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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Sharon: Keep Arafat out of forum

Ariel Sharon told U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell that Israel will not participate in an international peace conference with Yasser Arafat. The Israeli prime minister met Powell in Washington on Monday, a day before he was slated to meet President Bush.

Sharon expressed support for an international conference with Arab states that the White House is trying to organize. He also said an end to terrorism and far-reaching reforms of the Palestinian Authority are prerequisites to progress toward peace.

Al-Qaida linked to Tunisia blast

Al-Qaida has been linked to last month's truck explosion at a Tunisian synagogue.

Searching a suspect's home, Tunisian investigators found bomb-making instructions and souvenirs brought back from a training camp in Afghanistan, German television reported over the weekend.

The investigators also found a satellite telephone like those used by Al-Qaida fighters, the report added. At least 18 people, including 13 German tourists, were killed after a truck rammed a wall protecting the Ghriba Synagogue on April 11.

In another development, Israeli officials are now assessing whether to offer incentives to encourage Jews from Tunisia and Morocco to immigrate to Israel. Contradicting a report in the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*, a government official told *Ha'aretz* on Monday that there is currently no plan "for any mass immigration of Moroccan or Tunisian Jews."

UJC sets priorities on Israel

The North American federation system has decided to focus allocations from its Israel emergency campaign on five areas. The areas include keeping children safe; helping hospitals and providing other medical needs; supporting security initiatives; funding immigration of Argentine Jews to Israel; and providing aid to Israeli citizens directly affected by terrorism.

More than \$119 million has been raised so far by individual federations for emergency needs, and United Jewish Communities officials say they expect to raise hundreds of millions more.

The five priorities were determined after consultation with Israeli government officials and the UJC's overseas partners — the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

NEWS ANALYSIS

As push mounts for peace talks, many ready to revive Clinton ideas

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Barely 10 weeks after they were presented in late December 2000, President Clinton's bold Israeli-Palestinian peace proposals appeared to be dead and buried.

Palestinians had launched a new wave of terror attacks, Israel had a new, more hawkish prime minister, and a new American president, who vowed to follow a different route, had taken in power in Washington.

Even Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, when each left office early in 2001, announced that the generous offer that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat had spurned was no longer "on the table."

Yet just more than a year later, the "Clinton parameters" are enjoying a revival. Israel's Operation Protective Wall temporarily crippled the Palestinian terrorist infrastructure, but it also underlined just how explosive the situation is and how easily it could ignite a wider regional conflict.

In the international community, there now is a general consensus on the need for a credible political process to pre-empt new eruptions of violence.

Moderate Arab leaders from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan have been suggesting a return to the Clinton formula, and the Americans and Europeans have been listening. The attraction is that the parameters offer a giant leap to the endgame.

The downside is that the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon won't touch them.

Recent peace initiatives — including the Saudi plan and President Bush's "vision" for Mideast peace — all see the solution as two states, Israel and Palestine, coexisting side by side. But none of the plans offers a clear road map on how to get there.

"We need Israel now to move directly to final status" negotiations, Jordanian Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher said. "We need a road map. We need a calendar."

Many believe the Clinton parameters are the missing guide.

"We don't want to have to start from square one," Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher said, underlining the Arab demand that the peace talks resume from the point they broke off at Taba, Egypt, in January 2001, with the Israelis and Palestinians negotiating on the basis of the Clinton parameters and, by all accounts, making considerable headway.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell last week announced that an international conference on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be held this summer.

For it to be of any value, Arab states say, it must be convened on the basis of the Saudi plan — which calls for an Israeli withdrawal from all territory won in the 1967 Six-Day War in exchange for peace with the Arab world — and the Clinton parameters.

The Clinton parameters dealt with the three core issues in the Israeli-Palestinian impasse — territory, Jerusalem and refugees.

On territory, Clinton proposed a Palestinian state in Gaza and 94 percent to 96 percent of the West Bank, with compensation for the remaining land from Israel proper. On Jerusalem, he proposed a division of sovereignty from neighborhood to neighborhood, based on demographics, and suggested various options for shared sovereignty on the Temple Mount.

On refugees, Clinton proposed that most go to the envisioned state of Palestine, some to Israel and others to a list of countries willing to absorb a set number.

The implication was that if the sides could tie up the loose ends on these key issues,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Bethlehem standoff nearing end?

Israel and the Palestinians neared an agreement Monday to end the monthlong standoff at Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity.

The deal being worked out calls for some of the Palestinian gunmen holed up in the church to go into exile in Italy. Others would be sent to Gaza, where they could be imprisoned under the watch of U.S. and British jailers, Palestinian sources said. The remaining Palestinians not wanted by Israel would be freed.

The two sides remained at odds Monday on several issues, including how many of the Palestinian gunmen wanted by Israel would be deported. Palestinian officials want no more than eight of those in the church sent into exile. Israel, which claims that the wanted Palestinians were responsible for killing Israeli civilians, is reportedly insisting that at least a dozen be exiled.

IDF has new tactic

Israel has adopted a new tactic in the West Bank. After its large-scale anti-terror operation wound down late last month, the Israel Defense Force is now entering Palestinian population centers, arresting suspected terrorists and then quickly departing.

Israeli military officials say the tactic already has borne fruit. The brief incursions already prevented a terror attack planned to take place near Tel Aviv, a military spokesman told The Associated Press.

Anti-Israel resolution averted

A resolution to expel Israel from the World Medical Association was thwarted.

The resolution that was expected to be introduced by Denmark or another Scandinavian country was not presented at last week's conference because of intense lobbying by the Israel Medical Association, Hadassah and B'nai B'rith, according to Leah Wapner, an official with the Israeli group.



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they could reach a historical peace deal formally ending the conflict between them.

But Sharon is not ready to go down that road. Nearly 20 months of violence have shown that the Palestinians cannot be trusted to keep the peace, and that Israel should not be asked to make irreversible concessions that weaken its defenses, Sharon argues.

Sharon also is against dividing Jerusalem or allowing any refugees back into Israel proper. Moreover, he has a major strategic problem with the territorial provisions of the Clinton parameters: He believes Israel must retain the Jordan Valley as a buffer to prevent Iraq, Syria and even Jordan from joining forces to attack Israel from the east.

Sharon envisages Israel having two defensive columns, one for defense against the Palestinians along the pre-1967 border with the West Bank, and one in the Jordan Valley for defense from the east.

Both zones would bite into West Bank territory, leaving any future Palestinian state with 85 percent or less of the West Bank.

Rather than a leap to final status, therefore, Sharon is proposing a more measured approach in three phases over an indefinite period.

First, he says, there must be a process of democratization in the Palestinian Authority, with all armed forces placed under one central authority and financial transparency instituted to prevent development funds donated by Europe from being used again to finance terrorist attacks against Israel — as Israel says they have been used in the past.

Second, for a trial period, there would be a Palestinian state on part of the territory only. Third, negotiations on final borders, Jerusalem and refugees would take place only after the trial period proves successful.

Sharon is convinced that there is no chance of achieving real peace as long as Yasser Arafat is the Palestinian leader. For his key tete-a-tete with President Bush this week, Sharon brought documents to Washington detailing Arafat's involvement in financing terrorism against Israel.

Sharon hopes the "Arafat file" will serve to discredit the Palestinian leader and spark international and Arab pressure for change at the top.

Among themselves, the Palestinians also are talking about the need for reform, which some Israelis see as the most encouraging result of Operation Protective Wall.

As they survey the ruins of their cities, towns and villages, Palestinians from all walks of life are asking where suicide bombings have brought them. There is widespread talk of the need for a leadership and policy shake-up, and of the need for financial transparency and unification of armed forces.

But no one in the Palestinian camp talks about deposing Arafat.

The key question is whether the Palestinian drive for change will lead to accommodation with Israel on the Sharon model or something like it, or whether Sharon's failure to put anything as bold as the Clinton parameters back on the table will end in new waves of Palestinian violence.

Gilead Sher, one of the chief Israeli negotiators under Barak, still believes the Clinton parameters offer the only viable long-term solution.

Not long after the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000, Sher predicted that, sooner or later, the parties would come back to Clinton's outline.

"After rivers of blood, God forbid, we will come back to the same table for the same deal," he declared. "No responsible Israeli government — not even a right-wing government — will be able to do anything else." □

Israelis back West Bank operation

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Some 90 percent of Israeli Jews believe the decision to launch the anti-terror campaign last month in the West Bank was correct, a poll said.

According to a Peace Index poll released Monday, even 60 percent of those who support the dovish Meretz Party agreed, while only 9 percent of Israeli Arabs backed the military operation, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The survey also showed that 91 percent of Israeli Arabs, but only 3 percent of Israeli Jews, believe that Israeli soldiers carried out a massacre in the Jenin refugee camp, a claim Israel categorically denies.

In recent days, human rights groups, along with some Palestinian sources, have said no massacre was carried out in the camp. □

JEWISH WORLD

Rabbinical students form group

North American rabbinical students from a range of denominations formed a new group that criticizes Israel's recent military actions.

In a recent letter to major Jewish organizational leaders in the United States, the group condemned Palestinian suicide bombings and other attacks on Israeli civilians, but asked the American Jewish community to acknowledge "the suffering that Israel has caused the Palestinian people during the 35-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip."

Rabbinical Students for a Just Peace includes 108 students from seven rabbinical seminaries: the Jewish Theological Seminary, the University of Judaism, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Academy of Jewish Religion and the Aleph Alliance.

Times boycotts launched

Two campaigns are being launched to protest what is seen as a pro-Palestinian bias in The New York Times' Middle East coverage. Both campaigns call on readers to cancel their subscriptions to the Times for at least one month to protest the alleged bias.

"When it comes to victims on the Palestinian side, they are always described in great detail, making them human," said Ali Scharf, who is spearheading one of the campaigns. "The Israelis are rarely given a face."

The Times denies any charges of bias.

Pro-Israel politician slain

A Dutch politician who often spoke out on behalf of Israel was shot and killed. Pim Fortuyn was shot at close range Monday night, nine days before national elections.

Four people who were with Fortuyn at the time of the attack chased the gunmen, and police are now holding a suspect, according to reports.

There are no details about the gunman's identity or motive.

The leader of a new right-wing party named after him, Fortuyn often spoke out against Islam and immigration.

Fire at California synagogue

Officials are investigating what they're calling a "suspicious" fire at a California synagogue. No one was hurt and there was little damage after the fire burned the outside of the Beth Jacob Congregation in Oakland.

On Sunday morning, firefighters extinguished three small fires at the site and found what appeared to be gasoline around the building. Fire officials said Monday they will wait for test results before deciding whether it was a case of arson.

British Jews turn out for rally in London in support of Israel

By Yakir Zur

LONDON (JTA) — British Jewry has marshaled one of its largest crowds ever to show support for Israel.

Some 50,000 demonstrators from all over Britain filled Trafalgar Square on Monday afternoon, carrying Israeli and British flags and banners reading "Yes to peace, no to terror" and "Suicide bombers kill people and the peace."

A small but noisy pro-Palestinian demonstration was held nearby, carrying banners supporting the intifada and denouncing the "Zionist state."

Two people at the counter-demonstration, which drew about 300 people, were arrested for public order infractions.

Thousands of police officers were deployed in the square and neighboring streets to prevent clashes between pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian demonstrators.

But apart from a little pushing and shoving between these demonstrators, the rally ended without incident.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the main speaker, said Israel should not allow Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to head a state because it would be a terrorist state, not a peaceful one.

He also drew comparisons between the British stand against Nazism and Israel's struggle for survival.

Were it not for Britain's resistance against the Nazis, the course of history might have been very different, Netanyahu said.

"But now Britain stands before another road, and it must choose between two opposing paths — the path of appeasing terror or the path of confronting terror," he said.

Netanyahu also called on the international community to support Israel in what he called its existential struggle.

"Israel is determined to fight," Netanyahu said. "The question isn't whether Israel will fight, but whether we will fight alone."

A number of high-profile speakers addressed the rally, including Labor Party legislator Peter Mandelson, Conservative Deputy Leader Michael Ancram and Orthodox Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

Sacks noted that Monday's turnout was the greatest gathering in the history of British Jewry.

"It is important that Israel knows that it's not alone," he said in his speech.

Mandelson, formerly the Cabinet secretary for Northern Ireland, said a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute could not be imposed from outside, but could only be reached through negotiations between the two sides.

"Violence and terror will only delay and obstruct the just outcome they seek," he said. "Politics, not violence, secures peoples' lives."

Mandelson added that a vision of peace benefiting all had sustained the peace process for years.

"In the Middle East, this vision is of an Israel secure within its borders, its existence unchallenged, its people never with their bags packed, never prepared to run again," he said.

"And it is the equivalent for the Palestinian people — a viable, independent state, one that brings not just freedom but responsibility too, fulfilling all the obligations of international law."

Approximately 350 buses brought tens of thousands of Jews from all over Britain, including thousands of pupils, students and members of youth groups.

The equivalent of hundreds of thousands of dollars were collected, mainly from the budgets of the United Jewish Israel Appeal, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Jewish National Fund, as well as from private contributions.

A small number of Jewish leftists, including groups called Just Peace and Jews for Justice to Palestine, staged a small vigil opposing the main rally.

Peace Now boycotted the rally, claiming that it was a show piece to support the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Calls to increase humanitarian aid to Palestinians win broad support*By Matthew E. Berger*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — At a time when few initiatives related to the Middle East win universal support, an increase in humanitarian aid to the Palestinians is winning strong backing from Israel, the Arab world and the United States.

In the last few years, the idea of cutting U.S. assistance to the West Bank and Gaza Strip once was seen as a way of punishing Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian leadership, but views have changed.

Now, most agree that increasing aid that benefits Palestinian people — and doesn't go to the Palestinian Authority — is an essential move toward achieving a lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Even many American Jewish leaders, who have advocated sanctions against Arafat and the P.A. leadership, concede the need for humanitarian aid.

"Palestinian people are real live people that you have to relate with," said Hannah Rosenthal, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. "We are very concerned about their humanitarian needs."

But Jewish leaders' support is hesitant, noting that aid must go for its intended humanitarian purposes, and not to support the Palestinian Authority.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee has generally supported the idea of humanitarian aid since the beginning of the Oslo peace process. Though AIPAC has supported a bill sponsored by Rep. Eric Cantor (R-Va.) that would cut off all aid to the Palestinians, AIPAC officials say they will not stand in the way of efforts to increase U.S. funding.

"AIPAC would support increased humanitarian aid if it can be truly guaranteed to benefit the Palestinian people, rather than be siphoned off through corruption and used to rebuild refugee camps that are simply launching pads for terrorism," said Josh Block, AIPAC's press secretary.

Israeli officials have concurred.

This change of direction comes as the Bush administration has made humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians a priority, and expressed its desire to increase the annual amount.

"As we work to improve the security situation in the region, all of us must step up our efforts to bring humanitarian relief and economic assistance to the Palestinian people," President Bush said recently.

The United States already provides some \$75 million to the West Bank and Gaza annually.

Other international organizations, such as the World Bank, European Union and Arab states, give funds directly to the Palestinian Authority. Because of the P.A.'s rampant corruption, however, Congress outlaws direct funding to the Palestinian Authority and requires that the money be distributed through the United States Agency for International Development.

USAID distributes the funds to contractors and other service providers in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as international programs.

Questions have been raised about whether USAID funds in fact end up with the Palestinian leadership, but most of the funds are believed to go to legitimate humanitarian causes, including

water resource development and health care.

Jewish organizations quietly have supported the programs for years. An official with one Jewish organization said Jewish lobbying groups now are more enthusiastic about supporting aid, but are unsure it will get to the right places.

At an international donors conference in April, the United States pledged an additional \$30 million in aid, part of \$1.2 billion the conference earmarked for the West Bank and Gaza.

The additional money, taken out of the USAID program and the State Department's Emergency Refugee and Migration Account, does not require congressional approval.

But lawmakers are considering legislation that would raise the amount of humanitarian aid even more. Few details have emerged about the legislation being considered by leaders of the House International Relations Committee.

Analysts say giving humanitarian aid to the Palestinians has several benefits. It reinforces the idea that the United States is intent on a solution that aids the Palestinians, and counters the Arab perception that the United States blindly supports Israel. It also is seen as giving the Arab world and the European Union an important role in the peace process.

"It's very important that there be a meaningful and robust program of assistance that rebuilds, or helps rebuild, the Palestinian economy that has been devastated because of the events of the last 18 months," said David Satterfield, deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs.

Speaking Monday at the Anti-Defamation League's leadership conference, Satterfield said it was the goal of the United States to "do it better this time" than when the Palestinian Authority was formed, creating "transparency, accountability and democracy" in a future Palestinian state.

Some analysts believe that if the Palestinian economy improved, Palestinians would be less interested in violence and would press their leadership toward the negotiating table.

However, previous attempts by Israel and the international community to bolster the Palestinian economy did not prevent the Palestinians from choosing violence over peace talks.

Still, advocates argue that increasing U.S. aid would give the United States a larger stake in the building of a Palestinian infrastructure.

"If you have a more streamlined chain of command with transparent budgets and operational procedures, it is easier to stop organizations from participating in terrorist activities," said Lewis Roth, assistant director of Americans for Peace Now.

But some American Jewish leaders worry that the money may inadvertently fall into the wrong hands. Money is fungible, they say.

For example, Palestinian refugee camps, which largely are funded by the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency, are centers of Palestinian terrorism.

"People are skeptical because of past corruption," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Palestinian textbooks, paid for by the United States and European Union, label Israel as "Palestine" and are full of anti-Semitism.

Israeli officials and Jewish leaders who support plans for increased aid say they are concerned that it will be given in a lump sum, instead of in return for Palestinian performance against terrorism. □