



*Split in Radical Sunni  
Islam*

**Muslim  
Brotherhood  
Challenges al Qaeda  
for Jihadi Primacy**

*Arab Allies Ditch  
Defiant Assad*  
**Saudi & Egyptian  
Rulers Shift  
Support to Syrian  
Opposition**

*US-Israeli P1-P2  
Centrifuge Dispute*  
**The Key to  
Evaluating the  
Timeline for Iran's  
Nuclear Bomb**

*Subversion and Sabotage  
May Work Better than  
Sanctions*  
**Is Iran Being Dosed  
with Its Own  
Medicine?**

*Chechnya*  
**A Rebel Winter  
Offensive after the  
Breakdown of  
Secret Diplomacy**

**HOT POINTS**  
**A Digest of  
DEBKAFfile Round-  
the-Clock  
Exclusives in Week  
Ending January 12,  
2006**

Vol. 5, Issue 237, January 13, 2006

*Split in Radical Sunni Islam*

**Muslim Brotherhood Challenges al Qaeda for Jihadi Primacy**



The first rumbles of a quake threatening to sunder the militant Islamic world have gone unnoticed. Still subterranean, they have not yet begun to touch on any political or economic conventions in the West. That exemption will not last long.

It is the first time in the 12 years since al Qaeda snatched the lead of the Sunni Muslim warfront by its first attempt to blow up New York's Twin Towers that the Muslim Brotherhood has decided to fight back and recover its primacy of international radical Islam.

**DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** Muslim experts, having discerned the first symptoms of this rupture, see it developing into a bloody struggle for supremacy. The potential mutual attrition of the two violent movements could afford the West its first prospect of some respite from the global plague of Islamist terrorism. The Muslim Brotherhood was galvanized into bestirring itself to challenge al Qaeda's pre-eminence by the loss of one important Middle East stronghold after another.

1. Their leaders decided enough was enough when they heard **Osama bin Laden's** deputy **Ayman Zawahiri's** videotaped message on Jan 5, in which he mocked the Muslim Brotherhood's historic election gains of one-fifth of Egypt's parliamentary seats, then poked fun at the Brotherhood's rising strength in Jordan and finally ridiculed the Hamas' expectation of victory in the Palestinian general elections on January 25<sup>th</sup>.

Al Qaeda's No. 2 sneered at the "naiveté" of the Muslim Brethren for trusting that the infidels would let them assume power. He then accused them of serving as fig leaves for corrupt regimes.

As the largest and most powerful movement of Sunni Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood could not afford to be made a laughingstock in Muslim eyes.

2. The Muslim Brotherhood movement is dismayed by al Qaeda's rapid invasion of its strongholds in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Sinai and the Gaza Strip. Its leaders are aghast at al Qaeda's takeover of the Palestinian street and its threatened displacement in the Gaza Strip of Hamas, an arm of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. This encroachment was made possible by the Palestinian policy pursued by the United States and Israel

**(This process was described in detail in the last issue of DEBKA-Net-Weekly).**

3. A similar situation prevails in Jordan.

**Goaded by mockery**

4. It may be recalled that Dr. Zawahiri hails from the Egyptian Jihad Islami, the sworn foe of the Muslim Brotherhood. They well remember him for the book he wrote twenty years ago called *Bitter Harvest*, in which he disparaged the Muslim Brotherhood movement as an "ornament of the Muslim world" and an impediment to the development of Islamic faith.



Nothing since 1985 has happened to change this animosity.

Goaded into action, our sources report the world leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood headed by **Mahdi Akf** convened in Cairo Monday, Jan 9, and resolved to stand up and beat al Qaeda back. Wafk's deputy **Muhammed Habib** was put in charge of getting the movement ready for the challenge.

If this decision is translated into outright conflict, our experts expect blood to flow and its fallout to appear first of all in three spheres:

A. In Iraq, where al Qaeda's **Abu Musab al Zarqawi** has held back from attacking Sunni targets except for factions and figures lining up with the Americans. This truce may disappear overnight. The first intimation of a change afoot was signaled by an ominous notice addressed by Zarqawi on Jan. 8 to Iraqi Sunnis: "Don't imagine I accepted your participation in Iraq's general election. This time I held back, but no more."

B. In Afghanistan, where the Taliban will find itself on the horns of a dilemma between reverting to its parent-movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, or sticking with al Qaeda.

C. In the Gaza strip, where Hamas may decide to forcibly expel the newly-established al Qaeda cells.

If this conflict gathers steam - in these three arenas before spreading across the Muslim world - the prognosis is for key elements of Osama bin Laden's terrorist movement to find themselves severely hamstrung for the first time.

[Back to top](#)

---

### *Arab Allies Ditch Defiant Assad*

## **Saudi & Egyptian Rulers Shift Support to Syrian Opposition**



By rejecting the UN commission's request for an interview, Syrian president **Bashar Assad** this week became a disposable liability for the disenchanted Arab rulers who had tried hardest to throw him a lifeline.

Saudi **King Abdullah bin Abdelaziz** and Egyptian president **Hosni Mubarak** presented him Sunday, Jan. 8, with a last-chance ultimatum to save himself from the consequences of defying the UN on

Lebanon and the inquiry into the **Rafiq Hariri** assassination.

The matter was pressing enough for Saudi foreign minister **Prince Saudi al Faisal** to emplane for Damascus early Sunday after a crack-of-dawn conference with the king at 5.30 a.m. Jeddah time. The Saudi minister strode into the Syrian presidential palace with an order to Assad to present himself to the Saudi king forthwith before the onset of the annual hajj at noon.

**DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** Gulf sources report the Syrian ruler arrived with one hour to spare. His conversation with the king was even less pleasant than the prince's morning wake-up call. He was given a bald ultimatum: comply with three conditions or forfeit the solidarity of his Arab co-rulers in Riyadh and Cairo.

1. Give up evasive maneuvers and fully cooperate with the UN commission probing the assassination of Lebanese politician Rafiq Hariri last February.

(The UN commission condemned his rejection of this demand as disrupting the investigation.)

2. Arrest all suspects named by the UN team as accomplices in the crime.

3. Hands off Lebanon: desist from any political, diplomatic or military meddling in Lebanese affairs and withdraw sponsorship from Syrian protégés, whether politicians, parties, or organizations.

**DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** sources say this stipulation was hard for Assad to

swallow because it requires him to pull his patronage from his close ally, Lebanese president **Emil Lahoud**, with serious repercussions for his own standing at home.

The Saudi monarch made it clear that he and Mubarak were of one mind on this ultimatum. He told the Syrian ruler that the Egyptian president expected him in Sharm el-Sheikh at 4.00 p.m. sharp that same afternoon.

Before confronting Assad that day, Abdullah and Mubarak had laid some careful groundwork.

### **Haddam organizes Syrian government-in-exile**

(As first reported by DEBKAFfile – see **HOT POINTS**-), they put their heads together on Tuesday, Jan. 3, then decided that after breaking all his promises to them, Assad was no longer worthy of their support. From now on, they would back the policies pursued by Washington and Paris on the Lebanese and Syrian questions and furthermore go along with the UN commission's Hariri probe. But first, they resolved to apply a spot of shock treatment, in the hope that the knowledge his regime was under siege would scare Assad into finally coming round.



Mubarak accordingly flew to Paris Jan. 4, informed President **Jacques Chirac** of their decision and then called secretly on Syrian ex-vice president **Khalim Haddam**, the man who called Assad a traitor, at the Georges V Hotel. Haddam's next visitor was **Prince Bandar bin Sultan**, supreme coordinator of Saudi intelligence agencies. These visits were intended to put Assad on notice that Riyadh and Cairo were now ranged alongside Washington and Paris and against him. )

**DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** Paris sources disclose that, encouraged by this supportiveness, Haddam went into action and opened immediate talks with overseas Syrian opposition groups on setting up a government-in-exile, based on a broad coalition of factions fully prepared to replace the Assad dynasty in Damascus.

All these movements were brought to Assad's knowledge. On the short flight from Jeddah to the Sinai resort Sunday, he must have assessed the danger of Saudi Arabia and Egypt allowing Haddam and his opposition groups to come closer to home and fight his regime from their territory.

When he returned to Damascus from the two confrontations, Assad briefed his insider circle. They were astounded, never having believed that the Saudi and Egyptian rulers would go to such extremes against the president and his family. The only member of Syria's ruling elite who was not shocked was Assad himself, he still seems to believe he can get away with murder.

#### **Last-minute flash:**

*Syrian information minister **Mahdi Dakhallah**, who Monday announced Damascus would reject any interview of the Syrian president Bashar Assad with the UN commission, announced Thursday night he had been misquoted and no final decision had been taken.*

**DEBKA-Net-Weekly** notes that this is the latest twist in the Syrian position vis-a-vis the UN Hariri inquiry – but unlikely to be the last.

[Back to top](#)

---

[US-Israeli P1-P2 Centrifuge Dispute](#)

[The Key to Evaluating the Timeline for Iran's Nuclear Bomb](#)



Diplomacy has gone as far as it can to halt Iran's race towards a nuclear weapon. The West now has to dream up more practical preventatives before it is too late, according to **DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** intelligence sources.

The poor shape of the equipment for enriching uranium discovered at the Natanz site after the UN seals were finally broken Thursday, Jan. 12, may provide a handle for a breakthrough.

That is, if it is true. It may be another Iranian ruse for strengthening the American assessment that a bomb is three years away, against the estimates of Israeli nuclear experts that Iran will arrive at its goal before the end of 2006.

The Iranians say they are reactivating the centrifuge equipment for the resumption of "nuclear research." This would indicate that thousands of P1 and P2 type centrifuges – most of home production - are in no condition to go straight ahead with the orderly process of uranium enrichment for the manufacture of nuclear bombs and missile warheads in any quantity. The long testing still necessary would qualify as the nuclear research Tehran described.

**DEBKA-Net-Weekly** reports the intelligence community is divided over Iran's centrifuge capabilities. No one knows their exact number, whether in the thousands or tens of thousands, but American experts believe most are of the inferior P1 type which uses an aluminum rotor, while the Israelis believe Iran has a large quantity of P2 centrifuges, which use a maraging steel rotor that is stronger, spins faster and therefore enriches more uranium per machine than the P1.

### **P2 centrifuges are the fast route to a bomb**

This also accounts for the gap in time estimates for building a nuclear bomb – the Americans give Tehran at least three years, while the Israelis estimate that, by the end of 2006, Iran will have manufactured enough enriched uranium to take it nine-tenths of the way to a bomb. They are certain they are right and there is no time to lose.



**DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** sources in the nuclear industry report furthermore that the Iranians are in a mad rush to mobilize top talent to help them overcome technical snags. Engineers from North Korea, China, Russia and parts of Europe, such as Germany, are willing to hire out to Tehran without asking their governments.

According to a report in the London *Observer* last Sunday, Jan. 8, a truck loaded with 1,000 kilos of zirconium silicate from a British firm was stopped at the Bulgarian border with Turkey, before being allowed to continue its journey to Tehran. No British export license was required although zirconium metal which can be used in a nuclear weapons program can be extracted from the silicate.

With this much international help, Iran will short-cut its technical problems and be ready in the spring of 2006 to announce it can proceed to the "limited production of enriched uranium for research."

Decoded, this means a further step towards a bomb.

It is worth mentioning that the Iranians never for a moment halted uranium enrichment for military purposes, but because the process went forward in clandestine conditions, the quantities yielded were small.

In recent weeks, the secret manufacture of P2 centrifuge manufacture has been stepped up to aim for a target of 60,000 units.

Iran's clerical rulers are pleased with their brinkmanship tactics. They decided at closed conferences this week in the office of Iran's supreme ruler **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei** and the National Security Council to continue

testing the limits of Western patience.

President **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** offered the opinion that a tough stance would make the West back down still further and was the most beneficial of any tactics.

### **Tehran could swing back to the Russian option**



Khamenei, in a speech marking the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice, declared the Islamic Republic must adhere to its independent nuclear program in all circumstances.

Tehran's tactics therefore remain unchanged: each important advance in their program is accompanied by an apparent softening in its hard-line position – all for the purpose of disarming the West and toning down its strident condemnations.

A case in point this week was Tehran's unexpected waiver of its objections to temporarily relocating its uranium enrichment processing to Russia, with the reservation that this could happen only after Iran achieves full independent capacity.

According to **DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** sources in Tehran, the Iranians are genuinely concerned to explore the Russian option, to find out if they can learn enough from the Russians to improve their enrichment techniques. A project in Russia would not prevent them from continuing their enrichment operations – openly in Natanz and covertly at the closed military compound at Parchin and other sites scattered around the country. It will therefore not be surprising if Tehran comes out with an offer to seriously discuss this project with Moscow.

At the internal councils in Tehran this week, our sources report the supreme ruler made fun of Washington's threats to refer its nuclear activities to the UN Security Council for sanctions. Khamenei asked: Would the Americans go for an oil embargo and risk depriving the world of 2.5 million barrels of Iranian oil a day and so send the price shooting up from \$60 to \$100 the barrel?

### **Would UN sanctions raise oil to \$100?**

A more efficient sanction, Tehran realizes, would be to choke off its imported refined oil products from the neighboring Gulf emirates, to the tune of \$8bn per annum.

This would bring grinding to a halt Iran's civilian and military vehicles for lack of petrol and plunge the country in chaos. But Tehran is gambling on its neighbors' wariness of siding with the West and putting up backs in Tehran.

**DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** diplomatic sources suggest that Iran is not the only party playing for time. Washington too appears to be in no hurry to take drastic steps.

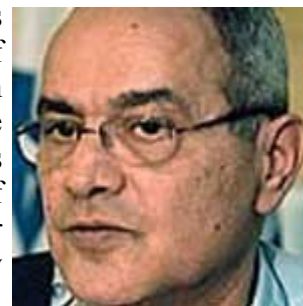
US intelligence believes that it will take the Iranians another four years at least to crack the problem of how to deliver a nuclear bomb. They lack the technology for making devices small enough to be carried by fighter planes or to fit as nuclear warheads on their missiles. Even if they mastered the construction of an atomic bomb the size of a house, how would they deliver it to target?

The Americans appear to have rejected out of hand an aerial attack on Iran's nuclear installations. Critics claim they are scattered too widely to be knocked out quickly from the air. These installations range from the uranium mines at Saghand near Kashan, to the Isfahan facility where yellow cake is manufactured, Natanz, center of uranium enrichment, Arak where a heavy water reactor is under construction, and dozens of facilities in Tehran and its outskirts like Levizan and Parchin, and more facilities in the foothills of the

Albroz mountains near Damavand north of the capital and the Moallem Kalayeh region.

### **The military option is still on the table**

However the option of air attack has its proponents too in Washington. They argue that snapping any of the links in the chain of Iran's weapons production would derail the entire process and is therefore worth a try. The argument that most of the facilities are buried deep underground and therefore out of reach of Western bombs is advanced mostly for public consumption, to put people off the military option for snuffing out Iran's nuclear aspirations.



However, **DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** sources believe that military action is worth considering because the right kind of bunker-busters or smart bombs could be effective. A hint in this direction was thrown out enigmatically this week by the Israeli chief of staff **Lt.-Gen Dan Halutz** who said there was a military way of overcoming Iranian installations in answer to a question put to him at Tel Aviv University. He did not elaborate. The fact is that Washington appears to prefer non-military means. The conviction has gained ground in the US intelligence community that there is a cheaper way of doing away with Iran's nuclear threat that would not entail large-scale bloodshed. That would be to help the Iranian people rise up and topple the clerical regime in Tehran. Given the right expertise and a good enough understanding of the Iranian people's modes of behavior and psyche, the United States could engineer the downfall of the Iranian regime, as it did in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In this regard, Tehran was buzzing with rumors this week that sabotage brought down the small Falcon jet which crashed in northern Iran Monday, Jan. 9, killing the entire intelligence elite of the Revolutionary Guards ground forces. It just so happened that among the victims was the team that supervised the production of Iranian Shehab-3 and Shehab-4 missiles intended to carry nuclear warheads.

More about the new chapter of an apparent secret war for cutting down the rule of the ayatollahs in Tehran and scotching their nuclear aspirations - in the next article in this issue.

[\*Back to top\*](#)

---

### ***Subversion and Sabotage May Work Better than Sanctions*** **Is Iran Being Dosed with Its Own Medicine?**



The roster of Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps officers who perished when their Falcon executive jet crashed over Oroumieh in northern Iran Monday, Jan 9, is truly star-studded in terms of the Islamic Republic.

It was topped by **Gen. Ahmed Kazemi**, head of the RGC's ground forces, his operations commander **Said Soleymani**, his deputy commander **Col. Safdar Reshadi**, director of its intelligence branch **Hanif Montazer-Qaem**, **Gholem-Reza Yazdani**, artillery commander, and **Said Mohtadi**, commander of the elite Army Division 27.

**DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** intelligence sources reveal that Gen. Kazemi was the most senior. He was one of the two officers killed in the crash who were

directly responsible for the Shehab-3 and Shehab-4 missile programs, the key delivery vehicles for the nuclear warheads Iran is striving to develop. Another of the dead officers was in charge of running Iranian terrorist groups in Iraq and Lebanon.

Hanif Montazer-Qaem, whose rank and function the Iranian official bulletin took care not to disclose, was a director of the intelligence branch responsible for gathering information on any Israeli military plans to strike Iranian nuclear installations, as well as useful Israel targets for Tehran to strike in reprisal or pre-emptive operations.

The officer in charge of Iranian terrorist structures in Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority was Said Mohtadi, commander of the Rassoulollah Army Division 27. He too bore extensive intelligence duties, such as running the RGC agents associated with Shiite and Sunni terrorists and insurgents in Iraq, including Abu Musab al Zarqawi's network. Mohtadi also held the lines to Hizballah terrorist and security branches in Lebanon, as well as RGC's links with Palestinian terrorist organizations, such as the Jihad Islami and the Fatah-al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

The wiping out in a single air disaster of the top officers of Iran's nuclear missile program and its intelligence and terrorist machines immediately raised the suspicion of sabotage. The official attribution of the crash to heavy weather and dilapidated engines raises more questions than answers. An executive jet, part of the flight used by top RGC brass, must have had the best possible maintenance work at the Mehrabad air base outside Tehran. It does not stand to reason that both its engines died at the same moment.

Neither was the weather as heavy as described. Atmospheric conditions were stable, there were no thunder storms and the snowfall was light. Photos of the crashed plane's fuselage on the ground after it was burnt by fire exposed large holes in the upper surface, consistent with blasts of small quantities of explosives rather than engine failure or a weather-induced crash.

**DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** Iranian sources report that no one in to the top military and political echelons in Tehran gives much credence to the official version of the mishap. So prevalent are the suspicions that two Iranian lawmakers spoke openly of sabotage in speeches they made in the *majlis* Monday, Jan. 9.

If the crash was caused by sabotage, then two possible causes spring to mind:

### **An external factor**

For a foreign agency to have caused the disaster, a far deeper penetration than ever suspected must have been driven into the heart of Iranian operational intelligence branches engaged in the most secret aspects of Iran's nuclear and terrorist activities.

A penetration on this order would constitute the most significant adverse action against the clerical regime of Tehran since mid-2005, when American, British and Iraqi agents succeeded in stirring up armed national resistance against Tehran in oil-rich Khuzestan, Kurdistan and Balochistan.

Israel's long arm through the Mosad cannot be ruled out.

In the second half of 2004 and through 2005, the Mossad demonstrated its ability to strike behind enemy lines under the noses of Iranian intelligence without leaving a trace in such places as Damascus and the Hizballah-controlled districts of Beirut.

### **An Internal factor**

It is also possible that a bomb was planted in the Falcon by a group inimical to the extremist president **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** and his Revolutionary Guards power base. Only three weeks ago, December



15, his convoy was ambushed driving by night on the Zabol-Saravan highway through the Sistan province of Balochistan in the southeast. Some of his bodyguards were killed and injured.

Tehran denied any assassination attempt occurred against the president. But our Iranian sources revealed that to this day, Iranian security services are stumped in their efforts to lay hands on the death-squad. It may well be that the same hand also destroyed Ahmadinejad's Revolutionary Guards champions, this time with stunning success.

**DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** Iranian sources disclose that the Iranian intelligence probe into the attempted presidential assassination recently closed in on a militia known as Jund Allah, the Soldiers of Allah, of the Balochi Aksani tribe.

On Jan. 4, this militia kidnapped eight Iranian border guards in that same Sistan province near the Pakistani border. At first, Tehran ascribed the abductions to Balochi Sunni nationalist elements which subsist on dope and people smuggling, including al Qaeda operatives. But more disquieting discoveries soon emerged:

1. The Aksani tribal militia which kidnapped the Iranian border guards was also responsible for the December ambush of Ahmadinejad's convoy in the same province.

2. An operational tie-in was unearthed between the Balochi Jund Allah, which operates in the southeast, and the Arab insurgents of Khuzestan in the west. The two dissident movements appear to be working in partnership along the axis of the drug corridor that starts in Afghanistan, traverses Pakistani Baluchistan, continues into Iranian Balochistan, then heads south to the Shatt al Arb outlet to the Persian Gulf.

Iranian security heads never imagined that Shiite guerrilla groups from the south would possibly join forces with Sunni insurgents in the west. They are now asking themselves whether the American and British agents who fomented the ethnic Arab guerrilla war in Khuzestan, or some other Western agency, is also orchestrating the Balochi resistance.

[Back to top](#)

---

### *Chechnya*

## **A Rebel Winter Offensive after the Breakdown of Secret Diplomacy**



**Shamil Basayev**, Chechen warlord and head of the South Russian terrorist-guerrilla army, has done a deal with the chief of al Qaeda's Arab Abu Hafs for the military Shura council to approve a winter offensive against the Russian forces in Chechnya.

**DEBKA-Net-Weekly's** counter-terror sources report that the assault is due to be launched very shortly, after the undercover talks he held in recent

weeks with secret Russian envoys failed to negotiate an end to the Chechen war.

Basayev stipulated that before overt negotiations could begin, Russian forces must totally withdraw from the embattled province. The Russian emissaries agreed to a pull-back as the end-product of negotiations, but not before an accord was signed and implemented.

This controversy could not be bridged.

Addressing his troops this week, Basayev declared that the coming assault would be "the worst hell the Russians had experienced since 2001." He accused the Russian generals of losing control of their men with the result

that Russian troops were indulging in unbridled excesses against the Chechen population to a degree that further fueled the revolt against Moscow.

The rebel leader accused the Russian president **Vladimir Putin** of talking from both sides of his mouth; while discussing the withdrawal of government troops, the president had ordered a chain of new Russian bases to be built across the province. One example was Khankala near the capital Grozny, where the Kremlin had begun to virtually build a whole new base with a military airfield that was to be the largest in Chechnya.

Basayev assured his men that the Chechen rebel army was more powerful and in better shape for the new offensive than ever before in the last two years. He boasted a war plan consisting not only of attacks on Russian forces in the province, but broad operations in other Muslim regions of the Russian federation.

A notice posted on the Arabic website of the Chechen Holy War on Jan 2, apparently by al Qaeda's Abu Hafs, offered the faithful attending the hajj some glad tidings. The statement claimed the first signs of their coming victory had appeared to the Chechen mujahedeen, despite the death of one of their leaders, **Abu Omar al-Seif**.

The notice congratulated the Chechen fighters for luring the Russians into "a diplomatic trap" and inflicting blows that are draining their strength. The jihad is going forward, said the notice, even through some of the fighters are too young and others too old for combat.

[\*Back to top\*](#)

---

## ***HOT POINTS***

### **A Digest of DEBKAFfile Round-the-Clock Exclusives in Week Ending January 12, 2006**

#### **Britain followed by Canada and Australia closed its embassy in Jordan indefinitely over security fears.**

**7 January:** Terrorists may be in the final stages of planning attacks against Westerners and places frequented by Westerners," the Foreign Office Web site said.

DEBKAFfile adds: There are growing indications - including the warning issued by al Qaeda's No. 2, Ayman Zawahiri, in the videotape aired by al Jazeera Friday - that terrorist organization is preparing to take advantage of the crisis created by Ariel Sharon's critical condition to attack a Western ally in the Middle East, including Israel.

#### **The Rice phone call to Olmert indicates Washington is ready to move on**

**7 January:** In her phone call Friday, Jan. 6, to acting prime minister Ehud Olmert, US secretary of state Condoleezza first inquired about the health of ailing prime minister Ariel Sharon, before getting down to brass tacks.

Who have you chosen as your contact man with the Bush administration? she asked. Whom do we call when there is a problem?

The very question carries three messages:

1. The Bush administration realizes the Sharon era is over and is feeling its way towards a different style of relations with the incoming administration in Jerusalem.

2. The Rice telephone call was also a test of the new Israeli leader's ability to make fast decisions and judgments. She took advantage of Olmert's being thrown off-balance by the unexpected responsibility thrust on him by his boss's indisposition to put forward her own candidate as contact-man, the US

ambassador in Tel Aviv, Richard Jones.

3. This was a smart move. Olmert, who is a long way from thinking about appointments, could hardly refuse.

DEBKAFfile's political sources note that if Olmert accepts Ambassador Jones for the long term, he will buy into an arrangement which Sharon shunned: keeping contacts running between Jerusalem and Washington through American emissaries assigned to Israel. He preferred to work through his own representatives, sending them on his business to Washington.

The US secretary seems to have taken a step towards her goal of moving the acting premier away from the Sharon method of communication and channeling his interchanges with Washington in future through Ambassador Jones and the new US military coordinator Maj.-Gen Keith Dayton, who arrived in Israel Friday, Jan. 6.

### **US security coordinator Maj.Gen. Keith Dayton returns to region**

**7 January:** DEBKAFfile's political sources say his return was prompted by the rising anarchy in Palestinian areas that threaten the course of a general election in 18 days. In the view of former US ambassador to Israel and Egypt Edward S. Walker, it is no longer a question merely of terror but pure criminal behavior and absence of central government.

### **Hamas Runs for Election Vowing Never to Talk to Israel or Disarm**

**8 January:** Hamas campaigners, confident of a strong showing in the Jan 25 elections for the Palestinian legislative council, announced in Gaza City Sunday, Jan. 8, that, if elected, they will put an end to any Palestinian talks with Israel. Negotiations with the Zionist entity will only take place through the barrel of a gun, said the man topping the Hamas list, Ismail Haniya.

Abu Mazen succumbed to the Fatah-al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades revolt against his administration in Rafah, the border town divided between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. He swallowed the conquest of the entire strategic border strip by this lawless group.

In Khan Younes, 7 terrorist factions set up a local vigilante militia to enforce order in the South Gazan region that was formerly the site of Israeli Gush Katif.

An increasing number of independent candidates running for office are turning to Hamas for patronage and campaign funding.

DEBKAFfile's counter-terror sources reveal that 10 radical Jihad Islami leaders headed by Abdallah Shami have passed through the Rafah crossing to Egypt on their way to the Saudi hajj city of Mecca. According to those sources, the group is rendezvousing there with Iranian Revolutionary Guards commanders of Tehran's terrorist cells.

Despite international guarantees, the Rafah crossing has deteriorated into a mainline transit hub whose main function is to ease terrorist movements between the Palestinian Gaza Strip, Sinai, Damascus and Tehran.

### **Bush forces Hamas down Israel's throat in Jerusalem. Olmert government is stunned**

**9 January:** Sunday night Jan 8, US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice discussed the forthcoming Palestinian elections to the legislative council on the telephone with Palestinian Authority chairman Abu Mazen.

Jerusalem was not briefed, DEBKAFfile's political sources report.

Twelve hours later, the US consul in Jerusalem Jacob Wallis visited Abu Mazen's office in Ramallah with an oral message from President George W. Bush. According to our sources, it was a presidential guarantee that all the Palestinian parties running for election on Jan 25 would be allowed to

campaign openly in East Jerusalem, eligible voters in the city would be permitted to cast their votes through local post offices, and the voter slips of all Palestinian parties without exception would be available in the balloting booths.

The Israeli government was not informed of the extraordinary step taken by Bush over its head and in respect of Israeli sovereign territory.

The step has some disturbing implications:

1. The Bush administration took advantage of Ehud Olmert's having been less than a week in the job of acting prime minister and treated his reluctance to undertake firm decisions - as long as prime minister Ariel Sharon's condition was uncertain - as a leadership vacuum in Jerusalem.
2. Olmert's failure to come down decisively on the Jerusalem issue has a serious consequence: Washington's intercession enables the terrorist Hamas group to fly its green flags and hold rallies on Temple Mount with its standard calls for jihad against Israel.
4. Governing circles in Jerusalem were stunned by the White House action. They asked if Bush wanted Binyamin Netanyahu and Likud to win the March election having awarded him the edge on the Jerusalem issue.

### **Haddam's Attacks on Assad Backed from Riyadh and Cairo**

**9 January:** This week, disaffected former Syrian vice president Abdul Khalim Haddam called for a popular uprising to oust president Assad, whom he called a traitor. Speaking to the BBC from Paris, where he lives under French intelligence protection, Haddam said: "Public opinion is very frustrated" and "There is an opposition in Syria which will find its way to leading the people to overthrow him."

Haddam said the Syrian president should go to prison for his involvement in Hariri's assassination. He has set up a headquarters at the Georges V Hotel in Paris for an operation to oust the Assad regime. A French security guard detail is posted there by presidential decree.

### **Iran has crossed the point of no-return to a nuclear weapon**

**10 January:** The cries of outrage over Iran's bald-faced removal of the seals at its Natanz nuclear facility have a familiar ring. They also evoked little more from the turbaned rulers of Tehran than a cool shrug.

The seals to shut down equipment for making centrifuges for the enrichment of uranium were affixed two years ago by the UN nuclear watchdog's inspectors at the subterranean Natanz facility.

During this period, Tehran broke one pledge after another and defied every international rebuke, as diplomacy led by France, Britain and Germany, alternated with unfulfilled threats of UN sanctions, to grant the Iranians precious time to forge ahead with its atomic weapons program. Now, belatedly, the International Atomic Energy Agency's director, Dr Mohammed ElBaradei warns that, as well as breaking the international seals at Natanz, Iran will before Wednesday remove seals on two other connected sites.

But the Iranians clearly don't give a hoot about their EU-3 negotiating partners, the IAEA, the Americans or the Israelis. Because they have used the time afforded them by sterile diplomacy to manipulate their way to their objectives, as DEBKAF's Iranian sources reveal:

1. Thousands of P2 and P1 type centrifuges, developed under cover of the two-year purported suspension, can go into action free of international curbs. The IAEA statement said uranium hexafluoride, a uranium gas - can be fed into cascades of centrifuges to produce low-level nuclear fuel or weapons-grade material. This can happen within a week or two.
2. The intelligence consensus reaching our sources is that within six weeks to two months, the centrifuges will have produced enough enriched uranium to

build a single nuclear weapon. Tehran has reached this point of no-return with no real opposition.

The Islamic Republic's rulers are fairly sure Moscow and Beijing will veto Security Council sanctions. The Russians are motivated by their heavy investments, past and potential, in Iran's nuclear industry. The Chinese are heavily dependent on Iranian gas and keen to expand their stake in Tehran's oil industry, partly in order to compete with the Russians.

### **Olmert Is Losing Ground for Kadima and Government Lead**

**11 January:** Ehud Olmert's hand was forced to grant elder statesman Shimon Peres the No. 2 position on the Kadima list, a concession the party's founder Ariel Sharon would have blocked.

Kadima also saw Binyamin Netanyahu as a looming threat as his Likud began narrowing the gap between the two parties. Olmert's next setback was a kite flown by Sharon's close advisers and family Wednesday Jan. 11 to place the ailing prime minister in the No. 1 slot of Kadima.

The acting PM suffered two further blows.

1. He was outmaneuvered by the Bush administration on Palestinian elections in E. Jerusalem. Olmert tried telling US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice that his government would not allow Hamas to electioneer and place its candidates' names on voter slips in Jerusalem, but she overruled him, stating Israel could not stop independents from running for election.

Both know that most Hamas and Fatah candidates in Jerusalem are running as independents. Olmert has thus landed himself with having to explain to the Israeli voter how he let the Palestinians backed by Washington divide Jerusalem and how Hamas' "independent" candidates were allowed to walk off with victory in the Israeli capital

2. Tuesday, Jan. 10, prominently ran a long article captioned Netanyahu stands by in an uncertain Israel. Ex-leader could be heir to his old rival (Ariel Sharon).

This was the second American blow below the belt for Olmert.

### **Abu Musab al-Zarqawi sends a terrorist cell by sea to strike Caesarea or Ashkelon**

**12 January:** Lebanese intelligence services on Sunday, Jan. 8, succeeded in thwarting a terrorist attack against Israel when they seized four al Qaeda operatives near Tripoli. The team was preparing to set off in a boat loaded with weapons and explosives for attacks on the Israeli coast. They told their interrogators that they were to attack the Mediterranean ports of Caesarea or Ashkelon, targeting Israel's two big power plants.

The thwarted attack fits the warnings from Ayman al Zawahiri, Osama bin-Laden's second in command, and al Qaeda in Iraq leader, Musab al-Zarqawi, that al Qaeda was ready for attacks inside Israel.

On Monday, the day after Zarqawi's threat was issued and the terrorist cell was captured in Tripoli, Chief of General Staff Lt.-Gen. Dan Halutz said al Qaeda is more of a virtual phenomenon than a real entity. Rather, it is an umbrella organization. Halutz said the Palestinians operatives, after getting paid by organization A, then move over to organization B. Ultimately, we are talking about the same 107-mm. Katyushas, he said.

Halutz's remarks are typical of airmen who tend to ignore happenings on the ground. DEBKA-file's counter-terror sources assert authoritatively that Al Qaeda in the Middle East is no virtual entity, but a combat force directed by a central command in Baghdad, Iraq, with branches in at least six other regional countries. This force is successfully confronting the US Army in Iraq and frustrating every effort to subdue it. Zarqawi's al Qaeda is now offering a challenge to the IDF.

[\*Back to top\*](#)

---

Copyright 2000-2006 DEBKAfile. All Rights Reserved.