

IN THE NEWS

Rice: Force an option with Iran

Iran must understand that force is an option in dealing with its nuclear threat, Condoleezza Rice said.

The U.S. secretary of state met Wednesday with Jewish leaders to outline U.S. policy on Iran and Hamas.

"No options are off the table, no one is ready for a nuclear Iran, the Iranians must understand that," Rice said, according to notes from three people attending the meeting. "The United States and this president do not have a credibility issue when it comes to the use of force."

Israel eyes P.A. cutoff

Ehud Olmert told U.S. Jewish leaders that Israel is prepared to cut off ties with the Palestinian Authority as soon as a Hamas-led government is sworn in.

The radical Islamic group, having won Palestinian Authority elections last month, is expected to begin building the Cabinet once the new Parliament convenes this weekend.

"On the day that the chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Abu Mazen, will appoint a candidate from the Hamas to lead the Palestinian government, we will review all of our contacts with the Palestinian Authority," Israel's acting prime minister said Tuesday in a speech to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations in Jerusalem.

Palestinian killed in West Bank

Israeli troops killed a Palestinian in the West Bank.

The youth was killed in the town of Kabatiya on Wednesday as soldiers searched the area for terrorists.

According to Palestinian witnesses, the teenager was mentally handicapped and carrying a toy gun.

Israeli security sources said troops opened fire on a gunman, fearing their lives were at risk.

WORLD REPORT

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Rice talks tough on nuclear Iran in her meeting with Jewish leaders

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA)— Condoleezza Rice used a meeting with Jewish leaders this week to make one of her toughest statements to date on the use of force to contain Iran's nuclear program.

"No options are off the table, no one is ready for a nuclear Iran, the Iranians must understand that," the U.S. secretary of state said Wednesday, according to notes from three people attending the meeting at the State Department. "Accomplishing that goal is not in their interests. The United States and this president do not have a credibility issue when it comes to the use of force."

The reference, made at a private forum with eight Jewish organizational leaders, appeared to be to the U.S. decision in 2003 to lead an invasion of Iraq, despite international opposition.

Comparing the Iraq war and what might happen to Iran is rare for administration officials, who usually go out of their way to say the cases are vastly different because Iran poses far more serious military challenges than Saddam Hussein's Iraq did.

On Tuesday, Iran began enriching uranium, a necessary step in the making of a nuclear bomb, although Iran insists its program is for peaceful purposes. Iran is accelerating its nuclear program and cutting off nuclear inspectors in the wake of a decision this month by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. nuclear watchdog, to refer Iran to the U.N. Security Council for possible sanctions.

Rice made it clear that any decision to use force was a long way off, and went out of her way to say the United States is considering its

actions with due deliberation.

According to participants, she said she opposed sanctions that would harm the Iranian people, such as an oil embargo, or dropping Iran's soccer team from this year's World Cup. Instead, she suggested, one step might be to starve Iran of foreign currency, limiting its ability to withstand the economic blow Western sanctions would bring.

The meeting brought together leaders of Jewish organizations that have been most outspoken about Iran's nuclear ambitions. Western experts say Iran might be at least 10 years away from a bomb, but some Israelis believe the Islamic republic could have a bomb by the end of next year.

Representatives at the meeting included two leaders of the American Jewish Committee; two leaders of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby; and leaders of the Jewish Institute of National Security Affairs, the United Jewish Communities, the Republican Jewish Coalition and B'nai B'rith International. The American Jewish Congress was also invited, but was unable to send a representative.

Many Jewish organizational leaders were in Israel this week on a mission of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The meeting between Rice and the Jewish leaders had been in the works since January because of concerns ahead of that month's Palestinian legislative elections, according to administration sources. The invitations were sent out last week, after the terrorist group Hamas won a surprise landslide majority in the elections.

Rice took time out of a busy day testify-

Continued on page 2

■ *In a meeting with Jewish leaders, Rice did not limit the U.S. response to Iran*

Continued from page 1

ing before the U.S. Congress about her department's budget requests. The Bush administration wants \$85 million to assist opponents to the Islamists now ruling Iran.

In her testimony to the Senate, she referred to Iran's decision to enrich uranium, but maintained the administration's standard line — softer, more ambiguous and stressing diplomacy without mentioning force.

"The more Iran does the kinds of things that it did today in starting enrichment and reprocessing and therefore defying the international community, the more, I think, you will see people come together around a set of consequences for Iran's behavior," she told senators. "We are in very intense discussions with our colleagues about what that menu might look like, about how that menu might play out over time. I don't want to get ahead of the diplomacy but we are in those discussions."

Speaking with the Jewish leaders, Rice reiterated that the U.S. government would not deal with a Hamas government until it renounces violence and recognizes Israel's right to exist. She said U.S. assistance would continue through Feb. 18, when Hamas is to officially assume its majority in parliament but "the clock would start ticking" once Hamas establishes a government. That could take weeks.

Rice also said U.S.-Palestinian security cooperation posed a conundrum: on the one hand, the Bush administration

wanted no ties at all with a Hamas-led government; on the other, pulling out from a program that provides training and non-lethal equipment to Palestinian security forces now would undermine the security

gains achieved so far.

Israeli officials have said security improvements under the previous Fatah-led government have helped stem terrorist attacks. ■

Foundation to be major education donor

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Since its founding in 1987, the Jim Joseph Foundation has been a modest trust making gifts to American Jewish organizations that, largely, focus on Jewish education.

But when Joseph died in 2003, he left the foundation assets worth in excess of a half billion dollars. Now, insiders are saying, the trust — recently incorporated as a private foundation — has entered the big leagues, joining the Bronfmans and the Schustermans and the Steinhards as among the largest and, potentially, most influential funders on the Jewish philanthropic scene.

Before his untimely death in 2003, Jim Joseph, an enormously successful real estate developer in the San Francisco Bay area, had funded a variety of initiatives aimed at supporting the education of Jewish children and youth in America — programs that were both religious and secular, formal and informal.

Each year the foundation gave out \$500,000-\$1 million, in addition to personal gifts from Joseph. By 2007, in accordance with U.S. law — which requires such foundations to disburse 5 percent of their assets annually — the Jim Joseph Foundation is likely to be giving out at least \$25 million each year.

As per Joseph's instructions, the incorporated foundation will continue its focus on initiatives for the young, making good on prior commitments to organizations like the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education and the Curriculum Initiative, as well as searching out new groups.

"We're really trying to make sure" that Joseph's "vision of touching every Jewish child in this country comes true," said Al

Levitt, chairman of the foundation's board and a longtime confidant of Joseph.

That means the organization may give money to everything from day schools to Jewish camps to pre-schools and beyond, Levitt said.

Joseph often conferred with advisers before making his gifts, but the bottom-line decisions were left up to him. Now, the non-profit entity that existed during Joseph's lifetime has been succeeded by a charitable trust to be headed beginning in April by Chip Edelsberg, vice president at the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland.

First and foremost, Edelsberg said, the foundation is seeking counsel on "what is most important and most promising," particularly in Jewish education.

"Ideally by the end of the year," we'll be "able to say, 'Here's where we believe the foundation has its greatest opportunities over, hypothetically, the next 20-40 months,'" he said.

Among the things they must decide is exactly what "children and youth" means: Does it include pre-schoolers? College students?

If the definition does include Jewish college students, "it could lead us to consider being a funder of birthright,"

Edelsberg said, referring to the birthright Israel program, which provides free trips to Israel for Jews age 18 to 26.

Levitt said that the foundation, which will make grants by invitation only, hopes to partner with other foundations.

"It became clear that a lot of the grants that foundations make are scattered; they don't really hit the mark," he said. "Jim was really interested in having projects that affected a great number of children, and one of the best ways to do this is through partnering with other foundations." ■

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ISSUES

The foundation
will likely give out
at least \$25 million
annually.

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Azeri leader hints at stronger ties with Israel

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

BAKU, Azerbaijan (JTA) — The president of Azerbaijan told a group of American Jewish leaders that his country may upgrade its relations with Israel and open a trade mission there.

President Ilham Aliyev made the comments in a meeting with visiting American Jewish leaders this week, although the issue was left unresolved.

Azerbaijan, a Muslim state, established diplomatic relations with Israel in the early 1990s but has yet to open an embassy in Israel; Israel has had an embassy in Baku since 1993.

Azerbaijan has said its complicated geopolitical situation, particularly its proximity to Iran, as well as its membership in international Islamic organizations, prevent it from opening a mission in Israel.

Leaders of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations mission to Baku believe the visit of a high-profile Jewish group to Azerbaijan was a success because Aliyev and the Jewish leaders were able to engage in dialogue.

"We believe that Azerbaijan is a critical country strategically, geopolitically and even morally," said Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents.

The delegation of 50 American Jewish leaders, under the auspices of the Conference of Presidents and the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress in conjunction with NCSJ — Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia, met Monday in Baku with Aliyev and other top officials at the end of their four-day visit.

Azerbaijan is increasingly important for the United States and Israel in the world of geopolitics.

The country is sandwiched between several larger regional giants, including Russia, Iran and Turkey, and has traditionally had good relations with Tehran.

Azerbaijan gained strategic importance recently with the discovery of new oil and gas riches in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian basin: A just-completed pipeline that bypasses both Iran and Russia would transport Azeri and Central Asian oil and gas from Baku via Turkey to

Western European markets, and possibly to Israel.

Most recently, Azerbaijan has become a U.S. partner in the war against terror sending its small contingents to Afghanistan and Iraq and providing NATO aircrafts air and landing rights on its territory.

ACROSS THE
FORMER
SOVIET
UNION

Aside from geopolitical considerations, Azerbaijan should be commended for its treatment of its Jews, U.S. Jewish leaders said.

Israelis and local Jewish groups estimate the number of Jews living in

Azerbaijan at between 15,000 to 40,000.

This predominantly Shi'ite Muslim nation of 8 million is widely described as a safe haven for its Jewish community; unlike many other former Soviet republics, Azeri Jews have not seen any major manifestations of anti-Semitism or anti-Zionism.

According to Gennady Zelmanovich, the head of the Ashkenazi Jewish community of Azerbaijan, "there have never been any problems whatsoever for Jews in Azerbaijan. Even in Soviet times, we have not had much of the restrictions Jews in other republics had," referring to the broader religious freedom and other rights local Jews have long enjoyed.

While Azerbaijan has been criticized in the West for a lack of democratic freedoms and suppression of political opposition, cooperation with the United States and Israel dominated this week's agenda.

"We don't shy away from the difficult questions. But at the same time, it's important to recognize the positive things that are taking place here," said Mark Levin, executive director of NCSJ. "This is a Muslim country whose Jewish community is not threatened, whose government has normal diplomatic relations with Israel."

Said Hoenlein: "We can bring this positive message to other countries, including some of Azerbaijan's neighbors, and we hope they can learn from this example."

While visiting Jewish leaders and Israeli diplomats based in Baku have

been describing Azeri-Israeli relations as normal — and far warmer than Israel has with many other Muslim states — the issue of opening an embassy of Azerbaijan in Israel still seems far off.

Azerbaijan insists that the issue of its relations with Israel should be treated delicately. Iran, the country's southern neighbor, has the largest ethnic Azeri community in the world, exceeding several times Azerbaijan's own Azeri population.

"It is always important to remember who our neighbors are," Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov told the U.S. delegation on Monday in Baku, where the Jewish leaders also met with the Jewish community and with the country's chief Islamic religious authority.

Mammadyarov told the American group that his country was "moving in this direction" toward enhancing its relations with Israel but did not make any promises regarding the opening of his country's embassy in Israel.

For his part, Aliyev also was cautious when assessing this possibility and shied away from making any direct comments on the matter.

Aliyev mentioned a possibility for a trade mission in a private exchange with top members of the delegation. When speaking to the entire group in the presence of Azeri TV cameras, he said that the "level of our cooperation" with Israel "is increasing. We want to have more contacts, more communication."

Mammadyarov told U.S. Jewish leaders that his country — a secular Muslim state — has to be aware of the sensitivities of its Muslim neighbors, particularly because these countries have traditionally given Azerbaijan their diplomatic support on Nagorno-Karabakh, an area formerly under Azeri jurisdiction with a large ethnic Armenian population.

The bloody conflict with Armenia over that region that has lingered since 1988 resulted in Armenia conquering 16 percent of Azerbaijan territory and turned more than 1 million people from both sides into refugees.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Peretz: Hamas a red line

Israel's Labor Party leader, Amir Peretz, told American Jewish leaders Wednesday that if he wins the upcoming election he will not talk to Hamas as long as they do not disarm, end terrorism and recognize Israel.

"My red line is the green flag. Hamas calls for the destruction of the Jewish state. It is a terrorist organization and no funds must reach them, not from Israel and not from the international community. I call on the entire international community to adopt this red line as well," said Peretz.

Peretz was addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations during their annual visit to Israel.

Hamas admits Hezbollah link

Hamas admitted receiving help from Hezbollah.

Hamas' armed wing said on its Web site Wednesday that one of its West Bank terror cells, which killed 18 Israelis, had been trained and bankrolled by the Lebanese militia.

The admission ran counter to traditional denials by the radical Islamic group that it received anything other than moral support from outside the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israel says Hezbollah, acting on the orders of Iran, has recently stepped up support for West Bank terrorists in the hopes of destabilizing the region.

U.S.: Dismantle Hezbollah

The Bush administration used the anniversary of the assassination of a Lebanese leader to call on Lebanon to disarm Hezbollah.

"This is going to be a decision for the Lebanese government," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Tuesday, a year after Rafik Hariri, an anti-Syrian prime minister, was killed in a massive Beirut bomb blast. "How and in what manner they accomplish compliance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559, which states very clearly that the Lebanese people, Lebanese government should dismantle all militias."

The Lebanese "can't have it both ways," McCormack said.

Military leader: Iran wants to destroy Israel

Iran seeks to destroy Israel, the new chief of Israeli military intelligence said.

In his inaugural briefing to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin said Tuesday that within six months Iran could have the means to build a nuclear bomb.

"Iran aims to destroy Israel," Yadlin was quoted as telling lawmakers. Along with developing medium-range Shihab missiles that could be armed with nuclear warheads, Iran wants to pincer Israel on the ground through its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, and Palestinian terrorist groups in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Yadlin said.

Israel backs U.S.-led efforts to curb Iran's nuclear program diplomatically but has refused to rule out a pre-emptive military strike as a last resort.

Caliphate vs. Zionism

A new Israeli Arab political party called for Islamic rule in the Jewish state. "Our ideology calls for Islamic rule, by a Caliphate, over the land, or at least the Arab and Muslim land," Ibrahim Sarsur, leader of the Islamic Arab Union said Wednesday during a news conference to launch the party.

A coalition of the United Arab List and National Arab Movement factions, the union has struck a strident Islamist tone unusual in Israeli politics. Making clear his policies are anti-Zionist and pro-Pal-

estinian, Sarsur said he would work to reverse the "Israelization" of some of the Jewish state's citizens.

The union is expected to take around seven of the Knesset's 120 seats in the March 28 elections.

WORLD

Iranian envoy in trouble over remarks

The Iranian ambassador to Portugal was criticized after he voiced doubt about the Holocaust.

"When I was ambassador in Warsaw, I visited Auschwitz and Birkenau twice and made my calculations," Mohammed Taheri told Portugal's RTP radio Wednesday. "To incinerate 6 million people, 15 years would be necessary."

Taheri further defended Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has called the Holocaust a myth, and said the recent controversy over Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed was a "conspiracy by Zionists."

In response, the Portuguese government summoned Taheri to lodge a protest. Portugal's foreign minister, Diogo Freitas, said in a statement that the ambassador's remarks "seriously offended humanity's collective conscience."

U.N. questions Lebanon on weapons

The United Nations asked Lebanon about reported arms shipments crossing the country's border with Syria to go to Hezbollah.

The questioning came after Lebanese Druse leader Walid Jumblatt made the allegation over the weekend. If true, the shipments would violate U.N. Security Council Resolution 1554, a 1994 resolution that called for Hezbollah to be disarmed.

NORTH AMERICA

Group backs funding cut for P.A.

Americans for Peace Now endorsed a congressional resolution recommending a ban on funding for a Hamas-controlled Palestinian Authority.

"So long as Hamas has the controlling stake in the Palestinian Legislative Council, sanctions on U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority represent an appropriate tool to pressure Hamas," a statement from the group said.

The non-binding resolution, replicating a Senate resolution passed unanimously earlier this month, comes before the House of Representatives on Wednesday.

It calls for an end to direct assistance to the Palestinian Authority so long as a group that calls for Israel's destruction controls more than half the seats in the legislature. The Reform movement also supports the measure. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee favors the measure, but is focusing on another binding bill that is much more far-reaching, with bans on assistance to a government with any Hamas affiliation at all.

The group was a principal proponent of U.S. funding for the Palestinian Authority prior to the terrorist group's landslide victory in legislative elections last month.

New coordinator for Jewish Katrina efforts

Two Mississippi Jewish organizations are making available a coordinator for U.S. Jewish groups that wish to play a role in post-Katrina recovery.

The Jackson Jewish Welfare Fund and Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Miss., have joined forces to create the position, which will help groups coordinate logistics, partners and resources in efforts to help the rural poor.