

# NATO: No talks with Hamas

Rumsfeld: U.S. will monitor Arab aid to Iraqi insurgents

By Amir Oren

TAORMINA, Sicily – Talks between the Palestinian Authority and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will not be renewed if Hamas forms the new PA government, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told *Haaretz* Friday.

After a meeting of NATO defense ministers, Scheffer said talks are "certainly impossible."

Talks with a Hamas-led PA would require the agreement of all 26 member countries, including the United States.

PA chief negotiator Saeb Erekat and security adviser Mohammed Dahlan asked Scheffer to open talks with the PA about a year ago. Scheffer was authorized to send a mid-level official, his bureau chief, Ed Kronberg, for preliminary talks in Ramallah. Kronberg's brief was to make clear to the Palestinians that there would be no NATO involvement in Israeli-Palestinian relations, referring specifically to the evacuation of settlements in Gaza and the northern West Bank.

U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, also in Taormino for the NATO meeting, told *Haaretz* that the United States would not let Syrian and Iranian assistance to anti-American and Iraqi administration forces in Iraq slide.

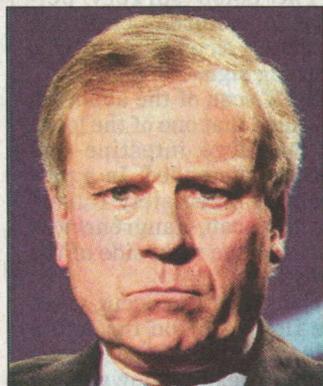
Also speaking at Friday's briefing, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's spokesman, Sean McCormack, refrained from outrightly criticizing Russia for initiating talks with Hamas, differentiating between its self-imposed prohibition on talks with Hamas and the decision of other governments to meet with Hamas. McCormack said he hoped any government talking to Hamas would make clear the Quartet's position on Hamas' obligation to recognize Israel and disavow terror.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, who had lunch with

seven NATO ministers from Mediterranean countries, later met separately with Rumsfeld and the defense ministers of Tunisia, Turkey, Greece, France and the United Kingdom. Mofaz asked Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov to reconsider Moscow's invitation to Hamas so as not to assist it during the critical period of the selection of cabinet and parliamentary appointments. Ivanov said an official invitation had not yet been extended to Hamas, and if it were, it would be for "public relations" purposes.

Ivanov invited Mofaz to visit Moscow, and the latter did not condition acceptance on the withdrawal of the invitation to Hamas.

The two agreed that the chief of staff of the Russian army would visit Israel, and that Russia would delay the transfer of 50 armored personnel carriers to the PA se-



NATO's Jaap de Hoop Scheffer

curity forces.

Mofaz told Ivanov that Russia's willingness to impose sanctions on Iran to reveal its nuclear program was essential, and that Russian weapons sold to Syria found their way to Hezbollah, and were used in the attack on the Israel Defense Forces in Ghajar.