

# Israel, Palestine examine new 'road map' to peace

Joel Greenberg  
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

JERUSALEM — After months of delays, a blueprint for Middle East peace was formally presented to Israel and the Palestinians on Wednesday, a plan to end 31 months of violence and resume negotiations leading to a comprehensive agreement and a Palestinian state in 2005.

But even as they received the document, Israeli and Palestinian officials differed over how the plan, known as the road map, should proceed.

The plan was released under the pall of a suicide bombing early Wednesday in which three Israelis were killed and dozens wounded at a Tel Aviv pub. Israeli officials insisted that there could be no progress without effective action by the new Palestinian prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas, to halt such attacks.

Hamas and Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a militant offshoot of the mainstream Fatah movement, claimed responsibility for the bombing, calling it a message to Abbas, who had denounced terrorism and warned that he would disarm the militants in a speech Tuesday. On Wednesday, Abbas condemned the bombing.

Israeli security officials said that both the bomber and an accomplice, who fled when his explosives failed to detonate, carried British passports and had entered Israel from the Gaza Strip.

The road map was presented to Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, in Ramallah by diplomats of the so-called Quartet sponsoring the plan — the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations — after the prime minister and his Cabinet were sworn in. Confirmation of Abbas and his Cabinet was a condition set by President Bush for release of the plan.

Earlier in Jerusalem, the American ambassador to Israel, Daniel Kurtzer, handed a copy of the road map to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at his official residence.

The text was identical to a draft given to the Israelis and Palestinians in December. Both sides expressed reser-

vations. Israel has in recent weeks asked for 15 amendments to the plan, but Quartet diplomats said that it was being presented unchanged.

"We told the prime minister that the road map would not be re-opened," said UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen after meeting Abbas.

Secretary of State Colin Powell is expected to arrive May 8 for meetings with Sharon and Abbas on the plan.

Bush on Wednesday called Abbas "a man I can work with," and White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said that Abbas would be invited to Washington to meet with Bush, though he did not give a date.

In a telephone conversation with Powell, Sharon asserted that Abbas would have to go beyond negotiating a truce with militant groups, according to a statement from Sharon's office.

"The Prime Minister emphasized that the aim is not to bring about a cease-fire but a real war on terror, in which the terrorist organizations will be dismantled," the statement said. "The Prime Minister emphasized that any progress in the political process will be based solely on performance, and there will be no compromises on the issue."

Abbas is expected to try to halt the violence by restarting truce talks with militant factions, a move publicly urged on him by Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, at a parliamentary session that approved the new Cabinet. An all-out campaign against the groups, who have defiantly refused to put down their guns, runs the risk of igniting civil strife.

The leader of Hamas, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, rejected the road map Wednesday, vowing to continue attacks on Israel. "The road map aims to assure security for Israel at the expense of the security of our people," Yassin told Reuters. "Our resistance will continue, and no one will stop it."

While the Israelis are insisting on security performance by the Palestinian Authority as a condition for any action on their part, Palestinian officials point to language in the road map that

speaks of parallel moves by both sides.

"These commitments have to be carried out in parallel by the parties," said Nabil Shaath, the Palestinian foreign minister. "We cannot talk about preconditions or sequences."

In the first phase of the plan, the Palestinians are supposed to end violence, arrest militants and confiscate illegal weapons as Israel scales back military measures and gradually withdraws troops from areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip taken in the current conflict. Security cooperation is supposed to resume between the Israeli army and restructured Palestinian security forces.

The Palestinians also are supposed to carry out political reforms, including drafting a constitution and holding elections. Israel is expected to lift curfews, to ease restrictions of movement of Palestinians, to dismantle illegal outposts built by settlers and to freeze new building in settlements.

The second phase of the plan provides for the possible creation of a Palestinian state with provisional borders. The final phase envisions negotiations on a permanent agreement, resolving fundamental questions such as the fate of Palestinian refugees, borders, the status of Jerusalem and the future of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In fresh violence on Wednesday, three Palestinians were killed.

The army said that soldiers at the Gaza Strip town of Rafah near the border with Egypt opened fire at a man spotted moving in the early morning darkness toward their position, killing him. He was later found to be unarmed, and it was unclear what he was doing in the area.

Elsewhere in the Gaza Strip, Palestinians reported that a woman herding a flock of sheep was killed by army gunfire near the settlement of Netzarim. The army said it was checking the report.

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## News brief

### Republican party divided about tax plan

Jill Zuckman  
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans and administration officials have begun trying to generate majority support in Congress for President Bush's tax package despite dissent within the GOP.

Congressional leaders met with Bush at the White House on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, with the president urging lawmakers to pass \$550 billion in tax cuts, including his centerpiece plan to eliminate taxes on stock dividends.

In the narrowly divided upper chamber, four Republican senators have blocked Bush's proposal, with two opposed to any tax cuts and two others opposed to approving cuts totaling more than \$350 billion.

Adding to Bush's problems, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan told the House Financial Services Committee on Wednesday that he opposes expensive tax cuts that would increase the already large deficit.

Both the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee are expected to craft their tax proposals next week.

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