

Israeli soldiers storm Ramallah

By Vincent J. Schodolski
Chicago Tribune

MEGIDDO JUNCTION, Israel — Israeli troops stormed the West Bank compound of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat early Thursday, a day after a Palestinian suicide bomber killed 17 people aboard a commuter bus in northern Israel.

Gunfire resounded as Israeli tanks entered Ramallah, and Palestinian sources reported casualties at Arafat's compound.

"He's safe, but there was heavy shelling, heavy shooting," Palestinian Cabinet minister Saeb Erekat said of Arafat.

The Israeli raid came after a young man from Jenin, said to be 16 years old, drove a car laden with explosives into an Israeli commuter bus at rush hour Wednesday morning and set off a devastating explosion. Dozens of people were wounded.

Thirteen of the dead were young Israeli soldiers headed to bases in the Galilee region.

The car rammed the bus, which was headed north from Tel Aviv, just in front of Megiddo Prison, where hundreds of Palestinians are being held, Israeli radio reported.

The militant group Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack, the deadliest since Israel ended its six-week military sweep in the West Bank last month.

Islamic Jihad called the bombing "a response to the crimes of the Israeli aggression." It said the attack was timed to coincide with the 35th anniversary of the 1967 Mideast war, during which Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the territory that Palestinians demand make up the core of an independent state.

Within hours of the terrorist act, Israel sent two dozen tanks into the West Bank town of Jenin, which Islamic Jihad identified as the hometown of the assailant,

Hamza Samudi.

The bomber was 16, a relative said, making him one of the youngest bombers to strike Israel.

Israel has long identified Jenin as a nest of terrorist cells, and the army took over the town in April and May in one of the bloodiest operations of the West Bank campaign. Jenin is just a few miles from the scene of Wednesday's bus bombing.

The sweep into Ramallah came in the early hours of Thursday, exactly five weeks after U.S. intervention helped lift a 34-day siege of Arafat at his base.

Tanks and armored personnel carriers took positions outside Arafat's office and there were exchanges of fire between soldiers and Palestinians, officials from both sides said.

An Israeli armored bulldozer had begun destroying the building housing Arafat's office, Palestinian officials said.

"Arafat is not the target," said Gideon Meir, a senior Foreign Ministry official. "What Israel is doing is the minimum that it can do as an act of self-defense after the recent terror attacks, especially yesterday's vicious terrorist attack, which was aimed to kill innocent Israelis."

In Washington, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said administration officials were closely monitoring the situation outside Arafat's compound and had been in touch with both Israeli and Palestinian officials.

A senior administration official said the Israelis had indicated "they are not going after Arafat personally."

"The Israelis have acknowledged our view that we don't think harming Arafat will help the situation in any way," the official said.

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Census

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out of necessity. The heavily bike-, foot- and bus-bound students say they need the short campus commute, especially those working late jobs or studying past midnight in the Knight Library.

But the University is expected to admit a record number of students for the second year in a row this fall. Simultaneously, vacancy rates in the neighborhood are at record-low single-digit levels, according to Duncan and Brown, a local company that studies housing trends in Eugene. Apartments are also scarce in the Duck's Village, University Commons and Chase Village complexes built near Autzen Stadium about two miles from campus by private companies in the late 1990s.

The combination has administrators worried that it will be harder than ever for students to find a house or apartment in the campus' backyard.

"My impression is that next fall is going to be pretty tight," University Housing Director Mike Eyster said. "It's going to be a real problem in the community."

Fall enrollment is expected to surpass 20,000, due in part to large freshman classes over the past two years.

Associate Vice President Anne Leavitt said she has already seen students heading as far as Springfield or the Whiteaker neighborhood where the rents are lower but the commute is longer, and she said the University is working with Lane Transit District to make sure bus routes run through student areas.

Jeff Osanka, a spokesman and former chairman of the Fairmount Neighborhood Association, said many students also are heading for property east of campus. Rents is higher, but the neighborhood has fewer houses, bigger lawns and a traditional neighborhood feel.

"It's a different, quieter atmosphere," Osanka said. "We want and welcome students to move into our neighborhood."

But many West University Neighborhood residents said the combination of campus proximity and affordable rents is an advantage that express bus routes and larger front yards can't trump.

"Location played a huge factor, probably even more so than who I was going to be living with," said junior Derek Bell, who will live next year with a roommate in an apartment on 18th Avenue across from Hayward Field.

Bell, who spent the past two years as a resident assistant, said he would have kept his job for a third year if he couldn't rent a place in the neighborhood.

"Everyone has a car, it seems sometimes, and parking is so limited that it's really hard to find a spot," he added.

Senior Martha Grover has lived in the West University Neighborhood for almost two years and works at a market in downtown Eugene to help pay for school. She said classes and homework consume enough of her day, and biking two miles or waiting for the bus would be a massive inconvenience.

"Basically, the only reason I live Turn to Census, page 6

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