

IN THE NEWS

**Rethinking
the intifada**

The Palestinian Authority's prime minister called on his people to rethink their fight against Israel.

"This anniversary should make us all — the people, factions and Palestinian Authority — reconsider the past four years, where we went wrong and where we went right," Ahmed Qurei told reporters in Ramallah on Tuesday, referring to an armed revolt launched four years ago this week.

Many Palestinian moderates have urged for an abandonment of terrorism and guerrilla tactics in favor of a nonviolent quest for statehood alongside Israel.

But Hamas and Islamic Jihad, two leading terrorist groups, vowed to continue seeking the Jewish state's destruction.

**Kidnappers free
CNN producer in Gaza**

A CNN producer who was kidnapped in the Gaza Strip was freed. Riad Ali, an Israeli Druse, was freed Tuesday, a day after he was seized in Gaza City by four armed men who approached the car in which he was traveling.

**Presbyterians insist
on divestment call**

Presbyterian officials refused to back down from a decision calling for the church to divest from companies that do business with Israel.

The refusal came Tuesday during a meeting in New York between Jewish officials and leaders of the Presbyterian Church USA.

After the meeting, church officials said they were eager for dialogue with Jews on the issue and expressed regret that the discussion had not taken place earlier.

But they also insisted that the church would not back away from the decision, which passed at the group's July gathering.

"There's a natural divide in terms of perspectives. We see things through radically different lenses," said Rabbi Paul Menitoff, executive vice president of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis.



WORLD REPORT

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U.S. Jewish groups debate how to back Sharon's Gaza plan

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Now that Ariel Sharon is hurrying along plans to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, a number of American Jewish groups believe it's time to formally sign on with the Israeli prime minister.

An effort to round up organizational support for the removal of settlements from the Gaza Strip and from part of the West Bank is revealing cracks in the U.S. Jewish consensus on Israel, with some groups enthusiastic, others derisive and others waiting to see how it plays out.

The Anti-Defamation League is circulating a "statement of support" for the plan.

"This plan is consistent with long-term strategic interests to promote Israel's security and improve the situation on the ground in the territories," it says.

The author of the statement, ADL National Director Abraham Foxman, acknowledges that the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations would ordinarily be the avenue for such a community-wide statement.

The 50-plus-member Conference of Presidents' standards for consensus, however, stymied him, Foxman said.

"I was hoping that it would be done through the conference, where most expressions of support come from, but it wasn't possible because of the nature of the conference and the issue," said Foxman, who said he hoped to issue the statement, along with signatories, after the Sukkot holiday ends on Oct. 8.

Foxman emphasized that his end-run was not implicitly critical of the conference, or of

its senior executives and staff.

He said it had more to do with the pressures on Sharon, who is under pressure to shepherd the plan through Israel's political system by March and to solicit support from Europe and the Arab world.

"In a situation where the overwhelming majority of the Israeli public supports the initiative of the government of Israel and the president of the United States has stood behind it in a letter, it's appropriate for the American Jewish community to express itself in support," he said.

Foxman does not yet have an idea how many organizations will join him, and several leaders interviewed said their groups were just now considering their stance.

Several senior staffers from member organizations said the Conference of Presidents would likely support the Gaza initiative, but was waiting for Sharon to pass his first political hurdle — a vote in the Knesset or in the full Cabinet, likely to take place within two months.

Malcolm Hoenlein, the Conference of Presidents' executive vice chairman, said of his member groups: "Many have raised questions about the timing, not the substance, when the Knesset and government haven't taken it up."

Hoenlein said the Conference of Presidents understood the time pressures, and was pressing forward with its consideration of the Gaza plan.

He said Foxman's statement and others would be considered at an Oct. 14 meeting.

One problem dogging support of the ADL in its initiative is the sensitivity of ceding the lead to one of the 50 or so organizations

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**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

■ Jewish groups spar over waiting to support Sharon's withdrawal plan

Continued from page 1
around the conference table.

"By and large we prefer to see the conference speak with one voice when possible," said David Harris, the American Jewish Committee's executive director.

Harris said his group in principle supports Sharon's plan — and has said so publicly — and he would not count out joining the ADL appeal.

Consensus "is not always possible, and we have to consider various options."

Another factor is domestic politics, said Martin Raffel, the associate executive vice chairman of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. A task force of the umbrella body for Jewish community relations councils decided in June to delay a decision on support until after the November presidential election.

"Things that were not partisan could be interpreted as being partisan," Raffel said.

■
The main problem for many member organizations is that the plan's governmental status is murky.

Sharon has won the overwhelming approval from his Inner Cabinet to set in place the legal, military, diplomatic and financial groundwork for the plan. But it has the caveat that ultimately nothing can move forward without approval either from the Knesset or the wider Cabinet.

That means that Sharon might be ready to go in March, his declared deadline for withdrawal, but might lack the political backing to do so.

Such ambiguity affects the traditional U.S. Jewish organizational ethos of let-

ting the Israeli government take the lead on matters of Israel's security — has the government spoken or hasn't it?

"We're not going to get ahead of ourselves if it's not clear if the Israeli government has or has not adopted this," said David Twersky, the international affairs director of the American Jewish Congress.

He noted the AJCongress's emphatic support last May for the withdrawal, but also noted its conditionality of the government accepting it.

Because the government has not yet accepted it, the AJCongress would not sign on to the ADL letter, Twersky said.

Of course, not every organization concerns itself with the mechanics of consensus. The Israel Policy Forum, a group promoting U.S. engagement in Middle East peace processes, was on board with the Gaza withdrawal within days of Sharon outlining its parameters to President Bush on April 14. IPF has abjured membership in the Conference of Presidents.

The organization most sensitive to not getting ahead of the Israeli government is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

■
On the Gaza withdrawal, AIPAC has refrained from formal statements of support, instead emphasizing support for the U.S.-led "road map" peace initiative — a now-moribund plan that the Bush administration says could be resuscitated by the Gaza disengagement.

Other groups said to be reluctant to sign on include the Orthodox Union and the United Jewish Communities.

Without naming any groups, Foxman dismisses such concerns as nitpicking.

"The government of Israel to the best of my knowledge is the prime minister and his policies," he said. "If the president of the United States felt comfortable enough with the plan, and if the Israeli public in poll after poll supports it in solid majorities, I think we're OK."

Foxman said the groups in Israel that oppose the plan needed to know that the community was behind Sharon.

"Especially now that the prime minister is getting threats on his life, what we can do is say, 'We're with you,'" he said.

For his part, Hoenlein said there was no

doubt that once disengagement was under way, the conference would be on board.

"When disengagement is implemented we'll support him on it," Hoenlein said of Sharon.

That might be a case of bolting the barn door after the horse has gotten away, said other organizational leaders who back Foxman's statement.

"There is no issue that is more crucial to the future of Israel than the matter of this withdrawal," said Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism.

"It is the issue that will determine Israel's destiny. Think of the consequences in terms of Israel's future, in terms of the U.S.-Israel relationship if there is no withdrawal. Let the conference take more time, but those of us who say it is critically important, we are saying the time is now to express our support."

Yoffie, who said his group intended to sign on, said slowness was a longtime problem with the conference.

"The conference has 52 or 53 members and every member is equal whether they have 3,000 members or a million members, so the extent to which it is representative is always a question," said Yoffie. "And it is reluctant on issues that run into resistance on the right."

Such resistance is natural after the collapse of the Oslo process, said Morton Klein, the president of the Zionist Organization of America.

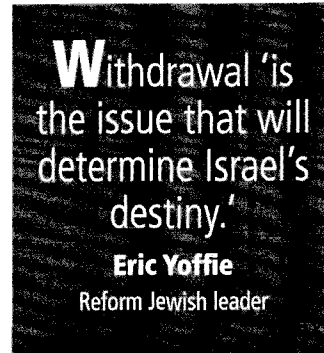
"Until the Israeli government formally approves throwing the Jews out of Gaza, no American Jewish leaders should be supporting this policy. It is not formal government policy," Klein said.

Americans for Peace Now, also a conference member, said the pullout from Gaza signaled a return to defensible borders, and that U.S. Jewish support was crucial.

"I hope and expect that the conference will stand behind this recognition of existential choice for the Jewish state of Israel," said Mark Rosenblum, an APN founder and the group's policy director.

If the Conference of Presidents doesn't act, the ADL's initiative could prove successful, Rosenblum said.

"It will be too bad if the conference and the central umbrella organizations are unwilling to mount a significant campaign, but it will come from others," he said. ■



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Would Israel go it alone if sanctions on Iran fail?

By **LESLIE SUSSER**

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After months of high-profile lobbying against Iran's nuclear program, Israeli officials are confident that the international community will impose sanctions on Tehran if it fails to meet a Nov. 25 deadline to halt its nuclear weapons program.

They base their optimism on a series of meetings with American and European officials, mainly during the recent U.N. General Assembly session in New York. They say they detect a major shift in the European position, which could lead to the Europeans joining a U.S.-led move on sanctions at the U.N. Security Council.

If the sanctions fail, Israeli analysts believe the United States has the capacity to stop Iran going nuclear by military means. They are also not ruling out a strike by Israel, if the Iranians go past the point of no return in nuclear bomb manufacturing and the international community fails to take effective action.

Israeli officials, however, make it clear that Israel sees Iran's nuclear program as a global rather than an Israeli problem, and would much prefer to see the international community dealing with it.

■

The hardening of the European line came after the Iranians rejected a mid-September demand from the International Atomic Energy Agency not to produce the enriched uranium from which nuclear bombs are made.

The defiant Iranian response was to announce that it had begun converting large amounts of raw uranium and that it had test-fired a new version of the Shihab-3 missile, capable of reaching Israel and most European capitals.

A few days later, at the U.N. General Assembly session in New York, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said he was encouraged by the new European stance.

The time, he said, was now ripe "to move the Iranian case to the Security Council in order to put an end to this nightmare."

At the same time, Israel's national security council chief, Giora Eiland, came away from talks with American officials convinced that they realized the gravity of the situation and would be ready to act.

November, Eiland stressed in his talks, would be the very last chance to do something effective to halt the Iranian nuclear drive without having to resort to force.

Gerald Steinberg, an expert on nuclear proliferation at Bar-Ilan University's BESA Institute, asserts that the Europeans, tired of Iran's double game, will now be ready to follow an American lead.

"The British, the Germans and, to some degree, the French now realize that their approach, holding various kinds of dialogue with Iran, has failed," he said.

Nor does he expect Russia or China to oppose a move for U.N. sanctions against Iran.

"Russia, given its troubles in Chechnya, will find it difficult to condone a nuclear build-up in terror-supporting Iran," he said.

"And China won't want to be the only permanent member of the Security Council to allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons."

Steinberg estimates that the Iranians are at least six months and perhaps some years away from producing a bomb, so that there is time to test whether a sanctions strategy works.

If it doesn't, the next step could be an American-led military strike. Spelling out U.S. policy in late September, President Bush said he would prefer to use diplomacy, including sanctions, to stop the Iranian nuclear drive, but if necessary he would not shy away from the use of force.

A leak in Newsweek magazine that American contingency plans to hit Iran were being updated seemed to underline the president's message.

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Although Iranian nuclear facilities are spread out across the country, and in some cases protected by thick concrete bunkers, Steinberg believes that if sanctions don't work and the Iranians get very close to producing a bomb, the Americans would be capable of destroying Iran's entire nuclear program.

"The U.S. certainly has the military capability to destroy the key facilities of the Iranian program," he said. "Iran could always reconstitute its capabilities, but it would take years. Two decades after the Israeli strike against the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981, the Iraqis were still not as close to producing a weapon as they had been then."

As for the possibility of Israel attacking Iran's nuclear facilities if sanctions fail and the international community does not take military action, Steinberg said he does

not rule it out.

But he said the imminent supply of 500 one-ton "bunker buster" bombs to Israel from the United States should not be seen as directly connected to any operational policy vis-a-vis Iran, "although it does enhance the credibility of the Israeli threat to Iran's nuclear program."

Senior Israeli officials warn that the international community should not count on Israel to remove the Iranian nuclear threat.

Israeli policy, they say, has been geared toward convincing the international community that Iran's nuclear program is an international and not an Israeli problem, and that it should be dealt with by the international community, not by Israel.

"The world should not wait for us to do its 'dirty work,'" by taking out the

Iranian nuclear threat, Yoav Biran, the outgoing director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, warned in a recent interview in the mass circulation Yediot Achronot daily.

"No one in the world has any doubts about Iran's intentions, which remain to achieve full military nuclear capability with long-range missiles," he said, alluding to the goal of delivering nuclear warheads.

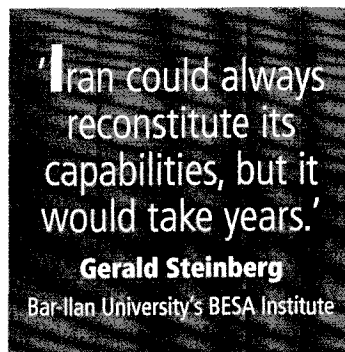
"It's not solely an Israeli problem. First and foremost, it's a problem for the stability of the Middle East and the whole international order. Only persistent international pressure, which must include Europe, the United States and others, will prevent Iran from achieving its goal," he declared.

Now, after years in which the Americans pressed for a hard line and the Europeans for "constructive dialogue" with Iran, the international community seems to be ready to take the kind of concerted action Biran had in mind.

But whether sanctions or the threat of sanctions will be enough to convince the Iranians to drop their nuclear ambitions remains an open question.

And, despite Bush's tough talk and the new optimism in Israel, there is an even bigger question: If sanctions fail, will the international community really take military action, or wait for Israel, armed with long-range bombers and "bunker busting" bombs, to do so — and risk the consequences? ■

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



NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

O.U. wants debates switched

The Orthodox Union has asked for the dates of the presidential debates to be switched because they conflict with Sukkot and Shabbat.

In a letter sent to the Commission on Presidential Debates earlier this month, the O.U. requested that the commission modify its debate schedule so observant Jews could be accommodated.

"While we appreciate the fact that the commission cannot plan these debates to ensure every citizen is available to view the debates, we feel this circumstance particularly impacts upon the Orthodox Jewish community as a group," the letter said.

Observant Jews do not watch television on holidays. Thursday's debate conflicts with Sukkot, and a debate on Oct. 8 falls on Shabbat. The O.U. says it has not received a response.

Education Dept. to fight anti-Semitism

The U.S. Department of Education says it will now prosecute cases of anti-Semitism on college campuses and in public schools.

In a letter to schools received this week, the department's Office of Civil Rights said it had jurisdiction over matters of racial and national-origin discrimination, and therefore could investigate cases of harassment of Arab Muslim, Sikh and Jewish students.

Previously, anti-Semitism cases were deemed discrimination based on religion and were forwarded to the Justice Department.

Now, the Education Department can take cases to an administrative law judge.

"I have heard anecdotally that they think it is happening and people don't know where to turn," said Kenneth Marcus, who oversees the department's Office of Civil Rights.

"People don't know they have an opportunity to get protection from the federal government."

Day school case to get day in court

A U.S. appeals court ruled against a New York day school that wanted to expand its facilities.

On Monday, the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit overturned a summary judgment for the Westchester Day School, which claimed the Zoning Board of Appeals in Mamaroneck, N.Y., unlawfully denied its petition to build a new school building and new parking spaces.

The board had cited traffic concerns in making its decision.

The court disagreed with the school's argument that because of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000, the board needed a more compelling reason to deny a religious group permission to expand. The case now goes back to the circuit court, where it will be heard in its entirety.

'Jenin, Jenin' screened in Canada

A controversial film about Israel's April 2002 military operation in the West Bank city of Jenin was one of 12 films screened at a pro-Palestinian film festival in Canada.

"Jenin, Jenin" was shown at last week's festival in Winnipeg sponsored by the Canada-Palestine Support Network.

Some of the films were shown on Yom Kippur, reducing the possibility that Jews would show up to ask questions, said David Matas, senior legal counsel for B'nai Brith Canada, who called the films "pure propaganda."

Sarna wins top prize

Jonathan Sarna, a professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University, was awarded the top prize in the National Jewish Book Awards. Sarna, a member of the JTA board of directors, won

for his history of U.S. Jewry, "American Judaism."

The fiction prize has yet to be announced. The awards, given by the Jewish Book Council, will be formally presented Dec. 1 in New York.

WORLD

Israelis in New Zealand to be released?

Two Israelis being held in New Zealand on charges of attempting to obtain passports for the Mossad reportedly will soon be released.

Eli Kara and Uri Kelman were due to be released next week.

Conviction in attack on Soviet Jews

A German court convicted a woman in connection with a failed bombing of a busload of Soviet Jews in Hungary.

The court ruled Tuesday that Andrea Klump, 47, must serve additional time in jail for aiding and abetting attempted murder in the 1991 attack in Budapest on a bus carrying Soviet Jews on their way to Israel or the West.

The blast wounded two Hungarian police officers and injured four passengers. Klump must spend a total of 12 years in jail.

She is currently serving a nine-year sentence for attempting to set off a bomb at a NATO base in Rota, Spain, in June 1988.

Israel to reopen embassy in Panama

Israel will reopen its embassy in Panama, which was closed in 2002 due to budget cuts. Israel's Costa Rica-based ambassador to Panama, Alexander Ben-Zvi, said the embassy should be ready to open in early 2005. In a statement, the Panamanian Foreign Ministry said it is "pleased" with the decision.

Panama has a Jewish community of around 8,000, by far the largest Jewish community in Central America.

Argentine gang members sentenced

The leader of an Argentine gang accused of kidnapping a Jewish man and cutting off his finger was sentenced to 22 years in jail.

Other members of the gang were sentenced Monday to between three and 16 years of prison and two were acquitted.

The victim, Ariel Strajman, said he was disappointed by the sentences. The court did not consider "racial hate" as part of the sentence, although the perpetrator allegedly used an anti-Jewish epithet.

MIDDLE EAST

Mentally ill Palestinian killed

Israeli troops killed a mentally ill Palestinian, mistaking him for a terrorist.

The man was shot dead in Jenin on Tuesday as troops scoured the West Bank city for arms caches.

According to Israeli security sources, the Palestinian approached soldiers despite their repeated requests that he halt, forcing them to open fire.

Investigations determined that he was not armed and had a history of mental illness.

Israeli innovators honored

Two Israelis were named among the world's 100 top innovators. Kinneret Keren and Yaakov Benenson were both commended by Technology Review's innovation round-up this month.

Keren was honored for her research at Israel's Technion — Israel Institute of Technology that used DNA to create the world's first self-assembling nonatransistor. Benenson was named for his research on miniaturizing medical techniques. Benenson is a doctoral student at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot.