

**IN THE NEWS**
**Rice rejects overtures to Iran, Syria**

Condoleezza Rice rejected the Iraq Study Group's recommendation to engage Syria and Iran.

"They're looking for compensation to do that, and that's a problem," the U.S. secretary of state told the Washington Post's editorial board Dec. 14. The comments are the most explicit so far from the administration to reject recommendations from the study group, chaired by James Baker, the former secretary of state, and Lee Hamilton, a former congressman and longtime chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives' International Relations Committee.

**Carter responds to anti-Semitism claims**

Former President Carter responded to claims that his vehement criticism of Israel was anti-Semitic.

In a letter to "Jewish citizens of America," released Friday by the Carter Center, Carter denied he ever had claimed that American Jews control the media.

Carter said that what he sees as "overwhelming bias for Israel" comes from the Christian community.

Carter also called a meeting Tuesday with six Phoenix rabbis the "high point" of his tour to promote his recent book, "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid."

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**Pelosi adds two to appropriations**

Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), speaker-elect of the U.S. House of Representatives, doubled the Jewish membership of its most powerful committee. Announcing additions to the House Appropriations Committee this week, Pelosi increased Jewish membership from two to four with Reps. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) and Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.).

The two other Jewish lawmakers on the committee are Reps. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), and Steve Rothman (D-N.J.).

# WORLD REPORT

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## Abbas stares down Hamas with a call for early Palestinian elections

By DAN BARON

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — For Palestinians, the choices now seem stark: radical reform or civil war.

After months of prevaricating while the Palestinian Authority nose-dived into poverty and violence, P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas finally confronted his Hamas rivals by calling new elections in hopes of changing the government.

"We should not continue in a vicious circle while life breaks down," Abbas said in a long-awaited speech Saturday. "We'll go back to the people and let the people decide."

Though Abbas was, in principle, invoking an executive privilege, Hamas accused him of seeking to topple its 9-month-old administration with the West's blessing.

"This is a real coup against the democratically elected government," said Mushir Masri, a lawmaker with the Islamic terrorist group. Hamas was elected last January and took office in March, prompting a cut-off of Western aid.

Abbas didn't set a date for new elections, and it's not clear how exactly the process would proceed, as P.A. law is vague on electoral procedures. Hamas claimed Abbas was free to resign as president, but had no authority to call new parliamentary elections.

Fighting quickly flared after Abbas' announcement. In the Gaza Strip, shots were fired at the convoys of the P.A. prime minister and foreign minister, both of them Hamas leaders, and gunmen killed an Abbas bodyguard in a separate incident. U.S.-trained security forces loyal to Abbas

fanned out around government buildings.

In the streets of the West Bank, there were violent scuffles between Hamas loyalists and supporters of Abbas' Fatah faction.

In Jerusalem and Western capitals, the whirlwind developments drew mixed reactions.

While no one was upset to see Hamas under pressure, neither was the prospect of intra-Palestinian bloodshed welcomed. Even if new elections — anticipated in mid-2007 — are held peacefully, there is no guarantee that Hamas won't be re-elected. That surely would sound Fatah's death knell and confirm that the Palestinians are irrevocably taking a radical road.

The Israeli government, which long has called on Abbas to honor his international commitments by cracking down on Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups, fell silent Sunday. Political sources said Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had ordered his Cabinet colleagues to keep mum on the P.A. crisis.

That decision won rare praise from Ahmed Tibi, an Israeli Arab lawmaker and confidant of top Fatah officials. Any overt Israeli action to help Abbas "would only weaken Fatah," Tibi told Army Radio in an interview.

While he voiced worry at the violence in the West Bank and Gaza, Tibi predicted that Abbas would try to leverage the threat of new elections into talks that would prod Hamas toward compromise.

But Hamas has proven resilient, weathering a Western aid blockade on the Palestinian Authority and refusing to accommodate

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## ■ *Israel is being used by some as a justification for raising the stakes in Iraq*

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international demands that the Palestinian government recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce terrorism and honor past P.A. commitments.

The United States was less reticent than Israel about the Palestinian Authority crisis.

"While the elections are an internal matter, we hope this helps bring the violence to an end and the formation of a Palestinian Authority committed to

'the Quartet' principles," White House spokeswoman Jeanie Mamo said.

The "Quartet" is a diplomatic grouping made up of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations that's guiding the "road map" peace plan.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who was due to arrive later Sunday for a troubleshooting visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority, spoke in Abbas' defense.

"This is the moment for the international community to come behind him, to help build his authority and his capability, to deliver improvements in the living standards of the Palestinian people, but also in the progress that we all want to see on resolving the Israel-Palestinian issue," Blair said.

" Hamas at the present time is not prepared to be constructive," he added. "I think he [Abbas] is serious about elections." ■

## Should Ahmadinejad face genocide charges?

By BEN HARRIS

NEW YORK (JTA) — Barely 48 hours after the conclusion of a government-sponsored Holocaust denial conference in Tehran, Jewish leaders in New York announced an initiative to bring Iran's president to trial for inciting genocide.

An all-star lineup of prominent politicians, lawyers and Jewish leaders laid out the case against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, noting his stated objective of "wiping Israel off the map," his consistent denial of the Holocaust, and his country's pursuit of nuclear and ballistic missile capacity.

Ahmadinejad's incitement violates the 1948 U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, speakers said. Thursday's event at the New York County Lawyers' Association was organized by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Even as speakers accused Ahmadinejad of violating the genocide convention, they also sought to lay the groundwork for a military strike if diplomacy and legal action don't derail Iran's quest for nuclear weapons.

"We will try the law. We will try politics. We will try everything," said Alan Dershowitz, a prominent attorney and professor at Harvard Law School. "But if they fail, we will use self-defense."

In addition to seeking an indictment of Ahmadinejad in the International Criminal Court, Dershowitz disclosed that he and Irwin Cotler, a Canadian legislator and prominent human-rights lawyer, were preparing a brief to justify military preemption if legal efforts don't work.

"We waited once, we will not wait again," said Dershowitz, who like other speakers evoked the global silence as the Nazis prepared the Holocaust. "Do not expect passive acceptance of genocide. We will fight back."

Iranian diplomats in New York were unavailable for comment.

Several speakers expressed reservations about placing too much faith in the United Nations.

"When you're thinking about remedies, don't be naive about the United Nations," said Ruth Wedgwood, a noted international lawyer and professor at Johns Hopkins University.

She further cautioned that U.N. initiatives have a history of being turned around and used as diplomatic weapons

against the State of Israel.

Martin Peretz, editor-in-chief of The New Republic, scoffed at the idea that the United Nations could stop Iran. He accused U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan of being a "handmaiden to Darfur," where government-sponsored Arab militias have killed tens of thousands, and a silent bystander as genocides unfolded in Rwanda and Bosnia.

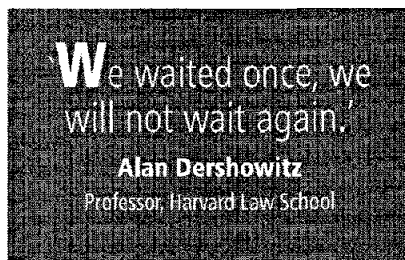
Annan "is invited to dinners all over Manhattan, at Jewish tables," Peretz said. "He should be put in herem," or excommunicated.

The resort to legal recourse against Iran was initiated by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, whose president, former Israeli U.N. ambassador Dore Gold, said Ahmadinejad was in "clear-cut violation of the anti-incitement clauses of the 1948 genocide convention."

Speakers noted two cases in which international law had been used successfully to prosecute war criminals — former Chilean leader Augusto Pinochet and Slobodan Milosevic, former president of Serbia and Yugoslavia.

But neither of those figures was brought up on charges before committing their crimes, leading a questioner to challenge the efficacy of using legal remedies to prevent Ahmadinejad from achieving his objectives.

Also speaking at the event were outgoing American U.N. envoy John Bolton, U.S. Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) and Meir Rosenne, a former Israeli ambassador to the United States. ■



**JTA**

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# Carter meeting can't repair rift

By BEN HARRIS

NEW YORK (JTA) — For Jimmy Carter, a meeting with a group of Phoenix-area rabbis was the high point of his tour to promote "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid," a new book in which the former U.S. president blames Israel for the absence of Middle East peace.

For members of the Phoenix Board of Rabbis' executive committee, who hoped a face-to-face meeting could help repair Carter's relationship with the Jewish community, the Dec. 12 encounter was a disappointment.

"As a Jewish community, we have had a great deal of respect over the years for the human-rights work you have done and your commitment to the peace process," Rabbi Andrew Straus told JTA, describing the group's message to Carter. "But your new book has hurt our relationship with you and hurt our understanding of who you are and what you're trying to do."

The meeting, which lasted more than an hour, was described as cordial and respect-

ful, but the rabbis left disheartened.

Carter claimed to be unaware of significant political differences within the American Jewish community with regard to Israel, and refused to speak out on behalf of Israeli soldiers being held captive in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.

He also told the rabbis that his use of the incendiary term "apartheid" was meant to apply only to the West Bank and Gaza and not to Israel itself, which he described as a vibrant democracy.

The rabbis professed to be "shocked" by the revelation, noting that the book did not convey any sense of admiration for Israel. Carter promised he would be more explicit in drawing that distinction in subsequent media interviews.

Carter also expressed his willingness to condemn Palestinian terrorism more vociferously and to consider traveling to Israel with the rabbis, provided they also agreed to visit locations he deemed significant for his understanding of the conflict. The meeting concluded with participants joining hands in prayer.

In a subsequent phone call with Carter, Straus asked the former president if he saw the Palestinians as bearing any measure of culpability for the breakdown in the peace process.

"He couldn't see any failures," Straus said.

"Somehow or another, he has accepted the Palestinian vision and understanding of the Israeli-Arab dialogue, and is not able to be critical of the Palestinian community," said Straus, of Temple Emanuel of Tempe, Ariz. "You read through the book and there's almost no criticism of Palestinians, almost no mention of terrorism."

Released last month, Carter's book has come under intense criticism from Jewish organizations who have blasted everything from its title — which evokes comparisons to apartheid South Africa — to its scholarship, which has been described as shoddy and riddled with errors.

The Anti-Defamation League, in particular, has taken Carter to task, sponsoring an ad campaign in major American publications and devoting a section of its

Web site to criticizing the book.

Abraham Foxman, the ADL's national director, told JTA that Carter is "engaging in anti-Semitism" by suggesting that his book is a reaction to stifled debate on Israel.

Criticism of Carter has not been restricted to Jewish organizations.

Writing in the *Washington Post*, Michael Kinsley called the apartheid analogy "a foolish and unfair comparison, unworthy of the man who won — and deserved — the Nobel Peace Prize."

The chorus of outrage was heightened by the resignation last week of Kenneth Stein from his post as a fellow of the Carter Center, the former president's human rights foundation based at Emory University in Atlanta.

In his letter, which ended a 23-year association with the center, Stein claims the book is "replete with factual errors, copied materials not cited, superficialities, glaring omissions, and simply invented segments."

Carter has stood his ground, as he did in the Phoenix meeting. In interviews he has said that in some instances, Israeli conduct is "even worse" than South Africa's.

Last Friday,

Carter released a letter to "Jewish citizens of America," denying that he had ever claimed that U.S. Jews control the media and clarifying that what he sees as "overwhelming bias for Israel" comes from the Christian community. He also acknowledged that the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's efforts to build support for Israel in Washington are legitimate, but lamented what he called the absence of countervailing voices.

Many have noted the irony that it was during Carter's presidency that Israel achieved its most significant breakthrough in relations with its Arab neighbors: the 1979 peace treaty signed by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Carter presided over the negotiations at the presidential retreat at Camp David.

But that history only further saddens those who would look to Carter as a peacemaker. ■

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### THIS WEEK

#### MONDAY

■ President Bush meets at the White House with top Jewish educators from Hillel, Yeshiva University, Brandeis University and seminaries. Later in the day he lights the White House menorah and hosts the annual Chanukah party.

#### TUESDAY

■ Bush administration official Karl Rove briefs Jewish leaders who are in Washington to attend the White House Chanukah party.

■ Yad Vashem's International Institute of Holocaust Research holds a conference marking 60 years since the Nuremberg Trials. The conference will draw researchers, legal scholars, and historians from Europe, the United States and Israel. Topics to be addressed include the effect of the Nuremberg Trials on current international law, the Eichmann trial, the trials of kapos and the representation of the trials in film.

#### SATURDAY

■ The Palestine Liberation Organization mission in Washington stages a "Christmas procession" to bring attention to the plight of West Bank Christians, which the PLO blames on Israel's continued presence in the West Bank. Actors playing Mary and Joseph will lead a donkey around the White House.

President Carter is not able to be critical of the Palestinian community.

Rabbi Andrew Straus

Temple Emanuel, Tempe, Ariz.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDEAST

**Syria softens on Golan**

Syria said it could give up its demand for a return of the Golan Heights as a precondition for peace talks with Israel.

"A constructive dialogue has to start without preconditions," Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem told The Washington Post last Friday in what appeared to be the first public softening of Damascus' demand.

Syria has issued several peace overtures to Israel since the summer war in Lebanon, but Jerusalem has regarded them with suspicion, noting that Damascus is eager to distract from its support for Palestinian terrorists and alleged involvement in the Iraqi insurgency.

**Israeli soccer embroiled in fixing scandal**

Israeli soccer was rocked by a match-fixing scandal.

Three players from the second-division Hapoel Beersheba team appeared in court over the weekend on charges of accepting bribes to influence the outcome of at least one match. The arrests prompted the cancellation of the team's next game.

**Pal-Kal inventor convicted**

The inventor of a faulty building material was convicted in connection with the collapse of an Israeli banquet hall.

Jerusalem District Court on Sunday found Eli Ron and three of his associates guilty of negligent manslaughter in the Versailles disaster case. Ron invented Pal-Kal, a building material used in Jerusalem's Versailles banquet hall. The building collapsed in 2001, killing 23.

The hall's three owners are serving 30-month prison terms for their role in installing the Pal-Kal.

## NORTH AMERICA

**Bush marks Chanukah**

President Bush sent Chanukah greetings, marking it as a freedom holiday.

"After Jerusalem was conquered by an oppressive king and the Jews lost their right to worship in freedom, Judah Maccabee and his followers courageously set out to reclaim Jerusalem from foreign rule," Bush said in his message Dec. 15.

"Each year the glow of the menorah is a reminder of the blessings of a just and loving God and the sacrifices made over the centuries for faith and freedom."

**White House slams Nelson on Syria**

The Bush administration slammed Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) for visiting Syria.

Tony Snow, the White House spokesman, said Nelson's visit this week was "inappropriate" when administration policy is to isolate the Bashar Assad regime as long as it backs terrorist and insurgent activities in Lebanon, Iraq and among the Palestinians.

**O.U., Agudah revile Neturei Karta**

The Orthodox Union and Agudath Israel of America, the two top U.S. Orthodox Jewish groups, called Neturei Karta representatives who appeared at a Holocaust denial conference in Iran last week a "disgrace."

Neturei Karta spokesmen at the conference said Israel's existence posed a greater threat to the Jews than their newfound friends in the Holocaust denier community.

The tiny sect rejects Zionism, arguing that Jews should not form their own state but must wait passively until the Messiah comes and miraculously confers sovereignty.

**Orthodox Jew to New Hampshire state house**

New Hampshire swore in its first Orthodox Jewish state representative last Wednesday.

Rep. Jason Bedrick, 23, was elected in a state that has fewer than 10 Orthodox Jewish families, according to the Union Leader newspaper. Bedrick, a Chabad-Lubavitch follower who keeps strictly kosher and does not shake hands with women, won his election by six votes.

**Bush honors Sharansky, Lederberg, Safire**

Three Jews were among those receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

President Bush hosted a White House ceremony Dec. 15 for nine medal recipients, including Natan Sharansky, an Israeli political leader who was imprisoned nine years in the Soviet gulag; Joshua Lederberg, a Nobel laureate and science adviser to several presidents who specializes in space travel and genetics; and William Safire, a speechwriter for President Nixon who became an influential New York Times columnist.

**Palestinian policy worsens U.S. image among Arabs**

The perception of U.S. policy toward the Palestinians has a profoundly negative impact on Arab opinion about the United States, a poll showed.

The Bush administration's Palestinian policy scored high negatives in the Zogby International poll carried out in November on behalf of the Arab American Institute in five countries, with 88 percent of respondents giving "negative" ratings in Saudi Arabia and Jordan; 93 percent in Morocco; 74 percent in Lebanon; and 51 percent in Egypt.

U.S. policy toward the Palestinians scored as one of two major reasons for the negative change in all five countries.

**Reform launches campaign for recognition**

Leaders of the Reform movement launched a campaign to demand recognition from the Israeli government.

The North American Federation of Temple Youth, the movement's youth organization, is encouraging Reform teens to send letters to Israeli President Moshe Katsav, who refused to refer to Reform leader Eric Yoffie as a rabbi.

## WORLD

**Jews attacked in Ukraine**

Three Orthodox Jews were attacked in Ukraine's capital.

Elhanan Shershevsky, an Israeli teacher at a Kiev synagogue, and two other Orthodox Jews, all in traditional Orthodox garb, were attacked Dec. 10 not far from Kiev's main synagogue. The incident was not reported to the media for a week.

According to witnesses, 10 young men hit the three Jews and a passer-by who tried to stop the attackers. Shershevsky suffered injuries and a concussion.

**World War II massacre marked**

Ukrainian Jews and officials marked the 65th anniversary of a World War II massacre.

Local officials, deputies of the Ukrainian Parliament, Holocaust survivors and Jewish community members gathered Dec. 14 in Kharkov, Ukraine's second largest city, for a ceremony at the site of Drobitsky Yar, located just outside Kharkov. From December 1941 to January 1942, Nazis and local collaborators killed 16,000 to 24,000 Jews, Red Army prisoners of war and resistance fighters in Drobitsky Yar.