



# News from the Nations

## Germany advocates two-state solution

German Foreign Minister Frank Walmer Steinmeier has reiterated his belief that a two-state solution is the only way to solve the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. As reported by the *Jewish Chronicle*, "Mr Steinmeier expressed concerns at a Berlin conference about Israel's settlement policies but said Germany remains committed to helping achieve a stable peace".

## Brown supports Israel against Iran

Gordon Brown recently urged Iran to suspend its nuclear programme or face isolation, while attacking the country's president for his "abhorrent" threat to wipe Israel off the map. Although the meaning of the Iranian leader's words is contested, the British prime minister, speaking to Israel's parliament in Jerusalem, promised that the Jewish state would not have to stand alone in its struggle with Iran. Mr Brown warned that Teheran was risking "the collective response not of one nation but of many nations".

## UK to ban support for Hizbullah

Support for the armed wing of the Lebanese Hizbullah militia is to be barred under Britain's anti-terrorism laws, the Home Office announced recently. The group's external security organisation was already included in the government's list of outlawed terror groups, drawn up under legislation passed eight years ago. Now Hizbullah's entire military structure is to be banned. This reflects UK anger that the organisation, which faced Israel in the second Lebanon war, also supports terrorism against British troops in Iraq.

## Israel and Syria at Paris summit

The European Union and its Mediterranean neighbours launched a new platform for their relationship at a recent summit in Paris. According to the *Financial Times*, leaders of more than forty countries attended the inaugural session of the Union for the Mediterranean, a project conceived by Mr Sarkozy, the French president, as a way to bridge differences between the EU and the states of North Africa and the Middle East. It was the first time an Israeli and a Syrian leader had been seated in the same room. The session was carefully planned so that Mr Assad, leader of Syria, and Mr Olmert, prime minister of Israel, neither exchanged words nor shook hands. Mr Assad made it plain that he saw no prospect of direct peace talks with Israeli leaders, at least until George Bush, the US president, left office; and it could take up to two years to reach a Syrian-Israeli peace deal. According to the report in the *Financial Times*, "Mr Olmert underlined that Israel's US-supported negotiations with Palestinian leaders were his immediate priority. After meeting Mr Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, at the Paris summit, Mr Olmert said, 'It seems to me that we have never been as close to the possibility of reaching an accord as we are to-day'. The most striking outcome of the summit appeared to be the announcement that Syria would open an embassy in Beirut, and Lebanon an embassy in Damascus, for the first time since Lebanese independence in 1943. Such a step would imply Syrian acceptance of the sovereignty of Lebanon. Mr Sarkozy stated that he intends to visit Syria in September, a gesture he could withdraw if Mr Assad has not fulfilled his promise to open an embassy in Lebanon by then".

## SARKOZY SAYS NUCLEAR IRAN IS UNACCEPTABLE

French President Sarkozy's address to the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, in June offered Israel strong support against Iran's nuclear programme, but also called on the country to make broad concessions toward establishing a Palestinian state. He is reported in the *Financial Times* as saying, "I reiterate here in the clearest manner: As far as France is concerned, a nuclear Iran is totally unacceptable, but will lead, along with its partners, a policy that integrates gradually intensifying sanctions with openness, in case Iran chooses to honour its international obligations. France is Israel's friend and will always stand by her side when her security or existence are threatened and will block the path of those calling for the destruction of Israel". Mr Sarkozy was less congenial regarding Israel's policies in the West Bank: "Peace cannot be achieved without a complete and immediate cessation of the settlements; peace cannot be achieved without solving the problem of the Palestinian refugees; peace cannot be achieved without the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of two states and guaranteeing freedom of access to holy sites for all religions".

### **Desalination cannot meet Israel's water needs**

*Current plans for water conservation and existing desalination facilities in Israel are insufficient to meet the country's growing water demands and rapidly decreasing supply, the Environmental Protection Ministry warned recently. Due to the "serious threats to Israel's water resources, there is a need for a visionary plan exceeding the one in place today". The ministry's chief scientist, Dr Bar-Or, was referring to the Desalination Master Plan, launched in 2000, which called for the construction of a series of plants along the coast, to enable an annual total of 400 million cubic metres of desalinated water to be produced by 2005, chiefly for urban consumption. According to the plan, production is intended to rise to 750 million cubic metres by 2020. Israel has had lower than average rainfall for the last several years. Dr Bar-Or has outlined several measures urgently required, including a constant and comprehensive public relations campaign teaching how to conserve water, via local authorities and nature conservation bodies, and teaching local authorities how to build and use infrastructure to conserve water and catch rainfall; and updating existing infrastructure. There is likely to be a grave water shortage in the West Bank this summer, which risks repercussions for the economy and the health of tens of thousands of Palestinians. Water usage in the West Bank now stands at 66 litres a day per head, about two thirds of the World Health Organisation's recommended minimum.*

### **Kosovo—new charter, old problems**

Kosovo's new constitution came into force on 15 June, four months after the former Serbian province declared its independence. But Kosovo's path to autonomous statehood remains rocky. Although some forty countries have recognised Kosovo's secession, Serbia and her ally Russia oppose its sovereignty, which they view as a violation of international law. Observers warn that the charter could also inflame simmering tensions between Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority and its resident Serbs. EU member nations like Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Spain openly defy the rest of the Union's desire to allow Kosovo to govern itself. Instead of coming together, the EU and NATO members are squabbling with one another and putting their own national obsessions and interests ahead of a common European policy. Into this power vacuum comes Russia, which has always seen the Balkans as its back yard and has meddled endlessly in the region. For many Balkan Slavs, Russia remains popular as the nineteenth-century liberator of the Balkans from Ottoman rule. Today Moscow is seeking to cast its authority over the region in an effort to prove to Washington and Brussels that it has returned as a foreign-policy heavyweight. Montenegro is almost a new Russian colony, with Russians buying property and business in this tiny state, and Russia is using money and energy contracts to buy favours and influence in the rest of the Balkans. Serb nationalists talk openly of siding with Moscow and ditching Belgrade's proclaimed EU ambitions. This trend gives rise to the fear that, instead of seeing the Europeanisation of the Balkans, we are witnessing the creeping Balkanisation of Europe.

### **US to provide Israel with F-22 jets**

US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman, whose panel had prevented the sale to Israel of the F-22 stealth fighter jet, told the *Jerusalem Post* in June that he was open to removing the sales restriction in order to boost Israeli deterrence. According to this report, the F-22 *Raptor* has long been regarded as a tremendous potential asset in any Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities, given its ability to penetrate even the most sophisticated radar and other defence systems.

### **WARNING OF MIDDLE EAST NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION**

*Warnings of a "cascade" of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, spurred on by fears about Iran's nuclear arms potential, have been issued by a top London-based defence think tank. In its report Nuclear Programmes in the Middle East in the Shadow of Iran, researchers at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) also spoke of fateful decisions faced by Israel "as Iran reaches one technological milestone after another in its journey towards acquiring nuclear weapons". The IISS said, "Israel's response to the looming threat of a nuclear-armed Iran is fundamentally distinct from that of its other Middle East neighbours. Israel is alone in publicly characterising a nuclear Iran as a threat to its very survival".*

### **Earthquake warning for Israel**

According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, an Israeli government committee has warned that a large earthquake may hit northern Israel in the near future. Hospitals in the north have been warned to be prepared for mass casualties in the event of such a natural disaster, although the authorities insisted there was no need for public panic.