

## IN THE NEWS

## Defense lawmakers demand Peretz quit

Israeli lawmakers demanded the defense minister's resignation.

Members of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee called Monday for Amir Peretz to step down.

This followed Peretz's telephone conversation Sunday with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Political sources said Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who has held off on meeting Abbas, was angry at the disclosure.

## Two Hamas members killed in strike

Israel killed two Hamas members in an airstrike on Gaza City. Four Palestinians were wounded in the strike, including a 1-year-old girl.

Palestinians continued to fire rockets at southern Israel, with one rocket causing damage in Sderot. Also Monday, Palestinians surrounded the home of a Hamas operative, acting as human shields to prevent an Israeli strike after the army warned occupants to vacate the house.

## Germany probes six in El Al plot

Germany is investigating an alleged plot to blow up an El Al plane. German prosecutors announced the weekend arrests Monday, saying the alleged plot was uncovered when suspects tried to persuade an airport worker to load a bomb onto a passenger plane.

The suspects made contact with the person but were unable to agree on a price for planting the explosives. German authorities arrested six suspects last Friday, releasing five Saturday. The sixth suspect was held on an unrelated matter.

**Because of Thanksgiving, the JTA World Report will not be published Friday, Nov. 24.**

# WORLD REPORT

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## In Israeli-Palestinian conflict, peace plans abhor a vacuum

By LESLIE SUSSER

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — After rejecting a new European peace initiative, Israeli leaders are gearing up for more international efforts to restart the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating process on terms unfavorable to Israel.

Israel fears the initiatives might lead to the lifting of political and economic sanctions against the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority without it having to meet the international community's three benchmarks for dialogue: recognition of Israel's right to exist, acceptance of previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements and renunciation of terror.

The European initiative, led by Spain, France and Italy, is not the only one on the table. The Arabs have resuscitated the Saudi plan of 2002 and, perhaps most importantly, the United States is said to be working on a new plan of its own that includes an international conference based on the Saudi plan.

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, worried about where the new international initiatives might lead, wants Israel to come up with a plan to pre-empt them.

The situation is reminiscent of summer 2003. Then, too, after a long deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian relations, international initiatives began to surface. It was partly to pre-empt outside plans he thought were detrimental to Israel that then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon produced his plan to unilaterally pull Israeli troops and settlers out of the Gaza Strip.

Sharon's gambit worked: The interna-

tional community backed him and put its own ideas on hold. Indeed, in April 2004, President Bush promised that he would not back any other initiative while Sharon's disengagement plan was on the table.

The recent Lebanon war changed that. After the fighting, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, elected on a platform calling for a unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank, announced that he was shelving the plan. That created the political vacuum the new plans are starting to fill.

The European plan has five components: An immediate Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire is implemented; the Palestinians form a national unity government acceptable to the international community; Israel and the Palestinians exchange prisoners; Olmert and P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas start a peace dialogue; an international force moves into Gaza to keep the peace.

Israel rejected the plan on the grounds that it contains nothing new, except the call for an international force in Gaza, which Israel opposes. The Israelis argue that such a force would only make it more difficult for Israel to monitor the huge influx of weapons into Gaza across the Egyptian border.

The European plan has yet to be adopted by the European Union, several of whose members regard it as a dilettantish piece of work. But the European Union wants to play a role in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and may well come up with a more substantial proposal.

Here Britain could prove important. On the eve of a meeting this week with Livni,

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NEWS  
ANALYSIS

## ■ *New international peace efforts could lift sanctions on Hamas prematurely*

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British Prime Minister Tony Blair reiterated his view that Israeli-Palestinian peace could greatly help the West in its battle against radical Islam. Blair, who is stepping down soon, also has said he intends to devote much of the rest of his time as prime minister to promoting Middle East peace.

The Arab plan, being pushed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, has two stages: Acceptance of the Saudi initiative of 2002 as a basis for peace talks, followed by an international peace conference. The Saudi initiative calls for full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territory and a resolution of Palestinian refugee demands in return for peace with all 22 Arab countries and the Palestinians.

Israel has expressed reservations about the Saudi initiative, concerned that it could generate pressure for the return of millions of Palestinian refugees to Israel and impose a territorial solution without room for negotiation.

But the United States is showing growing interest in the Saudi plan. As part of the Bush administration's exit strategy from Iraq, senior Israeli officials believe, the United States may buy into the idea of an international conference based on the Saudi initiative.

"For months the Americans have been trying to cultivate an axis of moderate Arab states, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, as a counterweight to the Iranian-led 'axis of evil.' Backing the Saudi initiative would give them added



Brian Hendler

Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema, left, and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni talk to the media in Tel Aviv in September.

leverage," a senior Israeli official told JTA.

For weeks there have been rumors that the United States is trying to set up an international conference in which Israel and moderate Arab states would be the main players. The idea would be to explore the Saudi initiative and strengthen Abbas by providing financial and military support for his Fatah movement in its internal struggle with Hamas, which is even more radical.

Israel, however, fears that all three plans — the European, Arab and American — may end up strengthening Hamas. The Israelis are concerned that the very fact that there is a process could lead to the lifting of the political and economic boycott of the Hamas-controlled P.A. Cabinet without it recognizing Israel. The European initiative, for example, says nothing about such recognition.

The Israelis add that a premature international conference could fail in spectacular fashion, and — like the failed Camp David summit of July 2000 — leave the parties even worse off.

Livni told the Cabinet on Sunday that

Israel therefore should come up with a detailed plan of its own. She suggested a cease-fire, followed by the Palestinian government's acceptance of the three international benchmarks and, after prisoner exchanges, quick movement to a Palestinian mini-state and a framework for negotiations on a final peace deal.

The call is Olmert's. He does not believe Bush or the new Democratic U.S. Congress will try to pressure Israel on the Palestinian or Syrian tracks. This despite the fact that former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's Iraq exit-strategy report, due to be submitted to Bush soon, is widely expected to include recommendations for negotiations on both tracks.

Olmert wants to see movement, at least with the Palestinians. And some pundits believe that behind the scenes he may be working secretly on the contours of a deal with Abbas.

On Sunday, Olmert gave a clue, berating Defense Minister Amir Peretz for discussing a cease-fire with Abbas.

"Don't interfere," he said. "You could be spoiling things."

**'The Americans have been trying to cultivate an axis of moderate Arab states... Backing the Saudi initiative would give them added leverage.'**

**Israeli official**

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# Captured soldier's family watches, waits

By JOSEPH MILLIS

LONDON (JTA) — Shlomo Goldwasser knew his son, Ehud, was in trouble on the Lebanon border in July, even though he himself was several thousand miles away in Namibia at the time.

"As soon as the news alert about two Israeli soldiers being kidnapped on the Lebanon border flashed up on CNN, I knew I was in the game," Shlomo Goldwasser told JTA this week during a brief visit to London.

Goldwasser and his wife, Malka, and their daughter-in-law Karnit, Ehud's wife, were in the British capital for meetings with officials and legislators and to take part in an annual *British Friends of Technion* talk on terrorism.

Childhood sweethearts, Ehud and Karnit Goldwasser are both Technion students, on the verge of finishing masters' degrees in environmental studies.

Shlomo Goldwasser works in shipping in Durban, South Africa. A small and intense man who is a former ship's captain, Goldwasser seems worn down by the family's ordeal.

"Until now, we have had no proof, no real proof, that Udi is still alive. No tapes, no photos, no DNA. Nothing," he said wearily.

Six weeks ago, Karnit Goldwasser met Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, but he was vague about Ehud's condition.

"He told Karnit that Udi is alive and in good condition, but that's about all," Shlomo Goldwasser said.

■  
The family received the same message from Italian officials. As far as Goldwasser is concerned, Hezbollah "is planting the message that Udi and Eldad Regev," the other soldier nabbed in a July 12 cross-border raid that sparked a monthlong war, "are alive, for whatever reason. I suppose he won't be useful to them if he's dead."

Without wishing to be publicly critical of the Israeli government's handling of the episode, Goldwasser makes his feelings clear.

"They went to war immediately after the kidnapping with the stated aim of getting the boys back. But the war is over and our sons are not here," he said. "Then there was the blockade of Beirut and its airports and Lebanon's ports. But that's over and

our sons are not back. Then the last Israeli soldier left Lebanon and still our sons are not home."

"We haven't even received any information about our sons," he continued. "Hezbollah is playing its cards very close to their chests."

Malka Goldwasser was more critical.

"For the past six years, since Israel withdrew from Lebanon, they haven't prepared properly for this situation, even though we knew it was likely to happen," she said. "We didn't plan a war, we planned for peace. We set up small hotels and we developed tourism in the North. We were preparing for peace. They were preparing for war."

Malka Goldwasser recalled how the family's life changed beyond recognition in one day.

"Five days beforehand, Shlomo and I were sitting on the balcony in Durban, looking at the bright lights of the casino, sipping wine and talking about our good life and our wonderful children. We hadn't a care in the world," she said.

Now the family is back in Nahariya, Israel, six miles from the Lebanon border, waiting.

During the London visit, Karnit rushed to the British Parliament to raise her husband's plight with legislators.

She has been described as a latter-day

Avital Sharansky, the wife of the former Soviet dissident, who fought tirelessly for her husband's release from the Gulag.

"I have heard that said," Karnit told JTA with a shy smile. "But I'm me. I'm his wife. I want him back. He's No. 1 in my life and I need to work for him. Udi is my job right now. I will talk to anyone who wants to listen and people who don't want to listen."

Malka Goldwasser is less comfortable with the comparison.

Avital Sharansky "was dealing with a country, with a government that, bottom line, was rational," she said. "Hezbollah aren't like that."

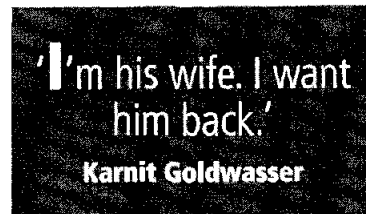
Malka Goldwasser grew up in Nahariya and "knows the Arabs well. I used to play with them in their villages. But Hezbollah is something else. Their mentality is hatred."

The family describes Udi as mentally strong.

"He'll know what to concentrate on inside his head, and what not to bother with," Karnit said.

Malka Goldwasser says no obstacle will stop her from working on her son's behalf.

"I even told Tony Blair when he was in Israel to take me to meet Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah," she said. "I'll go on my knees just to get my son back." ■



## Al-Jazeera launches English station

NEW YORK (JTA) — What began a decade ago as a bold experiment in Arab journalism is now available to the English-speaking world with the launch of Al-Jazeera International, the first global television station headquartered in the Middle East to broadcast in English.

A satellite news channel based in the Persian Gulf emirate of Qatar, Al-Jazeera made waves with its launch in 1996. It was the freest media outlet in a region accustomed to newspapers and television stations that function as little more than government mouthpieces — although it often has been accused of broadcasting anti-American and anti-Israel propaganda in the guise of news.

The new English-language channel,

which starting Nov. 15 will broadcast 24 hours a day from centers in Doha, Qatar, Washington, London and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, initially will reach 80 million households worldwide, according to a news release.

Riz Khan, a former broadcaster with CNN International and the BBC who will anchor a daily one-hour news program on the new station, told JTA the station will have a much broader global focus than other channels, bringing American viewers stories that often are overlooked in other media.

"What it will do is allow people to judge for themselves openly and honestly what the channel is about," without relying on other people's portrayals, Khan said. ■

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### P.A. unity talks suspended

Talks on forming a unity government in the Palestinian Authority were suspended.

An aide to P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas, who heads the formerly dominant Fatah faction, said Monday that negotiations on joining a coalition with the governing Hamas had been suspended, given irreconcilable differences.

Palestinians had hoped that by bringing the more moderate Fatah into the government, a Western aid embargo imposed when Hamas came to power in March could be removed.

But the Islamist terrorist group has rejected donor nations' conditions that it recognize Israel and renounce terrorism.

According to one Palestinian media report, the dispute between Fatah and Hamas centered on the distribution of Cabinet portfolios.

### Indian Jews head to Israel

A group of Bnei Menashe immigrants left India for Israel.

Reuters reported that dozens of Jews left India Monday to make aliyah.

The group's 218 members originally were supposed to immigrate on the same day, but following pressure from the Indian government, which was wary of major media focus, the immigration was staggered.

The group was converted last year by rabbinical judges sent to India by Israel's Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar.

Amar has declared Bnei Menashe, who claim descent from the biblical tribe of Menashe, to be "descendants of the Jewish people" and has been working to help facilitate the aliyah of those who want to live in Israel.

Many of the 1,000 or so members of the community who arrived in Israel as tourists and later converted to Judaism live in Israel today as citizens.

### Arab families reject compensation

The families of eight Israeli Arabs shot dead by police during pro-Palestinian riots in 2000 rejected state compensation.

The relatives of the slain protesters announced Monday that they would not accept the damages offered by the state, saying they want police officers prosecuted over the October 2000 shootings.

Ten Israeli Arabs, a Palestinian living in Israel and an Israeli Jew were killed during riots staged in solidarity with the nascent intifada.

Israel decided not to press charges against policemen involved in putting down the riots, citing lack of evidence.

### Ahmadinejad dismisses Israeli threats

Iran's president shrugged off Israeli threats to attack his country's nuclear facilities as psychological warfare.

"This is a media campaign, because the Zionist regime is weak. We have faced stronger countries in the past," an official Iranian news agency quoted Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as saying Monday.

Israeli officials recently have stepped up hints that a pre-emptive strike on Iran's nuclear sites could be launched if diplomatic pressure on Tehran fails to curb its atomic ambitions.

Some independent analysts, however, believe Israel does not have the military capability to take on Iran.

### Cluster bombs under scrutiny

Israel's military chief suggested cluster bombs were used improperly during the Lebanon war.

Israel used thousands of the air force and artillery munitions against Hezbollah targets during the 34-day campaign, but leftover

bomblets have caused civilian casualties since the war ended and have drawn international censure. Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz, Israel's military chief of staff, said Monday that an investigation is under way.

"There is no doubt that one of the things we wanted to check was how orders were given and carried out," he told Army Radio. "I think we must check whether the instructions were clear. I believe they were."

An Israeli newspaper recently reported that, for budgetary reasons, Israel chose to use U.S.-made cluster bombs rather than a locally produced version, even though the former had a higher "dud" rate and therefore posed more of a threat to civilians.

### Sharansky exits

Natan Sharansky officially quit the Israeli Parliament.

The Soviet refusenik-turned-Likud lawmaker, who announced his intentions last month, tendered his resignation and was given a farewell ceremony in the Knesset on Monday.

He is expected to take up a full-time position at the Shalem Center, a conservative Jerusalem think tank.

Sharansky was one of the best-known Jewish dissidents in the former Soviet Union.

Having spent many years in KGB custody, he was released in 1986 and moved to Israel.

He entered politics in 1996 with the new immigrant party Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, eventually serving as a Cabinet minister.

## WORLD

### Germany urges transparency on looted art

Germany's culture minister and museums called for greater transparency and more provenance research for the restitution of Nazi-looted art.

The statement came after Bernd Neumann met Monday in Berlin with museum heads.

The meeting followed a contested restitution of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's 1913 "Berlin Street Scene."

Berlin's Bruecke Museum passed the painting to the heir of the Hess family, which had been persecuted by the Nazis.

The heir auctioned the work for \$38 million on Nov. 8.

The museum's patrons association argued that the Bruecke had given up the work of art too easily, and questioned whether the original owner, Tekla Hess, had really sold under duress or received less than it was worth.

Germany signed an agreement in 1998 to identify and return works of art illegally taken during the Nazis' reign.

"Restitution must become more transparent, better coordinated and more irreproachable," The Associated Press quoted Neumann as saying.

The minister is to meet with the Claims Conference later this year to discuss the issue.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Bush, Indonesia commit to Palestinian state

President Bush reaffirmed his commitment to Palestinian statehood in a meeting with Indonesia's president.

"Both presidents stressed their support for the establishment of a viable, independent, democratic and sovereign Palestinian state that would live side-by-side in peace with Israel," said a joint statement released Monday after Bush met with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono during Bush's Asian tour.

Israel and the United States hope to draw Indonesia, the most populous Muslim nation in the world, into Middle East peacemaking.