

CORE SCRIPT JMM

20 March 2006

The Jericho Monitoring mission was established in 2002 as part of the Ramallah Agreement. In conjunction with the US we agreed with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to monitor the continued seclusion of six Palestinian prisoners in a Palestinian Authority jail in Jericho.

The six Palestinian prisoners are Ahmad Sa'adat (Secretary of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) Fuad Shobaki, Basel Al Asmar, Ahmed Abu Ghalma, Majdi Al Rimawi and Harudi Qar'an. Sa'adat was elected in the recent Palestinian Legislative Council elections and may take part in the new Hamas-led government. Sa'adat and Shobaki were never sentenced for their crimes. Shobaki was accused by Israel of organising the Karine A arms shipment while he was working for the late President Arafat. The other four detainees, Basel Al Asmar, Ahmed Abu Ghalma, Majdi Al Rimawi and Harudi Qar'an were sentenced for their involvement in the assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi.

Top Lines

- We withdrew our Monitors because we could no longer guarantee their security.
- The Palestinians repeatedly failed to meet their obligations under the Ramallah agreement.
- There was no collusion with the Government of Israeli over the timing.

Expected questions

Why was the JMM there?

The monitors were there to verify that the six detainees remained secluded continuously in custody at the designated prison in Jericho under appropriate conditions.

How many monitors were there?

3 in any one team; 14 altogether

[Background: the three withdrawn were actually all British; this was purely coincidental; it was a joint UK/US decision.]

Why did we withdraw from the JMM?

We withdrew to ensure the security of our monitors. We issued a joint US/UK letter to President Abbas on 8 March 2006 which noted that unless security was improved and the conditions of the Ramallah agreement were met, or Israel and the PA came to a new agreement, we would have to withdraw from the mission (release text of letter).

In 2005 we received two independent reports which noted that security for the monitors was not adequate. Throughout the course of 2005 the threat to the monitors increased. On 15 December 2005 we informed the PA that unless the safety of our monitors could be improved we would have to withdraw. We raised this issue again with the PA on 31 January 2006.

In addition, the Palestinian Authority has consistently failed to meet many of its obligations under the Ramallah Agreement.

What exactly were the security concerns?

There have been a number of incidents over the last year. There have been riots inside and outside the prison. We did not believe that the security of our staff could be guaranteed.

Is this a temporary withdrawal?

Our Consul General contacted the President's office four times since Friday to urge the PA to take action or renegotiate the Ramallah Agreement with the Israeli Authorities. Unless our conditions are met we would not be able to return to the mission.

Why now?

In the letter to President Abbas it was made clear that we would have to terminate our involvement with the mission if the PA did not immediately comply with the Ramallah Agreement and ensure the safety of our monitors. We are unable to comment on specific security information. However the timing was chosen to ensure security for our monitors.

What about the safety of the prisoners?

Security for the prisoners is provided by the Palestinian Authority, not the monitors. The detention of the prisoners is a matter for the Israeli and Palestinian authorities. We have a duty of care to ensure the safety of the monitors and we judged that we had become unable to ensure their safety. We gave the Palestinian Authority a chance to rectify the situation but the requisite action was not taken.

Do we think the prisoners should be released?

The detention of the prisoners is a matter for the Israeli and Palestinian authorities.

Was it a US decision?

This was a joint decision taken by the US and the UK for the protection of our monitors.

People have been killed since the JMM withdrew. This was inevitable and is UK's fault?

We deeply regret any injuries or loss of life. But we made clear to the Palestinian Authority what steps they need to take for our involvement in the mission. Our Consul General contacted the President's office four times since Friday to urge the PA to take action or renegotiate the Ramallah Agreement with the Israeli Authorities. Unless our conditions are met we are unable to return to the mission.

What is your reaction to the Israeli attack on the prison.

The Foreign Secretary earlier today spoke to Israeli Foreign Minister Livni. He urged the maximum restraint in their activities outside Jericho Prison.

HMG view on attacks on British Council?

We are deeply concerned about the violence this morning, and particularly about the attacks on the British Council. Such violence is entirely unacceptable. We made our concerns clear to the Palestinian Authority last week and said that unless immediate action was taken, we would withdraw our monitors.

(Background: 8 staff at the Gaza British Council Office; this was one of four British Council offices in Gaza and the West Bank.)

Has HMG changed its travel advice for UK citizens?

We changed our travel advice this morning. We now advise against all travel to the Occupied Territories following serious threats against UK and US nationals. Additionally we urge all British nationals who do not have adequate and continuous professional close security protection to leave the Occupied Territories.

Israel/PA

Did we pre warn the Israeli/Palestinian authorities?

As required by the Ramallah Agreement (that we inform both parties of changes or potential changes to the status of the JMM) we informed the Israeli Government of the letter delivered to the PA on 8 March. We did not co-ordinate our plans with either party, but both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities were informed as the monitors left the mission.

We had previously informed the Palestinian Authority (e.g. on 15 December 2005 and 31 January 2006) that we would withdraw if our security recommendations were not implemented. On 17 February HMA Tel Aviv informed the Israeli authorities that we might have to withdraw from the mission due to security concerns.

Did we agree with the Israeli that they could arrest/capture the prisoners?

No. The ongoing detention of the prisoners is a matter for the Israeli and Palestinian authorities.

(If the prisoners are killed) did we not think it inevitable?

In our letter to the PA we made clear that if they were not willing to comply with the arrangement that they should arrive at a new agreement with the Government of Israel. The PA were aware of their responsibilities.

Hamas

Was the election of Hamas a factor?

The decision to withdraw was taken to protect our monitors. It is the outgoing PA government that has been unable to deliver on its obligations. Suggestions that the prisoners might be released by the incoming administration confirmed our concerns that the Palestinian Authority was not committed to upholding the Ramallah agreement.

Does withdrawal reflect HMG future policy towards the PA?

No any future assistance from the UK to the Palestinian Authority, will be governed by the principals laid out in the Quartet statement on 30 January and reviewed against that government's commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap.

Statement made by the Foreign Secretary on 14 March 2006 as part of Foreign Office Questions.

11. Gordon Banks (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Lab): What steps he is taking to establish channels of communication with Hamas; and if he will make a statement. [57937]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): We fully support the approach set out by the Quartet. Members of any Palestinian Government must be committed to non-violence, the recognition of Israel and the acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map.

May I take this opportunity to explain to the House what has happened today in Jericho and elsewhere in the occupied territories? First, I must emphasise the Government's condemnation of today's appalling acts of violence. They are totally unwarranted. I am glad to tell the House that all United Kingdom monitors and other employees of the British Government are safe—including British Council employees, all of whom are Palestinian—in Gaza and in Ramallah. We are currently advising against all travel to the occupied territories. I set out the background to the withdrawal of our monitors from the prison in Jericho in a written ministerial statement to the House this morning. The

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House will recall that they arrived in Jericho under the Ramallah agreement in 2002, which helped to bring about the end of the siege of President Arafat's compound.

The Ramallah agreement set out clear conditions under which the six Palestinian prisoners would be held. The 14 British and American monitors were there to monitor those conditions, not to detain or protect the prisoners. Regrettably, the Palestinian Authority have never in the past four years met all their obligations under the Ramallah agreement, despite our repeated demands that they do so.

Our monitors faced an increasing threat to their safety. I considered—on advice from officials and security experts—withdrawing them last year, but I judged that, on balance, the risk was just acceptable to allow them to stay. In the light of recent reports, however, I decided that their position was no longer tenable and the security risks were unacceptable. The safety of the British monitors had to be my overriding concern. In my original statement to the House of 29 April 2002, I set out the fact that that was our overriding concern, but also the principal responsibility of the Palestinian Authority.

Given the deteriorating situation, on Wednesday last, 8 March, we—that is, the United States and the United Kingdom consuls general—informed the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government, as the Ramallah agreement required us to do, by letter of our intention to withdraw the monitors "with immediate effect"—I quote directly from the letter—unless the Palestinian Authority took a final opportunity to meet their obligations. I regret that they felt or were unable to do so. For obvious security reasons—namely, the safety of the monitors as they withdrew—we could not give precise timings of the withdrawal, but the phrase "with immediate effect" was absolutely clear. We made sure, and were assured, that President Abbas was made aware of our plans. The letter, indeed, was to him.

Just before coming to the House, I spoke to President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, the United States Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, and the Israeli Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni. I urged the Government of Israel to show the maximum restraint in their current actions being undertaken in the perimeter of Jericho prison.

Gordon Banks: In the light of today's developments and of reports of hostage-taking in Gaza, will my right hon. Friend tell us what wider measures he is taking to ensure the safety of all British nationals in Gaza and on the west bank, to reduce the immediate tensions and to limit any possible spread of today's violence?

Mr. Straw: We immediately issued changes to travel advice, urging British citizens—British subjects—not to travel to the occupied territories for the time being. We also gave other detailed advice. As I told the House earlier, I have already spoken to the Foreign Minister of the Government of Israel, and urged that the Israeli defence force show maximum restraint in the present difficult circumstances.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks) (Con): May I return to the substance of the original question? The

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Quartet has laid down clear conditions for Hamas to comply with its demands. Will the Foreign Secretary tell us how much time Hamas has in which to change, and specifically when a cut-off in funding might occur?

The Foreign Secretary is right to attach such importance to the safety of our monitors, and his decision in principle to withdraw from the Jericho monitoring mission is therefore understandable. However, several questions inevitably arise. Did the Government give sufficient consideration to the consequences of a sudden withdrawal, and should an interim arrangement have been sought to avert an outbreak of violence when the monitors withdrew? What was done to alert the British Council and British officers in the region to the possibility of a sudden escalation of violence? Were the Government aware of the likelihood of Israel seeking to take custody of the prisoners by force? Under the terms of the Ramallah agreement, which party has responsibility for the lives and safety of the Palestinian detainees now that the monitoring mission has been withdrawn? In the meantime, what steps are the Government taking to make clear to armed Palestinian groups—or, indeed, anyone else—that the targeting of British property and personnel will in no circumstances advance their interests?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman asked about the time that we would give the Hamas Administration. No time scale has been laid down so far. Indeed, for the time being there is no Hamas Administration. We wait to see the nature of that Administration. However, the Quartet's statement is very clear. Meanwhile, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and I have sought to ensure that while clear expectations are laid at the door of the new Hamas majority in the Palestinian legislative assembly, ordinary Palestinians are not punished or impoverished for the results of their perfectly free decisions in the election.

As for the withdrawal decision that I announced earlier today, I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the understanding that he showed. He asked whether sufficient consideration had been given to whether there was any alternative. The answer is yes. The matter had been under active consideration by me for getting on for a year. When I was first asked to agree to the withdrawal I decided not to do so, because at that stage, after further questioning of the security assessments, I judged—although it was a risk, for which I took responsibility—that it was just acceptable for the monitors to stay.

There comes a moment, however, when it is impossible to be irresponsible about such risks. My judgment then became, last week, that the risk to the people for whom we were directly responsible was too great. I also considered whether there could be some kind of phased withdrawal. The problem was that, according to the advice that I received and according to my judgment, if we gave notice our own monitors might end up being subject to kidnap or

siege inside the prison. I am in no doubt about that. For that reason—and although we made it absolutely clear in the letter that was sent to President Mahmoud Abbas, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, that unless there was any change the decision would have immediate effect—we could not give either the Palestinians or the Israelis advance notice.

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Did we alert the British Council? I cannot give the House the precise details, but I can say that British Council staff, who were all Palestinians, became aware of the possibility of demonstrations and that all those staff in both Ramallah and Gaza were withdrawn, so happily they are safe.

Were we aware of the likelihood of the Israelis' seeking to take people into custody or seeking, effectively, to lay a siege around Jericho prison? Indeed we were, and that was part of what I had to consider. The House will recall the background—these detainees had been accused by the Israeli Government of complicity or involvement in the assassination of the Israeli Tourism Minister. The Israelis wished to arrest them, but they took refuge in the Muqata'a, President Arafat's compound. There was then a siege of President Arafat and those prisoners, the resolution of which was that the prisoners would be held in a Palestinian jail but with British and American monitors. The Israelis only agreed to that provided that we agreed to monitor the situation. It for that reason that we kept saying to the Palestinians, "Please improve security, ensure that the conditions of the Ramallah agreement are observed and ensure the security of our personnel."

Who is responsible for the detainees? Legally, I believe it is the Palestinians but, so far as the Israelis are concerned, the detainees are prisoners at large under charge in Israel. That is the currently the subject of intensive diplomatic efforts with the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Whatever revulsion Hamas arouses, is not it a fact that its election victory was as valid as that of the Israeli Government and a good deal more valid than that of George W. Bush in 2000? Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the Israelis continue to create their own do-it-yourself ghetto behind a wall encroaching deeply into Palestinian territory, while maintaining 350,000 illegal Israeli settlers and carrying out pre-election stunts like they have just done in Jericho, peace will be impossible and support for Hamas will rise still further?

Mr. Straw: The Quartet has accepted and acknowledged and, indeed, congratulated the Palestinian people on,

"an electoral process that was free, fair and secure."

In the same statement, the Quartet reiterated its view that settlement expansion by Israel had to stop, reiterated its concern regarding the route of the barrier and noted acting Prime Minister Olmert's recent statements that Israel will continue the process of removing unauthorised outposts. This is a difficult situation—it has been on many occasions in recent years—and we urge all sides to show restraint.

Mr. Michael Moore (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (LD): This is a tragic development and whatever the Israelis' calculations and concerns, their actions have turned a sensitive situation into a highly volatile one, and that is utterly counter-productive. The Foreign Secretary is right that our first priority must be the safety of British citizens in the west bank and Gaza. We agree that retaliatory attacks against them and others are a disgrace and must be completely

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condemned. Will he clarify the steps that are being taken to mobilise the Quartet in response to these events? Will he confirm when he personally most recently discussed the Ramallah agreement with his opposite numbers in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority? What additional security measures at the prison were requested and refused?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his understanding and acceptance that the first priority for any Foreign Secretary must be the security of his own personnel. Frankly, if I am open to criticism, it is on the basis that I kept them there as long as I did, and not that I had to remove them earlier today. On mobilising the Quartet, I have spoken to the United States' Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and I will speak to other members of the Quartet, including High Representative Solana, later today. Earlier today, I spoke to Ursula Plassnik, the Austrian Foreign Minister, who holds the presidency of the Foreign Minister's Council of the European Union. In any event, I am clear that all members of the Quartet will be of the same view as the British Government.

I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman off-hand when I last discussed the Ramallah agreement with either the Palestinians or the Israelis. However, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that our staff in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv have constantly raised the issue, especially with the Palestinian Authority. Following the dispatch of the letter by fax to President Abbas's office last Wednesday, the consul-general, John Jenkins, to whom I spoke just two hours ago, made four separate phone calls to Mahmoud Abbas's chief of staff to ensure that the letter had been received and fully understood. When I spoke to Mahmoud Abbas, who happened to be in Vienna, earlier today, he confirmed that he was indeed aware of the content of the letter. He expressed concern about the fact that we had not given them a precise date and time for the removal, but I have dealt with that issue: if we had, the monitors could have been kidnapped. The security problem has not been the willingness of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah to act, but the inaction of the security personnel on the ground in the Jericho prison.

What we required of the Palestinian Authority was very straightforward—that they kept to the detailed conditions of the operational procedures for the Authority, as agreed in an annexe to the Ramallah agreement. That agreement included no use of mobile telephones, but they were used. Mr. Sa'adat, the leader of the Palestinians who stood in the Palestinian election, ran an election campaign from his cell with his telephone. There were supposed to be restrictions on visitors—they were ineffective—and on correspondence. Moreover, conditions for the monitors became so difficult that they could not carry out cell searches. A fundamental part of the Ramallah agreement was that the six prisoners in question should be kept separate from all other prisoners. However, the monitors were unable to be within the prison; instead, they had to stay on the roof, making effective monitoring increasingly difficult. That was the fundamental problem and putting it right could have been very straightforward—simply by following the Ramallah agreement. I regret that the Palestinian Authority did not have it within them to do so.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): As the Foreign Secretary said, these are accused, not convicted,

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men. However, can he give unequivocal confirmation that there was no collusion with the Israelis on the timing of the withdrawal of the monitors, and will he condemn what I can only describe as state-sponsored terrorism, involving attacking a prison with tanks and rockets?

Mr. Straw: I can absolutely give that undertaking to my hon. Friend—there was indeed no collusion. Under the terms of the Ramallah agreement, we had to give formal notice in writing of our intention to withdraw not only to the Palestinian Authority, but to the Israeli Government. That letter, a copy of which was put in the House Library this morning, spelled

out that we were indeed giving a copy of it to the Israelis. We deliberately decided not to tell anybody about the exact timing of the withdrawal because of the risk to the safety of our monitors, but also precisely to ensure that there could be no collusion with the Israeli defence force. The truth, given the nature of surveillance in the occupied territories, is that if we had told anybody in the occupied territories, we would in practice have been telling the Israeli defence force at the same time.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): The week before last, two of my hon. Friends and I visited the west bank. I shall allow them to speak for themselves, but it was quite apparent to me that relations between the Israeli defence force and the Palestinians were hardly cordial, and today's events will not have improved that. Can the Foreign Secretary persuade me that what he is doing is going to have a practical diplomatic and political consequence, and that it is not simply a well-motivated exercise in appearing to do something? What practical steps can he and his friends in the other members of the Quartet take to achieve some form of progress with this very vexing problem?

Mr. Straw: What I have announced today is a matter of regret, but had I come to the House and instead announced the death of British monitors as a result of my taking too high a risk, that would have been a matter of condemnation, not regret. That is the dilemma that I faced and, as I have said to the House, I was extremely reluctant to take these steps, which is why I held off from taking them, kept asking for more information on the security assessments and insisted that we gave proper notice to President Mahmoud Abbas. But there we are—I took that decision and I happen to think that it was the right one, even though there have been consequences, which we did anticipate.

As for the future, all I can say is that notwithstanding these difficulties there has been some progress, if we look back to April 2002 when the situation was dire and killings were taking place daily on both sides. There is now a ceasefire and the numbers of deaths on each side have been reduced. We have to build on that. It is fundamental to the interests of the Palestinians for Hamas to understand that just as we have responsibilities in terms of recognising the legitimacy of the election, the Hamas leadership has a responsibility to recognise that democracy is incompatible with the pursuit of terrorism.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have allowed Question Time to continue for a further 20 minutes, but we must now move on.

Written Ministerial Statement
14 March 2006

Withdrawal of Monitors from Jericho Monitoring Mission

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I would like to inform the House that the UK and the US withdrew our monitors from the Jericho Monitoring Mission on 14 March. As I made clear in my statement to the House on 29 April 2002 (*Official Report, column 668*), it is the prime responsibility of the Palestinian Authority to ensure the personal security of the United States and United Kingdom monitors. Over the last months it has become increasingly clear that the Palestinian Authority is unable to do this.

The UK and the US have repeatedly raised our concerns over the security of our monitors with the Palestinian Authority and urged them to meet their obligations under the Ramallah agreement. Unfortunately, there has been no improvement. We therefore issued a joint US/UK letter to President Abbas on 8 March 2006. This letter said that we would have to terminate our involvement with the mission if the Palestinian Authority did not immediately either fully comply with the Ramallah Agreement (which sets out monitoring arrangements) and make substantive improvements to the security of the monitors or come to a new agreement with the Government of Israel. As required by the Ramallah Agreement we informed the Israeli Authorities that we were delivering a letter in these terms. I have placed a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

The Palestinian Authority has consistently failed to meet its obligations under the Ramallah Agreement. Ultimately the safety of our personnel has to take precedence. It is with regret that I have to inform the House that these conditions have not been met and we have terminated our involvement with the mission today, 14 March 2006.

Withdrawal of Monitors from Jericho Monitoring Mission

Lord Triesman of Tottenham: I would like to inform the House that the UK and the US withdrew our monitors from the Jericho Monitoring Mission on 14 March. As my Right Honourable Friend the Foreign Secretary (Mr. Jack Straw) made clear in his statement to the other place on 29 April 2002 (*Official Report, column 668*), it is the prime responsibility of the Palestinian Authority to ensure the personal security of the United States and United Kingdom monitors. Over the last months it has become increasingly clear that the Palestinian Authority is unable to do this.

The UK and the US have repeatedly raised our concerns over the security of our monitors with the Palestinian Authority and urged them to meet their obligations under the Ramallah agreement. Unfortunately, there has been no improvement. We therefore issued a joint US/UK letter to President Abbas on 8 March 2006. This letter said that we would have to terminate our involvement with the mission if the Palestinian Authority did not immediately either fully comply with the Ramallah Agreement (which sets out monitoring arrangements) and make substantive improvements to the security of the monitors or come to a new agreement with the Government of Israel. As required by the Ramallah Agreement we informed the Israeli Authorities that we were delivering a letter in these terms. I have placed a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

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PMQs on 15 March 2006

David Cameron MP

Everyone in the house will be deeply concerned by what happened yesterday in the palestinian territories.

We understand the extremely difficult situation under which the british monitors were operating at the prison in jericho. Is the prime minister satisfied that the consequences of withdrawing the monitors were properly thought through?

PM

Yes, I am satisfied about that and what's more, it gives me the opportunity to explain to the house and indeed, to the country, that for the past three months, we have been warning the Palestinian Authority that the security of these month tars was at risk, that the procedures at the particular detention centre were not adequate and proper and that culminated last week, with the US and UK Consuls General, writing to the president, making it clear that unless the Palestinian Authority met its obligations we would have to terminate involvement with the mission, with immediate effect. The fact is for months we have been warning about this. Let me emphasise something to the house.

These monitors are unarmed civilians, whose role is not actually to do the policing, and to make sure that people are properly imprisoned, but to monitor that the procedures agreed were being implemented. In fact for a long time they have been saying the procedures are not being properly implemented. The idea this was uncalled for or unthought through is wrong.

DC

I am grateful for that answer. People will have been concerned by the attacks on the british council in the gaza strip.

Can the prime minister tell us what steps he is taking today, to protect british citizens buildings and organisations that have been working so hard to help the palestinian people? Can the prime minister tell us, whether they were given any advanced warning to take extra security precautions yesterday?

PM

On that last point, i am not sure of the precautions they were told to take. I know this is something that had been discussed widely and extensively with people because we were concerned about the situation that might arise. Perhaps i could make one other point as well.

This country has been generous in the help that it has given to people within the palestinian authority area. We will continue to do everything we can to support the palestinian people, but there is one issue that has to be addressed by the palestinian authority, and that is security on the palestinian side. And if people want progress towards a two state solution which we have championed in this country - champ beyond in this country, a palestinian state living side by side with israel, the security within the palestinian area is of concern. We have done everything we can to support them. We need some help back from the other side.

One other thing i should mention is that another reason for our concern was the recent statement from hamas, following the elections in the palestinian authority, that they intended to release the particular people in this detention centre and therefore, i hope people understand that we could not continue with the situation where wholly unarmed people were put at risk.

DC

I am grateful for that issue. On the issue of hamas and on their election victory and the effect of the funding of the palestinian authority, dont the events of the last 24 hours reinforce the

need to ensure that hamas abides by the conditions set down by the international community? Recognise israel, abandon violence and abide by all of the previous agreements between the palestinian authority and israel, one of which actually concerned the running of the jericho prison itself.

PM

Of course, it is the case that in addition to the bilateral assistance which in this financial year, amounts to £36 million, we have supported the £120 million - 120 million euro package.

We are giving every support to the palestinian authority. Yes, of course, the only way we are ever going to get a peace process beginning again, in the middle east, is if it is accepted that the solution the international community is committed to, a two state solution can only be proceeded with if both sides accept the existence of the other state. Otherwise it is extremely difficult to see how we can make progress. One thing should be made clear again, we respect the mandate that hamas secured in the elections. We supported the democratic elections.

We support them still. But if they want our help, both financially and politically to make progress, it has to be on an understood basis that means giving up violence and negotiating peacefully and accepting the existence of israel. The foreign secretary admitted he knew that when the uk and us monitors were withdrawn from jericho the israelis would seek to take the prisoners by force, giving the impression across the palestinian territories of collusion.

Labour MP - Palestine - Monitors etc

Given that yesterday, the israeli government also reiterated its intention to seize more palestinian land, by extending the wall, incorporating more illegal settlements into israel and annexing the jericho valley, what is the british government going to re-establish its shattered reputation as an honest broker between israel and the palestinian authority?

PM

I am afraid i have to disagree with my honourable friend.

Let me explain the circumstances in which we came to do this monitoring function. We did it under what was called the ramallah agreement, entered into 22002 - 2002 wrsh people charged with serious charges, would be kept in this detention centre and and we would monitor their detention and the agreement on both sides, with israel and the palestinian authority, the palestinians would take charge of the decision, but it would be monitored by us. We have kept to that agreement every inch of the way, we have done the independent monitoring. The breach has been because the proper detention procedures were not being observed on the palestinian side and i do stress stress to her three months of saying to the palestinian authority, including last week, directly to the president of the palestinian authority, "look this is a serious situation, you have to act." i think is evidence of our good faith, not our bad faith.

And i would repeat to her, because i think it is important this message is sent out from this country, we stand stand ready to take this process forward and can help in anyway we can, but it has to be on the basis that agreements entered are abided by everyone.

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Our people, who are the independent monitors, which we did voluntarily to try to sort out the situation that existed in Ramallah in 2002, they are unarmed civilians, they monitor, they are not the prison warders, the Palestinians do that job. These people have frankly been warning us for a year or more that the conditions are not right, that the prison warders are not carrying out their functions effectively, in other words they are monitoring, which was disclosing the fact that it wasn't being done properly. We were getting increasingly worried by the threats that there were to them, because I would feel deeply responsible if one of those independent monitors for example lost their life as a result of an incident, when we had been warned that there were problems; and then it wasn't helped, I have to say, by the Hamas official who then came out and said that it was their intention as a government to release all these prisoners.

So that kind of made our position even worse. So what we then were doing, and over the past couple of weeks, was saying to the Palestinian Authority look you have got to grip this problem, but we can't have our independent monitors there, unable to do their job properly, and at risk of their lives. And I am not saying it is not difficult from the Palestinian point of view, and I know exactly what the impact is when Israel then moves in and so on. I simply say to people, particularly in the Arab world, they have to look at it from the other point of view as well, and we must do the same incidentally, because I understand the sense of anger and injustice on the Palestinian side, but you know this was not some great conspiracy between the US, the UK and Israel, what it was was a genuine situation in which the Foreign Secretary became not just uncomfortable, but extremely concerned, that we were putting at risk the lives of people we had sent in to do a monitoring job that they were telling us they couldn't do any more. Now that in the end is how we had to do it I am afraid.