of murder.

In the past, relatives of Israelis killed by Palestinian militants have asked that Israel not release Palestinians with "blood on their hands." But Israel has overridden that guideline before, releasing prisoners convicted of murder to gain the remains of soldiers for proper burial. Some Israelis argue that the rumored Shalit trade will provide incentive for future kidnappings.

Gilad Shalit release: Hamas, Israel prisoner swap said to be imminent

At the same time, Israelis regularly rally for the return of Shalit, who was 19 when he was kidnapped in a Palestinian cross-border raid in June 2006. Last month, Israel released 20 **female** Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a **Hamas** videotape that showed Shalit to be in good physical health.

Officials tight-lipped

Local news stations reported that several senior **Hamas** officials left Gaza on Monday for negotiations in Egypt; many speculated that Sgt. Shalit could be with them for a "hand-over" via officials in Cairo. But as expectation build officials on both sides have grown tight-lipped about the matter - prisoner exchanges are highly emotional matters on both sides of the divide. What seemed more in question Monday was not whether there would be an exchange but whom it would include.

Hamas representative Osama Hamdan denied in an official statement released Sunday that the deal was near completion, according to Palestinian press reports in Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office referred reporters to a statement light on detail.

"Many details coming from abroad and in foreign media are being published lately, but they are not credible and some of them are even intentionally distorted," the statement read. "Efforts to secure Gilad Shalit's release are continuously under way, out of the media's view, and we have no intentions of commenting beyond that."

Netanyahu told his right-wing faction on Monday that there was "no deal yet," according to officials present at the meeting, and said that the issue would be decided by his cabinet and debated in the Knesset, Israel's parliament.

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Load-Date: November 23, 2009

Hamas mobilizes mass rally in show of strength, vows to continue struggle against Israel

Guelph Mercury (Ontario, Canada)

December 14, 2009 Monday

Final Edition

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Section: Pg. 01

Length: 713 words

Dateline: ARTICLE

Body

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip - **Hamas** mobilized tens of thousands of supporters on Monday for an anniversary rally meant to show the Islamic militant group has not lost support despite Israel's devastating military assault on Gaza a year ago.

The crowd responded with chants of "We won't recognize Israel" to a fiery speech by **Hamas**' prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh, who said the movement scored a "divine victory" against the Jewish state and will not lay down its arms.

Despite the defiant words, **Hamas** has sharply curtailed rocket fire on Israeli border towns since last winter's Israeli offensive, which inflicted heavy losses on the militants.

And unlike at last year's rally, **Hamas** did not taunt Israel over the captive Israeli soldier it is holding, Sgt. Gilad Schalit, whom the militants hope to trade for hundreds of Palestinians held by Israel. It appears **Hamas** didn't want to spoil prospects of a German-mediated prisoner swap.

Hamas, founded in 1987 during the first Palestinian uprising against Israel, seized Gaza from Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in 2007 and has since tightened its control despite a crippling border blockade enforced by Israel and Egypt.

Monday's rally illustrated **Hamas**' firm grip and flair for the theatrical.

Gaza was decked out in Islamic green, with **Hamas** flags fluttering from rooftops, lampposts and cars, while the yellow banners of Abbas' Fatah movement have all but disappeared.

The crowd packed a large vacant lot where a huge banner draped over the wall of a building showed a picture of Jerusalem's main Islamic shrine and photos of senior **Hamas** figures.

Bands played and scout troops marched in processions. "Gaza is free. Gaza is steadfast," shouted a male singing troupe, whose members wore military camouflage.

Women stood in a separate section, many of them wearing face veils and green baseball hats over headscarves. Some children were dressed in combat fatigues and wore green headbands.

Hamas mobilizes mass rally in show of strength, vows to continue struggle against Israel

Haniyeh struck a hard line, saying Hamas would not recognize Israel or call off armed struggle "until the Palestinian people achieve freedom and independence."

The U.S. and Europe, which branded Hamas a terrorist organization after it killed hundreds of Israelis in suicide bombings, have said they will shun the group unless it renounces violence and recognizes Israel.

In recent months, Hamas' leader, Khaled Mashaal, has tried to reach out to the West with conciliatory statements, saying his group supports the idea of a Palestinian state in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem. However, Mashaal hasn't said if he would consider that the final arrangement.

Haniyeh suggested Monday that Hamas hasn't dropped its objective of destroying Israel.

"This movement, with the help of the militant factions liberated the Gaza Strip, and we say, brothers and sisters, we will not be satisfied with Gaza," Haniyeh told the crowd. "Hamas looks toward the whole of Palestine, the liberation of the strip is just a step to liberating all of Palestine," meaning Israel as well as the West Bank and Gaza.

Despite the belligerent words, rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza fell sharply in 2009, according to Israel's military. Since the end of the three-week war in mid-January, 242 rockets and mortars were fired, compared to 3,300 in 2008.

Israel launched the three-week offensive on Dec. 27 to halt the attacks and subdue Hamas, inflicting heavy losses on the militants and making it harder for them to provide for Gaza's 1.5 million people.

Hamas has been unable to rebuild homes, sewage lines and water pipes destroyed in the assault because Israel and Egypt continue to enforce a border blockade. Basic goods like food and some medicines are allowed into Gaza, but construction materials are not.

Smugglers bring in goods from Egypt through tunnels, though those routes may eventually be cut off. Egypt has recently begun installing border fortifications to block the tunnels, which also serve as a conduit for Hamas weapons.

Israel first sealed Gaza in June 2006 after Hamas-allied militants captured Schalit, the Israeli soldier. The closure tightened a year later, when Hamas ousted Abbas' forces.

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Associated Press writers Rizek Abdel Jawad in Gaza City, Mohammed Daraghmeh in Ramallah and Mike Barajas in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

Load-Date: January 5, 2010

Hamas Shifts From Rockets To Culture War

The New York Times

July 24, 2009 Friday

Late Edition - Final

Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company

Section: Section A; Column 0; Foreign Desk; Pg. 1

Length: 1062 words

Byline: By ETHAN BRONNER; Taghreed El-Khodary contributed reporting.

Dateline: GAZA

Body

Seven months after Israel started a fierce three-week military campaign here to stop rockets from being fired on its southern communities, **Hamas** has suspended its use of rockets and shifted focus to winning support at home and abroad through cultural initiatives and public relations.

The aim is to build what leaders here call a "culture of resistance," the topic of a recent two-day conference. In recent days, a play has been staged, a movie premiered, an art exhibit mounted, a book of poems published and a television series begun, most of it state-sponsored and all focused on the plight of Palestinians in Gaza. There are plans for a documentary competition.

"Armed resistance is still important and legitimate, but we have a new emphasis on cultural resistance," noted Ayman Taha, a **Hamas** leader and former fighter. "The current situation required a stoppage of rockets. After the war, the fighters needed a break and the people needed a break."

Mr. Taha and others say that the military has replaced field commanders and restructured itself as it learns lessons from the war. The decision to suspend the use of the short-range Qassam rockets that for years have flown into Israel, often dozens a day, has been partly the result of popular pressure. Increasingly, people here are questioning the value of the rockets, not because they hit civilians but because they are seen as relatively ineffective.

"What did the rockets do for us? Nothing," Mona Abdelaziz, a 36-year-old lawyer, said in a typical street interview here.

How long **Hamas** will hold its fire and whether it will obtain longer-range missiles -- which it says it is seeking -- remain unclear. But the shift in policy is evident. In June, a total of two rockets were fired from Gaza, according to the Israeli military, one of the lowest monthly tallies since the firing began in 2002.

In that tactical sense, the war was a victory for Israel and a loss for **Hamas**. But in the field of public opinion, **Hamas** took the upper hand. Its leaders have noted the international condemnation of Israel over allegations of disproportionate force, a perception they hope to continue to use to their advantage. Suspending the rocket fire could also serve that goal.

Hamas Shifts From Rockets To Culture War

"We are not terrorists but resistance fighters, and we want to explain our reality to the outside world," Osama Alisawi, the minister of culture, said during a break from the two-day conference. "We want the writers and intellectuals of the world to come and see how people are suffering on a daily basis."

That suffering is quite real. An Israeli-led boycott limits economic activity here to farming and basic commerce, although Israel does allow about 100 trucks of food and medicine in each day, and more and more goods are coming in through desert smuggler tunnels from Egypt. Israel is experimenting with minor adjustments, allowing some equipment and glass in last week for the first time in a long time.

Because Israeli officials also believe that they must improve public relations and message management, the new focus on culture here sets up an intriguing battle for world opinion. Both sides argue that journalists show too much sympathy for the other.

But it may also bring unforeseen risks to the Islamist leaders of Hamas. The play currently seen nightly at Gaza City's Shawa cultural center offers an example of how.

Called "The Women of Gaza and the Patience of Job," it consists of a series of contemporary and historical scenes about suffering. And while it might be helping to create a sense of solidarity among the people of Gaza, it pushes some local limits.

In one satirical scene, for example, a Hamas fighter is standing over his rocket launcher about to fire at Israel when a woman asks about her brother, a fellow fighter.

Oh yes, he replies excitedly, her brother is a hero. He made the Israelis quake in their boots. "He hit Tel Aviv!"

From the audience emerges a dismissive laugh, for it knows how meaningless such boasting proved over the years.

After the show one recent evening, its writer, director and star, Said al-Bettar, said he wrote the scene that way to make the point that, "We were the victims of a big lie." He added, "The people paid a heavy price and society is looking for someone to express its views clearly."

Mr. Bettar, who is not a follower of Hamas and is popular here, said the government had not interfered with his work or criticized it. Besides mocking the rockets, he has done something else rather subversive -- his entire cast (apart from himself) is female, and women sing on stage, something that is frowned upon by religious Muslims.

He said he wanted to challenge the conservatives of Gaza and added, "We need to engage with the world, not isolate ourselves."

Abd Alkhalik Alaff, a poet and literature professor at the Islamic University, is the chief consultant on government efforts to use artists and writers to make Gaza's case abroad. He said there were plans to award work that showed the plight of Gaza and added that a television series aimed at the holy month of Ramadan, which starts in late August this year, focused on Jerusalem. One of the first cultural products of the new campaign was given its premiere last week at the Islamic University. Written by Mahmoud Zahar, a physician who is among the most powerful Hamas leaders, it is a movie profile of Emad Akel, a commander of the Hamas military wing who was killed by Israel in 1993.

The two-hour film shows Mr. Akel's use of numerous disguises, including as a religious Israeli settler. It was shot at the new media center on the grounds of what used to be called Gush Katif, a group of Israeli settlements in southern Gaza from which Israel withdrew four years ago.

A senior Hamas police commander who spoke on condition of anonymity said the focus on culture and away from rockets was appropriate for now. He said Hamas was working on increasing the range of its rockets. But he said: "We have made a decision not to fire. As long as Israel is committed to an unofficial truce, so are we."

Hamas Shifts From Rockets To Culture War

He pointed out holes punched in his building by Israeli missiles in late December and said the world needed to know. As he bid goodbye, this menacing man with a fighting past had world opinion on his mind. With a bow and slight smile, he said, "Thank you for coming to Gaza."

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Graphic

PHOTO: In Gaza City, a poster advertised a movie about Emad Akel, a commander of the **Hamas** military wing who was killed by Israel.(PHOTOGRAPH BY WISSAM NASSAR/ZUMA, VIA REUTERS)(pg. A10)

Load-Date: July 24, 2009

End of Document

Pakistan: 'Israel-Hamas prisoner swap deal near'

Right Vision News

November 25, 2009 Wednesday

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Length: 545 words

Dateline: CAIRO

Body

CAIRO, Nov. 25 -- Israel has softened its terms for a prisoner swap with Hamas and the two enemies are nearing a deal to exchange hundreds of Palestinian inmates for an Israeli soldier held in the Gaza Strip, officials said on Monday. A delegation from Hamas, the Islamist group that controls the Gaza Strip, crossed into Egypt for a planned meeting with Egyptian security officials in Cairo to discuss the deal that Egypt and Germany have been mediating. Officials close to the talks said Israel had agreed to include in the exchange for the soldier, Gilad Shalit, some 160 prisoners whose release it had previously vetoed. Shalit was captured by Palestinians who tunneled into Israel from the Gaza Strip in 2006. Israel has linked any major easing of its blockade on the territory to the soldier's return home. "The Shalit episode is about to be closed," one of the officials said. Sources on both sides told Reuters there were hopes that a deal might be struck by the end of the week, when the festival of Eid ul-Azha begins. In al-Quds, Israeli government officials declined to comment on prospects for a deal with Hamas, a group that has rejected Western demands to recognise Israel, renounce violence and accept existing interim Israeli-Palestinian peace accords. "The efforts to win Gilad Shalit's release are continuing and taking place outside the media spotlight.

We have no intention of commenting beyond this," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement. Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak told reporters: "This is too sensitive a time for talk. We have to anticipate and be prepared to carry out any possible and appropriate procedure to return Gilad home." Sources close to the negotiations have said Hamas, in the first part of a deal, would hand over Shalit to Egypt and Israel would release some 350 to 450 prisoners. In a sign of flexibility from Hamas, the sources said, the group had agreed that some would go into exile rather than return to the West Bank or Gaza Strip. More prisoners would be released when Shalit was transferred from Egypt to Israel, while other prisoner releases could take several more weeks to complete. Officials who reported that a deal is approaching said Arabs holding Israeli citizenship are among the 160 newly agreed prisoners slated for release. Israel had objected to including Israeli Arabs in an exchange. Public pressure has been mounting on the Israeli government to show flexibility in a prisoner swap, even if it meant freeing Palestinians jailed for planning some of the most deadly Palestinian suicide bombings in Israel. Amid the mounting speculation that a deal is near, Shalit's parents met on Monday Israel's chief negotiator in the indirect contacts with Hamas. "Of course we are hoping and want to see Gilad at home after so many years ... To my regret I cannot discuss (this) today, and I don't want to. This is not the time for chatter but for action," the soldier's father, Noam Shalit, told reporters. On Oct. 2, Israel freed 20 Palestinian women in return for a "proof-of-life" video showing the 23-year-old Shalit. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Right Vision News. For more information on news feed please contact Sarabjit Jagirdar at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

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Pakistan : ' Israel - Hamas prisoner swap deal near'

Load-Date: November 24, 2009

End of Document

Releases a 'triumph' for Hamas as video of captive soldier shown

The Irish Times

October 3, 2009 Saturday

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Section: WORLD; Other World Stories; Pg. 13

Length: 761 words

Byline: MICHAEL JANSEN in Gaza

Body

GAZANS GATHERED early yesterday morning at a makeshift roadblock south of the Erez crossing into Israel to welcome Ruda Habib and her 18-month old son, freed from jail in Israel in exchange for a video of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

Ms Habib and her cousin Fatma Zek were arrested at Erez in May 2007 after Israeli intelligence discovered they intended to carry out suicide bombings in Israel on behalf of Islamic Jihad. Zek is set to be freed on Sunday.

On the Israeli side of Erez, scores of Shalit supporters staged a rally aimed at boosting pressure on both Hamas and the Israeli government to conclude a deal to exchange as many as 1,000 Palestinian prisoners for the 23-year-old sergeant captured by Hamas affiliates in 2006.

They paraded with Israeli flags and posters of the young man while a school group unrolled a banner-petition calling for his release.

Ms Habib's uncle and brother waited in the sun to meet her. Once in Gaza, she was greeted by Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas's de facto prime minister, who said the freeing of 20 Palestinian women, 18 into the West Bank, amounted to a triumph for the resistance.

Rival Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah are expected to approve a reconciliation plan later this month at a ceremony in Cairo attended by officials from Arab states.

Hamas, which rules Gaza, has already accepted the reconciliation plan presented by Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman but Fatah, which holds sway in the West Bank, has yet to agree.

Mahmoud Zahar, leader of Hamas's Gaza delegation at this week's talks in Cairo, told The Irish Times that his movement's approval of the Egyptian plan represented only the first step towards the reconciliation of the two Palestinian groups.

The deal is good but needs a lot of effort to succeed, he said.

This is not the end but the start. We have to implement what we have already agreed upon, including the release of prisoners, before tackling the main issues dividing the two sides.

Releases a 'triumph' for Hamas as video of captive soldier shown

He said the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority is holding 1,000 prisoners, including 600 from Hamas and its allies. However he insisted that prisoners in jails in Hamas- controlled Gaza came from all factions and were under trial for crimes they committed.

Among the issues requiring resolution are the holding of elections for president and parliament, restructuring of the security services and the reform of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to include Palestinians in the occupied territories and the diaspora in decision-making.

This would mean expanding the PLO to embrace Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other excluded factions.

Differences would be resolved in a committee of all PLO factions and Egypt.

Dr Zahar revealed that Hamas and Egypt had agreed that elections should take place in June rather than on January 25th, the date set by the Fatah- dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank.

The election date remains a bone of contention.

The security forces issue is very big, he said. It is going to be a long story before we implement [changes]. Asked if Fatah had the will to see this through, he replied, No.

He also suggested that this process could be complicated by US general Keith Dayton, who has been supervising the reformation of the West Bank security apparatus.

Dr Zahar suggested that Egypt and the Arab counties were committed to Palestinian reconciliation and unity for two reasons.

Palestinian divisions do not serve their interests and Egypt's border with Gaza gives rise to concern that potential unrest in Gaza could spread to Egypt.

It is too early to speak about US support for reconciliation, he said. Washington is concentrating on relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We cannot touch any positive statements about reconciliation.

Dr Zahar called for an end to the conditions for participation in peace talks imposed by the international quartet composed of the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and Russia. These conditions demand that Hamas recognise Israel, halt armed resistance to the Israeli occupation and accept agreements reached between the PLO/PA and Israel.

Hamas has countered these demands by saying it would endorse a Palestinian state in East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank, abide by a long-term ceasefire with Israel and respect agreements made by the PLO/PA and Israel.

Dr Zahar said there was no dissent within Hamas as there was within Fatah about adopting the Egyptian proposal.

Our decision is a collective one. If any [leader] from Hamas says Yes, it is a common agreement, he said.

Load-Date: October 3, 2009

Hamas bans women on motorcycles in Gaza Strip

AlArabiya.net

October 7, 2009 Wednesday

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Length: 287 words

Body

Hamas rulers of the Gaza Strip said Thursday safety concerns and social traditions, are behind a ban on women riding motorbikes and scooters; meanwhile the Islamic movement said it taken control of al-Aqsa University in the Gaza strip.

In a decision which would raise eyebrows in Rome or Rio de Janeiro, the Interior Ministry said it was banning women from riding two-wheelers or being pillion passengers, to limit accidents and to "protect community values." Spokesman Ehab Al-Ghsain said the decision was taken after they found that women riding behind their husbands or male relatives were a prime reason for accidents in recent weeks.

"We have taken a series of decisions to limit accidents and avoid loss of lives. Men carrying women behind them on motorcycles caused accidents and did not match our social traditions," he said. "The image looked odd."

Human Rights groups say Hamas is gradually imposing a strict Islamic code on the 1.5 million Palestinians of Gaza.

Gaza couples complain of being stopped by police and asked for papers to prove they are married, and men have been told to cover up on the beach.

Taking control of Aqsa University

Meanwhile, the Islamic movement said it has taken control of al-Aqsa University in the Gaza strip and replaced President Dr. Ali Zaidan Abu Zohri with the university's vice president who is a Hamas leader.

The changes drove the university into a state of turmoil and ignited anger among academics.

Hamas had taken control of the College of science and technology in Khan Younes two year ago, prompting most students to leave the institution.

Al-Aqsa University is the only government university in the Gaza strip. It was formerly under the Palestinian Authority in West Bank.

Load-Date: October 8, 2009

Hamas bans women on motorcycles in Gaza Strip

End of Document

International: Hamas rockets stop amid talks on Israel soldier

The Guardian - Final Edition

November 23, 2009 Monday

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theguardian

Section: GUARDIAN INTERNATIONAL PAGES; Pg. 15

Length: 429 words

Byline: Rory McCarthy, Jerusalem

Body

Hamas has won an agreement from other militant groups in Gaza to halt rocket fire into Israel for the first time in almost a year, as both sides indicated progress on a deal to release a captured Israeli soldier.

The agreement, announced on Saturday, appears to be an attempt by the Palestinian Islamist movement to prevent another descent into fighting at a time when reconstruction has barely begun almost 12 months after the devastating conflict with Israel.

It also reflected more progress in secretly mediated talks to release Gilad Shalit, the soldier captured more than three years ago, in exchange for the return of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

Last month, **Hamas** handed over a video showing Shalit in apparent good health, in return for which Israel freed 20 **female** Palestinian prisoners.

A **Hamas** newsletter issued on Saturday said a deal was "reaching completion."

The Israeli president, Shimon Peres, in Cairo for talks with the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, whose government has acted as a mediator in the case said: "As we all know, there is progress. I hope it will end positively." Reports suggested Israel would release 450 prisoners once Shalit had been handed over to Egypt and flown to Israel. At a later date, another 550 prisoners would be freed, but disagreements remain over exactly who and where they would be returned to.

Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi, Israel's chief of staff, said on Saturday: "We have a deep commitment . . . to bring (Shalit) home, but I prefer to leave this effort behind the scenes."

Hours after Fathi Hamad, the **Hamas** interior minister in Gaza, announced the ceasefire agreement, Israeli jets bombed what the military said were two "weapons-manufacturing facilities" in northern and central Gaza.

The strikes, in which seven Palestinians were injured, also targeted a smuggling tunnel. The Israel Defence Force (IDF) said it had been responding to rocket fire early on Saturday.

International: Hamas rockets stop amid talks on Israel soldier

An IDF statement said nearly 270 rockets and mortars had been fired from Gaza at Israel since the end of the war in January - far fewer than in previous years.

Hamas is believed to have stopped firing rockets after the war, but it took months to persuade more hardline groups - such as Islamic Jihad - to stop as well.

Israel has maintained a tight economic blockade on Gaza, and continues to prevent the import of most construction supplies. Egyptian cement has been smuggled in through tunnels.

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C​apti​ons:

A Gaza home hit by an Israeli airstrike hours before the **Hamas** ceasefire. Other militant groups have signed up to the deal

Load-Date: November 23, 2009

End of Document

Hamas kid's Web site encourages suicide bombers in Europe

The Jerusalem Post

November 25, 2009 Wednesday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 3

Length: 457 words

Byline: BENJAMIN WEINTHAL, Jerusalem Post correspondent

Body

BERLIN - The educational content of the **Hamas** children's Web site Al-Fateh (The Conqueror) is not a form of pedagogy, but an "indoctrination to suicide bombing," said David Oman, the director of communications for the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-SE) on Tuesday at a press conference at the Regent Hotel.

Gert Weisskirchen, a former Social Democratic Party MP and chairman of the OSCE on combating anti-Semitism between 2004-2008, introduced the IMPACT-SE study, and said that "there is a chance to prevent the indoctrination of children and youngsters in Germany and all over Europe."

The study "Al-Fateh - The **Hamas** Web Magazine for Children: Indoctrination to Jihad, Annihilation and Self-Destruction" took place from September 2002 to April of this year.

Oman cited the "friends of Al-Fateh" entry of the young German-Palestinian child Muhammad Warad as growing evidence of the spread of radical, anti-Western **Hamas** ideology.

The **Hamas** Web site, according to the IMPACT-SE study, serves to demonize Israel through the use of anti-Semitic cartoons and tries to strip the country of its right to exist.

The promotion of violence is a standard theme of Al-Fateh. A telling example, said Oman, is the glorification of **female** suicide bomber Zeynab Abu Salam, who murdered two Jerusalem police officers in 2004.

Al-Fateh claims to receive millions of visitors, according to Oman. He said the Al-Fateh server, which has been tracked to Russia and Malaysia, frequently relocates its operation to prevent closure. The United Kingdom is listed as the site's current host.

The educational material on the site contravenes "all of the International Educational Standards based on UNESCO Resolutions," noted the study. Moreover, the authors of the study wrote that the site violates the International Convention on the Rights of the Child affirming that "every child has the inherent right to life," by inciting children to commit suicide bombings.

The pro-violence ideology of **Hamas** will have "implications for the West and Israel," said Oman.

"What will happen in 10 or 15 years from these children after their exposure to this type of hate?" asked Oman.

Hamas kid's Web site encourages suicide bombers in Europe

The Iranian-**Hamas** connection appears on Al-Fateh. The study highlighted the role of the founder of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, in stoking hatred against the West and Israel.

"The Web site often uses stories of shahids [martyrs] or their last wills and testaments to convey the message of violent jihad till victory or death - a message found in the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini," wrote the authors.

"Child abuse" was the term Oman invoked to describe the effect of **Hamas**'s educational site on adolescents and children.

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

Mashaal: We can talk to Obama. Hamas chief denies reports of progress on Schalit

The Jerusalem Post
August 17, 2009 Monday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 4

Length: 691 words

Byline: KHALED ABU TOAMEH

Body

Hamas is interested in opening a dialogue with the Obama administration because its policies are much better than those of former US president George W. Bush, **Hamas** leader Khaled Mashaal said on Sunday.

He denied reports about progress in negotiations for the release of kidnapped IDF soldier Gilad Schalit.

Mashaal also denied that **Hamas** was seeking to impose strict Islamic rule in the Gaza Strip, saying religion should not be enforced through coercion.

The Damascus-based leader's remarks came in an interview with the Qatari newspaper Al-Watan and were published a day after **Hamas** foiled an attempt by a more radical Islamist group to establish an Islamic emirate in the Gaza Strip.

At least 28 Palestinians were killed and more than 120 were wounded in clashes that erupted between **Hamas** security forces and the Jund Ansar Allah group in Rafah.

The group's leader, Sheikh Abdel Latif Mousa, died when he and one of his bodyguards blew themselves up during attempts to persuade them to surrender.

"We're not courting anyone, but we are dealing with matters with openness and realism," Mashaal said when asked whether his recent statements about accepting a Palestinian state alongside Israel marked a shift in **Hamas**'s policy.

"We have no problem dealing with any party in the world except for the Zionist occupier. As for the US or any other country in the west or east, we are prepared to conduct dialogue with them because we are owners of a just cause."

He praised President Barack Obama for using a different language than his predecessor.

"As long as there's a new language, we welcome it," Mashaal said. "But we want to see not only a change of language, but also a change of policies on the ground. We have said that we are prepared to cooperate with the US or any other international party that would enable the Palestinians to get rid of occupation."

Mashaal: We can talk to Obama. Hamas chief denies reports of progress on Schalit

Mashaal stressed, however, that his statements did not mean that Hamas would accept the demands of the Quartet to recognize Israel, renounce violence and honoring all previous agreements reached between Palestinians and Israelis.

Mashaal strongly denied that his organization was trying to impose Shari'a in the Gaza Strip. Hamas, he said, was a national liberation movement whose main priority was to "liberate the homeland and restore Palestinian rights."

Hamas did not have a policy of "imposing religion on anyone, because faith comes should come through persuasion, not coercion."

Mashaal claimed that a recent decision by a judge in the Gaza Strip requiring female lawyers appearing in court to cover their heads did not reflect Hamas policy.

"The judge acted on his own and not in coordination with Hamas or the government of Ismail Haniyeh," he explained. "The judge wanted to implement his own interpretation of the law. We are now looking into this matter, but our policy remains that religion should not be imposed on anyone."

As for Schalit, there was nothing new. The efforts to agree on a prisoner exchange with Israel were continuing nevertheless, he added. "Until now, there hasn't been a real breakthrough," he said, denying reports that some Arab parties had offered Hamas money in return for the soldier.

The Hamas leader expressed concern over the recent unrest in Iran, but said he was confident that Teheran would continue to support his movement.

"We are certainly not worried about our relations with Iran or the support that the Iranians give us," he said. "It's no secret that Iran is one of many Arab and Islamic parties that have been supporting Hamas."

Meanwhile, a number of radical Islamic groups in the Gaza Strip threatened on Sunday to avenge the death of the Jund Ansar Allah members by attacking Hamas figures and institutions.

One of the groups, Swords of Right, urged residents of the Gaza Strip to stay away from Hamas-run institutions and mosques because it was planning to attack them soon.

Another group, Ansar Assuna (Companions of the Sunnis), said its members were planning a major attack in the Gaza Strip to express their solidarity with al-Qaida. The group is headed by Mahmoud Taleb, nicknamed Abu Mutasem, who has been wanted by Hamas for three years.

Graphic

Photo: Khaled Mashaal

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

Hamas' Zahar tells Haaretz: Shalit swap deal still a long way off

Right Vision News

September 7, 2009 Monday

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Length: 588 words

Dateline: Pakistan

Body

Pakistan, Oct. 07 -- Mahmoud al Zahar, a senior **Hamas** official in Gaza and one of the figures leading the group's negotiations in the Gilad Shalit affair, said Sunday that the talks are likely to continue for a while, 'perhaps a long time.' In an interview with Haaretz, Zahar sought to clarify a number of statements attributed to him in various media outlets. He stressed that progress in the talks now hinges primarily on the Israeli side. 'If Israel wants to wrap up this affair, it could be concluded quickly,' he said.

'If not, then it is likely to continue for a lengthy amount of time.' According to Zahar, **Hamas** has relayed messages to Israel through the German mediator. Among them, **Hamas** says no conditions have been set in stone. Israel has outright rejected a number of **Hamas** demands in exchange for the release of kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit. Nonetheless, Zahar added, 'We are sticking to our demand for the release of all the names that appear on the list.' Zahar sounded cautious when asked to comment on the possibility of concluding the negotiations. He said the issue of expelling the released prisoners, a demand that Israel raised during negotiations toward the latter stages of Ehud Olmert's term as prime minister, has not been raised in the current round of talks. 'The Israelis have not brought up this issue at all,' Zahar said, adding that more work needs to be done before conditions ripen for an agreement. Zahar also added that disagreements with Israel remain on a number of issues in the talks, not one specific aspect. The London-based pan-Arab daily Asharq Al-Awsat reported on Sunday that a dispute over the release of Israeli Arab and East Beit-ul-Moqaddas prisoners is delaying the conclusion of a prisoner exchange between Israel and **Hamas** aimed at securing Shalit's release. Zahar said Israel has taken a provocative stance on these issues. The 20th and last **female** Palestinian prisoner to be released as part of the deal with **Hamas**, in exchange for footage of Shalit, returned Sunday to her home in the Gaza Strip. Rawda Habib was imprisoned in Israel on charges of aiding a relative, Fatima A-Zik, in her bid to leave Gaza and carry out a suicide bombing. Habib was added to the list of 20 prisoners slated to be released last week. Upon her return home, she was greeted by the head of the **Hamas** government in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh. Palestinian sources told Haaretz that **Hamas** officials sense Israel is more willing now than in the past to compromise and agree on the release of the 450 prisoners whose names appear on the group's list. **Hamas** believes the airing of Shalit's video on television will impact public opinion and increase the pressure on the Israeli government to quickly reach an agreement. In a separate story, Asharq Al-Awsat quoted a senior Israeli defense official as saying that Israel knows exactly where Shalit is being held captive, and that the location is under constant Israeli surveillance. According to the report, the official said that if Israel so desired, it could take the risk and storm the site, but the fear that Shalit might get hurt is preventing Israel from launching such an operation. **Hamas** is aware of this, the paper reported, and has consequently surrounded the location with explosives. **Hamas** has also issued a directive to kill Shalit if an Israeli attack is sensed, the paper said. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Right Vision News. For more information on news feed please contact Sarabjit Jagirdar at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

Hamas' Zahar tells Haaretz: Shalit swap deal still a long way off

For any query with respect to this article or any other content requirement, please contact Editor at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

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End of Document

Hamas officials hold talks on Shalit prisoner swap deal

Guardian.com

November 24, 2009 Tuesday

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theguardian

Length: 681 words

Byline: Rory McCarthy, guardian.co.uk

Body

ABSTRACT

Reports say deal to free Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in return for release of Palestinian prisoners may be close at hand

FULL TEXT

Senior figures from the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas were in Cairo today for talks on a deal to hand over an Israeli soldier captured near Gaza more than three years ago in return for the release of hundreds of Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

Several accounts suggested that a deal on Gilad Shalit, 23, was close at hand, although the Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, remained cautious about the prospect.

A deal would be widely welcomed by the Israeli public but would also boost support - at least temporarily - among Palestinians for Hamas, in turn further weakening the position of their rival Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president.

Several accounts in the Arab media suggested that an agreement could be reached within days in which Shalit would be handed first to Egyptian authorities and then to Israel.

In return 450 Palestinian prisoners would be freed, followed by several hundred more at a later date.

One prisoner whom Hamas wants freed, Marwan Barghouti, is often spoken of as a future Palestinian leader but has been sentenced to five life terms in Israel in connection with five murders. Some senior Israeli officials have said they do not want him freed.

Eli Yishai, Israel's interior minister, suggested a prisoner swap was close. "God willing, it will be approved," he told Israel Radio.

"All the ministers, without exception, think that everything must be done to bring him home ... I very much hope that it will be finalised very soon, within not more than a few weeks."

Hamas officials hold talks on Shalit prisoner swap deal

Some reports had suggested Shalit would be freed as early as Friday, but that seems unlikely.

Netanyahu tried to dampen suggestions of a breakthrough today, saying: "There is still no deal, and I do not know if there will be one."

If an agreement was reached, he said, there would at least be a cabinet discussion before any releases. The names of the prisoners to be freed would also likely be published first.

"I can say that if there is [a deal], it will be brought first of all to a cabinet decision, and in such a case we will not skip a public discussion. We will not do it as a *fait accompli*," Netanyahu said.

Shalit was captured in a militant raid close to the Gaza boundary in June 2006; two other soldiers were killed in the attack. Since then Israel has led several military operations into Gaza, killing hundreds of Palestinians, but officials now seem to accept that the only way to win Shalit's freedom is through a mediated deal with Hamas. Most cabinet members are thought likely to vote in favour of a swap.

Some are still against it, including within the Israeli security services and among the families of those killed in suicide bombings. Rami Igra, a former director of the prisoner of war department in Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service, described any such deal with Hamas as a "shameless and bottomless surrender".

"It restores to the combat ranks the greatest murderers and past experience shows that they will return to activity and that the price will be hundreds of people killed in the future," he wrote in the Israel Hayom newspaper. Israel holds around 7,000 Palestinian "security" prisoners in its jails, according to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem. Some 300 are held without charge.

Efforts to agree a deal, mediated by Egyptian officials and more recently German intelligence officers, have been tried before but failed at the last minute. One breakthrough came last month when Hamas released a video showing Shalit in good health. In return, Israel freed 20 female Palestinian prisoners.

Shalit has French citizenship, and the French government has closely followed the case. Bernard Kouchner, the foreign minister, said Israel had passed on a list of around 500 prisoners to be released and that Hamas had "amended" the list. "It seems that things are going in a positive direction," he said.

Hamas today played down the possibility of an agreement, saying there were still "obstacles" to overcome.

Load-Date: November 24, 2009

Abbas accuses Hamas of splitting Palestinians

Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

August 6, 2009 Thursday

First Edition

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Section: NEWS AND FEATURES; International News; Pg. 10

Length: 448 words

Byline: Jason Koutsoukis Herald Correspondent in Bethlehem

Body

THE Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas, has told delegates to the first Fatah party conference in 20 years that while Palestinians had chosen the path of peace, they had not abandoned the right to legitimate resistance against Israel.

To loud applause, Mr Abbas told more 2200 delegates of Fatah, the dominant faction within the Palestine Liberation Organisation, that the Palestinians would not resume peace talks with Israel until the Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, gave unequivocal support for a two-state solution to the conflict. "Our determination to choose the path of peace and negotiations does not mean that we have abandoned our noble path of legitimate resistance, which is based on international law," Mr Abbas said. "Yes, resistance is legal, and we are with this resistance."

Praising the popular struggle against the demolition of Palestinian homes and Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Mr Abbas accused Mr Netanyahu of evading peace talks.

"Through a policy of relief measures and economic development, Netanyahu is trying to erase our national rights. Bread on its own without freedom is not important to us," he said.

"The establishment of a Palestinian state on all the lands that Israel occupied in 1967 is a question of time."

In a speech lasting more than two hours, Mr Abbas also warned of an endless cycle of violence if Israel was allowed to continue building settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, but sought to stress that Palestinians rejected "all sorts of terrorism".

He reserved his strongest rhetoric for **Hamas**, the popular Islamic resistance movement that governs 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and which refused to allow 400 Fatah delegates to attend the conference in Bethlehem.

According to Mr Abbas, **Hamas** was responsible for the deep split among Palestinians and he accused **Hamas** of executing hundreds of Palestinians in Gaza "by throwing some from the tops of buildings."

"The divisions created by **Hamas** pose the most serious threat to the Palestinian cause since 1948 and give Israel an excuse not to fulfil its commitments under previous agreements reached with the Palestinians." Appearing to keep the option of armed struggle open, Mr Abbas left Israeli analysts questioning Fatah's commitment to a lasting peace.

Abbas accuses Hamas of splitting Palestinians

Some Palestinian voices also expressed criticism and disappointment at Fatah's failure to regenerate. "We need a new leadership that will change the lives of Palestinians," said Ziyad Abu Ein, a Fatah veteran.

"Change will only come through a changing of the guard."

With only 241 women at the conference, a female delegate, Muna Afana, was sharply critical of Fatah's commitment to liberating women.

Graphic

PHOTO: An endless cycle of violence ... the Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas, speaks to delegates at the first Fatah party conference in 20 years. Photo: AP/Tara Todras-Whitehill

Load-Date: August 6, 2009

End of Document

Up to 28 dead as Hamas attacks Al-Qa'ida allies; gaza strip Splinter group leader killed

The Gazette (Montreal)

August 16, 2009 Sunday

Final Edition

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Section: NEWS; Pg. A7

Length: 276 words

Byline: REUTERS

Dateline: RAFAH, GAZA STRIP

Body

Palestinian Islamists **Hamas** struck back at an Al-Qa'ida challenge to their hold on the Gaza Strip by storming a mosque in battles that left the leader of the "Warriors of God" splinter group among up to 28 dead.

When fighting ended in the town of Rafah yesterday, **Hamas** said the preacher-physician who led the group and who had proclaimed an

Al-Qa'ida-style Islamic "emirate" from a mosque on Friday was dead - blown up by his own hand along with a Syrian ally and killing a mediator trying to negotiate a truce.

The worst inter-Palestinian violence since **Hamas** seized Gaza from its secular, Western-backed rivals two years ago exposed bitter tensions in the blockaded coastal strip, where **Hamas** has imposed its own nationalist brand of Islam while also seeking Western favour to end its international isolation.

Some of the dead were former **Hamas** men who wanted stricter Islamic rule. Under **Hamas**, imposition of, say, headscarves for **women** or an alcohol ban has been patchy. **Hamas**'s leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, said radicals had led young men astray.

Moussa's group "wanted a return to anarchy," said Ehab al-Ghsain, the spokesman for the Interior Ministry of the **Hamas** government which has run Gaza since routing forces loyal to Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in June 2007.

"We have said there is no chance of a return to anarchy."

As **Hamas** police hunted more followers of Abdel-Latif Moussa and his Jund Ansar Allah (Warriors of God) following what locals in the Egyptian border town called a "night of horror," a website linked to Al-Qa'ida denounced **Hamas** as a "criminal gang" imitating Israeli tactics and bent on thwarting Islamic rule.

Load-Date: August 16, 2009

Up to 28 dead as Hamas attacks Al-Qa'ida allies; gaza strip Splinter group leader killed

End of Document

Women in Gaza face Hamas crackdown; Attempt to strictly enforce Islamic law

The Toronto Star
July 9, 2009 Thursday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. A15

Length: 435 words

Byline: Daa Hadid, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dateline: JERUSALEM

Body

An attempt by **Hamas** police to detain a young woman walking with a man along the Gaza beach has raised alarms that the Islamic militant group is seeking to match its political control of the coastal territory with a strict enforcement of Islamic law.

The man she walked with and two of his peers were detained, beaten and ordered to sign statements promising not to engage in immoral activities, said the woman and one of the men.

The incident was the first known case of **Hamas** openly trying to punish a woman for behaving in a way it views as un-Islamic since seizing power two years ago. But it follows months of quiet pressure on Gaza's overwhelmingly conservative 1.4 million residents to abide by its strict religious mores.

Hamas officials in Gaza have urged shopkeepers to take down foreign advertisements showing the shape of **women's** bodies and to stash away lingerie displayed in windows. Officials search electronic shops to check if they are selling pornography on tiny flash drives.

"There's an open, public program to preserve public morals in Gaza," said local rights activist Isam Younis. "In reality, that means trying to restrict freedoms."

Hamas denies any crackdown is underway. Freelance journalist Asma al-Ghoul says a group of **Hamas** police sent a message that certain behaviour would not be tolerated when she went to the beach one evening in late June.

Al-Ghoul, 26, said she was spending time with a group of friends - two **women** and three men - on the northern Gaza shore.

Al-Ghoul is fairly exceptional in Gaza because she does not wear a Muslim head scarf. On that evening she wore jeans and a T-shirt - dress considered provocative in Gaza's conservative society and which could have easily attracted the attention of the plainclothed **Hamas** vice police who patrol the beaches.

Al-Ghoul swam, fully dressed, with a girlfriend, and then asked a male friend to walk her over to a nearby beach house rented by another couple she knew to shower and change.

Women in Gaza face Hamas crackdown Attempt to strictly enforce Islamic law

Three policemen showed up and waited for al-Ghoul in the beach house garden, said an eyewitness. They took her identity card and demanded she accompany them to a nearby station. She refused.

An argument ensued and she was able to avoid detention and get her identity card back only after the homeowner contacted a senior **Hamas** official by phone, who intervened and spoke to the officers.

The eyewitness said the police did not say why they wanted to detain al-Ghoul but were insinuating that her behaviour was unbecoming. Under **Hamas**' strict interpretation of Islamic law, a woman should not go out in public with men who are not related to her.

Load-Date: July 9, 2009

End of Document

German mediator seeking prisoner swap between Israel, Hamas meets with militant group in Gaza

Guelph Mercury (Ontario, Canada)

December 23, 2009 Wednesday

Final Edition

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Section: Pg. 01

Length: 498 words

Dateline: ARTICLE

Body

A German mediator met with **Hamas** in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday to deliver Israel's latest counter offer for a prisoner swap, but the Islamic militant group's Syrian-based leadership is expected to have the final say.

The German mediator is seeking to clinch a long-anticipated swap of some 1,000 Palestinian prisoners for a single Israeli soldier.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum confirmed the mediator delivered the offer and said **Hamas** was considering it.

"We in **Hamas** are discussing this issue among our leadership, and when we finish, we will give our answer through the German mediator," he said, without indicating when the group would respond.

A deal to exchange 23-year-old Israeli soldier Gilad Schalit for the Palestinian prisoners appeared imminent earlier this week when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his top ministers convened for a series of meetings described as crucial.

Israel and the Iranian-backed **Hamas** movement have held multiple rounds of swap talks, most mediated by Egypt, ever since militants affiliated with the Islamic group dragged a bleeding Schalit into Gaza after a cross-border raid in June 2006. The raid also killed two other soldiers. The talks have led to repeated false alarms that a deal was nearly completed.

Momentum picked up in recent months with the introduction of a German mediator into the negotiations. Israel has been reluctant to meet **Hamas'** demand to release dozens of Palestinians involved in deadly attacks on Israelis - including some of the most notorious suicide bombings of recent years. It also wants some of the prisoners deported outside the West Bank, for fear they would resume their violence against Israel, as did some Palestinians freed in previous releases.

According to a Palestinian close to the negotiations, Israel's current offer would see the release of 15 high-profile prisoners responsible for violent attacks on Israelis. **Hamas** insists they be part of any deal. The source spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the talks.

The parties still disagree on about 100 of the prisoners, and **Hamas** seeks to limit the number of prisoners to be deported, the source said.

German mediator seeking prisoner swap between Israel , Hamas meets with militant group in Gaza

There was no official comment from Israel on the sticking points of the negotiations.

The emerging prisoner swap is stirring up emotions on both sides of the decades-old conflict.

In Israel, where most citizens perform military service, many have been swept up by the soldier's plight in captivity. But others feel releasing prisoners convicted of violence could encourage militants to take more hostages.

For the Palestinians, the release of hundreds of men, women and teenagers would be a major victory. Most Palestinian families have had relatives in Israeli jails at one time or another, and the prisoners have come to achieve near-iconic status in Palestinian society.

But Hamas has proven resistant to compromise in the past, and may refuse to give up the soldier, its only bargaining chip, if offered less than it demands.

Load-Date: January 5, 2010

End of Document

ISRAEL, HAMAS TO SWAP PRISONERS FOR VIDEO OF CAPTURED SOLDIER

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Pennsylvania)

October 1, 2009 Thursday

SOONER EDITION

Copyright 2009 P.G. Publishing Co.

Section: WORLD; Pg. A-4

Length: 389 words

Byline: RICHARD BOUDREAUX, LOS ANGELES TIMES

Body

JERUSALEM -- Shortly after he was seized by Palestinian militants, then-Cpl. Gilad Shalit wrote of his ordeal as an "intolerable and inhumane nightmare." The letter, one of just three that the captive Israel soldier has been allowed to write, appealed to authorities to bring him home from his "closed and solitary prison" in the Gaza Strip.

Yesterday, after more than three years of indirect negotiations for his freedom, Israel and Gaza's **Hamas** rulers reported the first tentative step toward a deal -- the exchange of 20 **female** Palestinian prisoners for a recent videotape as proof of now-Staff Sgt. Shalit's well-being.

The swap, scheduled for tomorrow, was described in Israel's announcement as a confidence-building measure in advance of "the decisive stages" of talks aimed at trading the 23-year-old conscript for a far-larger number of Palestinian militants.

Israel has conducted prisoner exchanges before. But this is believed to be the first time during its decades of armed conflicts with Arab neighbors that the Jewish state has agreed to trade imprisoned adversaries for information about an Israeli captive.

The negotiations ahead are expected to be difficult, fraught with the same obstacles that have long frustrated Egyptian mediators. Among the 1,000 or so prisoners whom **Hamas** wants freed are some Israel has insisted on keeping locked up because it alleges they made deadly attacks against its citizens.

"This is a positive step in the negotiations," Israeli President Shimon Peres said after yesterday's announcement. "But the road to his release is still long and not simple, and we do not want to create any illusions."

Israel and **Hamas** nonetheless have reasons for wanting to strike a deal.

Sgt. Shalit's homecoming would end a painful ordeal for Israel, a country where military service is mandatory for Jews. Israelis have rallied behind the soldier and his family, which has led a vocal campaign to get him freed.

For **Hamas**, Sgt. Shalit's release would satisfy a key Israeli condition for ending the economic blockade that has caused shortages of many basic items for Gaza's 1.5 million people and blocked repairs of the extensive damage caused by Israel's 22-day military offensive last winter. The restrictions were tightened after the soldier's capture, then tightened again when **Hamas** took control of Gaza in 2007.

ISRAEL, HAMAS TO SWAP PRISONERS FOR VIDEO OF CAPTURED SOLDIER

Graphic

PHOTO: Israeli Staff Sgt. Gilad Schalit

Load-Date: October 2, 2009

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Hamas Fights, Often Within Its Ranks, Over Gaza's Islamist Identity

The New York Times

September 6, 2009 Sunday

Late Edition - Final

Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company

Section: Section A; Column 0; Foreign Desk; Pg. 4

Length: 1109 words

Byline: By TAGHREED EL-KHODARY and ETHAN BRONNER; Taghreed El-Khodary reported from Gaza, and Ethan Bronner from Jerusalem.

Dateline: GAZA

Body

An acute struggle is emerging within the Hamas movement, which rules this coastal Palestinian strip, over the extent and nature of its Islamist identity. Guardians of religious morality, some self-appointed, others from within the government, have sought to impose their views in recent months.

So far, top government officials have pushed them back, but it remains unclear for how long.

Examples of the battle abound. The most threatening occurred in mid-August when an extreme group called the Warriors of God commandeered a mosque in the southern city of Rafah and, calling Hamas impure and collaborationist, declared strict religious law to be in force. Hamas forces surrounded the mosque and, after an all-night gun battle, killed about two dozen people, including the group's leader, and arrested 155 others, Hamas officials said. The Interior Ministry is now monitoring mosques and sponsoring public lectures against Muslim extremism.

Other cases involved no violence but plenty of coercion. The chief justice decreed this summer that female lawyers must wear the hijab head covering in court. A committee set up by the religious affairs ministry sent men along the beaches instructing bathers not to touch each other in public and to cover up. And a number of teachers and headmistresses in girls' high schools told their students to dress in long coats and hijab rather than the jean skirts of past years.

All of those rules have already been reversed. Prime Minister Ismail Haniya told the chief justice, Abed al-Raouf Halabi, to rescind his order to female lawyers, and he did so.

The education minister, Mohammed Asqoul, called any new uniform requirement "an individual act."

"The government and Hamas have nothing to do with it," he said. "I'm against such orders since there is no need to impose the hijab in a conservative society."

Khalil al-Hayya, a senior political leader in Hamas, said: "Neither the government nor Hamas has come out with any decision regarding such orders. We are an Islamic resistance movement that will never oblige anyone against his or her will. Advice is the best tactic."

Hamas Fights, Often Within Its Ranks, Over Gaza's Islamist Identity

Iyad el-Serraj, a psychiatrist and close observer here, said there was little doubt that Gaza, long a religiously and socially conservative place, was increasingly so. Without instruction from above, the vast majority of women wear religiously modest dress and more and more men are bearded. No alcohol is sold.

Dr. Serraj attributes the shift to several developments beyond the fact that such an outward expression of identity is increasingly common across the Muslim Middle East. Hamas, he noted, has been in power for more than two years and those in midlevel positions of power, as well as those aspiring for such jobs, want to be noticed and promoted.

Second, he said, with the economy completely stalled because of the blockade of Gaza led by Israel, there is little to do and little horizon for advancement or development. In such circumstances, he suggested, fundamentalism finds fertile ground.

But Hamas, despite favoring Islamic law and behavior, has many reasons for pushing back. Its rival, the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, uses any hint of the imposition of religious law as evidence that Hamas is not capable of running a responsible, modern government. Hamas is labeled a terrorist organization by the United States, European Union and Israel, and is seeking international legitimacy to be the leader of the Palestinian movement.

It rejects Israel's right to exist and remains doctrinally committed to its destruction. However, its leaders have said several times that if Israel were to leave all land taken in the 1967 war, Hamas could accept a Palestinian state limited to the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, depending on the terms of a truce.

A hard-line leader in Gaza said Hamas was deluding itself if it thought moderation would lead to international acceptance. "The world will never recognize us and will never end the siege," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity. He added that perhaps imposing religious law "will scare them and force them to end the siege."

For the small number of relatively secular Palestinians in Gaza, the growing push toward a more Islamic life is deeply worrying.

Ahmed Shawa, 18, said that when he asked friends for a back massage on the beach recently, a man wearing civilian clothing intervened. He said there should be no touching and instructed Mr. Shawa to put on a shirt. When he and his friends asked for an explanation, the man said: "The way you sit is satanic. You invite the devil to play in your heads."

Mr. Shawa, who plays basketball, also said he was walking home from the stadium recently and was stopped by a man wearing Pakistani-style clothing who told him not to wear shorts or a sleeveless shirt. When Mr. Shawa argued, the man threatened him, saying, "Next time, I'll use the other way."

The morals committee that sends such men around the streets is against mixing of the sexes, against men's wearing "feminine" clothing and against the sale of posters, books, magazines and DVDs that violate strict morals. The men have visited cafes, asking owners not to serve women the traditional shisha water pipes smoked throughout the region.

At the start of the school year in late August, a number of high school girls were told to return home to cover their heads and dress in the long coat known as the jilbab. In the wealthier sections of Gaza City, many were unhappy.

"It's the first time in my life to cover my hair and to wear a jilbab, and I feel suffocated," said Domoua al-Ali, 16, on a recent day. The moment she stepped out of the school, Ms. Domoua and her friend Dinah Nasrallah, 17, opened the buttons of the jilbab and proudly showed their tight jeans, then turned the hijab into a scarf around their neck. They mocked their religion teacher who explained the order this way: "It's God who called for the hijab, not the headmistress. How can we forbid what he called for?"

Outside Ahmed Shawqi School, another circle of girls was led by Aziza Doghmosh, 16. She, too, removed the hijab the moment she stepped out of school and complained about her teacher. "My teacher said when you wear a tight skirt and shirt, the devil plays in the head of men," she said to the laughter of her friends.

Hamas Fights, Often Within Its Ranks, Over Gaza's Islamist Identity

While only 20 girls among more than 800 did not abide by the new dress code during the first week of school, the number rose by the second week. But in the more conservative and less well-off eastern part of Gaza City, all complied, even after the rule was officially lifted.

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Graphic

PHOTOS: Abdel Latif Moussa, top, and his Warriors of God took over a mosque in August and declared strict religious law to be in force in Gaza before ***Hammas*** troops raided it. Left, students at girls' schools in Gaza were told to cover up, with mixed results.(PHOTOGRAPH BY ABED RAHIM KHATIB/EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY)

(PHOTOGRAPH BY ASHRAF AMRA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

Load-Date: September 6, 2009

End of Document

Israeli PM's Office: Deal Yet To Be Reached In Prisoner Exchange Negotiations With Hamas

RTT News (United States)

November 23, 2009 Monday

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Length: 414 words

Body

(RTTNews) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office on Monday dismissed earlier media reports which suggested that the Jewish nation was close to reaching a prisoner exchange deal with Hamas--the radical Islamic group that governs the Gaza Strip, stressing that a prisoner-exchange deal that would secure the freedom of an Israeli soldier abducted by Palestine militants in 2006 is yet to be finalized.

"During the recent period, many pieces of information originating abroad and in the foreign media have been published; they are unauthorized, and some of them are intentionally false," Israeli media quoted Netanyahu's office as saying in the statement.

"The efforts over Shalit's release are continuing all the time, away from media's gaze, and the Prime Minister has no intention of referring to the subject further," the statement added.

The statement came as representatives of Hamas and Syria were in Cairo for Egyptian-mediated talks aimed at securing the release of Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier abducted by Hamas militants in a cross-border raid in June 2006. Recently, Israel had released 20 Palestinian women prisoners in exchange for a videotape confirming Shalit was still alive.

Earlier media reports suggested that Hamas is demanding the release of some 1,000 Palestinians held in Israeli jails in exchange for freeing Shalit. It is understood that earlier negotiations were deadlocked over the names of some 70 prisoners in the list of detainees Hamas wanted released in exchange for Shalit's freedom.

However, officials knowledgeable of the talks said on condition of anonymity on Monday that the negotiating teams are close to agreeing on a compromise list provided by the negotiators. They indicated that the first part of the deal under consideration requires Hamas to hand over Shalit to Egypt, as Israel releases between 350 and 450 prisoners. It would be followed with the release of some 650 more prisoners when the freed soldier is being transferred to Israel.

Israel is currently holding about 10,000 Palestinians as prisoners on various charges. Previous Egyptian-mediated negotiations between Israeli officials and Hamas militants on a prisoner exchange scheme have ended dead-locked after the two sides failed to agree on the number of Palestinian prisoners to be released in exchange for the release of Shalit.

For comments and feedback: contact editorial@rttnews.com

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Israeli PM's Office: Deal Yet To Be Reached In Prisoner Exchange Negotiations With Hamas

Load-Date: April 18, 2010

End of Document

Hamas tells Gazan schoolgirls to wear traditional clothes or be expelled

The Jerusalem Post
August 24, 2009 Monday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 1

Length: 392 words

Byline: KHALED ABU TOAMEH

Body

Hamas has instructed schoolgirls in the Gaza Strip to wear the jilbab (Islamic long-sleeved dress) and head scarves or face being expelled from school.

The movement has also banned girls from wearing jeans at school.

The latest order follows a similar directive that was issued earlier this month by a local judge requiring all **female** lawyers who appear in the Gaza Strip's courts to wear the hijab (Islamic head scarf).

The cases are seen in the context of **Hamas**'s efforts to enforce strict Islamic laws throughout the Strip.

Until a few years ago, many Gazan schools endorsed jeans or trousers as an official uniform for girls. But since **Hamas** seized full control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, schools have come under intense pressure to force girls to dress in accordance with Islamic rules.

A source in the **Hamas**-controlled Education Ministry said that his ministry's policy was to allow each school administration to decide on the type of clothes students should wear.

According to the source, the ministry decided this year to exempt all students from wearing school uniforms due to the financial crisis in the Gaza Strip.

"Headmasters and headmistresses have been given a green light to decide on what type of clothes the students should wear," the source said. "In many schools, the administrations, in coordination with the families, decided to impose hijabs and jilbabs on girls."

A veteran journalist in the Gaza Strip said that most girls who returned to schools that reopened on Sunday were seen dressed in traditional Islamic clothes.

He noted, for instance, that at the Maghazi Girls Secondary School in the center of the Gaza Strip, "about 95 percent" of the girls showed up wearing jilbabs.

"The few who came to school wearing jeans were warned that they would be expelled if they did not wear jilbabs," the journalist told The Jerusalem Post.

Hamas tells Gazan schoolgirls to wear traditional clothes or be expelled

The new academic year officially began in Gaza on Sunday, as more than 250,000 pupils headed to 383 government-run schools. Another 200,000 youngsters went to schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

The academic year in the West Bank is scheduled to begin next week. Palestinian Authority officials in Ramallah said the **Hamas** government had refused to coordinate the opening of the new academic year with the Education Ministry belonging to the government of Prime Minister Salaam Fayad.

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

In Hamas video, abducted Israeli sergeant says he is well

The Salt Lake Tribune

October 2, 2009 Friday

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Section: NEWS; National; World; Local

Length: 836 words

Byline: By Amy Teibel The Associated Press

Body

Jerusalem » In the first glimpse of him since his capture more than three years ago, a thin but healthy-looking Israeli soldier said in a video released Friday that he is being treated well by his Palestinian captors and appealed to Israel's leader to bring him home.

Israel received the two-minute video of Sgt. Gilad Schalit from Hamas militants after it released 19 female Palestinian prisoners earlier Friday in an exchange that is the first tangible step toward defusing a key flash point in Israeli-Palestinian hostilities.

The images of Schalit were the first to be released since his capture 3 1/2 years ago by Hamas-linked militants in the Gaza Strip. Dressed in olive drab military fatigues, Schalit sat in a chair in front of a bare wall reading a prepared statement tucked behind an Arabic-language newspaper, displayed to show the date, Sept. 14.

At one point, he rose from the chair and walked toward the camera and back, apparently to demonstrate he could stand on his own. He smiled several times during the video.

Speaking lucidly and reading clearly in Hebrew, he sent his love to his parents, recalled in detail a 2005 visit his family paid to his military base and appealed to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "not to squander this opportunity" to bring him home.

"I read the paper to find material and hope to find any material about my release and my imminent return home," he said.

Schalit, 23, said he was in good health and that his captors were treating him "excellently." He was clean-shaven and his hair was closely cropped, but he was not wearing glasses, as he did before his capture.

The video's arrival in Israel, together with the Palestinian prisoners' triumphant return home to a flag-waving and cheering crowd, gave hope to each side that a wider, long-awaited prisoner swap was in the offing.

Hamas is demanding freedom for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners as their price for Schalit, whose capture and drawn-out captivity has touched a raw nerve in a country where most families have loved ones in the military.

Friday's deal could also herald an end to a crippling, Israel-led blockade of Gaza that has prevented the territory from rebuilding after Israel's war there in December and January.

In Hamas video, abducted Israeli sergeant says he is well

Israel imposed the blockade after Hamas, a violent group backed by Iran and Syria, seized power in Gaza two years ago. Israel has made it clear that it will not ease the embargo before the serviceman is freed.

Hamas' prime minister in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, hailed the deal as a "triumph" for the armed Palestinian resistance against Israel.

The video opened with Schalit holding a daily Arabic-language newspaper published in Gaza on Sept. 14 -- Hamas' proof the footage was taken recently. He gave his name, the names of his parents and siblings, identified his hometown and recited his Israeli identity card number.

"I have longed for a long time for the day I will be released," he said. "I hope the current government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu will not squander now the opportunity to reach an agreement and that I can finally realize my dream to be released.

"I want to send greetings to my family and tell them I love them and miss them very much and wish for the day I will see them again," he added.

Channel 10 TV commentators said Israel had demanded that Schalit get up and take a few steps to prove he was able-bodied. The details about his family's visit to his military base, they said, were meant to prove the man reading the text was not an impostor

A spokesman for Netanyahu, Nir Hefetz, said that "although the path to Gilad's release is still long and arduous, the fact that he is healthy and well encourages us all." He also held Hamas responsible for the soldier's well-being.

Israel's lead negotiator in prisoner swap talks viewed the video first in Tel Aviv to determine its authenticity before ordering the Palestinian women released. The video was then transferred to Jerusalem, where Netanyahu viewed it.

A copy of the disc was delivered by helicopter to the Schalit family in northern Israel.

About 200 people waving Palestinian flags greeted vans carrying the released women into the West Bank. The prisoners, wearing the headscarves of devout Muslim women, blew kisses to the crowd through the vehicles' open windows.

Later, the prisoners were greeted by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in his walled compound as elated relatives threw fistfuls of candy in the air.

Abbas told the women their "sacrifice will not go in vain" and prayed for the release of other prisoners.

The women had been jailed for relatively minor offenses and were close to release.

Schalit was captured in June 2006 by Hamas-linked militants in Gaza who tunneled under the border into Israel, killed two other soldiers and dragged him bleeding into Palestinian territory. Before Friday, the only signs of life had been three letters and an audio tape.

The Palestinians want Israel to trade up to 1,000 Palestinian prisoners for Schalit, including many convicted of deadly attacks on Israelis.

Graphic

In this image taken from a video released by Hamas on Friday, Israeli Sgt. Gilad Schalit, held captive for more than three years in the Gaza Strip, says that he is being treated well by his Palestinian captors.

In Hamas video, abducted Israeli sergeant says he is well

Load-Date: January 22, 2010

End of Document

Hamas to give proof Israeli alive; Militants to trade video of Schalit in return for freeing 20 prisoners

The Toronto Star

October 1, 2009 Thursday

Copyright 2009 Toronto Star Newspapers, Ltd.

Section: NEWS; Pg. A18

Length: 444 words

Byline: Mark Lavie, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dateline: JERUSALEM

Body

In a surprise deal announced Wednesday, **Hamas** will give Israel a videotape providing a first glimpse of a captured Israeli soldier to prove he is alive in return for the release of 20 Palestinian **women** held in Israeli prisons.

The deal marked the first tangible sign of progress in more than three years of talks aimed at a larger prisoner exchange, and it could lead to an end to a crippling blockade of the impoverished, war-torn Gaza Strip, which is ruled by militant Islamic **Hamas**.

Israel said the video-for-prisoners exchange would take place Friday.

Until now, the only signs of life from the soldier, Gilad Schalit, were several letters and an apparently scripted audiotape, released just months after he was captured in June 2006. **Hamas**-linked militants tunneled under the Gaza border, attacked an Israeli base from the rear, killed two soldiers and hauled away a bleeding Schalit.

Hamas had demanded the release of as many as 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for the soldier, including many convicted of deadly attacks against Israelis. Israel says it will not ease the Gaza blockade until the soldier is freed.

Hamas and Israel do not talk directly, so Egypt, joined recently by Germany, has mediated on-again, off-again negotiations.

The first sign of progress came Wednesday when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office released a statement disclosing the deal - a recent videotape of the soldier in exchange for freedom for 20 Palestinian **female** prisoners.

The statement described it as a "confidence-building measure."

In Gaza, **Hamas** spokesman Osama Muzini confirmed the deal, which he said was struck after German mediators asked for information on Schalit's health, and **Hamas** responded that "nothing is free."

"Twenty prisoners will be released in exchange for the Zionist enemy's learning about his life through a cassette that shows him and reassures the enemy that he is still alive," Muzini said.

Hamas to give proof Israeli alive Militants to trade video of Schalit in return for freeing 20 prisoners

A **Hamas** website reported the videotape was about one minute long. Israeli officials said it would include proof that it was taken recently. They did not elaborate.

Commenting on the deal, Israeli President Shimon Peres called it a positive step in the negotiations, "but the road to (Schalit's) release is still long."

Such a deal could be critical for the 1.4 million residents of Gaza who are mired in poverty and facing shortages of vital supplies because of the punishing blockade, imposed after **Hamas** overran the territory in 2007 and expelled forces loyal to Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

The shortages have prevented **Hamas** from repairing the massive damage caused in Gaza by an Israeli military offensive last winter.

Graphic

ABBAS MOMANI AFP GETTY IMAGESPalestinian Alazerh Hiam Bayd's mother talks to wellwishers about her daughter's release from Israeli prison. Bayd and 19 other **women** are being let go in exchange for proof that captured Israeli Gilad Schalit, right, is alive.

Load-Date: October 1, 2009

End of Document

Israel begins prisoner release for Hamas video

AlArabiya.net

October 1, 2009 Thursday

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Length: 569 words

Body

Israel began releasing 19 Palestinian women from its jails on Friday in the first part of a deal with Hamas, in return for a video showing the fate of a captured Israeli soldier being held by the group.

Officials said the 19 women, to be joined by a 20th on Sunday, will first be brought in International Red Cross vehicles to border crossings with the Gaza Strip and West Bank, but will not be freed until Israel gives the green light after viewing the videotape. Reuters Television saw two black prison vans emerging from Hadarim jail north of Tel Aviv as the handover process began.

The swap is the most positive move in three years of efforts to free soldier Gilad Shalit, captured in June 2006 in a cross-border raid by Palestinian militants

Brokered by German and Egyptian mediators, it could be a step towards a broader deal for his liberation, in return for the release of hundreds of Hamas prisoners.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has not visited Shalit and only a few letters and an audio cassette from him have reached his family, which has waged a vocal campaign to get him freed

Officials have said that the German mediator has already viewed the recording and believes it showed Shalit in recent weeks. Shalit's family was expected to view the videotape before its release to the public.

Abu Mujahed, a spokesman for the Popular Resistance Committees, said on Wednesday that the video of the soldier lasts about a minute, and "shows Shalit alive and moving".

"Israel will receive updated and clear proof on the health and condition of Gilad Shalit. This proof of life will be handed to Israel by the mediators in the form of a videotape that has recently been filmed," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said when announcing the deal on Wednesday.

"The video is one minute long and is proof that Shalit is alive," said a spokesman for the Popular Resistance Committees, one of the three groups that launched the raid in which Shalit was captured.

Shalit, now 23, is also a French citizen. He was spirited into Gaza by Islamist militants who tunnelled into Israel in a raid in which two soldiers and two of the attackers were killed.

Israel begins prisoner release for Hamas video

Israel holds more than 10,000 Palestinian prisoners. Hamas is negotiating for the release of hundreds of its members in exchange for Shalit, including militants behind deadly attacks who Israel has said in the past it would not free.

Netanyahu's office stressed that the latest development did not herald an imminent release of Shalit, but was meant as a confidence-building measure ahead of "decisive stages in the negotiations," and warned that the talks were still expected to be "long and arduous."

All but one of the Palestinian women due to be released are from the West Bank and none has been directly implicated in killing Israelis.

The women include members of Hamas, Fatah, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

A 15-year-old Palestinian girl who was on the initial list of prisoners to be released in the swap was freed on Wednesday after a parole board shortened her sentence in a development unconnected with the prisoner swap.

The teenager was serving 11 months for attempted murder and an attack on a police officer.

A total of 7,200 Palestinians are held in Israeli prisons, 60 of them women, including those to be released on Friday, and 320 are under 18 years old, according to the prisons service.

Load-Date: October 2, 2009

End of Document

Video of Israeli soldier held by Hamas is 'proof of life'

Irish Independent

October 3, 2009 Saturday

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Independent.ie 

Section: WORLD NEWS

Length: 280 words

Body

A two-minute video of Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier, held captive by the Palestinian Islamist group **Hamas** for the past three years shows him "healthy and coherent" and speaking to the camera, officials said yesterday.

Mr Shalit (23) was holding a newspaper dated September 14, in the classic "proof of life" gesture.

Recorded images of the soldier were handed over in exchange for Israel's release of 20 Palestinian **women** from its jails, one of whom brought home to Gaza a 20-month-old boy born in prison.

The swap with **Hamas**, brokered by German and Egyptian diplomacy, could be a step towards a larger prisoner exchange and the release of Mr Shalit, one of Israel's top priorities since his capture in a June 2006 cross-border raid.

"The success of the resistance in achieving this deal heralds further success in achieving a further deal," said Osama Al-Muzaini, a senior **Hamas** official close to the negotiations.

"There is active movement, and there is an energetic German role and we hope to be close to achieving the deal that would please us all," he told journalists.

Israel had said yesterday's deal was a confidence-building gesture before crucial stages in negotiations for Shalit's release, and added that lengthy and difficult negotiations lay ahead before any final swap.

Israeli officials said the video of Mr Shalit was authenticated before 19 of the Palestinian **women** were released.

A copy was to be viewed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the parents of the soldier before any decision was made to make it public.

The video was handed over as a convoy of Red Cross jeeps carried 18 freed **women** prisoners over the Beitunya checkpoint into the West Bank.

Load-Date: October 3, 2009

Video of Israeli soldier held by Hamas is 'proof of life'

End of Document

Hamas feels religious pressure in Gaza; Guardians of morality impose their views, in a challenge to government

The International Herald Tribune

September 7, 2009 Monday

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Section: Pg. 4

Length: 961 words

Byline: TAGHREED EL-KHODARY and ETHAN BRONNER

Dateline: GAZA CITY

Body

ABSTRACT

Guardians of morality, some self-appointed, others from within the government, have sought to impose their strict Islamic views in recent months.

FULL TEXT

An acute struggle is emerging within the **Hamas** movement, which rules this coastal Palestinian strip, over the extent and nature of its Islamist identity. Guardians of religious morality, some self-appointed, others from within the government, have sought to impose their views in recent months.

So far, top government officials have pushed them back, but it remains unclear for how long.

Examples of the battle abound. The most threatening occurred in mid-August when an extreme group called the Warriors of God commandeered a mosque in the southern city of Rafah and, calling **Hamas** impure and collaborationist, declared strict religious law to be in force. **Hamas** forces surrounded the mosque and after an all-night gun battle killed about two dozen people, including the group's leader, and arrested 155 others, **Hamas** officials said. The Interior Ministry is now monitoring mosques and sponsoring public lectures against Muslim extremism.

Other cases involved no violence but plenty of coercion. The chief justice decreed this summer that **female** lawyers must wear the hijab head covering in court. A committee set up by the religious affairs ministry sent men along the beaches instructing bathers not to touch one another in public and to cover up. And a number of teachers and headmistresses in girls' high schools told their students to dress in long coats and hijab rather than the jean skirts of past years.

All of those rules have already been reversed. Prime Minister Ismail Haniya told the chief justice, Abed al-Raouf Halabi, to rescind his order to **female** lawyers, and he did so.

The education minister, Mohammed Asqoul, called any new uniform requirement "an individual act."

"The government and **Hamas** have nothing to do with it," he said.

Hamas feels religious pressure in Gaza Guardians of morality impose their views, in a challenge to government

"I'm against such orders, since there is no need to impose the hijab in a conservative society."

Khalil al-Hayya, a senior political leader in Hamas, said: "Neither the government nor Hamas has come out with any decision regarding such orders. We are an Islamic resistance movement that will never oblige anyone against his or her will. Advice is the best tactic."

Dr. Iyad el-Serraj, a psychiatrist and close observer here, said there was little doubt that Gaza, long a religiously and socially conservative place, was increasingly so. Without instruction from above, the vast majority of women wear religiously modest dress, and more and more men are bearded. No alcohol is sold.

Dr. Serraj attributes the shift to several developments beyond the fact that such an outward expression of identity is increasingly common across the Muslim Middle East. Hamas, he noted, has been in power for more than two years, and those in midlevel positions of power, as well as those aspiring for such jobs, want to be noticed and promoted.

Second, he said, with the economy completely stalled because of the blockade of Gaza led by Israel, there is little to do and little horizon for advancement or development. In such circumstances, he suggested, fundamentalism finds fertile ground.

But Hamas, despite favoring Islamic law and behavior, has many reasons for pushing back. Its rival, the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, uses any hint of the imposition of religious law as evidence that Hamas is not capable of running a responsible, modern government. Hamas is labeled a terrorist organization by the United States, European Union and Israel, and is seeking international legitimacy to be the leader of the Palestinian movement.

It rejects Israel's right to exist and remains doctrinally committed to its destruction. However, its leaders have said several times that if Israel were to leave all land taken in the 1967 war, Hamas could accept a Palestinian state limited to the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, depending on the terms of a truce.

A hard-line leader in Gaza said Hamas was deluding itself if it thought moderation would lead to international acceptance. "The world will never recognize us and will never end the siege," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity. He added that perhaps imposing religious law "will scare them and force them to end the siege."

For the small number of relatively secular Palestinians in Gaza, the growing push toward a more Islamic life is deeply worrying.

At the start of the school year in late August, a number of high school girls were told to return home to cover their heads and dress in the long coat known as the jilbab. In the wealthier sections of Gaza City, many were unhappy.

"It's the first time in my life to cover my hair and to wear a jilbab, and I feel suffocated," said Domoua al-Ali, 16, on a recent day.

The moment she stepped out of the school, Ms. Ali and her friend Dinah Nasrallah, 17, opened the buttons of the jilbab and proudly showed their tight jeans, then turned the hijab into a scarf around their neck. They mocked their religion teacher, who explained the order this way: "It's God who called for the hijab, not the headmistress. How can we forbid what he called for?"

Outside Ahmed Shawqi School, another circle of girls was led by Aziza Doghmosh, 16. She, too, removed the hijab the moment she stepped out of school and complained about her teacher. "My teacher said when you wear a tight skirt and shirt, the devil plays in the head of men," she said to the laughter of her friends.

While only 20 girls among more than 800 did not abide by the new dress code during the first week of school, the number rose by the second week. But in the more conservative and less-well-off eastern part of Gaza City, all complied, even after the rule was officially lifted.

Hamas feels religious pressure in Gaza Guardians of morality impose their views, in a challenge to government

Load-Date: September 9, 2009

End of Document

Hamas travel ban may disrupt Fatah conference. Delegates not allowed to go to West Bank unless PA frees detainees, Gaza officials say

The Jerusalem Post
July 27, 2009 Monday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 2

Length: 859 words

Byline: KHALED ABU TOAMEH

Body

Fatah leaders were debating on Sunday whether to go ahead with plans to hold their sixth general assembly next week or postpone it, after Hamas said it wouldn't allow members of the faction to leave the Gaza Strip.

Hamas officials said the Fatah representatives would not be allowed to travel to the West Bank unless the Palestinian Authority released hundreds of Hamas supporters being held without trial in Palestinian detention centers.

Ismail Radwan, a Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, said that his government would consider the possibility of permitting some 400 Fatah members to leave the Gaza Strip only if the PA released "political detainees" and reopened all Hamas-affiliated institutions that its security forces shut down in recent months.

"Hamas will allow them to go to the [Fatah] conference in Bethlehem if all the political detainees are released and if the Palestinian Authority reopens all the institutions that were closed down," Radwan said. "Fatah is not interested in dialogue [with Hamas], and its ongoing security cooperation with Israel is the main reason why the reconciliation talks failed."

Fatah officials in Ramallah said they had asked Egypt, Syria and Turkey to intervene with Hamas to allow the delegates to leave the Gaza Strip.

Fatah appeared to be divided over the participation of the Gaza delegates.

Faisal Abu Shahla, a Fatah legislator, said he favored postponing the conference until Hamas rescinded its decision, arguing that it was "inconceivable" that the gathering should take place "without our brothers from the Gaza Strip."

He and several Fatah operatives said they had been trying to persuade their leaders to call off the long- delayed conference in protest of Hamas's ban.

However, other Fatah representatives in Ramallah said they were strongly opposed to the postponement of the conference, on the grounds that such a move would cause further damage to their faction's credibility.

"Hamas is trying to extort us," complained Azzam al- Ahmed, another Fatah legislator. "We must not allow them to win."

Hamas travel ban may disrupt Fatah conference. Delegates not allowed to go to West Bank unless PA frees detainees, Gaza officials say

Fatah spokesman Fahmi Za'areer said Hamas's ban would have "serious repercussions" for efforts to consolidate the internal Palestinian front and achieve Palestinian national unity.

Hamas, he charged, was committing a new crime against the Palestinian people by seeking to spoil the sixth general assembly of Fatah.

Fatah legislators in the Gaza Strip told The Jerusalem Post that the Hamas government had informed them that they would not be permitted to travel to the West Bank for the conference.

Legislator Ashraf Juma'ah, who is also a member of the Fatah "revolutionary council," condemned the measure against him and his colleagues as a "flagrant violation of freedom of expression and an assault on our parliamentary immunity."

He claimed that Hamas's ban was part of an "Israeli conspiracy" to thwart the Fatah parley. He added that he did not believe that the conference would be convened without the participation of the Fatah members from the Gaza Strip.

Also Sunday, Hamas's security forces arrested four senior Fatah operatives who were preparing to travel to the West Bank for the conference, a Palestinian journalist in Gaza City told the Post.

The journalist named the four men as Abdel Aziz Makadmeh, Faisal Muhanna, Jalil Ishtaiwi and Shafik al- Talouli.

Three female Fatah members from the Gaza Strip were also banned from traveling to the West Bank, the journalist said. He said that Hamas security forces had confiscated the women's ID cards to prevent them from leaving the Gaza Strip. The three were identified as Itidal Abu Kamar, Zainab al-Daghmah and Siham al-Karm.

Meanwhile, scores of Fatah representatives in different Arab countries have notified the Fatah leadership in Ramallah that they will not attend the conference because it is being held under "Israeli occupation."

It is not clear how many Fatah members living outside the PA territories have been invited to attend the conference. Ironically, their decision to boycott the conference is likely to boost the local Fatah representatives, who are often thought to be less radical than their colleagues who live in Arab countries.

Organizers were hoping that more than 1,500 Fatah members would attend the conference, which is expected to hold internal elections for some of its two key institutions, the Revolutionary Council and the Central Committee.

Many Fatah members have said they expect a stormy session due to the nature of the issues on the conference's agenda. These issues include the mysterious death of Yasser Arafat and Fatah's expulsion from the Gaza Strip by Hamas.

In a related development, a veteran hard-line Fatah leader who has long been considered a "natural successor" to Abbas has decided to move from Jordan to the West Bank.

Ahmed Ghnaim, better known as Abu Maher, was among several Fatah leaders who openly challenged Arafat when he signed the Oslo Accords with Israel. Sources close to Ghnaim said he was planning to attend next week's conference before moving to Ramallah permanently.

His decision to move to the West Bank triggered a wave of rumors that he was planning to replace Abbas in the near future.

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

Hamas swaps video of captured Israeli soldier for Palestinian prisoners

The Telegraph-Journal (New Brunswick)

October 3, 2009 Saturday

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Section: NEWS;NEWS; Pg. A9

Length: 1135 words

Byline: Steven Gutkin THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Body

In the first video images since he was captured by Palestinian militants in 2006, Israeli Sgt. Gilad Schalit - looking thin but healthy, his hair freshly trimmed - sent love to his family, appealed for his freedom and held up a newspaper to prove the footage was recent.

Israel freed 19 Palestinian women from prison on Friday in exchange for the video, raising hopes for the young soldier's release and taking a step toward defusing a key flash point in Israeli-Palestinian hostilities.

In the West Bank, jubilant Palestinians cheered and waved flags as the freed women returned home, some with prison-born babies in tow. And in Gaza, ruled by the Hamas militants holding Schalit, the prime minister called the swap a victory for Palestinians.

Looking fresh-faced and at times nervous in the video, Schalit talked of his love for his parents and siblings and recalled a family prayer on a roadside with a view of snowcapped mountains.

"Shalom, I am Gilad, son of Noam and Aviva Schalit, brother of Hadas and Yoel," the fatigue-clad 23-year-old soldier said in Hebrew at the beginning of the two-minute, forty-second video, which at several points showed him smiling tentatively. "My ID number is 300097029."

By pulling on the heartstrings of Israelis, nearly all of whom have loved ones in the military, the video could increase domestic pressure on Israel's government to meet Hamas' demand for Schalit's release: freedom for hundreds of jailed militants.

Friday's deal, brokered by Egyptian and German mediators, could also herald an end to a crippling, Israel-led blockade of Gaza, which has prevented the territory from rebuilding after Israel's bruising war there last winter. Israel has said it will not consider easing the embargo until Schalit is home.

In the footage, Schalit sat on a plastic chair placed against a blank wall and read from a piece of paper tucked behind an Arabic-language newspaper. He said he was in good health and that his captors were treating him "excellently."

At one point, he rose and took a few steps - apparently to show he is able-bodied. At another, he held the newspaper to the camera to show the date - Sept. 14, 2009 - as proof the footage was taken recently.

"I hope the current government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu will not squander now the opportunity to reach an agreement and that I can finally realize my dream to be released," he said.

Hamis swaps video of captured Israeli soldier for Palestinian prisoners

"I want to send greetings to my family and tell them I love them and miss them very much and wish for the day I will see them again," he added.

Speaking lucidly and reading clearly, the clean-shaven Schalit recalled in detail a 2005 visit his family paid to his military base, an apparent attempt by Hamis to prove he was not an impostor.

There were hints of circles around the young man's eyes, which were without the glasses he had worn before his capture.

A spokesman for Netanyahu, Nir Hefetz, said that "although the path to Gilad's release is still long and arduous, the fact that he is healthy and well encourages us all." He also held Hamis responsible for the soldier's well-being.

Schalit's capture and long captivity have touched a raw nerve in Israel, where people hold regular vigils for his release, motorists have bumper stickers that say "Gilad lives" and where one news anchor ends his broadcast each night by reciting the number of days Schalit has been held.

Israel's lead negotiator in prisoner swap talks viewed the video first in Tel Aviv to determine its authenticity before ordering the Palestinian women released. The video was then transferred to Jerusalem, where Netanyahu viewed it.

A copy of the disc was delivered by helicopter to the Schalit family in northern Israel, and the family later agreed to make the video public.

About 200 people waving Palestinian flags greeted vans carrying 18 of the freed women into the West Bank. The prisoners, wearing the head scarves of devout Muslim women, blew kisses to the crowd through the vehicles' open windows.

Later, the prisoners were greeted by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in his walled compound as elated relatives threw fistfuls of candy in the air.

Zhour Hamdan, arrested in 2003, was reunited with her eight children and saw her first granddaughter, 1-year-old Selina, for the first time. Her daughter Nasreen, 26, said she had not been able to visit her mother for more than a year because of Israeli travel restrictions.

"It's indescribable," Nasreen said of the reunion. "We are preparing a tremendous celebration."

Abbas told the women their "sacrifice will not go in vain" and prayed for the release of other prisoners.

Another woman, 41-year-old Fatima Ziq, returned to her home in Gaza City with her youngest son, who was born in prison. She received a hero's welcome and was greeted by Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamis prime minister, in a chaotic scene.

Haniyeh called Friday's swap "a day of victory for the Palestinian will, for the Palestinian resistance, for Palestinian steadfastness."

Another prisoner will be released to Gaza on Sunday, bringing to 20 the total number of women freed as part of the exchange, Israel's prisons service said.

The women had been jailed for relatively minor offences and were close to release.

Prisoner swaps, though not uncommon for Israel, are controversial at home because of their potential to encourage hostage-taking.

On Friday, Hamis' exiled leader, Khaled Mashaal, threatened to capture more Israeli soldiers to exchange them for more Palestinian prisoners.

Hamas swaps video of captured Israeli soldier for Palestinian prisoners

Speaking in Damascus, Syria, Mashaal said those who captured Schalit and held him were capable of taking "Schalit and Schalit and Schalit until there is not even one prisoner in the enemy's jails."

In northern Israel, reporters and cameramen thronged the Schalit home as an army general walked in with a manila envelope containing the video. Policemen stood guard outside the house. A spokeswoman for the family said the Schalits would have no immediate comment.

Schalit was captured in June 2006 by Hamas-linked militants in Gaza who tunneled under the border into Israel, killed two other soldiers and dragged him bleeding into Palestinian territory. Before Friday, the only signs of life had been three letters and an audiotape.

Israel and Hamas shun each other, and German and Egyptian mediators have been acting as go-betweens.

The Palestinians want Israel to trade up to 1,000 Palestinian prisoners for Schalit, including many convicted of deadly attacks on Israelis. More than 9, 000 Palestinians are jailed in Israel - one of the most emotional issues in Palestinian society, where nearly every family has been affected.

Dov Weisglass, once a senior aide to former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, predicted Israel and Hamas were heading toward a resolution of the hostage ordeal.

"This is creating enormous emotional pressure to get him released," he said.

Load-Date: October 3, 2009

Abbas insists on the right to 'resist' Israel; Hamas lambasted at conference

The Age (Melbourne, Australia)

August 6, 2009 Thursday

First Edition

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Section: NEWS; International News; Pg. 11

Length: 562 words

Byline: JASON KOUTSOUKIS, MIDDLE EAST CORRESPONDENT, BETHLEHEM

Body

PALESTINIAN Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has told delegates to the first Fatah party conference in 20 years that while Palestinians had chosen the path of peace, they had not abandoned the right of legitimate resistance against Israel.

To loud applause, Mr Abbas told more than 2200 delegates that the Palestinians would not resume peace talks with Israel until Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed unequivocal support for a two-state solution to the conflict.

"Our determination to choose the path of peace and negotiations does not mean that we have abandoned our noble path of legitimate resistance, which is based on international law. Yes, resistance is legal, and we are with this resistance," Mr Abbas said.

Praising the popular struggle against the demolition of Palestinian homes and Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, Mr Abbas accused Mr Netanyahu of evading discussions on peace.

"Through a policy of relief measures and economic development, Netanyahu is trying to erase our national rights. Bread on its own without freedom is not important to us," Mr Abbas said.

"The establishment of a Palestinian state on all the lands that Israel occupied in 1967 is a question of time."

In a speech that lasted more than two hours, Mr Abbas also warned of an endless cycle of violence if Israel was allowed to continue building settlements in the occupied West Bank and occupied east Jerusalem, but said that Palestinians rejected "all sorts of terrorism".

Mr Abbas reserved his strongest rhetoric for **Hamas**, the Islamist resistance movement that governs 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and refused to allow 400 Fatah delegates to attend the conference in Bethlehem.

According to Mr Abbas, **Hamas** "which defeated Fatah in the last democratic elections held by the Palestinian Authority, in January 2006" "was responsible for the deep split among Palestinians. He accused **Hamas** of executing hundreds of Palestinians under its rule in Gaza.

"The divisions created by **Hamas** pose the most serious threat to the Palestinian cause since 1948 and give Israel an excuse not to fulfil its commitments under previous agreements reached with the Palestinians," Mr Abbas said.

Abbas insists on the right to 'resist' Israel Hamas lambasted at conference

Appearing to keep the option of "armed struggle" open, the speech left Israeli analysts questioning Fatah's commitment to a lasting peace.

Fatah's refusal to consider recognition of Israel as a Jewish state also drew Israeli criticism.

Some Palestinians, meanwhile, expressed frustration and disappointment at Fatah's failure to regenerate.

"We need a new leadership that will change the Palestinians' lives," said Ziyad Abu Ein, a veteran Fatah member. "We have to liberate Gaza from the fascist Hamas. Change will only come through a changing of the guard."

Former Palestinian Legislative Council member Qadura Fares said he had no illusions about what the conference could achieve. "A conference after 20 years, in such a complex situation, will not lead to an upheaval and a new path," Mr Fares said.

"We can only ask to embark on a new path."

With only 241 women accredited to the conference, Muna Afana was sharply critical of Fatah's commitment to women's liberation.

"They talk about equal treatment for the sexes, but in practice, we are treated in keeping with Oriental tradition," Ms Afana said. "They set a quota for the participation of women. This is pathetic."

Load-Date: August 5, 2009

Liberating Hopes; Hamas must now free Gilad Schalit to end the stalemate and despair in Gaza

The Times (London)

October 3, 2009 Saturday

Edition 1, Scotland

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THE TIMES

Section: EDITORIAL; Pg. 2

Length: 577 words

Body

Nineteen Palestinian women, together with a baby born in prison, were released by Israel yesterday in return for a video cassette proving that Gilad Schalit, an Israeli soldier seized by Palestinian militants three years ago, is alive and held hostage by Hamas. The exchange, which took weeks of international diplomacy to arrange, raises hopes of a larger prisoner exchange in return for the release of the 23-year-old soldier whose fate has caused anguish throughout Israel.

Yesterday's exchange might seem an unequal bargain and a violation of Israel's longstanding insistence that it does not bargain with terrorists. But it is a measure of the enormous emotional importance that the Schalit case has assumed in Israel that the Government was prepared to release so many prisoners just for confirmation that Mr Schalit was alive, healthy and coherent. Israel has made it a point of honour that it never gives up efforts to rescue any citizen held hostage or retrieve the body of anyone killed by its enemies. The cassette is small comfort for Mr Schalit's family, who have campaigned tirelessly for his release. It will at least bring relief that he is surviving the ordeal of being held for so long. But for many Israelis the anguish of seeing him scouring a Palestinian newspaper for any hint that he may be freed may prove hard to bear.

Understanding Israeli psychology, his captors have sent contradictory signals. For months, nothing is said about him in the attempt to stoke fears that he has been killed. Then the occasional hint - a letter or audio cassette - has been allowed out to mock Israel's inability to find him. Hamas is demonstrating not just its organisational ability, but also its capacity for premeditated cowardice and cruelty. The kidnapping of Gilad Schalit has left his family paralysed by fear, uncertainty and helplessness. It is the behaviour of a terrorist organisation, not a partner for peace. The use of human shields earlier this year showed the same brutal disregard for the wellbeing of innocent civilians.

As we have said, Israel is better than its enemies and we expect it to behave like a democracy that respects the rule of law. That does not mean that we expect its enemies to do the opposite: in the case of Gilad Schalit, Hamas shows itself to be both disciplined and barbaric.

Liberating Hopes Hamas must now free Gilad Schalit to end the stalemate and despair in Gaza

Yesterday's exchange offers a hope that backchannel diplomacy may break the impasse in Gaza. Israel has refused to recognise or deal with **Hamas** until the Islamist militants acknowledge Israel's right to exist. **Hamas** in turn has refused to give that acknowledgment as long as Israel occupies Palestinian land. The stalemate has brought nothing but violence, bloodshed and deprivation to Gaza. If Mr Schalit is freed and Israel releases more of the 10,000 Palestinian prisoners it holds, there is a hope that the two sides will find a modus vivendi that halts the retaliatory cycle of **Hamas** rockets and Israeli airstrikes, ends the blockade of Gaza and eventually encompasses **Hamas** in talks about an overall peace deal. The broader prospects for peace are not bright. George Mitchell, President Obama's special envoy, returned home without a firm Israeli commitment to halt settlements. President Obama's push for an overall settlement has stalled. But much depends, as ever, on events on the ground. The prisoner release could swiftly change attitudes. There is now a slight hope that moderation, flexibility and humanity could prevail this time.

Load-Date: October 3, 2009

End of Document

Schalit release likely in first half of 2010. Hamas expected to use boosted popularity after mass prisoner releases to gain votes in Palestinian elections

The Jerusalem Post
October 2, 2009 Friday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 1

Length: 364 words

Byline: YAAKOV KATZ

Body

A prisoner swap with **Hamas** for the release of St.-Sgt. Gilad Schalit will likely take place after January but before the Palestinian elections, which are to be held by June, The Jerusalem Post learned on Thursday.

The scheduled release on Friday of 20 Palestinian **female** security prisoners in exchange for a video recording of Schalit was an indication that talks on an exchange are on a "positive track," a foreign official involved in the mediation said, but he stressed that this did not mean a swap was imminent.

According to the latest credible assessments, **Hamas** will try to use a Schalit swap to gain votes in the upcoming Palestinian Authority elections, and the negotiations with Israel over the IDF tank gunner will likely advance in lock-step with the progress made in **Hamas**'s reconciliation talks with Fatah in Egypt.

Earlier this week, **Hamas** announced that it had accepted an Egyptian proposal to hold presidential and parliamentary elections, initially scheduled for January, sometime in the first half of 2010.

"**Hamas** will want to use a massive prisoner swap to its advantage in the elections against Fatah," a foreign official said. "This is why the swap will likely take place sometime in the first part of next year."

On Wednesday, the security cabinet approved the release of the 20 prisoners in exchange for an up-to-date videotape of Schalit, in what is perceived as the first concrete move toward freeing the soldier since he was kidnapped more than three years ago.

The decision to release the Palestinians came at the recommendation of the team working for Schalit's release, headed by the prime minister's point man on the issue, Hagai Hadas, and was unanimously approved by the 15-member security cabinet.

Negotiations between Israel and **Hamas**, according to foreign sources, are currently focused on two issues - the final Israeli approval of the 450 names on the list of prisoners **Hamas** demands be released, and **Hamas** approval of an Israeli demand that the prisoners be released only to the Gaza Strip or overseas, and not to the West Bank.

Israel is under pressure from Egypt to approve additional names on the list. It has already approved more than half of them.

Schalit release likely in first half of 2010. Hamas expected to use boosted popularity after mass prisoner releases to gain votes in Palestinian elections

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

Hamas turns away from its rockets; Sensing Gazans' fatigue, Palestinian group pushes a 'culture of resistance'

The International Herald Tribune

July 25, 2009 Saturday

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Section: Pg. 1

Length: 1085 words

Byline: ETHAN BRONNER - The New York Times

Dateline: GAZA CITY

Body

Seven months after Israel started a fierce three-week military campaign in the Gaza Strip to stop rockets from being fired on its southern communities, **Hamas** has suspended its use of rockets and shifted focus to winning support at home and abroad through cultural initiatives and public relations.

The aim is to build what leaders here call a "culture of resistance," the topic of a recent two-day conference. In recent days, a play has been staged, a movie has made its premiere, an art exhibit has been mounted, a book of poems has been published and a television series has begun, most of it state-sponsored and all focused on the plight of Palestinians in Gaza. There are plans for a documentary competition.

"Armed resistance is still important and legitimate, but we have a new emphasis on cultural resistance," said Ayman Taha, a **Hamas** leader and former fighter. "The current situation required a stoppage of rockets. After the war, the fighters needed a break and the people needed a break."

Mr. Taha and others say that the military has replaced field commanders and restructured itself as it learns lessons from the war. The decision to suspend the use of the short-range Qassam rockets that for years have flown into Israel, often dozens a day but causing little damage, has been partly the result of popular pressure. Increasingly, people here are questioning the value of the rockets, not because they hit civilians but because they were seen as relatively ineffective.

"What did the rockets do for us? Nothing," Mona Abdelaziz, a 36-year-old lawyer, said in a street interview.

How long **Hamas** will hold its fire and whether it will obtain longer-range missiles - which it says it is seeking - remain unclear. But the shift in policy is evident. In June, a total of two rockets were fired from Gaza, according to the Israeli military, one of the lowest monthly tallies since the firing began in 2002.

In that tactical sense, the war was a victory for Israel and a loss for **Hamas**. But in the field of public opinion, **Hamas** took the upper hand. Its leaders have noted the international condemnation of Israel over allegations of disproportionate force, a perception they hope to continue to use to their advantage. Suspending the rocket fire could also serve that goal.

Hamas turns away from its rockets Sensing Gazans' fatigue, Palestinian group pushes a 'culture of resistance'

"We are not terrorists but resistance fighters, and we want to explain our reality to the outside world," Osama Alisawi, the minister of culture, said during a break from the two-day conference. "We want the writers and intellectuals of the world to come and see how people are suffering on a daily basis."

That suffering is quite real. An Israeli-led boycott limits economic activity in Gaza to farming and basic commerce, although Israel does allow about 100 trucks of food and medicine in each day and more and more goods are coming in through desert smuggler tunnels from Egypt. Israel is experimenting with minor adjustments, allowing some equipment and glass to enter this month for the first time in a long time.

Because Israeli officials also believe that they must improve public relations and message management, the new focus on culture sets up an intriguing battle for world opinion. Each side argues that journalists show too much sympathy for the other.

But it may also bring unforeseen risks to the Islamist leaders of Hamas. The play currently seen nightly at the Shawa Cultural Center in Gaza City offers an example.

The play, "The Women of Gaza and the Patience of Job," consists of a series of contemporary and historical scenes about suffering. And while it might be helping to create a sense of solidarity among the people of Gaza, it pushes some local limits.

In one satirical scene, for example, a Hamas fighter is standing over his rocket launcher about to fire at Israel when a woman asks about her brother, a fellow fighter.

Oh yes, he replies excitedly, her brother is a hero. He made the Israelis quake in their boots. "He hit Tel Aviv!"

From the audience emerges a dismissive laugh, for it knows how meaningless such boasting proved over the years.

After the show one recent evening, its writer, director and star, Said al-Bettar, said he wrote the scene that way to make the point that "we were the victims of a big lie."

"The people paid a heavy price, and society is looking for someone to express its views clearly," he said.

Mr. Bettar, who is not a follower of Hamas and is popular in Gaza, said the government had not interfered with his work or criticized it. Besides mocking the rockets, he has done something else rather subversive - his entire cast (apart from himself) is female, and women sing on stage, something that is frowned upon by conservative Muslims.

He said he wanted to challenge the conservatives of Gaza and added, "We need to engage with the world, not isolate ourselves."

Abd Alkhalik Alaff, a poet and literature professor at the Islamic University, is the chief consultant on government efforts to use artists and writers to make Gaza's case abroad. He said there were plans to award work that showed the plight of Gaza and added that a television series aimed at Ramadan, the holy month that starts in late August this year, focused on Jerusalem.

One of the first cultural products of the new campaign was given its premiere this month at the Islamic University. Written by Mahmoud Zahar, a physician who is among the most powerful Hamas leaders, it is a movie profile of Emad Akel, commander of the Hamas military wing who was killed by Israel in 1993.

The two-hour film shows Mr. Akel's use of numerous disguises, including as a religious Israeli settler. They are played by Palestinians speaking in Arabic-accented Hebrew, and it was shot at the new media center on the grounds of what used to be called Gush Katif, a group of Israeli settlements in southern Gaza from which Israel withdrew four years ago.

Hamas turns away from its rockets Sensing Gazans' fatigue, Palestinian group pushes a 'culture of resistance'

A senior **Hamas** police commander who spoke on condition of anonymity said the focus on culture and away from rockets was appropriate for now. He said **Hamas** was working on increasing the range of its rockets. But, he said: "We have made a decision not to fire. As long as Israel is committed to an unofficial truce, so are we."

He showed his visitor the holes punched in his building by Israeli missiles in late December and said the world needed to know. As he bade goodbye, this menacing man with a fighting past had world opinion on his mind. With a bow and slight smile, he said, "Thank you for coming to Gaza."

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Taghreed El-Khodary contributed reporting.

Load-Date: July 29, 2009

End of Document

'They accused me of going without a headscarf and laughing in public'. PA female journalist says Hamas modesty squad tried to arrest her in Gaza

The Jerusalem Post

July 5, 2009 Sunday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 2

Length: 617 words

Byline: KHALED ABU TOAMEH

Body

A Palestinian **female** journalist complained over the weekend that **Hamas** policemen attempted to arrest her under the pretext that she came to a Gaza beach dressed immodestly and was seen laughing in public.

The journalist, Asma al-Ghul, said that the policemen instead confiscated her passport. Since the incident, she added, she has been afraid to leave her home, especially after receiving death threats from anonymous callers.

"They accused me of laughing loudly while swimming with my friend and failing to wear a hijab," Ghul told a human rights organization in the Gaza Strip. "They also wanted to know the identity of the people who were with me at the beach and whether they were relatives of mine."

In a phone interview with the Dubai-based Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya news Web site, the journalist said that the policemen who stopped her belonged to the **Hamas** government's Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice security force.

The special force reports directly to the Ministry of Waqf Affairs and is said to be a copy of units that have long been operating in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan.

The **Hamas** government, according to local reporters, has refrained from publicly admitting that the force exists out of fear of being branded fundamentalist.

The **Hamas** force consists of dozens of plainclothes police officers who patrol beaches, public gardens, restaurants, hair salons and coffee shops to make sure that males and **females** are not mixing together and that the **women** are dressed modestly.

Ghul said that many Palestinian **women** have noticed the presence of the police officers at the beaches and other sites. She said that the talk in the Gaza Strip these days was about **Hamas**'s intention to impose the hijab on all **female** school children from first to 12th grade.

She said she was astonished by the fact that the **Hamas** security forces were providing security to hotels that are frequented by **women** wearing miniskirts while at the same time targeting "common people" who go to the beaches and public parks.

'They accused me of going without a headscarf and laughing in public'. PA female journalist says Hamas modesty squad tried to arrest her in Gaza

Ghul said that Hamas has banned men in the Gaza Strip from swimming topless. "And as in my case, Hamas has banned women from laughing while swimming," she added.

She and her friends were stopped by Hamas policemen while swimming in the sea. She said that the policemen confiscated her passport and laptop after accusing her of laughing loudly and appearing in immodest clothes in a public place.

Two of her male friends were detained for questioning for three hours. They said the police officers beat them and abused them verbally before releasing them.

Hamas security commanders initially said that the journalist and her friends were stopped because they were having a mixed party at the beach. Later, one of the commanders said that Ghul was stopped because she was not wearing a hijab while swimming. Another commander claimed that the journalist and her friends were stopped because they had been seeing smoking nargilas and partying in a public place.

Islam Shahwan, spokesman for the Hamas security forces, said that policemen have been deployed at the beaches at the request of the Ministry for Waqf Affairs. He said the policemen's task is to impose law and order and prevent harassment of families picnicking and swimming at the beaches.

"We are there for the safety of the people," he said. "We operate there to prevent men from harassing women. We've received many complaints about these negative practices."

Shahwan said that Hamas does not interfere with the way women want to dress. However, he stressed, "we must preserve our Islamic culture and traditions. If there's a woman who wants to dress as she wishes, she must go to a private swimming pool and not to a public place."

Graphic

Photo: A HAMAS security officer stands guard near the beach in Gaza City. (Credit: AP)

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

Hamas swaps video of Israeli soldier for prisoners

The Bismarck Tribune

October 3, 2009 Saturday

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Section: WIRE; Pg. 2A

Length: 803 words

Byline: STEVEN GUTKIN Associated Press Writer

Body

JERUSALEM - In the first video images since he was captured by Palestinian militants in 2006, Israeli Sgt. Gilad Schalit - looking thin but healthy, his hair freshly trimmed - sent love to his family, appealed for his freedom and held up a newspaper to prove the footage was recent.

Israel freed 19 Palestinian women from prison on Friday in exchange for the video, raising hopes for the young soldier's release and taking a step toward defusing a key flashpoint in Israeli-Palestinian hostilities.

In the West Bank, jubilant Palestinians cheered and waved flags as the freed women returned home, some with prison-born babies in tow. And in Gaza, ruled by the Hamas militants holding Schalit, the prime minister called the swap a victory for Palestinians.

Looking fresh-faced and at times nervous in the video, Shalit talked of his love for his parents and siblings and recalled a family prayer on a roadside with a view of snow-capped mountains.

"Shalom, I am Gilad, son of Noam and Aviva Schalit, brother of Hadas and Yoel," the fatigue-clad 23-year-old soldier said in Hebrew at the beginning of the two-minute, forty-second video, which at several points showed him smiling tentatively. "My ID number is 300097029."

By pulling on the heartstrings of Israelis, nearly all of whom have loved ones in the military, the video could increase domestic pressure on Israel's government to meet Hamas' demand for Schalit's release: freedom for hundreds of jailed militants.

Friday's deal, brokered by Egyptian and German mediators, could also herald an end to a crippling, Israel-led blockade of Gaza, which has prevented the territory from rebuilding after Israel's bruising war there last winter. Israel has said it will not consider easing the embargo until Schalit is home.

In the footage, Schalit sat on a plastic chair placed against a blank wall and read from a piece of paper tucked behind an Arabic-language newspaper. He said he was in good health and that his captors were treating him "excellently."

At one point, he rose and took a few steps - apparently to show he is able-bodied. At another, he held the newspaper to the camera to show the date - Sept. 14, 2009 - as proof the footage was taken recently.

"I hope the current government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu will not squander now the opportunity to reach an agreement and that I can finally realize my dream to be released," he said.

Hamis swaps video of Israeli soldier for prisoners

"I want to send greetings to my family and tell them I love them and miss them very much and wish for the day I will see them again," he added.

Speaking lucidly and reading clearly, the clean-shaven Schalit recalled in detail a 2005 visit his family paid to his military base, an apparent attempt by Hamis to prove he was not an impostor.

There were hints of circles around the young man's eyes, which were without the glasses he had worn before his capture.

A spokesman for Netanyahu, Nir Hefetz, said that "although the path to Gilad's release is still long and arduous, the fact that he is healthy and well encourages us all." He also held Hamis responsible for the soldier's well-being.

Schalit's capture and long captivity have touched a raw nerve in Israel, where people hold regular vigils for his release, motorists have bumper stickers that say "Gilad lives" and where one news anchor ends his broadcast each night by reciting the number of days Schalit has been held.

Israel's lead negotiator in prisoner swap talks viewed the video first in Tel Aviv to determine its authenticity before ordering the Palestinian women released. The video was then transferred to Jerusalem, where Netanyahu viewed it.

A copy of the disc was delivered by helicopter to the Schalit family in northern Israel, and the family later agreed to make the video public.

About 200 people waving Palestinian flags greeted vans carrying 18 of the freed women into the West Bank. The prisoners, wearing the head scarves of devout Muslim women, blew kisses to the crowd through the vehicles' open windows.

Later, the prisoners were greeted by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in his walled compound as elated relatives threw fistfuls of candy in the air.

Zhour Hamdan, arrested in 2003, was reunited with her eight children and saw her first granddaughter, 1-year-old Selina, for the first time. Her daughter Nasreen, 26, said she had not been able to visit her mother for more than a year because of Israeli travel restrictions.

"It's indescribable," Nasreen said of the reunion. "We are preparing a tremendous celebration."

Abbas told the women their "sacrifice will not go in vain" and prayed for the release of other prisoners.

Another woman, 41-year-old Fatima Ziq, returned to her home in Gaza City with her youngest son, who was born in prison. She received a hero's welcome and was greeted by Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamis prime minister, in a chaotic scene.

Load-Date: October 5, 2009

Hamas now fighting with art, not rockets; Shifting policy, leaders are looking to cultural initiatives to win support

The International Herald Tribune

July 25, 2009 Saturday

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Section: Pg. 4

Length: 940 words

Byline: ETHAN BRONNER - The New York Times

Dateline: GAZA

Body

Seven months after Israel started a fierce three-week military campaign here to stop rockets from being fired on its southern communities, **Hamas** has suspended its use of rockets and shifted focus to winning support at home and abroad through cultural initiatives and public relations.

The aim is to build what leaders here call a "culture of resistance," the topic of a recent two-day conference. In recent days, a play has been staged, a movie premiered, an art exhibit mounted, a book of poems published and a television series begun, most of it state-sponsored and all focused on the plight of Palestinians in Gaza. There are plans for a documentary competition.

"Armed resistance is still important and legitimate, but we have a new emphasis on cultural resistance," said Ayman Taha, a **Hamas** leader and former fighter. "The current situation required a stoppage of rockets. After the war, the fighters needed a break and the people needed a break."

Mr. Taha and others say that the military has replaced field commanders and restructured itself as it learns lessons from the war. The decision to suspend the use of the short-range Qassam rockets that for years have flown into Israel, often dozens a day, has been partly the result of popular pressure. Increasingly, people here are questioning the value of the rockets, not because they hit civilians but because they were seen as relatively ineffective.

"What did the rockets do for us? Nothing," Mona Abdelaziz, a 36-year-old lawyer, said in a typical street interview.

How long **Hamas** will hold its fire and whether it will obtain longer-range missiles - which it says it is seeking - remain unclear. But the shift in policy is evident. In June, a total of two rockets were fired from Gaza, according to the Israeli military, one of the lowest monthly tallies since the firing began in 2002.

In that tactical sense, the war was a victory for Israel and a loss for **Hamas**. But in the field of public opinion, **Hamas** took the upper hand. Its leaders have noted the international condemnation of Israel over allegations of disproportionate force, a perception they hope to continue to use to their advantage. Suspending the rocket fire could also serve that goal.

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Hamas now fighting with art, not rockets Shifting policy, leaders are looking to cultural initiatives to win support

That suffering is quite real. An Israeli-led boycott limits economic activity in Gaza to farming and basic commerce, although Israel does allow about 100 trucks of food and medicine in each day and more and more goods are coming in through desert smuggler tunnels from Egypt. Israel is experimenting with minor adjustments, allowing some equipment and glass in last week for the first time in a long time.

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Taghreed El-Khodary contributed reporting.

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CAPTION:

A billboard, center, advertising a film about Emad Akel, a Hamas commander who was killed by Israel. The movie is among cultural projects focused on the plight of Palestinians in Gaza.

Photo Credit: Hatem Moussa/The Associated Press

Hamas now fighting with art, not rockets Shifting policy, leaders are looking to cultural initiatives to win support

Load-Date: July 29, 2009

End of Document

Status of Schalit negotiations unclear after video release. Hamas spokesman says deal is near, but Netanyahu cautions release 'is still far away'

The Jerusalem Post
October 4, 2009 Sunday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 1

Length: 904 words

Byline: HAVIV RETTIG GUR, Yaakov Katz, Jerusalem Post staff, and news agencies contributed to this report.

Highlight: Lead Story

Body

Despite rampant speculation following the release of the first video showing kidnapped IDF soldier Gilad Schalit to be alive and well, the government was holding its cards close to its chest Saturday on the status and future of negotiations for his release.

Assessments of when the negotiations will be completed run from immediately, according to a Hamas spokesman in Gaza, to as late as June 2010, according to a foreign official involved in the mediation effort.

Negotiations are stalled as the two sides have failed to reach agreement on the release of the 450 security prisoners demanded by Hamas.

Israel has approved more than half of the list, but has balked at releasing those convicted in terrorist attacks that resulted in deaths.

There is also disagreement over an Israeli demand that the prisoners not be released to the West Bank.

Gaza-based Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said on Saturday that a deal was being held up only by the "stubbornness of the Zionist occupation."

The two-minute video of Schalit was the first sight Israelis have had of the 23-year-old soldier, and showed him to be in good health.

In the clip, Schalit addressed Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and his parents, Noam and Aviva, telling them he was being treated well by Hamas, but that he yearned to see his family. Schalit is seen clean-shaven with a fresh haircut, wearing dark green clothes.

The video was delivered by Hamas in exchange for the release of 20 female security prisoners. Israel released 19 of them on Friday morning, 18 to the West Bank via the Beitunya crossing near Ramallah and one to Gaza via the Erez crossing. The 20th woman will be released on Sunday.

In Gaza, the released prisoner, a member of Islamic Jihad, was received by Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. She entered Gaza with an 18-month-old boy who was born in prison. Haniyeh pronounced the infant "the youngest Palestinian prisoner."

Status of Schalit negotiations unclear after video release. Hamas spokesman says deal is near, but Netanyahu cautions release 'is still far away'

Hamas officials in Gaza called the video-for-prisoners exchange a victory for the Islamist group, saying it demonstrated that it was **Hamas**, and not its bitter rival Fatah, that brought results for the Palestinians.

But Israeli officials over the weekend noted that the released prisoners were all nearing their release dates and were unlikely to constitute security threats.

They were low-interest for Israeli security agencies, having failed to complete, or being only minor accessories to, terrorist attacks.

Three years and two major military engagements later, officials say, **Hamas** has only hundreds of dead fighters and a growing political failure in Gaza to show for its continued holding of Schalit.

Hamas leaders adopted seemingly contradictory tones over the weekend. While officials in Gaza, including Mahmoud Zahar, celebrated Friday's exchange and said the sides were only weeks away from a final prisoners-for-Schalit deal, Damascus-based political leader Khaled Mashaal said late Friday that the group would capture more IDF soldiers and would eventually witness Israel's destruction.

Those who were able to capture Schalit and hold him safely for more than three years are capable of capturing "Schalit and Schalit and Schalit until there was not even one prisoner in the enemy's jails," Mashaal said.

The same lack of clarity seemed to be reflected in statements made by the Schalit family over the weekend.

Whereas Gilad's mother, Aviva, expressed the hope that the video deal "is the beginning of the end," father Noam said he believed the negotiations could still take years.

Noam, who is often briefed by government officials, said that despite Friday's video release there was still no breakthrough in talks. The statement came after he had spoken with both Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

"We're not on the brink of a deal," he told reporters in Mitzpe Hila, outside the Schalit family home, on Friday night.

Shortly after viewing the video on Friday, Netanyahu released a statement noting that he had "watched the video" and had spoken with Noam Schalit.

According to the statement released by the Prime Minister's Office, "the prime minister believes the importance of the tape is in putting the responsibility for Gilad's health and well-being squarely on **Hamas**'s shoulders."

The prime minister said that "even though the release of Schalit is still far away, the video is an encouraging sign."

On Friday evening, Netanyahu was briefed by intelligence officials who analyzed the video.

Experts formulated an updated assessment of the captive soldier's health and of the conditions in which he is being held, according to Army Radio.

Barak spoke with both Noam and Zvi Schalit, Gilad's grandfather, minutes after the family viewed the video at approximately 2 p.m. on Friday, according to a statement issued by Barak's office.

The defense minister told the Schalits, "I want to embrace you. Gilad looks healthy, and this fact only further puts into focus my own responsibility and the responsibility of all of us to bring him home."

For its part, the international community has called for Schalit's release.

A statement issued by the French government over the weekend called for the "immediate, unconditional release of Schalit."

Status of Schalit negotiations unclear after video release. Hamas spokesman says deal is near, but Netanyahu cautions release 'is still far away'

Schalit holds dual Israeli-French citizenship and Noam Schalit has been lobbying French President Nicolas Sarkozy to help secure the release of his son. On Saturday, the Schalit family received a supportive call from Sarkozy.

Schalit has been held by **Hamas** for 1,197 days.

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

**Schalit videotape likely to spur renewed calls for deal to gain his freedom.
Women prisoners' release could delay final agreement, however, if it leads
 Hamas to raise its demands**

The Jerusalem Post

October 1, 2009 Thursday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 2

Length: 349 words

Byline: YAAKOV KATZ

Highlight: ANALYSIS

Body

The Gilad Schalit video that **Hamas** is to give Israel on Friday will have two immediate effects.

The first is that it will create the impression that something is moving on the until-now stalled Schalit negotiation track. The second effect will be the immediate calls on the government by almost every single Israeli to immediately carry out a prisoner exchange with **Hamas** for Schalit's release.

Despite these feelings, there is no certainty that a deal is close to being finalized.

In June 2007, **Hamas** released an audiotape in which Schalit's voice was heard for the first time since he had been taken captive a year earlier. The feeling at the time then, too, was that something was afoot.

The two years that have passed proved otherwise.

We also will likely not be able to learn much from the tape. As the former head of the Mossad's MIA Department told The Jerusalem Post, Schalit will likely claim that his health is deteriorating and urge Israeli leaders to work to release him.

The tape could also be a goodwill gesture planned by **Hamas** to coincide with the Egyptian-mediated reconciliation talks it has been holding with Fatah in Cairo. Just this past Monday, **Hamas** announced that it was accepting an Egyptian initiative that will pave the way for presidential and parliamentary elections in the first half of 2010.

Regardless of the motivation for releasing the tape, **Hamas** immediately scores two major accomplishments.

First, it succeeds in releasing 20 **female** prisoners, some of them the planners of terror attacks. This could, though, have a negative effect on the negotiations, since it could increase the Palestinian street's appetite for the release of more prisoners. This could then pressure **Hamas** into raising its demands.

The second achievement is that it gets Israelis to once again focus on Schalit, making it more likely there will be pressure on the government to finalize the deal and release hundreds of prisoners, though not everyone in the government feels comfortable with this.

Schalit videotape likely to spur renewed calls for deal to gain his freedom. Women prisoners' release could delay final agreement, however, if it leads Hamas to....

The question left is whether this new tape brings Schalit's release closer or pushes it off once again.

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

For Israel, a low price to pay for a sign of life; for Hamas, a propaganda coup

The Jerusalem Post

October 1, 2009 Thursday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 2

Length: 452 words

Byline: YAAKOV LAPPIN

Highlight: ANALYSIS

Body

The price Israel has agreed to pay Hamas in exchange for a videotaped sign of life from abducted soldier Gilad Schalit is relatively low.

Of the 20 female prisoners Israel has agreed to let go, 16 were slated to be released in the near future after completing their sentences, although 14 had been convicted for attempting to cause the deaths of Israelis.

Four of the women are in custody pending trial, which will they will now evade.

The prisoners include women like Rujina Riad Muhammad, convicted of plotting a crime and attempting to cause a death, and Nahada Farahat Dara, who was awaiting trial for assaulting a soldier and carrying a knife under suspicious circumstances.

None of the prisoners are considered to be senior terrorist operatives, and none have actually killed or caused serious injury.

For Hamas, however, struggling to rebuild Gaza in the wake of Operation Cast Lead and still suffering from a severe blow to its image among Gazans for its poor performance in the conflict, the release is a propaganda coup that could not have come at a better time.

The women will be paraded before Gazans as "proof" of Hamas's "winning strategy" against a militarily superior foe.

Lt.-Col. (ret). Anat Berko, author of *The Path to Paradise - In the World of Suicide Bombers and their Dispatchers*, is an expert on Palestinian security prisoners and has interviewed hundreds of them in the course of her research. As Berko told The Jerusalem Post earlier this year, the remaining security prisoners will now live in the hope that future kidnappings will set them free, too.

On June 26, 2006, the day Schalit was abducted, Berko was interviewing female security prisoners, who became excited upon hearing of the kidnapping.

"It was clear to them there would be a deal and they would be set free," Berko recalled.

The days when Israel refused to negotiate with terrorists are long gone.

For Israel , a low price to pay for a sign of life; for Hamas, a propaganda coup

The late **Hamas** founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin had told Berko in prison in 1996 that their next meeting would take place in Gaza. Three months later, he was released. But this is the first time Israel has released prisoners for a sign of life, setting a potentially dangerous precedent.

It would be wrong for decision makers to disregard the unimaginable pain and torment of the Schalit family. At the same time, the government must counterbalance the natural urge to assist them with a concern for the wider national interest.

In the meantime, Palestinian security prisoners serving far heavier sentences than the 20 **women** who will soon be released will continue to study and attend religious and political classes in jail, while praying for their own impending release.

Some have good reason to believe that their prayers will be answered.

Graphic

Photo: ALHAM KHALIL of Hebron holds a photograph yesterday of her daughter Haba, an Israeli prisoner who is among the 20 scheduled to be released in exchange for the Schalit tape. (Credit: Nasser Shiyoukhi/AP)

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

Haniyeh cancels Mecca trip as hopes rise for Schalit deal. 'During the next few days the picture will become clear,' Hamas official says after talks with German and Egyptian mediators

The Jerusalem Post

November 25, 2009 Wednesday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 1

Length: 1212 words

Byline: KHALED ABU TOAMEH, YAAKOV KATZ and TOVAH LAZAROFF, Herb Keinon, AP and JPost staff contributed to this report

Highlight: Lead Story

Body

In a sign that negotiations on an Israeli prisoner exchange for captive soldier Gilad Schalit were moving forward, **Hamas** Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh canceled a trip to Saudi Arabia for the annual Muslim pilgrimage at the last minute on Tuesday.

Anticipation that hundreds of Palestinian prisoners might soon be released in a deal with Israel was so high in Gaza that Haniyeh had been asked to remain in the Gaza Strip to greet the prisoners, said a **Hamas** legislator in Gaza City.

Meanwhile, **Hamas** representatives flew to Damascus on Tuesday to consult with their leadership after holding talks in Cairo with German and Egyptian mediators.

The representatives, Mahmoud Zahar, Khalil al-Haya and Nizar Awadallah are scheduled to return to Cairo later this week for more meetings with the mediators.

In Damascus on Tuesday, **Hamas** official Muhammed Nazzal said Israel still had reservations over releasing some prisoners sought by **Hamas** who had "long prison terms."

"If Israel reacts with flexibility, it will end soon, or it will be postponed indefinitely," he said. "During the next few days the picture will become clear."

A day before convening the security cabinet for its weekly meeting, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu continued to tone down expectations that an agreement was imminent.

There is no deal as of yet, and I do not know if there will be one," he told reporters Tuesday. "But one thing I can tell you is that it will first go to the cabinet for approval."

From Cairo to Jerusalem, Arab, Israeli and foreign officials weighed in on the matter, with statements that both raised and dampened public hopes that Schalit would be freed after 1,248 days in captivity.

Chief of General Staff Lt.-Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi said he hoped that Schalit would return home soon.

Haniyeh cancels Mecca trip as hopes rise for Schalit deal. 'During the next few days the picture will become clear,' Hamas official says after talks with German....

"As the commander of the military and as the one who sent Gilad Schalit, I will make every effort to complete our mission to return Gilad home," Ashkenazi said during a tour of the South.

"We do everything we can to return soldiers from their missions. Unfortunately, soldiers get wounded and killed but the IDF does not leave wounded behind."

Defense Minister Ehud Barak told new recruits at the Tel Hashomer Induction Center that Israel is responsible for retrieving Schalit.

"We have a deep responsibility - ethical and as commanders - to bring Gilad home in every possible and appropriate way," he said.

Industry, Trade and Labor Minister Binyamin Ben- Eliezer (Labor) told army radio from Turkey, "I'm very happy that this deal is heading to its conclusion very soon. Are we closer than ever? My answer is definitely affirmative."

Egyptian officials said that a deal was close, but was unlikely to be sealed in the next few days, whereas Hamas spokesmen Ayman Taha and Sami Abu Zuhri expressed cautious optimism about the prospects of reaching a deal in the coming days.

However, the two said it was too early to talk about a major breakthrough in the mediation efforts.

Hamas has instructed its leaders and spokesmen to refrain from making public comments about the secret negotiations.

As Hamas representatives headed to Damascus, the Egyptians and Germans have, meanwhile, briefed the Palestinian Authority leadership on the recent progress in their mediation efforts.

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, who is visiting the region, met in Jerusalem with Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and in Ramallah on Tuesday with PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad.

Westerwelle, whose countryman Ernst Urlau has played a key role in trying to put together an agreement, would not discuss the matter when he met with journalists.

He said that while he hoped an agreement would soon be in the offing, premature discussion could jeopardize any deal.

He did, however, talk privately with Fayyad about the deal.

Egyptian Intelligence Chief Gen. Omar Suleiman phoned senior PA officials and also briefed them on the details of the agreement.

The PA leadership is worried that a prisoner exchange would bolster Hamas's standing among Palestinians.

PA officials have in the past few days stepped up their rhetorical attacks on Hamas, particularly since the reports that the movement has agreed to stop firing rockets at Israel.

The officials, including PA President Mahmoud Abbas, have also accused Hamas of conducting clandestine talks with Israel.

Yasser Abed Rabbo, a top PLO official who also serves as an adviser to Abbas, said that Hamas was prepared to ally itself with the devil to achieve its goal of undermining the PA.

He accused Hamas of adopting a hypocritical approach by talking about the need to continue the resistance against Israel while, at the same time, it was holding secret talks with Israelis and agreeing to stop rocket and missile attacks.

Haniyeh cancels Mecca trip as hopes rise for Schalit deal. 'During the next few days the picture will become clear,' Hamas official says after talks with German....

A senior Fatah operative in Ramallah voiced concern that the release of several hundred Palestinians from Israeli jails would boost **Hamas**'s popularity at the expense of the PA.

"It would be very embarrassing for the Palestinian leadership if **Hamas** manages to free a large number of prisoners in return for the soldier," the official told The Jerusalem Post. "I'm not sure our leaders will be happy."

Fayyad described all Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails as heroes and called for their immediate release.

Addressing a conference on Palestinian prisoners, Fayyad did not make any mention of the reports regarding an imminent prisoner swap deal.

"To our heroic prisoners I say, the day of freedom is near" he said. "Your freedom is part of the freedom of the homeland and people."

Fayyad also saluted Amneh Muna, a **female** prisoner from Fatah who is serving a life sentence for her role in the abduction and murder of 16-year-old Ofir Rahum at the beginning of the second intifada.

His government, Fayyad said, was now seeking to rally support for international recognition of the Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails as prisoners of war.

He sent his greetings to Fatah operative Marwan Barghouti, who is serving five life terms in prison and Ahmed Sa'dat, secretary-general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine who was charged with masterminding the assassination of tourism minister Rehavam Ze'evi in 2001.

Its unclear if Barghouti and Sa'dat are on the list of prisoners due to be released.

Barghouti's wife on Tuesday told Channel 2 she hoped her husband would be home by next week.

She added she wanted to see a "fair deal" which would also see imprisoned Palestinian **women** and children released.

On Tuesday, three bereaved parents filed a petition to the High Court of Justice demanding that the government release the full list of the more than 1,000 prisoners that are due to be swapped for Schalit.

It expected that in the first stage of the deal, Schalit would be transferred from Gaza to Egypt, while Israel frees 450 prisoners, including those who have killed Israelis.

In the second stage he would be brought back to Israel and 550 more prisoners, charged with low-level offenses, would then be freed.

It expected that the cabinet will approve such a deal, but some ministers have been cagy about their position.

At a joint press conference with Westervelle, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said needed to see all the details before taking a stand.

"I will be able to deal with the issue when I know what is on the table," he said.

Graphic

Photo: **HAMAS** PRIME Minister Ismail Haniyeh waves to Palestinians crossing into Egypt for the upcoming Id al-Adha festival in Rafah yesterday. (Credit: Eyad Baba/AP)

Haniyeh cancels Mecca trip as hopes rise for Schalit deal. 'During the next few days the picture will become clear,' Hamas official says after talks with German....

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

International: Middle East: Hopes rise for release of soldier captured in Gaza as Hamas holds talks in Cairo: Shalit could be handed to Egyptian authorities: Israel would free initial 450 prisoners under deal - Correction Appended

The Guardian - Final Edition
November 25, 2009 Wednesday

 **Correction Appended**

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theguardian

Section: GUARDIAN INTERNATIONAL PAGES; Pg. 21

Length: 690 words

Byline: Rory McCarthy, Jerusalem

Body

Senior figures from the Palestinian Islamist group **Hamas** were in Cairo yesterday for talks on a deal to hand over an Israeli soldier captured near Gaza more than three years ago in return for the release of hundreds of Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

Several accounts suggested that a deal on Gilad Shalit, 23, was close at hand, although the Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, remained cautious about the prospect.

A deal would be widely welcomed by the Israeli public but would also boost support - at least temporarily - among Palestinians for **Hamas**, in turn further weakening the position of Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president and leader of the rival Fatah.

Several accounts in the Arab media suggested that an agreement could be reached within days in which Shalit would be handed first to Egyptian authorities and then to Israel. In return 450 Palestinian prisoners would be freed, followed by several hundred more at a later date.

One prisoner whom **Hamas** wants freed, Marwan Barghouti, is often spoken of as a future Palestinian leader but has been sentenced to five life terms in Israel in connection with five murders. Some senior Israeli officials have said they do not want him freed.

Eli Yishai, Israel's interior minister, suggested a prisoner swap was close. "God willing, it will be approved," he told Israel Radio.

"All the ministers, without exception, think that everything must be done to bring him home . . . I very much hope that it will be finalised very soon, within not more than a few weeks."

International: Middle East: Hopes rise for release of soldier captured in Gaza as Hamas holds talks in Cairo:
Shalit could be handed to Egyptian authorities: Is....

Some reports had suggested Shalit would be freed as early as Friday, but that seems unlikely.

Netanyahu tried to dampen suggestions of a breakthrough yesterday, saying: "There is still no deal, and I do not know if there will be one." If an agreement was reached, he said, there would at least be a cabinet discussion before any releases. The names of the prisoners to be freed would also probably be published first.

"I can say that if there is (a deal), it will be brought first of all to a cabinet decision, and in such a case we will not skip a public discussion. We will not do it as a fait accompli," Netanyahu said.

Shalit was captured in a militant raid close to the Gaza boundary in June 2006; two other soldiers were killed in the attack. Since then Israel has led several military operations into Gaza, killing hundreds of Palestinians, but officials now seem to accept that the only way to win Shalit's freedom is through a deal with Hamas. Most cabinet members are thought likely to vote in favour of a swap.

Some are still against it, including within the Israeli security services and among the families of those killed in suicide bombings.

Rami Igra, a former director of the prisoner of war department in Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service, described any such deal with Hamas as a "shameless and bottomless surrender".

"It restores to the combat ranks the greatest murderers and past experience shows that they will return to activity and that the price will be hundreds of people killed in the future," he wrote in the Israel Hayom newspaper. Israel holds around 7,000 Palestinian "security" prisoners in its jails, according to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem. Some 300 are held without charge.

Efforts to agree a deal, mediated by Egyptian officials and more recently German intelligence officers, have been tried before but failed at the last minute.

One breakthrough came last month when Hamas released a video showing Shalit in good health. In return, Israel freed 20 female Palestinian prisoners.

Shalit has French citizenship, and the French government has closely followed the case.

Bernard Kouchner, the foreign minister, said Israel had passed on a list of around 500 prisoners to be released and that Hamas had "amended" the list. "It seems that things are going in a positive direction," he said. Hamas yesterday played down the possibility of an agreement, saying there were still obstacles to overcome.

Captions:

An Israeli rally for Gilad Shalit, the soldier captured in Gaza in 2006, who was shown looking healthy in a recent video (below) Photograph: Gali Tibbon/AFP/Getty

Correction

* The headline with a report about negotiations between Israel and Hamas on a deal to free the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit said that his 2006 capture happened in Gaza. In fact, as the article indicated, it was on the Israeli side of the boundary with the Gaza Strip (Hopes rise for release of soldier captured in Gaza as Hamas holds talks in Cairo, 25 November, page 21).

Correction-Date: November 27, 2009 Friday

Load-Date: November 25, 2009

International: Middle East: Hopes rise for release of soldier captured in Gaza as Hamas holds talks in Cairo:
Shalit could be handed to Egyptian authorities: Is....

End of Document

Israel and Hamas deal: 20 prisoners for a video of Shalit; Israel has agreed to release 20 female Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a video of Cpl. Gilad Shalit, who is being held in Gaza.

The Christian Science Monitor

September 30, 2009 Wednesday

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Length: 815 words

Byline: Joshua Mitnick Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Body

Israel said it will release 20 **female** Palestinian prisoners Friday in return for a video of a soldier held by **Hamas** in the Gaza Strip for more than three years, calling it a confidence building measure ahead of "decisive" negotiations on a prisoner exchange. "It is important that the entire world know that Gilad Shalit is alive and well and that **Hamas** is responsible for his well-being and fate," read a statement from the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. A masked spokesman from **Hamas**'s military wing confirmed the deal during a hastily called news conference in Gaza. The announcement marks the first tangible sign of progress in drawn-out talks to free Israeli Defense Forces Cpl.

Gilad Shalit in return for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, many of whom were convicted of participating in attacks on Israeli civilians. The abduction of Shalit in June 2006 and the failure of the sides to reach a deal has contributed to instability along the Gazan-Israeli border, where a war erupted earlier this year for several weeks. "It will help bring down the tension between Israelis and Palestinians and open the door to talks about a [cease-fire] rather than conflict," says Mohammed Dajani, a political science professor at Al Quds University in Jerusalem. "It will facilitate getting back to the peace table." A win for **Hamas**? Winning the freedom of large numbers of prisoners could provide a major political dividend to **Hamas**, which has seen support among Palestinians sag in recent months in the aftermath of the Gaza war. Though many Palestinians will undoubtedly praise the Islamic militants for the prisoner swap, others have quietly questioned whether the price - siege, economic devastation, and thousands of war casualties - was justified. While Shalit's freedom would remove a central justification for Israel's economic blockade of the coastal strip of 1.5 million Palestinians, some analysts say that such a deal could also spur efforts to reconcile the two-year rift between **Hamas** in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Netanyahu's asymmetric swap In Israel, Mr. Netanyahu will likely come under criticism from his conservative wing, who argue such asymmetric swaps only encourage new abductions. Still, such swaps are not unusual. And polls indicated that most Israelis will support the prime minister paying a high price for Shalit's release. "Shalit has become such a major symbol and a major element in Israel's psyche. He is a symbol of the responsibility of the state to all its soldiers," says Yaron Ezrahi, a Hebrew University of Jerusalem political science professor. "Netanyahu expects to gain a lot of emotional public support for the exchange." Any deal for Shalit's freedom would also mark a major achievement for Egyptian and German mediators between Israel and **Hamas**, which don't recognize one another. Still, Israel's government said in its statement today that the talks are likely to be "long and arduous." Shalit's family, who have led a national campaign to pressure Israel's government for a deal, released a statement today calling the agreement a "meaningful achievement" and a "first step in the right direction to the release of Gilad," the Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported. A book recently published by the Gaza correspondent of Israel Channel 2 television news detailed allegations about the mental and physical stresses faced by Shalit while in

Israel and Hamas deal: 20 prisoners for a video of Shalit Israel has agreed to release 20 female Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a video of Cpl. Gilad Sha....

Hamas captivity. A report by United Nations investigator Richard Goldstone on the recent Gaza war also called on **Hamas** to release Shalit. In the past, **Hamas** has released a letter and a video of Shalit, but has not allowed any humanitarian groups to visit the soldier. Israel has cited the abduction as a justification for its ongoing sea and land trade blockade of the Gaza Strip. Dan Scheuftan, a professor of political science at Haifa University in Israel, says the deal announced on Wednesday marks a "capitulation to emotional terrorism" and lacks strategic vision. Freeing the **female** prisoners will send a message to would-be Palestinian **women** militants that they could eventually be released from jail. Nohi Eyal, the director of the Land of Israel Forum, told Haaretz that Netanyahu shouldn't engage in an asymmetric swap. "For a soldier of ours, they need to release one soldier," he said. "A genuine government must look beyond the eyes of the Shalit family and into the eyes of the future kidnap victims, which, to our regret, such a deal will only encourage." However, Netanyahu would not be the first Israeli prime minister to conclude a controversial asymmetric swap with a militant Arab group without direct ties to Israel. In 2008 former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert released several hundred Hezbollah fighters in return for the bodies of three soldiers. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon also conducted a similar exchange with Hezbollah.

Graphic

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip's Jebaliya refugee camp flash V signs Wednesday in front of a wall painting showing Israeli Sgt. Gilad Schalit, who has been held by **Hamas**-linked militants in Gaza since 2006. Hatem Moussa/AP

Load-Date: February 19, 2010

Hamas: Swap of Schalit video for 20 women prisoners is first phase of an exchange agreement. Tape to be handed over Friday * Germans and Egyptians broker deal to provide Israel with 'updated and unequivocal proof' of Schalit's well-being * First release of Palestinian prisoners since Netanyahu became PM

The Jerusalem Post

October 1, 2009 Thursday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 1

Length: 1356 words

Byline: KHALED ABU TOAMEH and HERB KEINON

Highlight: Lead Story

Body

The decision to swap a videotape of captive IDF soldier St.-Sgt. Gilad Schalit for 20 Palestinian ***female*** prisoners held by Israel is the first phase of a prisoner exchange agreement, ***Hamas*** said on Wednesday.

Hamas also boasted that Israel had "finally succumbed" to the demands of Schalit's captors.

In Jerusalem, the security cabinet on Wednesday approved the release of the 20 prisoners and detainees in exchange for an up-to-date videotape of Schalit, in what could be the first concrete move toward freeing the soldier since he was kidnapped over three years ago.

This will be the first release of Palestinian prisoners since Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu took office on March 31, and those to be released - according to government sources - were the type of prisoners generally released as goodwill gestures for Ramadan and various Muslim holidays.

Unlike in years past, this year Israel did not release any prisoners for Ramadan.

The decision to release the Palestinians came at the recommendation of the team working for Schalit's release, headed by Hagai Hadas, and was unanimously approved by the 15-member security cabinet.

The release of the Palestinians, and receipt of the tape, are scheduled to take place on Friday.

According to a suggestion that came from the German mediating team headed by Ernst Urlau, working together with the Egyptians, Israel will get "updated and unequivocal proof" of the well-being and status of Schalit in the form of a videotape filmed in the last few weeks. A ***Hamas*** Web site reported that the video was about a minute long.

Netanyahu congratulated Hadas and his team for their "professional work" away from the spotlight, and said, "It is important that the whole world will know that Gilad Schalit is alive and well, and that ***Hamas*** is responsible for his fate and well-being."

Hamas: Swap of Schalit video for 20 women prisoners is first phase of an exchange agreement. Tape to be handed over Friday * Germans and Egyptians broker deal t....

A statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office said the cabinet decided to respond positively to this initiative as a "confidence-building measure within the framework of the indirect negotiations" with Hamas over Schalit.

The statement said the move came "ahead of the decisive stages in the negotiations for Gilad Schalit's release and on the basis of the government of Israel's determination to bring him back home quickly while upholding Israel's vital interests."

The names of the Palestinians to be released were posted Wednesday afternoon on the Israel Prisons Service's Web site. A statement on the Web site said the list of prisoners was examined by legal and Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) authorities and that the prisoners had been "found suitable for release from the aspect of their danger to the public and the charges against them."

Nineteen of the 20 prisoners are from Judea and Samaria, and only one is from Gaza. The vast majority had already served two-thirds of their sentence and were scheduled to be released within the next two years.

None of the women were directly involved in the killing of Israelis, although a few were indirectly involved. A number of others were arrested for offenses such as carrying knives.

A senior source in the Prime Minister's Office said Hadas was in constant contact with the Schalit family, and that they were informed of the developments.

"The negotiations are still expected to be long and hard," the source said, "and we will continue to take concrete steps to bring Gilad home as quickly as possible."

The sources cautioned that this development did not mean the sides were on the cusp of an agreement, but that this was part of a larger agreement that was still a long way off.

Urlau has had experience with this type of move in the past. In late 2003, to get a "sign of life," he visited kidnapped Israeli Elhanan Tannenbaum, who was being held by Hizbullah in Lebanon, in exchange for the return of two Hizbullah bodies.

Three months later, Tannenbaum and the bodies of three IDF soldiers killed along the Lebanese border were returned in exchange for 435 prisoners.

Once the names of the Palestinian female prisoners were placed on the Internet Wednesday afternoon, the public - as was the case in similar prisoner releases in the past - was given 48 hours to appeal their release. After that period, the prisoners could be released once Urlau hands the tape over to Israel.

Urlau has already seen the video.

If a final deal is agreed upon for Schalit's release, these 20 prisoners will come off the final number of prisoners that the Palestinians are demanding in exchange. It is not clear whether these names were on the list of prisoners that was originally drawn up by Hamas.

Vice premier and security cabinet member Silvan Shalom said the decision to free the prisoners was "not simple."

But, he said, it was important to keep in mind that the move was an "important step toward the overall deal."

At the same time, Shalom added, a vote in favor of this release did not automatically ensure a vote in favor of an overall deal if one is reached.

"I voted in favor today, but there is no doubt that before the overall deal we will need to think again. That decision is likely to set criteria for situations that might, God forbid, occur in the future."

Another member of the security cabinet, Industry and Trade Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, welcomed the decision, saying that first and foremost it gave hope to the Schalit family.

Hamas: Swap of Schalit video for 20 women prisoners is first phase of an exchange agreement. Tape to be handed over Friday * Germans and Egyptians broker deal t....

"We will continue all efforts to bring about a breakthrough," he said. "This government is doing everything possible so that we not only get a sign of life, but also bring him safely home."

Palestinians said that a prisoner swap was likely to boost Hamas's popularity at the expense of the Palestinian Authority.

"The fact that the Palestinian resistance managed to hold on to the soldier for three years is a major achievement," said Ahmed al-Bahr, a senior Hamas official in the Gaza Strip. "For the past few years, Israel had recruited its military and intelligence machine to locate the soldier, but to no avail."

Calling on Israel to accept all the demands of the captors, Bahr praised Egyptian and German mediators who helped strike the deal.

He added that the agreement over the release of the 20 inmates in return for a videotape of Schalit "proved that the path of resistance was the only option to restore Palestinian rights."

Osama al-Mazini, the Hamas official in charge of the "Schalit Portfolio," credited Germany for reaching the agreement. However, he cautioned against "excessive optimism," saying there were still some obstacles that needed to be overcome before reaching a comprehensive agreement.

Mazini did not elaborate on the nature of the obstacles, but he said that despite the role Egypt had played in the mediation efforts, the breakthrough was achieved only following the intervention of the Germans.

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri pointed out that Schalit's captors had demanded the release of prisoners belonging to various Palestinian groups and not only to Hamas. He said that the captors had also insisted that the prisoners be from both the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"The Palestinian resistance groups that are holding the soldier consider all prisoners to be members of one people and one homeland," Abu Zuhri explained. "We reject any attempt to discriminate between the prisoners on the basis of their geographic location or political affiliation."

He said that the current deal demonstrated Hamas's "moral, religious and national obligation to end the case of the prisoners in Israeli jails."

He added that Hamas's decision to give priority to the women in the prisoner swap reflected the movement's appreciation for the role these women have played in the struggle against Israel.

The Hamas official said that his movement wanted to pursue indirect negotiations with Israel on a daily basis to reach an agreement over the case of Schalit.

Hamas officials in the Gaza Strip and Syria hailed the agreement as a huge achievement for their military wing, Izaddin Kassam.

Abdel Sattar Qassem, a political analyst closely affiliated with Hamas, heaped praise on Schalit's captors for succeeding in hiding him for over three years. He said that the performance of Izaddin Kassam was "professional and secretive."

Graphic

2 photos: PALESTINIANS IN the Jabalya refugee camp flash V signs in front of a wall painting showing captive soldier Gilad Schalit (pictured at right) who has been held in Gaza since 2006. (Credit: AP)

Hamas: Swap of Schalit video for 20 women prisoners is first phase of an exchange agreement. Tape to be handed over Friday * Germans and Egyptians broker deal t....

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

Hamas releases video of captive Israeli soldier; Young sergeant expresses love for family in footage handed over in exchange for Palestinian prisoners

The Toronto Star

October 3, 2009 Saturday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. A18

Length: 608 words

Byline: Steven Gutkin, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dateline: JERUSALEM

Body

In the first video images since he was captured by Palestinian militants in 2006, Israeli Sgt. Gilad Schalit - looking thin but healthy, appealed for his freedom and held up a newspaper to prove the footage was recent.

Israel freed 19 Palestinian **women** from prison Friday in exchange for the video, raising hopes for Schalit's release and taking a step toward defusing a key flashpoint in Israeli-Palestinian hostilities.

In the West Bank, jubilant Palestinians cheered and waved flags as the freed **women** returned home, some with prison-born babies in tow. And in Gaza, ruled by the **Hamas** militants holding Schalit, the prime minister called the swap a victory for Palestinians.

Looking fresh-faced and at times nervous in the video, Schalit talked of his love for his parents and siblings and recalled a family prayer on a roadside with a view of snow-capped mountains.

"Shalom, I am Gilad, son of Noam and Aviva Schalit, brother of Hadas and Yoel," the fatigue-clad 23-year-old soldier said in Hebrew at the beginning of the 22-minute, 44-second video, which at several points showed him smiling tentatively. "My ID number is 300097029."

By pulling on the heartstrings of Israelis, most of whom have loved ones in the military, the video could increase pressure on Israel's government to meet **Hamas'** demand for Schalit's release: freedom for hundreds of jailed militants.

Friday's deal, brokered by Egyptian and German mediators, could also herald an end to a crippling, Israel-led blockade of Gaza, which has prevented the territory from rebuilding after Israel's bruising war there last winter. Israel has said it will not consider easing the embargo until Schalit is home.

In the footage, Schalit sat on a plastic chair placed against a blank wall and read from a piece of paper tucked behind an Arabic-language newspaper. He said he was in good health and that his captors were treating him "excellently."

At one point, he rose and took a few steps - apparently to show he is able-bodied. At another, he held the newspaper to the camera to show the date - Sept. 14, 2009 - as proof the footage was recent.

Hamas releases video of captive Israeli soldier Young sergeant expresses love for family in footage handed over in exchange for Palestinian prisoners

He said he hoped "the current government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu" would not squander the opportunity to reach an agreement so that he could realize his "dream to be released."

A spokesman for Netanyahu, Nir Hefetz, said "although the path to Schalit's release is still long and arduous, the fact he is healthy and well encourages us all."

He also held Hamas responsible for the soldier's well-being.

Schalit's capture and long captivity have touched a raw nerve in Israel, where people hold regular vigils for his release, motorists have bumper stickers that say "Gilad lives" and where one news anchor ends his broadcast each night by reciting the number of days Schalit has been held.

Meanwhile, about 200 people waving Palestinian flags greeted vans carrying 18 of the freed women into the West Bank. The prisoners, wearing the head scarves of devout Muslim women, blew kisses to the crowd.

Later, the prisoners were greeted by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in his walled compound as elated relatives threw fistfuls of candy in the air.

Another prisoner will be released to Gaza Sunday, bringing to 20 the total number of women freed as part of the exchange, Israel's prisons service said. The women had been jailed for relatively minor offences and were close to release.

Schalit was captured in June 2006 by Hamas-linked militants in Gaza who tunnelled under the border into Israel, killed two other soldiers and dragged him bleeding into Palestinian territory.

Before Friday, the only signs of life had been three letters and an audiotape.

Graphic

DARREN WHITESIDE reuters Linan abu Ghulmi, centre, is greeted by well-wishers near the West Bank city of Ramallah after she was released from an Israeli prison Friday.reuters photo Israeli soldier Gilad Schalit, who was abducted by militants in 2006, is seen in video released Friday on Israeli TV.reuters photo Israeli soldier Gilad Schalit, who was abducted by militants in 2006, is seen in video released Friday on Israeli TV.

Load-Date: October 3, 2009

U.N. finds proof of Gaza war crimes; Israel and Hamas both targeted civilians, human rights report says

The International Herald Tribune

September 16, 2009 Wednesday

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Length: 959 words

Byline: Neil MacFarquhar

Dateline: UNITED NATIONS, New York

Body

ABSTRACT

A United Nations fact-finding mission investigating the three-week war in Gaza last winter concluded in a report issued Tuesday that both Israel and Palestinian militant groups appeared to be guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

FULL TEXT

A United Nations fact-finding mission investigating the three-week war in Gaza last winter concluded in a report issued Tuesday that both Israel and Palestinian militant groups appeared to be guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity, but it reserved its harshest language for Israel's overall treatment of the civilian Palestinian population.

The report said the three-week Israeli attack on Gaza from the end of 2008 through the first two weeks of 2009 "was a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorize a civilian population, radically diminish its local economic capacity both to work and to provide for itself, and to force upon it an ever increasing sense of dependency and vulnerability."

But the long-anticipated, 575-page report from the U.N. Human Rights Council also was critical of rocket attacks by Palestinian armed groups against Israeli civilians.

The four-member fact-finding panel, lead by Judge Richard Goldstone of South Africa, listed a litany of actions taken by the Israeli military that the panel concluded violated international humanitarian law.

The Israeli government said it was studying the report, but it immediately issued a 38-page document questioning the validity of some testimony from Palestinian witnesses, painting them as stooges of the militant organization **Hamas**, which controls Gaza.

Israel had also tried to discredit the mission from the start, saying that the Human Rights Council has a long record of bashing the country. Judge Goldstone called it a disappointment that Israel had rejected any dealings with the panel.

U.N. finds proof of Gaza war crimes Israel and Hamas both targeted civilians, human rights report says

In a statement issued Tuesday, the Foreign Ministry said it had refused to cooperate because of the one-sided nature of the panel and noted that some 100 allegations against Israeli military actions in Gaza had been investigated, with 23 criminal investigations still pending.

In Gaza, a spokesman for Hamas said it fired the rockets at Israel to try to defend itself. "We did not intentionally target civilians," said Ahmed Yousef, a Hamas advisor. "We were targeting military bases but the primitive weapons make mistakes."

Judge Goldstone said the mission went out of its way to hear testimony from as many people as possible - conducting 188 individual interviews, reviewing 10,000 pages of documents and 1,200 photographs, including satellite imagery. After Israel refused to even allow them into the country, it paid for several Israeli witnesses, including the mayor of Ashkelon and some of the Israeli victims of the Palestinian attacks, to give testimony in Geneva.

Judge Goldstone said that during his long experience investigating incidents under apartheid in South Africa, he was used to both sides damning his reports. Asked about how his Jewish heritage influenced his thinking, he said his family had long been affiliated with Israel.

"It is obviously a great disappointment to me, putting it mildly, that Israelis have behaved in the way described in the report," he said. "It is grossly wrong to label a mission or to label a report critical of Israel as being anti-Israel. It seems to me to be in the interest of Israel and in the interest of the Palestinians that the truth be established."

The report said that the blockade imposed around Gaza constituted collective punishment, and said the Israeli military targeted factories, wells, schools, hospitals, police stations and other public buildings. There were numerous instances of deliberate attacks on civilians and Israel in several cases prevented humanitarian organizations from reaching the wounded, the report said.

In terms of armaments, the report said Israel used white phosphorous, heavy-metal weapons and flechettes - short, pointed, metal darts - that are inappropriate in highly populated areas. It also said the Israeli military had used civilians as human shields and mistreated both male and female prisoners.

When it came to Palestinian actions, the reports said that Palestinian armed groups who had fired rockets into southern Israel failed to distinguish between military targets and the civilian population, which might constitute a war crime and crimes against humanity. It said the attacks since April 2001 have killed four people and injured hundreds.

The report did not take a position on the hotly contested number of civilian casualties during the Gaza war. It noted that they range from the Israeli government figure of 1,166 to the Hamas number of 1,444, with a couple of humanitarian organizations' estimates somewhere in between.

The report called on both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority to start serious internal investigations about possible crimes by both sides. It called on the U.N. Security Council to demand that both sides undertake serious domestic efforts to investigate possible crimes within the next six months, or else to refer the matter to the International Criminal Court for investigation.

Judge Goldstone noted that the report did not try to second-guess military decisions made in the heat of battle, but instead looked in detail at 36 specific incidents, like a shell being fired into a mosque during evening prayers.

The mission also looked into conditions on the West Bank. One of its overall conclusions was that crimes against the Palestinian population had long been the subject of impunity because of the length of the Israeli military occupation, and that the "justice crisis" there warranted further international action.

Load-Date: September 25, 2009

U.N. finds proof of Gaza war crimes Israel and Hamas both targeted civilians, human rights report says

End of Document

Blocking the truth behind the Gaza war. How the Goldstone Commission understated the Hamas threat to Palestinian civilians

The Jerusalem Post

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Byline: JONATHAN D. HALEVI, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

Highlight: ANALYSIS. Col. (res.) Jonathan D. Halevi is the research director for the Orient Research Group and a research fellow of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Halevi previously served as a senior adviser for political planning in the Foreign Ministry and as head of the data and information branch in the IDF Spokesperson's Unit. This article is an edited version of a Jerusalem Issues Brief for the JCPA, written in conjunction with the Global Law Forum sponsored by the Legacy Heritage Fund.

Body

On September 15, 2009, the UN investigating commission known as the Goldstone Commission published its conclusions regarding Israel's Gaza operation (December 27, 2008- January 18, 2009), accusing Israel of violating both international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions, and committing war crimes.

In response, the Israel Foreign Ministry issued an official statement accusing the commission of bias and one-sidedness, and of ignoring the thousands of Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli civilians which, Israel claimed, made the military operation an absolute necessity. "The one- sided mandate of the Gaza Fact-Finding Mission, and the resolution that established it, gave serious reasons for concern.... At the same time the report all but ignores the deliberate strategy of Hamas of operating within and behind the civilian population and turning densely populated areas into an arena of battle," said the ministry.

Was the UN commission's approach one-sided against Israel, or unbiased and objective as commission chairman Richard Goldstone contended?

The commission never asked about Palestinian war crimes

Statements of Palestinians recorded by the commission and posted on the UN Web site provide reliable evidence of the commission's methodology and raise serious questions about its intentions to discover the truth. Commission members did not ask the interviewed Palestinians questions about the activities of Hamas and the other Palestinian terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip which could be classified as war crimes or that were potentially dangerous to innocent Palestinians. They never asked about:

1. Launching rockets at Israeli towns and villages from within residential dwellings.
2. Firing mortar shells into Palestinian neighborhoods when IDF soldiers were operating in or near the area.
3. Firing anti-tank missiles, rifles and machine guns at Palestinian buildings in Gaza suspected of having been entered by the IDF despite the presence of Palestinian civilians in the area.

Blocking the truth behind the Gaza war. How the Goldstone Commission understated the Hamas threat to Palestinian civilians

4. Seizing private homes from which to ambush IDF units.
5. Booby-trapping houses before and during the war and detonating the bombs.
6. Planting various types of anti-personnel and improvised anti-vehicular bombs near houses and detonating them;
7. Sniping and firing heavy machine guns at Israeli soldiers within residential areas.

None of the statements taken by the commission (as posted on the UN Web site) reported even a single instance of the presence of armed Palestinians, or of Palestinians firing rockets at Israel or shooting at IDF soldiers operating in the Gaza Strip.

There was no serious consideration of Palestinian "friendly fire" incidents, which occur with the most disciplined armies. We can only guess how many Palestinian civilians were killed or wounded by Palestinian fire. In fact, the statements reported that throughout the entire three weeks of fighting there was no significant Palestinian resistance.

The commission did not press the witnesses in order to elicit more information and did not confront them with the reports issued by the terrorist organizations themselves, which detailed the fighting in a way that often contradicted the Palestinian witnesses. It did not adequately examine Palestinian rules of engagement - or the lack of any such rules. In addition, the witnesses hid vital information from the commission regarding the presence of armed terrorists or exchanges of fire in their vicinity, casting doubt on their reliability.

On June 28 and 29, 2009, the Goldstone Commission recorded Palestinian statements at the UNRWA headquarters in Gaza City, and posted the questions and answers on the commission's website. The following is an analysis of the four main statements, the way the commission interpreted them, and reports from other Palestinian sources which contradict the testimony presented to the commission:

Statements from

the Silawi family

Three members of the Silawi family were interviewed by the commission: Moussa al-Silawi (91, blind), Sabah al-Silawi (Moussa's wife) and Mouteeh al-Silawi, a Hamas official.

The most detailed statement was that of Mouteeh al-Silawi, deputy director of the Hamas administration's Muslim Religious Endowments Ministry for the northern Gaza Strip, who said he was giving a sermon when the mosque was attacked on January 3.

He claimed that there was no military activity in the Ibrahim al-Maqadma Mosque or around it during the attack. Worshipers came to the mosque seeking a safe haven on the assumption that it was a secure place. The evening and night prayers were said one after another to prevent unnecessary movement of worshipers outside the mosque. Israel committed a war crime in violation of international law by attacking civilians in a mosque, the witness said.

The commission members did not ask about armed men in the mosque, whether it was used for military purposes or incited worshipers to carry out terrorist attacks against Israel. They did not ask if there were weapons in the mosque, if armed men were operating near the mosque, whether Hamas and its Izzadin Kassam Brigades controlled the mosque and used it to recruit operatives, or the identity of the casualties and their organizational affiliation (including members of the Silawi family).

An examination of freely accessible Palestinian sources shows that the casualties in this incident were terrorists and included members of the Silawi family, who were represented to the commission as innocent civilians. Among them: Ibrahim Moussa Issa al-Silawi; Omar Abd al- Hafez Moussa al-Silawi; Sayid Salah Sayid Batah; Ahmed Hamad Hassan Abu Ita; Muhamad Ibrahim al-Tanani; Rajah Nahad Rajah Ziyada and Ahmed Assad Diyab Tabil.

Blocking the truth behind the Gaza war. How the Goldstone Commission understated the Hamas threat to Palestinian civilians

Statement of Muhammad Fuoad Abu Askar

Muhammad Fuoad Abu Askar represented himself to the commission as the director-general of Hamas's Ministry of Muslim Religious Endowments. He said he had been detained in Israel in 1992 for belonging to Hamas.

He told the commission that his house was "unjustly" blown up by the IDF. He said he had received a telephone call warning him to evacuate the house from someone who identified himself as an IDF representative and that 20 minutes later his house was struck from the air.

Askar said a short time later the area around the Fakhura school was also bombed. The school served as a shelter for many Palestinians from Beit Lahiya, al-Salatin and al-Atatra, who regarded it as a safe haven because it was located in the middle of the refugee camp and it was flying the UNRWA flag. He said he saw three bombs hit the school region and he heard more. Two hit the house of the Diyab family, killing 11 people. Dozens of people were killed near the school and most of the casualties were children, Abu Askar said. There were no armed men in the area, as opposed to Israeli claims, he said. Two of his children, Khaled and Imad, were killed, as was his brother Raafat, all of them, according to Askar, innocent civilians.

Although Muhammad Fuoad Abu Askar admitted being a Hamas operative and having been detained by Israel, the commission did not think to ask whether he was connected with Izzadin Kassam. They did not ask him whether those killed near the school belonged to any organization or were military-terrorist operatives.

An examination of freely accessible Palestinian sources shows that contrary to his claims, he and his sons were directly and closely linked to Izzadin Kassam, a connection that included providing terrorists with weapons and ammunition, and that there were a number of terrorists in the Fakhura school area, including Mohammad Fuoad Abu Askar himself and Khaled Mohammed Fuoad Abu Askar, Mohammad's son. Another son, Ahmed, was killed on July 7, 2006, when he tried to launch an anti-tank missile at an IDF unit, and yet another son Osama was critically wounded fighting the IDF on October 13, 2004.

Others terrorist operatives killed in the same Fakhura school incident included: Bilal Hamzah Obeid, an Izzadin Kassam operative; Raafat Abu Askar, a military-terrorist operative in the security services with the rank of warrant officer; Osama Jemal Obeid, an Izzadin Kassam operative; Iyad Jaber Aman, an Izzadin Kassam operative; Abd Muhammad Abd Qudas, a Fatah operative active in Palestinian Military Intelligence; and Atia Hassan al-Madhoun and his son, Ziyad al-Madhoun, operatives in the Brigades of National Resistance, the military-terrorist wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Statements of Wail

and Salah al-Samouni

Wail and Salah al-Samouni described the shelling of Wail's house, where the extended Samouni family had sought shelter and where more than 20 people were killed.

They told the commission: At about 5:30 a.m. on January 5, Wail left the house with other men to bring wood for a fire. As soon as they left the house a helicopter fired a missile at them and then a number of missiles at the house. After the house was hit the wounded proceeded toward Salah a-Din Street and were refused medical attention by IDF soldiers. Salah claimed that the soldiers fired shots over their heads to frighten them and make them leave more quickly. They said there was no activity of armed Palestinians around the house. Salah al-Samouni said that "everyone is a farmer, I swear to Allah that everyone is a farmer," and rejected the possibility that they were armed or wanted.

The commission did not ask about the identity of the dead Palestinians and about the possibility that some of them were terrorists. It did not challenge their claim that there were no armed Palestinians in the area, despite reports by both Palestinian terrorist organizations and the IDF about exchanges of fire in the area.

Blocking the truth behind the Gaza war. How the Goldstone Commission understated the Hamas threat to Palestinian civilians

In addition, the commission did not press the witness about his claim that the soldiers did not provide medical attention, in contradiction of a statement given by a female member of the family who told the NGO B'Tselem that the soldiers had given them medical aid.

An examination of freely accessible Palestinian sources shows that Wail and Salah al-Samouni hid important details from the commission that could shed light on the event. An examination of their statements and the statements of other members of the Samouni family to human rights organizations and published in Palestinian newspapers raises questions as to the veracity of their version of what actually happened on January 5.

Members of the family repeatedly claimed that all the people in the house were ordinary civilians. However, at least three were affiliated with Islamic Jihad. Meisa al-Samouni did not tell B'Tselem that her husband, Tawfiq Rashad Hilmi al-Samouni, who was killed on January 5, was an Islamic Jihad terrorist. She and the other members of the extended family, including Wail and Salah (who gave statements to the Goldstone Commission), never mentioned or hinted that other family members in the house at the time were Islamic Jihad operatives, among them Muhammad Ibrahim Hilmi al-Samouni and Walid Rahad Hilmi al-Samouni. A Islamic Jihad flyer noted that Muhammad and Walid al-Samouni were active in fighting against the IDF in the Zeitun neighborhood.

An Islamic Jihad poster commemorating Muhammad Ibrahim al-Samouni is captioned: "He [Muhammad], along with the mujahed Walid Rashad al-Samouni, blew up the tank, causing the deaths of a number of Zionists, as admitted by the enemy, on the first night of the ground invasion during the war south of the Zeitun neighborhood."

Statement of Khaled Muhammad Abd Rabbo

Khaled Abd Rabbo reported on the deaths of two of his children on January 7, 2009. Khaled lives in Jabalya, in a four-story house. He and his family did not leave it even when the ground fighting began, he said. He claimed he saw no activity of armed Palestinians in the area.

He said that on January 7 an IDF unit entered the area around his house and positioned tanks nearby. The soldiers used a megaphone to call the residents out of the house. They came out holding a white flag, and one of the soldiers got out of a tank and shot at his children for no reason. He said two of his daughters were killed, another was seriously wounded, and his wife was also wounded.

No questions were asked by the members of the commission, not about the events, or whether there was fighting in the area, or whether there were armed Palestinians.

Contrary to the claims made by Khaled Abd Rabbo, Palestinian sources reported on armed Palestinian activity in the area near the incident and on exchanges of fire between Palestinians and the IDF.

At the time Khaled claimed his daughters were shot by IDF soldiers, four other Palestinians were killed nearby: Ibrahim Abd al-Rahim Suleiman, 19, an Izzadin Kassam operative; Shadi Issam Hamad, 33, a Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine operative; Muhammad Ali al-Sultan, 55, an Izzadin Kassam operative; and Ahmad Adib Faraj Juneid, 26, another Izzadin Kassam operative.

An Izzadin Kassam report reveals information about the exchange of fire between the IDF and armed Palestinians in the area where Khaled Abu Rabbo's daughters were killed, and its closeness in time to the events he reported. His version and the Izzadin Kassam Web site provided similar descriptions of the advance of IDF armored vehicles into the area at the same time.

However, Abu Rabbo did not tell the UN commission about the exchanges of fire between IDF and Izzadin Kassam. The possibility cannot be ruled out that his children were caught in the crossfire and may have been killed by Palestinians.

AS WE can see from a detailed analysis of freely accessible Palestinian sources (in Arabic), competing explanations exist that counter the claims of the Palestinians who testified before the Goldstone Commission. At the

Blocking the truth behind the Gaza war. How the Goldstone Commission understated the Hamas threat to
Palestinian civilians

same time, questioning by the members of the commission proved to be superficial and was ill-suited to elicit the truth about events in Gaza.

Graphic

Photo: **HAMAS** SECURITY men on patrol in Gaza City. (Credit: George Azar/Bloomberg)

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

Mediator to give Israeli response on prisoner swap

Daily News Egypt

December 1, 2009 Tuesday

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Length: 420 words

Body

CAIRO: A German mediator is to give Israel's response to Hamas on a prisoner swap as the two sides edge closer to a deal, a Palestinian official said on Monday.

The official, who requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the talks, said Hamas leaders would meet the mediator in the Gaza Strip where he would relay Israel's response to the Islamist movement's latest proposal.

The official, who is close to the talks, said the dispute centered on 70 prisoners whom Israel refused to free. Hamas drafted its final position during a meeting in Damascus last week, with the results passed on to Israel, he said.

Israel will free about 1,000 prisoners, included 450 militants chosen by Hamas, in exchange for captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

The two sides were narrowing their differences.

But Hamas is insisting on six prisoners whom Israel has turned down, the official said, including Marwan Barghuti, a populist leader with its rival Fatah faction, and Ahmed Saadat, whose group assassinated an Israeli minister.

Hamas also insists on the release of its senior members Abdullah Barghuti, who is serving 67 consecutive life terms over suicide bombings in Israel, and Ibrahim Hamed, who is accused of ordering attacks in Israel, and two others.

A further dispute, the official said, was over Israel's demand that some of the prisoners it releases be exiled. "Hamas agreed to the exile of some of them, but not all of them," he said.

Both sides reported progress in the talks last week but have since downplayed reports of an imminent deal after negotiations hit a snag over the group that Israel refuses to free.

The indirect talks, with Egypt also a key mediator, have dragged on since Palestinians including Hamas members, captured Shalit in a cross-border raid from Gaza in 2006.

Israeli media quoted court documents on Sunday as saying Israel would free 980 Palestinian prisoners, including 450 chosen by Hamas, in exchange for Shalit.

Mediator to give Israeli response on prisoner swap

The government informed the Supreme Court of the possible releases after an Israeli group appealed to the court, demanding that Israel provide the names of Palestinians to be freed, the reports said.

Israel's cabinet is expected to ratify the deal before the swap takes place.

Shalit is to be handed over to Egypt before Israel frees the first group of prisoners, and then returned to Israel, after which the rest of the Palestinians would be freed.

The Jewish state released 20 women prisoners last month after Hamas handed over a videotape of Shalit showing him in good health. -AFP

Load-Date: December 1, 2009

End of Document

German Mediator In Gaza For Prisoner Exchange Negotiations

RTT News (United States)

December 23, 2009 Wednesday

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Body

(RTTNews) - A German mediator involved in the indirect prisoner exchange negotiations between Israel and the **Hamas** militants visited the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, according to **Hamas** officials.

Officials said that the German mediator's Gaza visit was to deliver Israel's latest offer on the proposed prisoner exchange deal to a **Hamas** delegation. **Hamas** is expected to make a reply in the coming days after studying the Israeli offer carefully.

The development comes a day after media reports suggested that Israel and **Hamas** were moving closer to a prisoner exchange deal that would secure the freedom of Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier abducted by Palestine militants in 2006.

Israeli media reports indicated on Tuesday that Israel has responded to the **Hamas** offer for prisoner exchange and has forwarded a list of Palestinian prisoners it wants to deport to either Gaza or some foreign country as a part of the deal.

Gilad Shalit was captured by **Hamas** militants from Gaza in a cross-border raid in June 2006. Egypt has been mediating for his freedom in exchange for release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. The previous negotiations on the issue, which were held just before the term of the last Israeli government ended, concluded without any result.

Israeli government has been under tremendous pressure to secure Shalit's freedom from within after **Hamas** recently released a proof-of-life video of Shalit in exchange for the freedom of 20 Palestinian **women** prisoners held in Israeli jails.

Germany joined the prisoner exchange negotiations earlier this year as a mediator in a effort to hasten the release of the abducted Israeli soldier. The European country has a history of successfully negotiating several prisoner exchange deals between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militants.

Earlier, Israel's seven-member security cabinet went through two days of intense discussions on Sunday and Monday over the prisoner exchange deal proposed by **Hamas**. The proposed deal calls for the release of some 1000 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, including some senior **Hamas** officials responsible for planning or carrying out violent attacks against Israelis.

After the security cabinet meeting, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said Tuesday that efforts were progressing to secure the release of Shalit. He, however, added that his government's priority was to secure Shalit release, though "not at any cost, but in every possible and appropriate way".

German Mediator In Gaza For Prisoner Exchange Negotiations

"This is a sensitive time and it would be wrong to expound upon the topic, but we, as those who sent Gilad, feel a responsibility to make every feasible and worthy move to bring Gilad home, though not at any price," he said.

It is understood that the negotiations were deadlocked over Israel's refusal to release some of the most dangerous Palestinian prisoners to the West Bank. Israel wants to deport them to either a foreign country or to the Gaza Strip, where they would be confined because of the ongoing Israeli siege on the Palestinian territory.

Officials involved in the talks have indicated that the first part of the deal under consideration requires **Hamas** to hand over Shalit to Egypt, as Israel releases between 350 and 450 prisoners. It would be followed with the release of some 650 more prisoners when the freed soldier is being transferred to Israel.

Israel is currently holding about 10,000 Palestinians as prisoners on various charges. Previous Egyptian-mediated negotiations between Israeli officials and **Hamas** militants on a prisoner exchange scheme have ended dead-locked after the two sides failed to agree on the number of Palestinian prisoners to be released in exchange for the release of Shalit.

For comments and feedback: contact editorial@rttnews.com

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Israel to free 20 Palestinians for video

The Daily Star (Lebanon)

October 1, 2009 Thursday

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THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

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Body

Israel will free 20 Palestinian women from jail as early as Friday in exchange for a videotape from Hamas proving an Israeli soldier held in Gaza since 2006 is alive, officials on both sides said on Wednesday. Egyptian and German mediators are continuing to work on a final deal to swap the soldier for hundreds of Hamas prisoners.

Nidal al-Mughrabi

Reuters

GAZA: Israel will free 20 Palestinian women from jail as early as Friday in exchange for a videotape from Hamas proving an Israeli soldier held in Gaza since 2006 is alive, officials on both sides said on Wednesday. Egyptian and German mediators are continuing to work on a final deal to swap the soldier for hundreds of Hamas prisoners. The negotiations are part of international efforts to ease Israel's blockade of the Hamas-run Gaza Strip.

"It is important for the entire world to know that ... [the soldier] is alive and well and that Hamas is responsible for his well-being and his fate," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement.

The Israeli soldier was spirited into the Gaza Strip by Islamist militants who tunneled into Israel three years ago in a raid in which two Israeli soldiers and two of the attackers were killed.

An Israeli official said the handover of the 20 women and the tape should take place on Friday, at the end of a two-day period when Israeli citizens can appeal in court against their release, an Israeli official said. He added that a German mediator had already seen the video and believed it genuinely showed the Israeli soldier during recent weeks - and certainly after Israel's offensive in Gaza in December and January in which some 1,400 Palestinians were reported killed.

The video lasts about a minute, said a spokesman for the Popular Resistance Committees, one of the Hamas allies that took part in the raid in which the soldier was captured. "It shows [he] is alive and moving," said the spokesman, Abu Mujahed.

Announcement of the pending exchange was the first major sign of progress in efforts to put together a deal between Israel and Hamas Islamists.

But an Israeli official cautioned that "lengthy and difficult negotiations" were still ahead before any final swap.

Israel to free 20 Palestinians for video

One of the women set for release, and the only one identified, Fatima Younis Zaq, gave birth in jail to a son, who is currently with her. An Islamic Jihad member, Zaq was arrested in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on suspicion of planning a suicide bombing.

At her family home in the Gaza Strip, relatives hugged and kissed, and her husband said: "We were so happy to get the news. We hope all other prisoners will be released."

Zaq is the only Gaza resident due to be freed. The other 19 were from the West Bank, where Hamas's secular rivals from President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party hold sway.

Netanyahu has faced mounting public pressure to win the freedom of the soldier, who also holds French citizenship, in a deal that could involve releasing Hamas militants behind deadly attacks.

Palestinians view brethren held by Israel as heroes. A major prisoner release would be a boost for Islamist Hamas, which is opposed to peace with Israel.

Israeli officials said none of the 20 women was directly involved in killings or serving a sentence exceeding two years.

A spokesman for Hamas' armed wing, Abu Ubeida, said four of the women belonged to Hamas and five to Fatah. Three more were members of Islamic Jihad and the rest came from other groups.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has not visited the captive Israel soldier and only a few letters and an audio cassette from him have been sent to his family, which has waged a vocal campaign to get him freed.

Israel holds over 10,000 Palestinian prisoners. Hamas is negotiating for the release of hundreds of its members.

Load-Date: September 30, 2009

In Gaza, Opportunities Fade As Feeling of Isolation Grows

The New York Times

October 27, 2009 Tuesday

Late Edition - Final

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Section: Section A; Column 0; Foreign Desk; Pg. 4

Length: 1092 words

Byline: By ETHAN BRONNER; Taghreed El-Khodary contributed reporting.

Dateline: GAZA

Body

The bank executive sits in a suit and tie behind his broad empty desk with plenty of time to talk. Almost no loans are being issued or corporate plans made. The Texas-trained engineer closed his firm because nothing is being built. The business student who dreamed of attending an American university -- filling a computer file with meticulous hopes and plans -- has stopped dreaming. He goes from school to a part-time job to home, where he joins his merchant father who sits unemployed.

Ten months after the Israeli military said it invaded this Palestinian coastal strip to stop the daily rocket fire of its Islamist rulers, there are many ways to measure the misery of Gaza.

Bits of rubble are being cleared, but nothing is going up. Several thousand homes remain destroyed. Several dozen families still live in United Nations tents strung amid their ruined houses. A three-year-old embargo on Hamas imposed by Israel and Egypt keeps nearly all factories shut and supplies away. Eighty percent of the population gets some form of assistance.

But the misery of the educated and professional class has a particular poignancy. Many abroad view Gaza as a large slum, yet there is near universal literacy here and infant mortality is low by regional standards. Midsize glass towers gleam. Many thousands have advanced degrees. Half a dozen stylish restaurants fill each day with young women -- a few with heads uncovered -- carrying laptop computers, and with the underemployed, who smoke hookahs and lament their future.

"We are entering very dark years," remarked Slama Bissiso, vice chairman of the Palestinian Bar Association, slowly exhaling scented tobacco smoke on the balcony of the Deira Hotel overlooking the Mediterranean. He said that the embargo on Gaza and the divide between the Hamas government here and the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority in the West Bank were driving Gaza into deeper isolation every month.

Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, announced on Friday that elections would be held in January. But it was effectively an announcement that Fatah and Hamas had failed to reconcile their differences despite Egyptian mediation. There will be no election here without the agreement of Hamas, and it has no intention of granting it now. If that means a vote will be held in the West Bank only, the horizons of Gaza will retreat even further.

In Gaza, Opportunities Fade As Feeling of Isolation Grows

Hamas's control of Gaza feels solidly unchallenged. Its security forces patrol the streets. Pictures of President Abbas with big X's across his face line the main avenue, sadly known as Unity Street. A new sign on the Gaza side of the Israeli border bars even foreigners from bringing in alcohol.

Left out of the banking system, **Hamas** affiliates opened their own bank recently. In keeping with Muslim strictures, it does not charge interest or offer loans, making money by buying cars or homes the customer wants, then reselling them at a higher price.

Israel allows about 100 trucks a day to pass into Gaza bearing food, medicine and other humanitarian goods. But it has closed off commerce in the hope of alienating the population here from their rulers. That seems to be happening. Yet if no election occurs, it is hard to see how the alienation can be expressed or government changed.

Israel wants to isolate **Hamas** because the group rejects Israel's existence. As Ayman Taha, a **Hamas** movement spokesman, said in an interview, "Our long-term strategy is the liberation of all of Palestine, but we would agree to a temporary solution involving a state in the 1967 borders with a truce of about 10 years, depending on the conditions of the truce."

Egypt rejects **Hamas** because of its affiliation with the Cairo-based Muslim Brotherhood. Both Egypt and Israel worry about Iranian arming of the group as well.

The increasing isolation of Gaza is taking its toll. Opportunities for training and education abroad or for outsiders to come here, for example, are scarce. The children's library in the center of the city could not persuade either Israeli or Egyptian officials to let anyone in to help set up new programs or carry out quality control.

Executives at Jawwal, the Palestinian cellphone company, sat last week at their work stations in blue jeans -- as at the end of every work week it was Casual Thursday -- and said their jobs were getting harder because spare parts and training were unavailable. Their senior managers, who used to travel abroad once a month, now cannot travel at all.

While 1,100 students admitted to programs abroad did get through the crossing into Egypt over the past few months -- and another 50 were granted permission through Israel -- more than 800 others who had spots waiting for them were unable to leave, according to Gisha, an Israeli human rights group.

Many of the professionals here reject **Hamas**'s ideology, although some voted for the party in 2006 out of rage over the corruption in Fatah.

"**Hamas** won by a slim margin, and it was because of people like me," said Mohamed, who comes from a Fatah family and works for a charity. "I regret voting for them. I wanted to punish Fatah."

Like nearly all in Gaza who spoke about politics, he asked that his identity be hidden for fear of what the government might do. The rules of political dissent remain fuzzy.

The Texas-trained engineer also voted for **Hamas** in 2006 and wishes he had not.

"Israel is saying, 'Because you elected **Hamas**, you should have no life,' " he said. "Yet people elected **Hamas** because of Fatah corruption. I believe in peace with Israel, but I wanted desperately to get away from the corruption. I didn't expect **Hamas** to win. Next time, I won't vote at all."

While the legitimate economy here depends on foreign aid that provides salaries for tens of thousands to do little, the black market for high-priced goods smuggled in from Egypt through hundreds of tunnels is thriving, leading to the growth of a tunnel mafia.

Professionals here are frustrated that their political options are Fatah, which they still consider corrupt, and **Hamas**, whose ideology poses problems for them and for many foreign governments.

In Gaza, Opportunities Fade As Feeling of Isolation Grows

Some said the rejection of **Hamas** by the world meant it made no sense for it to stay in power, but they had no idea how to effect a change.

"I'd like to see the creation of a political alternative with businesspeople instead of **Hamas** and Fatah," said Rami Alagha, 39, manager of the Jawwal cellphone company. "The United States and the Europeans could get behind such a program. Otherwise we have no future."

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Graphic

PHOTO: **Hamas** members in Gaza burn a coffin with pictures of Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president. Many Gaza professionals reject **Hamas**'s ideology. (PHOTOGRAPH BY SAID KHATIB/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE -- GETTY IMAGES)

Load-Date: October 27, 2009

End of Document

Afghanistan: Swapping Prisoners

Right Vision News

November 27, 2009 Friday

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Length: 412 words

Dateline: Pakistan

Body

Pakistan, Nov. 27 -- A much-awaited exchange of prisoners between Israel and **Hamas** is now being finalised. Brokered by Egypt, the deal is significant in terms of the human factor.

Hopefully, it could also end the Palestine-Israel impasse. With the **Hamas** representatives currently in Cairo, it's almost a done deal. If implemented, hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails will be released in exchange for the captured Israeli soldier, Sergeant Shalit. The list of prisoners could include charismatic Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti. It comes just days after Israeli leader Shimon Peres' visit to Cairo. Shalit's imprisonment since 2006 has become a national concern for Israel. In exchange for Shalit, Israel will initially release between 350-450 Palestinians, followed by another 650 in the coming weeks. That this final agreement has finally come through is a positive development. Previous efforts to reach a mutual agreement failed in view of contentions from both sides about the prisoners. **Hamas** had used the Shalit card to its advantage and even managed to secure the release of twenty Palestinian **female** prisoners in exchange of a video film of the Israeli prisoner. The release of Palestinian prisoners, and in these numbers, is a significant achievement that can be attributed to both **Hamas** and the Egyptians. What may be a bigger achievement is the release of Barghouti, who many view as a natural alternative to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Having tendered his resignation in protest over Israel's unwillingness to move the peace process forward, Abbas's decision has created a big dilemma for the US and Israel. Refusing to acknowledge or deal with **Hamas** on the pretext that it is a terrorist group, the international community has to date been focusing only on Fatah. Which is not without its risks since **Hamas** enjoys tremendous Palestinian support and is accepted as a legitimate political group among the people. It is about time Washington and Israel recognised no peace is possible with the exclusion of **Hamas**. The prisoner exchange deal may serve as a precedent to open communication channels between **Hamas** and Israel. At the same time, **Hamas** and Fatah need to reconcile their differences and join hands to push for Palestinian statehood and the Middle East peace. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Right Vision News. For more information on news feed please contact Sarabjit Jagirdar at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

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Load-Date: November 26, 2009

Mashaal: We'll capture more Schalits until not even one prisoner is in enemy jails

The Jerusalem Post
October 4, 2009 Sunday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 3

Length: 264 words

Byline: Jerusalem Post staff

Body

Hours after Israel released 19 **female** Palestinian prisoners - an additional prisoner will be released Sunday - in exchange for a video proving captive IDF soldier Gilad Schalit was alive, **Hamas** leader Khaled Mashaal on Friday night threatened to capture more Israeli soldiers in order to win the release of all Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons.

In a speech in Damascus, Mashaal congratulated the Palestinian people on the release of the prisoners and promised to work for the release of thousands of Palestinians held by Israel.

Those who were able to capture Schalit and hold him safely for more than three years are capable of capturing "Schalit and Schalit and Schalit until there is not even one prisoner in the enemy's jails," Mashaal said.

The Damascus-based leader's comments were followed by remarks from **Hamas** spokesman Mushir al-Masri, who on Friday night said that the prisoner release proved that Israel had no choice but to give in to the group's demands.

"The Zionist enemy has no choice but to accept **Hamas**'s demands," Masri reportedly said.

According to Channel 10, Masri told the **Hamas** television network that "the fact that 20 **female** prisoners were released today helps **Hamas**, and the passing time does not help the Zionist enemy, but rather strengthens our position."

The **Hamas** spokesman said that even though it could take a long time, the negotiations with Israel would lead to a prisoner exchange deal.

"The negotiations over the deal are being held slowly and will continue for a long time, but we are sure they will be successful," he was quoted as saying.

Graphic

Photo: **HAMAS** LEADER Khaled Mashaal speaks in Damascus on Friday. (Credit: Bassem Tellawi/AP)

Mashaal: We'll capture more Schalits until not even one prisoner is in enemy jails

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

One year after Operation Cast Lead: Everybody stronger but Gazans

Egypt Independent

December 28, 2009 Monday

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EGYPT INDEPENDENT

Length: 1161 words

Byline: Reuters,AFP

Body

One year after Israel struck the Gaza Strip, the Islamic resistant group **Hamas**, which continues to govern the enclave, remains defiant and in full control, rebuilding its strength and shrugging off criticism from Palestinian opposition.

A new interior minister has replaced the man Israel assassinated during its three-week offensive, and new police units have been formed to make up for those killed by Israeli bombs in the opening air strikes of the war.

"When I took this post I knew my chances of being killed would increase, but that's the risk we take," Interior Minister Fathi Hammad told Reuters in an interview at his home.

Hammad said his priority was to ensure internal order, fight crime and rebuild the security institutions destroyed during the Israeli bombings that killed 350 policemen and demolished 60 buildings.

Hammad said 350 new recruits were added to the police force and a damaged building had been fixed up for them. "We have not yet made up for the loss of equipment, weapons and cars," said Hammad.

One year on, there are still sporadic exchanges of gunfire at the border between Gaza and Israel.

Some Israelis say former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who launched the offensive on December 27 2008, called it off too soon, leaving the operation unconcluded and **Hamas** claiming victory.

Olmert's centrists narrowly lost a spring election to Benjamin Netanyahu, a rightwinger who vowed to take a hard line if the Islamists resumed firing rockets into Israel. While rarely lethal and often missing their targets, the rockets reportedly terrorize southern Israeli towns and cities.

Hamas is backed by Iran, and Hammad said it gets no help from Arab governments, which "follow the international line which is to isolate and boycott the Gaza Strip."

One year after Operation Cast Lead: Everybody stronger but Gazans

Hamas' critics claim the group violates civil rights and represses political expression. Many human rights activists say it is trying to impose Islamic law on the community.

"There is an Islamist movement in power here, and it seeks to reflect that on our political and social systems," says **women's** right activist Zainab Al-Ghonaimi.

"Unfortunately, its particular view of things has continued and where there is no plurality, there is no democracy," says the veteran lawyer.

Complaints by human rights groups overcame attempts by some **Hamas** officials this year to impose head covering on schoolgirls and **female** lawyers. But Ghonaimi says **female** government employees are forced to cover their hair.

Rabah Mhana, a senior leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), says **Hamas**' reputation has been damaged.

"**Hamas** made big mistakes both in governance and in handling political issues, and those mistakes must have an impact," says Mhana, who recently accused **Hamas** security forces of preventing PFLP gunmen from firing rockets into Israel.

Incessant rocket fire by Gazan militant groups under the aegis of **Hamas** was Israel's stated reason for its offensive last year, codenamed Operation Cast Lead.

Hamas refuses to recognize Israel or abandon armed resistance, but says it would conclude a truce with the Jewish state.

It denies trying to stop other groups fighting Israeli forces around Gaza, which is under a tight blockade, but appears to have won an agreement to limit rocket fire.

Hammad denied any harassment of political opponents and invited human rights representatives to visit prisons to prove that "we have no political detainees at all."

The Islamists' embittered rival Fatah, the dominant Palestinian movement in the West Bank, says its Gaza members are oppressed. **Hamas** makes the same charges against Fatah in the West Bank.

On Saturday Human Rights Watch accused Israel and **Hamas** of failing to take punitive measures against members of their own forces accused of atrocities during Israel's strike on Gaza.

In a statement, the New York-based rights group also criticised Israel's blockade of Gaza, which "created massive humanitarian need and prevented the reconstruction of schools and homes" in the coastal strip.

"Both Israel and **Hamas** have failed to punish those responsible for serious violations during the fighting," Fred Abrahams, HRW senior emergencies researcher, said in the statement.

"Some rocket attacks continue and the Israeli blockade of Gaza has prevented basic reconstruction. The only things getting built in Gaza are desperation and despair," he added.

One year after Operation Cast Lead: Everybody stronger but Gazans

Human Rights Watch accused Israel of "drone-launched missile attacks that killed 29 civilians, the killing of 11 civilians holding white flags, and the use of white phosphorus munitions in densely populated areas."

It said the Jewish state's forces also destroyed many unjustified civilian targets including farms, factories and much of Gaza's water and sanitation network, and that most of them still remain unrepaired.

Hamas and other armed Palestinian groups were accused of firing hundreds of rockets into populated areas of Israel, and using the 22-day war as an excuse to kill and torture political rivals.

"Israel has so far punished only one soldier, a sergeant, for wartime abuse, sentencing him to seven and a half months in prison for stealing a credit card," said the statement.

"Human Rights Watch does not know of any investigations by **Hamas** authorities in Gaza into laws-of-war or human rights violations during the fighting." An estimated 1,400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed in last year's war.

Thousands of Gazan homes, factories and businesses were destroyed by bombing and shelling.

The \$5 billion international aid pledged for reconstructing Gaza 10 months ago remains on paper only.

While **Hamas** and Fatah remain at loggerheads, donor countries are unsure how to channel the funds to Gaza, and the Israeli blockade imposes severe restrictions on building materials that could be used for military purposes.

"I am replanting my land which was razed by the invasion. I've planted date trees, lemons and oranges. Like the trees we will remain implanted in our land and we will never abandon it," says Issa Hamouda, whose home was destroyed in the land assault.

"**Hamas** gets more popular every day. Whether there is reconstruction aid or not we will build our houses brick by brick," says the old man.

But Ghaleya el-Samouni, who lost 29 members of her extended family in the offensive, said the situation was grim and survivors were left without help. "[Whether it's] **Hamas** or Fatah, they are all illusions. Nobody is standing with the people," she says.

Gazans cling to the fading hope that **Hamas** and Fatah will end their feud so reconstruction can begin.

"I have not seen any progress since the war. Everything is at a standstill. I hope for national reconciliation and the reconstruction of our homes," says 25-year-old Mohamed Darduna, whose home was destroyed in January.

Dalal Abu Aisha, 15, lost her parents and three siblings when an Israeli missile hit their house. "I have no one to study with and I have no one to play with," says the young girl who now lives with her grandfather.

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Veiled anxiety

The Jerusalem Post

August 7, 2009 Friday

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Section: FEATURES; Pg. 15

Length: 1028 words

Byline: YAAKOV KATZ, AP contributed to this report.

Highlight: With the possibility of PA elections being held in January, and with the increased imposition of Sharia law in Gaza, the defense establishment is concerned about another **Hamas** takeover - this one inside Israel.
SECURITY AND DEFENSE

Body

Beach patrols break up groups of singles, and tell men to put on shirts. **Women** are ordered to wear hijabs, veils and long black robes when strolling along the waterfront. Couples caught holding hands in public are detained and asked to present their marriage papers. One couple was caught kissing in a car. The woman was sent home and the man severely beaten.

This is the new Gaza Strip. Here, two years after violently seizing control from the Palestinian Authority, and seven months after Operation Cast Lead, **Hamas** is for the first time imposing Islamic law on an already strained Palestinian public.

The campaign even has a slogan - "Yes to virtuous deeds; no to abominations" - which can be seen on signs along some of the main thoroughfares. **Hamas** insists that its "virtue campaign" is merely a response to the Gazan preference for conservative ways, and that compliance on the part of the public is still voluntary. The Israeli defense establishment, however, believes it to be yet another indication of radicalization in the Strip. As a result, it is carefully watching the trend.

Indeed, the increasing Islamization of Gaza is manifested in a number of ways. Firstly, **Hamas** has decided the government will be run according to Sharia law. One example is the establishment of a new banking system. Until recently, **Hamas** used Palestinian Authority banks in the Strip. On April 21, it opened the first "Islamic National Bank," which functions in accordance with Sharia - for example, forbidding interest on loans.

Hamas also established an insurance company that operates according to Sharia.

Last month, Gaza Supreme Court Chief Justice Abdel Raouf Halabi ordered **female** lawyers to wear head scarves and dark robes, or be barred from courtrooms when they return to work in September. "We will not allow people to ruin morals," he explained.

In government-run schools, head scarves for **female** students are supposed to be optional. But one high school has made robes and head scarves a condition for enrollment. Teachers are now being asked to pressure the girls to put them on, said Education Ministry spokesman Khaled Radi.

Veiled anxiety

Hamas also recently established new television and radio stations. Press credentials are issued by Hamas, and it demands to see the material before it is broadcast or published. In jails, Hamas has set up programs for memorizing the Koran, and offers shortened sentences to inmates who succeed at doing so.

On Friday, Hamas operatives enter the main markets in Khan Yunis and the Shati refugee camp, and order the men to go to nearby mosques for prayer services. And, while on the topic of mosques in Gaza, there are close to 1,000. Prior to the Hamas takeover in the summer of 2007, there were only 774.

"THIS IS all part of Hamas's ultimate plan, which is to establish an Islamic state in Gaza and throughout Israel," explained an IDF intelligence officer in the office of the coordinator of government activities, who is responsible for following trends in the Palestinian territories.

Though the Islamization appears to be of a religious nature, it is also part of Hamas's effort to solidify control and neutralize potential pockets of resistance, such as members of Fatah who were not allowed to leave Gaza this week to attend the movement's conference in Bethlehem.

While Hamas is cracking down on its own civilians, it has lowered its terrorist profile since the end of Cast Lead in mid-January. During the three-week operation, more than 800 Kassams and mortars were fired at Israel. Since the war's end, only 170 have been launched.

There are a number of reasons for the lull. Firstly, Hamas is still rehabilitating its damaged military infrastructure, and needs time to rearm and rebuild bombed-out tunnels and command centers. Secondly, it is in the midst of Egyptian-mediated talks with Fatah regarding a potential reconciliation which could lead to the terror group's rejoining the PA government.

In addition, it is also gearing up for elections that may be held in January. Another war with Israel would cause more damage to Gaza, and possibly impact negatively on public opinion.

THIS DOESN'T mean that Gaza is terror-free, however. Rather, Hamas is allowing smaller groups to do the dirty work. On July 29, an explosion rocked a Hamas military training camp in Khan Yunis, likely caused by a "work accident."

A day later, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine held a military march in Rafah, where its operatives displayed their uniforms and weaponry.

Israel is increasingly concerned with the possibility that elections will be held in the PA, and fears a Fatah defeat. Though recent polls show Fatah leading by 10 percent, this was the same assessment ahead of the 2006 elections which brought Hamas to power.

Israeli officials have conveyed this concern to PA President Mahmoud Abbas - who publicly declares his support for the elections - and to European and American leaders. "It is in our interest to oppose the elections," a senior Defense Ministry official said.

Indeed, the current situation is optimal for the IDF. The Palestinians are not united, and Hamas is not involved in the political process. Fatah officials openly admit that they do not talk directly with Hamas, but use mediators in Syria, Egypt and Jordan.

Israel is comfortable with its current partners, Abbas and Prime Minister Salaam Fayad. An unprecedented number of businesses have opened in the PA this year; hundreds of roadblocks and checkpoints have been removed; and the International Monetary Fund predicts that the West Bank economy will grow by 7 percent.

For this reason, Israel is concerned that the Fatah conference in Bethlehem will end with decisions that could undermine Fayad's authority. The conference, the sixth of its kind, opened on Tuesday, and was attended by more than 2,000 delegates from across the Arab world. On the agenda was choosing a new leadership and platform for the movement.

Veiled anxiety

Israel's worry is that the new leadership will not only be more radical, but would want to see one of its own - a member of Fatah - as PA prime minister, instead of Fayad. If this happens, the positive developments in the West Bank could end.

Graphic

Photo: SHARIA IN Gaza. **Women** are now ordered to wear hijabs, veils and long black robes when strolling along the beach. (Credit: AP)

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

Three Christians, one Israeli elected to Fatah council

The Irish Times

August 17, 2009 Monday

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Section: WORLD; Other World Stories; Pg. 9

Length: 427 words

Byline: MICHAEL JANSEN

Body

THE PALESTINIAN Fatah movement has released the list of 81 members elected to the revolutionary council, the organisation's second-highest consultative body.

Among the victors were 11 women, three Christians and one Jewish Israeli, Dr Uri Davis, a dissident academic who joined Fatah in the 1980s.

The elections, the first in 20 years, to Fatah's two decision-making bodies took place last weekend and results for the 23-member central council, headed by Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, were declared on Tuesday.

Yesterday, Mr Abbas announced that the Fatah-dominated Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) would proceed with elections for the Palestinian National Council, a parliament bringing together Palestinians from both the Israeli-occupied territories and the diaspora.

West Bank-based Fatah is proceeding with these popular consultations to bolster its legitimacy at a time when the movement is facing a severe challenge from Hamas, which rules Gaza, and is under increasing pressure from Arab governments, particularly those of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to reconcile with Hamas and form a national unity government.

Fatah and Hamas representatives are scheduled to meet in Cairo on August 25th to continue talks on how to achieve these ends but Mr Abbas does not wish to pursue reconciliation. Hamas chief Khaled Mishaal said the Cairo-brokered talks may not reconvene.

In Gaza, Hamas strengthened its position and boosted its call for dialogue with western governments by taking on and defeating Jund Ansar Allah, or Soldiers for God, a radical Muslim faction which last Friday proclaimed an Islamic emirate in Gaza. In a shoot-out in a mosque in the southern town of Rafah, Hamas security forces killed the group's leader and a dozen of his followers. About 100 members of the group have been arrested.

De-facto Gaza prime minister Ismail Haniyeh said Hamas was obliged to take action against Jund Ansar Allah because it had worked against the government, described it as irreligious, and armed themselves in opposition. These were radicals who blew themselves up amidst security officers.

Hamas, which is observing a ceasefire with Israel, was angered when the group launched an attack on the Nahal Oz fuel-delivery facility on the border with Israel.

Three Christians, one Israeli elected to Fatah council

Hamas claims to be the legitimate authority in Gaza and insists that its security forces should have a monopoly on weapons. It argues that it is a national liberation organisation rather than a militant Muslim salafi grouping like Jund Ansar Allah, which is said to have connections with al-Qaeda.

Load-Date: August 17, 2009

End of Document

Israel moves closer to freeing captive soldier

Daily News Egypt

September 30, 2009 Wednesday

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Length: 787 words

Body

JERUSALEM: Israel and **Hamas** fighters announced a deal Wednesday that will see Israel release 20 Palestinian **women** from prison this week in exchange for a videotape proving that a captive Israeli soldier held in the Gaza Strip is still alive.

The decision was the first tangible sign of movement in more than three years of talks over the release of the soldier, Sgt. Gilad Shalit, who has not been seen since he was captured by **Hamas**-linked fighters in a cross-border raid in June, 2006.

Shalit's release, which does not appear imminent, would defuse a central point of contention and could help ease a crippling Israeli blockade on the **Hamas**-ruled Gaza Strip.

In a statement, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Wednesday that it expects Shalit's **Hamas** captors to release a recent videotape of the soldier. The deal is to be carried out on Friday.

The statement said Israel's Security Cabinet accepted the deal, put forward by Egyptian and German mediators, as a "confidence-building measure." It quoted a senior official in Netanyahu's office as saying the negotiations are still "expected to be long and difficult."

The deal was carried out, the statement said, "ahead of the critical stages in the negotiations for the release of Gilad Shalit and based on Israel's commitment to work with determination to bring him home quickly."

Hamas is demanding that Israel release hundreds of prisoners, many of whom are serving lengthy sentences for violent attacks on Israelis, in exchange for the soldier. Israel has balked at many of **Hamas**' demands.

In Gaza, a **Hamas** spokesman using the pseudonym Abu Obeida confirmed that 20 **female** prisoners were expected to be released in the coming days. He made no mention of a videotape of Shalit, saying only that **Hamas** would respond by "clarifying" the soldier's condition.

"This simple deal is a precursor, God willing, to a comprehensive deal," he said.

He said the prisoners would come from various Palestinian factions, including **Hamas**, the rival Fatah movement and Islamic Jihad, and that one was from Gaza while the rest were from the Fatah-controlled West Bank.

Israel moves closer to freeing captive soldier

Israel says that while the women were jailed for security-related offenses they were not directly involved in killing Israelis and are all within two years of the end of their prison sentences. Their names were to be published Wednesday, allowing a legally mandated 48-hour period for court appeals against their release before the deal is carried out.

A senior Egyptian official involved in the mediation said the move was designed to create "an atmosphere of trust."

"There is no doubt that this step will support the efforts of all sides to solve the problem," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity under security guidelines.

Egypt has been trying to mediate a prisoner swap since Hamas-linked fighters tunneled into Israel in June 2006 and attacked an Israeli tank, killing two crewmen and capturing Shalit.

The Israeli soldier has not been seen since his capture and the Red Cross has not been allowed to visit him. But several letters and an audio recording have been released by his captors.

Netanyahu believes it is important that the world know Shalit is alive and well and that his safety is Hamas' responsibility, according to the statement from his office.

Both Hamas and Israel appear eager to wrap up a deal.

For Israel, the return of Shalit would end a painful chapter. In a country where military service is mandatory, Israelis have rallied behind the soldier and his family, holding protests calling for his release and decorating their cars with bumper stickers bearing his name. One news anchor even ends his broadcast each night by mentioning how long Shalit has been in captivity.

Hamas, meanwhile, wants to end a painful Israeli-led economic blockade of Gaza that has caused widespread shortages of many basic items. These shortages have prevented Hamas from repairing the massive damage caused in Gaza by an Israeli military offensive last winter.

Israel imposed the blockade after Hamas, a violent group backed by Iran and Syria, seized power in Gaza two years ago. Officials have said the embargo will not be lifted until Shalit comes home.

The closure has led to a bustling smuggling business along Gaza's border with Egypt. On Wednesday, two smugglers were killed and four were injured when a tunnel under the border collapsed. A paramedic said the men were working in a tunnel in an area struck by the Israeli military the night before.

The Israeli army confirmed it targeted three tunnels in response to rocket and mortar fire from Gaza in the previous two days. Israel says the tunnels are used to smuggle weapons into Gaza.

More than 120 people have died in tunnel collapses since 2007.

Load-Date: September 30, 2009

Getting the interests straight

The Jerusalem Post

November 25, 2009 Wednesday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 3

Length: 763 words

Byline: YAAKOV KATZ

Highlight: ANALYSIS

Body

In October, when Israel released 20 **female** prisoners in exchange for a video of Gilad Schalit, defense officials at the time said that **Hamas** was not interested in an immediate deal and preferred to wait for a date closer to elections in the Palestinian Authority to boost its popularity.

Israel's interest has always been the opposite: To release Schalit far away enough from the elections - which have since been postponed to an unknown date - to prevent the mass release of prisoners, which will naturally be credited to **Hamas**, from significantly undermining PA President Mahmoud Abbas. Abbas is the leader Israel has tried to bolster in recent years and with whom Israel ultimately hopes to make peace.

The release of Schalit, commonly looked at only with regard to the heavy price Israel will pay, entails a multitude of interests by many different players including Israel, **Hamas**, Fatah and the United States. Quite the burden for one soldier who has been in **Hamas** captivity for almost three-and-a-half years.

The Israeli interest is twofold and also seemingly contradictory. On the one hand, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, like Ehud Olmert before him, wants to retrieve Schalit, but at the same time avoid strengthening **Hamas**.

While **Hamas** will be boosted in the immediate future by the release of over 1,000 prisoners, the delay in Palestinian elections - the election commission will meet in December to set a new date - may diminish the effect.

In addition, if reports are true that **Hamas** prisoner and Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti will be released in the swap, he is believed to have the public support needed to bolster Abbas and counter **Hamas**'s strengthening as well.

For Abbas, Barghouti could be the ace up his sleeve. So far, he has remained silent on the impending deal and is traveling through South America. He spoke in Argentina on Monday of the need for renewed negotiations and an Israeli freeze on settlement construction, but made no mention of Schalit.

For Netanyahu, the swap could mean one of two things. On the one hand, he will be recognized by most Israelis (the ones who support the deal) as taking a brave step and succeeding where others failed before him, after less than a year in office. On the other hand, Netanyahu holds himself to be a hardliner who has preached against surrendering to terrorism. Caving in to **Hamas**'s demands will be perceived as doing just that.

Getting the interests straight

Together with his PR team, he will try to spin the story differently, mainly by saying that Olmert set the standard with the negotiations he held and therefore he, Netanyahu, had no choice but to accept the format. From Schalit forward, though, Netanyahu will likely claim Israel will no longer pay such prices. This, of course, remains to be seen.

The main battle though will begin the moment the prisoners are released by Israel and it will be between **Hamas** and Fatah over the Palestinian public opinion.

Like in previous prisoner swaps, those released to the West Bank will likely first stop at the Mukata in Ramallah for an embrace and picture with Abbas, even if he cannot be directly credited with their release. **Hamas** officials will likely argue that they are the real leaders of the Palestinian people and that only they can secure the release of prisoners.

Israelis will have a lot to ponder regarding the release of some of the hardcore prisoners on **Hamas**'s list as published in Arab newspapers. Barghouti, for example, is currently serving five life sentences in an Israeli prison. Ahmad Sa'adat, the PFLP leader whom Israel captured in a daring raid in Jericho several years ago and who was behind the assassination of former tourism minister Rehavam Ze'evi, is also rumored to be on the list, as published in Arab newspapers.

But there are other names with which the public is less familiar who are reported by Arab newspapers to be on the list, such as Ibrahim Hamed, the former head of the **Hamas** military wing and responsible for dozens of Israeli deaths, as well as Abed Said, who dispatched the suicide bomber to the Park Hotel on Seder night seven years ago.

There is also the issue of the release of east Jerusalem Arabs, who also appear to be on **Hamas**'s list as published in Arab newspapers.

Their release would be something of a precedent for Israel, by linking the release of its own citizens, even if they are terrorists, with a deal it is carrying out with a Palestinian terror group. What would happen to these Israeli Arabs? Would they go back to their homes in Israel, continue to receive National Insurance benefits and vote in elections after their release?

Graphic

Photo: Marwan Barghouti (Credit: AP)

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

The fractures of Palestine

New Straits Times (Malaysia)

August 17, 2009 Monday

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Section: Pg. 16; LOCAL

Length: 423 words

Body

DEVELOPMENTS in a cracked and bleeding Palestine are racing ahead of whatever halting progress could possibly be made on the "road map" to the "two-state solution" advocated, with varying degrees of sympathy to Israel, by various United States administrations. If there were only President Mahmoud Abbas' Palestinian Authority on the Palestinian side of that equation, the signs could be considered hopeful, even promising. Abbas' Fatah party has concluded its first assembly in 20 years significantly refreshed. The aging Fatah freedom fighters who returned from exile in Syria, Egypt and Jordan to Bethlehem for the assembly helped elect 11 women to the party's 81-member congress and 14 younger leaders to the 19-member central committee. This has positioned Fatah well to liaise with the Palestine Liberation Organisation on convening the Palestinian National Council as government-in-exile.

But Palestine is not just the West Bank. In the Gaza Strip, Fatah's bitter rival Hamas holds sway - and that tiny territory hemmed in on all sides by hostility has become a microcosm of the fates of polities forged in enmity. Hamas hounded out Fatah authorities to gain control of Gaza two years ago. Now Hamas' rallying sentiment of dissatisfaction with Fatah's "appeasements" of Israel and the US is being usurped by those who consider Hamas' own accommodation of the hated foe as a betrayal of its founding goal to "destroy" Israel.

A Hamas maturing to the value of diplomacy and political solutions is not extreme enough for the likes of preacher Abdel Latif Moussa and his Jund Ansar Allah "Warriors of God", apparently dedicated to establishing a strict religious "emirate" on the Strip, and blown away over the weekend by Hamas security forces in engagements that left more than a score dead on both sides. Hamas had had enough of that gadfly, but there are others. The al-Qaeda resemblance among groups like these is striking, but the connections could be as direct or indirect as it is with groups like Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia or Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines: they feed on the decomposition of their own societies. Under the leadership of Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas is, to its credit, trying to develop a semblance of both politics and governance in Gaza, within which to contain the fiery radicalism of its founding. Now it faces the sundry rebellions of splinter groups inspired by its own intransigent early example, but fuelled by motives deeper than Hamas' nationalistic devotion to a liberated and independent Palestinian homeland.

Load-Date: August 17, 2009

Professionals in Gaza fear 'very dark years' of isolation

The International Herald Tribune

October 27, 2009 Tuesday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 8

Length: 1134 words

Byline: ETHAN BRONNER

Dateline: GAZA

Body

ABSTRACT

But the misery of the educated and professional class has a particular poignancy.

FULL TEXT

The bank executive sits in suit and tie behind his broad empty desk with plenty of time to talk. Almost no loans are being issued or corporate plans made. The Texas-trained engineer closed his firm, since nothing is being built. The business student who dreamed of attending an American university, filling a computer file with meticulous hopes and plans, has stopped dreaming. He goes from school to part-time job to home, where he joins his merchant father, who sits unemployed.

Ten months after the Israeli military invaded the Gaza Strip, with the stated purpose of stopping daily rocket fire, there are many ways to measure the misery here. Bits of rubble are being cleared, but nothing is going up. Several thousand homes remain destroyed. Several dozen families still live in United Nations tents strung amid their ruined houses. A three-year embargo imposed by Israel and Egypt on Hamas, the Palestinian faction that governs the Strip, keeps nearly all factories shut and supplies away. Eighty percent of the population gets some form of assistance.

But the misery of the educated and professional class has a particular poignancy. Many abroad view Gaza as a large slum. In fact, there is nearly universal literacy here, and infant mortality is low by regional standards. Midsize glass towers gleam. Many thousands have advanced degrees. Half a dozen stylish restaurants are filled each day with young women, a few with heads uncovered, carrying laptop computers and with the underemployed who smoke hookahs and lament their future.

"We are entering very dark years," said Slama Bissiso, vice chairman of the Palestinian Bar Association, slowly exhaling the scented tobacco smoke on the balcony of the Deira Hotel, which overlooks the Mediterranean. He said the embargo on Gaza and the divide between the Hamas government here and the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority in the West Bank were driving Gaza into deeper isolation every month.

The Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas, announced Friday that elections would be held in January. But it was effectively an announcement that Fatah and Hamas had failed to reconcile their differences despite Egyptian mediation. There will be no election here without Hamas's agreement, and it has no intention of granting

Professionals in Gaza fear 'very dark years' of isolation

that now. If that means a vote will ultimately be held in the West Bank only, the horizons of Gaza will retreat even further.

Hamas's control of Gaza feels solidly unchallenged. Its security forces patrol the streets. Pictures of Mr. Abbas with big X's across his face line the main avenue, Unity Street. A sign after the Israeli border bars even foreigners from bringing in alcohol. Left out of the global banking system, **Hamas** affiliates opened their own recently. In keeping with Shariah, it does not charge interest or offer loans, making money by buying cars or homes the customer wants, then reselling them at a higher price.

The increasing isolation of Gaza is taking its toll in many ways. Opportunities for training and education abroad or for outsiders to come here, for example, are scarce. The children's library in the center of the city could not persuade either Israeli or Egyptian officials to let anyone in to help them set up new programs or carry out quality control.

Executives at a Palestinian cellphone company, Jawwal, sat at their work stations last week and said their jobs were getting harder because spare parts and training were unavailable. Its managers used to travel abroad once a month.

Although 1,100 students admitted to programs abroad did get through the crossing into Egypt over the past few months - and 50 others were granted permission through Israel - more than 800 others who had spots waiting for them were unable to leave, according to Gisha, an Israeli rights group focused on freedom of movement for Palestinians.

Many of the professionals here reject **Hamas**'s ideology, but some voted for it in 2006 out of rage over Fatah's corruption.

"**Hamas** won by a slim margin and it was because of people like me," said Mohamed, who comes from a Fatah family and works for a charity. "I regret voting for them. I wanted to punish Fatah."

Mohamed went to college in the United States and lived on the West Coast for 12 years. Like nearly all in Gaza who spoke about politics, he asked that his identity be hidden for fear of what the government might do. The rules of political dissent remain fuzzy.

The Texas trained engineer also voted for **Hamas** in 2006 and also wishes he had not. "Israel is saying, 'Because you elected **Hamas**, you should have no life,'" he said. "Yet people elected **Hamas** because of Fatah corruption. I believe in peace with Israel but I wanted desperately to get away from the corruption. I didn't expect **Hamas** to win. Next time, I won't vote at all."

Israel allows about 100 trucks a day to pass into Gaza bearing food, medicine and other humanitarian goods. But it has closed off commerce in the hope of alienating the population here from their rulers. That seems to be happening. Yet if no election occurs, it is hard to see how the alienation can be expressed or government changed. Meanwhile, a generation of Gazans grows up with little hope or exposure to other ways and values.

Israel wants to isolate **Hamas** because the group rejects Israel's existence. As Ayman Taha, a **Hamas** movement spokesman, said in an interview, "Our long-term strategy is the liberation of all of Palestine, but we would agree to a temporary solution involving a state in the 1967 borders with a truce of about 10 years, depending on the conditions of the truce."

Egypt rejects **Hamas** because of its affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo. Egypt and Israel worry about Iranian arming of the group as well.

While the legitimate economy here depends on foreign aid that provides salaries for tens of thousands to do little, the black market from high-priced goods smuggled in hundreds of tunnels from Egypt is thriving, leading to the growth of a tunnel crime syndicate.

Professionals in Gaza fear 'very dark years' of isolation

Professionals here are deeply frustrated that their only political options are Fatah, which they still consider corrupt, and **Hamas**, whose ideology poses problems both for them and for many foreign governments. Some said the rejection of **Hamas** by the world meant it made no sense for it to stay in power, but they had no idea how to effect a change.

"I'd like to see the creation of a political alternative with businesspeople instead of **Hamas** and Fatah," said Rami Alagha, 39, manager of Jawwal, the cellphone company. "The United States and the Europeans could get behind such a program. Otherwise, we have no future. Today, everyone is depressed and anxious. People take it out on their families."

Load-Date: October 28, 2009

End of Document

Israel swaps 20 prisoners for Schalit film

Scotsman

October 1, 2009 Thursday

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Length: 454 words

Byline: Ben Lynfield in Jerusalem

Highlight: IN A move aimed at breaking three years of deadlock over the capture of one of its soldiers, Israel will tomorrow set free 20 Palestinian women prisoners in exchange for Hamas releasing a videotape proving Corporal Gilad Schalit is still alive.

Body

Yesterday's announcements by Tel Aviv and Hamas were the first signs yet that the two sides may be moving towards a deal, ending their stand-off over what price Israel should pay to regain Cpl Schalit, who was captured in a cross-border raid and taken to Gaza three years ago.

Hamas has previously forwarded letters from him but there have been no pictures and the Islamic militant group has denied the Red Cross access.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the security cabinet had approved the deal after it was proposed by Egyptian and German mediators as a "confidence-building measure".

Hamas has been demanding that Israel release hundreds of prisoners, many of them serving lengthy sentences for violent attacks on Israelis, in exchange for Cpl Schalit. Israel has balked at those demands.

Hamas wants a wider deal, ending the Israeli and Egyptian blockades on Gaza that have caused widespread shortages and left it unable to repair damage from last winter's Israeli military operation because of a shortage of building materials.

Israeli officials have said the embargo will not be lifted until Cpl Schalit is returned.

A lopsided swap, as seems to be shaping up, would be a huge victory for Hamas, boosting its standing at the expense of the Fatah movement, headed by president Mahmoud Abbas, and signalling that armed struggle, rather than negotiation, is the way to get things out of Israel.

"This is a great step in the right direction," Hamas's senior leader in the West Bank, Aziz Dweik, told The Scotsman. "This gives me the impression that the exchange of prisoners will come pretty soon."

Mr Netanyahu said it was vital to get the video of Cpl Schalit. "It is important the whole world see Gilad is alive and healthy and that Hamas is responsible for his health and well being," he said.

Israel swaps 20 prisoners for Schalit film

His government is under pressure to bring Cpl Schalit home, even at high cost, because Israelis - who perform mandatory military service - strongly identify with the soldier and his family, and believe it is the government's obligation to bring troops back from the battlefield.

Musa Abu Marzouk, the deputy head of **Hamas**'s political department, pointed to Israel's agreement to release the **women** prisoners as a reason for militant groups to take more soldiers as prisoners. "Zionist soldiers must be imprisoned by resistance factions so that they can be traded for our prisoners," he said.

Of the 20 **women**, four are from **Hamas**, five from Fatah, three from the Islamic Jihad and one from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Israel said all 20 had been jailed for security-related offences, were not directly involved in killing Israelis and were within two years of the end of their sentences.

Load-Date: March 14, 2011

End of Document

SWAP OF PALESTINIAN PRISONERS FOR ISRAEL SOLDIER REPORTED NEAR; SGT. SHALIT KIDNAPPED FROM GAZA BORDER POST IN 2006

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Pennsylvania)

November 24, 2009 Tuesday

SOONER EDITION

Copyright 2009 P.G. Publishing Co.

Section: WORLD; Pg. A-4

Length: 537 words

Byline: Richard Boudreaux, Los Angeles Times

Body

JERUSALEM -- Expectations of a swap of hundreds of jailed Palestinian militants for an Israeli soldier held by **Hamas** soared yesterday after some of the most promising signs of progress in years of negotiations.

Citing the sensitivity of indirect talks with its bitter enemy, Israel's government imposed silence on its officials and tight censorship on its news media to try to keep the details of an emerging agreement under wraps.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the militant group's leadership in the Gaza Strip played down the likelihood of an imminent deal, even as other officials on both sides fueled speculation of one.

"The light has dawned," Ahmad Bahar, a **Hamas** official who is deputy speaker of the Palestinian Parliament, declared to a group of Palestinian prisoners' relatives in Gaza. "You will soon meet your imprisoned sons."

Negotiations have been under way since shortly after Sgt. Gilad Shalit was dragged from a border post into Gaza in June 2006, but conditions for a deal have ripened only recently. Early last month, Israel freed 20 Palestinian **female** prisoners in return for a proof-of-life video of the 23-year-old Israel tank crewman.

Talk of his impending release began filling Israeli and Palestinian news media and blogs over the weekend, fueled by unofficial reports of concessions by both sides.

Israeli President Shimon Peres, after meeting Sunday in Cairo with Egyptian and German mediators, confirmed that there had been progress in the negotiations. Moussa Abu Mazrouk, **Hamas**' deputy political leader, also reported a narrowing of differences over terms of a swap, as senior **Hamas** officials from Gaza and Syria arrived in Cairo yesterday to meet with the mediators. Neither Mr. Peres nor Mr. Mazrouk would elaborate publicly.

But several unofficial accounts said Sgt. Shalit would be freed from clandestine detention in Gaza and sent to Egypt in return for about 450 Palestinian prisoners, then brought home to Israel in exchange for hundreds more.

One account, by the **Hamas** journal A-Risala, said the two sides had agreed on all but one of the prisoners to be included in the swap. A **Hamas** official in Cairo said, however, that the gap was wider, and that **Hamas** was still discussing an Israeli proposal that 150 freed Palestinians be expelled to other countries and barred from returning to Gaza or the West Bank.

SWAP OF PALESTINIAN PRISONERS FOR ISRAEL SOLDIER REPORTED NEAR SGT. SHALIT
KIDNAPPED FROM GAZA BORDER POST IN 2006

Some **Hamas** officials said they hoped an agreement would be concluded by Friday, the start of the Muslim Eid al-Adha holiday.

Last evening, however, **Hamas** leadership issued a statement saying, "It is still too early to talk about definitive results any time soon." It accused Israel of leaking details to raise the expectations of prisoners' families and bring pressure on **Hamas** negotiators to make concessions.

Mr. Netanyahu resisted pressure to explain the reported terms of a swap to members of his right-wing Likud Party. An Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity after the closed meeting said Mr. Netanyahu told them: "There is no deal and no decision. ... It is still not clear what is happening with the other side."

The Israeli leader said any proposed agreement would go to the Knesset, Israel's parliament, for debate and to the Cabinet for approval.

Load-Date: November 24, 2009

End of Document

Exchange begins for Shalit tape; Israel releases 19 Palestinian women

The Age (Melbourne, Australia)

October 3, 2009 Saturday

First Edition

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Section: NEWS; International News; Pg. 16

Length: 470 words

Byline: CALEV BEN-DAVID. BLOOMBERG

Body

ISRAEL began its release of 20 **female** Palestinian prisoners in return for a videotape proving that Gilad Shalit, a soldier held captive in the **Hamas**-controlled Gaza Strip for more than three years, is alive.

A bus carrying 19 of the prisoners left a military prison near the Israeli-occupied West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday, its departure broadcast live on Israel's Channel 1 television.

The prisoners will return to their homes in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip after officials in the Israeli Prime Minister's office receive the tape of Corporal Shalit from a German mediator and confirm its authenticity. A 20th prisoner is scheduled to be freed tomorrow.

No decision had been reached yet on whether the tape would be made public, said an official in the Prime Minister's office, who commented on condition of anonymity.

The decision whether to release the tape would be made jointly with Corporal Shalit's family, who were to receive a copy, the official said.

"It is important that the entire world knows that Gilad Shalit is alive and well and that **Hamas** is responsible for his fate and safety," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said two days ago in a statement announcing the exchange.

The only contact between Corporal Shalit, who holds Israeli and French citizenship, and the outside world during the past three years has been three letters and one audio tape recording.

The current deal was arranged by a German mediator acting under Egyptian auspices, the Israeli Prime Minister's office said this week.

Nineteen of the **women** are from the occupied West Bank and one is from the besieged Gaza Strip.

A **Hamas** spokesman said four of the **women** were affiliated with the Islamist group.

Egypt has been trying to broker a prisoner exchange between Israel and **Hamas** for more than a year.

Israel balked at **Hamas** demands earlier this year to free hundreds of prisoners in exchange for the soldier.

Exchange begins for Shalit tape Israel releases 19 Palestinian women

Germany's foreign intelligence service had also been involved in trying to arrange a swap, Germany's Der Spiegel news magazine reported last month.

Former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert rejected a prisoner exchange deal with **Hamas** in March because he said the group's demands for the swap were too extreme.

Hamas blamed Mr Olmert for the failure of the talks, saying its position hadn't changed from the moment of Corporal Shalit's capture.

Hamas has been asking for the release of 1000 prisoners, including 450 prisoners who are accused by Israel of direct involvement in the killing of Israeli civilians.

Israel sealed its borders with Gaza in 2007 after **Hamas** seized control of the coastal strip and ousted forces loyal to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

In December last year, Israel began a 22-day military offensive in Gaza, codenamed Operation Cast Lead, which killed more than 1300 Palestinians.

Load-Date: October 2, 2009

Shalit one step closer to home

The Australian

October 2, 2009 Friday

1 - All-round Country Edition

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Section: WORLD; Pg. 12

Length: 466 words

Byline: John Lyons

Body

CAPTURED Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit may have become the most valuable prisoner in the world when Israel agreed to release 20 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a one-minute video showing he is alive and in reasonable physical condition.

The deal was the first time since Benjamin Netanyahu became Prime Minister in March that Israel has agreed to any prisoner release, and it was seen in Israel as a possible precursor to a deal for the 23-year-old soldier to return home after being captured three years ago by Hamas fighters during a clash on the Gaza-Israel border.

The deal, brokered by German and Egyptian mediators, was the first the new Israeli government has done with Hamas -- even though only one of the prisoners will be released into Hamas-controlled Gaza. The rest will be released into the Fatah-controlled West Bank.

Shalit's case has huge resonance in Israel. The Israeli Defence Forces has a long-standing tradition of doing whatever it can to see the return of captured or killed soldiers, and in Jerusalem a large marquee has been set up on the footpath next to the Prime Minister's residence in Rehavia which each day shows the number of days Shalit has been held. His face is commonly seen on bumper stickers on cars around Israel.

Last year, the previous Olmert government considered the release of 450 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Shalit, but Israel refused to release about 120 of those on the Hamas wish-list because of their involvement in terrorist acts.

Announcing the deal, Mr Netanyahu said: "It is important that the entire world know that Gilad Shalit is alive and well, and that Hamas is responsible for his health and state."

A government statement said the deal came ahead of "the decisive stages" in negotiations for Shalit's release "and on the basis of the government of Israel's determination to bring him back home quickly while upholding Israel's vital interests".

The 20 prisoners are all women and none has been involved in any acts of terrorism. While 14 of them were in prison after being convicted of attempted murder, they were deemed not to be a continuing threat to Israel.

Under the system of prisoner release, the Israeli public now has 48 hours to check the list and lodge any complaints. Given that the prisoners proposed for release are not regarded as terrorists, and that the Israeli public

Shalit one step closer to home

is craving news of Shalit, there are not expected to be any complaints. If that is the case, the video will be handed over at the weekend.

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri was quoted by The Jerusalem Post saying the deal demonstrated **Hamas's** ``moral, religious and national obligation to end the case of the prisoners in Israeli jails". He said **Hamas** had insisted that the 20 prisoners be from different Palestinian groups, not just **Hamas**.

Load-Date: October 1, 2009

End of Document

Israel To Swap 20 Palestinian Prisoners For Video Of Abducted Soldier

RTT News (United States)

September 30, 2009 Wednesday

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Length: 285 words

Body

(RTTNews) - Israel announced Wednesday that it will release 20 Palestinian women prisoners in exchange for a recent videotape that would prove that Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier abducted by Hamas militants in 2006, is still alive.

"It is important that the entire world know that Gilad Shalit is alive and well and that Hamas is responsible for his well-being and fate," said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu's office said in a statement issued on Wednesday that the deal was proposed by international mediators as a "confidence-building measure." It added that Israeli authorities were still waiting for the video said to be taken recently by the captors of Shalit in Gaza.

Hamas confirmed the deal, with a spokesman for the armed wing of the organization telling reporters at a press conference in Gaza that 19 of the Palestinian women prisoners would be released in the West Bank, while a 20th one will be released from Gaza along with a child she had had in prison.

Gilad Shalit was captured by Hamas militants in a cross-border raid in June 2006. He has not been seen since his capture by Hamas militants.

Israel, which holds about 10,000 Palestinians as prisoners, said Wednesday that it will continue with negotiations for Shalit's release, but added that it expects the talks to be "long and arduous."

Previous Egyptian-mediated negotiations between Israeli officials and Hamas militants on a prisoner exchange scheme have ended dead-locked after the two sides failed to agree on the number of Palestinian prisoners to be released in exchange for the release of Shalit.

For comments and feedback: contact editorial@rttnews.com

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Load-Date: April 17, 2010

ISRAEL ORDERS MORE DISCUSSIONS ON SHALIT PRISONER SWAP

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Pennsylvania)

December 22, 2009 Tuesday

SOONER EDITION

Copyright 2009 P.G. Publishing Co.

Section: WORLD; Pg. A-4

Length: 359 words

Byline: Calev Ben-David, Bloomberg News

Body

JERUSALEM -- Israeli ministers early today ordered their negotiators to renew efforts to free captive soldier Gilad Shalit, declining for now to endorse a proposed deal with Hamas that would release hundreds of prisoners in exchange for him.

"The prime minister and ministers gave the negotiating team directives regarding the ongoing efforts to bring back Gilad Shalit safe and sound," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement issued after a meeting with six other ministers that ended past midnight.

Earlier yesterday, Sgt. Shalit's father, Noam, said he expected a government decision "very soon" on a swap with the Islamic Hamas movement that controls the Gaza Strip. Sgt. Shalit's parents and supporters of an agreement had rallied outside of Mr. Netanyahu's office as the ministers debated a proposal inside.

Sgt. Shalit, 23, was seized by Hamas militants in a June 25, 2006, attack on an Israeli army outpost on the Gaza border. Egypt has been trying to broker a prisoner exchange between Israel and Hamas for more than a year and was later joined by Germany. Israel balked at Hamas demands earlier this year to free hundreds of prisoners in exchange for Sgt. Shalit.

The soldier's captivity has been an emotional as well as a political issue in Israel, where the army pledges to make every effort to leave no soldier in enemy hands. In March, then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert rejected a prisoner exchange deal with Hamas because he said the group's demands were too extreme.

Hamas blamed Mr. Olmert for the failure of the talks, saying its position had not changed from the moment of Sgt. Shalit's capture.

The only contact between the soldier, who holds Israeli and French citizenship, and the outside world during his captivity has been three letters, an audio tape and a DVD that Israel received Oct. 2 in return for releasing 20 female Palestinian prisoners.

"I have been waiting and hoping for a long time for my freedom," Sgt. Shalit said in the DVD, broadcast on Israeli television. He urged Mr. Netanyahu not to "waste an opportunity to make a deal whose result is that I can finally realize my dream of being freed."

ISRAEL ORDERS MORE DISCUSSIONS ON SHALIT PRISONER SWAP

Load-Date: December 22, 2009

End of Document

Signs of life

The Jerusalem Post

October 2, 2009 Friday

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Section: OPINION; Pg. 13

Length: 726 words

Highlight: Editorial

Body

The onus has always been on kidnappers to prove that their hostages are alive and well. Yet this week, the government of Binyamin Netanyahu paid Hamas to do just that.

Rather than tell Hamas that unless it could prove Gilad Schalit was in good condition there was nothing to negotiate, Israel agreed to release 20 Palestinian women prisoners in exchange for a recent video of the captive soldier.

The official spin is that these Palestinian ladies are not accomplished terrorists. Yet each and every one of them tried to kill, or help someone else try to kill Israeli soldiers or civilians. They are members of Fatah, Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Some, like the knife-wielding Bara'a Malki, are juveniles serving short terms. Others such as the 47-year-old Zohar Hamdan, were caught smuggling suicide bomb belts.

Forget those stereotypes about Jewish business acumen. This was a bad bargain.

In paying for this "sign-of-life," Israel has also certified that Hamas's counterintelligence operation is superb. Clearly, our intelligence agencies don't have a handle on where Schalit is being kept - even though it's probably a relatively short drive from the Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv.

Discharging the women inmates is phase one of a deal that could see the staged release of 1,000 terrorists, including key operatives behind some of the most heinous bloodbaths carried out by the Palestinian "resistance." If things go smoothly for Hamas, it will have essentially achieved the objectives put forth the very first week Schalit was taken prisoner three years ago.

The main stumbling block to total Israeli capitulation is, apparently, the security establishment's insistence that the 1,000 terrorists be confined to the Gaza Strip. Assuming further elasticity of Israeli principles, a steadfast Hamas politburo will have triumphed over two consecutive Israeli cabinets loaded with savvy ex-generals.

WHILE PAYING Hamas's price will end the Schalit family's ordeal, it will also have two perilous repercussions: Some of Hamas's most able "engineers" and tacticians will resume their careers; and the movement's standing within the Palestinian polity - and in the international arena - will further solidify.

Palestinians assert that Israel is holding 9,000 prisoners. If one Israeli soldier can buy 1,000 prisoners, how many will it take to deliver the other 8,000?

Signs of life

From **Hamas**'s vantage point, all this could not come at a better time. The Islamists, under Egyptian auspices, may soon sign a "national unity" pact with Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah, paving the way for West Bank and Gaza elections in 2010. **Hamas** will then reasonably campaign as the "resistance" faction that can "deliver" Israeli concessions.

It is true that the Abbas "moderates" have shown no sign of wanting to come to an agreement with Israel - not with the Olmert-Livni government, and not with Netanyahu's. Fatah refuses to recognize the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state; Abbas's maximalist negotiating demands would have a militarized Palestine face a truncated Israel confined behind the 1949 Armistice Lines. Strategic settlement blocs would have to be abandoned. The cost of making peace on Abbas's terms would be acceding to the demand for millions of Palestinians to "return" to Israel proper.

Nor has Abbas prepared his people for the idea of coexistence. In fact, though he egged Israel on to rout **Hamas** during Operation Cast Lead, now he's exploiting the Goldstone Mission's findings, leading the bandwagon to have Defense Minister Ehud Barak, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi and Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin labeled "war criminals."

With all that, Abbas does proclaim his backing for a two-state solution. He does not advocate portraying the Palestinian conflict with Israel as part of the global jihad. **Hamas**, in contrast, will not even entertain the prospect of Israel's right to exist. And its theoreticians are unregenerate anti-Semites.

WE DO not presume to know the depth of suffering felt by Gilad Schalit and his parents, Noam and Aviva, dignified and indefatigable advocates for their son's freedom. But the government's responsibility extends to the entire House of Israel.

Much as we Israelis welcome a sign of life from the soldier whose fate is so much in our hearts, it is the government's duty to pursue his freedom mindful of the many other lives at stake down the road.

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

Settlers beat, seriously injure female Israeli police officer over West Bank construction ban

Guelph Mercury (Ontario, Canada)

December 15, 2009 Tuesday

Final Edition

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Section: Pg. 01

Length: 492 words

Dateline: ARTICLE

Body

JERUSALEM - Angry settlers beat and seriously injured a **female** Israeli police officer Tuesday, police said, as she tried to enforce a government ban on new housing construction in Jewish West Bank settlements.

It was the most serious clash between settlers and authorities since the building restrictions were imposed last month. Settlers have vowed to defy the orders and have confronted government inspectors, scuffling with them.

Tuesday's incident went beyond the usual pushing and shoving.

Police spokesman Gil Elhadad said about 100 settlers, most of them teenagers, burned tires and blocked the entrance to the settlement of Tsofit, in the northern part of the West Bank near the line with Israel. He said some of them jumped the police officer and beat her, breaking several ribs. She was taken to a hospital for treatment of serious injuries, he said. He did not give her name or age.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared the 10-month moratorium on construction of new housing in the West Bank as a gesture to the Palestinians, hoping they would resume peace negotiations.

However, Palestinian leaders rejected the move because it did not include east Jerusalem and allowed completion of about 3,000 housing units already under construction as well as putting up new public buildings, like schools and synagogues, in the settlements.

In the West Bank city of Ramallah, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told the PLO central council that Palestinians would not participate in peace negotiations until Israel fully freezes Israeli settlement building and agrees to recognize all areas captured in the 1967 Mideast war as the basis for a Palestinian state, referring to the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem.

"If there is a total freeze of settlement activity and recognition of 1967 borders, yes, we will go to negotiations," Abbas said.

Israel's position is that issues like settlements and borders should be discussed in negotiations, not as preconditions.

Settlers beat, seriously injure female Israeli police officer over West Bank construction ban

Also Tuesday, a Palestinian human rights group listed 116 **Hamas** activists who were arrested in the West Bank this week by the government dominated by the rival Fatah movement.

Jaber Wishah of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights said the **Hamas** members were detained in an attempt to pre-empt celebrations of **Hamas**' 22nd anniversary, marked on Monday with a huge rally in Gaza City.

Palestinian Authority police spokesman Adnan Damiri said the **Hamas** members were only summoned and warned that **Hamas** celebrations were "illegal."

The West Bank and Gaza have been ruled by rival governments since **Hamas** expelled forces loyal to Abbas from Gaza in 2007.

While both **Hamas** and Fatah frequently detain and abuse each other's members, rarely have so many people been arrested at once.

A **Hamas** official in the West Bank, who requested anonymity fearing arrest, said some detainees were released Tuesday, but he did not know how many.

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Additional reporting by Dalia Nammari in Ramallah, West Bank.

Load-Date: January 5, 2010

End of Document

Settlers beat and injure Israeli officer

Deseret Morning News (Salt Lake City)

December 16, 2009 Wednesday

Copyright 2009 The Deseret News Publishing Co.

Length: 485 words

Byline: Mark Lavie Associated Press

Body

JERUSALEM ? Angry settlers beat and seriously injured a **female** Israeli police officer Tuesday, police said, as she tried to enforce a government ban on new housing construction in Jewish West Bank settlements. It was the most serious clash between settlers and authorities since the building restrictions were imposed last month.

Settlers have vowed to defy the orders and have confronted government inspectors, scuffling with them. Tuesday's incident went beyond the usual pushing and shoving. Police spokesman Gil Elhadad said about 100 settlers, most of them teenagers, burned tires and blocked the entrance to the settlement of Tsofit, in the northern part of the West Bank near the line with Israel. He said some of them jumped the police officer and beat her, breaking several ribs. She was taken to a hospital for treatment of serious injuries, he said. He did not give her name or age. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared the 10-month moratorium on construction of new housing in the West Bank as a gesture to the Palestinians, hoping they would resume peace negotiations. However, Palestinian leaders rejected the move because it did not include east Jerusalem and allowed completion of about 3,000 housing units already under construction as well as putting up new public buildings, like schools and synagogues, in the settlements. In the West Bank city of Ramallah, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told the PLO central council that Palestinians would not participate in peace negotiations until Israel fully freezes Israeli settlement building and agrees to recognize all areas captured in the 1967 Mideast war as the basis for a Palestinian state, referring to the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem. "If there is a total freeze of settlement activity and recognition of 1967 borders, yes, we will go to negotiations," Abbas said. Israel's position is that issues like settlements and borders should be discussed in negotiations, not as preconditions. Also Tuesday, a Palestinian human rights group listed 116 **Hamas** activists who were arrested in the West Bank this week by the government dominated by the rival Fatah movement. Jaber Wishah of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights said the **Hamas** members were detained in an attempt to pre-empt celebrations of **Hamas**' 22nd anniversary, marked on Monday with a huge rally in Gaza City. Palestinian Authority police spokesman Adnan Damiri said the **Hamas** members were only summoned and warned that **Hamas** celebrations were "illegal." The West Bank and Gaza have been ruled by rival governments since **Hamas** expelled forces loyal to Abbas from Gaza in 2007. While both **Hamas** and Fatah frequently detain and abuse each other's members, rarely have so many people been arrested at once. A **Hamas** official in the West Bank, who requested anonymity fearing arrest, said some detainees were released Tuesday, but he did not know how many.

Load-Date: December 16, 2009

Female Israeli police officer severely beaten

Charleston Daily Mail (West Virginia)

December 16, 2009, Wednesday

Copyright 2009 Charleston Newspapers

Section: NEWS; Pg. P5A

Length: 492 words

Byline: THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Body

JERUSALEM - Angry settlers beat and seriously injured a ***female*** Israeli police officer Tuesday, police said, as she tried to enforce a government ban on new housing construction in Jewish West Bank settlements.

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Additional reporting by Dalia Nammari in Ramallah, West Bank.

Load-Date: December 17, 2009

End of Document

Israel to free 20 prisoners for proof Shalit alive

AlArabiya.net

September 29, 2009 Tuesday

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Length: 332 words

Body

Israel will free 20 Palestinian women prisoners in exchange for a video of soldier Gilad Shalit, proving he is still alive after he was captured by Gaza fighters in June 2006, Israeli and Palestinian sources said on Wednesday.

"The Israeli security cabinet decided to authorize the release of 20 Palestinian women detainees and prisoners," the Israeli prime minister's office said in a statement. "Israel will receive updated and clear proof on the health and condition of Gilad Shalit. This proof of life will be handed to Israel by the (Egyptian) mediators in the form of a videotape that has recently been filmed."

The deal had been proposed by Egyptians and Germans mediating between Israel and the Hamas rulers of Gaza, senior officials said.

The armed wing of Hamas confirmed the deal, saying "the Palestinian prisoners will be released within days."

A source close to the negotiations said he expected the women prisoners and the information on Shalit to be exchanged on Friday. Israel said it would publish a list of the women to be freed, to allow objections to their release by its citizens.

"Humanitarian gesture"

"This is a humanitarian gesture," said an Egyptian source, who has been close to Cairo's mediation efforts that have been going on between Gaza's rulers and Israel for many months.

A spokesman for Hamas's armed wing, Abu Ubeida, told a news conference in Gaza: "This is a success for the Egyptian and German mediators."

He said four of the women to be released were members of Hamas, while 5 were members of the rival Fatah movement. A further 3 were members of Islamic Jihad and the others were from other Palestinian groups.

Shalit, a young conscript who was a corporal at the time, was seized by fighters from Hamas and allied groups during a raid on an Israeli border base in 2006.

He has not been visited by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Israel to free 20 prisoners for proof Shalit alive

Israel holds more than 10,000 Palestinians in its jails. **Hamas** is negotiating for the release of hundreds of its members.

Load-Date: September 30, 2009

End of Document

Israel Rejects UN Report On Gaza War Crimes

RTT News (United States)

September 16, 2009 Wednesday

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Length: 457 words

Body

(RTTNews) - Israel on Wednesday rejected a UN report into alleged war crimes committed by Israeli security forces during the recent Gaza offensive, and said it would launch a diplomatic offensive to prevent any prosecutions of its soldiers by an international war crimes tribunal.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it was "appalled and disappointed" by the "biased" UN report, adding that Israel "did not feel able to cooperate with the Fact Finding Mission because its mandate was clearly one-sided."

"Both the mandate of the Mission and the resolution establishing it prejudged the outcome of any investigation, gave legitimacy to the Hamas terrorist organization and disregarded the deliberate Hamas strategy of using Palestinian civilians as cover for launching terrorist attacks," the statement added.

The Israeli response came a day after a UN-appointed investigating committee released its findings on alleged war crimes committed by Israeli forces and Hamas militants during the December-January Gaza conflict.

The UN team, led by South African Judge Richard Goldstone, was appointed by the UN's Human Rights Council and was charged with investigating the allegations of war crimes committed by Israeli military and Hamas fighters during the Gaza conflict.

The 575-page report published by the UN team on Tuesday concluded that "actions amounting to war crimes and possibly, in some respects, crimes against humanity were committed by the Israel Defense Force," and Hamas militants during the Gaza offensive.

The UN team also listed a series of recommendations in its report, including the handing over of the case to an international tribunal if Israel fails to investigate the war crimes allegedly committed by its soldiers during the Gaza offensive.

Israel had launched a 22-day offensive against the Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip on 27th December in response to continued rocket fire into southern Israel by Palestinian militants in Gaza. The three-week war was finally halted on 17th January by separate unilateral cease-fire declarations by Israel and Hamas, the radical Islamist group that controls the Gaza Strip.

Earlier in the year, Israeli army had disputed the Palestinian claims that 1400 Gazans were killed in the conflict, stating that investigations revealed that only 1,116 Palestinians were killed in the three-week long offensive.

The military had acknowledged that 295 Palestinian civilians were killed during the operation, including 49 women and 89 children under the age of 16. It said that 162 Palestinians killed in the offensive "have not yet been attributed to any organization."

Israel Rejects UN Report On Gaza War Crimes

For comments and feedback: contact editorial@rttnews.com

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Load-Date: April 17, 2010

End of Document

The Islamic republic of Gaza

The Jerusalem Post

September 29, 2009 Tuesday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 5

Length: 959 words

Byline: JONATHAN SPYER

Highlight: ANALYSIS

Body

Deriving accurate and reliable information from within the **Hamas**-ruled Gaza Strip is not easy. The Strip is largely closed to journalists, and its inhabitants are reluctant to speak in detail of events there.

Nevertheless, reliable sources confirm that one observable trend taking place there is the growing dominance of Islam. This process is being driven forward by the growing strength of Salafi and extreme Sunni elements.

A slow introduction of Islamic norms and practices into society began immediately following the **Hamas** victory in PLC elections in January 2006. This process was accelerated following **Hamas**'s seizure of exclusive control of Gaza in 2007.

However, there are clear internal differences in the movement regarding the pace of change. **Hamas**'s current leadership has tended to favor a slow encouragement of Islamic practices and rules, without straying too far from the desires of the broader public.

More hardline and Salafi elements within the movement want a stricter and more formal introduction of Islamic norms. Events over the last 18 months indicate that the latter camp is now making the running, with **Hamas**'s leadership under pressure from extreme forces both within the movement and beyond it.

This change is being felt in the very fabric of daily life in Gaza. A transition of the status of Islamic observance from social norm to legal compulsion is under way.

The most obvious sign of this is the creation of the new "Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice" security force, which operates under the command of the Ministry of the Waqf (Islamic Endowment).

This force is tasked with enforcing Islamic codes of behavior. Its members patrol beaches, parks and public areas, ensuring proper Islamic modesty.

One source describes how a man wearing shorts while sitting on his own balcony in southern Gaza was spotted and advised that this must not happen again. Rules banning men from bathing topless, and **women** (who may still bathe separately from men and fully covered) from laughing or smiling while bathing, are also in the process of enforcement.

The Islamic republic of Gaza

A special all-**female** unit within the police has also been created, with responsibility for enforcing **female** modesty and handling **female** suspects. This force, numbering 100-150 officers, wear niqab and gloves, with only an eye slit visible.

Other forms of social control are also being strengthened. Every mosque now has an Amir al-jamia or "head of the community" who according to sources functions as a kind of political commissar on behalf of the authorities. It is his task to observe the prayer habits of all members of the mosque, and to intervene and offer help where insufficient devotion is diagnosed.

More familiar methods of increasing public dependence on the authorities may also be observed. Preferential access to desperately needed social services for those close to the rulers of the Strip is becoming increasingly apparent. In the spring of 2009, **Hamas** established the "Islamic National Bank."

An Islamic insurance company and Islamic investment bank have since also been set up. Increasingly, **Hamas**'s ample social welfare budgets are channeled through these bodies. Similarly, Islamic charity organizations are increasingly replacing elected local governments as the providers of social services. The result is to establish channels of material dependence between the public and the **Hamas** organization.

Few **women** may now be seen in Gaza without the hijab. More and more are now wearing the jilbab (the long, shapeless black dress associated with Islamic piety).

The wearing of the hijab is now said to have become an accepted social norm - perceived as a requirement when outside of the home even by Gaza's few remaining Christian **women**. From the summer of 2009, the wearing of the hijab and jilbab became required in Gaza's secondary schools (according to some sources, certain schools have chosen to ignore this instruction).

It is not only dress in schools, but also the content of study which is becoming increasingly religious in character. Many secular teachers have been fired. **Hamas** summer camps, which provide cheap alternatives for poor families in the summer months, involve intensive Koran study and competitions which again can provide access to much-needed funds and jobs.

The promotion of Islamic norms in Gaza extends to the widespread banning of books and restricting of access to "immoral" internet sites. In 2007, there was an outcry when a book of Palestinian folk-tales, "Speak bird, speak again" was banned in the Gaza Strip because of its supposedly lewd content.

Today, such bans are the norm, and no longer merit much attention. The increasing use of Islamic Sharia law in judicial proceedings in Gaza is an additional facet of the growing influence of Islam on life there. The formal judicial system remains in existence. But it is being filled with Islamic content.

For example, the local reconciliation committees, which were once a forum where clans resolved issues by mediation, have now largely been transformed into Islamic reconciliation committees concerned with the dispensing of advice and guidance based on Sharia law.

It is important to note that these developments do not represent the playing out of some **Hamas** master plan for the creation of an Islamic republic. Rather, they are taking place because of grass-roots agitation and insistence on the part of ultra-religious elements both within **Hamas** and outside it.

The **Hamas** leadership depends on Islamic legitimacy, and is thus vulnerable to claims that it is merely a nationalist group waving the flag of Islam. **Hamas** jealously guards its political power - also from its Salafi rivals. But in matters of Islamic observance, it appears willing to bow to their wishes and pressure.

Graphic

The Islamic republic of Gaza

Photo: FEW **WOMEN** may now be seen in Gaza without the hijab. More and more are now wearing the jilbab (the long, shapeless black dress associated with Islamic piety). From the summer of 2009, the wearing of the hijab and jilbab became required in Gaza's secondary schools. (Credit: Hatem Moussa/AP)

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

End of Document

Women free after Shalit video

Weekend Australian

October 3, 2009 Saturday

3 - All-round Metro Edition

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Section: WORLD; Pg. 21

Length: 688 words

Byline: Correspondents in Ramallah

Body

NINETEEN Palestinian women prisoners were released last night in a breakthrough swap for a video of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who has been held by Hamas militants since 2006.

Israeli television early today showed the video of tank sergeant Shalit, who looked well and spoke lucidly.

It was the first glimpse of the 23-year-old since his capture by Hamas fighters nearly 3 1/2 years ago. Before yesterday, the only signs of life had been three letters and an audio tape.

Sergeant Shalit held up an Arabic language newspaper dated September 14, 2009 -- Hamas's proof the footage was taken recently.

"I want to send my regards to my family and tell them that I love them and miss them and yearn for the day I will see them again," he said reading from a piece of paper.

"I hope that the government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu will not waste now an opportunity to reach a deal.

"I feel well and the mujahedeen of the (Ezzedine) Al-Qassam Brigades are treating me very well," he said, referring to the armed wing of Hamas.

"I have been waiting a long time for the day I am released."

At the end of the two-minute, 40-second recording, Sergeant Shalit got up and walked toward the camera to illustrate that he was in good health. He also told a story of when his family visited him at a Golan army base.

The release of the Palestinian women came after Israel's military Chief-of-Staff, Gabi Ashkenazi, assessed the footage.

About 200 people waving Palestinian flags greeted vans carrying 18 of the women into the West Bank. One prisoner, Fatima Yunes al-Zaq, returned to her home in Gaza and was to be followed to the Hamas-controlled territory by another woman tomorrow.

"To exchange one minute of Gilad Shalit for 20 women is a big victory," said Qiffah Afanah, who served nine months for assaulting an Israeli soldier.

Women free after Shalit video

The prisoners' triumphant return home to a flag-waving and cheering crowd, together with the video's arrival in Israel, gave hope to each side that a long-awaited wider prisoner swap is now in the offing.

Hamas is demanding freedom for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners as their price for Sergeant Shalit, whose capture in a bloody cross-border raid has touched a raw nerve in a country where most families have loved ones in the military.

The deal yesterday could herald an end to the crippling Israeli blockade of Gaza, which has prevented the territory from rebuilding after Israel's war on the area. Israel imposed the blockade after **Hamas** seized power in Gaza two years ago. Israel has said it will not ease the embargo before the serviceman is freed.

As part of a three-stage deal, Israelis ensured the video of Sergeant Shalit met established criteria before they gave the green light for the **women** to be freed.

The DVD was sent to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after Lieutenant General Ashkenazi analysed it.

The deal was a major breakthrough after nearly three years of on-again, off-again Egyptian-brokered negotiations between Israel and **Hamas**.

It was the first time Israel has released prisoners as part of the negotiations.

Cairo has been trying to broker a deal under which hundreds of Palestinian prisoners would be released in exchange for Sergeant Shalit, who has been held in Gaza since he was captured in the deadly cross-border raid in June 2006.

He was seized after Gaza militants, including **Hamas**, tunnelled out of the Palestinian territory and attacked an Israeli army post, killing two soldiers.

Mr Netanyahu's office stressed that the latest development did not herald Sergeant Shalit's imminent release, but was meant as a confidence-building measure ahead of ``decisive stages in the negotiations'', and warned that the talks were still expected to be ``long and arduous''.

All but one of the Palestinian **women** released come from the West Bank, and none has been implicated in killing Israelis.

A total of 7200 Palestinians are held in Israeli prisons, and those freed yesterday were among 60 **women** prisoners. The Israeli prison service says 320 of the detainees are under 18.

The freed **women** include members of **Hamas**, Fatah, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Load-Date: October 3, 2009

A glitzy premiere for first ' Hamaswood' movie in Gaza City

The Daily Star (Lebanon)

July 20, 2009 Monday

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THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Length: 534 words

Byline: Daily Star Staff

Body

The Gaza movie premiere drew an exclusive crowd with local celebrities posing for jostling photographers – and that's pretty much where the similarities end between Hollywood and the fledgling film industry of Gaza's Hamas rulers. The Islamic militants' first feature film – an action-packed homage to a top Hamas militant.

Diaa Hadid

Associated Press

GAZA CITY: The Gaza movie premiere drew an exclusive crowd with local celebrities posing for jostling photographers – and that's pretty much where the similarities end between Hollywood and the fledgling film industry of Gaza's Hamas rulers. The Islamic militants' first feature film – an action-packed homage to a top Hamas militant – cost only \$200,000 to make and is being shown to segregated audiences of bearded men and veiled women.

"It's Hamaswood instead of Hollywood," Fathi Hamad, Gaza's Hamas interior minister, said after the film's first showing Friday evening at Gaza City's Islamic University.

"We are trying to make quality art that is Islamic and about the resistance, without provocative [sexual] scenes."

Hamad doubled as producer, and the screenplay was penned by Mahmoud Zahar, the Gaza strongman seen as one of the architects of the group's violent takeover of Gaza two years ago.

Despite his fierce reputation, Zahar, a physician, has always had an artistic streak, with three novels and two screenplays to his credit.

The movie tells the story of Emad Akel, commander of the Hamas military wing, who was killed in a firefight with Israeli troops in Gaza in 1993.

Akel, 23 at the time, was known as "the ghost" for his many disguises, including dressing up as a Jewish settler with a skullcap. In the early 1990s, he topped Israel's wanted list for his suspected role in killing 11 Israeli soldiers, an Israeli civilian and four Palestinian informers in a series of attacks.

A glitzy premiere for first 'Hamaswood' movie in Gaza City

In the two-hour movie, titled "Emad Akel," there's plenty of action. The hero frequently leaps out of cars to open fire on Israeli soldiers, prompting bursts of applause from the audience each time.

There's no romance, however, and the female actors all wear long robes and headscarves.

The actors playing the Israeli characters – soldiers, then-Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his army chief of staff at the time, Ehud Barak – speak in Hebrew with a heavy Arabic accent, and their dialogue is translated in Arabic subtitles.

Rabin frequently yells at an inept Barak – now Israel's defense minister – who can't stop Hamas fighters.

The cast is made up of amateur actors, all from Gaza, including 57-year-old carpenter Mohammad Abu Rous, who portrays Rabin, assassinated in 1995 by an ultranationalist Jew.

The movie was shot over 10 months on a production lot that Hamas hopes will one day grow into a \$200 million media city.

Gaza doesn't have movie houses, and "Emad Akel" will be screened at a cultural center. Gaza's cinemas were closed down in the late 1980s, with the outbreak of the first uprising against Israeli occupation.

Activists across the Palestinian territories felt entertainment was inappropriate at a time of struggle.

Zahar said making movies is just another way for Palestinians to fight Israeli rule.

"Resistance can be a word, a poem," he said.

Load-Date: July 20, 2009

International: Israel to free 20 female prisoners for tape of soldier

The Guardian - Final Edition

October 1, 2009 Thursday

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theguardian

Section: GUARDIAN INTERNATIONAL PAGES; Pg. 23

Length: 308 words

Byline: Rory McCarthy, Jerusalem

Body

Israel said yesterday it would release 20 **female** Palestinian prisoners and that in return **Hamas** would hand over a recent video of a soldier who had been captured near Gaza more than three years ago.

The agreement suggests progress in the effort to secure the release of Gilad Shalit, who was captured by Palestinian militants, including some from **Hamas**, in June 2006. German intelligence officers have been mediating in the case since July, with Egyptian officials.

Israel's security cabinet agreed the **women** would be freed in return for "updated and unequivocal proof regarding the well-being and status of Gilad Shalit".

Of the prisoners, who are likely to be released tomorrow, 19 are from the West Bank and one is from Gaza. Some back **Hamas**, others are linked to the rival Palestinian factions Fatah and Islamic Jihad. The Israeli government said the move was a "confidence-building measure" and part of "indirect negotiations".

In the past letters and audio recordings from Shalit, now 23, have been handed over but the Red Cross has not been allowed to visit him. He is believed to be held in Gaza. "It is important that the entire world knows that Gilad Shalit is alive and well and that **Hamas** is responsible for his well-being and fate," said Israel's prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu.

A German mediator had seen the video of Shalit and believes it to be genuine and recorded after Israel's war in Gaza in January this year, Israeli officials said.

Israel has carried out military raids in Gaza over the past three years killing hundreds of Palestinians, and has imposed an economic blockade, in part, it claims, because of the captivity of Shalit. **Hamas** said it would release Shalit in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, but the two sides have failed to agree a deal.

More than 7,000 Palestinians are currently held in Israeli jails.

Load-Date: October 1, 2009

International: Israel to free 20 female prisoners for tape of soldier

End of Document

Gaza militant groups agree to stop firing rockets into Israel

Guardian.com

November 22, 2009 Sunday

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theguardian

Length: 416 words

Byline: Rory McCarthy, guardian.co.uk

Body

ABSTRACT

Deal appears to be attempt by Hamas to prevent another descent into conflict

FULL TEXT

Hamas has won an agreement from other militant groups in Gaza to halt rocket fire into Israel for the first time in almost a year, as both sides indicated progress on a deal to release a captured Israeli soldier.

The agreement, announced, appears to be an attempt by the Palestinian Islamist movement to prevent another descent into fighting at a time when reconstruction has barely begun almost 12 months after the devastating conflict with Israel.

It also reflected more progress in secretly mediated talks to release Gilad Shalit, the soldier captured more than three years ago, in exchange for the return of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

Last month, Hamas handed over a video showing Shalit in apparent good health, in return for which Israel freed 20 female Palestinian prisoners.

A Hamas newsletter issued yesterday said a deal was "reaching completion."

The Israeli president, Shimon Peres, in Cairo for talks with the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, whose government has acted as a mediator in the case said: "As we all know, there is progress. I hope it will end positively." Reports suggested Israel would release 450 prisoners once Shalit had been handed over to Egypt and flown to Israel. At a later date, another 550 prisoners would be freed, but disagreements remain over exactly who and where they would be returned to.

Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi, Israel's chief of staff, said yesterday: "We have a deep commitment ... to bring [Shalit] home, but I prefer to leave this effort behind the scenes."

Hours after Fathi Hamad, the Hamas interior minister in Gaza, announced the ceasefire agreement, Israeli jets bombed what the military said were two "weapons-manufacturing facilities" in northern and central Gaza.

Gaza militant groups agree to stop firing rockets into Israel

The strikes, in which seven Palestinians were injured, also targeted a smuggling tunnel. The Israel Defence Force (IDF) said it had been responding to rocket fire early yesterday.

An IDF statement said nearly 270 rockets and mortars had been fired from Gaza at Israel since the end of the war in January - far fewer than in previous years.

Hamas is believed to have stopped firing rockets after the war, but it took months to persuade more hardline groups - such as Islamic Jihad - to stop as well.

Israel has maintained a tight economic blockade on Gaza, and continues to prevent the import of most construction supplies. Egyptian cement has been smuggled in through tunnels.

Load-Date: November 23, 2009

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Schalit prisoner swap could bring freedom for 'next leader' of Fatah; Nearly 1,000 Palestinians may be released Middle East

The Times (London)

November 24, 2009 Tuesday

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THE TIMES

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Byline: James Hider; Frenkel Cairo

Body

Israel and the Palestinians are close to reaching agreement on a prisoner swap that could mean freedom for an Israeli soldier held for more than three years in exchange for the release of nearly a thousand Palestinian militants.

Gilad Schalit, the young Israeli corporal captured by **Hamas** in a cross-border raid in June 2006, could be freed as early as Friday, when Palestinians observe Eid al-Adha - a traditional period for amnesties. Among those expected to be released by Israel is Marwan Barghouti, a leading candidate to succeed the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, who has threatened to step down over a lack of progress in the peace process. Barghouti, the leader of the Fatah young guard, is serving multiple life sentences for murder and attacks on Israelis during the last intifada.

Seen as a more militant leader, Barghouti is one of the few figures who may be able to bridge the bitter divide between **Hamas** and Fatah. He has been in an Israeli jail since 2002. Despite his popular backing among the Palestinians, he is a pragmatic figure who is viewed by many Israelis as a potential successor to President Abbas who could forge a peace deal..

Hamas's official newspaper said the swap could go ahead in the middle of next week. A **Hamas** delegation was due to leave Gaza today for Egypt to finalise details of the prisoner swap.

The exchange, facilitated by Egypt with aid from German negotiators, would probably be in two stages. In the first, Galid Schalit, 23, and promoted to sergeant during his detention, would be handed over to the Egyptians in return for the first tranche of prisoner releases. In the second, he would be transferred to Israel, resulting in further releases of Palestinians.

His parents, Noam and Aviva, were being briefed by government officials as press speculation grew that a deal was close, but his father said yesterday that the family had received no official notice of an impending release.

Schalit prisoner swap could bring freedom for 'next leader' of Fatah Nearly 1,000 Palestinians may be released Middle East

Ayman Taha, a **Hamas** official in the Cairo delegation, said that "details" were still being negotiated, but that serious progress had been made. An Egyptian official said that the main question was where to place the released Palestinian prisoners.

Israel wants to ensure they will be exiled outside the Palestinian territories, where they can be kept under supervision by local authorities. "There will be some public outcry over the identity of some of these prisoners. To pre-empt this, Israel wants to make sure that they are not allowed to return to their violent activities," said an Israeli official. Israel would probably make an exception in Barghouti's case. If he plays a leading role in the Palestinian Government, he would be expected to live on the West Bank.

This is not the first time that both sides have geared up for an exchange, only to see hopes shattered at the last minute. However, reports were given credence yesterday by **Hamas**'s confirmation of a unilateral moratorium on rocket-firing into Israel. One Israeli newspaper said that some Palestinian prisoners had written to their families saying they would soon see them again.

A prisoner exchange would provide a huge boost for **Hamas**, isolated and under blockade in the Gaza Strip for more than two years. Unlike Fatah, which has negotiated with Israel, yet won no serious benefits, **Hamas** has continued to urge armed resistance. Liberty for hundreds of militants would bolster its domestic prestige, damaged by its economic isolation and the imposition of Islamist curbs on the population it controls.

Sergeant Schalit's release would come as an enormous relief to the Israeli authorities. His captivity has tortured a military that prides itself on never leaving a man behind, dead or alive, and struck at the heart of every family in a nation where military service is compulsory. There are some who fear that the price being paid is too high-especially some of the families of victims of violence perpetrated by those now slated to go free.

The tentative ceasefire between **Hamas** and Israel may have other motives, too. With Western attempts to defuse Iran's nuclear programme having stalled, it is believed that Tehran has told its proxies on Israel's northern and southern border, Hezbollah and **Hamas**, to keep their powder dry for now, to threaten the Jewish state with three-way retaliation if it strikes Iran's nuclear facilities.

Egyptian sources said explosives bound for Gaza had been intercepted - another sign that **Hamas** is rearming after its war with Israel a year ago.

Online

Breaking news on the prisoner swap timesonline.co.uk/mideast

Prisoner exchanges

Oct 2009 20 Palestinian **women** freed in return for a "proof-of-life" video of Gilad Schalit

June 2008 Lebanon hands over the bodies of two Israeli soldiers. Israel frees five Lebanese prisoners and Palestinian prisoners and the bodies of Lebanese Hezbollah militants

Jan 2004 Israel delivers to Hezbollah 436 Arab prisoners and the bodies of 59 Lebanese fighters for a civilian, Elchanan Tenenbaum, and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers

July 1996 Israel frees 65 prisoners for the return of the bodies of two soldiers from Lebanon

Sept 1991 Israel swaps 51 prisoners for proof that one of its soldiers in Lebanon is dead

May 1985 Israel exchanges 1,150 Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners for three Israeli soldiers

Nov 1983 Israel swaps 4,600 Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners for six Israeli soldiers

Schalit prisoner swap could bring freedom for 'next leader' of Fatah Nearly 1,000 Palestinians may be released
Middle East

Negotiated solutions are not always possible. The whereabouts of Guy Hever, an Israeli soldier missing in the Golan Heights in 1997, are unknown. Ron Arad, kidnapped in 1986, is still missing, as are the soldiers Zachary Baumel, Tzvi Feldman and Yehudah Katz

Estimates of Palestinians in Israeli custody vary. Rights groups say that 335 are held without trial

Sources: Associated Press, Reuters, Times database

The release of militants would bolster **Hamas**'s domestic prestige

Graphic

Marwan Barghouti: has been in jail since 2002

Noam Schalit has waited more than three years for his son's return, but some Israelis feel that the price for his freedom is too high

ILAN MIZRAHI FOR THE TIMES

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Israel bombs Gaza smuggling tunnels

Christian Science Monitor

September 30, 2009, Wednesday

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Section: WORLD; Pg. 99

Length: 522 words

Byline: Kristen Chick

Body

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A daily summary of global reports on security issues

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Israel launched airstrikes against two smuggling tunnels on the Gaza border Wednesday night in response to a rocket fired into Israel from the coastal enclave.

The trade of fire is the latest in a string of recent cross-border hostilities that follows a period of relative calm. A cease-fire has largely held since the end of Israel's war in Gaza in January.

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The attacks come as Israel released the first of 20 **female** prisoners it promised to let go in exchange for a video proving that Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier captured by **Hamas** in 2006, is still alive, reports The Jerusalem Post.

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Agence France-Presse reports that the most recent rocket and tunnel attacks caused no casualties. On the same day, Palestinian militants fired mortars into Israel near the Kissufim crossing between Israel and Gaza. The Israeli army responded with tank fire.

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YNet News, an Israeli news website, reports that Wednesday's exchange is only the latest in a series of incidents that began on Saturday, when the Israeli air force killed three Islamic Jihad militants allegedly planning to launch rockets into Israel. Militants responded by launching a Qassam rocket into Israel, and the two sides traded fire until Tuesday night, when Israeli warplanes attacked three smuggling tunnels after Palestinian militants fired two Qassam rockets into Israel.

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Israel bombs Gaza smuggling tunnels

Xinhua reports that two Palestinian smugglers died when they tried to repair the damage from that attack. The work of smuggling is dangerous: Agence France-Presse reports that more than 120 Palestinians have been killed in the tunnels - by cave-ins or Israeli strikes - since 2007.

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The tunnels have been used extensively to smuggle weapons, food, and other goods into Gaza from Egypt since Israel began a tough embargo on the coastal territory two years ago, when **Hamas** seized control of Gaza. Egypt has also closed its official border with Gaza, strangling its economy and leading to the rise of the lucrative tunnel business. (See a slideshow of tunnel smugglers here.)

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The Christian Science Monitor reported in August that the tunnels contribute to **Hamas**'s strength in Gaza. Israel's embargo is aimed at weakening the Islamist organization, but instead, **Hamas** has been able to consolidate power by becoming Gaza's key financial middleman, using its control of the smuggling tunnels, money changing, and tax revenue to buy up property in Gaza, reported the Monitor.

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Hamas officials deny any formal initiative to buy property, or that the group is benefiting from the siege in any way.

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But a blockade that prohibits importing everything but humanitarian items has made the smuggling tunnels between Gaza and Egypt a vital lifeline. While Israel considers the tunnels illegal, no one here does. **Hamas** levies a value-added tax of 14.5 percent on every item that comes through, local shop owners say....

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According to Palestinian smugglers, **Hamas** taxes luxury items like cigarettes at higher rates and sometimes demands protection money for allowing their tunnels to be used.

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Load-Date: October 1, 2009

Conclusions about Israel's guilt in Gaza were voiced well in advance of a 'fact-finding' mission

Irish Independent

October 10, 2009 Saturday

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Independent.ie 

Section: ANALYSIS

Length: 1037 words

Body

Last January, speaking to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs, I asked the question 'What would you do' if Ireland found itself in a situation comparable to that of Israel at the end of 2008, following eight years of rocket and mortar attacks on its southern communities from Hamas-ruled Gaza. In the months since, nobody in Ireland has come forward with an answer to my question.

An implied answer has now come from an international source, in the shape of the report of the Goldstone "fact-finding" mission into the Gaza conflict at the start of this year.

The answer is that, in practice, a democratic state confronted with terrorist attacks against its citizens must do nothing. Terrorists everywhere will rejoice that a UN- mandated body has effectively ruled that there are no legitimate means by which states may counter the complex and innovative terrorist techniques evolved by groups such as Hamas.

The mission was mandated by the so-called Human Rights Council, a misnomer if ever there was one. This body, which has contained paragons of human rights values such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Cuba, currently has nothing to say about, for example, the 400,000 deaths in Darfur for which Sudan is responsible, or the 1,000,000 displaced civilians in Somalia.

It had absolutely nothing to say during the years when 12,000 Hamas rockets -- more than 7,000 since Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 -- landed on houses, streets, hospitals and schools, making a speciality of targeting the morning school-going period, and only an efficient system of shelters prevented heavy civilian casualties. Not a single UNresolution was passed condemning those criminal attacks.

Instead, of the 25 resolutions passed by the Council in the three years since its foundation, 20 have singled out Israel for censure.

The Goldstone mission contained members who had clearly voiced their conclusions about Israel's guilt well in advance of any "fact-finding" being carried out. This led several distinguished individuals, including former President of Ireland and former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, to refuse invitations to chair the mission. Ms Robinson objected that the mission seemed to her to be "guided not by human rights but by politics".

Conclusions about Israel's guilt in Gaza were voiced well in advance of a 'fact-finding' mission

During its investigation, the mission did not ask its witnesses any questions relating to Hamas terrorist activity, the storage of weaponry in civilian areas or the launching of attacks from those areas. Except in one case, it failed to inquire into the widespread reports of the abuse of mosques to hide weapons and terrorist activity.

The Goldstone report accuses Israel of targeting Gaza's hospitals, but admits that it did not investigate the well-corroborated reports that the Hamas command centre was located in Shifa Hospital. Why did it not ask such questions? A clue is provided by its admission that the witnesses appeared "reluctant to speak about the presence or conduct of hostilities by the Palestinian armed groups" -- a reluctance which it says "may have stemmed from a fear of [Hamas] reprisals".

The report quotes the boast of a Hamas spokesman that it had created "a human shield of women, children, the elderly and the jihad fighters" but, incredibly, goes on to state that it does not consider this as evidence against Hamas.

In the narrative of the report, there is no place for the extensive diplomatic and political efforts made by Israel to avoid an outbreak of hostilities. Neither is there any place for self-defence. Former Prime Minister Olmert's direct plea on Al-Arabiya TV to the people of Gaza, just before the conflict, to stop the Hamas rocket fire, and his statement "that we are not acting against [the residents of Gaza] and that we have no intention of punishing them for the actions of Hamas", are ignored.

A recognised expert with insight into the dilemmas associated with combating the tactics of groups such as Hamas is Colonel Richard Kemp, former commander of British forces in Afghanistan. Yet the commission made no attempt to interview him. Judge Goldstone admitted: "There was no reliance on Colonel Kemp mainly because in our report we did not deal with the issues he raised regarding the problems of conducting military operations in civilian areas ... "

The warning systems implemented by Israel to limit civilian casualties -- dropping one million flyers, sending tens of thousands of text messages and cellphone calls asking people to leave target areas -- measures which were, according to Colonel Kemp, unprecedented in the history of warfare, are mentioned in the report only to be criticised as "inadequate".

In complex urban warfare, despite the best precautions, civilian casualties are tragically inevitable. There may also have been incidents in which a few soldiers did not always maintain the standards that Israel expected of them.

The true test of a democracy is how it examines its own failings. Israel has opened more than 100 separate investigations into allegations of misconduct arising out of the Gaza conflict, and instituted criminal proceedings in 23 of these.

Overall, the worst feature of the Goldstone report is the moral equation it makes between a democratic state seeking to put an end to attacks against its citizens, and the terrorist group responsible for those attacks.

In the first case, the motives and intentions of Israel are treated as inherently suspect, and its own scrutiny and judicial mechanisms treated as flawed and inadequate. In the second case, Hamas, referred to as "the Gaza authorities", is allotted small space in the report. The history of its aggression is ignored, and its charter, calling for the killing of Jews and the destruction of Israel, similarly ignored.

However, regardless of this report, Israel is ready to open peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority without any preconditions.

Hopefully, eventually, Israel and moderate Palestinians will be able to forge a lasting peace, based on two states for two peoples: the state of Israel that already exists as the homeland of the Jewish people and a future Palestinian state as the homeland of the Palestinian people.

Zion Evrony is the Israeli Ambassador to Ireland

Conclusions about Israel 's guilt in Gaza were voiced well in advance of a 'fact-finding' mission

Load-Date: October 10, 2009

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[Israel agrees to free Palestinian prisoners for Gilad Shalit video](#)

Guardian.com

September 30, 2009 Wednesday

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theguardian

Length: 409 words

Byline: Rory McCarthy, guardian.co.uk

Body

ABSTRACT

Government says it will release 20 **female** prisoners for proof kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit is 'alive and well'

FULL TEXT

[Israel](#) said today it would release 20 **female** Palestinian prisoners and in return the Islamist movement [Hamas](#) would hand over a recently recorded video of a soldier captured near [Gaza](#) more than three years ago.

The agreement suggests progress behind the scenes in the effort to secure the release of Gilad Shalit, who was captured by [Palestinian](#) militants, including some from [Hamas](#), in June 2006. German intelligence officers have been mediating in the case since July, along with Egyptian officials.

Israel's security cabinet agreed that the **women** prisoners would be released in return for "updated and unequivocal proof regarding the well-being and status of Gilad Shalit".

The names of the prisoners to be released will be published in case there are objections within Israel and they are then likely to be released on Friday. Of the **women**, 19 are from the West Bank and one from Gaza. Some are supporters of [Hamas](#), others are linked to the rival Palestinian factions Fatah and Islamic Jihad.

The Israeli government said it was a "confidence-building measure" and part of "indirect negotiations".

In the past [letters](#) and audio recordings from Shalit, now 23, have been handed over, but the Red Cross has not been allowed to visit him. He is believed to be alive and held by [Hamas](#) in Gaza.

"It is important that the entire world knows that Gilad Shalit is alive and well and that [Hamas](#) is responsible for his well-being and fate," said Israel's prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu.

A German mediator had seen the video of Shalit and believed it was genuine and was recorded after Israel's war in Gaza in January this year, Israeli officials said. It is thought to be about a minute long.

Israel agrees to free Palestinian prisoners for Gilad Shalit video

Israel has launched a series of military raids in Gaza over the past three years that have left hundreds of Palestinians dead and has imposed a severe economic blockade, in part it says because Shalit is still being held.

Hamas said it would release Shalit in return for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails, but the two sides have failed to reach an agreement on a deal.

The **female** prisoners due to be released were serving sentences of less than two years and were not convicted of direct involvement in the killing of Israelis.

More than 7,000 Palestinians are held in Israeli jails, nearly 400 of them without charge.

Load-Date: September 30, 2009

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