

IN THE NEWS
Rice confident on Iran accord

Condoleezza Rice said she is confident that an international accord can be reached to prevent Iran from enriching uranium.

The U.S. secretary of state made the comments Wednesday, a day after the U.N. Security Council failed to reach an agreement on how to respond to Iran's nuclear program.

Britain and France reportedly want to give Iran a two-week deadline to stop enriching uranium — a precursor to making nuclear weapons — but have met resistance from China and Russia.

PLO, Hamas in power play

The PLO rejected Hamas' governing agenda. For decades the Palestinians' only representative in national decision-making, the PLO announced Wednesday that it would not endorse Hamas' political platform after the Islamic terrorist group refused to submit to the PLO's authority.

Fatah, the main PLO faction, has been the dominant force in the Palestinian Authority, but the PLO has been eclipsed by Hamas' victory in recent elections.

Hamas announced that it would bring its new Cabinet to the Palestinian Parliament for approval Saturday.

Study: BRCA test for cancer flawed

A genetic test for breast cancer mutations linked to Ashkenazi Jews misses the mutations about 12 percent of the time, according to a new study.

The test searches for the BRCA-1 and BRCA-2 mutations, which are carried by 2 percent of Ashkenazi Jews and have been linked to both breast and ovarian cancers, according to the Human Genome Project in Washington. Experts said Ashkenazi Jews have specific types of mutations that are unlikely to be missed by the test.

WORLD REPORT

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As P.A. financial crisis looms, Europe's hard line starts to waver

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — With the Palestinian Authority facing the prospect of a financial crisis when Hamas takes power in two weeks, the European Union, the P.A.'s biggest donor, is wavering on its commitment not to fund a government led by the terrorist group.

The question of whether to continue funding the Palestinian Authority is constantly on the minds of E.U. diplomats as they weigh their commitment to the principles of the diplomatic "Quartet" — composed of the European Union, United States, United Nations and Russia — overseeing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The Quartet has declared that it will not support Hamas unless it recognizes Israel's right to exist and renounces terrorism, yet also feels it has a humanitarian obligation to the Palestinian people.

With Hamas showing no indication that it's ready to accept the Quartet's conditions, the possibility of P.A. bankruptcy is looming.

A World Bank report released Thursday estimates that a reduction of E.U. aid, combined with Israel's decision to withhold P.A. tax revenue, will cause a deep economic depression in Palestinian areas.

Aware of the coming crisis, P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas had embarked on a grand fund-raising tour of Europe this week. He met with Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel in Vienna on Monday and was to address the European Parliament and meet with E.U. leaders in Brussels.

But Abbas never made those later meet-

ings: He cut short his trip Wednesday to deal with fallout from Israel's military siege of a Jericho jail.

Following Hamas' Jan. 25 victory in P.A. elections, the West initially appeared united in its refusal to deal with a group committed to the destruction of its neighbor. Russia

promptly shattered that consensus, however, saying it had never considered Hamas a terrorist group and inviting its leaders to Moscow for talks.

E.U. officials told JTA they're hoping for a shift in Hamas' stance at a March 28 Arab League summit in Khartoum, Sudan.

If not, E.U. officials are desperately seeking ways to continue providing aid by working around Hamas, perhaps channeling money through Abbas — who is staying on as P.A. president, though he has little clout — U.N. relief agencies and non-governmental organizations. However, interviews with top-level diplomats in Brussels show the Europeans believe they'll have to channel part of the aid through a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

For critics of the E.U.'s cash flow to the Palestinians, the cliché of a Europe that coddles Arab terrorists could be realized.

"The notion that the E.U. would stand fast on anything, including boycotting Hamas, I find slightly absurd," observed a key British participant in longtime European efforts at Mideast peacemaking.

"The idea that with patience, goodness will prevail, is almost too nauseating for some of us to think about," the Briton said, asking that his name be withheld because he is still active in high-level politics.

Abbas told European leaders they should

Continued on page 2

NEWS ANALYSIS

■ Some European ministers want to offer Hamas a 'carrot' to prevent radicalization

Continued from page 1

keep the money flowing because Hamas will soften its violent rhetoric "step by step" if given some time, E.U. officials told JTA. Israeli officials consider that approach naive, and believe only economic pressure has a chance of moderating Hamas.

Abbas' case was not helped by the Palestinian reaction to the Israeli raid on the Jericho prison. Palestinian gunmen set fire to a British Council center in Gaza City, attacked other U.K.-owned property and kidnapped at least nine foreigners, including two Frenchmen, who were released a day later.

"If this were to go on, of course, there would be a breakdown of our help, and the first that would suffer would be the Palestinians themselves," said Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the E.U.'s external relations commissioner.

Ferrero-Waldner gave the Palestinian Authority \$143 million, including more than \$20 million to pay civil servants and P.A. security forces, in late February — after Hamas' election, but before the terrorist group took power.

In fact, the E.U.'s initial hardline posturing seems to have been abandoned, judging from Ferrero-Waldner's statement last weekend, at an E.U. Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Salzburg, that "We want to keep the door open."

Why the waffling?

Jana Hybaskova of the Czech Republic, chairwoman of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Israel, says the European Union views balance, not a

heavy hand, as the key to pushing Hamas toward moderation.

"Across the spectrum in the E.U., from the socialists to the most right-wing parties, nobody wants the Iranization or Iraqization of the [Palestinian] territories," explained Hybaskova, who predicts that the European Union might keep some money flowing to the P.A. security forces to prevent instability.

But there's no unanimity on policy: Some European leaders, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, have nothing but rebukes for Hamas, while E.U. diplomats such as Ferrero-Waldner and foreign policy chief Javier Solana sound more inclined to appease the group.

"Our foreign minister has made it very clear that this is not the time to even think about the possibility of how to give money to the P.A.," one German diplomat confided, "but other ministers would probably give a carrot to Hamas if it shows some signs of compromise."

The new E.U. member states from the former Eastern bloc are considered more sympathetic to Israeli concerns about Hamas-sponsored terrorism. Diplomats say the Scandinavians, followed by the French, Spanish and Belgians, are the driving force behind the carrot approach.

"We must avoid suffocating the Palestinian territories. That would lead to economic, social and security chaos," French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy said at the E.U. meeting in Salzburg. The council consists of ministerial-level government representatives from each E.U. country, and is the most powerful decision-making body in the 25-member union.

Emma Udwin, spokeswoman for Ferrero-Waldner, denies that her boss' February aid package marked a softening of the E.U.'s stance on withholding money from Hamas.

"We did what we could to meet the immediate basic needs of the Palestinians, since half of them live in poverty," she said.

Some analysts, like Emanuele Ottolenghi, a fellow at Oxford University, say the European Union is hypocritical, willing to let

millions of people die in places like Sudan and the Congo while continuing to prop up a Palestinian Authority that has wasted millions of dollars in international aid on corruption and support for terrorism.

"If the money stops flowing, so what?" he asked. "The Palestinians have to bear the consequence of their own vote."

Meanwhile, some wonder how the

European Union will keep the Palestinian Authority on oxygen without creating a rift with the United States. The Bush administration has said it plans to increase humanitarian funding to the Palestinians, but has maintained its refusal to deal with a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

Richard Whitman, head of the European

program at Chatham House, a London-based think tank, said it suits U.S. diplomacy to take a tough stance against terrorism while the Europeans — perhaps with tacit U.S. approval — keep the Palestinian territories from descending into mayhem.

"The E.U. believes it has a more reasonable approach than the U.S., one that brings financial stability," he said. "Throwing money at problems drives an awful lot of European approaches to difficult problems. It's a strand of the European DNA."

An American Jewish Committee delegation in Europe this week has been discussing the issue in meetings with European leaders.

"What I'm seeing right now is a great deal of internal debate among E.U. officials and foreign ministers about how they can, with minimal or no pain inflicted on the Palestinian people, not give aid and comfort to Hamas, and they will frankly admit that they have not figured out," said Jason Isaacson, the AJCommittee's director of government and international affairs.

"There's a powerful sense in Europe of faith in a Hamas change and redemption, which does not exist in Washington," he said. "But the evidence against the possibility of redemption is so overwhelming that people who want to believe that Hamas will moderate are looking hard for any signs of it, and they convince themselves they see those signs when they don't exist."

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Richard Whitman
European program, Chatham House

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Israel hopes for worst for Hamas government

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Hamas has completed its takeover of the Palestinian Authority, and Israel is hoping the radical Islamic group's success will turn into a failure.

Busy before March 28 elections, Israeli officials had no immediate comment after Hamas unveiled its 24-member Cabinet this week. But a political source in Jerusalem said the move would intensify international pressure on the Palestinian Authority.

"This is a reality check for the Palestinians," the source said. "Hamas has proven damn adept at dispatching teenagers to carry out suicide bombings, but let's see how good it is at managing an economy or foreign policy."

Hamas, labeled a terrorist group by the United States, European Union and Israel, formed its government after failing to talk rival factions into entering a government coalition.

As expected, Ismail Haniyeh was nominated for prime minister, a powerful post though it formally is subject to vetoes by the more moderate president, Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas.

Haniyeh is considered a relative pragmatist in Hamas, but he, too, has spoken again and again in favor of violence against Israel. He survived an Israeli assassination attempt in 2003.

Following Israel's killings of Sheik Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantissi in 2004, Haniyeh led Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip along with Mahmoud Zahar.

Commentators who parsed a recent hard-line interview Haniyeh gave to Israeli television found marginally positive elements when he talked about "resistance according to the interests of our people" — which some took to mean that violence could be suspended, under certain circumstances.

Zahar, the most public face of Hamas during its major terrorist campaigns against Israelis in 2002 and 2003, was named foreign minister.

Zahar studied medicine at Cairo's Ain Shams University, specializing in general surgery. It was in Cairo that he was influenced by Egypt's oldest and largest Islamist organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, whose ideology nourished Hamas.

Zahar was influential for Hamas in an-

nouncing an informal truce last year and in arranging Hamas' participation in the recent parliamentary elections.

As finance minister — a tough job given the threat of aid cutoffs hanging over the West Bank and Gaza Strip since Hamas won January elections — the group appointed Omar Abdel Razek, a West Bank economist.

Most worryingly for Israel, senior Hamas official Sayed Seyam took over the Interior Ministry, gaining control of the Palestinian Authority's dozen or so armed forces.

As JTA reported in its recent series on UNRWA, the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, nine former UNRWA staffers who ran for Parliament were forced to resign their UNRWA jobs. Seyam resigned from UNRWA in February 2003 to become a Hamas spokesman, and reportedly was a protege of Rantissi.

According to a source familiar with his employment record, Seyam worked from 1980 to 1993 in UNRWA schools in Gaza, and then served for seven years as head of the teachers union, reportedly a Hamas-dominated group.

In April 2004, as masked Hamas members countered a U.S. threat to freeze assets by collecting cash and jewelry from mosque-goers, Reuters quoted Seyam explaining that the fund raising would

not only allow the group to buy more ammunition, but also would send "a message to the Zionist enemy and to the Americans that they would never succeed in besieging resistance and blocking its resources."

Wary of being used as a fig leaf for Hamas's jihad against the Jewish state, the more pragmatic Palestinian faction Fatah declined to join a coalition.

Abbas, the Fatah chairman, had insisted that Hamas first renounce terrorism and recognize past Israeli-Palestinian agreements. It refused.

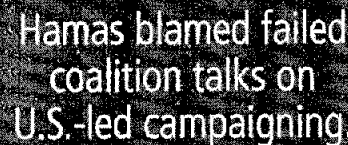
Hamas was even shunned by the Popular Front for the

Liberation of Palestine, a fringe terrorist group whose leader, Ahmed Sa'adat, was seized from a West Bank prison by Israeli troops last week.

Khaled Meshaal, a Hamas leader living abroad, blamed the failed coalition talks on U.S.-led campaigning.

"The United States placed pressure on Palestinian factions to not participate in the government so that the government will be purely Hamas and Israel can justify carrying out its plan to attack the Palestinian people," he said during a visit to Yemen.

The United States, with E.U. backing, has called for the Palestinian Authority to be cut off diplomatically and deprived of government-level donor aid once Hamas takes power.



Argentina memorial focuses on Iran

By FLORENCIA ARBISER

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — A memorial service is usually about the past. But a service honoring the victims of the 1992 terrorist attack at the Israeli Embassy was also about the present — and the future.

Braving an afternoon of constant rain, hundreds of people gathered at a Buenos Aires corner to pay tribute to the 29 people killed in the attack.

Last Friday's demonstration started exactly at 2:50 p.m., the time on March 17, 1992, that a bomb destroyed the local embassy.

Calls for justice in the still-unsolved case were heard, as was criticism of Iran, which is believed to be behind the embassy bomb-

ing, as well as a 1994 terrorist attack on the AMIA Jewish center here.

Israel's ambassador to Argentina, Rafael Eldad, demanded that Argentina and the international community consider Iran a "global threat."

To Eldad, Iran's responsibility for the Israeli Embassy and AMIA attacks were precursors to the Islamic republic's current threats to build a nuclear weapons program and calls by its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to destroy Israel.

Although most believe that Hezbollah and Iran were responsible for the embassy attack, this has never been proven. The Argentine Supreme Court, in charge of the investigation, has not made much progress in the case.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Legal fund launched for ex-AIPAC staffer

Lawyers representing an indicted former employee of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee established a legal defense fund.

Attorneys from Arent Fox said the purpose of the Keith Weissman Legal Defense Fund, which was set up Tuesday, is to enable AIPAC's former Iran analyst to mount a vigorous defense to the charge that he shared classified information with reporters and Israeli government officials.

"A successful defense is critical to protect the freedom not only of Mr. Weissman, who maintains his innocence, but of all Americans who exercise their First Amendment rights," said Weissman's lawyers, John Nassikas and Baruch Weiss.

The trial for Weissman and Steve Rosen, AIPAC's former research director, is scheduled to begin next month.

Weissman and Rosen are pressing AIPAC to pay additional funds for their defense.

Attorneys say the organization stopped paying fees last spring, and is violating its obligations to the two.

Right-wingers target Carter

A conservative group wants Congress to censure former President Carter, saying he is advancing the interests of Hamas. The "Move America Forward" campaign is in response to an effort by Sen. Russell Feingold (D-Wis.) to censure President Bush for authorizing eavesdropping without warrants.

Move America Forward says former presidents are subject to censure.

Carter has argued in favor of continued assistance to the Palestinians through third parties since Hamas' election to lead the Palestinian Authority in January, and expressed hope that the terrorist group would give up violence.

Israel group gets new leader

David Elcott was named executive director of the Israel Policy Forum.

The IPF is a New York-based organization that backs strong U.S. engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Elcott previously was director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee. He replaces the IPF's founding director, Jonathan Jacoby.

Ex-Dartmouth president dies

James Freedman, a former president of Dartmouth College who fought intolerance and anti-Semitism at the school, died of cancer Tuesday at age 70.

Freedman, who was Jewish, died of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. In 1988, Freedman condemned the Dartmouth Review, a conservative newspaper, for ridiculing minorities and women.

He defended the paper's right to publish whatever it wanted, but said it should not have done so.

In 1997, he recounted the history of anti-Semitism at Dartmouth in a speech, emphasizing that such attitudes were in the past.

MIDDLE EAST

Jihadist slain in Jericho

Israeli soldiers killed a wanted Palestinian in the West Bank. The Islamic Jihad fugitive was shot dead Wednesday as troops raided his hideout in northern Jericho.

Two other members of the terrorist group were arrested. Israeli

special forces on Tuesday foiled an Islamic Jihad suicide bombing planned for Tel Aviv.

Israel helps Palestinians over bird flu

Israel pitched in to help Palestinians contain a suspected outbreak of bird flu in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli veterinarians were dispatched to advise Palestinian counterparts Wednesday after several dozen chickens died overnight at a Gaza farm, apparently the latest victims of the H5N1 virus discovered over the weekend in Israel.

Israel also is testing the carcasses on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. In the West Bank, Palestinian farmers have been placed on alert for further outbreaks.

Libya halts peace trek

An interfaith peace trek across the Sahara ground to a halt when Libya refused to let in the Israeli participants.

The Jerusalem Post, which sent a reporter to cover the monthlong desert voyage by the coexistence group Breaking the Ice, reported Wednesday that the nine trekkers were turned back to Egypt after reaching the Libyan border. "Israel does not exist as a country, it is Palestine. We don't allow occupiers into our country," a Libyan official was quoted as saying.

The nine-member group includes three Israelis, as well as a Palestinian, an Iraqi and an Iranian. Libya has made overtures to the West and to former Libyan Jews, but has no relations with Israel.

WORLD

London mayor at it again

London's mayor stirred up another controversy over racist remarks to Jews. Ken Livingstone said Tuesday that Jewish property developers David and Simon Reuben had created a "poisonous state of relations" among the planners of the city's Olympic Games complex, and that if they were "not happy here perhaps they could go back to Iran and try it under the ayatollahs."

When it was pointed out that the brothers were born in India to Iraqi parents, the mayor offered an "apology to the people of Iran to the suggestion that they may be linked in any way to the Reuben brothers."

Livingstone is fighting a four-week suspension over previous remarks in which he compared a Jewish journalist to a Nazi.

New Jewish forum to meet in the fall

The first meeting of a new international Jewish body is scheduled for October.

The World Jewish Forum will convene in Jerusalem, the Jerusalem Post reported. The body was established by Israel's president, Moshe Katsav, to deal with Israeli-Diaspora issues.

The body of 200-300 Jewish leaders is expected to be split 50-50 between Jewish officials and leading professionals who are Jewish.

Jewish show back on Ukrainian TV

A Jewish-themed show returned to Ukrainian television.

"Mazel Tov," a weekly show, was canceled under controversial circumstances in January.

The show is affiliated with a company close to Vadim Rabinovich, a business tycoon and head of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress. The Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine, a Chabad-led group that is a rival to Rabinovich for influence in the Jewish community, had announced its own TV project.

But after negotiations between Rabinovich and top government officials, "Mazel Tov" returned to the air.