

Arafat has allowed the Islamic opposition groups to resume terrorist attacks on Israel.

The officials said the CIA now shares Israel's assessment that Arafat gave Hamas and Islamic Jihad a green light to carry out terrorist attacks, at least while he is abroad.

[From the New York Times, Aug. 21, 1997]

DEFYING ISRAEL, ARAFAT EMBRACES ISLAMIC MILITANTS

(By Joel Greenberg)

GAZA.—Defying Israeli and American demands that he crack down on Islamic militants, Yasir Arafat kissed and applauded leaders of the Hamas and Islamic Holy War movements today and warned that Palestinians were prepared to resume their violent revolt against Israel.

At a conference of Palestinian factions here, Mr. Arafat returned to the combative language of the seven-year uprising against Israeli occupation, which ended in 1994 with the beginning of Palestinian self rule.

"There was an uprising for seven years," Mr. Arafat told the conference, which he called to protest the policies of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel. "Who did it? The lion cubs, our children—this glorious uprising. Seven years. We can erase and do it again from the beginning. There is nothing far from us. All options are open to us."

As he has many times in his career, Mr. Arafat was fighting on several fronts at once.

His remarks came just days after Dennis B. Ross, the American mediator, prodded him to renew security cooperation with the Israelis and take action against Hamas and other hard-line Islamic groups that have carried out terrorist bombings in Israel. Mr. Arafat met Tuesday with the head of Shin Bet, the Israeli domestic security agency, as he began to comply with that request.

But at today's session in Gaza, called the National Unity Conference to Confront the Challenges, Mr. Arafat was lining up support from a broad array of factions, including the militant Islamic groups who favor a more confrontational stance toward the Israelis. The Islamic groups said they saw the meeting as a means of resisting the crackdown by the Palestinian Authority that Israel and the United States are demanding.

In Washington, senior American officials were dismayed by Mr. Arafat's remarks. "It simply makes an already difficult situation more difficult," one official said. "We have a crisis of confidence, so no party should do or say things that undermine confidence about a peaceful resolution of their differences."

[James P. Rubin, the State Department spokesman, said the United States remained convinced that Mr. Arafat would carry out his pledge to cooperate with the Israelis against terrorism. "We are going to judge, in the area of security cooperation and anti-terrorist cooperation, Chairman Arafat by deeds," he said. "Deeds are the coin of the realm when it comes to fighting terrorism."]

Today's conference in Gaza was significant because it marked the first time Islamic Holy War, a militant group that operates primarily in Gaza, had joined a meeting of Palestinian factions under Mr. Arafat's leadership. Unlike Hamas, which has both social programs and a military wing, Islamic Holy War has devoted itself almost exclusively to attacks on Israel.

At the conference, representatives of Hamas and Islamic Holy War, who are political leaders of their organizations, not members of their clandestine military wings, exchanged customary kisses with Mr. Arafat after their speeches.

They said later that their participation in Mr. Arafat's conference did not mean they

were renouncing violence, as the Palestinian leader did in reaching an accord with the Israelis. The delegates said they remain implacably opposed to the agreement reached in Oslo in 1993 between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

"This is not a conference to support Oslo, but to support the stance of our people against the American and Israeli pressures on the Palestinian Authority to arrest and crack down on the Islamic movements," said Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, a Hamas leader.

The relationship between Mr. Arafat and the Israeli Government, which had been strained, worsened considerably last month after a suicide bombing in a Jerusalem market on July 30 in which 14 people and the two attackers were killed.

Israel demanded that Mr. Arafat take action against Hamas and Islamic Holy War and it imposed economic sanctions and other punitive measures that the Palestinian leader condemned as a declaration of war against his people.

The measure included closing borders, demolishing houses of Palestinians on the grounds that they were built without permits, and freezing payments of taxes and other money to the Palestinian Authority.

Israel's moves united Palestinians of all political stripes behind Mr. Arafat. Many perceive him as standing up to heavy Israeli and American pressures to suppress the militants.

United States officials have backed the Israeli demands, but they have also urged Israel to rescind economic sanctions that are not directly linked to its security. To ease the economic pressure, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt pledged Tuesday to give the Palestinian Authority \$10 million.

Israeli officials criticized Mr. Arafat for inviting Hamas and Islamic Holy War to the Gaza conference, asserting that his invitation of groups responsible for bombings that killed scores of Israelis contradicted his commitment to fight terrorism. Mr. Arafat is "giving the terrorist organizations a stamp of approval," said David Bar-Illan, communications director for Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Mr. Arafat and his aides might think that "appeasing, pacifying and placating these organizations will do the trick," Mr. Bar-Illan added, "but they already tried that, and we found that all this dialog does is give these organizations the respectability and legitimacy which makes it easier for them to continue their terrorist activity with impunity."

But Tayeb Abdel Rahim, a close aide of Mr. Arafat who was chairman of the conference, rejected the Israeli criticism. "None of the speakers advocated explosions or terrorism," he said. "They all protested the Israeli policy that disregards the peace process. They agreed on a common denominator of rejecting the policy of dictation."

The speakers, apparently following rules agreed upon in advance, did not call explicitly for violence against Israel, but instead urging "resistance," "confrontation" and "struggle" against the Israeli "enemy."

Many called on Mr. Arafat to stop security cooperation and negotiations with the Israelis, and urged a boycott of Israeli products in response to the Israeli border closures. They criticized American officials for what they described as a stance that favors Israel, and they urged Mr. Arafat to resist Israeli "dictates" backed by the Americans to crack down on militant groups.

Mr. Arafat has recently renewed security contacts at the urging of the Americans, and he met on Tuesday with Ami Ayalon, the head of Shin Bet, the Israeli security services. But before the conference delegates he vowed never to submit to Israeli economic and political pressures.

"In the name of our children," he said, "the children of the uprising, I say: No one can humiliate the Palestinian people, no one can defeat the Palestinian people, no one can make our Palestinian people bow!"

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, we continue to await the arrival of Senators on the floor to present amendments. We have a very crowded schedule for the Senate with the FDA legislation and other appropriations matters to follow. So I urge my colleagues to come to the floor so we can continue to move the Labor, Health and Human Services bill along.

In the absence of any other Senator on the floor, Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROBERTS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DORGAN. I ask unanimous consent I be allowed to speak for 10 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL TESTING

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I understand we are not yet on the appropriations bill today. It has not been formally called up. We have a number of issues in the appropriations bill that is now before the Senate, and I know the majority leader and others would like to complete it soon. I want to describe one of them that I think is very important that I hope will get resolved today. That is the issue that was raised last week on the subject of national testing with respect to achievement levels at various grades in our schools.

President Clinton has suggested, and others have called for some kind of national testing system by which we can evaluate at the fourth grade level whether children are able to read sufficiently and at the eighth grade level whether they have sufficient capabilities in mathematics, because those are the benchmarks in the education system that allow you to proceed and succeed. If you are not able to read sufficiently in fourth grade, you are not going to do well beyond that. If you don't have a basic grasp of the concept of mathematics by the eighth grade, you are not going to do well beyond that. The question is, What are we getting for our education dollars? We spend a substantial amount of money in this country on elementary and secondary education. What are we getting for it?

The proposal is a proposal that says, let us measure that, let us evaluate that, student to student, school to

school, State to State, so that we know what we are getting out of our education system. There isn't a more important subject, in my judgment, for this country's future than the subject of education. Is our education system a good one? Does it work? Does it prepare our country for the future?

Benjamin Franklin once said that if you invest your purse in your head, no one will ever take your purse from you. His point was that, if you invest in education, nobody can ever take from you what you have achieved yourself. That is a very important point. That is why it is so important for our country to make sure that we have an education system that works.

Although reading is the foundation for virtually all other learning in our country, it is estimated that 40 percent of America's fourth graders cannot read at a basic level. Likewise, nearly 40 percent of eighth graders in our country are not achieving at a basic level, and 76 percent are not achieving at a proficient level. According to a recently released Third International Math and Science Study, 55 percent of U.S. eighth graders score below the international average in math.

Now, the point about national testing is not to suggest in any way that the Federal Government try to run the local school systems. School systems ought to be run locally. They are now and they will be in the future. But we ought to give parents information about how their students and schools in our States are doing, comparing them student to student and school to school and State to State. We simply don't have that capability. Providing parents with that information, through a national testing program, will be an important step in trying to evaluate where we are in the educational system and then what we need to do to strengthen and improve it.

Again, this is a proposal that says, let us try to evaluate across this country how our children are doing in reading at the fourth grade level and how our children are doing in mathematics at the eighth grade level. Giving parents that information will be enormously beneficial. I have two children in public schools this morning. They are the most wonderful young children that live in this country—as all parents feel about their children. I want them to have the finest education available to them. They are in public school. I like their teachers, I respect their school. But I happen to believe that, to the extent that we can improve this country's educational system, we will do that if we arm parents with more and more information about how the system does, how the schools are doing, how the teachers are doing, and how our students are doing.

There are three things that will work to improve education in this country, and all three are necessary in order for the educational system to work well. First is a student that is willing to learn. Second is a teacher that knows

how to teach. And third is a parent that is involved in their student's education. The failure to have any one of the three means we don't do nearly as well as we can.

Now, the proposal for a national testing program has substantial support. Polls have shown that 77 percent of the American people support national standards for measuring the academic performance of schools. It has substantial support from leaders all across this country, national business leaders like the National Chamber of Commerce, the Business Roundtable, the National Alliance of Business, and it is clear to them that our ability to succeed in the long term and compete in the long term with other countries rests in our ability to provide an educational system that educates our children sufficiently so that we do succeed and prevail.

Here is the testimony from the business leaders in America. Let me read a couple of the pieces of testimony. This is Jim Barksdale, the CEO of Netscape Communications, and L. John Doerr, a partner in the firm of Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield & Byers, on behalf of 240 technology industry leaders in a bipartisan call for national education standards in reading and math:

Every State should adopt high national standards, and by 1999, every State should test every fourth grader in reading and eighth grader in math to make sure these standards are met. President Clinton's national testing initiative offers a new opportunity to widely accept national benchmarks in reading and math against which States, school districts, and parents can judge student performance.

Now, the proposal is completely voluntary. No student is required to take tests. Any student can opt out, any school can opt out, any State can opt out—a completely voluntary proposal. Then we had some amendments offered in the other body, the House of Representatives, an initiative, and some amendments here in the Senate, which I think will be withdrawn, that would prohibit any kind of national testing. So there has been discussion back and forth in recent days about, should we prohibit any kind of national testing? I think the answer to that should be no.

We are proposing that the National Assessment Governing Board, called NAGB—a bipartisan, independent board—will oversee and ensure the integrity of these national tests. NAGB was established by Congress in 1989 to independently formulate policy guidelines for the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

I don't have any interest, again, in having the National or the Federal Government decide that we are going to, in any way, impose restrictions or arbitrary requirements on school districts across this country. That is not my interest. It is my interest to provide some leadership to see if we can't describe some kind of national achievement levels which we aspire to reach as a country.

It is interesting. You go on a radio show, talk radio, these days—and it has

been that way for some years now—and somebody calls in and talks about how any effort by anybody to test some sort of achievement level is some intrusive encroachment on education. I don't think that at all. As much as we spend on education, we ought to try to find out what we are getting for all of this. Where are we succeeding and where are we failing? That is what this initiative is all about. It is not an attempt to eclipse the powers, rights, or interests of local school boards. It is an attempt to see if we can't, all across this country, give parents more information about what they are getting for their education dollar and give school administrators and give other administrators who are interested in this an evaluation of where we are with respect to reading at the fourth grade level and mathematics at the eighth grade level, to see whether we are reaching the goals that we aspire to reach as a country. If we can't take that first baby step, if we don't have the opportunity or courage to take that step, then we are not in any way going to achieve the goals we have for this country's education in the years ahead.

I thought this was going to be resolved last week, and I understand it is still ricocheting around the Chamber. If it's not resolved, I am inclined to offer a second-degree amendment to one of the first degrees that has been noticed, which would simply say that the National Assessment Governing Board would be the board that would be empowered to help provide this national testing. I want us to have an affirmative discussion and decision on this. I think that will be a very important thing for the Senate to say with respect to this appropriations bill because it is likely the appropriations bill coming to conference from the House side will say, in a negative way, that they don't want anything to do with this kind of national testing.

So I came to the floor today to say that I thought this had been resolved last week, and it has not been. If it is not resolved soon, I would like to offer an amendment. Senator BINGAMAN has one noticed. If that is not offered, I will probably offer a second degree, and we should have a vote on this issue. This country can do better in education. One way to do that is to aspire to have a national evaluation of what we are getting and what our performance levels are at the fourth grade level for reading and at the eighth grade level for mathematics.

I yield the floor.

Mr. GORTON addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I may speak for up to 10 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.