

# Sharon vows to implement unilateral steps in months

## US warns Israel on imposing solution

AFP, AP, Herzliya

Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon gave notice to the Palestinians Thursday that he would abandon attempts to reach a peace deal and implement his own unilateral measures if they did not meet their commitments to the Middle East roadmap within months.

"We wish to speedly advance implementation of the roadmap towards a quiet and genuine peace," Sharon said in a keynote speech here.

"We hope that the Palestinian Authority will carry out its part. However if in a few months the Palestinians still continue to disregard their part in implementing the roadmap then Israel will initiate the unilateral security step of disengagement from the Palestinians."

"The disengagement plan" will be realised only in the event that the Palestinians continue to drag their feet and postpone implementation of the roadmap."

His speech brought immediate

condemnation from the Palestinians with premier Ahmed Qorei saying that he was disappointed by the "threats" while the top aide to veteran leader Yasser Arafat said it amounted to a rejection of the roadmap.

The White House warned that the United States would oppose any "unilateral" moves by Israel that falls outside the terms of the roadmap.

And Sharon also came under fire from Israeli settlers after warning that settlements would be evacuated under the terms of a program of unilateral disengagement.

"The relocation of settlements will be made first and foremost in order to draw the most efficient security line possible, thereby creating this (unilateral) disengagement between Israel and the Palestinians," Sharon said.

Sharon did not name which settlements would go but Bensi Lieberman, president of the Settlers' Council, vowed to battle any such plan.

"If we come to the conclusion that

the prime minister will take unilateral measures which will involve the transfer of Jews and dismantling of communities we will do everything in our power to prevent these measures becoming reality," Lieberman told public television.

Sharon also vowed that Israel would "greatly accelerate" construction of its West Bank separation barrier which has come under fierce international criticism for cutting deep into Palestinian land.

"The rapid completion of the security fence will enable the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) to remove roadblocks and ease the daily lives of the Palestinian population not involved in terror," he said.

Sharon's talk of unilateral measures prompted an angry response from the Palestinian leadership which opposes non-negotiated decisions that might affect their future state and fear any redeployment would be considered definitive by Israel, whether or not it matches internationally recognised borders.

Sharon told AFP that he was prepared for talks with Sharon and insisted that a bilateral agreement remained possible.

AP adds: The United States warned Israel against imposing a solution if peace efforts remain stalled, and the Palestinians called Ariel Sharon's ultimatum unacceptable.

Jewish West Bank settlers, also reacting swiftly to the plan Sharon unveiled Thursday, said the prime minister's idea of moving some settlements was an illusion.

Sharon warned in a speech in this Tel Aviv suburb that the Palestinians had only a few months to make peace or Israel would take unilateral steps to separate itself from Palestinian areas.

Sharon said Israel remained committed to a US-backed road map peace plan. But he demanded Palestinians begin dismantling militant groups, as called for by the plan, or face an Israeli-imposed security border. The road map envisions a Palestinian state by 2005.

## Malvo found guilty in US sniper case

REUTERS, Chesapeake

A jury on Thursday found Lee Malvo, 18, guilty of murdering Linda Franklin, one of 10 people gunned down in a series of sniper shootings that terrorized the Washington, D.C., area last year.

Malvo was 17 when he and his accomplice John Muhammad, 42, roamed the region in an aging automobile, picking off random human targets through a hole cut in the trunk.

Dressed in a light sweater, Malvo sat without apparent reaction as a court official read out guilty verdicts in each of two counts of capital murder, which could mean the death penalty or life in prison without the possibility of parole.

"We are extremely pleased with the verdict," said Bob Meyers, the brother of another of the pair's victims, Dean Meyers, who was shot on Oct. 9, 2002 at a gas station near Manassas, Virginia.

A separate jury last month convicted Muhammad Meyers' murderer and sentenced the Gulf War veteran to death. A judge will review the recommendation and make a final sentencing in February. "We believe that justice has been served," Meyers told journalists outside the court building.



PHOTO: AFP  
Indian army soldiers stand guard as a local villager (2-R) goes about his work during their patrol of the Indo-Bhutan border at Darranga, some 100km north of the capital of the Indian state of Assam, Guwahati yesterday. Up to 120 Indian rebels have been killed by the Bhutanese army during a crackdown on rebel camps in the Himalayan kingdom, the Indian army said as the offensive intensified.

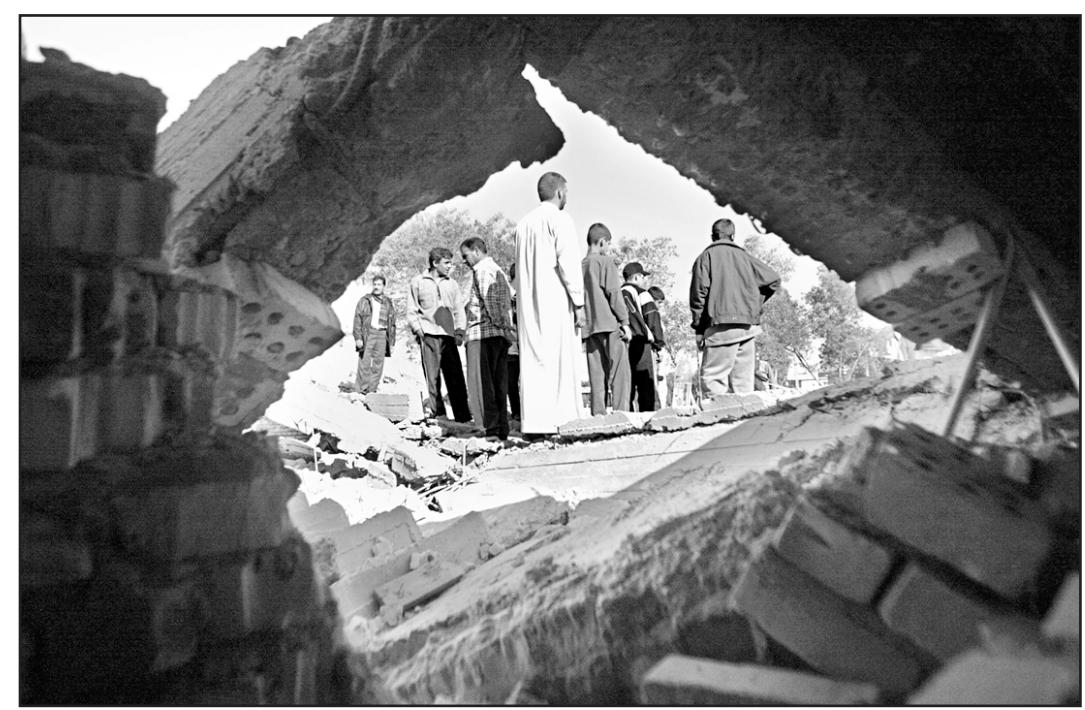


PHOTO: AFP  
Iraqi civilians stand on the debris of a homeless shelter, which was hit in a pre-dawn bombing raid in Baghdad yesterday. The building collapsed onto families sleeping in the west Baghdad compound of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) killing one woman and wounding eight other people.

## US to pour more troops into Iraq

### Iraqi WMD search group reduced to 40 experts

AFP, Baghdad

The United States said Thursday it will pour more troops into Iraq after another US soldier died there in a roadside ambush, and Russia agreed to consider reducing Iraq's crippling debt.

Senior defense officials said Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld approved the deployment of an extra brigade of the elite 82nd Airborne Division to Iraq next month and extended the tour of duty of another brigade to maintain combat power as other forces are rotated out.

The deployment will increase the total size of the US force in Iraq by a couple of thousand troops over a three month period during which the entire force is to be replaced with fresh units, the officials said.

"It is a spike, no question about it," said one official. "But it will provide some capability during the transition period that Abizaid

thought was important."

General John Abizaid, commander of the US Central Command, had asked for the deployment of the 82nd Airborne's 1st Brigade after deciding that an infantry brigade of the Washington National Guard that was to have deployed to Iraq in January needed more training.

The latest US casualty in Iraq came as a top US general warned that insurgents fighting the US-led occupation were increasingly targeting Iraqi civilians and security forces.

The fatality brought to 199 the number of US combat troops killed in Iraq since President George W. Bush declared major fighting over on May 1, according to an AFP count.

US troops killed two people and captured 86 others during anti-insurgency operations Thursday in the flashpoint town of Samarra.

Meanwhile, the US-led Iraq

Survey Group hunting for weapons of mass destruction has had its personnel reduced to under 40, a British newspaper reported yesterday.

The Independent daily said the move showed US President George W. Bush had in effect "washed his hands" of the hunt for such weapons of mass destruction.

The survey group has a nominal staff of 1,400 US and British specialists, analysts and translators. But the numbers in the field have been less, with two teams of 20 at most deployed, said the Independent.

"In October, the group's strength dwindled further when Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defense Secretary, ordered many personnel to be transferred to the regular forces to help counter the growing rebellion," said the London-based paper, without citing its sources.

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made this commitment, but what is important remember is that it is only a first step," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said in Washington.

"Iran needs to bring this into force, needs to ratify this additional protocol that is now signed and above all it needs to implement the programmes that they have agreed to," he said.

Iran had long resisted signing the additional protocol but made an about-face under intense diplomatic pressure in October when the foreign ministers of EU countries Britain, France and Germany visited the country.

Tehran then agreed to sign the additional protocol, hand over full details of its activities and suspend uranium enrichment.

In November the IAEA adopted a resolution condemning it for 18 years of covert nuclear activity.

Iran on Thursday signed up to surprise UN inspections of its nuclear sites in a move hailed as a watershed for Tehran as it tries to fend off accusations that it is seeking nuclear arms.

Iranian Ambassador Ali Akbar Salehi signed an additional protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) at a ceremony at the Vienna headquarters of the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"Iran has turned a new leaf," said IAEA director general Mohamed ElBaradei, who has urged that the accord was the only way for Tehran to prove that its atomic programme is purely peaceful.

"The protocol is an important tool for establishing confidence... to determine that the Iranian

nuclear programme is totally peaceful... we will have the legal right to inspect all the installations and sites of Iran."

The inking came two months after the IAEA threatened to present its concerns over Iran's nuclear programme to the UN Security Council, which could impose sanctions.

"This is the opportunity for Iran to break a vicious circle that has been going on for 20 years," ElBaradei said.

Salehi told reporters: "It is a landmark event, I hope that now my country will not be exposed anymore to unfair and politically motivated accusations."

The United States, which has accused Iran of using its civilian nuclear energy programme to secretly develop atomic weapons, said the signing of the additional protocol was just a first step.

"It is welcome that Iran has

## Musharraf to offer alternatives to Kashmir plebiscite

AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf is ready to offer alternatives to Pakistan's life-long demand for a plebiscite in disputed Kashmir, Information Minister Sheikh Rashid said yesterday.

"He's not dropping the call for plebiscite," Rashid told AFP.

"He's saying that we can think of certain other things, we have some alternative proposals. He's prepared to offer some alternatives."

While it is not clear that Musharraf has committed to abandoning demands for a referendum, the offer to negotiate on the key platform of Islamabad's Kashmir policy could mark a dramatic turning point in relations between Pakistan and India, just weeks ahead of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to Islamabad for the January 4-6 South Asian Cooperation (Saarc) summit.

The demand for a plebiscite has been backed by the United Nations Security Council in several resolutions since 1948.

Islamists were up in arms at the suggestion of backing down on the plebiscite demand.

"Any unilateral decision bypassing the Kashmiri people will not be acceptable to us," Liaquat Baloch, a federal MP and executive of Pakistan's most powerful Islamic party Jamaat-i-Islami told AFP.

The minister declined to outline the "alternative proposals", saying only that Musharraf would raise them with Indian leaders when "serious talks" are held.

"He has them in his mind, when there's serious talks he will talk," Rashid said.

Pakistan has demanded Kashmiris be allowed to choose between rule by Pakistan or India since 1948, a year after Pakistan was carved out of India in the partition of the subcontinent.

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