


IN THE NEWS
**Israel, P.A.
back in business**

Israel resumed contact with the Palestinian Authority.

Wednesday's decision by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Security Cabinet came several days after Sharon suspended contacts with the Palestinian Authority following a deadly attack on Israelis in the Gaza Strip.

At the same time, the Security Cabinet told the Israel Defense Forces to prepare for a large-scale invasion into Gaza if rocket and mortar fire on the southern Israeli town of Sderot and Israeli settlements in Gaza continues, Israel Radio reported.

**Annan: U.N. created
as reaction to Holocaust**

A U.N. General Assembly session commemorating the liberation of Nazi death camps is significant because the world body grew out of the Holocaust's ashes, Kofi Annan said.

"The founding of this organization was a direct response to the Holocaust," the U.N. secretary-general said during a news conference Wednesday with Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Dan Gillerman, and representatives of other nations that back the gathering.

As of Tuesday, 148 of the United Nations' 191 member countries had expressed support for the session, and letters were still coming in.

Among the nations signing on are Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Yemen, Turkey, South Africa and China.

**Two Palestinians
killed in the Gaza Strip**

Israeli soldiers killed two Palestinians as they approached Israel's security barrier around the Gaza Strip.

In Wednesday's incident, soldiers opened fire on the Palestinians, who responded by throwing a grenade.

Also, two Israeli soldiers were wounded when an antitank rocket was shot at Israeli bulldozer in Gaza.

WORLD REPORT

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At Senate hearings, Rice stresses she's committed to brokering peace

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Condoleezza Rice could be forgiven for wishing that all she had to talk about was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Bipartisan agreement that there is new hope in the region was among the few calm spots in confirmation hearings this week for President Bush's nominee for his second-term secretary of state.

The friendly exchanges between Rice and some of the Bush administration's toughest critics in the Senate underscore the unanimity of support for President Bush's path to peace in the region.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved Rice's nomination by a vote of 16 to 2 — Sens. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) voted against her — and referred it to the full Senate, which was expected to confirm Rice next week.

Rice said she expected to devote much of her time to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"We all believe, and most especially the president, that we have a really good opportunity here, given the election of a new Palestinian leader and given the Israeli-Gaza withdrawal plan, which is linked to the West Bank through the four settlements that would be dismantled in the West Bank as well," Rice said at hearings Tuesday. "I expect myself to spend an enormous amount of effort on this activity."

Rice was spare on details, but outlines were familiar: an expectation that Israel

would withdraw from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank and that the Palestinians would stop terrorism.

Such diplomatic efforts, senators said, would benefit from Rice's closeness to President Bush, forged through his 2000 campaign and then over his first term, when Rice served as Bush's national security adviser.

"In Iraq, across the Middle East, in North Korea, in our relations with China, and in so many other places we face major challenges. I would submit that Dr. Rice has the skill, the judgment and the poise and the leadership to lead in these difficult times," Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) said in a friendly introduction.

"When Dr. Rice meets with Hu Jintao or Ariel Sharon or Vladimir Putin, there will be no doubt that she speaks for and on behalf of the president of the United States," Feinstein said, referring to the leaders of China, Israel and Russia, respectively.

The unstated implication: Outgoing Secretary of State Colin Powell's inability to develop a personal relationship with Bush meant he was less effective in dealing with those leaders and regions.

Rice's closeness to Bush is her greatest advantage: Even her toughest critics said she appeared headed for an overwhelming confirmation vote.

"You are going to be confirmed and everybody knows that," said Kerry, the 2004 Democratic candidate. But he added that he would vote against her because of Rice's role in formulating

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■ Rice stresses commitment to Middle East peace

Continued from page 1

Bush's Iraq policy.

Still, Rice didn't have an easy ride.

Republicans and Democrats alike asked tough questions about a wide range of Bush administration policies, ranging from its isolation of the Chavez regime in Venezuela to its efforts to contain nuclear proliferation.

In one contentious session, Boxer came as close as she could, within the confines of genteel Senate rules, to calling Rice a liar for her role in defending the Iraq war.

"Your loyalty to the mission you were given, to sell this war, overwhelmed your respect for the truth," Boxer said.

Rice choked back tears in her reply.

"Senator, I have to say that I have never, ever lost respect for the truth in the service of anything," she said. "It is not my nature. It is not my character. And I would hope that we can have this conversation and discuss what happened before and what went on before and what I said without impugning my credibility or my integrity."

■
Republicans were hardly less tough. Sen. Lincoln Chafee (R-R.I.) accused Rice of lacking consistency in propping up repressive regimes in the formerly Soviet Caucasus, but coming down hard on the democratically elected Venezuelan government.

Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) took a shot at the Bush administration's emphasis on Social Security reform at the expense of other pressing issues.

But, like a dental patient hearing the drill wind down, Rice's face lit up every time the Israeli-Palestinian issue came up.

"I look forward to personally working with Palestinian and Israeli leaders and bringing American diplomacy to bear on this difficult but crucial issue," she said. "Peace can only come if all parties choose to do the difficult work, and the time to choose peace is now."

Rice evaded pressure for details.

"No one has objections in principle to the idea of an envoy, but it is a question of whether that is appropriate to a particular point in time in the process that we're involved in," she said when Hagel pressed her on whether she thought Bush should appoint a full-time envoy to the region.

She was similarly cagey when Sen. John Sununu (R-N.H.) asked her how much the United States expected to spend to promote Palestinian institution-building.

"I will look with others when I get to State at precisely how we might fund the obligations that I'm sure we're going to have to undertake to help the Palestinians in this important period of time," she said.

Rice suggested the United States would help pay to train Palestinian Authority security forces.

"Clearly the training of the security forces is going to be critical," she said. "They've got to fight terrorism. They've got to have trained security forces to do it. It will be a good investment to train those forces."

■
Rice went out of her way to emphasize the West Bank element in Israel's planned withdrawals this year, apparently seeking to address criticism that Sharon is planning a "Gaza first and last" feint.

She told Chafee she expects any Palestinian state formed in the West Bank to be contiguous and have a border with Jordan.

"It has to have territory that makes it viable," she said. "It cannot be territory that is so broken up that it can't function as a state, and I think that that's now well understood. Has to have economic viability, and there it probably needs to have economic viability in relationship to other states around it — to Jordan, to Israel and to

others."

She also said ending terrorism and incitement against Israel was crucial, and singled out for criticism "moderate" Arab states that say one thing to diplomats and another to their citizens.

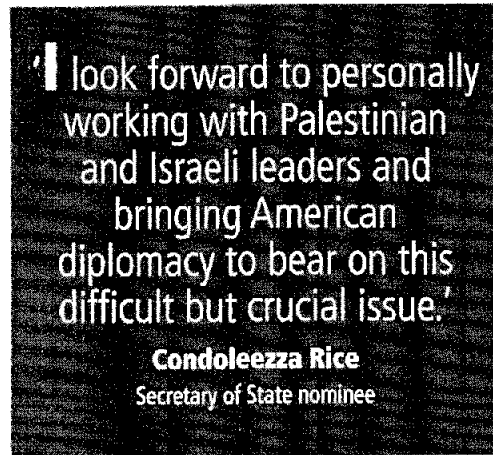
"There are other roles that we need the Arab states to play," she said, after calling for Arab financial support for the Palestinians. "I think the most important is, you can't incite hatred against Israel and then say you want a two-state solution. It's just got to stop. They've got to stop it in their media, they've got to stop it in their mosques, because it is a message that is inciting the people who want to destroy the chances for peace between Israel and Palestine."

Rice cited Syria in this regard.

"It is incumbent on Syria to respond finally to the entreaties of the United States and others about their ties to terrorism," she said in response to a question from Sen. Mel Martinez (R-Fla.).

Rice's command of the Middle East issue was clear, but she faltered slightly on another topic — anti-Semitism. Pressed by Sen. George Voinovich (R-Ohio), Rice confessed that she was not aware that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe so far has failed to budget for a promised anti-Semitism monitoring office. Voinovich accused Russia of blocking the office.

"I will look into the budget issue," Rice said. "I was not aware of the budget issue, but I will look into that." ■



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Groups see abortion showdown looming

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish groups are hoping to enlist rabbis in the struggle to ensure that abortion rights are not eroded during President Bush's second term.

A coalition of organizations, led by the National Council of Jewish Women, is asking rabbis across the country to sign a letter that would be sent to U.S. senators if a new Supreme Court nominee is announced, as is expected in the next few years.

The letter approaches the abortion issue from a religious liberty perspective, arguing that if the procedure is made illegal, Jews will be prevented from following their religious teachings — which mandate abortions in rare circumstances when the life of the mother is threatened.

It's an aggressive effort by the Jewish community to play a larger role in the abortion debate, and comes at a time of great fear that impending Supreme Court vacancies and a Republican Congress will align to roll back a woman's ability to end a pregnancy.

The push also is timed to coincide with Saturday's 32nd anniversary of the Supreme Court ruling on *Roe v. Wade*, which made abortion legal.

In addition to seeking out rabbis, NCJW has pushed Jewish civil rights groups, including the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee, to highlight the abortion issue on their legislative agendas.

Advocates on both sides of the debate are expecting a fight if a Supreme Court justice announces retirement and attention turns to choosing a replacement. Chief Justice William Rehnquist is being treated for thyroid cancer, and several other justices, including the moderate Sandra Day O'Connor and the liberal John Paul Stevens, are of advancing age.

With the influence of Christian conservatives and the focus on faith and values heightened after November's presidential election, Jewish leaders hope the influence of rabbis and a religious argument for legalized abortion will be a counterweight. The goal is to show that not all people of faith oppose abortion rights.

"The religious right has succeeded and clearly established a feeling in this country that people of faith are against choice," NCJW President Marsha Atkind said. "But that isn't the case, and we need to make that very clear."

The goal is to get rabbinical leaders and congregational rabbis to sign a letter that will be sent to all senators if a court nomination is forwarded by President Bush, a time when the letter is anticipated to have the most impact.

The letter suggests the decision to have an abortion should be up to a woman in consultation with her doctor and clergy, and shouldn't be determined by governmental decree.

Most Reform and Conservative rabbis support abortion rights, and both movements are reaching out to their members through rabbinic listservs to get them to sign the letter.

The Orthodox Union does not participate in abortion debates because of the complexity of halachah on the issue. Agudath Israel of America opposes the current abortion laws, and seeks laws that would allow abortions only in exceptional cases and when mandated by religious law.

"We would like to see *Roe v. Wade*, which is a bad decision, overturned," said Rabbi Avi Shafran, Agudath Israel's director of public affairs. "But we would not like to see abortions outlawed without exception."

One Orthodox rabbi said he supports NCJW's efforts because he is concerned about federal judges outlawing a procedure that halachic law specifically calls for in rare circumstances.

"I think the Orthodox community should be concerned about laws that would restrict people from observing halachah," said Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld, rabbi of Ohev Shalom Talmud Torah synagogue in Washington.

Jewish leaders believe a statement from a diverse list of rabbis would carry more weight with senators than rallies and other overt efforts to show support for choice.

"They speak with a kind of moral authority and are compelling speakers," said Sammie Moshenberg, NCJW's Washington director. "The presence of a long list of rabbis on a letter will make senators stand up and take notice."

It also will be a tangible

sign for senators that religious leaders, including ones from their home states, back abortion rights.

Pro-choice groups often have centered their argument on a woman's right to privacy, but in its latest appeal NCJW specifically focuses on the religious liberty issue.

The crux is that prohibiting abortions could in some cases prevent Jews from practicing their religion. That would mean that the religious views of those who believe abortion is always wrong could obstruct others from practicing their beliefs.

"It is imperative that nominees to the federal bench protect fundamental religious and personal freedoms, such as reproductive choice," the letter says. "Any infringement on these rights subverts the basis upon which our nation is built."

NCJW has pushed Jewish civil rights groups to take a larger stand on this issue. Groups like the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee at times have spoken out on choice — against the ban on so-called partial birth abortions, which passed Congress in 2003, for example — but NCJW has asked them to make the issue a more central part of their legislative agendas.

"We want to make clear that it is not the religious view to be against reproductive rights," said Richard Foltin, the American Jewish Committee's legislative director.

'It is imperative that nominees to the federal bench protect fundamental religious and personal freedoms, such as reproductive choice.'

Letter from NCJW

**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Rabbi to bless Bush

A rabbi will bless President Bush's pre-inaugural dinner. Rabbi Levi Shemtov, a Lubavitch rabbi in the Washington area, will deliver the invocation at a candle-lit dinner for Republican faithful Wednesday evening at the National Building Museum.

The ticket is one of the hardest inauguration invites in a city packed with balls and parties: Speakers at the event include Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and Condoleezza Rice, the nominee for secretary of state.

Mehlman named Republican chairman

A Jewish adviser to President Bush officially was elected chairman of the Republican National Committee.

Ken Mehlman, campaign manager of the Bush-Cheney re-election campaign, won unanimous approval for the committee post Wednesday.

He previously served as White House political director and was the national field director for Bush's first presidential campaign.

Senator to head Helsinki Commission

Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) was named chair of Congress' Helsinki Commission.

The commission explores democracy and human-rights issues in Europe, and has been a leading advocate for the fight against international anti-Semitism.

Senate Republican leaders on Wednesday appointed Brownback chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Brownback replaces Rep. Christopher Smith (R-N.J.), whose term expired.

Look out, Howard Stern

B'nai B'rith International and JTA are launching a partnership on satellite radio.

"Studio J," a nationally syndicated news magazine, will review Jewish news and provide feature stories. "Studio J" will premier March 27 on Sirius satellite radio, Channel 115.

WORLD

Indonesia: No Israeli aid

Indonesia said it won't accept tsunami aid from Israel — though it already has.

"On the governmental level, we have heard nothing," Alwi Shihab, an Indonesian Cabinet minister, told Al-Jazeera in a Jan. 13 telecast available on the Web site of the Middle East Media Research Institute.

He said Indonesia would accept aid from Jews, but "as for a request from the Israeli government, this will not happen."

In fact, an El Al airliner delivered 80,000 tons of relief to Indonesia two days before the interview, and Indonesian and Israeli diplomats have appeared together in public since then.

Indonesia suffered almost 170,000 of the estimated 210,000 deaths in the Dec. 26 tidal wave.

The broadcast is available at <http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=488>.

Hungarians mark ghetto liberation

Ceremonies are being held in Hungary this week to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto.

The main ceremony was held Tuesday in Budapest's Dohany Synagogue, where Hungarian dignitaries, including Hungary's president, prime minister and speaker of the Parliament, took part for the first time in a Jewish commemoration.

In addition, several commemorations are being held in Budapest

this week to remember Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest in 1944 but disappeared on Jan. 17, 1945.

Something rotten in Denmark?

A Danish-Palestinian man is in Israeli custody on suspicion of working for Hezbollah.

The Danish Foreign Ministry said Wednesday that the man was arrested in Israel earlier this month and had his remand extended until Jan. 24 by a closed security court.

Israeli officials declined comment, citing a gag order on the case. According to Danish media, the man is a Lebanese native believed to have been recruited by Hezbollah for a mission in Israel.

London attacks probed

Recent attacks on Jews in London were linked, British police said.

Police said they are looking for a group of Asian and black men who allegedly committed the assaults in the Stamford Hill section of north London in the past two months.

World honors Einstein

Germany is launching an international "Year of Einstein." German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and German Education Minister Edelgard Bulmahn will kick off the year Wednesday at an event with 800 guests.

The year marks 100 years since the German-born Jewish physicist came up with his special theory of relativity.

The event is part of a larger World Year of Physics, a United Nations-backed effort to spark fresh interest in the science.

MIDDLE EAST

No lull in terrorism, ambassador says

Israel's ambassador to the United Nations denied that there was a lull in Palestinian terrorist activities, saying fewer attacks succeeded because of the West Bank security barrier.

"Let there be no mistake. There is a perception of calm and quiet in our region. Unfortunately, that is not true. Palestinians have so far, unfortunately, not made any serious effort to stop terrorism and to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism," Gillerman told reporters Wednesday at the United Nations. Gillerman said the fence had led to a 90 percent reduction in suicide bombings and a 75 percent drop in the number of Israelis killed by terrorists.

Group: Don't fund checkpoints

Americans for Peace Now called on the U.S. government not to fund improved checkpoints in the West Bank.

Israel recently tested a checkpoint with a high-tech scanner and found it reduces passage to three minutes for Palestinians and minimizes contact with Israeli soldiers.

Israel argues that reducing obstacles for Palestinians will spur the economy and bolster support for diplomatic initiatives.

Israel has asked the United States for help in building more such checkpoints, which could cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

Peace Now says that introducing the checkpoints along Israel's security barrier, which runs inside the West Bank at some points, is tantamount to spending U.S. dollars on settlement protection.

Reward offered for evidence on airman

An Israeli nonprofit offered a \$10 million reward for reliable evidence about missing Israeli air force navigator Ron Arad.

The reward is part of a campaign launched by the Born to Freedom Foundation to find information about Arad, who bailed out of his crippled jet over Lebanon in 1986, was captured by Shi'ite militia-men and is believed to have been handed over to Iran.