



Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center
Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation

January 1-15, 2007

Violent confrontations between Fatah and Hamas



The burned-out house of Col. Mohammad Gharib, inspector general of the Palestinian Preventive Security, who was murdered by Hamas operatives and its Executive Force (Palestinian TV, January 5).



Gharib's funeral procession, which turned into a mass anti-Hamas Fatah demonstration (Palestinian TV, January 5).

Contents

Overview

Important Events

Statistical Data

Internal
Palestinian Arena

Overview

- During the past two weeks events focused on the wave of violent confrontations between Hamas and Fatah, starting in the Gaza Strip and spreading to Judea and Samaria. The confrontations, which were accompanied by incidents of excessive cruelty, included assassinations, abductions and attacks on institutions and offices identified with both sides. During the past few days, however, there have been fewer events.
- In an attempt to stop the confrontations, Abu Mazen and Ismail Haniya agreed to renew the dialogue concerning the establishment of a Palestinian national unity government. It has been reported that Abu Mazen, who is to visit Damascus next week, may meet with Khaled Mashaal, head of Hamas's political bureau, in an attempt to reach an agreement about a national unity government.
- On the ground, there has been a marked decrease in the number of Qassam rocket launchings and other types of terrorist attacks. However, sporadic rocket fire continues, led by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Important Events

Gaza Strip

Israeli policy

■ Israel continues to maintain the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip despite continued rocket fire. The IDF has pinpointed the terrorist squads launching the Qassams but has not undertaken broad measures in the Gaza Strip.

Decrease in Qassam rocket fire

■ During the first two weeks of January there was a marked decrease in the number of Qassam rockets fired at population centers in the western Negev. Nine rocket hits were identified, following 37 hits identified during the last two weeks of December. There was also a decrease in other forms of terrorist attacks (see Statistical Data).

■ According to the Israeli media,¹ at a government meeting Israel Security Agency (ISA) chief Yuval Diskin reported that terrorist attacks originating in the Gaza Strip had significantly decreased, apparently following instructions from PIJ headquarters in Damascus. He stated that as a result there were fewer Qassam rocket launchings and a reduction in arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip from Egypt.

■ The PIJ issued a statistical report detailing its operations since the Gaza ceasefire went into effect. It claimed that members of the organization had launched 35 rockets of various types and five mortar shells, all of which had caused casualties, damaged property and lowered the morale of the residents of western Negev population centers. The organization claimed to have fired the rockets in retaliation for what they called “Israeli violations” of the agreement (Fares News Agency Website, January 2). In actuality, the PIJ is the terrorist organization which has launched the greatest number of rockets since the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip went into effect.

¹ An article by Uri Yablonka in the January 15 edition of Israeli evening newspaper *Ma'ariv*.

Unmanned aerial vehicle crashes and falls into Hamas' hands

■ An IDF UAV crashed near the town of Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip following a technical mishap. Its remains were collected by Hamas operatives who then displayed them to the media (Ma'an News Agency, January 11).



The remains of the UAV displayed by a member of Hamas's Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades (Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades Website, January 11)

Two terrorist-operatives armed with explosive device killed

■ On the night of January 14, IDF soldiers identified two armed terrorist-operatives crawling toward the security fence in the northern Gaza Strip near the Erez crossing. The soldiers opened fire, causing the explosive device one of the terrorists was carrying to explode, killing both of them. A spokesman for the Popular Resistance Committees confirmed that two of the organization's operatives were killed by the IDF while trying to plant a side charge.

Judea and Samaria

Local detentions turned into confrontations during the Sharm el-Sheikh summit

■ On January 4, during a local military operation in Ramallah initiated to detain individuals suspected of involvement in terrorist activities, an IDF force was exposed and fired upon. Confrontations broke out with dozens of local residents,

and assault helicopters were called in, firing in open areas. According to Palestinian reports six Palestinians were killed and approximately 20 wounded. An IDF soldier was slightly injured.

■ The incident took place while Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was in a summit meeting with Egyptian President Mubarak at Sharm el-Sheikh. During the meeting Egypt condemned the IDF action in Ramallah.



Left: Israeli vehicle damaged in Ramallah (Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesperson, January 4).
Right: IDF operation in Ramallah (Al-Jazeera TV, January 4)

Arrest of Fatah/Tanzim operatives in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus prevented suicide bombing attack in Israel

■ On January 7 Israeli security forces detained two Fatah/Tanzim operatives, residents of the Balata refugee camp in Nablus. The two had almost finished preparing a suicide bombing attack in Israel. During interrogation they related that there were two explosive belts in the apartment they had been staying in. The belts were found and detonated by the IDF.²

² For further information see our January 7 Bulletin entitled “**The arrest of Fatah Tanzim operatives in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus, one of the major hotspots of terrorism in Judea and Samaria, prevented a suicide bombing attack in Israel,**” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/ct_fatah_e.htm and http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ct_fatah_e.pdf.



The two explosive belts (Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesperson, January 7)

Popular Front operatives detained

■ The Israeli security forces recently detained 19 operatives belonging to the Popular Front from the village of Dir Abu Mashaal in the Ramallah district. They had carried out dozens of firebombing attacks on cars traveling between the settlements of Nili, Ofarim and Halamish.

Hamas operatives detained

■ On January 11 the Israeli security forces detained Khaled Muhammad Amin al-Hajj, a senior Hamas operative, head of Hamas's terrorist-operative infrastructure in Jenin. He was responsible for the organization's activities in Jenin and for coordinating with Hamas headquarters in Judea, Samaria, the Gaza Strip and outside the Palestinian Authority. Another senior operative was arrested with him, who had in his possession tens of thousands of dollars earmarked for Hamas activities.

Israel's counterterrorism activity continues

■ The following detentions were carried out as part of the Israeli security forces counterterrorism activity:

✿ **January 1** – IDF security forces detained 24 wanted operatives in Nablus, Tulkarm, Ramallah and Bethlehem. During the operation an IDF vehicle was shot at, wounding two soldiers.

✿ **January 4** – Security forces detained Tawfiq Abu Zaid in Bethlehem. During the past year he had been involved in many shooting attacks directed against IDF forces and enlisted operatives to carry out shooting and

explosive device attacks. He also manufactured weapons and specialized in explosive devices. His activity was directed and funded by the Popular Resistance Committees in the Gaza Strip.

✿ **January 12** – IDF forces exposed an explosive device made from a gas bottle containing 20 kilograms (44 lbs) of explosives and metal fragments. It was hidden in the ground in a village south of Jenin. It was apparently intended to be used to attack IDF soldiers operating in the area. The device was detonated by the IDF.



Left: The explosive device. Right: The IDF safely detonates the device (Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesperson, January 12)

First easing of restrictions on movement of Palestinians in the West Bank

■ On January 1 the IDF began easing restrictions on the movements of Palestinians in the West Bank. The decision was made in the wake of the summit meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and PA Chairman Abu Mazen.³ According to the IDF spokesperson, the following steps have been taken so far: the passage of goods through some roadblocks in Samaria has been facilitated; only spot-checks will be made of those going through 16 main roadblocks, at the discretion of the commanders in place; the crossing in the northern Jordan Valley was opened to enable the passage of goods and agricultural produce from Palestinian villages to the Jordan Valley (January 9).

³ For further information see our Bulletin entitled “News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation December 15-31 2006,” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/t31dec_e06.htm and http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/t31dec_e06.pdf.

The number of entry permits into Israel for workers from Judea and Samaria was increased.

■ The aforementioned steps do not yet represent a full implementation of the decisions reached by Olmert and Abu Mazen. The IDF plans additional steps, whose security aspects are still being examined in relation to humanitarian considerations and the desire to ease movement for local residents. In any case, the Palestinian media are still full of complaints that the IDF continues to delay residents wanting to move between Tulkarm, Jenin and Nablus, and to carry out strict examinations of their belongings (Al-Quds newspaper, January 14)

Lebanon

Hezbollah weapons cache used by IDF soldier abductors uncovered

■ On January 11, during an IDF search of the area near moshav Zar'it where two IDF soldiers were abducted on July 12, a weapons and equipment cache was uncovered. It contained RPGs and RPG launchers, LAU missiles, carriers and other military equipment. According to first assessments, the equipment was abandoned by Hezbollah operatives after the abduction



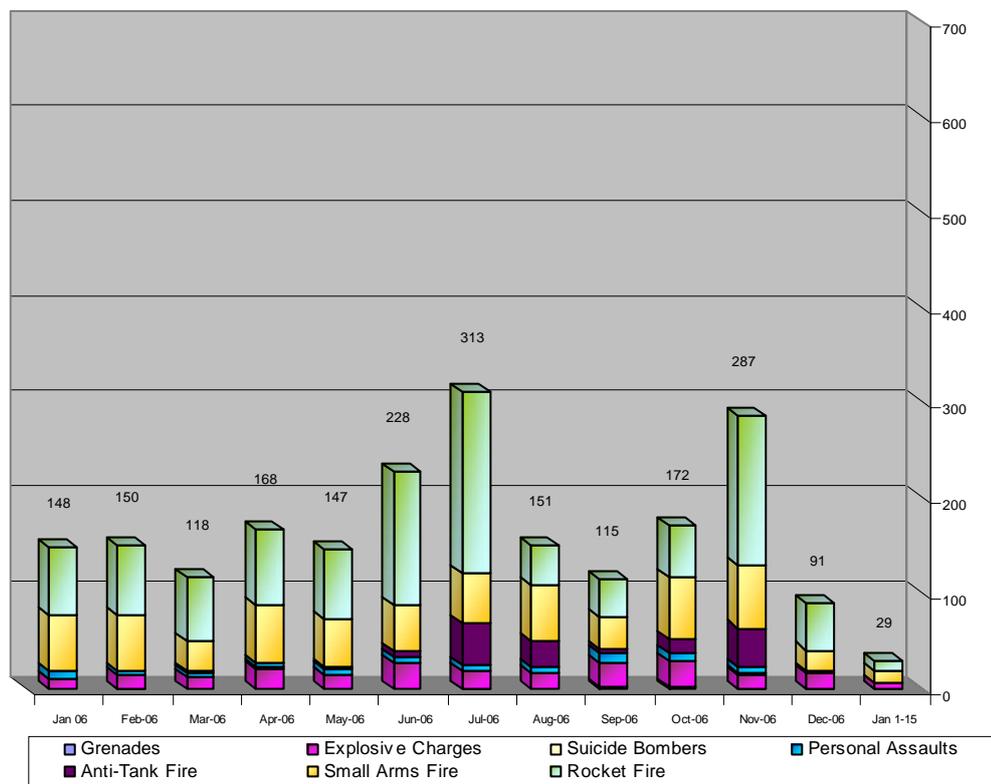
Some of the weapons and equipment (Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesperson, January 11)

Iran and Hezbollah increase activity in the PA-administered territories

■ According to the Israeli media⁴ ISA head Yuval Diskin told a government meeting that Hezbollah was increasing its terrorist infrastructure-building activity in Judea and Samaria, in addition to its activity in the Gaza Strip and among Israeli Arabs. Hamas, he also stated, was leaning more toward Iran, which was “coming in through the window [thus opened], and providing money, guidance and training for terrorist activists.”

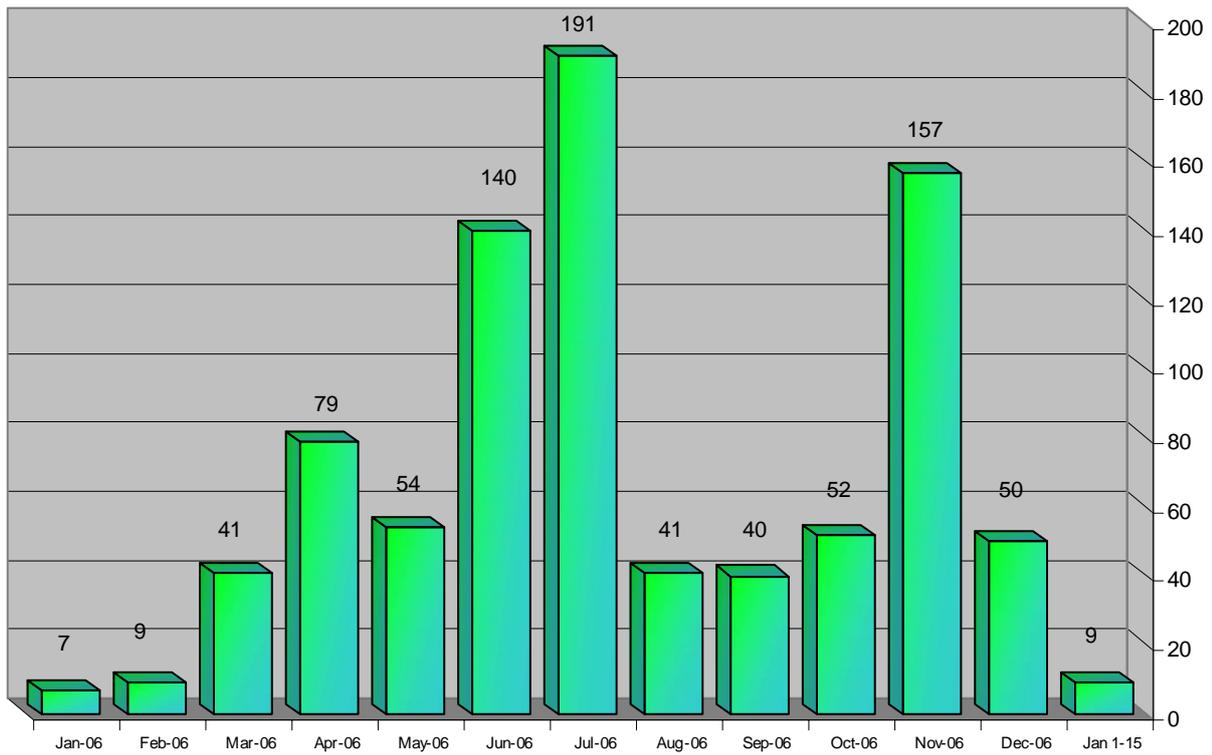
Statistical Data

Monthly distribution of attacks

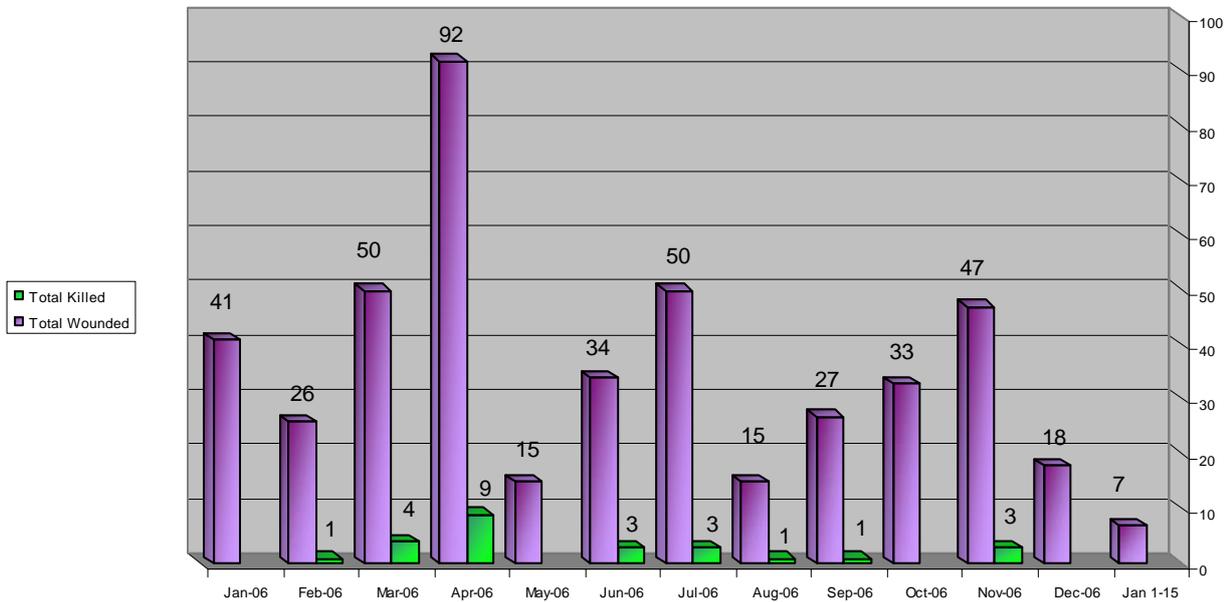


⁴ An article by Itamar Eichner in the January 15 edition of Israeli morning newspaper *Yediot Aharonot*.

Monthly distribution of rocket hits



Monthly distribution of Israeli casualties



The internal Palestinian arena

Rising anarchy

The current situation

- During the past two weeks there was an increase in the violent confrontations between Hamas and Fatah (and the security forces), which began with Abu Mazen's call for early elections on December 16. There have been exchanges of gunfire, mutual assassinations and abductions, and institutions and offices identified with both sides have been attacked. During the past few days the situation has become calmer, but the potential for another flare-up still exists.
- During the confrontations dozens of Palestinians were killed, either intentionally or by accident (about 50, in our estimation). Some of them were Fatah or Hamas operatives or members of the security forces. Some of them were relatives of operatives or members of the security forces, or innocent civilians who were killed in the crossfire. It has been reported that Gaza Strip residents are afraid to leave their houses because of the increased number of murders and abductions.
- The rival sides blamed each other for having acted with particular cruelty. The Hamas attack on the house of Mohammad Gharib was accompanied by extreme acts of cruelty and expressions of hatred (see below). Hamas operative Musheir al-Massri held a press conference in Gaza on January 10, during which he showed photographs of Hamas operatives who, he said, had been abducted by Fatah and tortured: "They used fire, iron bars, cigarettes, beatings, curses and blasphemy" (Al-Sharq al-Awsat, January 11)
- Attempts made by external arbitrators (Egypt, for example) and by Palestinian public figures to end the anarchy have failed. The ceasefires reached were not put into practice and the lulls in violence were only temporary. It would seem that if the escalation does not stop, the PA will suffer more extreme violence, a complete disintegration of its institutions and the exchange of what remains of the PA government for a regime of armed militias, local gangs and strong clans.

- With the worsening situation in mind, Palestinian prime minister Ismail Haniya gave a conciliatory speech calling for the violent confrontations to stop and for a renewal of the negotiations to establish a Palestinian national unity government. He said that it was out of the question that Fatah and Hamas weapons be aimed at Palestinians, and called for them to be aimed only at the Israeli “occupation” (Al-Jazeera TV, January 13). It was reported that Abu Mazen, who is to visit Damascus next week, may meet with Khaled Mashaal, the head of the Hamas’s political bureau, to try to reach an agreement on the establishment of a national unity government.

The confrontations

- The incidents can be described as follows :

- ✿ **Violent incidents focus in the Gaza Strip:** Most violent incidents continue to be confined to the Gaza Strip, where Hamas has the advantage over Fatah and its security forces, which are loyal to Abu Mazen. During the incidents Hamas initiated counter-attacks on Fatah power bases, especially against the higher echelons of the Palestinian Preventive Security.

- ✿ **Spread of clashes to Judea and Samaria:** Fatah, aware of its inferiority in the Gaza Strip, as in the past, initiated the spread of violence to Judea and Samaria, where it and the security forces enjoy a position of power, to create a balance of deterrence with Hamas. Fatah forces attacked prominent Hamas operatives, city and council elected officials, clerics and workers in “charity” institutions affiliated with Hamas. However, the confrontations in Judea and Samaria were of lesser magnitude than those in the Gaza Strip.

- **The power of the clans increases as the central government weakens**

- ✿ As the PA weakens – or disintegrates – a vacuum has been created which the clans have rushed to fill, especially in the Gaza Strip. Drawn into the violent confrontation between Hamas and Fatah, they have become the central factor motivating the internecine Palestinian violence.

- ✿ Especially conspicuous is the blood feud between the violent Dughmush clan and Hamas’s Executive Force, following the murder of two of

Dughmush members in December 2006. Armed clan members shot at the house of Hamas foreign minister Mahmoud al-Zahar in the Sabra district of Gaza a number of times, abducted Hamas operatives and were involved in violent clashes with a rival clan.

■ **The main incidents were:**

✿ **The murder of Col. Mohammad Gharib**, inspector general of the Palestinian Preventive Security, by Hamas operatives on January 4: He was murdered during a Hamas and Executive Force attack at his home in Jabaliya. During the attack dozens of RPGs were fired at his house, and the nearby residence of senior Fatah official Sufyan Abu Zayda was blown up. The attack lasted for some time and resulted in nine dead and more than 75 wounded.



Mohammad Gharib's wife holding his picture (Palestinian TV, January 5)

✿ **Clerics attacked:** On January 5 sheikh Adel Nassar, a senior *da'wah* activist, was murdered as he left the mosque in the al-Maghazi refugee camp where he had given the Friday sermon. (Another sheikh, who had also attended the service, was wounded.) Fatah sources claimed that his sermon had included harsh criticism of Hamas, and that had prompted the killing. A Hamas Website blamed Fatah for his death. Another cleric, Islamic preacher Ibrahim al-Imawi, the sheikh of a mosque in Beit Hanoun, was beaten by Hamas operatives because his sermon included a condemnation of the growing anarchy in Gaza (Palestinian News Agency, January 12).

✿ **A Peruvian photographer working for Agence France-Presse was abducted on January 1.** On January 7 he was released. Apparently he was abducted by the Dughmush clan, which demands that the Hamas operatives who killed two of its members be handed over.

✿ **Attacks by Fatah operatives on individuals and institutions identified with Hamas in Judea and Samaria:** Mahdi Hanbali, deputy mayor of Nablus and identified with Hamas, was abducted; Marwan Qadoumi, a lecturer at Al-Najah University in Nablus and affiliated with Hamas, was attacked and wounded; the bodyguard of Aziz Dweik, Hamas head of the Palestinian Legislative Council, was shot at; Muhammad Ramhi, Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, was shot at; the Islamic sports club in Jenin was torched; the Hamas deputy minister of health was abducted; the car of the Hamas minister of prisoners' affairs was torched.



Abducted deputy mayor of Nablus photographed with his captors (Al-Jazeera TV, January 7)

The propaganda war

■ The escalation in the violence was accompanied by an escalation in the propaganda war waged in the media. Mutual mud-slinging epithets included Fatah's calling Hamas "Shi'ite terrorists," "Pesh Merga militias" (the Kurdish militias in Iraq), "loathsome murderers," etc. Hamas responded in kind by calling his opponents in Fatah "subversives," "pro-Zionist," "infidels" and "Oslo hooligans." Muhammad Dahlan, still in Hamas crosshairs, was accused of leading the Fatah "subversives", of plotting with the Americans, of causing the prisoner trade deal with Israel to fail and of trying to incite civil war.

Mass Fatah rallies in Gaza and Ramallah

■ Since Abu Mazen's speech on December 16, Fatah has experienced a sense of unity and a general enlistment into its ranks and those of the security forces. That was reflected in two mass rallies to celebrate the 42nd anniversary of the founding of Fatah. One was held in Gaza and the other in Ramallah. They were designed to demonstrate Fatah's strength vis-à-vis Hamas.

■ Muhammad Dahlan spoke in Gaza, accompanied by shots fired into the air and shouts of "Long live Fatah, death to the murderers..." During the speech the crowd chanted "Shi'a, Shi'a," that is, a taunt to Hamas for its increasing closeness to Shi'ite Iran. Dahlan quieted the crowd, saying: "They are not Shi'ites, they are murderers" (Al-Jazeera TV, January 7).

Muhammad Dahlan and his supporters demonstrate their strength



Left: Muhammad Dahlan speaking in Gaza (Palestinian TV, January 7) Right: Dahlan carried on the shoulders of the inflamed crowd (Al-Jazeera TV, January 7)

■ Another Fatah show of strength was the rally held at the Muqataa in Ramallah. More than 100 thousand Fatah activists and operatives from Judea and Samaria participated (half a million, according to the rally's organizers). Abu Mazen gave a conciliatory speech calling for national unity, and stressed his opposition to a civil war. The crowd chanted "Hamas, Shi'ites." Abu Mazen, who tried to calm them, answered: "That slogan is no good...We are not opposed to anyone...and we don't accuse anyone of heresy..."



The Fatah rally in Ramallah (Al-Jazeera TV, January 11)

Political power struggles between Abu Mazen and Hamas

■ In addition to the violent confrontations and propaganda war, political power struggles continue between Abu Mazen and Hamas. For example:

✿ Abu Mazen announced that he had issued an edict to disband Hamas's Executive Force, claiming it was illegal. Hamas responded to the announcement with harsh condemnation, saying that it would more than double the Force from 5,500 to 12,000.

✿ Interior minister Sa'id Siyam decided to stop issuing passports in Ramallah and to force West Bank residents to receive their passports from the authorities in Gaza. That was done to make West Bank residents dependent on services provided by Hamas officials. He also fired the head of the passport authority in the West Bank for "negligence."