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## Israel: Hamas part of 'axis of terror'

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By Nir Katin, AP

A wounded woman is rushed away from the site an explosion near a fast food restaurant in Tel Aviv.

By Joshua Mitnick, *The Christian Science Monitor*

TEL AVIV — After Hamas defended a deadly suicide bombing Monday, Israel's U.N. ambassador warned that recent statements by the Palestinian government, Iran and Syria "are clear declarations of war, and I urge each and every one of you to listen carefully and take them at face value."

Ambassador Dan Gilerman cautioned that a new "axis of terror" — Iran, Syria and the Hamas-run Palestinian government — was sowing the seeds of the first world war of the 21st century.

"A dark cloud is looming above our region, and it is metastasizing as a result of the statements and actions by leaders of Iran, Syria, and the newly elected government of the Palestinian Authority," he said.

A Palestinian suicide bomber killed at least nine bystanders in an attack during the Passover holiday Monday, setting up a confrontation between Israel and the new Hamas-led Palestinian government.

In an initial response, Israeli aircraft bombed an empty metal workshop in Gaza City early today, causing no injuries.

**VIDEO:** [Israel weighs response](#)

The Israeli Army said the workshop was used by militants to manufacture homemade rockets to be launched at Israeli targets.

The Tel Aviv bombing is the first inside Israel since Hamas took office last month. It will figure as the first major test of Israel's response to terrorism since Hamas was elected in January to run the Palestinian government.

Islamic Jihad, which is not connected to Hamas, claimed responsibility for the bombing. The Hamas government called the attack a legitimate response to Israeli aggression — a break with past regimes, which usually issued condemnations after attacks. Hamas does not recognize Israel's right to exist and has not renounced violence.

"We think that this operation ... is a direct result of the policy of the occupation and the brutal aggression and siege committed against our people," said Khaled Abu Helal, spokesman for the Hamas-led Interior Ministry.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, a moderate from the Fatah Party, condemned the bombing.

Although Hamas has observed a yearlong calm during which suicide attacks have dropped sharply, the Islamic militant group has said it won't prevent other groups from launching attacks against Israel.

Despite Islamic Jihad's claim, Israel said it holds Hamas responsible for the attack.

"Hamas' constant preaching for the destruction of Israel serves as a catalyst for these attacks," said David Baker, an Israeli government spokesman.

Governments around the world condemned the bombing. "The burden of responsibility for preventing terrorist attacks such as this one rests with the Palestinian Authority," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said.

Analysts said Israel now faces the question of whether to increase its level of force in retaliating.

Israel has much greater latitude in its options because Hamas' support for the use of violence likely will limit international criticism of a military response, said Ted Galen Carpenter, a

### SUICIDE BOMBINGS SINCE TRUCE

**April 17, 2006:** A bomber blows himself up at a Tel Aviv restaurant, killing eight.

**March 30, 2006:** Disguised as a Jewish hitchhiker outside a West Bank settlement, a bomber kills four Israelis who stopped to pick him up. The Al Aqa Martyrs' Brigades, a violent offshoot of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah Party, claims responsibility.

**Jan. 19, 2006:** A bomber disguised as a peddler blows himself up at a Tel Aviv felaful restaurant, wounding 20.

**Dec. 29, 2005:** A bomber explodes at an Israeli army checkpoint in the West Bank, killing an Israeli soldier and two Palestinians.

**Dec. 5, 2005:** A shopping mall in the coastal town of Netanya is the mark of a bomber who killed five.

**Oct. 26, 2005:** A bomber blows himself up in Hadera at a food stand, five are killed.

**Aug. 28, 2005:** A bomber blows himself up in the southern city of Beersheba, killing only himself.

**July 12, 2005:** A bomber blows himself up outside a shopping mall in Netanya, killing five.

**Feb. 25, 2005:** In the first attack after a truce is declared, a bomber blows himself up near a Tel Aviv nightclub, killing four.

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foreign affairs analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington.

Israel "still might have to proceed cautiously, however," Carpenter said. "If there are Palestinians who ... want peace with Israel, they can be further radicalized."

Hamas leaders also face a decision about whether to try to fend off a potentially major Israeli offensive by pushing other militant

groups to cease violence.

"Is Hamas prepared to at least try to impose a short-term cease-fire on the other parties ... in the hope that it would be reciprocated by Israel?" asked Robert Malley, who heads the Middle East program at the International Crisis Group. "Or does it fear that it's too politically costly and has too much to lose from trying to impose conditions that it would not accept in its previous history?"

The bomb went off shortly before 2 p.m. in a crowded fast-food restaurant, injuring about 65 and ripping through a crowd of lunchtime diners on a day many Israelis took off to celebrate the weeklong holiday of Passover.

The attack was the deadliest since Israel and the Palestinian Authority declared a truce in the violence 14 months ago. Islamic Jihad identified the bomber as Samer Hammad, 21, from a village outside the West Bank town of Jenin.

**STORY:** [Bomber was a university dropout](#)

*Contributing: Bill Nichols, USA TODAY in Washington; Laurie Copans, The Associated Press in Tel Aviv.*

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