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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israeli killed in ambush

An Israeli woman was killed in a Palestinian ambush in the West Bank on Monday. Rescue workers tried to resuscitate the woman at the scene of the drive-by shooting near Ramallah.

She was transferred to a hospital in Jerusalem where she died of her wounds, according to Israel Radio. Another Israeli reportedly was wounded in the attack.

Israeli army hits Gaza HQ

Israeli forces raided the main Palestinian security compound in Gaza City. Israeli helicopters, soldiers and tanks took part in Monday's strike, which targeted the headquarters of the Preventive Security Service.

The operation uncovered dozens of mortar shells and grenades, three rocket-propelled grenades, as well as mines, ammunition and anti-tank missiles.

Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said the cache proves the "tight connection between the security forces of the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian terror groups."

Israeli forces pulled out after about three hours, leaving several of the compound's 11 buildings in ruins. A few hours after the raid, Palestinians fired two missiles at a Jewish settlement near Gaza City but caused no damage or injuries, the army said.

Hijacker wanted to hit Tel Aviv

An Israeli Arab who allegedly attempted to hijack an El Al flight on Sunday said he wanted to carry out a Sept. 11-like attack, according to his Turkish interrogators. Citing the interrogation, Turkish TV reported Monday that the man had wanted to crash the plane into a Tel Aviv building.

According to The Associated Press, which cited Israeli officials Monday, the man was not wielding a knife when he allegedly confronted a stewardess before trying to rush the cockpit.

10 Commandments statue nixed

A U.S. judge ruled that a monument of the Ten Commandments must be removed within 30 days from the Alabama judicial building.

The judge ruled Monday that the 5,300-pound monument in the state capital of Montgomery violates the U.S. Constitution's ban on government endorsement of religion.

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Palestinian talks fail to yield truce, and attacks against Israel continue

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Supposed truce talks between Hamas and Fatah representatives in Cairo must leave some Israelis wondering what Palestinians mean when they talk about a cease-fire.

According to early reports, Fatah planned to press Hamas to stop carrying out terrorist attacks.

Later reports said the talks were aimed at limiting attacks to just the West Bank and Gaza Strip, not inside Israel proper.

Then it was reported that any cease-fire would last only for three months, to avoid helping right-wing politicians before Israel's Jan. 28 elections.

Since the meetings ended without any cease-fire declaration -- and with, instead, an agreement to cooperate in the fight against Israel — the idea that a truce was even on the agenda seems questionable.

In fact, it was a gunman from Fatah's own Al-Aksa Brigade who crossed into Israel proper and killed five civilians, including two children, in Kibbutz Metzer on Nov. 10, while the Cairo talks were still under way.

Then, on Nov. 15, days after the Cairo talks ended, Islamic Jihad terrorists attacked a group of settlers returning from Sabbath prayers in Hebron.

When Israeli troops and other security personnel responded to the gunfire, the Palestinians ambushed them, killing 12. Another 14 Israelis were wounded.

That brought the tally of Israeli casualties from the Palestinian intifada to 668 dead and 4,755 wounded.

Moderates in the Palestinian camp are well aware that terrorist escalation is likely to strengthen the right in Israel's elections. In fact, just hours before the Hebron attack, Sari Nusseibeh, the top PLO official for Jerusalem, published an article on the front page of the Al-Quds newspaper urging the Palestinians to act more moderately in order to strengthen the Israeli left.

The Hebron ambush symbolizes the general situation of near-anarchy in the Palestinian territories. The Israel Defense Force maintains a strong military presence, but does not have direct control over the Palestinian population.

Many believe that the Palestinian Authority has lost control over the territories, whether because it's unable to master the situation or because it prefers chaos that allows terrorism to flourish while giving the Palestinian government the ability to deny responsibility.

In that situation, many Israeli officials believe that even if the Palestinians do decide on a cease-fire, it will be nearly impossible to enforce. While Hamas and Islamic Jihad maintain tight control over their military cadres, Fatah — P.A. President Yasser Arafat's mainstream movement — has become a collection of small gangs that often do not respect any central authority.

The Hebron attack also illustrates the conundrum facing Israeli decision-makers. Israel repeatedly is pressed to ease up on the Palestinians, both to improve the lot of the general population and to give Palestinian officials an incentive to work toward moderation. Yet the terror groups invariably take advantage of any easing of restrictions to launch new attacks.

The IDF stopped patrolling most Palestinian areas of Hebron on Oct. 25 as part of a plan promoted by then-Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer. Under the plan, Israeli

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MIDEAST FOCUS

Abba Eban laid to rest

Abba Eban was buried Monday in Israel's Kfar Shmaryahu Cemetery. Israeli President Moshe Katsav, Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres delivered eulogies at the funeral. Eban, a former foreign minister and ambassador to the United States and United Nations, died Monday at 87.

Reports: 'Road map' being revised

The U.S. plan for an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord reportedly is being revised. The latest draft, obtained by The Associated Press, contains some answers to Palestinian concerns, including a softening of a demand to name a prime minister to relieve Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat of some of his duties.

The changes in the draft are apparent in its new title, according to the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*. The original draft was called a "performance-based road map," and reflected the Israeli demand that all progress be contingent on Palestinian compliance. Now it's being called "a performance-based, goal-oriented road map," apparently a reflection of the Palestinian demand for a clear timetable for progress.

Red Cross, Magen David sign pact

Israel's Magen David Adom was to sign its first-ever cooperation agreement Monday with the American Red Cross. The accord calls for coordination and cooperation between the two relief organizations in case of disaster.

Report: Syria rejects U.S. call

Syria reportedly rejected a call from the United States to close the Damascus offices of Islamic Jihad. Israel's Ibm news agency reported that the message was delivered Monday by the U.S. ambassador in Damascus following a directive from the White House.



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troops would pull out of West Bank areas where relative quiet prevailed, giving the Palestinian Authority a chance to prove that it could maintain order.

It now turns out that the Islamic Jihad cell that carried out the attack had returned to Hebron after Israeli troops departed.

Islamic Jihad is a much smaller organization than Hamas in terms of organization, membership, military potential and popular backing.

Islamic Jihad does not receive its orders from Cairo, Gaza or Ramallah; its headquarters are in Damascus and it operates with Syrian backing and Iranian military and financial support.

The Damascus operation is run by Ramadan Shahal. Locally, the group's power base is in Gaza, and its leaders are well-known: Sheikh Abdullah Shami is its religious leader, Nafez Azzam and Mohammad Hindi its political figures.

However, the group's terrorist network is highly clandestine and smaller than those of Hamas and Fatah. That is a disadvantage in terms of popular support, but allows the group to more easily elude Israeli military thrusts.

In the past, when Arafat felt his reign threatened by the radical Islamic organizations, he imposed temporary crackdowns, imprisoning their activists for several months.

He did so in 1996, following a series of suicide attacks inside Israel that threatened to — and ultimately did — throw the Israeli elections to Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu over Labor's Shimon Peres.

There still are occasional confrontations between Fatah and the Islamic groups, such as the arrest last summer of Hamas activists over a blood feud in Gaza. But with the outbreak of the intifada more than two years ago, Fatah has cooperated with Hamas and Islamic Jihad in a number of terrorist attacks.

With no peace talks under way, Arafat might be too weak to oppose the Islamist organizations even if he wanted to. Thus he gave the green light for the Cairo talks — though many analysts believe he may have torpedoed them by releasing — and his top aides.

Still, the talks were important because they marked the first time that delegations from Hamas and Fatah met to coordinate their activities since a November 1995 agreement, which was also hammered down in Cairo.

Zacharia Agha, a member of Fatah's Central Committee, headed one delegation, while Hamas was represented by Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook, deputy head of its political department. The dialogue was held under the auspices of the Egyptian government, with European involvement.

The talks dealt not only with attacks on Israel, but with the entire scope of relations between the two groups.

The talks produced nothing in the direction of ending attacks on Israel. In fact, though Arafat has committed himself in various peace agreements to disarm Hamas, the talks ended with a statement pledging that Fatah and Hamas would cooperate in the fight against Israel and work to preserve Palestinian unity.

Osama Hamdan, a Hamas representative in Lebanon, brought up Fatah's attack in Kibbutz Metzer as a sign that Fatah itself was not interested in ending attacks inside Israel.

"The dialogue is not based on the cessation of resistance but rather on the unity of the Palestinian ranks," he said.

So far the talks have produced the type of results Arafat seems to specialize in: favorable media reports and statements of intent, but no real decisions.

Unofficially, Fatah spokesmen said an understanding was reached that if Israel stopped all military activities against the Palestinians, Hamas also would lay down its weapons.

Hamas, however, denied any such understandings.

Though the Palestinian Authority is not a representative democracy, results of the latest poll by the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion may explain why the Cairo talks ended the way they did, and why cheering crowds in Gaza celebrated the Hebron attack.

According to the poll, some 45 percent of Palestinians support the continuation of suicide attacks, and 50 percent support the continuation of the armed intifada. Other recent Palestinian polls have shown even much higher support for attacks.

If there's a silver lining in the poll, it's that another 45 percent support, to varying degrees, the American "road map" for peace. □