

?I would encourage you to carefully read this NYT piece (bearing in mind that the Israeli's and the so-called Quartet (perhaps that's the "international community?") have turned the truth upside down -- i.e., the real terrorists are the Zionist/American occupiers who for as long as I've been keeping up with the news (since about 1968) they have murdered, tortured, bombed, brutalized, incarcerated, and collectively punished the Palestinians for not rolling over and acquiescing to the constant land grabs, displacement, and collective punishment of the Palestinian people -- including shooting their children like they were quails.? ?I sincerely believe and deeply fear that if the true international majority community doesn't stand up and back the Palestinian people and their chosen government, as well as that of the Haitian people, it will signal a new era of still greater global repression and a dramatic increase in warfare in the Middle East -- which will come back to haunt us -- perhaps precipitate a new and hot world war.? We cannot continue to capitulate to these greedy, shortsighted, cold and callous, mean and vicious, violent s.o.b.'s and allow them to systematically destroy the planet and its peoples.

In an editorial by Gideon Levy, he reported:??the prime minister's advisor Dov Weissglas and including the Israel Defense Forces chief of staff, the director of the Shin Bet and senior generals and officials, convened for a discussion with Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni on ways to respond to the Hamas election victory. Everyone agreed on the need to impose an economic siege on the Palestinian Authority, and Weissglas, as usual, provided the punch line: "It's like an appointment with a dietician. The Palestinians will get a lot thinner, but won't die," the advisor joked, and the participants reportedly rolled with laughter.?

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Israel, in Slap at Hamas, Freezes Money for Palestinians

By STEVEN ERLANGER

JERUSALEM, Feb. 19 ? Israel's cabinet decided today to immediately freeze the transfer of about \$50 million a month in tax and customs receipts due to the Palestinian Authority, arguing that Saturday's swearing in of a Hamas-dominated legislature means that the Palestinians are now led by the militant group.

"It is clear that in the light of the Hamas majority in the parliament and the instructions to form a new government that were given to the head of Hamas, the Palestinian Authority is in

practice becoming a terrorist authority," the acting prime minister, Ehud Olmert, told his cabinet. "The state of Israel will not agree to this."

Israel's position put it at odds in terms of timing with its main ally, the United States, and the rest of the so-called quartet ? the European Union, Russia and the United Nations.

The quartet has said that its financial support for the Palestinian Authority would continue until a new Hamas-led government is in place, a process that could take five weeks or longer. Even as Israel acted to cut off money to the Palestinians, the quartet's representative, [James D. Wolfensohn](#), was in the Middle East raising money for the Palestinian Authority until Hamas fully takes over the government.

The Israeli move now means that Mr. Olmert, in the midst of an election campaign, will not have to transfer February's customs and taxes to the Palestinians. He was sharply criticized by the Israeli right for having transferred January's money, and if he had agreed to the Quartet's timetable, he might even have had to transfer the payment due for March.

The Israeli move means that the Palestinian Authority will have an immediate shortfall of about \$110 million a month in its budget, which largely goes to pay 135,000 workers, including about 58,000 in the security services. Hamas says it will seek economies and other aid from the Muslim world, including Iran.

In Gaza City, the Palestinian president, [Mahmoud Abbas](#), said that the Palestinians were in a financial crisis. "Unfortunately, the pressures have begun and the support and the aid started to

decrease," he said. "Therefore we are currently in a financial crisis, and we hope to overcome it month by month."

Mr. Abbas went there to meet with Ismail Haniya, 42, whom Hamas confirmed would be its choice for prime minister, to ask him to form a government. The meeting will take place on Monday. Once Mr. Haniya accepts the charge, he has up to five weeks to form a government, though he says he will need less time than that.

On Saturday, Mr. Abbas, in a speech to the new Palestinian parliament, said he expected a new government to accept previous agreements with Israel, including the peace plan known as the road map, and to support negotiations with it. These are positions that Hamas rejects.

He did not specifically require an explicit recognition of Israel, however. Hamas is expected to move slowly for now, leaving relations with Israel in the hands of Mr. Abbas and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

"We will start a dialogue with President Abbas and the other factions," Mr. Haniya said in remarks broadcast on Al Jazeera, the Arab satellite television channel. He also criticized Israel's new sanctions against the Palestinians, calling them "part of the continued Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people."

Israel's cabinet decided to hold back for now on other sanctions that would have further serious effects on Palestinian life. Instead, the cabinet said that it would urge the international community to refrain from all financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority except for humanitarian aid, that it would

seek to prevent any new shipments of arms or equipment to the Palestinian security services, and that it would "increase security checks" at crossings between Israel and Gaza.

"These are measured and graduated responses to the swearing in of a Hamas legislature," said Raanan Gissin, an Israeli spokesman. "The point is to leave some ammunition in the magazine and give Hamas and the Palestinians the chance to assess the consequences of failing to meet the international community's demands."

Israel and the quartet have threatened to isolate Hamas and cut back aid to the Palestinian Authority unless a new government complies with three conditions: recognizing Israel's right to exist, forswearing violence, and accepting previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements, including the 1993 Oslo accords, which are predicated on negotiations with Israel leading to a permanent two-state solution.

Hamas rejects those conditions, but a senior Western diplomat said the militant group was seeking wording capable of satisfying at least part of the world community.

But Mr. Olmert, in the middle of an Israeli election campaign, listed a much harsher version of those conditions than appears in the quartet's statement of them, on Jan. 30.

Mr. Olmert said relations with the Palestinians would be downgraded and receipts withheld unless Hamas "fully accepts the principles that the international community has presented to it." He listed the principles as "recognition of the state of Israel and abrogation of the Hamas covenant, the renunciation of

terrorism and the dismantling of terrorist infrastructures (by adopting the road map and accepting its principles), and recognizing all understandings and agreements between Israel and the Palestinians."

But the quartet statement made no mention of Hamas, let alone of any need for it to abrogate its covenant. The statement said, "It is the view of the quartet that all members of a future Palestinian government must be committed to nonviolence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map."

Mr. Olmert's version appeared to be an effort to talk tough, even as some members of the quartet are beginning to discuss whether a Hamas acceptance in principle of a 2002 Arab peace proposal, long rejected by Israel, would be enough to consider that it had recognized Israel.

The senior diplomat speculated that if Hamas offered a longer truce with Israel and folded its military wing into the Palestinian security services, some of the international community, in particular some European countries, might give Hamas the benefit of the doubt in the name of preserving ties with the Palestinians and providing aid to an already poor population.

Alvaro de Soto, the United Nations representative to the quartet and Secretary General [Kofi Annan's](#) representative to the Palestinian Authority, said in an interview that the Israelis needed "to give it a chance ? you may be wrong" about the consequences of a Hamas victory.

"We've said that the review of foreign assistance will happen in

view of the commitments of the new government," he said. "Let's wait and see when there's a government in place and a program that's approved by the legislature. Anything before that is premature. In fact, now is the time to influence them to move in the right direction."

"We want to avoid massive punishment of the Palestinian people," Mr. de Soto said. "There's a plastic moment here, and the outcome is not predetermined."

It is not clear whether Mr. Abbas and Mr. Haniya, in their talks, will be able to bridge their fundamental differences. But Sadi Krunze, a former Fatah cabinet minister, praised Mr. Haniya. "Haniya is not close-minded," Mr. Krunze said. "He can work with all the factions and he can cooperate with the president."

Israel has killed several senior Hamas leaders in recent years, and Mr. Haniya survived an Israeli airstrike three years ago that targeted a meeting attended by top figures in the group.

Mr. Haniya, a father of 12, lives in Gaza City's Beach Refugee Camp, where he was born. His three-story home, wedged between the other cinderblock homes in the camp, also serves as his office.

He has a degree in Arabic literature from the Islamic University in Gaza City and worked there for many years as a dean. Israel arrested him several times in the late 1980's and early 1990's, and he was deported to Lebanon in 1992, along with other Hamas members, but returned to Gaza a year later. In 1998, he took charge of the office of Sheik [Ahmed Yassin](#), whom Israel killed

in 2004.

Separately today, an Israeli airstrike killed two Palestinians who Israel said were planting a bomb along the Gaza Strip's perimeter fence, near the southern town of Khan Yunis.

In the West Bank, Israeli forces shot and killed two Palestinians in the Balata camp in Nablus. Palestinians said the men were throwing stones at troops; the Israeli Army said they were planting bombs. Fifteen Palestinians were wounded during the operation, which resulted in the arrest of a local commander of Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades whose house was flattened after his arrest by the army.

And three Palestinian teenagers from Bethlehem were arrested en route to Jerusalem while carrying a pipe bomb, Molotov cocktails and knives. They told the police they had been sent on behalf of Islamic Jihad.

Greg Myre contributed reporting from Gaza City for this article.