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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

NEWS ANALYSIS

When Bush and Sharon meet, focus will be on Arafat's fate

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The future of Yasser Arafat — or of the Middle East without him — is shaping up as the key agenda item when Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon meets President Bush in Washington next week.

With the Palestinian Authority president effectively incarcerated in Ramallah for the past month and a half — and with Israeli tanks barely 100 yards from his headquarters — the questions facing the two leaders will be:

- Have they considered that continued Israeli military pressure on Arafat may well lead to his overthrow?
- Is it their policy to bring about Arafat's demise?
- Are they prepared to face mounting international opposition to such a policy?
- What alternative leadership or regime do they envisage for the Palestinians?

Neither Sharon nor Bush has stated in so many words that his goal is to remove Arafat from the head of the Palestinian Authority.

Sharon came the closest in December, when his Cabinet passed a resolution branding Arafat "irrelevant." But Israeli officials continue to demand that Arafat take action to rein in terror — which would seem to imply that his irrelevance is not irreversible.

Bush, too, has not publicly and unequivocally written off the Palestinian leader, but statements by the president and his closest aides in recent days have come close to doing so.

In this respect, Washington seems to have aligned itself closely with Jerusalem, to the gratification of Israeli officials.

The key word used by Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and other top U.S. officials is "disappointment."

Bush has said repeatedly that Washington believed Arafat was on its side in the worldwide battle against terror. After the Karine A arms affair — when Israel intercepted a ship carrying 50 tons of smuggled weapons to the Palestinian Authority — Bush no longer believes that Arafat sides with the anti-terror coalition.

Rather than fighting terror, Bush noted, the ship affair showed that Arafat was "enhancing" terror.

The president held consultations late last week with his top advisers to reassess relations with the Palestinian Authority.

Israeli experts say the Palestinians' grave mistake was not the initial purchase of the arms that were eventually placed aboard the Karine A, but their failure to stop the shipment after Sept. 11, when it became clear that a new international alignment was taking shape.

What previously might have provoked only a minor crisis now took on entirely different dimensions: The Palestinian Authority was seen to be in collusion with Hezbollah, which the United States considers to be a terror organization, and with Iran, which the United States sees as having reverted to sponsoring terrorism.

Some Israeli experts compare this Palestinian mistake with Arafat's misguided support for Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Nevertheless, much of the international community still is not prepared to write off the Palestinian leader.

This week has seen a surge of public support for the beleaguered Arafat:

- Saudi Arabian Nawaf ibn Abdulaziz, the head of the country's intelligence

Sharon OKs security plan

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon approved a plan to increase security in Jerusalem.

To prevent Palestinian terrorists from entering the city, the plan calls for construction of security walls, fences and ditches to separate neighborhoods near the city from areas under Palestinian control.

"There will be no walls or separation fences between Jerusalem neighborhoods," said Public Security Minister Uzi Landau, who, along with Sharon, is sensitive to the political implications of appearing to divide Jerusalem's eastern and western neighborhoods.

JDL members denied bail

The chairman of the Jewish Defense League and a group member were denied bail. JDL Chairman Irv Rubin, 56, and co-defendant Earl Krugel, 59, are being held on charges of conspiring to blow up a California mosque and the office of an Arab-American congressman.

A U.S. judge said Tuesday that Rubin "remains a flight risk, and also clearly there is a danger to the community."

The judge added that Krugel is a "minimal flight risk" but also denied him bail because "there is a danger to the community at this juncture."

Bush calls for more P.A. arrests

President Bush called for Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to arrest more terrorists.

"It is important for Mr. Arafat to not only renounce terror, but to arrest those who would terrorize people trying to bring peace," the president said Monday.

Palestinians open fire on Gilo

Palestinian gunmen fired on the Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo. One Israeli was slightly injured by shattered glass in the assault. Six apartments, two cars and an Israeli army outpost on the edge of the neighborhood sustained damage.

Palestinian sources said the attack on Gilo came in response to an Israeli army operation earlier Tuesday in the Palestinian-controlled village of Artas, south of Bethlehem. In that operation, Israel detained a wanted Islamic Jihad activist and two Palestinians suspected of involvement in terrorism.

MIDEAST FOCUS

Saudi weighs in for Palestinians

The leader of Saudi Arabia criticized the United States for not doing more to support the Palestinians.

In an interview Monday with *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, Crown Prince Abdullah tempered the criticism by underscoring the close Saudi-U.S. ties. But regarding the Palestinians, he said, "America has a duty to follow its conscience to reject repression." He also said that actions by the Israeli army provide the "reasons that lead people to become suicide bombers."

Israel tightens blockade

The Israeli army tightened blockades around Palestinian towns in the northern West Bank. The measures came amid warnings of possible attempts by terrorists to carry out suicide attacks inside Israel.

Defense sources also were concerned that Hamas may fire Kassam-2 rockets at Israeli towns if the conflict escalates, the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* reported.

IDF head blasts reservists' ad

The Israel Defense Force chief of staff criticized a group of reservists who refuse to serve in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Controversy is growing in Israel after a group of more than 50 reserve officers and soldiers took out ads in weekend newspapers voicing their refusal. Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz criticized the group Tuesday, saying, "The authors of the letter do not represent reserve officers and soldiers, who understand their mission very well and work day and night for the shared aim of providing security to Israel."

Mofaz did not say what action, if any, would be taken against those refusing to serve, but he has said he views the phenomenon as "a very grave matter."

The ad's organizers, two lieutenants from the Tel Aviv area, told Israeli media that they hope to get as many as 500 signatures in coming weeks.



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services, sent a public warning to Washington through a *New York Times* interview that letting Arafat fall would destroy Mideast peace prospects and could jeopardize Saudi Arabia;

- China sent a warm message of support to Arafat. According to the *People's Daily*, the message to Arafat criticized the virtual house arrest Israel has imposed on him and blasted Israel's military attacks and economic pressures on the Palestinian territories.

- The European Union's Council of Ministers urged Israel to understand that it needs Arafat as "a partner to negotiate with, both in order to eradicate terrorism and to work towards peace." The E.U. statement also called on the Palestinian Authority to "do everything to put an end to terrorism and the armed intifada."

Yet it was clear — as several of the E.U. foreign ministers acknowledged — that Europe was squaring up against what is seen as American support for Sharon's efforts to dislodge Arafat.

After the success of its Afghan campaign, Washington might be able to shrug off the international and Arab criticism. But is that what the Bush team intends?

The answer may become clearer before or during Sharon's visit to Washington.

Sharon will be preceded in the United States by the Labor Party's two senior ministers, Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

The two Labor ministers doubtless will conduct their own contacts with the Bush administration and presumably — though this is no longer certain — lobby against overthrowing Arafat.

On the Palestinian side, there also are intensive, informal contacts with Washington. The Palestinian line is as vehement as it is unanimous: There is no credible, moderate alternative to Arafat.

If he is removed, Palestinian officials warn, the Palestinian areas will descend into violent chaos.

Worse, the fundamentalist Hamas may make a bid for power.

In either case, terrorism against Israel will increase and the prospects of a negotiated peace, or even an agreed cease-fire, will recede, Palestinian spokesmen argue.

All Palestinian spokesmen and diplomats in the international lobbying campaign describe Arafat as the irreplaceable symbol of Palestinian national pride. If he is humiliated, the Palestinians will never forget or forgive, they say.

What interests observers is whether, beneath this front of loyalty, there are less rhetorical, more practical questions about what will happen after Arafat.

After all, Arafat is aging and infirm, and sensible people had begun to contemplate a future without him long before the present intifada erupted.

Is the Bush administration, whose hostility toward Arafat has surprised much of the world, quietly planning a replacement leadership based on younger security officials like Jibril Rajoub, perhaps together with grass-roots activists and militia leaders like Marwan Barghouti?

What is the Sharon government's real attitude to such a prospect? Would it demonstrate to the Palestinian people that new leadership would lead to an improvement in their living conditions?

Sharon has been saying little in public during recent weeks, and has been criticized for this even within his own Likud Party.

According to his opponents, Sharon says nothing because he has nothing to say. In contrast, supporters say he has deep thoughts that are not yet ripe for sharing.

The question is: Will Sharon let Bush in on his thinking? □

Annan: Don't exclude Arafat

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has urged the United States to work with Israel and the Palestinian Authority to resolve the Middle East conflict.

Speaking Tuesday in Vienna, Annan also warned against isolating Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

"Being isolated and virtually being under house arrest makes it difficult for him to lead," Annan said. "I think we need to be careful how we deal with the situation because when the leader who is supposed to act is weakened to the point of impotence we have a real problem on our hands." □

JEWISH WORLD

Muslim leader speaks at State

A controversial Muslim leader addressed State Department staffers.

Salam Al-Marayati, executive director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, said Monday he believed the people who committed the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11 used the American Muslim community.

He also said that American allies, including Israel, should not be allowed to use terror tactics. Al-Marayati was invited to speak as part of a State Department lecture series.

The decision angered some American Jewish leaders, who pointed to a series of anti-Israel statements Al-Marayati has made.

Hillel Congress starts in Moscow

More than 300 Jewish students gathered Tuesday in Moscow for the opening ceremony of the fourth annual Hillel Congress in the former Soviet Union.

The students came from nearly 40 cities across the former Soviet Union, as well as from Jerusalem and New York.

Hillel boasts 28 centers and thousands of activists across the former Soviet Union, according to organizers of the congress. The six-day program features lectures, classes, discussions and entertainment.

Relatives want Arafat questioned

Relatives of a slain Jewish couple want their lawyers to question Yasser Arafat and five Palestinian security chiefs as part of a \$250 million lawsuit.

The lawsuit was filed in the United States by the family of Yaron and Efrat Ungar last year against the Palestinian leader, the PLO and Hamas.

It claims Palestinian officials were responsible for the couple's deaths in a 1996 terror shooting because they allowed Hamas to operate training facilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and encouraged terrorism.

Russia-Israel immigration down

Immigration to Israel from the Soviet Union is down 40 percent.

More than 33,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union have arrived in Israel since the beginning of 2001 out of a total immigrant population of more than 43,000, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel.

ACLU sues over Jesus sign

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a federal church-state lawsuit against a southeastern Louisiana town. The lawsuit calls for the town of Franklinton to remove signs that proclaim: "Jesus is Lord over Franklinton."

ACLU officials said that because public money was used to put up the signs on state roads, they violated the constitutional separation of church and state.

Added urgency to interfaith talks following Sept. 11 terror attacks

By Ruth E. Gruber

ASSISI, Italy (JTA) — Events like the recent interfaith peace day organized by the Vatican — and the interfaith programming that will accompany the World Economic Forum this week in New York — are increasingly important in a world threatened by religious extremism, leading rabbis say.

"After Sept. 11, it is more important than ever that religion be seen as potentially part of the solution rather than the problem," said David Rosen, the American Jewish Committee's international director for interreligious affairs.

Rosen was one of about 200 rabbis, imams, priests and patriarchs from a dozen world faiths who converged Jan. 24 on Assisi, the central Italian town where St. Francis was born, for a "Day of Prayer for Peace in the World." He also will attend religious programming alongside the World Economic Forum, which will be held later this week in New York instead of its customary location in Davos, Switzerland.

"Especially seeing and hearing about Muslim leaders embracing Jewish and Christian leaders, and pledging themselves to peace and refuting the violent abuse of religion, sends a powerful message against stereotyping and hostile prejudice," Rosen told JTA about the Assisi event.

Such prejudice and stereotyping, he said, is "what compounds, if not nurtures, the violence in the first place."

The participants in Assisi were responding to an urgent invitation from Pope John Paul II in the wake of the Sept. 11 terror attacks on New York and Washington and the ensuing war in Afghanistan. The aim was to hammer home the message that religion must never be used as an excuse for violence, war or terrorism.

Participants concluded their day of prayer, reflection and meditation with a joint declaration proclaiming a "firm conviction that violence and terrorism are incompatible with the authentic spirit of religion."

They committed themselves "to doing everything possible to eliminate the root causes of terrorism" and also committed themselves to the principles of dialogue and forgiveness.

Rabbi Arthur Schneier of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation said it was important that this message was sent out by representatives of so many different faiths — not just Christianity, Judaism and Islam, but also Buddhism, Shintoism and other Asian and African religions.

"Symbolism is a very important means of communication," Schneier told JTA. "Leaders of many religions took part, not just the 'Children of Abraham.' This conveyed a sense of the common destiny of mankind."

"We need to energize and mobilize religious leaders to make clear that religion should not be fuel for violence," he said.

The fallout from Sept. 11 also led to an expansion of religious programming at the World Economic Forum. Last year was the first time that some dozen religious leaders were invited for interreligious discussion alongside the economic talks.

This year there will be about 40 religious leaders, including eight Jews, who will be integrated throughout the program and charged with forming a permanent religious council under the auspices of the World Economic Forum.

In establishing the council, the economic forum intends to strengthen inter-religious ties and offer business and political leaders the insight of faith.

The meeting scheduled for this week signals a rare meeting involving Israeli rabbis and clerics from Saudi Arabia and Iran, Rosen said.

Along with the archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, and Desmond Tutu, the former archbishop of Capetown, Prince Turki Al-Saud from the Saudi royal family and Ayatollah Mohajerani, director of the International Center for Islamic Civilization in Iran, are slated to join a dialogue with Rabbi Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University, and Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, one of Israel's chief rabbis.

The meeting is "nothing to sneeze at," Rosen said, but it's "only a first step." Its significance is that the Jewish religious leadership is "seen as part of the solution," he said. □

(JTA Staff Writer Rachel Pomerance in New York contributed to this report.)

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Profile of some victims shows how random terror attacks are

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The recent attacks that turned downtown Jerusalem into a horror gallery demonstrate the randomness of Palestinian terror: Victims included a fifth-generation Jerusalemite; a Russian immigrant; a student from Chicago who was studying at a girls yeshiva; a tourist from New York who survived the Sept. 11 Twin Towers attack; and two Arabs who were injured in previous terror attacks.

They were diverse individuals who had one thing in common: being at what one Israeli commentator called “our Ground Zero” at the wrong time.

Two attacks occurred within days of each other — a Jan. 22 shooting spree in which a Palestinian gunman killed two Israelis and wounded more than 40 people, and a bombing carried out by a Palestinian woman on Sunday that killed one person and wounded more than 120 others, most of them lightly.

Pinchas Takatli, 81, was killed in Sunday’s bombing on Jaffa Street. Police believe he was standing close to the female terrorist when the bomb went off.

Born in Jerusalem’s Yemin Moshe neighborhood, he was a fifth-generation Jerusalemite. He served in the Haganah, the precursor to the Israel Defense Force during the British Mandate, and later worked in advertising.

After retiring, Takatli became interested in cycling and was one of the founders of the Jerusalem Cycling Club. His son Gilad said his father rode his bicycle daily. An amateur artist, Takatli was returning from an art class and had gone downtown to pick up supplies when he was killed.

Takatli’s family described him as a punctual man. When he failed to come home, his wife phoned the art class. About an hour later, they learned the bitter news.

His family described Takatli as a loving grandfather. They said his grandchildren enjoyed painting with him. The walls of his home are filled with his paintings, many showing views of Jerusalem. He had planned to mount an exhibition of his works.

Svetlana Sandler, 56, represented the opposite end of the Israeli spectrum — an immigrant whose roots in the country were so shallow that it took two days to find her family, which had remained in Russia.

Sandler was critically wounded in the Jan. 22 shooting attack on Jaffa Road. She and another woman wounded in the attack, Sarah Hamburger, 79, later died of their injuries.

Sandler’s name was released for publication only 48 hours after the attack when the members of her family, all of whom live in Russia, were located and informed. Ten years after she made aliyah, her body was sent back to Russia for burial.

A Christian, Sandler came to Israel shortly after her marriage in August 1992. She divorced shortly afterward. Her son from a previous marriage was deported because he is not Jewish.

Sandler was taken to a local hospital after the shooting. When no one came to see her, staff contacted the Absorption Ministry.

Ministry and Jewish Agency officials located Sandler’s family in Russia by calling numbers in a phone book she left at a Jerusalem architectural firm, where she worked as an engineer.

They finally reached her elderly mother, who lives in Khadivinsk, some 1,000 miles from Moscow. Sandler’s sister and

son live there as well. Jewish Agency officials set out for the town to assist the family in coping with the tragedy.

Shayna Gould, of Chicago, was studying at a girls yeshiva in Jerusalem when she was injured in the Jan. 22 attack. She had been nervous over the summer about returning to Michlelet Esther for her second year, said Steve Kost, who employed Gould at Tov Foods in Skokie, Ill.

“Her parents didn’t even want her to go, but she had paid all this money for her ticket and for school,” Kost said. But Gould, who was active in the National Conference of Synagogue Youth, an Orthodox youth group, wanted to finish her studies.

Gould, 19, was seriously injured in the attack. She suffered a bullet wound to her left lung and was only saved because a paramedic recommended that the driver of her ambulance switch course and take her to Shaare Zedek Medical Center, which is close to the site of the attack, according to a Shaare Zedek spokesman.

Doctors were originally pessimistic, but by Tuesday, she had been upgraded to good condition.

For American tourist Mark Sokolow, 43, of New York, Sunday’s attack was his second brush with terror in five months.

Sokolow escaped from the second tower of the World Trade Center during the Sept. 11 attack. He and his family were lightly wounded in Sunday’s bombing in downtown Jerusalem.

“I was a lot luckier last time,” Sokolow told reporters from his hospital bed in Jerusalem. “This one involved my whole family.”

Members of an Orthodox congregation in Cedarhurst, N.Y., Sokolow, his wife, and two of their daughters were in Israel to visit their eldest daughter, Elana, 18, who is studying at Midreshet Lindenbaum, a prestigious girls yeshiva in Jerusalem.

They had gone downtown to buy shoes before their return to the United States. Sokolow recalled how the family was walking out of the shoe store when the explosion occurred.

“We walked out and all of a sudden I heard a blast. I felt a blast, like a boom. Almost it didn’t seem real,” he told Israel Radio.

“A number of people came over to help me. They put me into the back of an ambulance. I remembered that I had to go see if my wife and daughters were OK. I got out of the ambulance to try to find them, but I couldn’t find them anywhere.”

Mark, wife Rena and teen-age daughters Jamie and Lauren were injured and are still in Jerusalem. Rena broke her leg and will be in a body cast for several months, and Jamie had her eye injured by glass. Mark and Lauren’s injuries were less severe.

Sokolow said he believes his daughter will continue her studies in Israel. “I think it’s important that people come here,” he said.

“Here” has become increasingly dangerous: Since Palestinian violence erupted in September 2000, downtown Jerusalem’s main shopping district, a stretch of Jaffa Road from King George Street to just beyond Zion Square, has been the target of eight terrorist attacks.

Also injured in Sunday’s attack were Amir Zachayka and Moussa Awad, Arab employees of the Sbarro restaurant on Jaffa Road — itself the scene of a suicide bombing last August in which 15 people were killed and more than 130 wounded.

Zachayka survived that attack, but he was wounded in last week’s shooting spree, and then again in Sunday’s bombing.

“The images from last week all came back to me,” he said.

Awad, 25, also was injured in both recent attacks.

“I’m tired of life. I’m sick of what’s happening,” he said. □

(JTA Staff Writer Julie Wiener in New York and Pauline Dubkin Yearwood of the Chicago Jewish News contributed to this report.)