

IN THE NEWS
Probe: Israeli shell didn't kill civilians

Seven Palestinian civilians who died on a Gaza beach last Friday were not killed by an Israeli shell, an Israeli army report concluded.

The deaths probably were caused by an explosive device planted in the sand, according to the probe, released Tuesday.

Palestinians were believed to have mined portions of the beach against the possibility of an Israeli invasion.

Nine Palestinians killed in airstrike

Israel killed at least nine Palestinians in an airstrike.

The target of Tuesday's attack was Hamoud Wadiya, Islamic Jihad's main rocket launcher, who was killed along with at least one other Islamic Jihad member en route to a rocket attack, the Israeli military said.

A rocket in the terrorists' vehicle detonated by the strike, along with shrapnel from one of the Israeli missiles, killed at least seven Palestinian bystanders.

U.S. court rejects compensation appeal

The U.S. Supreme Court rejected an appeal on a Holocaust compensation case.

Monday's decision concerned the last litigant from a class action suit seeking compensation for property lost due to the Holocaust outside an agreement signed in 2000 by the Austrian and U.S. governments, Austrian businesses, the Austrian Jewish community and the Claims Conference.

Payment by Austria of approximately \$210 million to a Holocaust fund was stipulated on the cancellation of all such suits.

Some 2,000 out of a total of 19,000 claimants have received compensation from the fund, according to Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Claims Conference.

WORLD REPORT

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

As Abbas presses for referendum, what Washington sees is all chaos

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA)—For a Bush administration closely watching events unfold in the Middle East, the equation couldn't be starker: Israel has a plan; the Palestinians have chaos.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is unveiling his vision of the future in dribs and drabs, leaking plans this week for a negotiated Palestinian state in provisional borders and considering a staggered withdrawal: first settlers, then the army when things calm down.

By contrast, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is using a vaguely worded document drafted by prisoners and renounced by the Hamas-led P.A. government in a last ditch effort to consolidate power.

U.S. officials have refrained from commenting on Abbas' weekend announcement of a July 26 referendum on a plan for a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

The document also includes what some say is implicit recognition of Israel within the 1967 borders, along with the demand — flatly rejected by Israel — for a "right of return" to Israel for Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

Instead, Bush administration spokesmen have focused on internecine fighting between those loyal to the Hamas terrorist group and those loyal to Abbas and his relatively moderate Fatah Party.

"Responsible parties in the government have to take responsibility for providing a safe and secure environment for the Palestin-

ian people," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Tuesday.

"It is fundamentally up to the Palestinians to take control of their own security situation."

Taking a wait-and-see attitude is smart right now, said Glenn Robinson, an associate professor at the Defense Department's Naval Postgraduate School.

"The West is deliberately looking at this as an internal Palestinian matter," he said of the proposed referendum on the "prisoners document," named for the Hamas

and Fatah activists in Israeli prisons who drafted it.

"You don't want to take sides, it could backfire."

Robinson believes Abbas' gambit has less to do with Israel and the Americans and more to do with cornering Hamas.

"My own sense is that Abbas is setting the wheels in motion to take down Hamas," he said, noting that polls suggest overwhelming Palestinian support for a two-state solution, as opposed to Hamas' rejection of Israel's right to exist.

Mouin Rabbani, a Jordan-based analyst with the International Crisis Group and a contributing editor to the Middle East Report, agrees that Abbas' principal gambit is in cornering Hamas.

But he believes the P.A. president also has his eye on Washington.

The referendum plan is "an indirect way of creating pressure" on Israel to move forward, he said.

Olmert seems up to the pressure, leaking plans to Ha'aretz on Tuesday to negotiate

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ANALYSIS

■ *The Bush administration is reacting coolly to Abbas' call for a referendum*

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provisional borders with Abbas.

Coupled with his offer this week to arm forces loyal to Abbas, that could satisfy U.S. insistence that Olmert exhaust every possibility to bolster the P.A. president, who is repeatedly described by U.S. spokesmen as a "partner for peace."

The problem with that projection is that Abbas' long-term plan is not yet clear — perhaps even to him — according to David Makovsky, an analyst with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Abbas may want to change the Palestinian landscape. On the other hand, the referendum could merely be a tactic to split the Western determination to isolate the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, Makovsky said.

"Is his hope to reshuffle the deck, using his presidential powers to disperse the Parliament and create the conditions for new elections?" Makovsky asked. "Or to peel Europeans away from the Americans in the financial boycott?"

In effect since Hamas assumed government in March, the boycott already has had an impact, Makovsky said.

"There has been a 13-point drop in Palestinian support for Hamas," he said, citing a recent Bir Zeit University poll. "We're finally seeing Abbas standing up" to Hamas.

Maintaining the unity of the boycott is vital, Makovsky said.

In any case, speculation about the effect of Abbas' plan may be premature.

A study by the Palestine Center, a Washington-based think tank, said the P.A.'s basic laws neither provide for nor forbid a referendum mandated by the president.

Rabbani said Abbas has a long way to go before the referendum gains him entree into the West's good graces and negotiations with Israel.

"Hamas could turn this from a referendum on the substance of the prisoners document into a plebiscite on Abbas, which he's not certain to win," Rabbani said.

"If he does win, will Hamas go quietly or exercise the Samson option?" he asked, referring to a biblical Gazan who brought down the walls on his adversaries, sacrificing his own life in the process.

Even if it gets to the diplomatic stage, Rabbani said, "The most the Israelis are willing to cede" — believed to be some 90 percent of the West Bank, without eastern Jerusalem — "is less than the Palestinians are willing to accept. If this is a strategy for resuming for serious political negotiations with Israel, it's going to fail." ■

Chilean Jews encouraged by new leader

By JOE GOLDMAN

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Michelle Bachelet, the Chilean president who was elected earlier this year and recently met with President Bush, is looking promising to the Jewish community.

Three of the 20 ministers whom Bachelet named to her Cabinet are Jewish, a high percentage in a country containing some 15,000 Jews out of a population of 16 million, said Ram Tapia Adler, executive director of B'nai B'rith Chile.

The three are Karen Poniachick, the mining minister; Clarisa Hardy, minister of planning and cooperation; and Eduardo Bitran, minister of public works and infrastructure. Bitran and Poniachick are members of the center-left PPD Party, and Hardy is closely tied with Bachelet through their work in the Socialist Party.

Adler said that the three are active and respected members of the Jewish community of Santiago, where 90 percent of the country's Jews live.

Bachelet, who met with Bush on June 8 in Washington, became one of the first female leaders elected in South America

without a family connection when she was elected president of Chile in mid-March.

Chile-Israeli relations are improving, with growing trade between the two nations. However, Chile has often voted against Israel at the United Nations and

in other international organizations. Adler explained this as due in great part to the heavy influence of the Palestinian lobby in Chile.

About 550,000 Chileans are of Arab descent and of those more than 400,000 are Palestinians, he said.

"The Palestinians have tremendous economic and political clout. Five of the top 12 businesses in the country are Arab-owned. There are also 12 Palestinian congressmen," he said, "who have formed an Arab caucus which is especially vocal on Arab-Israeli issues and Middle East politics." ■

During the second intifada, they formed a powerful pro-Palestinian lobby, the Bethlehem Foundation 2000.

Adler added that there has been friction between the Jewish and Arab communities, with anti-Semitic propaganda "utilized by the local Arab groups, especially in times of heightened Middle East tensions." ■

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Ram Tapia Adler
Executive director, B'nai B'rith Chile

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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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Critics: Institute ignores women's voices

By RACHEL SILVERMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — When Avinoam Bar-Yosef decided to bring together the leaders of 15 major Jewish organizations, he focused on what should be discussed.

Bar-Yosef is director-general of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, an Israel-based think-tank created by the Jewish Agency for Israel that engages in long-term strategic planning. Among other items on the agenda, he included Jewish identity, technology and demographic trends.

But now his attention has shifted from the agenda to the invite list — which is notable for its absence of women.

Arlene Kaufman, chairwoman of the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella, is a guest of honor, but wasn't asked to take part in brainstorming activities. Carole Solomon, chairwoman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, was invited but couldn't attend.

Critics say the imbalance speaks to gender issues that plague the Jewish world: Though women have a healthy presence in Jewish organizations, they're scarce in upper-echelon positions.

Shifra Bronznick, president of Advancing Women Professionals, a UJC offshoot organization, said the lack of women at the policy institute event has "generated enormous response" from philanthropists, volunteers and professional leaders.

Many of those activists have flooded Dennis Ross, the former Clinton administration official who has headed the institute since its inception in 2002, with a steady stream of e-mails. JTA phone calls to Ross seeking comment were not returned.

Deborah Lipstadt, who directs Emory University's Rabbi Donald Tam Institute for Jewish Studies, was one of those writers. She told JTA that gender bias is "a problem endemic to this institution," comparing the institute's strategic planning to "a bunch of frat boys sitting around and deciding what the future of the university will be."

Even some taking part in the event, such as David Ellenson, president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, were troubled by the dearth of women.

"Given that the gathering is so important in terms of the high profile and renown of the participants, as well as the

themes and purposes of such a gathering, the omission of women constitutes a glaring gap," Ellenson wrote to Ross. "How can matters of Jewish identity, relations with Israel, the influence of Islam, etc., be discussed when half the Jewish community is not represented?"

In a memo to the institute, Bronznick asked: "Given the extraordinary number of women who have assumed significant positions in every sector, every field, and every country, why is it so difficult for the Jewish com-

munity to identify women when it convenes leadership groups?"

Some argue that qualified female candidates are few and far between.

According to a new report conducted by Steven Cohen, a professor at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, women are underrepresented in top federation positions. The study was commissioned jointly by Bronznick's organization and the UJC's Mandel Center for Leadership Excellence.

No woman served as a federation executive in any of the 19 largest American cities in 2005, the study found. In fact, the number of women nationwide who occupied executive director positions in federations dropped five percent nationally from 2004 to 2005.

On the other hand, the report showed that women constituted 70 percent of the total federation workforce last year.

Terry Meyerhoff Rubenstein, chairwoman of UJC's Gender Equity and Organizational Effectiveness team, said women who try to ascend the Jewish organizational ladder face numerous hurdles.

She said nominating committees often are reluctant to recommend women for top roles, as they are often composed of older men who see women as being unable to take a hard line on issues. She also cited a lack of role models, job demands that make it difficult to balance work and

family and skewed perceptions of female capability.

Bar-Yosef said the leaders invited to this week's two-day symposium merely reflect such trends.

"We try to bring the best, the most significant decision makers in the Jewish world to this meeting, and that's what we got," Bar-Yosef said, citing figures like David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, and Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League. "Women are not CEOs in those organizations we invited."

Bar-Yosef also said women have attended previous meetings held by the institute, and will be present in future discussions. But he noted that those events concerned Jewish thinkers, among whom there's no scarcity of women.

Bar-Yosef said the institute has extended a number of last-minute invites to Jewish female professionals to "try to deal with gender balance."

"We had no intention to offend anybody or not to have gender equality," he

explained. "Women are so crucial and important to the future of the Jewish people. Their input is really very important."

But feminist leaders said the olive branch was too little, too late.

Bronznick listed prominent women like Ruth Messinger, president of the American Jewish World Service and Morlie Levin, national executive director at Hadassah, whom she said should have been included from the start.

She also suggested that the institute change its criteria for inclusion, saying it ignored younger representatives from groups like Reboot, a nonprofit that supports creative Jewish initiatives, and Avodah, a service corps for Jewish youth.

"The Jewish community is so limited in its criteria for inclusion, and in doing so they're making their institutions irrelevant," Bronznick said. "You can't have creative initiatives designed by the usual suspects." ■

FOCUS ON ISSUES

The institute's strategic planning is like 'a bunch of frat boys sitting around and deciding what the future of the university will be.'

Deborah Lipstadt
Emory University

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Compromise on circumcision procedure

New York state health officials and Orthodox rabbis reached an agreement on a controversial circumcision procedure. According to the compromise signed Monday, mohels who perform the procedure known as metzitzah b'peh must sanitize their hands like a surgeon, the Albany Times-Union reported.

They also must clean their mouths with a sterile alcohol wipe and rinse with a mouthwash that contains at least 25 percent alcohol.

A controversy erupted after a mohel's use of metzitzah b'peh, in which blood is sucked from the wound, allegedly led to the death of a baby who contracted herpes.

Cantor pleads guilty to abuse

The former cantor of a New York City synagogue pleaded guilty to sexually abusing his nephew.

Howard Nevison, 65, former cantor at Temple Emanu-El, faces up to 19 years in prison after pleading guilty Monday to misdemeanor counts of assault, terrorist threats, corruption of minors and child endangerment.

The attacks took place from 1993 to 1997, while the boy was 3 to 7 years old. Two other family members were previously convicted of molesting the boy.

Polish official to meet U.S. Jewish groups

Poland's foreign minister will meet with Jewish groups in the United States later this month.

The American Jewish Committee is coordinating Anna Elzbieta Fotyga's June 19 meeting with several Jewish groups. Topics to be discussed include monument preservation, the fight against anti-Semitism, Holocaust education and a planned bill to offer compensation for the property of Holocaust victims and their heirs.

Jewish center opens in N.Y.

The \$12.5 million Schneerson Center for Jewish Life opened on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

About 300 people attended the June 9 ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The 17,200-sq.-ft. townhouse will be devoted to educational, social and outreach programs run by Chabad of the Upper East Side.

The center's cornerstone is a mikvah that takes up the entire basement, with two pools and eight preparation rooms. Scheduled to open June 25, it is believed to be Manhattan's third mikvah.

Philanthropist George Rohr and family provided major support for the center, and the mikvah was donated by New York businessman Peter Schwalbe.

MIDDLE EAST

Palestinians fighting Palestinians

Fatah activists set on fire the Palestinian Authority Cabinet building in Ramallah. Monday night's arson by followers of P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas' movement comes amid increasing violence between Fatah and Hamas.

Supporters of Hamas, which controls the Palestinian Authority government, rallied in Ramallah in response to the attack on the Cabinet building.

Rabin's killer allowed to become father

Israel's Supreme Court ruled that Yitzhak Rabin's assassin and his wife could try to have a child through artificial insemination.

The court rejected an appeal seeking to block efforts by Yigal Amir and Larissa Trimbobler to conceive, saying that the right to

become a parent is a basic human right. Other convicted murderers had been allowed to become parents, the court noted.

Amir was sentenced to 30 days without visitors and two weeks without phone calls after prison officials caught him on video tape trying to smuggle out sperm to Trimbobler.

Vigilante suspects arrested in Israel

Seven Israeli Arabs were arrested on suspicion of beating to death a Jewish gunman after he killed four people in their town.

Tuesday's arrests followed a lengthy investigation following the incident last August, in which army deserter and extreme-right wing activist Natan Eden Zada opened fire on a public bus in the Israeli Arab town of Shfaram.

WORLD

Germany agrees to pay WWII prisoners

Former inmates of Nazi prison camps in Tunisia may apply for compensation from Germany.

The development followed hours of negotiations Tuesday between the Claims Conference and Germany's Finance Ministry. Germany has committed a total of \$276 million to this and several related causes.

A few hundred people are eligible, said Gideon Taylor, the Claims Conference's executive vice president. The sum also includes \$26 million for social services aiding Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, which the German government has agreed to provide through the end of 2007.

Poll: French moving toward Israel

French attitudes toward Israel have improved greatly during the past four years, according to a new poll.

Some 38 percent of French citizens said they sympathized with Israel and an equal number chose the Palestinians, according to the poll, conducted by the Pew survey organization.

Four years ago, 36 percent sympathized with the Palestinians and 19 percent with Israel.

Program marks 100,000 free trips to Israel

Birthright Israel celebrated the 100,000 people who have participated in its free trips to Israel. Israel's deputy prime minister, Shimon Peres, spoke at the Tuesday night event in Jerusalem.

Some 7,000 people danced to Israeli techno music as confetti flew through the air and blue and white balloons were released. Launched in 1999, Birthright provides free trips to Israel for Jews aged 18 to 26.

Olmert runs through London

Israel's Ehud Olmert took his exercise routine to the streets of London. Olmert ran through London on Tuesday after a broken air conditioner forced him out of the gym in his London hotel, Reuters reported.

Olmert, who was in London as part of a diplomatic trip in Europe focused on explaining his unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank, runs 6 miles daily. Olmert arrived in Paris on Tuesday for meetings with President Jacques Chirac and French Jewish leaders.

Sweden not labeling Golan wine

Sweden backed away from a decision to label wine made in the Golan Heights as coming from occupied territory.

Golan wine will be sold without a label of where it was produced, according to Lena Posner-Korosi, president of the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities.