


IN THE NEWS
Chertoff picked for Homeland Security

President Bush nominated a Jewish judge to head the Department of Homeland Security.

Michael Chertoff, a judge on the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia, ran the Justice Department's criminal division from 2001 until 2003 and was involved in drafting the U.S. Patriot Act.

He also was U.S. Attorney in New Jersey from 1990-94, where he and his wife were active in the Jewish community.

U.N. to mark Auschwitz liberation

The United Nations will hold a special session commemorating the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Nazi concentration camps.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced Tuesday that a majority of U.N. member states had agreed to his request to hold the special session Jan. 24.

Annan also called on all member states to lend their full support to the occasion, which will feature speeches about the Holocaust.

Sharon, Bush congratulate Abbas

Israel's prime minister called the Palestinian Authority president-elect Tuesday to congratulate him on his victory at the polls.

According to Israel's Army Radio, Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas agreed to stay in contact and to meet in coming weeks.

President Bush also called Abbas to congratulate him Monday.

"The president had a very good conversation with President-elect Abbas yesterday," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said.

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WORLD REPORT

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Israel ready to take big steps if Abbas moves against terror

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After Mahmoud Abbas' convincing victory this week in the election for Palestinian Authority president and the establishment of a new moderate government in Israel, both Israel and the Palestinians now seem to have pragmatic leaders capable of making peace.

There is quiet optimism on both sides, with both leaders intimating that they will be prepared to make far-reaching concessions if the other side reciprocates with bona-fide peace moves.

But there are huge question marks over whether they will be able to pull it off.

The immediate difficulty is over what must be done to stop the violence. The two sides have very different approaches and that could make for failure at the very first hurdle.

Unless Israel and the Palestinians find a way to settle or circumvent differences over what constitutes a genuine end to violence, the international community may soon find itself having to judge which side is in the right.

Israeli officials say the United States will back them. But they fear that most of the Europeans are likely to support Abbas.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's internal political standing was strengthened Monday with the establishment of a new national unity government.

Sharon will have new flexibility to pursue his Gaza disengagement plan with the unity coalition, which brings the Labor Party and United Torah Judaism together with his own Likud Party.

In addition, the leading opposition in the Knesset, which voted 58-56 to approve the government, has made clear that it, too, will back his plan.

On Tuesday, Sharon called Abbas to congratulate him on his victory Sunday. Abbas won 62 percent of the vote in his effort to succeed Yasser Arafat, who died in November, as the president of the Palestinian Authority.

According to Israel Radio, Sharon and Abbas agreed to stay in contact and to meet in the coming weeks.

In outlining the Israeli position toward the Palestinians, Sharon has made clear that Abbas must disarm recalcitrant terrorist militias before substantive peace talks can begin. But Abbas says he hopes to achieve a cease-fire without confronting the militias, and that should be enough to get negotiations restarted.

Sharon aides retort that unless there is a sea-change on the Palestinian side, a cease-fire, even if achieved, will not last. Therefore, they say, Israel will not re-engage in peace talks based on the internationally approved "road map" unless the Palestinians take steps to ensure that violence does not flare up again.

Those steps include collecting terrorist weapons, ending incitement against Israel and instituting key governmental reforms.

A senior Israeli official told JTA that Sharon sees a cease-fire that does not entail disarming of the militias as a dangerous trap, because then, if the Palestinians don't get what they want at the

Continued on page 2

NEWS ANALYSIS

■ Israelis, Palestinians hopeful but wary about peace prospects

Continued from page 1

negotiating table, they simply can revert to terror.

"Israel wants to take terror out of the negotiating equation," he said. "Unless the terrorist militias are disarmed, it's like negotiating with a pistol on the table."

The official said the road map incorporated proposals made by two former American mediators, George Tenet, who tried to negotiate security arrangements between the two sides in 2001 when he was the director of the CIA, and Anthony Zinni, who served as a U.S. peace envoy in 2002.

The proposals, which outline specific steps to crack down on terrorists, stipulate how many weapons have to be collected every day.

"A cease-fire can't be a substitute for action against the terrorist infrastructure," the official said.

The official also emphasized the importance of Palestinian governmental reforms, arguing that they are essential to enable the Palestinians to control terror.

"For example, if they don't carry out legal reforms, they won't be able to try terrorists. And if they don't build jails, they'll have nowhere to put them," he said.

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Although Abbas, like his predecessor Yasser Arafat, shows little willingness to tackle the militias head on, there is no denying that there is a new mood on the Palestinian side that could lead to progress.

The buzzword among Palestinians is "change." There is a widespread belief that change is necessary and possible.

In his victory speech, Abbas, who won 62 percent of the vote, spoke about the "struggle ahead" but that struggle was not in confronting Israel, or, in an Arafat-like vein, in sending "a million martyrs to Jerusalem."

Rather, Abbas said, the big task would be to build a Palestinian state in which people could live in security. "There is a difficult mission ahead: To build our state, to achieve security for our people," he said.

The mission, he said, means giving "our prisoners freedom, our fugitives a life in dignity, to reach our goal of an independent state."

Abbas' strategy, it seems, will be to get the international community to press Israel to make concessions. He will try to convince Palestinian radicals that diplomatic pressure by the international community is likely to be far more effective than Palestinian military pressure ever was or could be.

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The key to future progress could lie in how he goes about drumming up this pressure. He could simply aim for a cease-fire and avoid any further reform.

But, Israeli pundits note, there is a lot of talk on the Palestinian side about state-building, reform and putting an end to the prevalent chaos.

One of the ways to do that would be to cut the number of armed Palestinian organizations from 14 to 3, and place them under a single command, as the road map demands.

Abbas would not necessarily disarm the militiamen, but rather persuade them to join one of the three new legitimate forces with their weapons. If he succeeds — and that's a big if — it will be extremely difficult for Israel to go on claiming that he hasn't carried out his part of the road map reforms.

For their part, the Palestinians are demanding that Israel lift roadblocks,

release prisoners and freeze building on Jewish settlements. They say they need these gestures to persuade the Palestinian people that their new peace-oriented policy is getting them somewhere.

Abbas has said he is afraid Sharon may "let him down" again, the way he did when Abbas was prime minister in 2003, by failing to meet Palestinian expectations for wholesale prisoner releases.

Israeli leaders are signaling that

they don't intend to make the same mistake again.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz says he is ready to hand over West Bank cities to Palestinian security control as soon as Abbas says he is ready. And Sharon says he intends to meet Abbas as soon as possible to discuss security issues.

Clearly, if there is a breakdown, neither side wants to be blamed for it.

Both the United States and Europe have indicated that they will be ready to help the Palestinians economically and to aid them in carrying out security and governmental reforms.

But whereas President Bush made it clear that American aid would be contingent on the Palestinians fighting terror, combating corruption and instituting democratic reforms, the Europeans have not laid down any conditions.

For now, even if the Palestinians don't stop the terror altogether, Israel is likely to try to coordinate its planned unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and part of the West Bank with them.

The question is what will happen after that. If the Palestinians don't fight terror, Israeli officials say, Israel will simply "park" along the new lines and stay put for as long as necessary.

But if they do fight terror, the sky could be the limit.

"They will find Israel ready to do things that only a short time ago seemed totally out of the question," Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom declared in a recent TV interview.

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Rabbi's son named to lead Homeland Security

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Michael Chertoff, the Jewish judge President Bush nominated this week to head the vast Homeland Security bureaucracy, brings a rabbi's son's sensibility to resolving the tensions between protecting Americans and preserving civil liberties.

Bush made clear in his announcement Tuesday that he found Chertoff attractive because of his toughness and his sterling reputation.

But Jewish community leaders who know him say the judge would bring much more than that to the position.

"I can't sing his praises high enough," said attorney Stephen Flatow, who says Chertoff was instrumental in drafting the USA Patriot Act, which led to the U.S. indictment of a Florida-based alleged leader of Islamic Jihad, which claimed responsibility for the 1995 murder of Flatow's daughter Alisa in a Gaza Strip terrorist attack.

Chertoff, 51, would be Bush's second Cabinet-level Jewish appointment; Josh Bolten has run the Office of Management and Budget since 2003.

Chertoff was the top criminal justice official at the Justice Department at the time of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The controversial Patriot Act, which removed the wall between how domestic and U.S. foreign intelligence agencies gathered and shared information, accelerated the case against the Islamic Jihad leader, Sami al-Arian, who faces trial in Florida this summer.

As a result of this legislation, "they were able to put together the case very quickly but thoroughly," said Flatow, who is now chairman of the community relations committee of United Jewish Communities of MetroWest in New Jersey.

Chertoff since has come to question what many consider some of the extremes of the Patriot Act — but that has also earned him Jewish praise.

"To his credit, Judge Chertoff recognized himself that many of things done immediately after Sept. 11 were not things that should have been done," said Paul Miller, the president of the American Jewish Congress, who has met frequently with Chertoff.

"He's someone who understands the balance we need between protecting people

on the one hand, and tools to protect our safety — and also not to destroy our American values."

Chertoff himself emphasized the need for balance in his short speech accepting the nomination.

"If confirmed, I pledge to devote all my energy to promoting our homeland security, and as important, to preserving our fundamental liberties," he said.

Chertoff has strong ties to the Jewish community. Born and raised in Elizabeth, N.J., Chertoff is the son of a rabbi, his two children

have attended Jewish day schools and his wife, Meryl, was a co-chairwoman of the regional Anti-Defamation League's civil rights committee when he was the U.S.

attorney in New Jersey in the mid-1990s.

He lives in Bernardsville, N.J.

Beyond his Jewish ties, Chertoff has an impressive resume: Harvard Law School, U.S. Supreme Court law clerk, partner with the law firm of Latham & Watkins, U.S. attorney, assistant U.S. attorney general. He's now a federal judge on the Philadelphia-based Third Circuit Court of Appeals.

But his biggest asset may be that he is not Bernard Kerik, the former top New York City cop who withdrew his own nomination for the job following sordid stories about favors he accepted and women he pursued — all of which had prompted criticism that the Bush White House did not do enough to vet nominees.

"He's been confirmed by the Senate three times!" Bush exclaimed with a smile at the outset of his introduction of Chertoff, a rake-thin, bearded and media-shy man who hesitantly approached the microphones to accept the nomination Tuesday.

Chertoff has a reputation for toughness, and it is clear that Bush expects him to tame the Homeland Security beast.

"When Mike is confirmed by the Senate, the Department of Homeland Security will be led by a practical organizer, a skilled manager and a brilliant thinker," he said.

More substantially, Jewish leaders say that Chertoff would bring a rare tendency to reach out to an administration with a reputation for insularity. Many Jewish

groups have chafed at what they say is the Bush administration's "with us or against us" ethos.

Chertoff, a moderate Republican, is well-liked on both sides of the aisle.

"Judge Mike Chertoff has the resume to be an excellent Homeland Security Secretary,

given his law enforcement background and understanding of New York's and America's neglected homeland security needs," U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said in a statement.

Chertoff was the sole Republican U.S. Attorney who Bill

Clinton kept in place after assuming the presidency in 1993, on the recommendation of then-Sen. Bill Bradley of New Jersey, himself a liberal Democrat, and largely on the basis of his success in pursuing mob figures.

He went on to become a special counsel for the Whitewater committee from 1994 to 1996, and had a reputation for toughness, although he quit just before that investigation of the Clintons turned rancorous.

Still, Sen. Hilary Clinton (D-N.Y.) was the sole dissenter in his most recent confirmation, for appeals court judge.

But Chertoff is not partisan in his toughness: His 2001 investigation into charges that New Jersey State Supreme Court Judge Peter Verniero had as attorney general suppressed evidence of racial profiling led Verniero to resign. Verniero had been a prince in the New Jersey Republican establishment.

Chertoff is a classic Rockefeller Republican, a moderate who knows how to talk to all sides, said David Twersky, who was an editor of the New Jersey Jewish News in the 1990s when Chertoff was U.S. Attorney in the state.

That political positioning makes Chertoff the right choice for running Homeland Security as the department has come under increasing criticism for heavy handedness, said Twersky, now the international affairs director for the American Jewish Congress.

"On the one hand we have people who say, 'Arrest everybody and throw away the key'; on the other you have those who say, 'Don't you ever profile Arabs,'" Twersky said.

"The point is to find someone who reconciles these different imperatives. Chertoff is precisely the guy to pull this off." ■

Chertoff is a classic Rockefeller Republican, a moderate who knows how to talk to all sides.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Williamson to head to U.N.?

Richard Williamson is considered a top candidate to become the next U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, according to U.N. insiders.

Williamson is a former U.S. ambassador to the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva and was a deputy to the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte.

The resignation of the current ambassador, John Danforth, takes effect Jan. 20.

'Wave rat' donates to Chabad

A man who sold the Internet domain name tsunamirelief.com donated his earnings to Chabad of Thailand.

Josh Kaplan, 20, whom the New York Post called a "wave rat" when he put up the site name for sale on eBay, gave Chabad the \$10,000 an Internet gambling outfit paid for it, Reuters reported.

Kaplan's mother told Reuters that her son always had planned to use the money for charitable purposes.

MIDDLE EAST

Israeli succumbs to mortar wounds

An Israeli man died of his wounds from a Palestinian mortar attack.

Nissim Arbiv, 26, from the Gaza Strip settlement of Nissanit, died Tuesday of wounds sustained from a mortar attack in Gaza nine days ago. Arbiv was injured by a shell while working at the Erez Industrial Zone on Jan. 2.

There were no casualties from another mortar barrage Tuesday on Gaza settlements and a rocket launch against the Israeli border town of Sderot.

Fifth Israeli tsunami victim found

The remains of a fifth Israeli victim of the Southeast Asian tsunami were identified.

A police forensic team used dental records Tuesday to determine that a body found in Thailand was that of Marie Politi, 42, who went missing during last month's tidal waves.

Central Maccabiah figure resigns

An Israeli man found criminally negligent following the collapse of a bridge at the 1997 Maccabiah Games resigned from Israel's Olympic Committee.

The Australian Jewish community, which suffered most in the tragedy at the opening ceremony to the 1997 Games, had been outraged that Maccabi Israel elected Yoram Eyal to represent it on the Olympic Committee.

Eyal, chairman of the organizing committee for the 1997 games, was found criminally negligent for the role he played in commissioning the footbridge over the polluted Yarkon River.

"I saw the mayhem the appointment had caused and I did not want it to become a major issue affecting this year's Maccabiah," Eyal told Ha'aretz.

El Al flies aid to Indonesia

An El Al jet delivered tsunami aid to Indonesia, a rare open contact between Israel and the world's most populous Muslim state.

The El Al airlift landed Tuesday in Indonesia, which was hard hit by last month's tsunami, after behind-the-scenes coordination between Jerusalem and Jakarta.

Indonesia does not recognize the Jewish state, but Israeli officials expressed hope that ties could be normalized following the donation of clothes and food.

Technion devises bomb detector

Israeli researchers at the Technion—Israel Institute of Technology created a device that can detect an explosive substance used frequently in terrorist attacks.

The Peroxide Explosive Tester detects the presence of the previously undetectable triacetone triperoxide, which has been used in bus bombings in Israel.

The device looks like a three-color ballpoint pen and releases three chemical mixtures that change color when they come in contact with TATP.

'Pray-in' against withdrawal in Israel

Thousands of protesters prayed against the Israeli disengagement plan in Jerusalem.

Protesters, including rabbis, held a two-hour "pray-in" outside government buildings Monday, Ha'aretz reported.

Meanwhile, a settlers' sit-down strike near the Knesset entered its seventh day Monday.

The protests show a new grass-roots strategy by protesters, who have exhausted political means of stopping the withdrawal, according to Ha'aretz.

Soldier jailed for lying

An Israeli soldier who killed a foreign pro-Palestinian activist was jailed for lying to investigators.

The army said Tuesday that a court-martial found that the unnamed sergeant who shot Tom Hurndall in the southern Gaza town of Rafah in April 2003 had falsely reported that the British activist was armed.

The soldier was jailed for more than 5 months.

WORLD

Fence claims collected

The United Nations began the process of collecting damage claims from Israel's West Bank security barrier. U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan announced Tuesday that he had sent a letter to the General Assembly president outlining a framework to record damages from the fence, as demanded in a General Assembly resolution last summer blasting the fence and ordering Israel to dismantle it.

"The purpose of the register is not to adjudicate claims of damage but to collect them for possible future adjudication and compensation," the United Nations said in a background note, The Associated Press reported.

More Swiss accounts go online

More than 3,000 Holocaust survivors and their heirs will have another chance to apply for compensation for Holocaust-era bank accounts.

Swiss banks have agreed to publish an additional 3,100 names of account holders who likely were victims of the Holocaust.

The move is part of the \$1.25 billion Swiss banks settlement, and is in addition to a list of 21,000 names published in 2001.

Tsunami victims buried

Two young Jewish lovers killed in the Southeast Asian tsunami were buried in South Africa.

Avadya Berman and Nikki Liebowitz were buried side by side in Johannesburg within an hour of each other Sunday.

A large crowd attended the private funerals.