

Wednesday, August 27, 2003

THE BATTALION

Israeli missiles hit Gaza City

By Stephen Graham
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM — Yasser Arafat appointed a new national security adviser Monday, an apparent bid to reassert control over the Palestinian security forces and undermine his prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas.

Arafat is locked in a struggle over control of the Palestinian security forces with Abbas, who has Washington's backing and is under pressure to crack down on Palestinian militants following a Hamas suicide bombing last week. The bombing and Israel's fierce response has thrown the U.S.-backed "road map" peace plan into turmoil.

In Gaza City, Hamas supporters warned Israel to "prepare coffins" after burying four militants killed in an Israeli missile strike Sunday, just four days after a similar strike killed a senior Hamas leader.

Abbas' Cabinet had no direct say in Arafat's decision to appoint Brig. Gen. Jibril Rajoub and establish a new national security council, which Arafat himself will chair.

Rajoub said the security council will oversee "reform of the security forces and its leadership." But he refused to discuss the scope or timing of its work. "Let's wait and see. We're still starting up," he said.

Israel and the United States want Palestinian authorities to unify their security forces in order to dismantle the armed groups — a key provision of the "road map." Secretary of State

Israeli missiles kill bystander, wound at least 26

The target of the attack in Gaza City, a member of the Hamas military wing, managed to flee before missiles struck the vehicle he was riding in, witnesses said.



SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI AF

Colin Powell last week appealed in vain to Arafat to give Abbas full authority over security so he can clamp down on Islamic militants.

Abbas was appointed in April under heavy U.S. and Israeli pressure to find an alternative to Arafat. But even he has been reluctant to crack down on militants, fearing it could spark civil war among the Palestinians.

Arafat fired Rajoub from his role as West Bank security chief

in July 2002 after an argument. But Rajoub and Abbas' security chief Mohammed Dahlan are also adversaries, and it appeared Arafat was trying to use Rajoub in his campaign to undermine Abbas' fledgling government.

Ghassan Khatib, a minister in Abbas' Cabinet, said the appointment was baffling and acknowledged Rajoub's presence at Arafat's side could further complicate relations between Arafat and Abbas.

"The appointment might add to the tension, but we don't know yet because we don't know what the appointment means," Khatib said.

Rajoub said the council would "oversee cooperation" with the United States, Russia, the United Nations and the European Union, the four backers of the peace plan.

Israel insists it has not abandoned the peace plan. But Army chief Lt. Gen. Moshe Yaalon declared on Sunday that every member of Hamas was now "a potential target for liquidation," underlining the tough new Israeli policy adopted after the Hamas bus bombing in Jerusalem last week that killed 21 people.

Its strike Sunday killed Ahmed Aishtawi, a top Hamas operative, as well as three others close to the crowded beach front in Gaza City.

Some of the victims were decapitated by the assault, and more than a dozen bystanders were injured, Hamas was defiant.

"Our response will be painful and quick," the Hamas military

wing, Izzedine al Qassam, said in a statement.

"We are on the way, and we say to him that your assassinations will only bring death and destruction to your people in their own homes," one speaker at the funeral said. Pointing a rifle toward the two bodies, he added: "All of us wish to be in their places."

On Monday evening, Hamas distributed a five-point list of instructions at Gaza mosques on how militants could avoid Israeli air strikes.

The statements, carrying a Hamas logo, urged fighters to avoid making appointments by cell phone for fear of Israeli eavesdroppers, to avoid traveling by car, especially in groups on main streets, and to use makeup and clothes to disguise themselves.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank city of Hebron, police and soldiers removed some 50 Jewish settlers and a trailer from a site known as Worshipers Way. Five settlers who refused to go were arrested, police said.

Since November, when an Islamic Jihad ambush in the area killed 12 security guards and soldiers, settlers have repeatedly tried to establish an illegal outpost.

Under intense U.S. pressure to carry out commitments under the "road map" peace plan, Israel has dismantled several West Bank outposts but has failed to freeze construction at established settlements and to remove dozens of other illegal outposts as the plan demands.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Heat wave in France leaves thousands dead

THIAIS, France (AP) — The neat rows of freshly dug graves at a cemetery outside Paris illustrate the latest grim twist in the fallout over this summer's deadly heat wave.

The city has a backlog of 400 identified but unclaimed bodies it must bury from a blistering heat wave that has killed thousands of people. So a section of the Square of Indigents at the Thiais Cemetery will serve as a resting place — if only temporarily.

Paris officials said Monday that the 400 corpses would be buried Sept. 1 at the cemetery south of Paris. If the family turns up later, the body can be reburied elsewhere.

"Families can come when they want, recover the body and organize a funeral or cremation, as they wish," said Cendrine Chapelle, a city employee.

August is the traditional month for summer vacation in France, and many have accused families of leaving their elderly relatives at home during the two-week heat wave — and then delaying burials until after the holiday.

Officials were still compiling the casualty count from the record heat that started in early August when temperatures reached 104.

The biggest French chain of undertakers has estimated that more than 10,000 people died over the two-week span. The government initially said the estimate was probably correct, but Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin later said the figure is unreliable. A final death toll is not expected for weeks.

For now, the unclaimed bodies are in makeshift morgues in and around the French capital.

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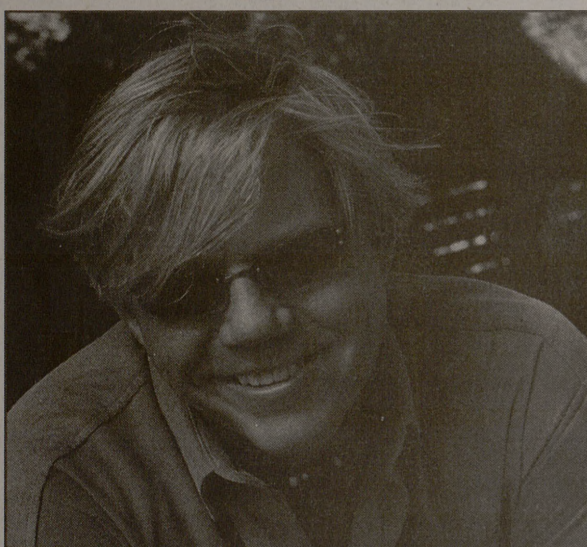
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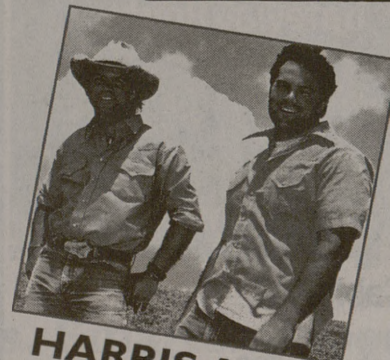
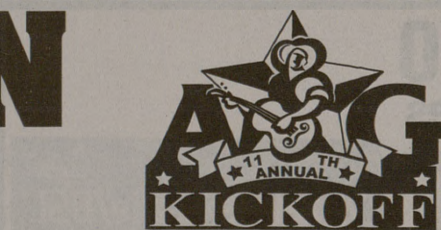
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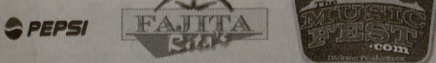


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THE BATTALION

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SR; Associated Press AP

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