

Israel's Likud party vetoes Palestinian state

By Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson and Alfonso Chardy
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TEL AVIV (KRT) — In a defiant political stand that could rekindle passions throughout the Middle East, Israel's ruling Likud party voted Sunday to oppose creation of a Palestinian state.

The vote could outrage Arabs and undermine Likud's leader, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, by revealing dissatisfaction with him in his political base. Sharon opposed the resolution but lost. The vote also was a slap at President George Bush, who has asserted repeatedly that the end result of any successful peace process must include an independent Palestinian state.

While Likud historically has opposed Palestinian statehood, Sharon recently acknowledged that it will be the inevitable conclusion to any successful peace process.

Arab leaders say no peace with Israel is possible without it.

The Likud vote thus could further set back efforts to broker peace in the region and could bolster Arab claims that Israel is more responsible than the Palestinians for failure to stop the violence.

"What would really put Sharon in a bind is if the Saudis can pressure the Palestinians to stop terror attacks, then Bush and Sharon might clash," said Gershon Gorenberg of the Jerusalem Report, a biweekly, centrist English-language magazine.

Meanwhile, Israeli reservists began returning home Sunday from Gaza after military officials postponed a planned assault on the area, headquarters for the Palestinian militant group, Hamas, which claimed responsibility for a suicide attack last week that claimed 15 Israeli lives.

The reservists were called up on

an emergency basis last week hours after the suicide bomber struck.

However, Israeli tanks remained massed on the outskirts of the Gaza Strip, a Palestinian-controlled area of 1.2 million people that lies on the Mediterranean Sea between Israel and Egypt.

At Likud's central committee meeting in Tel Aviv, Sharon tried to stave off Sunday's vote by calling instead for the 2,000 party members to support the government.

"Any decision taken today on the final agreement is dangerous to the state of Israel and will only intensify the pressures on us," he said. "To make peace and preserve Israel's strength we must preserve our relationship with our best friend, the United States."

But boos and hisses drowned him out, and his motion lost 669 to 465. The anti-Palestinian state question passed on an almost over-

whelming voice vote.

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu instigated the vote in what the Israeli media described as a bid to take Sharon's job. Many party members in the packed auditorium, like Sasi Hubousku of Tel Aviv, chanted support for Netanyahu until they were hoarse.

"Sharon is not believable; tomorrow he's left, today he's right," Hubousku explained.

Netanyahu said an independent Palestinian state could spell death for Israel.

"A state could bring in weapons for its soldiers without any limit. A Palestinian state would control the aquifer, which gives us 30 percent of our water. 'Yes' to a Palestinian

state means 'no' to a Jewish state, and 'yes' to a Jewish state means 'no' to a Palestinian state," Netanyahu said.

White House officials declined to comment on the development in Israel, saying that it was a matter of domestic politics. But they said it would not deter President Bush from his goal of a Palestinian state.

"President Bush is very clear what his vision for the Middle East is, and that is two states, of Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security," White House spokesman Sean McCormack said.

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Above: LGBTQA office manager Kristina Armenakis and fine arts senior Jessie Swimeley twirl around the EMU Amphitheater.

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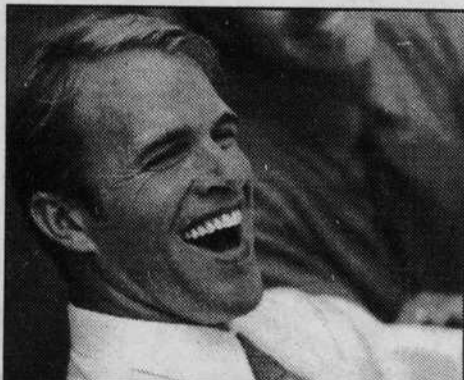
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