



IN THE NEWS

Israel pulls troops out of refugee camp

Israel pulled out of the Gaza Strip refugee camp of Rafah. The troops left all areas of Rafah on Monday night.

During the weeklong maneuver, called Operation Rainbow, the army killed 41 Palestinian terrorists and 11 civilians, and destroyed three tunnels used for weapons smuggling, Brig. Gen. Shmuel Zakai said.

Palestinians say many of those Israel calls terrorists were civilians. Zakai also said 56 homes were demolished during the operation.

Israel gains regional membership at U.N.

Israel's membership in a U.N. regional grouping was extended. Israel's membership in WEOG, the Western Europe and Others Group, was extended indefinitely last Friday.

Israel joined a U.N. regional grouping for the first time in May 2000, for a four-year term.

"This is an important milestone because Israel's membership in WEOG corrected a decades-long injustice in which Israel was the only member state of the U.N. that did not belong to any regional group and therefore could not be elected to any positions in the U.N. system," said Arye Mekel, Israel's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations.

In the past two years, Israel could apply for positions on U.N. bodies. Last Friday, Israel gained its ninth U.N. position, becoming vice chair of the General Assembly's First Committee, which addresses nonproliferation and disarmament.

UJC passes budget

The North American Jewish federation system passed its budget for fiscal year 2005.

The \$38.5 million budget — the same size as UJC's 2004 budget — passed Sunday at the organization's governance meeting in Chicago.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

In push for amended pullout plan, Sharon faces tough political battles

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Facing a crucial Cabinet vote next week on his amended disengagement plan from the Palestinians, Ariel Sharon is facing as much pressure as he ever did as a general on the battlefield.

On the international front, the Israeli prime minister has weathered scathing criticism of Israel's latest military operation in the Gaza Strip, which left more than 40 Palestinians dead and dozens of homes demolished in the Rafah refugee camp.

At home, a rebellion is gathering steam in Sharon's Likud Party by opponents of the planned withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank.

But Sharon is determined to press on. Just as his crossing of the Suez Canal turned the tables in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Sharon hopes that Cabinet passage of his amended disengagement plan will disarm critics in his party and improve Israel's tarnished international standing.

"I have been at the front for 60 years," Sharon told a gathering of veteran soldiers Sunday. "You know me and you know that when I fight for something that is right and just, I do it."

Earlier in the day, a resolute Sharon told the army's top brass that he "didn't want their opinions of his plan" — just their input on how best to carry it out.

Sharon says he will closely coordinate the withdrawal plan with the United States, Egypt, Jordan and Europe. This, he hopes, will help create a fount of international goodwill toward Israel.

Meanwhile, the prime minister's aides

predict that the new political dynamic will marginalize Sharon's hawkish critics in the Likud.

But it's not that simple. International goodwill will depend on successful implementation of a complicated withdrawal plan that includes evacuating Jewish settlements. The Israeli army's top brass hasn't been fully behind the plan, the confrontation with the Likud rebels could split the party and threaten Sharon's political career, and Sharon first will have to get the plan approved in the Cabinet, where opinion is split.

The decision last week to send Israeli troops into Rafah, in southern Gaza, came after reports that Iranian arms, including Katyusha rocket launchers and anti-tank weapons, were about to be smuggled into Gaza through underground tunnels leading from Egypt.

The army leadership long has argued that if Israel withdraws from Gaza, it would need to widen a strip along the Gaza-Egypt boundary, known as the Philadelphi route, and maintain a presence there to prevent future arms smuggling.

But international condemnation of Israel's destruction of Palestinian homes to find smuggling tunnels and widen the Philadelphi route, thereby making future tunneling virtually impossible, led to a revision of the military's thinking.

The generals realized they wouldn't be able to widen the Philadelphi route as much as they had planned, strengthening arguments against maintaining any Israeli military presence in Gaza.

The Shinui Party's Avraham Poraz made

Continued on page 2

NEWS
ANALYSIS

■ In push for amended pullout plan, Sharon faces tough political battles

Continued from page 1

that point to Sharon in a meeting last week. Israel, he said, should forget about trying to seal the border and prevent arms smuggling but should create a deterrent balance like the one with Hezbollah along Israel's northern border: If Palestinians shell Israeli civilians after a withdrawal from Gaza, Israel can hit back tenfold without breaching international norms, Poraz said.

Ironically, despite the international criticism and the Israeli and Palestinian casualties in Gaza, Sharon found himself in a political win-win situation.

If the army succeeded in establishing an efficient hold over the Philadelphia route, the army leadership then could back Sharon's disengagement plan. If it failed to do so because of international and domestic pressure, it would have to rethink its overall Gaza strategy in line with Sharon's longer-term evacuation plans.

■
The Likud challenge to Sharon is more serious. The main difference between Sharon's amended plan and the one Likud voters rejected in a May 2 referendum is that, under the new plan, withdrawal will be implemented in stages.

The withdrawal will begin with three isolated settlements in Gaza; phase two will see the withdrawal of four settlements in the northern West Bank; phase three will involve 15 settlements in Gaza's Gush Katif bloc; and phase four would focus on three settlements in northern Gaza.

The idea is to evacuate the more vulnerable settlements first, proceeding from one stage to the next only after the government is satisfied that the previous stage has created a more favorable security situation.

Sharon's Likud opponents say that's only a cosmetic change from the original withdrawal plan, which party members resoundingly rejected. In proceeding, Sharon is in breach of party discipline, they argue.

Several Likud legislators, led by Uzi Landau, a Cabinet minister who oversees Israel's secret services, say they will do whatever they can to block Sharon. In the Cabinet, they will try to influence other Cabinet ministers; in the party's parliamentary caucus or the Knesset, they have pledged to vote against the prime minister.

This group claims to have the support of more than half of the 40 Likud legislators in the Knesset, and the group clearly poses a serious threat to Sharon.

■
The first major battle will come next Sunday, when Sharon submits his amended plan to the Cabinet. Of the 23 ministers, 11 support the new plan, 11 are opposed and one, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, is the potential tiebreaker.

Sharon aides say that beside trying to win Shalom over, the prime minister is considering "creating a majority" by firing one or two of the rebel ministers — Landau and Diaspora Affairs Minister Natan Sharansky — and promoting Deputy Defense Minister Ze'ev Boim, who supports the plan, to the Cabinet.

Another strategy might be to put only

the first phase of the plan to a vote, and have the Cabinet merely "note" the plan as a whole.

One way or another, a determined Sharon likely will push at least part of his plan through the Cabinet. Then he will have a party rebellion on his hands, the size of which will depend on whether leading figures like Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu join it.

Sharon's hopes of political survival could depend on whether he is able to forge a political alliance with Labor. Labor could join with Likud in a coalition that pushes the disengagement plan through

the Knesset. Sharon also could form an electoral alliance with Labor and Shinui by running on a disengagement ticket in new elections that would be seen as a sort of national referendum on withdrawal.

Sharon aides say poll numbers show that such a united coalition would win close to an outright majority of 61 seats in the Knesset.

But there's yet another wrinkle for the beleaguered prime minister: Aside from all the political maneuvering, Sharon must survive a legal battle against corruption charges.

Attorney General Menachem Mazuz is due to rule within the next few weeks on whether or not to indict Sharon. An indictment almost certainly would end his career, while a decision not to indict would enable Sharon to survive yet another day — and face the political battle of his life.

■
(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.)

The first major battle will come next Sunday, when Sharon submits his amended disengagement plan to his Cabinet.

JTA WORLD REPORT

Howard E. Friedman
President

Mark J. Joffe
Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hostein
Editor

Michael S. Arnold
Managing Editor

Lenore A. Silverstein
Finance and Administration Director

Paula Simmonds
Marketing and Development Director

JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
© JTA. Reproduction only with permission.

U.S. agrees with Arab League decision

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Arab League's re-commitment to a Saudi proposal for Israeli-Palestinian peace is "very positive," the U.S. State Department said.

The league met last weekend in Tunis and reasserted its commitment to a 2002 Saudi initiative that offers peace for Israel's return to its pre-1967 borders.

"They are looking for a peaceful so-

lution, obviously, to Israeli-Palestinian issues, and reiterated their Beirut declaration, the Arab League declaration in Beirut, which we felt was a very positive contribution to the process," spokesman Richard Boucher said Monday.

"And they made very clear their opposition to terrorism and their opposition to terrorism being linked to Islam." ■

European Jews struggle to find their voice

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

BUDAPEST (JTA) — European Jews are struggling to find an effective way to assert their identity and articulate a coherent, collective voice in a rapidly changing Europe.

This challenge, European Jewish leaders say, is breaking stereotypes and fostering a positive sense of self-definition in the face of looming challenges that have put recent optimistic models of Jewish integration to the test.

"One of the biggest challenges we have is to get Jews generally and the world at large to recognize that we are not just defined by the three elements of anti-Semitism, the Holocaust and defense of Israel," Jonathan Joseph, the incoming president of the European Council of Jewish Communities, told JTA.

"It is obvious that 90 percent of our lives is not defined by these elements, but 90 percent of our image is," Joseph said. "I cannot sit and watch while we define ourselves and allow the world to define us in just those terms."

Joseph was elected president of the European Council of Jewish Communities at the conclusion of the third General Assembly of European Jewry, a three-day shmooz-fest held in Budapest on May 20-23 that gathered a record number of Jews from across Europe.

Sponsored by the European Council of Jewish Communities and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the G.A. provided an opportunity for more than 1,000 Jewish activists from more than 40 countries to party, network and assert their commitment to the ideal of a European Jewish identity.

Delegates came from all walks of life — including 72 doctors — and ranged in age from college students to octogenarians.

They converged on Budapest from established communities in Western Europe and from tiny outposts in post-Communist states — and from every type of community in between. There were even Jews there from Malta and Kosovo.

"It's been a real opportunity for communities in Europe — especially in a Europe that is trying to unite, expand and grow — to get together, get to know each other and start generating joint activities," Zdravko Sami, the president of the 208-member Jewish community of Mace-

donia, told JTA. "For small communities like us, it's really important."

But a series of uncertainties cast a shadow on the otherwise exuberant celebration. These included external questions, such as the impact on Europe's Jews of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism, which all have become acute since the last European G.A., which was held in Madrid three years ago.

Indeed, Israeli author A.B. Yehoshua shook up the conference with an appeal for European Jews to take the lead in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, calling on them to help draw the new border between Israel and a future Palestinian state.

He called U.S. policy in the Middle East "useless" and chastised European countries for not having played a more active role in helping settle conflicts such as the Balkan wars of the 1990s.

Conference participants also focused on deep-seated internal challenges, such as articulating a coherent Jewish voice in Europe, strengthening European Jewish leadership, evaluating a Jewish role in European affairs — and even defining whether a European Jewish identity really exists.

"Are European and Jewish interests compatible?" Paris-based historian Diana Pinto, long a champion of asserting a European Jewish identity in Europe, asked delegates.

"In the past four years, a feeling has emerged that the answer is no. Some forces in the Jewish world think that Europe is tone deaf, and even inimical."

But, she said in an interview, part of the blame lies on Jewish leaders who are unable to get a clear message across even to sympathetic non-Jewish ears.

"Back in the 1930s, the Jewish leaders in Europe were capable of formulating Jewish needs and concerns but had no one to speak to," Pinto said.

"But now, when there are so many ears open to Jewish concerns, I sometimes feel that the leadership seems only capable of mumbling."

The Budapest gathering took place just three weeks after the European Union expanded eastward to embrace Malta, Cyprus and eight former Communist countries, including Hungary.

Holding the meeting in Budapest was a deliberate recognition that the Cold War divide that for decades had divided Europe — and Europe's Jews — no longer exists.

But European Jews are looking forward to the effects of E.U. expansion with a mixture of eagerness and anxiety. And the conflicting emotions, combined with worry over anti-Semi-

tism and the continuing conflict in the Middle East, had a noticeable impact on the G.A.'s atmosphere.

"We are looking at a politically united Europe for the first time ever," Joseph told delegates.

"We are experiencing a reawakening of Jewish life and culture in Europe on a scale not seen for 100 years."

At the same time, he said, "We are living at a most delicate moment in global Jewish terms, with the Middle East in turmoil again, an intermingling of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism and the physical manifestation of this uncomfortably close to us. How we respond over the next few years will be one of the most significant things we will do as a Jewish people, and particularly as a European Jewish people."

"Anti-Semitism will never disappear," Joseph said. "But the best antidote to anti-Semitism is a positive presence of Jews. Jews have got to stand tall — and never have we had such an opportunity to do so."

A number of participants said that despite pledges by European Jewish leaders to develop a strong Jewish voice, the G.A. appeared to be inward-looking — to the point where one Italian delegate spoke of a "self-ghettoization."

"We are turning inward," she said. "The threats from outside are making people wary. We see families who want to put their children into Jewish schools because they are afraid to have them sit next to the children of Muslim immigrants in public schools."

'Some forces in the Jewish world think that Europe is tone deaf.'

Diana Pinto
Paris-based historian

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Reps press for fight against anti-Semitism

Congressional leaders of the top U.S. human rights monitoring group introduced legislation backing the fight against anti-Semitism in Europe.

The bipartisan legislation introduced in Congress last week by members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission encourages the "ongoing work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in combating anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance," a statement said.

The nonbinding legislation also urges the 55-nation OSCE to name a special envoy for the issue.

"This resolution focuses on the need for sustained involvement by governments in a variety of areas," said Rep. Benjamin Cardin (D-Md.), the top House Democrat on the commission.

Also sponsoring were Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-Colo.) and Rep. Christopher Smith (R-N.J.).

Reform rejects budget cuts

The Reform movement urged the U.S. Senate to reject budget cuts proposed by the U.S. House of Representatives.

The House's proposed budget for next year "would cut funding for vital domestic programs depended on by American families, including public housing, child care, and nutritional assistance for women, infants and children, while paving the way for \$55.2 billion in tax cuts this year, and massive tax cuts in future years," said Mark Pelavin, associate director of Reform's Religious Action Center.

The House proposal passed narrowly last week.

"Jewish tradition affirms our obligation to maintain a safety net for the less fortunate," Pelavin said Monday in a statement.

Girl Scouts march in parade

The national organization of Girl Scouts denied that a local troop's participation in Sunday's Salute to Israel parade in New York sparked controversy.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the Girl Scouts of Westchester Putnam had been warned against marching because it might insult Arab scouts.

But Ellen Christie, spokeswoman for Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., said that wasn't true. "We would never tell the girls that they couldn't participate in a parade," she said.

Christie said scouts are prohibited from marching only in parades endorsing political candidates.

Two years ago, however, local parents expressed concern about the safety of girls marching in the parade because of tension in the Middle East, she said. Tens of thousands of people joined the annual march in Israel's honor through the streets of New York City.

MIDDLE EAST

Israeli soldiers raid U.N. office

Israeli soldiers raided U.N. offices in the West Bank city of Jenin. Israeli sources said soldiers conducting a raid in Jenin entered the building and detained an UNRWA official, Paul Wolstenholme, after he failed to identify himself. In November 2002, an Israeli soldier accidentally killed Wolstenholme's predecessor, Iain Hook, during a gunfight in the Jenin refugee camp. Israel later apologized for that incident.

Armed Palestinian killed

Israeli soldiers shot an armed Palestinian in a West Bank refugee camp. Monday's killing occurred in the Balata refugee camp.

The soldiers were making a sweep for suspected terrorists in the camp, which lies on the outskirts of Nablus.

Shul bomb foiled

Israeli security forces foiled the bombing of a synagogue in a fervently Orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem.

The Shin Bet said Monday that acting on an intelligence tipoff, its agents caught a Palestinian would-be suicide bomber earlier this month in Mea She'arim. The terrorist planned to attack a synagogue, there, the Shin Bet said.

Arafat to take over Gaza?

The Palestinian Authority prime minister denied reports that Egypt sought to move Yasser Arafat to the Gaza Strip.

Asked about reports that Egypt wanted Arafat to assume control in Gaza after any Israeli pullback, Ahmed Qurei said that moving the P.A. president to Gaza was not on the table. "He should be moving freely as an elected president of the Palestinian people," Qurei said.

Looking for a few good spies

The Mossad launched a Web site. Israel's spy agency went online Monday at www.mossad.gov.il in an effort to boost recruitment.

A precedent-setting newspaper ad circulated by the agency in 2000 called for applicants to become Mossad case officers.

The new Web site boasts job openings ranging from "special agent" to "English-speaking waiter." The site's texts are available in Hebrew and English.

Animals die in Rafah

A zoo appears to have been a casualty of Israel's raid in Gaza.

Forty-five parrots were reported missing from the Brazil zoo in Rafah. Reports of the missing birds came after several animals reportedly were killed last Friday when Israeli soldiers overran the zoo. Israeli officials say the birds were freed so they wouldn't be killed by explosives.

WORLD

Operation Solomon babies turn 13

Ethiopian immigrants who were born during Operation Solomon became B'nai Mitzvah. Six 13-year-olds, born within the two days that the Israeli government airlifted nearly 15,000 Ethiopian refugees on May 24-25, 1991, celebrated in Jerusalem on Monday.

Of the six, two actually were born on the plane. The celebration, held at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's office in Jerusalem, marked the 13th anniversary of the rescue mission and lauded the 500 Ethiopian Israelis who work with JDC programs.

Gravestones trashed in Kiev

Some 50 gravestones were vandalized in a Jewish cemetery in Kiev. Jewish leaders in the Ukrainian capital called the incident, which took place over the weekend, an anti-Semitic act.

But a government spokesman said the stones fell apart because of old age.

Hungarian extremists arrested after rally

Three members of an extreme right-wing group who tried to disrupt a pro-Israel rally are in police custody in Budapest.

The members of the Combat 88 group were among seven arrested Sunday; the other four were released.

Police confiscated microphones, loudspeakers and banners with anti-Semitic and anti-Israel slogans from people holding a rally against the pro-Israel rally.