

Israelis protest pull out plan

By Ramit Plushnick-Masti
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM - Israelis formed a human chain stretching 55 miles from Gaza to Jerusalem to protest Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Gaza Strip withdrawal plan, as violence left six Palestinian militants dead and five Israeli children wounded.

The children, housed at a community center, were injured when Palestinians fired mortars at the largest Gaza settlement, Neve Dekalim, according to rescue services and the military. The settlement is a frequent target of Palestinian rifle and mortar fire. The attack occurred as demonstrators were heading home.

Israeli helicopters targeted a house in Gaza City in two separate missile strikes Sunday, witnesses said. One bystander was slightly injured in the missile blasts, the witnesses said. The Israeli military had no comment.

Also, Israeli forces killed six Palestinians in the West Bank town of Tulkarem. Israel Army Radio said they were members of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, loosely linked to Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement.

It was the bloodiest clash in the West Bank in a month. On June 26, Israeli forces ambushed Palestinian militants holed up in a tunnel in Nablus, killing seven.

Organizers of the human chain said they expected up to 150,000 Israelis to take part, about the same number as participated in a pro-withdrawal demonstration in Tel Aviv two months ago. Turnout appeared to be near expectations, with few gaps in the chain.

Israel Army Radio quoted police officials as estimating 70,000 people actually took part. Israel TV's Channel Two gave an estimate of 130,000.

The chain began at Nissanit, a settlement in northern Gaza, and stretched 55 miles along roads and highways to Jerusalem's Western Wall. Hundreds of rented buses carried people to various points along the route, and bullhorns signaled demonstrators to join hands.

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offensive and defensive individual position training as well as strength and conditioning. This was the last of four summer camps taught by Coach Laurie Corbelli and the volleyball team.

Bush holds slight lead as Kerry seeks to close electoral vote gap

By Ron Fournier
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON - John Kerry narrowly trails President Bush in the battle for the 270 electoral votes needed to win the White House, as he makes his case at the Democratic National Convention this week to topple the Republican incumbent.

Tall hurdles remain in his path, including Electoral College math that favors Bush.

"It's a tough, tough map. I think it's going to be a close race," said Democratic strategist Tad Devine, who helped plot Al Gore's state-by-state strategy in 2000 and plays the same role for Kerry.

"But looking back four years, we're much stronger now. I think we're going into this convention in great shape," he said.

With three months remaining in a volatile campaign, Kerry has 14 states and the District of Columbia in his column for 193 electoral votes. Bush has 25 states for 217 votes, according to an Associated Press analysis of state polls as well as interviews with strategists across the country.

Both candidates are short of the magic 270 electoral votes. The margin of victory will come from:

TOSSUPS - Bush and Kerry are running even in 11 states with a combined 128 electoral votes. Florida, Ohio, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Wisconsin, Michigan and West Virginia are the toughest battlegrounds. Two other tossups, Pennsylvania and Oregon, could soon move to Kerry's column.

LEAN KERRY - Maine, Minnesota and Washington (a combined 25 electoral votes) favor

Kerry over Bush by a few percentage points. Gore carried them in 2000.

LEAN BUSH - North Carolina, Colorado, Louisiana, Arizona, Virginia, Arkansas and Missouri (a combined 73 electoral votes) give Bush modest leads. He won all seven in 2000.

All total, 21 states are in play. Some will bounce between "lean" to "tossup" throughout the campaign.

Four years ago, Bush won 30 states and the 271 electoral votes — one more than needed. Gore won the popular vote, claimed 20 states and the District of Columbia for 267 electoral votes.

Since then, reapportionment added electoral votes to states with population gains and took them from states losing people. The result: Bush's states are now worth 278 electoral votes and Gore's are worth just 260.

Even if Kerry consolidates Gore's states, it's an easy task, the Democrats must take 10 electoral votes from Bush's column to close the electoral vote gap.

Kerry's best prospect may be in the five swing states won by Bush in 2000: Ohio, Florida, Nevada, New Hampshire and West Virginia.

Winning either Ohio's 20 electoral votes or Florida's 27 would do the trick.

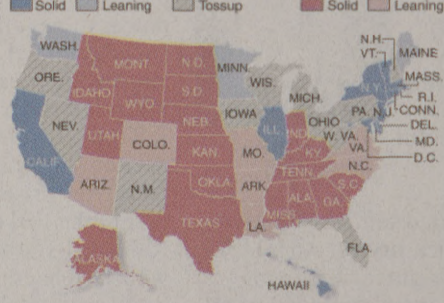
Bush easily won Ohio in 2000, but its lagging economy puts the state in play. Kerry must reduce Bush's advantages among conservative rural voters. Florida should favor Bush a more than in 2000, partly because of its relatively strong economy, but the war in Iraq helped keep the race close.

2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Battleground states key for Bush, Kerry
John Kerry narrowly trails President Bush in the chase for 270 electoral votes needed to win the White House as he heads into the Democratic National Convention this week.

Current trend of electoral votes

Kerry	Battleground states	Bush
14 states and D.C., 193 votes	11 states, 128 votes	25 states, 217 votes



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