



# News from the Nations

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## **IDF to remain along the River Jordan**

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu went to the Jordan Valley in March, noted the *International Jerusalem Post*. He made it clear that in any future agreement Israel must retain a security presence along the River Jordan. He called the area Israel's "eastern gate" and the country's insurance policy. He said, "Those defending the Jordan Valley are defending Israel—our line of defence starts here and [the country] has no alternative to the IDF's line of defence."

## **Peace concessions**

*Prime Minister Netanyahu said recently that he was ready to make concessions for achieving peace with the Palestinians. He was speaking at a joint news conference in Jerusalem with Chile's President Sebastian Pinera. Netanyahu, due to visit Washington soon, is expected to present a fresh initiative for resuming talks with the Palestinians.*

## **Peres criticises Europe**

*Israel Today reports: "President Shimon Peres spoke before 400 government officials, media editors, ambassadors, and opinion-makers in Spain and accused Europe of applying a double standard toward Israel." He said, "If Europe really has so many reasons to be upset with Israel, then we have even more reasons to be critical . . . you [NATO] killed 600 civilians during the war in Kosovo . . . so you should know how difficult it is to defeat terror. So don't try to teach us about morality."*

## **Israel's global energy**

New data suggest Israel may have not only much larger gas resources than previously believed, but also the third-largest deposit of oil shale in the world, and the technologies to utilise it are now being developed. Libyan oil accounts for less than two per cent of world oil production, yet the revolt against Gaddafi has managed to shoot up the price of oil to more than \$100 per barrel in the last month. The world is using up the reserves of non-Middle East oil very quickly. Of the trillion barrels of proven reserves still left, according to the CIA roughly 800 billion barrels are to be found in the Middle East, North Africa and Iraq. The gas discoveries in the eastern Mediterranean are well known. The Tamar field, which should begin production in 2013, is expected to supply all of Israel's domestic requirements for at least twenty years. The recently discovered Leviathan field, which has twice the gas of Tamar, could be completely devoted to exports. All the undersea gas fields together have about 25 trillion cubic feet of gas, but the potential for further discoveries is considerably greater, given that the US Geological Survey estimates that there are 122 trillion cubic feet of gas in the whole Levant Basin, most of which is within Israel's jurisdiction. These numbers could go up further. Greece has been talking to Israel about creating a transportation hub for distributing gas throughout Europe from the eastern Mediterranean that will come from undersea pipelines. According to the *International Jerusalem Post*, "A new assessment was released by Dr Yuval Bartov, chief geologist for Israel Energy Initiatives, at the yearly symposium of the prestigious Colorado School of Mines. He presented data that oil shale reserves are actually the equivalent of 250 billion barrels—as a consequence of these new estimates, we may emerge as the third largest deposit of oil shale, after the US and China."

## **EARTHQUAKE THREAT BRINGS JORDANIANS AND ISRAELIS TOGETHER**

*According to the Jerusalem Post, Jordan and Israel have long had their differences, even after signing a peace agreement, but the mutual threat of earthquakes rooted in the shaky Syrian-African Rift between them has inspired co-operation that is also promoted by the sight of the destruction from Japan's quake. "A joint Israeli-Jordanian training exercise simulating regional preparedness for an earthquake and the potential for co-operation between the two nations was held in the Arava recently . . . They created a camp for 'internally displaced persons' in Timna under the organisation of Magen David Adom and the Jordanian Red Crescent. There was this incredible energy as both the Israelis and Jordanians found their common language and worked together."*

### **Arms on ship from Syria captured by Israel**

*An Israeli capture of arms bound for Gaza revealed attempts by Hamas to obtain advanced capabilities with which to threaten Israeli shipping and natural-gas installations in the Mediterranean. According to the Jerusalem Post, three containers holding six new C704 anti-shiping missiles were found under sacks of lentils and bales of cotton—along with more traditional military hardware, mortars and Kalashnikov bullets. The advanced missiles, of Chinese design and made in Iran, were packaged along with two computerised command stations, two hydraulic launchers and two British-made small coastal radar systems. According to intelligence received several days earlier by Israel's defence establishment, "The Victoria cargo ship, which was flying a Liberian flag, had departed from Mersin Port in southern Turkey, with Alexandria, Egypt, as its destination. The ship was carrying 39 containers among the 100 on its deck that had been loaded onto it at Latakia in western Syria the week before. Latakia is one of Syria's primary ports and is also home to a newly built Russian navy base. It is there that the Russian supersonic P-800 Yakout cruise missiles will be brought later this year as part of a deal Israel tried to torpedo. It was also the port where two Iranian warships, the frigate Alvand and supply ship Kharq, docked in February. 'The Iranians want to show the long arm of their military, extending all the way from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean,' said Professor Ephraim Kam of the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv" (Jerusalem Post).*

### **Water crisis is on the way**

Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian environmentalists have warned that the region will face a water crisis unless there is more co-operation between the three countries. At a New Israel Fund (NIF) event in London, Friends of the Earth (FoE), Palestine director Nader Khateeb, Israel director Gidon Bromberg and Jordanian director Mehیار proposed a trans-national water committee for the area. They also called for increased water access for Palestinians, and for governments to push for changes in the way water is consumed. Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories share key water repositories, including the Jordan River, the Dead Sea and the Mountain and Coastal Aquifers. NIF is supporting FoE efforts to boost the levels of the lower Jordan River, which has lost ninety per cent of its annual flow since Israel, Jordan and Syria dammed and diverted nearly all of its feeder tributaries. The Dead Sea is dropping by one metre each year.

### **Threat of another flotilla**

According to reports in the *International Jerusalem Post*, "The Turkish IHH organisation is planning to send another flotilla back to Gaza sometime in May to mark the anniversary of the *Mavi Marmara* incident. Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon has urged foreign diplomats in March to prevent their nationals from taking part in 'this dangerous provocation.'" The IHH has proved by its words and deeds that it is a jihadist terrorist organisation.

### **Unpopular**

According to the *Jerusalem Report*, a poll conducted by the BBC World Service and released early in March shows that Israel is one of the least popular countries in the world, with only Iran, North Korea and Pakistan ranking lower. Israel received a forty-nine-per cent negative rating, despite a slight rise in positive ratings from last year's nineteen per cent to twenty-one per cent.

### **Egyptian troops back in Sinai**

In late January, Egypt sent two battalions, amounting to 800 troops, into Sinai with Israel's blessing. Large parts of the Sinai are lawless at the best of times, populated by Bedouins. When the unrest was at its height, Egyptian authorities thought anything could happen in the remote and troopless Sinai. "As far as Israel is concerned, with Hizbullah in Lebanon and the Iranian aligned President Assad in Syria, it has quite enough on its borders. So after three decades of a demilitarised Sinai, Egypt had new reasons for stationing troops there, and Israel had new circumstances which compelled it to agree. Israel views the deployments as temporary—in place until stability is restored in Egypt. But the troops are now a reality on the ground and likely to be there for quite some time before Israel decides that Egypt is stable. At the moment officials in Jerusalem desperately need the calm in Sinai that only troops can deliver."

### **WINDBREAK**

*The Trophy missile defence system (known in Israel as a Windbreaker) deployed with Israel Defence Force armoured units stopped an anti-tank missile fired by gunmen near the Gaza Strip security fence in March, the first time a system of this type was successfully battle-tested anywhere in the world.*