

IN THE NEWS
Kadima-led coalition formed

Israel's new coalition government under Ehud Olmert will be sworn in Thursday.

The swearing-in session at the Knesset was set Monday after Olmert's Kadima Party clinched enough partners for a coalition.

Kadima will be joined by the Labor Party, Shas and the pensioners' party Gil, giving the prime minister-elect a parliamentary majority. The Cabinet is expected to have 25 ministers.

Reform leads Darfur lobbying

Reform Jews led a lobbying effort for Darfur. More than 300 Americans met Monday with U.S. senators from more than 30 states to lobby for intervention in the Sudanese region, where government-backed Arab militias have massacred hundreds of thousands of people.

Barbara Weinstein, legislative director for Reform's Religious Action Center, which organized the lobbying day, said attendees pressed legislators to create a special envoy for Darfur and support the \$173 million for peacekeeping purposes included in a current supplemental appropriations bill.

The lobbying effort was coordinated on behalf of the Save Darfur Coalition of 150 faith-based advocacy and humanitarian aid organizations.

Congress mulls Olmert address

Top congressional leaders are considering a plan to have Ehud Olmert address both houses.

The Israeli prime minister is expected to visit in late May and has scheduled meetings with President Bush.

Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), the minority leader, have agreed to the plan, and have referred it to their Senate counterparts.

WORLD REPORT

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On 58th Independence Day, Israel still faces many of its initial dilemmas

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In its 58 years, Israel has turned itself into an undisputed regional military and economic superpower.

But as it celebrates its birthday this week, it faces some of the same problems it did at its inception: a lack of universal recognition, ongoing terrorism and the threat of physical destruction.

There's no comparison between the Israel of today and the tiny, struggling Jewish community at the state's founding in 1948, but six wars and two intifadas later, the Jewish state still has not achieved the normalcy its founding fathers envisaged.

That leaves Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's new government, one of the least experienced in Israel's history, confronting major regional, global and existential issues.

Some facts and figures give a sense of how far Israel has come over the past 58 years.

In 1948, the Jewish population of Israel was around 650,000; today it is some 6 million, with more Jews living in Israel than in the United States.

At the start of the War of Independence in 1948, there were roughly 29,000 Israelis under arms, and another 20,000 in reserve; the Israel Defense Forces today number close to 700,000.

In May 1948, the Israelis had no tanks, few armored vehicles and just four Messerschmitt planes.

Today, Israel has one of the largest tank forces in the Middle East and hundreds of

state-of-the-art fighter-bombers, some capable of flying missions as far afield as Iran without refueling.

On the economic front, annual exports from Israel in 1950 totaled \$18 million; today Israel exports around \$2.5 billion — a month.

According to figures published in 2000, Israel was second only to California's Silicon Valley in high-tech; third in the number of university graduates per capita behind the United States and Holland; and first in the number of scientists per capita, with 135 per 10,000 inhabitants, compared to just 85 per 10,000 in the United States.

Israel also has made tremendous diplomatic strides. In its early days, Israel suffered from American indifference, Soviet hostility and a trade boycott imposed by the Arab world, which some experts say cost Israel as much as \$40 billion.

Until 1967, the United States kept its distance and refused to supply "offensive" weapons, while the Soviet Union armed Israel's Arab enemies to the teeth and used them as proxies in the Cold War.

It was only after Israel's stunning victory in the 1967 Six-Day War that it was able to forge the close strategic relationship with the United States that has become the cornerstone of Israeli foreign policy.

The big change in Israel's global standing came in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the launching of a peace process with the Palestinians. Russia and other key international players, including China, India and Turkey, established diplomatic ties with Israel, and the Arab

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**ISRAEL
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■ Israel has come far in its 58 years, but has many lingering issues to resolve

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boycott dissipated as major firms from all over the world started doing business with Israel.

By that time, Israel's geo-strategic position had changed radically. In 1979, it concluded a peace deal with Egypt and made peace with Jordan in 1994. In the late 1980s, Soviet arms supplies to Syria began to dry up, and the two U.S.-led Persian Gulf Wars against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, in 1991 and 2003, broke the brunt of the "Eastern Front" against Israel.

Nevertheless, Israel still faces three major and potentially existential threats: nuclear weapons in the hands of an Iranian regime that threatens to "wipe Israel off the map"; global and Palestinian terrorism; and demands for a one-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which the Jewish state would be dismantled and Jews would become a minority in an Arab-ruled country.

These are the issues that will dictate the Olmert government's strategic agenda.

First, it will work with the international community to prevent Iran from producing nuclear weapons. Mossad Chief Meir Dagan recently visited Washington to exchange intelligence on the Iranian nuclear program and to coordinate plans to prevent Iran from weaponizing its nuclear technology.

The Olmert government's fight against terrorism will be two-pronged: an all-out war against the terrorists, coupled with

further withdrawal from the West Bank.

The withdrawal is designed to gain the moral high ground for Israel and to pre-empt calls for a one-state solution by creating space for a Palestinian state, with Israel on one side of the soon-to-be-completed West Bank security barrier and Palestinians on the other.

Fifty-eight years after the founding of the state, the new government will have to address its predecessors' unfinished business: setting internationally recognized borders; making peace with the Palestinians or at least managing the conflict better; getting international recognition for Jerusalem as Israel's capital; completing work on a constitution; and changing the electoral system to facilitate more stable government, considering that Israel has had 31 governments in just 58 years.

Can Olmert's new government, made up of his Kadima party, Labor, the Pensioners and Shas, handle the challenges? On the face of it, its most glaring weakness is the relative inexperience of its members.

All the senior ministers — Tzipi Livni at the Foreign Ministry, Amir Peretz at Defense, Avraham Hirschson in the Treasury and Olmert as prime minister — are new to their jobs.

Will this government be able to strike the right economic balance between free-market-induced growth and government

subsidies for the weak and needy? Will the fervently Orthodox Shas bolt, possibly precipitating new elections, when a major unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank begins to take shape?

Will Shas allow work on a constitution — assiduously carried out for the past three years in the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee — to go ahead? Will a commission set up by Pres-

ident Moshe Katsav be able to convince this government to underwrite an electoral reform that introduces a form of regional constituency elections that smaller, one-issue parties — such as Shas and the Pensioners — fear might destroy them?

And will Olmert have the same rapport with the U.S.

administration, and especially President Bush, as did his predecessor, Ariel Sharon? Will he be able to get the Americans not only to back another Israeli pullback, but to recognize the lines Israel decides to draw as its permanent, international border?

Olmert hopes that by 2010, when his term is due to end, he will have succeeded where all of the 11 prime ministers that preceded him — from David Ben-Gurion to Sharon — failed: In setting Israel's permanent borders and gaining near-universal recognition for the Jewish state, with its capital in Jerusalem

Israel still faces three potentially existential threats: a hostile, armed Iran; global and Palestinian terrorism; and demands for a one-state solution.

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Olmert and Haniyeh make Time list

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Israeli and Palestinian Authority prime ministers were among Time magazine's 100 most influential people.

Ehud Olmert and Ismail Haniyeh were among politicians listed in "The People Who Shape the World" section of the latest Time.

But the accompanying personality profiles were dramatically different in tone. Contributor Zev Chafets described Olmert as "probably the best politician"

to occupy the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem, a national leader who seeks to create "a modern, democratic society."

By contrast, Haniyeh, the most senior Hamas politician, was given a circumspect write-up by veteran U.S. diplomat Dennis Ross.

"Nowhere in his statements is there a place for peace with Israel," Ross wrote.

"Which means that even the illusion of peacemaking is over."

Sudanese refugees jailed in Israel

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Ali and his sister started running as hard as they could toward the mountains near their village in Darfur when it was attacked and burned by militia forces — but his sister did not run quite fast enough, and was gunned down before Ali's eyes.

Ali, not his real name, eventually made his way to Egypt and then Israel in search of refuge. Instead, he has spent nine months in an Israeli prison along with other Sudanese refugees who await a decision on their fate by Israeli and U.N. officials.

About 160 refugees have come to Israel in the past year, and most of them are being held in prisons or army bases. A law against infiltrators from enemy countries bars them from appealing their cases in court.

A few have been released to kibbutzim, where they are under house arrest.

"I came here for liberty and freedom in Israel, but unfortunately I found something else," Ali, 30, told JTA by telephone from the Ma'asiyahu prison in Ramle. "I ask the Israeli government to help us, not to punish us, because we have already been punished enough. We need their help."

Israeli officials say they're doing what they can to expedite the process of interviewing the detainees and finding them homes in different countries in coordination with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Israel will not send the refugees back to Sudan, but the government is not letting them apply for asylum here because Sudan is considered an enemy country.

Some of the asylum-seekers are from the Darfur region, others from other parts of the African country. A civil war in Darfur has morphed into genocide of the region's non-Arab peoples. Hundreds of thousands of people have died in the conflict, which has been led by government-sponsored militias recruited from Arab tribes who have murdered, raped and prevented humanitarian aid from reaching victims.

"Because of the terrible situation we have seen an influx to Israel. We are working very closely with the UNHCR in Geneva and are trying to find a solution whereby these people can be given refugee status. Obviously no one wants to send them back

to where they came from, and we are looking for a third party" which could accept them, Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said.

Sudanese who cross into Israel from Egypt often are caught by army patrols.

The Hotline for Migrant Workers and the Refugee Rights Clinic at Tel Aviv University recently filed a petition to the Supreme Court against the use of the infiltration law, which is being used to hold the Sudanese asylum-seekers without due process.

The organizations also are asking for the cases of the Sudanese asylum-seekers arrested by the army to be transferred to the Interior Ministry, where they can have access to judicial review within 24 hours. They argue that the Sudanese should be released from prison unless they're deemed a security threat or are accused of committing a crime.

Lastly, the organizations say the refugees should be allowed to apply for asylum in Israel, just as refugees of other nationalities are permitted to do.

The New Israel Fund, which helps fund the Hotline for Migrant Workers, also has called on Israel to find solutions for the asylum-seekers. They have placed ads in Israeli newspapers demanding their release and launched an online petition to pressure the government.

Eliezer Yaari, director of The New Israel Fund in Israel, said he understands that the legal situation of the Sudanese is complicated because they entered the country illegally — but says he hopes the government will show compassion.

"Israel should find temporary solutions to allow them not to be in jail. Their only crime is running away from a place they could be killed," he said.

Noting the role of American Jews in pressuring the White House to confront the situation in Darfur, attorney Anat Ben-Dor of the Refugee Rights Clinic at Tel Aviv University said she was hopeful American Jews might use their leverage to pressure

the Israeli government about Sudanese here.

"We are lawyers and our work is in prisons and courts, but we do think some political pressure coming from Jews in the U.S. might tip the balance here and maybe change the attitudes of authorities," Ben-Dor said. "Finding host countries for 160 people is not an easy task, and the fact that people are still detained while all this is happening is outrageous."

There has been a significant increase in the number of Sudanese crossing into Israel since last December, when at least 28 Sudanese protesters were killed in Egypt when police opened fire to disperse a large crowd. The protest was held outside the UNHCR office in Cairo by Sudanese refugees demanding better conditions and treatment.

Following the demonstration, the Egyptian government announced it would deport 650 Sudanese arrested during the melee who did not have identification papers on them. Word of the planned expulsions further alarmed the refugee community.

Shevy Korzen, executive director of the Hotline for Migrant Workers, said she thinks part of the reason Israel has detained the Sudanese under the infiltrator law is out of fear that the Jewish state could be flooded by refugees.

Korzen said she found it ironic that Israel was using the infiltrator law as a reason not to give the Sudanese a haven as refugees when it was Israel itself that promoted a section in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 requiring countries to exempt refugees from measures they might normally take against enemy nationals.

Israel championed the provision, pointing to the fact that England had given refuge to Jews from Austria and Germany during World War II even though they were citizens of an enemy country.

One of the Sudanese detainees told of being separated from his wife and 2-month-old son during the fighting in Darfur. He does not know their fate.

"Our families have died, others are suffering and we don't know where they are. We are asking for help quickly," he said. ■

FOCUS ON ISSUES

After at least 28 Sudanese were killed at a protest in Egypt, more Sudanese refugees fled to Israel.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. terrorist funding czar in Israel

A U.S. Treasury official arrived in Israel to discuss ways of isolating Hamas.

Stuart Levey, the Treasury under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, was to meet with Israeli counterparts and discuss "joint efforts to combat terrorist financing," U.S. officials told Reuters.

Now that Hamas, a terrorist group, is governing the Palestinian Authority, the United States has resisted efforts by France and the Arab League to pay P.A. salaries.

The West otherwise is committed to isolating the Hamas-led government.

The Palestinian Authority is by far the biggest employer in the territories, and P.A. officials say a cutoff in salaries could lead to chaos.

The United States has told banks that have handled P.A. salary accounts in the past — including Israel's Bank Hapoalim and Jordan's Arab Bank — that they face sanctions if they continue to do so.

Al-Arian gets an extra 18 months

A Florida professor who pleaded guilty to supporting Islamic Jihad will serve another 18 months in prison before being deported.

Sami al-Arian's plea was part of a deal with prosecutors after the government failed to secure a guilty verdict against him in a lengthy trial; the jury acquitted on eight of the 17 charges and deadlocked on others.

Rather than face retrial, al-Arian accepted the deal and had expected to be released Monday at his sentencing hearing. However, instead of sentencing al-Arian to the three years he has already served, U.S. District Court Judge James Moody tacked on another 18 months.

Al-Arian's fund raising for Islamic Jihad made him an "active leader" of the Palestinian terrorist group, Moody said. The judge mocked al-Arian's claims that he was fund raising for charities.

"Your only connection to widows and orphans was that you create them," he said.

Democratic activist to head ICC

The Israel on Campus Coalition hired a Democratic Jewish activist as its director.

David Harris, who currently is deputy executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council, will head the umbrella organization of some 30 campus Israel advocacy groups starting next month.

He succeeds Wayne Firestone, who recently was elected president of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

MIDDLE EAST

Woman killed in raid

A Palestinian woman was killed during an Israeli army raid on the West Bank.

Witnesses said troops surrounded a suspected terrorist hideout in the city of Tulkarm on Monday and opened fire after calling on the occupants to come out and surrender.

Some of the bullets hit a nearby home, killing a 45-year-old woman.

The wanted man, a suspected member of Islamic Jihad, was arrested.

Israeli security sources described the fusillade as precautionary, though there did not appear to be shooting from inside the hideout. The army said the incident was being investigated.

Pollard challenges Eitan appointment

Jonathan Pollard filed a court challenge against the appointment of his former Israeli handler to the Olmert government. Israeli lawyers for the convicted spy filed a petition Monday with the High Court of Justice, arguing that Rafi Eitan of the pensioners' party Gil is unworthy of being a government official.

Eitan was head of the Israeli intelligence unit Lakam when he recruited Pollard, then a U.S. Navy analyst. Pollard, who is serving a life prison sentence in North Carolina for spying for Israel, accuses Eitan of "abandoning him in the field."

Eitan took responsibility for the scandal that erupted when Pollard was arrested and has vowed to lobby from the Knesset for the spy's release. He is to take the health portfolio in the new government.

France shuns Hamas official

France denied entry to a Hamas official. Salah Bardaweel, Hamas spokesman in the Palestinian Authority's Parliament, said Monday his request to visit France as part of an unofficial delegation of lawmakers had been turned down.

"They gave no reason for the rejection but it was clear I was denied a visa because I am a parliamentarian from Hamas," he said.

Four Palestinian Authority lawmakers from factions not linked to Hamas are to tour France, Norway, Spain, Germany, Italy and Austria in coming weeks.

The European Union, like the United States, blacklists Hamas as a terrorist group.

Israelis left out of race

Egypt grounded 10 Israeli yachtsman taking part in an international regatta.

The crew of two yachts from Israel left Tel Aviv last month as part of the Med-Red Rally, which runs through the Suez Canal to the Egyptian port of Sharm el-Sheik.

But they were stopped in Suez this week after Egyptian authorities accused them of not obtaining proper registration papers. The yachtsmen said Monday they expected to clear the bureaucratic obstacle but voiced doubt that they could catch up with the other 50 vessels taking part in the regatta.

Maccabi Tel Aviv loses in final

Maccabi Tel Aviv lost its bid for a third European basketball title.

The Israeli team lost Sunday in Prague to CSKA Moscow, 73-69, in the final. Frequently cited by commentators as the best basketball team in Europe, Maccabi crushed Spanish opponent Tau Ceramica, 85-70, in the semifinal Friday.

But Maccabi, which had a weak season in Israel, was not up to the impressive defensive moves of Moscow, and the Israelis trailed by a few points for most of the game.

WORLD

Holocaust museum to help set up French memorial

A Holocaust memorial is to be set up in southern France. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum joined with a French provincial government and a French Jewish group to set up the memorial.

Participants at Monday's signing ceremony at the museum included representatives of the Department of the Pyrenees-Orientales, a provincial authority, and the Centre De Documentation Juive Contemporain. The memorial and database will be built at the site of the Rivesaltes concentration camp in southern France.

The database will cover information on internees in southern France during the war years.