

THE BATTALION

Powell seeks further Israeli withdrawal, more action

JERUSALEM (AP) — Secretary of State Colin Powell is trying to expand Israel's withdrawal on the West Bank and persuade Yasser Arafat to commit to some version of a cease-fire, limited results as he concludes a mission aimed at halting 18 months of escalating violence.

"I think we are making progress and are looking forward to making more progress in the next 24 hours," Powell said Tuesday.

But Israeli forces moved into a West Bank town and three villages near Jerusalem and imposed curfews as part of a high security alert timed to Israel's Independence Day.

Palestinians condemned the new incursions. But Powell has tempered his public calls for a total and quick military departure now that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has announced a pullout from all but Ramallah and Bethlehem within a week.

In any event, Israeli officials said the withdrawal would not preclude efforts to arrest Fuad Shobaki, who they accused of overseeing attacks on Israel and the abortive shipment of 50 tons of Iranian weapons to the Palestinians.

And, the officials said on condition of anonymity, they remained determined to arrest the plotters of the assassination last October of Tourism Minister Rehavam Zeevi.

Powell will have a second and final session with the Palestinian leader Arafat on Wednesday at his rocket-battered Ramallah headquarters, where he has been confined by Israeli troops for nearly three weeks.

In his meeting with Arafat, and in a one-



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An Israeli sniper keeps watch near the Mount Hertzl Military Cemetery in Jerusalem on Tuesday prior to the official memorial day ceremony for fallen soldiers.

hour session Tuesday with Sharon at the prime minister's home in midtown Jerusalem, Powell also was taking up the international peace conference that is quickly taking shape.

He would like to wind up the trip with fresh assurances from Arafat to reduce violence.

But Powell is falling short of the formal cease-fire he left Washington in search of 10 days ago.

Still, the peace conference would implement Powell's declared search for an

accelerated political process, one that President Bush and Powell have said must produce a Palestinian state.

Bush also had insisted on a quick withdrawal of Israeli forces, echoing European and Arab demands.

Sharon said the peace conference probably would be held in June in the United States. A site has not been selected. A potential problem is that Sharon wants to screen out Arafat but attend himself, even though the tentative plan is to hold it at the foreign ministers level.

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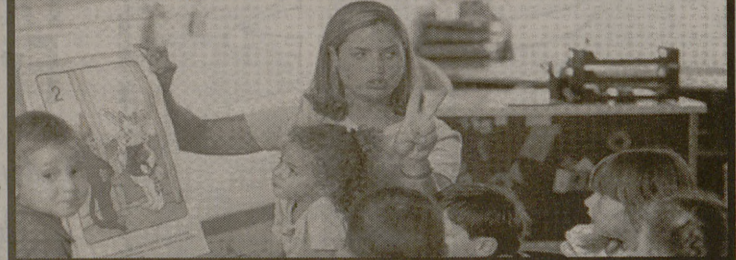
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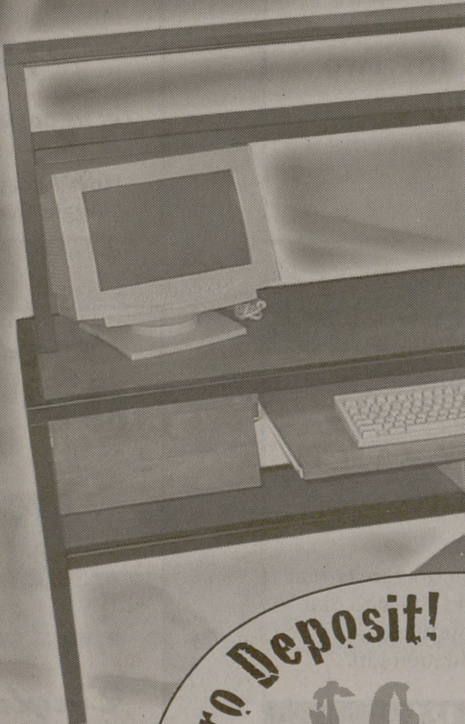
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