

Violence, death proliferate throughout Middle East

■ Some officials suspect terrorism regarding a recent explosion of a U.S. Navy ship in the Middle East

By Pauline Jelinek
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials defended the Navy's decision to refuel ships in Yemen, where a suspected terrorist blast killed 17 sailors, and promised Sunday to catch and punish those responsible no matter how long it takes.

"We will track them down. We owe that to the families," Secretary of Defense William Cohen said.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright also promised results and added: "We have made very clear that whoever is involved in these things, that there's no statute of limitations and that we will pursue them. And there will be accountability."

Speaking Sunday of the dangers inherent in using such ports as Aden, where an explosion outside the USS Cole blew a 40-foot-by-40-foot hole in the ship's hull Thursday, President Clinton's national security adviser said limited fueling options in the Persian Gulf area require such stops despite the terrorism risk.

"This entire area is a high-threat area," Sandy Berger said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

But Berger noted that 25 ships have refueled in the Arabian Peninsula port without incident in the past 18 months.

"Obviously we have to find out what if anything happened in this particular case," Berger said.

Later Sunday evening, 33 injured sailors from the Cole arrived at the ship's home port of Norfolk, Va. to

cheers of awaiting family members and fellow sailors. Some of the injured needed canes or crutches to disembark the plane that returned them home, while at least four others were carried off on stretchers.

U.S. officials believe their ship was the target of a suicide attack from a small vessel packed with powerful explosives. If terrorism is proved, it would be the deadliest attack on the U.S. military since the bombing of an Air Force barracks in Saudi Arabia in 1996 that killed 19.

Cohen said on CBS' "Face the Nation" that the explosion was "clearly an act of terrorism" but agreed that such risks are inevitable when the U.S. military deploys to the Middle East and many other parts of the world.

“We understand it's a high-threat area. There are risks involved. We try to minimize those risks.”

William Cohen
Secretary of Defense

"We understand it's a high-threat area. There are risks involved," said Cohen. "We try to minimize those risks."

"But certainly we can't prevent all types of acts of terrorism," he said. The Pentagon will determine through a thorough investigation, however, "whether there was any laxity, any failure to measure up to the very highest standards that we insist upon for force protection."

Secretary of State Albright said on ABC's "This Week" that the U.S. investigation, involving the FBI and other agencies, is moving well, and the United States is "getting a

lot of people in there" to participate.

No credible organization has claimed the attack, but names mentioned have included Saudi-born fugitive Osama bin Laden. The United States accuses bin Laden of organizing a network with followers across the Middle East, including Yemen, and says he masterminded the 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies in east Africa that killed 224 people including 12 Americans.

The Pentagon said last week it is investigating whether future ships will continue to refuel in the area and reviewing whether security policies need to be changed. The U.S. ambassador to Yemen, Barbara Bodine, told reporters Sunday that no Navy ships are scheduled for Aden port calls at present.

Aden's deep-water port has been used as a refueling point for U.S. warships for about two years. Discussions also had been started on a possible permanent U.S. facility around Aden, near the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula and the southern end of the Red Sea.

Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., said many ports in the Middle East are dangerous and the decision on which port to use "is properly left" to military commanders in the region.

"I don't think this is the time to be second-guessing our uniformed military," Levin, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said on CNN's "Late Edition."

"You and I know it's always easy to go back on Monday morning and figure out what happened in Sunday's football game," agreed the committee chairman, Sen. John Warner, R-Va.

Conflict continues as Israeli, Palestinian leaders convene

■ As Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat head into a peace summit, many Palestinians and Israelis are frustrated and pessimistic

JERUSALEM — After more than two weeks of clashes, many Israelis and Palestinians agreed Sunday on a pessimistic forecast: a peace summit in Egypt won't solve any major problems or relieve the current state of bitterness.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat head into today's summit at Sharm el-Sheik, Egypt, as reluctant participants with low expectations.

Each leader has constituents who advised them not to go. Palestinian gunmen fired automatic rifles into the air outside Arafat's office Sunday night to express their opposition. Arafat came to the front gate of the compound to explain his decision to the crowd of about 200.

"We are going to Sharm el-Sheik, but taking with us the condition of the Palestinian people," Arafat said. "We are on the way to Jerusalem until a Palestinian child raises the Palestinian flag on the walls of Jerusalem."

The crowd cheered, chanting, "With our blood, and with our soul, we will defend you."

In Jerusalem, Barak spoke with President Clinton shortly before the president departed for the summit. "The two leaders agreed there would be no preconditions for the talks and that each side would present its positions during the meeting," Barak's office said in a statement.

Frustrated Palestinians believe Arafat will face intense pressure to

sign an unfavorable agreement at the summit, which will include leaders from the United States, Egypt, Jordan and the United Nations.

"Arafat shouldn't go because Barak will not give anything to us," said Annan Amr, 19, a Palestinian student. "We are here to get our rights by fighting because this is the language Israel knows."

Most Israelis were also downbeat, questioning whether the Palestinian leadership was sincere about ending the worst violence since the two sides began peace talks in 1993.

"I think Arafat doesn't want an agreement," said Niv Cohen, 22, a Jew who recently completed his army service. Arafat's "target is to keep the area violent."

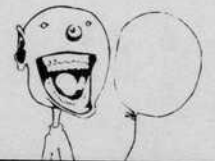
Two Israeli soldiers were lightly wounded by gunfire Sunday at the Jordanian border, according to officials in both countries. There was no word on who fired at the Israelis, who were outside the West Bank town of Jericho. Also, one Palestinian died of wounds suffered Wednesday. But no major battles were reported as violence continued to abate.

The summit's aim is relatively modest, though by no means assured. The parties will try to arrange a cease-fire, ending fighting that has claimed nearly 100 lives, most of them Palestinian, since erupting 18 days ago.

The Associated Press

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BADLY DRAWN BOY — *The Hour of Bewilderbeast*, Beggars Banquet, by Steve Lichtenstein

It's a crime that Badly Drawn Boy's debut LP won Britain's prestigious Mercury Prize last month — they should've given him two. *The Hour of Bewilderbeast* (bizarre title aside) is a blisteringly fine example of mature, well-crafted modern pop, toeing the line defined by The Beatles and eschewed by the likes of Beck and Belle and Sebastian. Tunes like the jaunty "Once Around the Block" and fragile "Fall in a River" (scenic imagery abounds here) are irresistible, and of the eighteen total songs, not one is even remotely unappealing. GPA: 3.8 (Out of 4)

FEEDBACK:

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