

IN THE NEWS
Iran: We've enriched uranium

Iran has enriched uranium, its president said. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad confirmed a comment earlier Tuesday by the country's former president, Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Iran resumed research at an enrichment facility in February, The Associated Press reported.

Uranium that has been enriched to a low level can be used as fuel for nuclear reactors; at a higher level it can provide material for a nuclear bomb. Israel is worried that Iran, which has threatened to annihilate the Jewish state, is developing nuclear weapons to use against Israel.

Sharon's career formally declared over

Israel formally brought the comatose Ariel Sharon's political career to a close.

Top government ministers convened Tuesday to implement a constitutional law in which Sharon, who suffered a crippling stroke last January and is not expected to recover, would be designated "permanently incapacitated."

Sharon, 78, is in intensive care at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem's Ein Kerem neighborhood but doctors may eventually move him to a long-term coma treatment center.

Poll says spouses are not converting

Fewer than one-fifth of non-Jews who marry Jews convert to Judaism, according to a new study.

The American Jewish Committee report also found that some 30 percent of parents who convert reluctantly instill ambivalence toward Judaism in their children; another 30 percent of converts are active, committed Jews.

The study interviewed 94 mixed-marriage couples and nine Jewish professionals who work with interfaith families.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE • WWW.JTA.ORG

Taking hard line against Hamas, Olmert also is taking a big chance

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ehud Olmert is intensifying Israel's political, military and economic pressure on the new Hamas-led Palestinian government, a strategy he hopes will force the terrorist group to change its ways or be overthrown.

The aim is to isolate Hamas internationally, cut off direct funding to the Palestinian Authority and force the Palestinians to stop firing Kassam rockets at civilian targets in Israel.

But it's a risky game. If successful, it could lead to the collapse of the Hamas government and the emergence of a more pragmatic Palestinian leadership. On the other hand, some warn, it could cause chaos on the Palestinian side, and even spark a new intifada.

Clearly feeling the heat, Hamas leaders have been looking for ways to alleviate the pressure.

In messages to the international community, they have been trying to give the impression of relative moderation. In secret communications to Israel, they have offered a limited cease-fire.

But key players remain unimpressed. Moderate-sounding Hamas statements invariably are followed by denials, further alienating world leaders. And Israelis are wary of a cease-fire that could simply let Hamas off the hook, while allowing it to build up its forces for a major terrorist onslaught against Israel at a later date.

On Sunday, Olmert convened top foreign policy and defense officials to update Israeli policy toward Hamas. The line he took was tough:

- Israel will have no ties with the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, which it defines as a hostile entity;

- It will seek to prevent Hamas from becoming an established government;

- It will boycott foreign diplomats who meet Hamas officials;

- It will suspend coordination between the Israel Defense Forces and P.A. security forces;

- It will not transfer taxes it collects for the Palestinian Authority to the Hamas government;

- It will seek to coordinate with

the international community ways of transferring humanitarian aid to the Palestinians without going through Hamas-run government agencies.

Olmert's policy makes a clear distinction between Hamas and P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas of the Fatah Party, who has not been blackballed in the same way.

But though Israeli left-wingers have urged Olmert to establish a peacemaking channel to Abbas, Olmert says he has no plans to meet with him soon.

Olmert's tough talk is being backed up by strong military pressure, with Israeli artillery pounding areas of Gaza that Palestinians use to launch rockets at Israeli civilian targets and aircraft carrying out targeted killings of leading terrorists.

Economic pressure also is being stepped up, with Israeli banks suspending dealings with the Palestinians and the international community refusing to transfer aid until Hamas meets three conditions set immediately after its election victory in January: recognition of Israel, acceptance of previous

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NEWS
ANALYSIS

■ *Diplomatic, economic and military pressure on Hamas could backfire*

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Israeli-Palestinian agreements and cessation of violence.

The upshot is that Hamas does not have money to pay P.A. salaries for April.

Hamas leaders are said to be concerned about a possible rebellion that could sweep them from power.

More than half of the 140,000 P.A. officials are from the rival Fatah organization, and Hamas leaders apparently fear that they might rebel if not paid soon.

According to Israeli analysts, the thinking behind the tough policy is that if the Hamas government resigns or is overthrown, a more pragmatic leadership will emerge.

If Hamas bends under pressure, it will itself have become a more pragmatic leadership.

And if it remains in power without meeting the international community's conditions, Olmert's plan to set Israel's borders unilaterally will get wall-to-wall international support.

So far the international community is staunchly behind Israel. The United States and European Union refuse to have anything to do with Hamas, which they regard as a terrorist organization. In line with this approach, France recently refused visas to two Hamas officials invited to observe the European Parliament in session in Strasbourg.

Israeli analysts are convinced the pressure is beginning to tell.

According to the IDF, Hamas is on the

verge of taking action to stop the firing of Kassam rockets into Israel.

In discreet messages to Israel, Hamas leaders have said they would guarantee quiet on their side if Israel suspends its military attacks.

Hamas also is under pressure from the Palestinian street, with mounting calls for it to accept conditions for re-engagement with Israel and the international community.

Hamas' response has been to make moderate-sounding statements, without actually recognizing Israel or accepting previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements.

In some cases, Hamas double-talk has actually made things worse.

For example, P.A. Foreign Minister Mahmoud Zahar wrote a letter to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, implying Hamas' readiness to accept a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

But the language didn't quite say that, and Zahar later denied that was what he had meant.

Around the same, while on a tour of Persian Gulf countries, Zahar declared that he longed for the day when he could see a world map without Israel's name on it.

The pressure on the Palestinians has left Hamas virtually unable to govern. It can't pay salaries, let alone take socio-economic initiatives or even guarantee

food and medical supplies.

But so far Hamas leaders are putting on a brave face.

"We will not bow to international blackmail," a defiant Hamas spokesman declared Monday.

The question is how long Hamas will be able to continue in this vein.

Writing in Ha'aretz, Danny Rubinstein,

a leading commentator on Palestinian affairs, predicted the Hamas government's early demise: "It is still too early to say whether the Hamas government... is about to fall. But judging by its performance so far, it can't be expected to last long."

For now, Israel seems to be in the drivers seat.

But its tough policy could backfire if economic sanctions result in a major humanitarian disaster on the Palestinian side, or if Israeli military actions cause heavy civilian casualties.

In either case, Israel would lose international support.

The pressure also could trigger a new round of all-out Palestinian violence.

Already, rogue Fatah militias are calling on Hamas to commit its military wing to a renewed intifada.

The question now is whether Israel's tough policies will convince Palestinians to step back from the brink — or whether they'll plunge the two sides into another cycle of violence and instability.

More than half of P.A. officials are from the rival Fatah group, and Hamas leaders apparently fear that they might rebel if not paid soon.

JTA
WORLD
REPORT

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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'Gospel of Judas' revealed

By DAN BARON

Jerusalem (JTA) — A new Gnostic gospel was revealed to the public, engendering debate about the role of Judas in Jesus' death. "The Gospel of Judas," discovered in Egypt in the 1970s, was made public April 6 by the National Geographic Society, which helped restore and translate the document. The document's authenticity reportedly is not in doubt.

According to the gospel, written in the Coptic language and believed to date from

around 300 C.E., Jesus asked Judas to turn him over to the Romans, believing it would hasten his spiritual salvation. "You will be cursed by the other generations — and you will come to rule over them," Jesus tells Judas in the document.

The New Testament presents Judas as treacherous, a representation that has influenced historical anti-Semitic motifs. The Gnostics were Christian communities in the second through fourth centuries C.E.; their texts and beliefs differ greatly from today's Christianity.

U.S. looks to Israel for ideas against terrorism

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON, (JTA) — For years, American law enforcement and security experts have been looking to Israel for the latest in homeland security practices.

Now Congress is hoping to work with Israel and other at-risk countries to develop science and technology applications to fight terrorism.

Israel advocates are behind new legislation that would create an office within the Department of Homeland Security for counterterrorism cooperation between the United States and its allies.

Israel is one of a handful of countries named in the legislation that U.S. officials believe could provide technological assistance.

The effort comes as numerous states and municipalities, as well as law enforcement agencies, are sending representatives to Israel to pick the brains of counterterrorism leaders.

While there is much to be learned from watching Israel fight terrorism, even more can be garnered by partnering with them in developing new tools, lawmakers said.

"We have gone and looked at what was there, not with a notion of partnering with cooperation, but taking back what we saw and trying to duplicate it," said Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.), a co-sponsor of the legislation and the ranking Democrat on the U.S. House of Representatives' Homeland Security Committee.

"With this legislation, we are fostering that cooperation so that we can jointly produce the best technology available" he said.

The bill creates a new office and grant program in the Homeland Security Department that would foster cooperation between research and development communities in the United States and countries like Israel. Also mentioned are the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Singapore.

The bill was introduced by Thompson and Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, as well as the chairman and ranking Democrat on the subcommittee on emergency preparedness, science and technology,

Reps. Dave Reichert (R-Wash.) and Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-N.J.).

It was unanimously approved by the subcommittee last month.

The legislation has been supported by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which in recent years has worked to promote U.S.-Israeli partnerships in homeland security to highlight the value of the bilateral

relationship.

"We believe its passage will contribute to a safer United States, a safer Israel and better safety for all other American allies in the war against terrorism who participate in international cooperative programs through the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate," AIPAC's executive director, Howard Kohr, and deputy director for policy and government affairs, David Cohen, wrote to King last month.

The bill also is being backed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the National Sheriffs' Association.

Visits to Israel have been frequent since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, but there has been little partnership between the two countries, even as many states and municipalities have set up similar programs, analysts said.

"With DHS, it's a little more complicated because it's a new organization," said Gen. Simon Perry, the Israeli police attache to North America.

"We are trying to establish cooperation, and there is a beginning."

While high-level officials toured Israel, Homeland Security staffers responsible for many programs did not.

The department already has an international affairs office, but people with knowledge of the department said it had little input on policy matters or operational decisions.

One analyst described the office as a

"mini-State Department within Homeland Security."

By contrast, designers of the new office hope people will bring suggestions about international cooperation for a wide range of policy matters and technology development.

Barry Bogage, director of the Maryland/Israel Development Center, said U.S. officials mainly have been taking from Israel a new way of thinking

about handling crises.

"The word I keep hearing about is a different doctrine," he said.

"The U.S. has experience with crime and with car accidents, but not with bombs going off in the streets and mass-casualty incidents" he added.

For example, Israelis have

taught U.S. officials to treat the injured from terrorist attacks on the scene, rather than bringing them immediately to a hospital.

Now, advocates said, the two countries can work together on technology and products that can be used in those scenarios.

"The United States is very strong in research and development, as well as Israel," Perry said.

"We need the same tools, so it doesn't make sense that each country should develop its own tools."

Thompson said the United States would be able to provide seed money for many projects.

The bill states that not less than 2.5 percent of the research, development, testing and evaluation budget for the Directorate of Science and Technology at Homeland Security each year should go to international programs.

"There is a need for us to look beyond our borders for many of those new technologies," he said. "My goal with this act is to look at Israel and other countries that have demonstrated proficiency in many of these technologies." ■

FOCUS ON ISSUES

The U.S. has experience with crime and with car accidents, but not with bombs going off in the streets and mass-casualty incidents.

Barry Bogage
Director, the Maryland/Israel
Development Center

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Bush: Iran must not go nuclear

Iran must not gain the know-how to build an atomic bomb, President Bush said.

"We do not want the Iranians to have a nuclear weapon, the capacity to make a nuclear weapon, or the knowledge as to how to make a nuclear weapon," Bush said Monday in a foreign policy address at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

"That's our stated goal. It's also the goal, fortunately, of friends and allies, starting with Great Britain, Germany, and France."

Israeli leaders have said that the tipping point in the danger Iran poses to the region is when it gains nuclear know-how, which would make a weapon inevitable.

Bush also dismissed as "wild speculation" reports that he was planning military action against Iran.

Reform leaders join immigration rally

A U.S. Reform Jewish leader compared the plight of illegal immigrants to that of the ancient Israelites.

Rabbi Scott Sperling, director of the Union for Reform Judaism's Mid-Atlantic Regional Council, made his remarks at an immigration rally Monday in Washington in front of an estimated 100,000 people.

Sperling said he would be adjusting the story of the Exodus at his seder to include undocumented immigrants.

The rally protested a bill passed in the U.S. House of Representatives that would tighten border security and criminalize some of the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants already residing in the country.

The Senate is at an impasse over a compromise that would provide illegal immigrants a path to legal status.

U.S. ups emergency aid to Palestinian refugees

The United States plans to more than double its emergency assistance this year to the U.N. body that cares for Palestinian refugees.

The Bush administration would contribute \$51 million to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency's emergency appeal this year, more than double the \$20 million it contributed last year.

In an unusual and lengthy release on Monday, the State Department outlined its contributions to UNRWA over the last four years.

Its 2006 contribution to the regular budget, separate from the emergency appeal, is \$84.15 million, slightly less than the \$88 million donated in 2005.

Condoleezza Rice, the secretary of state, has repeatedly stressed that the recent U.S. decision to cut off the Palestinian Authority in the wake of the electoral victory of Hamas, a terrorist group, would not affect humanitarian funding.

MIT students de-pledge Jewish sorority

A Boston-area Jewish sorority has lost members who say they didn't know about the organization's Jewish orientation.

About a dozen pledges and current members of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology chapter of Alpha Epsilon Phi, the nation's oldest Jewish sorority, have de-affiliated.

According to Elizabeth Katcoff, an MIT sophomore who is the sorority's vice president of recruitment, most of these young women didn't realize they were joining a Jewish sorority.

They were not told about it during recruitment, she says.

When chapter officials explained the sorority's history at a

February meeting, the exodus occurred.

The chapter is recruiting again, and has a new pledge class of five students, four of whom are Jewish.

Bonnie Wunsch, the sorority's national executive director, says the sorority is open to anyone regardless of religion, but is committed to its Jewish orientation.

"It was accepted onto MIT to meet the needs of Jewish women on campus, and it's important that we continue to meet those needs," she said.

MIDDLE EAST

Abbas' men take over Gaza crossing

Security forces loyal to Mahmoud Abbas took control of a border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt.

Scores of paramilitary police deployed at Rafah terminal Tuesday after the Palestinian Authority president, who is in a power struggle with the new P.A. government under Hamas, assumed control of border crossings.

Rafah opened last year as part of a U.S.-brokered deal whereby those entering and leaving Gaza would be inspected by European monitors.

According to security sources, the European Union threatened to withdraw its personnel to protest Hamas' rise to power.

Israeli diplomats visit Indonesia

Two senior Israeli diplomats visited Indonesia.

Israel's Foreign Ministry disclosed Tuesday that the deputy head of its Asia desk, Amos Nadai, and Israel's ambassador to Thailand, Yael Rubinstein, made an official visit to Indonesia this month despite the absence of formal relations between the Jewish state and the world's most populous Muslim nation.

The trip was made within the framework of a U.N.-administered trade conference in Jakarta.

Nadai told Israel Army Radio that while he does not expect full ties with Indonesia to be established before there is an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, Jakarta is interested in lower-level relations.

Israel broke the ice with Indonesia by sending an aid airlift following the December 2004 tsunami.

WORLD

British court blasts Israeli army killing

A London court censured the Israeli army over the killing of a British citizen in the Gaza Strip. St. Pancras Coroner's Court ruled Monday that the 2003 shooting of Tom Hurndall in the flashpoint Gaza town of Rafah was "unlawful," a move that could help the 22-year-old pro-Palestinian activist's family seek further legal redress in Israel.

An Israeli court-martial last year convicted an army sniper of manslaughter for the Hurndall killing, sentencing him to eight years in prison.

Hurndall's relatives welcomed the guilty verdict but called for the soldier's superiors to be prosecuted for complicity.

Last week, St. Pancras Coroner's Court similarly criticized the Israeli army for the killing of British cameraman James Miller, also in Rafah in 2003.

No troops have been convicted in that case. Britain's attorney general may now be asked to request that Israeli authorities re-examine both the Hurndall and Miller killings.

On Tuesday, Gerald Kaufman, a British lawmaker, called for sanctions against Israel unless it hands over suspects in the two deaths.