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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel cuts ties with Arafat

Israel said it is cutting off all contact with Yasser Arafat.

The move came after a series of recent terrorist bombings, including one Wednesday in which 10 Israelis were killed when Palestinians bombed a bus in the West Bank and then shot fleeing passengers.

The Palestinian Authority president "is directly responsible for the series of attacks and therefore is no longer relevant to Israel," the Security Cabinet said in a statement.

Israeli troops took over portions of Ramallah in the West Bank.

Tanks were stationed Thursday within 200 yards of Arafat's office in the city.

One Palestinian was killed during the Israeli raids.

Israeli warplanes also struck Palestinian targets in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. [Page 1]

Bush gets Jewish backing

Jews give President Bush nearly 80 percent approval ratings.

And if elections were held today, more Jews would vote for Bush than for former Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore, according to a new survey released by the Republican Jewish Coalition. [Page 3]

\$4.7 million for Sept. 11 victims

The United Jewish Communities has raised almost \$5 million for Sept. 11 relief efforts.

The North American federation umbrella has dispersed \$1.8 million from the emergency fund to aid those affected by the terrorist attacks and to support agencies providing social services.

The initial allocations include \$1.5 million to the UJA-Federation of Greater New York. More than \$300,000 was given to Jewish federations and communities in New Jersey and Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston.

The funds are being designated for a variety of programs, including ones that target immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Holocaust survivors and veterans affected by the terrorist attacks.

An estimated 80 families from the former Soviet Union lost family members in the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks.

Israel cuts contact with Arafat as Palestinian terror continues

By JTA Staff

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The United States and Europe are refusing to give up on Yasser Arafat, despite Israel's break with the Palestinian Authority president after yet another terror attack.

Israel's Security Cabinet decided Wednesday night to cut off all contact with the Palestinian Authority president after Palestinians bombed a bus in the West Bank and then shot fleeing passengers. Ten Israelis were killed and 23 wounded, the deadliest attack in the West Bank since the Palestinian intifada began nearly 15 months ago.

The Cabinet communique said Arafat's failure to take serious action to stop Palestinian terror rendered him "no longer relevant" to Israel.

According to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told the Cabinet, "From our point of view, Arafat no longer exists. Period." However, Justice Minister Meir Sheerit stressed that Israel would not harm Arafat personally.

It was not immediately clear what practical impact the decision to cut ties would have, as contact with Arafat has been extremely limited since the intifada began. Infrequent meetings have been conducted either by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres or by Omri Sharon, the prime minister's son and confidant.

It also was not clear whether the decision banned all contacts with Palestinian officials, including negotiators or security figures who have been meeting with Israeli military officials under the auspices of U.S. envoy Anthony Zinni.

The United States condemned the bus attack, which White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said "underscores the need" for Arafat "to take every step possible to reduce the violence." Yet Washington refused to give up on Arafat, saying it still considered him Israel's interlocutor and potential "peace partner."

"The United States recognizes Yasser Arafat as the leader of the Palestinians and will continue to work with him," the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, William Burns, said. "And we will continue to work with the Palestinian leadership as it must make very difficult choices involving moving against those extremist groups who threaten the interests of Palestinian people."

The statement was echoed by the European Union, though E.U. foreign policy chief Javier Solana admitted that P.A. action against terror "sometimes is not the most consistent."

The U.S. envoy to the region, former Marine Corps. Gen. Anthony Zinni, was to meet Sharon on Thursday night to discuss the implications of Israel's decision to cut ties. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said Thursday that Zinni would demand an explanation of the Israeli action.

"The situation is getting worse not better and we really cannot give up hope. We cannot walk away from this. The stakes are too high," Powell told reporters in Washington.

In addition, Powell said Arafat needed to understand that failure to take radical action against Palestinian terror might destroy his regime.

Wednesday's attack extended what is shaping up as one of the bloodiest periods of the intifada. At least 70 people have died since Zinni arrived Nov. 26 to broker a cease-fire. In all, more than 1,000 have died since the intifada began in September 2000.

Wednesday's attack took place near the fervently Orthodox settlement of Immanuel, north of Ariel. A team of three Palestinians waiting in ambush detonated bombs as the bus passed, damaging it and killing several passengers.

His tires blown out, the driver tried to make it to the gates of Immanuel about half

MIDEAST FOCUS

Egypt criticizes Israel

Egypt's foreign minister said Israel has "moved away from the path of negotiations." Ahmed Maher made the comments Thursday.

An emergency meeting of Arab foreign ministers was canceled until January, reportedly for security reasons.

In a related development, Arab League officials announced they want to boycott Michigan-based Guardian Industries because it does business with Israel. Guardian, which is owned by Detroit-area Jewish philanthropist William Davidson, operates a glass factory in Israel.

U.S. looks into Israeli detainees

The United States is working with Israel to make sure Israelis detained after the Sept. 11 terror attacks have access to Israeli diplomats.

At least 60 Israelis have been jailed across the United States since Sept. 11.

Egypt TV to air in Hebrew

Egypt plans to start television broadcasts in Hebrew.

The two-hour daily broadcasts by the state-owned station, slated to begin Jan. 1, are aimed to give an Arab view of the Mideast conflict to the Israeli public.

"We don't want to leave the arena free for the Israeli media apparatus," said Hassan Ali Hassan, the project's supervisor. Most Israelis can receive Egyptian television via cable.

Israeli, Palestinian share award

An Israeli and a Palestinian won a human rights prize. Hebrew University lecturer Nurit Peled-Elhanan and Palestinian writer Izzat Ghassawi were given the Sakharov human rights prize Wednesday by the European Parliament for their "active involvement" in the Middle East peace process.



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a mile away. Passengers began to flee when the bus stalled, and the Palestinian squad set on them, throwing grenades and shooting at passengers and emergency workers arriving on the scene.

One terrorist was killed when Israeli troops arrived, but the other two escaped back to Palestinian Authority territory.

Responsibility for the incident was unclear. The Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, affiliated with Arafat's Fatah Party, initially took credit, but Hamas later tried to claim responsibility.

Shortly afterward, in an unrelated attack, two suicide bombers attacked an Israeli car in the Gaza Strip, injuring four Israelis but killing only themselves.

The Palestinian Authority condemned the attacks, but said Israel had brought the attacks on itself.

Israel responded Wednesday night and Thursday by bombing and shelling Palestinian targets in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Among the targets were the Dahaniye Airport in the Gaza Strip, several Palestinian security compounds, Fatah offices and the Voice of Palestine radio station. Israel Defense Force troops also took over portions of Ramallah in the West Bank. One Palestinian was killed in the attacks.

The Security Cabinet also decided that Israeli forces would "deploy rapidly for action in the urban areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip" to arrest Palestinian militants and confiscate illegal weapons.

Arafat adviser Nabil Abu Rudeineh said in a statement Thursday that "the Israeli attacks against the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people are a formal declaration of war against the Palestinian nation and its leadership."

Peres also criticized the attacks, arguing that they only helped the more extremist elements among the Palestinians. "On one hand," groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad "are killing Israelis, and on the other hand are emerging victorious when the IDF hits hard, not at them, but at their enemy, the Palestinian Authority," Peres said at a meeting of Labor Party meeting Thursday.

If Sharon continues on his current course, Labor would have to reconsider whether to remain in the unity government, Peres said.

The deterioration comes after hopes had risen faintly that Zinni might indeed produce a cease-fire. He had managed to bring about a series of security talks that the two sides deemed "successful," and had pressed for a 48-hour cease-fire to begin establishing some semblance of confidence. During that period, the P.A. was to continue arresting militants and Israel would refrain from military actions unless attacked.

So far, Palestinian officials say they have arrested more than 100 militants. Israel argues that the arrests have focused mainly on minor operatives, rather than the 33 terror ringleaders on a "most wanted" list it gave the Palestinians. Israel also says the P.A. security services have refused to interrogate those arrested, instead holding them in comfortable conditions that in effect merely shield them from Israeli attack.

After Wednesday's attacks, there were reports that Arafat had ordered all offices of Hamas and Islamic Jihad closed. However, the decision did not appear to be implemented in the field, according to news reports.

Pressure has been mounting on Arafat finally to take concerted action against Palestinian terror, even that emanating from his own Fatah Party and from Palestinian Authority security services. The turning point appears to have been a series of suicide bombings Dec. 1 and 2 that killed 26 Israelis and wounded hundreds.

Even the Europeans, traditionally Palestinian allies, have grown exasperated with Arafat. On Monday, E.U. foreign ministers meeting in Brussels issued a statement that branded Hamas and Islamic Jihad "terrorist networks" and demanded that the Palestinian Authority dismantle them.

The ministers also called on the Palestinian Authority to arrest and try terror suspects and issue a "public appeal in Arabic for an end to the armed intifada."

The United States also has been keeping up the pressure on Arafat, with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and Vice President Dick Cheney this week questioning Arafat's leadership.

The gravity of the situation was underscored by U.N. envoy Terje Roed-Larsen, who said Thursday that the Palestinian Authority had to take urgent action against terror to "save itself" from destruction.

"I think we are as close as we've ever been to a full military confrontation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority," Larsen told CNN. □

JEWISH WORLD

Settlements get bulletproof vans

The Jewish Agency for Israel purchased 20 bulletproof vans for settlements under attack. Diaspora Jews donated the \$3 million for the vehicles, each of which cost \$160,000.

Among the donors are Jewish communities, funds and individual donors in the United States, as well as the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews.

This is the second fleet of vans the Jewish Agency has given to Israeli settlements in the line of fire.

Firefighters light menorahs

Three New York Jewish firefighters are traveling around the country for Chanukah appearances.

Representatives from the Ner Tamid Society of Jewish firefighters are lighting Chanukah candles in Concord, N.H., Newport Beach, Calif., and Knoxville, Tenn., this week in commemoration of the firefighters and others killed in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, according to Religion News Service.

At least two members of the association died in the Sept. 11 attacks.

German extremists are older

German extremists are more likely to be older than 60, according to a new survey.

The survey of 5,025 Germans found that those who are unemployed, less educated and live in the former East Germany are more likely to hold extremist views.

Overall, the survey found that 12 percent of Germans hold extremist views. Ten percent of those surveyed agreed with the statement, "The influence of the Jews is still too big today."

'Jewish Jordan' may transfer

College basketball's most famous Orthodox Jew may transfer to a New York school. Tamir Goodman said he would no longer play for Towson University in Baltimore after the coach allegedly threatened him and kicked a chair at him after a recent game.

Goodman's father said his son would like to transfer to another school, perhaps in New York, where the Jewish community is larger.

Polish Holocaust denier guilty

A Polish court convicted a former university professor for spreading Holocaust denial. But it waived punishment for Dariusz Ratajczak because of what it called "the negligible damage" of his book.

Only 350 copies of the book were printed in 1999, and only five copies were found on sale in bookstores. Ratajczak wrote that Zyklon B gas was used in Auschwitz to disinfect but not to kill people.

In a second edition of his book he distanced himself from "some theses of the revisionists."

Poll shows Jews support Bush; parties clash on interpretation

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish support for President Bush is high, but whether it will translate into sustained support for the Republican Party is up for debate.

Jews give the president an approval rating of nearly 80 percent, according to a survey released Thursday by the Republican Jewish Coalition. If the election were held today, the survey found, more Jews would vote for Bush — 42 percent — than for former presidential candidate Al Gore, who received 39 percent. In the 2000 election, Gore got 79 percent of the Jewish vote to Bush's 19 percent.

Republican activists were quick to hail the results as a shift of Jewish political sentiment, but Democrats cast doubt on the survey's significance.

Republican pollster Frank Luntz, who conducted the poll for the RJC, said the survey suggests a possible political realignment within the Jewish community.

"Despite conventional wisdom, Jewish voters are no longer a lock in the Democratic column," Luntz said, speaking on behalf of the RJC.

Observers across the political spectrum did not find Bush's approval ratings surprising, since every president is buoyed in times of national crisis. Bush also has gained favor recently in the eyes of many American Jews with his war against terrorism, his support for Israel and his pressure on the Palestinians to crack down on terror.

But some say that makes the survey an unfair snapshot of a president at his peak, rather than a clear indication of major political shifts among Jews. Mark Mellman, a Democratic pollster, called the survey a "publicity stunt" and said the realignment was a "gross exaggeration."

"Every year we hear the magic word 'realignment,'" said Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

Forman said aspects of the survey were "hokum" and sounded "bogus," adding that the survey appeared to draw conclusions from statistically insignificant samples.

The survey of 400 Jewish voters was conducted Nov. 28-29. The margin of error was 4.9 percent.

Among the key findings: Two-thirds approve of the way Bush has handled U.S.-Israeli relations and nearly 80 percent approve of Bush's policy toward Yasser Arafat. Some 27 percent said Bush's performance makes them more likely to vote for other Republicans, 28 percent said less likely, and 35 percent said no difference.

Luntz said the results show that Republicans need an active and sustained outreach in the Jewish community, and noted that young Jewish voters are "up for grabs."

It was not clear what impact Bush's present support might mean for the future of his presidency or the Republican Party.

Democrats should be warned but not alarmed by the survey, said Hyman Bookbinder, the former longtime American Jewish Committee representative in Washington. Bush deserves to gain politically in the Jewish community because he has done the right thing regarding Israel and the war on terrorism, Bookbinder said.

Bookbinder questioned results showing more favorable ratings for Bush's domestic agenda, saying people were not really focused on domestic issues now. Republican positions on domestic issues such as abortion and school prayer have alienated Jewish voters in the past.

In the survey, 42 percent approve of Bush's handling of domestic issues, but 47 percent disapprove. In the past, only 20 to 25 percent of Jewish voters have supported a Republican domestic agenda, according to the pollsters.

The Jewish community has been moving in a conservative direction for some time, according to Murray Friedman, director of the Feinstein Center of American Jewish History at Temple University and director of the Mid-Atlantic region for the AJCommittee.

Democrats say the results of the 2000 election show the strong Democratic base in the Jewish community. But what's important about the approval ratings in this week's survey is that Bush is seen as a leader, according to Marshall Breger, who served in the Reagan administration and is now a law professor at Catholic University in Washington.

"Even if the numbers go down, he's still a leader and president in his own right," Breger said. □

PROFILE

Alleged target of JDL bomb plot seen as next Arab political leader

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Even before grabbing the nation's headlines this week when his offices were the target of an alleged bombing plot by Jewish extremists, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) had already garnered the attention of the U.S. Jewish community.

Issa, a Lebanese Christian, spent a week in the Middle East last month, meeting with Arab leaders, including Syrian President Bashar Assad, and having dinner with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

When word reached back home of his meetings, including apparently misquoted comments saying Hezbollah was not participating in terrorist acts, he was lambasted.

Those comments are apparently what caught the attention of the Jewish Defense League, a militant group.

Two leaders of the Jewish Defense League were arrested Wednesday, accused of planning to bomb Issa's district office, as well as other Arab targets in the Los Angeles area.

Jewish lawmakers and American Jewish organizations, who have battled with Issa over Middle East legislation, rallied behind the freshman lawmaker, condemning the JDL's alleged plans.

"AIPAC is particularly disturbed by the reports of the JDL's intent to harm Darrell Issa, a democratically elected member of the House of Representatives," said Howard Kohr, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

"There is absolutely no place in our democracy for such reprehensible behavior and blatant disregard for freedom of speech and human life."

Despite their unwavering support for him as a target of alleged terrorism, Jewish officials are cautious in their approach.

Issa has stood out in his first year in Congress.

Though he calls himself "staunchly pro-Israel," he has made it clear through his actions and words that he will question Israeli policies and what he calls America's unilateral support for Israel.

He is seen as an important player, serving on the Middle East subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee and the House Judiciary Committee, key committees that deal with many of the issues of concern to Jewish groups.

As Jewish activists and lawmakers try to gauge his views, Jewish insiders say he has engaged the American Jewish community, eager to meet and discuss issues, but insistent on increasing understanding of the Arab vantage point on the Middle East.

Some see him as an emerging leader within the Arab American community, comparing him to Spencer Abraham, the former Michigan senator now serving as secretary of energy.

"He has a fire in his belly on these issues," said an official with an American Jewish organization. "He's going to be for his community what Tom Lantos is for the Jewish community."

Issa, who grew up in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, describes himself as a product of a Jewish neighborhood.

His first after-school job was delivering kosher chickens for a rabbi, he said.

As a Lebanese American, Issa — who founded Directed Electronics, a car alarm manufacturer — says he has a unique perspective on both sides of the Middle East conflict, and that he wants to work to bring about peace.

"I bring a perspective of being able to reach out to the Arab

side of the equation with some hopeful credibility because of my background," Issa told JTA.

He says he and his perspective have been welcomed by his colleagues on the International Relations subcommittee on the Middle East, a panel overflowing with Israeli advocates.

"I asked to be on it for reasons of wanting to work with the existing members and bring them a different insight," he said.

"He really saw himself as a bridge builder between Arabs and Jews," said an official with a Jewish organization, who asked not to be identified. This official called it "naive" for Issa to think he could persuade Hezbollah not to engage in terrorism.

But that was apparently his mission when Issa arrived for his third trip to the Middle East as a lawmaker last month, hoping to calm Arab concerns after Hezbollah had been named a foreign terrorist organization by the Bush administration.

After meeting with Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, Issa told reporters that he was bringing back to the United States a message that Hezbollah had a limited scope.

"You must differentiate between any organization working here from other organizations that might have a global reach," he told the Financial Times.

Issa's office confirms the quote, but said he was referring to Lahoud's position, not his own.

But other articles, including the Tehran Times, quoted Issa as saying Hezbollah had never been involved in terrorism.

Issa's aides say they believe the misquotes were leaked from the Iranian News Agency, and that it was particularly disturbing to Issa, whose congressional district includes Camp Pendleton, a Marine Corps base which housed several men killed in a Hezbollah attack on a Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983.

Despite Issa's denial, the Tehran Times article was picked up by U.S. columnists, and widely circulated on the Internet. Issa's congressional offices received a great deal of negative feedback.

"We don't mind explaining or defending the things we do say, but its frustrating to put down stories based on things we didn't say," said Dale Neugebauer, Issa's chief of staff.

Issa, a former president of the American Task Force for Lebanon, went to the region with the exact opposite intention, "delivering a message that Hezbollah needed to renounce violence," Neugebauer said.

Issa said he also sought information about the whereabouts of kidnapped Israeli soldiers and was told that they would try to get that information, but has not received anything yet.

"You ask for as much as you can get," he said. He said that he believed because he asked for the information in a closed environment, instead of announcing it as a goal of his trip, the Lebanese government will be more forthcoming.

Some say Issa expected to gain commitments from Hezbollah that it would cease terrorist tactics, and was instead used by the Iranians and Lebanese. But Neugebauer says Issa is not as naive as he is being perceived.

"I think he wants to participate in the process in a productive way," he said. "It is a difficult and intractable problem but he does see the opportunity for progress in some areas."

Back in Washington, Issa has emerged as someone who will play the role of "devil's advocate" and despite being a freshman lawmaker, has shown no fear in raising his voice.

"If we abandon the peace process, then Palestinian lands are held without democracy and that prevents the term of democratic in describing Israel," Issa said. "Israel is left with nothing but an apartheid state." □