

Yasser Arafat says peace talks 'at an impasse'

PARIS (AP) — Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said Monday that Middle East peace efforts were stalled because of Israel's delays in implementing key provisions of the autonomy accords.

"We are committed to the peace process, but we are at an impasse," Arafat said after meeting France's Socialist presidential candidate, Lionel Jospin.

Later Monday, Arafat met with President Francois Mitterrand and appealed to him to help move the process forward, then he left for Tunis. From there Arafat was to go to Cairo for a meeting of the PLO's executive committee on Tuesday.

It will be the first meeting of the committee outside the Palestinian self-rule areas since July. Some members of the executive committee resigned when Arafat signed the September 1993 peace accord with Israel, and others are expected to boycott the meeting.

PLO and Israeli negotiators also resume talks Tuesday in Cairo. The two sides have been trying to agree on an Israeli pullback of troops from the West Bank and the holding of Palestinian elections.

Tension is rising between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel over extending Palestinian autonomy to the rest of the West Bank. Arafat now controls the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.

Under the Israel-PLO accord, Israeli troops were to have pulled out of West Bank towns by last July to make way for Palestinian elections. However, Israel delayed withdrawal after a series of attacks by Islamic militants trying to sabotage the peace process.

In Jerusalem, Israeli officials said Monday that Arafat hadn't dismissed their offer to run the West Bank town of Jenin, and perhaps other cities, while Israeli troops maintained a presence there.

Israel radio quoted Arafat as saying in Paris that he was willing to consider the idea if Israel gave him control of other West Bank towns in addition to Jenin and if a timetable for eventual troop withdrawal from all towns was agreed upon.

However, a senior Palestinian negotiator said the Palestinians had rejected the idea.

"We're not going to take over any cities while Israeli soldiers remain, even if we are given guarantees and timetables by the Israelis for a troop withdrawal," said Ahmed Qureia, the Palestinian economics minister.

A French official in Paris said Arafat had painted a "very unsettling picture of the peace process" during his meeting with Mitterrand.

Arafat made clear there was a "real debate" within the PLO over continuing the peace process, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Relations between Arafat's self-rule government and the Muslim militant group Hamas also have been increasingly tense since Arafat began a crackdown on militants after a Jan. 22 suicide bombing that killed 21 Israelis.

In the Gaza Strip, gunmen firing from a car shot and wounded a local Hamas leader as he left his house Sunday evening, a Hamas spokesman said. The identities and motive of the gunmen weren't known. Police had no immediate comment.

Lebanon bombers attack Israeli land

RASHAYA, Lebanon (AP) — Tit-for-tat attacks erupted on the last active Arab-Israeli war front for a second day Monday as militants raided an outpost belonging to Israeli allies and war planes bombed guerrilla targets.

Two fighter-bombers swooped down on Jabal Abi Rashed, on the northeastern edge of the Israeli-occupied enclave in southern Lebanon, firing at least two air-to-ground missiles, said security sources.

Two jets returned less than an hour later to fire two more missiles at the same target: a dirt road used by Hezbollah guerrillas.

Hezbollah, or Party of God, reported no casualties. Ahmed Qamar, a Hezbollah leader, warned Israelis to "expect more selective military operations against them in the days ahead."

The raids, the sixth and seventh this year, came several hours after the Iranian-backed guerrillas attacked an outpost of Israel's surrogate militia, the South Lebanon Army, with machine-gun fire and grenades.

On Sunday, in the heaviest clashes this year, Hezbollah guerrillas attacked 12 Israeli and South Lebanon Army outposts.

Israeli warplanes struck back with three air raids, and tanks and artillery unleashed sustained barrages on suspected Hezbollah strongholds. Five people were killed and five wounded.

Serbian agreement may escalate war

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (AP) — Rebel Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia made military strategy together Monday for the first time, a sign that conflicts in the neighboring states could escalate into a single war.

A military council of Bosnian and Croatian Serbs discussed cooperation if Croatian Serbs are attacked by Croatian government forces, the Bosnian Serb news agency SRNA reported.

The meeting, in the Serb stronghold of Banja Luka in northern Bosnia, included Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and Croatian Serb leader Milan Martić. It ended with the creation of a joint military council.

"I hope there won't be any escalation of war if an agreement on territorial and political separation is reached," Karadzic was quoted as saying by Belgrade's Tanjug news agency. "But, unfortunately, there are prospects for war."

His military chief of staff, Gen. Manojlo Milovanovic, called the joint council a "most natural" development. "It is one people who have a common enemy," he said.

Rebel Serbs seized a third of Croatia in 1991, and Bosnian Serbs control 70 percent

of that republic after nearly three years of fighting.

Both were encouraged and supplied by Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, who says he has cut off the Bosnian Serbs to force them to make peace. But both insist they still wish to join Serbia and say Milosevic will assist them if they are in military danger.

They already have cooperated: Croatian Serbs are fighting across the border in north-west Bosnia against Bosnian government forces.

Croatia's government has told 12,000 U.N. troops stationed along Serb-Croat front lines for three years to begin withdrawing by March 31. Without the U.N. presence, the war that took at least 10,000 lives in 1991 could begin again.

Much of the Croatian Serbs' land is contiguous with Serb-held territory in Bosnia. Cooperation between the two sides could mean more troops and better supply lines and weapons for the Croatian Serbs.

But Bosnian Serbs got a warning Monday from a leading Bosnian Croat that more fighting may lie ahead in Bosnia, too.

Dario Kordic said that if the fate of Bos-

nian areas with traditionally large ethnic Croat populations is not resolved, "we will not renounce the use of force" to regain them.

U.N. spokesman Lt. Col. Gary Coward reported a sharp upsurge in fighting Monday along the so-called Posavina corridor. A narrow strip of land there is the only link between Serbia and Serb holdings in western Bosnia and western Croatia. Military analysts consider the corridor key to the entire conflict.

Coward reported that northwest Bosnia was quiet. But Bosnian radio said anti-government forces were attacking around the town of Velika Kladusa in the far northwest.

A four-month truce in Bosnia has generally held, except in the northwest. Both Bosnian Serbs and the Muslim-led government say they will not renew it if mediators cannot restart peace talks.

Milosevic on Sunday refused the latest attempt to get peace talks moving, even though it could have brought further relaxation of tough economic sanctions. He insisted sanctions be lifted before he makes concessions.

Trial may reveal attempt to maintain apartheid

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — A police commander accused of leading a terror campaign pleaded innocent Monday in a trial that could expose details of the white minority's attempts to retain power in apartheid's last days.

Testimony at Eugene de Kock's trial may support African National Congress charges that former President F.W. de Klerk's National Party fomented violence even as it opened the way to the country's first all-race elections last April.

The National Party needs to build support among the black majority if it is to have a chance challenging the ANC in future

elections. De Klerk became a deputy president in President Nelson Mandela's ANC-led coalition government.

De Kock, facing 121 charges ranging from murder to weapons offenses, is accused of heading a special police unit targeting anti-government activists.

Prosecutors say ANC agents were tortured and killed in de Kock's headquarters.

De Kock's squad has been linked to the death of an ANC lawyer who was killed when a tape recorder he received in the mail exploded. It has been accused of supplying weapons to the Inkatha Freedom Party, the ANC's main rival, in order to

destabilize the black opposition.

Former members of the unit began disclosing details of its actions as early as six years ago. An independent multiracial commission led by Justice Richard Goldstone — now the war crimes prosecutor for former Yugoslavia and Rwanda — last year uncovered evidence of police crimes.

Significant progress toward bringing de Kock to trial came only after the April election.

Now the government wants to set up a Truth Commission that would recommend granting amnesty to people who disclose full details of their apartheid-era crimes.

De Kock's lawyer, Flip Hattingh, has said his client might seek to delay trial until a Truth Commission completes its work — a process expected to last at least 18 months.

To counter that strategy, prosecutors filed charges that de Kock committed murder and other crimes for personal gain, not political reasons. The judge would have the final say on whether to delay the trial or proceed because the charges involved non-political crimes.

On Monday, Hattingh argued for access to prosecution evidence and witnesses. If granted, his request would likely postpone the trial.

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