



IN THE NEWS

'Quartet' announces Palestinian funding

The "Quartet" of Middle East peace mediators will set up a mechanism to funnel money to the Palestinians.

The four members of the group guiding the Middle East peace process — the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia — announced the decision Tuesday afternoon after meeting in New York.

The Quartet endorsed a "temporary international mechanism limited in duration and scope and fully accountable that ensures direct delivery of any assistance to the Palestinian people," U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said.

The European Union would develop the mechanism, which is designed to bypass the Palestinian Authority government now led by Hamas, a terrorist group.

Israel agrees to free taxes

Israel offered to release frozen Palestinian Authority taxes if they go toward humanitarian causes.

Israel collects some \$55 million in monthly customs levies on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, but froze payouts after Hamas won January elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Palestinian bill clears committee

The Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act cleared the U.S. House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee.

The act, which would cut off funding to the Palestinian Authority and severely restrict funding to the Palestinians, was due for a vote by the full House this week when the Judiciary Committee exercised its option to review the bill because its visa provisions fall under the committee's purview.

The committee approved the bill in a voice vote Wednesday.

WORLD REPORT

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Lobbying on Iran, groups strive to play down the Jewish angle

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — With concern mounting over Iran's atomic ambitions, the American Jewish community is lobbying intensively to ensure that the threat is taken seriously by the United States, the media and the world.

Careful to avoid giving the impression that it's primarily an issue of Jewish or Israeli concern, however, U.S. Jewish groups are taking pains to highlight the greater regional and global threats posed by a nuclear Iran and its Holocaust-denying president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"We have to mobilize public opinion in this country and around the world to understand the serious threat that this represents," Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, told JTA.

Iran is "the fulcrum of the international terrorist movement, not only through Hezbollah and Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which they aid, but terrorist groups around the world — including in the United States and Europe."

The American Jewish Committee bought ads last month in *The New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *International Herald Tribune* and *New York Sun*, asking, "Suppose Iran one day gives nuclear devices to terrorists. Could anyone anywhere feel safe?"

The idea, said David Harris, the AJCommittee's executive director, was "to make sure that the global threat was understood,

as opposed only to the Israel dimension."

On Tuesday, the head of Israel's military intelligence unit, Amos Yadlin, said that, absent sanctions, Iran would attain nuclear weapons by 2010.

According to reports, Iran already has procured North Korean missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads as far as Israel and parts of Europe.

The Bush administration has said it will not tolerate a nuclear Iran, a sentiment recently echoed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

When Ahmadinejad "says that he wants to destroy Israel, the world needs to take it seriously," Bush said in an interview with German weekly *Bild am Sonntag*. "This is a serious threat, aimed at an ally of the United States and Germany. What Ahmadinejad also means is that if he is ready to destroy one country, then he would also be ready to destroy others. This is a threat that needs to be dealt with."

The foreign ministers of several key Security Council members met Monday to discuss a proposed U.N. resolution to brake Iran's nuclear program, but did not reach consensus.

Russia and China still oppose including any mention of sanctions or possible military intervention in the resolution, which is being sponsored by Britain and France and backed by the United States.

Hoenlein said the Presidents Conference is deliberately taking a quiet approach to its lobbying on Iran.

"This is an area where, I think, we do not want this to be seen as a Jewish issue; it's

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BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ Jewish groups lobby hard on Iran, but stress that the issue is not only a Jewish one

Continued from page 1

not," he said. "This is a danger for America, for the world. Therefore, I think the low-visibility but intensive approach is appropriate.

"We're not against protests or American Jews expressing themselves on this," Hoenlein added, "but it shouldn't be exclusively Jews."

Jewish groups have publicly backed the Iran Freedom Support Act, a piece of legislation that has passed the U.S. House of Representatives and is now going through the Senate.

The act would impose sanctions on companies doing business with Iran and would promote democratic organizations there.

The House bill also includes language that urges American investors to divest from Iran.

Jewish groups have vigorously lobbied American and international leaders, and have held meetings to educate members of the media.

During its Washington policy conference in March, members of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee held more than 450 meetings with members of Congress in which Iran was among the major topics of discussion, AIPAC spokeswoman Jennifer Cannata said.

Leaders of the American Jewish Congress have held high-level talks on the topic with the Jordanian mission to the United Nations, and will be traveling to Jordan later this month to meet with King Abdullah II.

AJCommittee officials raised the topic of Iran when they met Tuesday with French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy. Last week, the AJCommittee spoke with Merkel and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, among others. The group also has met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Despite differences in approach among world leaders, Harris said, "There is a virtual unanimity of view on the threat assessment. No one we have met takes the issue lightly or minimizes the danger."

The World Jewish Congress has undertaken several significant programs to lobby and educate on the Iranian threat. Coming out of the group's February Governing Board meeting — during which Israeli, American and European experts addressed the group on Iran — leaders of European Jewish communities began lobbying their governments to speak out against Iran and declare Ahmadinejad and his colleagues *personas non gratas*.

The WJC, which continues to meet with world leaders on the subject, also has been putting out a bi-weekly publication called "Iran Update," a collection of relevant news on Iran and analyses of the situation that is sent to presidents of Jewish communities around the world, diplomats, politicians, experts and mem-

bers of the media. The WJC also has made a slide show on Iran available on its Web site, <http://www.worldjewishcongress.org>.

"Iran's nuclear program is not the only concern," said Pinchas Shapiro, the WJC's director of special projects. "Their unbridled support for international terrorism, from the Marine barracks bombing in 1983 to the Buenos Aires Jewish community center bombing in 1994 to their declared recruitment of tens of thousands of suicide bombers to attack Western targets, are all matters of grave seriousness."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said Iran is either No. 1 or No. 2 on the group's agenda in all meetings with American and foreign officials. Sometimes the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority tops the list of talking points.

"The threat of a nuclear Iran is an irrational state which has declared war not only on Israel and the Jewish people, but on our values and our institutions and on everything the free world cherishes," Foxman said.

Referring to Ahmadinejad's threats to annihilate Israel, Foxman added that history has taught that "you pay attention to what lunatics say, especially when they have the means to effectuate their words."

'We do not want this to be seen as a Jewish issue; it's not. This is a danger for America.'

Malcolm Hoenlein

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Mideast conflict hits N.Y. school

By JTA STAFF

NEW YORK (JTA) — Critics protested a daylong session on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at a New York City private school. Jewish activists rallied Tuesday outside the keynote session at the Ethical Culture Fieldston School because they believed the session, which featured anti-Zionist professors Rashid Khalidi and Tony Judt, was biased against Israel.

The day also featured a dozen other sessions with several Jewish journalists and liberal Jewish voices. In a letter addressed

to Fieldston's principal, John Love, Rabbi Avi Weiss, who pulled out of one of the sessions, called the final panel "so profoundly tilted against Israel that it renders your entire program a deep disservice to your students in intellectual, educational and moral terms," the New York Sun reported.

The school released a statement that read, in part, "Our institution has a long tradition of exploring complex subjects, and this day is in that tradition." The school canceled a previous Mideast day after parents complained that the line-up appeared biased against Israel.

Report criticizes BBC Mideast coverage

By EVE BACHRACH

LONDON (JTA) — A British Jewish leader is pleased with a report critical of the BBC's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but is withholding final judgment until he sees whether the changes recommended are implemented.

Jon Benjamin, chief executive of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, made the comments after the report concluded that the BBC does not give a "full and fair account" of the conflict, leading to "incomplete" and "misleading" coverage, the report found. The report, commissioned by the BBC Governors and carried out by an independent panel, was released last week.

Though it absolves the BBC of "deliberate or systematic bias," the report highlights several areas where coverage could be improved. Recommendations include providing more historical context and tightening editorial control. The BBC also should focus on issues and events aside from dramatic flare-ups, the report found.

A content analysis found that more on-air time is given to Israelis than Palestinians — though that includes Israelis highly critical of Israeli policy. It also found that Israeli fatalities are reported more frequently than are Palestinian deaths, perhaps owing to the dramatic footage that accompanies terrorist attacks against Israelis.

In addition, the BBC was urged not to shy away from the word "terrorist," but to ensure that it's fairly and evenly applied.

This last point earned some praise from Benjamin, who told JTA that he appreciates "the report's common-sense approach to the use of the word terrorism — which, as it says, best describes violent acts targeting civilians with the intention to cause terror for political purposes."

The Council for Arab-British Understanding said in a statement that the BBC avoids using the word "occupation" in its coverage of the conflict. In an e-mail to JTA, Benjamin disagreed.

"Almost without exception, Palestinians are shown as suffering from 'the occupation,'" he wrote.

According to the panel, the biggest shortcoming in the BBC's reporting is its "failure to convey adequately the disparity in the Israeli and Palestinian experience, reflecting the fact that one side is in control and the other lives under occupation."

The report suggests presenting dual

narratives of the conflict: By setting out parallel narratives, it's hoped that both sides would be presented "fully and fairly."

Both the Board of Deputies and the Arab council submitted reports to the panel. Benjamin and the council's director, Chris Doyle, said they look forward to seeing greater historical context in BBC reporting, though they cautioned that the report's true value will be known only when they see how the BBC reacts and improves.

Benjamin highlighted what he called shortcomings in the report.

BBC reports don't show "the way that the lives of Israelis are every day affected by the stringent security measures that have to be taken in response to terror," he told JTA. "Sadly, also overlooked are the wonderful stories of cooperation and collaboration between ordinary Israelis and Palestinians to improve the lives of both communities."

Controversy is nothing new to the BBC's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Board of Governors censured BBC Online in April for an article on the 1967 Six-Day War. The article stated that the United Nations called for Israel's withdrawal from all territory seized during the war, when in fact the United Nations had called for a "land for peace" agreement to be negotiated. The text of the resolution

was adopted after Arab diplomats failed in their attempt to demand an Israeli retreat from all the territory.

In 2003, the Israeli government effectively barred official contact with the BBC after it broadcast a documentary on Israel's supposed nuclear weapons program that Israeli officials felt was biased and lacked context.

The following year, the Board of Governors upheld a complaint of bias against a correspondent who reported having cried as she watched a dying Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, being helicoptered out of the West Bank.

In a statement released May 3, BBC News management "welcomed the report's central finding" of impartiality and promised to "study the detailed recommendations of the report" and "draw up a plan for implementing appropriate recommendations, for approval by the Board of Governors."

The news division already had implemented one of the panel's suggestions with the appointment in April of Jeremy Bowen in the new position of Middle East editor.

While BBC coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict generates a lot of complaints, viewers don't perceive a bias in the coverage, according to public opinion research carried out at the panel's request.

But only 29 percent of the BBC's audience feels they know "a reasonable amount" or "a lot" about the conflict. ■

In 2003, the Israeli government effectively barred official contact with the BBC.

Secular Israeli writers learn some Torah

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Huddled together over Styrofoam cups of coffee and copies of Kaddish, a group of Israel's top television and film writers search for the meaning behind the words that symbolize Jewish grief.

"It's as if we are helping the dead ascend by thinking of them," suggests Yulie Cohen-Gersten, as she underlines a Chasidic commentary about Kaddish and cross-references it with a biblical passage from Ezekiel.

Cohen-Gersten, 49, a documentarian, is one of 15 secular Israeli writers who gather Friday mornings to study Talmud and other Jewish texts at Alma College, a center

for Hebrew culture in Tel Aviv.

Organizers hope the religious texts will find their way into the writers' creations.

The group exchanged stories of loss and death that the reading of Kaddish triggered for them. The classes are a place of intense learning, debate and group study.

Organizers hope that by introducing these influential writers to the material, they will be inspired to incorporate Jewish themes into their own work.

The Beit Midrash is supported by UJA-Federation of New York in partnership with Alma College, the Avi Chai Foundation, the Geshar Foundation and Keshet Broadcasting Company. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Deadline set for Palestinians

Israel gave the Palestinians a deadline for showing they are legitimate peace partners.

Justice Minister Haim Ramon said Tuesday that the Palestinians have until the end of 2006 or Israel will begin setting its final borders unilaterally.

"If it becomes clear by the end of the year that we really have no partner, and the international community is also convinced of this, then we will take our fate into our own hands and not leave our fate in the hands of our enemies," Ramon told Israel's Army Radio.

Hamas seeks terror aid

Hamas called for financial support for its terrorists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"We ask all the people in surrounding Arab countries, the Muslim world and everyone who wants to support us to send weapons, money and men," the terrorist group's political leader, Khaled Meshaal, said Wednesday in a speech in Qatar.

"You should not shy away from this." In Jordan, authorities said they arrested 20 Hamas members accused of trying to recruit Jordanians for terrorist training in Syria and Iran.

Sharon to go to long-term care

Ariel Sharon reportedly will be moved to a long-term care facility next week.

Ma'ariv reported Wednesday that doctors believe there is no chance that the former Israeli prime minister, who was felled by a stroke in January, will regain consciousness.

He is to be moved next week from the intensive care unit at Jerusalem's Hadassah Hospital in Ein Kerem to a coma ward at Shiba Hospital in Tel Hashomer, the newspaper reported.

The Knesset Finance Committee on Tuesday approved state funding for the next five years of Sharon's hospital treatment.

Capt. Kirk to visit Israel

Actor William Shatner is planning to visit Israel to help disabled children.

The actor, known for his roles as Capt. Kirk on "Star Trek" and lawyer Denny Crane on "Boston Legal," will visit Israel later this month to support the Jewish National Fund's Therapeutic Consortium Endowment for Israel.

The project provides therapy for handicapped children through horse riding.

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. general: Arrow useful

Aspects of Israel's Arrow missile defense program were incorporated into U.S. systems, a top U.S. military officer said. "We've learned an awful lot collaboratively together working with the Israelis.

We have a series of exercises that we execute with them on an annual basis that we learn even more," Lt. Gen. Henry Trey Obering, director of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, said Wednesday in Senate testimony.

"We've actually been able to incorporate some of the developments on the Arrow program back into other interceptor programs within the Missile Defense Agency."

The United States helps fund Israel's Arrow program, designed to deflect missiles from hitting Israel.

U.S. checks with China on Hamas

The United States asked China to clarify a claim by a Hamas official that he was invited on a state visit.

Robert Zoellick, deputy U.S. secretary of state, testified Wednesday to Congress on U.S.-China relations.

"Some of you might have seen there was a report by the new foreign minister of Hamas for the Palestinian government sort of saying he was going to go to China," Zoellick said, referring to a claim last month by Mahmoud Zahar, the Palestinian Authority foreign minister. "I raised this with the Chinese promptly.

"Within two days the Chinese said, 'We didn't invite him.' "

JDate gets 'Online Oscar'

JDate won a Webby Award. JDate, the world's largest Jewish dating Web site, took top prize in the 10th annual Webby Award competition for outstanding social/networking site, beating out MySpace.com.

"This is better than Chanukah," David Siminoff, president and CEO of Spark Networks, the owner and operator of JDate, said in a statement.

The award is to be given June 12.

WORLD

Lawmaker wants Iran dropped from World Cup

A British lawmaker is leading calls for Iran to be banned from soccer's World Cup.

Chris Heaton-Harris of Britain's Conservative Party said Wednesday that he plans to make the demand in a letter to FIFA, the soccer league overseeing the World Cup, citing Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's calls for the destruction of Israel and his denial of the Holocaust.

Australian politician slams anti-Israel media bias

An Australian legislator criticized two television stations over what she called bias in their coverage of Israel.

Connie Fierravanti-Wells said that she was made aware of the "anti-Jewish, anti-U.S. slant that some broadcasters relish in adopting" after she visited Israel last year on a trip run by the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council's Rambam Israel Fellowship Program, the Australian Jewish News reported.

The senator made the remarks last week at an Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce lunch in Sydney.

Undiplomatic homecoming for Iceland's first lady

The Israeli-born wife of Iceland's president was involved in a diplomatic spat at Israel's Ben-Gurion Airport.

Dorit Moussaief and her husband, Icelandic President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, flew into Israel this week for a private visit.

Asked by a security woman for her Israeli passport, Moussaief, 55, voiced anger, saying, "This is why everyone hates the Jews." Iceland's Embassy in Israel had no immediate comment.

Fulbright celebrated in Israel

Fulbright scholars gathered in Israel to mark the 50th anniversary of the program. On Wednesday, Fulbright Israel and the United States-Israel Education Foundation hosted a symposium to mark the anniversary with writers and academics.

Fulbright exchanges to Israel began in 1956. Since then, more than 2,500 Israelis and Americans have participated in exchanges, and alumni include some of the most influential people in the country.