



News from the Nations

Arms smuggling into Gaza

An attempt to smuggle half a ton of TNT into the Gaza Strip from Egypt was thwarted by Israeli navy ships patrolling off the Gaza coast, reports the *Jerusalem Post*. The crew of a Dabur patrol boat spotted a suspicious fishing boat crossing into Israeli waters from Egypt in May. The navy sent an underwater retrieval unit to inspect the contents of the sacks jettisoned by the terrorists after the sailors opened fire. A robot located thirteen sacks of TNT, scavenged from dismantled mines in the Sinai, at a depth of thirty metres, said Lieutenant Commander Oren Raba, the unit's commander. Had the explosives reached their destination they would have been used to manufacture Kassam rocket warheads, according to Captain Lex, commander of the Ashdod Naval Base.

Israel in NATO tactical exercise

Israel took part in the first full NATO naval exercise in the Black Sea in June. Several Israeli missile boats took part, along with other vessels from the twenty-six-member organisation. The purpose of the exercise, explained Lieutenant Colonel Ilan Lavi in the *Jerusalem Post*, was to create better inter-operability between the Israeli Navy and NATO naval forces. Israel was invited to participate in the exercise as a member of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue (a ten-year-old forum for political consultations and practical cooperation between countries of the Mediterranean region, including Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Jordan).

US show of power in the Pacific

According to the *Daily Telegraph*, "More than six decades after Pearl Harbour, America is once again worried about the emergence of a powerful rival on the other side of the Pacific. This time it is China, and America is determined not to be caught by surprise. It is building up its military strength in the Pacific, and has launched a series of manoeuvres across the ocean, unmatched in scale for a generation, to confront the relentless build-up by China. It is the world's largest maritime war game this year, and involves seven other countries: Australia, Canada, Chile, Peru, Japan, South Korea and a small detachment of divers from the Royal Navy. Last month America brought together three of its giant aircraft carrier battle groups, a total of 28 ships and 280 aircraft, off the island of Guam. It was the biggest carrier exercise since the Vietnam war. A two-carrier exercise is due in August. It is clear that America is sending a message to at least two nations: North Korea and China. Iran will figure too. Gary Schmidt, of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, says the permanent shift of forces to the Pacific 'is meant to bolster an area of the world where there is potential for a major conflict, not just in China but in North Korea too'. Boiled down, it is a simple insurance policy: military readiness is being significantly raised in case China and North Korea turn openly hostile. Mr Schmidt suggested that the growing rivalry had parallels with the dreadnought building race between Britain and Germany in the years before the First World War".

ARAFAT'S ARMS PURCHASE

According to a report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, "Yasir Arafat used Israeli and international aid to buy weapons and ammunition to fight against the Jewish state, the late PA President's senior aide has revealed. According to Israeli media reports, the aide, Fuad Shubaki, told his interrogators that Arafat's deals included the fifty tons of weaponry seized by the Israeli Navy in 2002. The ship was intercepted in the Red Sea by Israeli naval commandos while it was en route to Gaza. The former official said the weapons included Sagger guided anti-tank missiles used by Hizbullah against Israeli armour in Lebanon, LAW anti-tank missiles, long-range mortars, mines and Katyusha rockets with a twenty kilometre range. According to his Shin Bet interrogators, Shubaki estimated that some \$7-10 million from international aid were used every two years to purchase arms for the Gaza Strip, and another \$2 million were used to fund the West Bank weapons—when money was in short supply, weapons purchases were reduced. Iran was one of the most generous donors, Shubaki said, offering to assist the Palestinians by training fighters, providing weapons and weapon-producing know-how, and funding the establishment of installations that could produce arms".

Iran accused of hiding secret nuclear weapons site

According to a Daily Telegraph report, fresh evidence has emerged that Iran is working on a secret military project to develop nuclear weapons that has not been declared to United Nations inspectors responsible for monitoring Iran's nuclear programme. Nuclear experts working for the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna are pressing the Iranians to make a full disclosure about a network of research laboratories at a secret military base outside the capital Teheran. The project is code-named Zirzamin 27, and its purpose is to enable the Iranians to undertake uranium enrichment to military standard. 'Zirzamin' means 'basement' in Farsi, which suggests the laboratories are underground, and '27' refers to the twenty-seven-year-old Iranian revolution. Although IAEA officials do not know the precise location of Zirzamin 27, they have comprehensive details of its activities. "This is a truly alarming development", said a senior Western diplomat working with the IAEA. "This evidence indicates that the Iranians remain committed to developing nuclear weapons, despite their claims to the contrary". The Zirzamin 27 operation is thought to be being supervised by Iran's Revolutionary Guards under the direction of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the head of Iran's Modern Defensive Readiness and Technology Centre, a top-secret military research site. According to the reports being studied by IAEA officials, scientists working at Zirzamin are required to wear standard military uniforms when entering and leaving the complex to give the impression they are involved in normal military activity. They are only allowed to change into protective clothing once inside the site. The report continues that special attention has also been given to developing specialised ventilation systems to make sure no incriminating particles of radioactive material are allowed to escape.

Threat of new arms race

Mr Putin raised the spectre of the Cold War recently, likening the United States to a voracious wolf and declaring that the arms race was not yet over. With relations between Moscow and Washington at their most strained in many years, Mr Putin used his annual state of the nation speech to revive Russia's military rivalry with the United States. He said, "It is premature to speak of the end of the arms race—moreover it is going faster today, it is rising to a new technological level". The balance of forces is as follows:

	USA	Russia
Tanks and armoured vehicles	30,141	62,029
Submarines and warships	198	306
Aircraft	4,088	4,293
Helicopters	9,183	3,927
Army personnel	633,630	395,000

Source: The Military Balance 2005-2006 International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Inter-religious conference

In a recent three-day conference in Moscow on inter-religious dialogue Vladimir Putin urged religious leaders to counter efforts to pit Muslims and Christians against each other in a clash of civilisations.

EU blessing for new gas pipeline

According to the *Financial Times*, "plans for a 3,300 km pipeline to transport gas from the Caspian region to Europe recently secured political backing from the European Commission in a move which could bring the \$5.8 billion project closer. Andris Piebalgs, the European Union energy commissioner, together with ministers from the five countries that will be linked by the pipeline—Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria—signed a statement pledging to work to 'successfully complete' the project. Mr Piebalgs said: 'The EU will continue to support this project, not only politically but also for feasibility studies'. The declaration sends a clear message to Moscow of the EU's intention to diversify its gas supplies, and reduce its dependence on Russian gas. The scheme involves building a pipeline with a capacity of 25 billion to 31 billion cubic metres a year to transport natural gas imported into Turkey from energy-rich states. The potential suppliers include Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan—as well as Russia which already supplies Turkey through a Black Sea pipeline. Iraq and Iran are also seen as possible sources, if the political problems involved can be resolved. The European Commission sees Nabucco as one of four or five new pipelines needed to supply Europe over the next twenty years or so. BP, the oil group, which is the operator of Azerbaijan's major new offshore gas field, is due to complete in September a pipeline linking Azerbaijan and Turkey. But the first significant quantities of gas for export to Europe will not be available before 2012. Russia, which is opposed to the Nabucco project, has proposed building a westward spur to its Black Sea pipeline to take gas to Hungary".