the Palestinian and Israeli science communities heightened further. Palestinian officials and Israeli peace activists claimed that damage done during the occupation had weakened the fledgling Palestinian research and education infrastructure.

The Palestine Academy of Science and Technology in Ramallah, for example, was damaged when Israeli troops used explosives to blast open doors before searching the building, says Imad Khatib, director general of the academy. Furniture was smashed, and files and office equipment were scattered on the floor, he adds.

Al Quds University claims that Israeli soldiers badly damaged laboratories and other buildings at its campuses in El Bireh and Ramallah. The university has asked the Israeli government and the international community to send fact-finding missions and to help rebuild its infrastructure. It has also pleaded for US\$675,000 of emergency aid, without which it says it will be unable to pay its 700 staff and may face closure.

Israeli officials were unavailable to comment on the specific allegations as *Nature* went to press. But the Israeli army has said it is taking allegations of vandalism seriously and will investigate them fully. The extent of the damage and the circumstances in which it was inflicted remain unclear. "It has been difficult to isolate and concentrate on specific aspects of the military operation," says Eva Illouz, a peace activist and researcher in sociology and anthropology at the Hebrew University. "News of the destruction of the research facilities went largely unnoticed."

Palestinian scientific leaders accuse the Israeli scientific community of being oblivious to their plight. Khatib, for example, complains that Israeli scientific leaders are "indifferent" to the damage at the Palestine Academy. Illouz counters that Israeli scientists are "disturbed" by reports of the destruction, but admits that there has been no public outcry because attitudes have hardened between Arab and Israeli scientists following the second intifada.

Dudy Tzfati, a geneticist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and one of the founders of the Alliance of Middle Eastern Scientists and Physicians, a body that is committed to promoting peace, nonetheless remains optimistic about the future. He predicts that the mutual trust created by contacts among scientists will endure, and that the international scientific community should renew its support for such cooperation.

Similarly, Nachum Finger, rector of Ben Gurion University, predicts that, on any sign of a return to normality, "the universities, the scholars, will be back to lead the *rapprochement* with the Palestinians". ■

Warhead-saving arms pact gets lukewarm reception

Geoff Brumfiel, Washington

American scientists have reacted with little enthusiasm to a new US–Russian nuclear arms pact, announced on 13 May, that would reduce the number of nuclear weapons deployed on each side but would take no action to destroy their warheads.

The three-page treaty, which will be signed by presidents George Bush and Vladimir Putin at a summit in Moscow next week, pledges to reduce the number of deployed nuclear weapons from 5,000–6,000 on each side to between 1,700 and 2,200 over the next 10 years.

But the plan would allow the decommissioned warheads to be kept in reserve rather than being destroyed — raising alarm about the possible security of the warheads, particularly in Russia. The freedom to keep the warheads was sought by the Bush administration, but it runs counter to the advice of many US scientists. In a 1997 study, the National Academy of Sciences called for the bilateral destruction of decommissioned warheads.

Scientists welcomed the fact that the two heads of state will actually sign a treaty — the Bush administration had originally proposed a less formal agreement — but lamented its

lack of real content. On the day the treaty was announced, the Union of Concerned Scientists released a letter signed by seven prominent US physicists to both presidents, calling for a treaty that would destroy decommissioned warheads as quickly as possible.

"This treaty is certainly a step forward, but it leaves a lot to be desired," says Michael Levi, a physicist at the Washington-based Federation of American Scientists. Levi says that the agreement will strengthen pro-Western elements in the Russian government. But he adds that, in storage, Russian warheads pose a significant threat. "If one of those warheads falls into terrorist hands, then we'll wish that we had used our stored warheads as a bargaining chip to have them eliminated," he warns.

Wolfgang Panofsky, former director of the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center in California, and one of the seven who signed the letter, says he is disappointed that the treaty fails to address smaller tactical warheads, which, he says, are considered a significant threat to non-proliferation efforts. Nonetheless, he says, "the treaty should be applauded as a forward step". ■

♦ www.ucsusa.org

Computer revives Bamiyan Buddha

Quirin Schiermeier, Munich

The giant statue of Buddha at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, one of two destroyed in March last year by the Taliban, will soon be reconstructed — electronically.

Researchers at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich are close to completing a three-dimensional computer model of the 2,000-year-old statue, using a set of high-resolution images taken in 1970 by Austrian cartographers.

"A high-accuracy computer model, which could be used as the basis for physical reconstruction, will be available by the end of the month," says Fabio Remondino, one of the scientists involved in the project.

But authorities warn that a full physical reconstruction is unlikely. Christian Manhart, an Asian specialist at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, says that rebuilding the statue, which stood nearly 55 metres tall, is neither realistic nor desirable.

The site should be left as it is and be protected as a memorial, similar to the concentration camp at Auschwitz or the memorial church in Berlin, Manhart says, as

Lost treasure: Bamiyan's giant Buddha before the Taliban's act of destruction.

recommended by the 1964 International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites.

Paul Bucherer-Dietschi, director of the Afghanistan Institute and Museum near Basel in Switzerland, is coordinating a feasibility study on possible reconstruction of the statue. He will meet with 40 other experts in Kabul this month to discuss the protection and restoration of Afghanistan's cultural heritage. ■

♦ www.photogrammetry.ethz.ch/research/bamiyan