



# News from the Nations

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## **Gaza blockade: the case for Israel**

The blockade that Israel has attempted to impose on Gaza, and its methods of enforcement, are both legal and moral, according to a special report in the *Jewish Chronicle*. The analysis report says that “the storm of criticism now raining down upon Israel must be seen for what it is, the successful outcome of planned provocation whose goal was to help legitimise the rule of the Islamist terrorist group Hamas over Gaza and to break international efforts to isolate it. Israeli officials have pointed to links between the Turkish party and IHH, the Charity organisation that owned the Mavi Marmara, flagship of the aid flotilla. Israel has linked IHH to al-Qaeda, and [says] that Turkey’s ruling party was ‘wholly to blame’ for the deterioration in relations between the two countries. There is no shortage of food or medicine in Gaza. Israel has always let such goods through the border, and the flow of aid via UNRWA—the UN body tasked with feeding the poor there—is undiminished”. The report continues: “The blockade is legitimate, the rule of Hamas is both a threat to Israel and the Palestinians themselves. That is why both Israel and Egypt, as well as many Western nations, approved sanctions in Gaza as an attempt to force the group to step down, or at least give up its quest for Israel’s violent elimination. The blockade’s goal is to prevent it from importing arms from Iran. Those who now call for the lifting of the blockade must understand that they are granting Hamas a crucial victory and putting paid to any hopes that it can be curbed. Those who self-righteously criticise Israel in this case are not helping the cause of peace or humanity. They are merely the ‘useful idiots’ of Hamas”.

## **Israel’s alternative ally**

*Israel’s relationship with the Ankara government has never been so bad. Turkey has recalled its ambassador from Israel and intends to lower its level of diplomatic representation to chargé d’affaires; but the belief in Jerusalem is that Ankara will not break off diplomatic relations completely. A special report in the Jerusalem Chronicle stated: “Israel has been cultivating over the last year alternative allies in the region. One country that seemed eager to deal with Israel recently was Greece, which announced a 10-day joint exercise between its air force and the Israeli air force. Ten Israeli combat jets and an airborne tanker flew to Crete and carried out mock air battles against Greek jets, taking advantage of NATO bombing ranges. The Israeli military is happy at the chance to broaden its relationship with Greece’s army, but it is no replacement for the one Israel enjoyed with Turkey, which is not only a regional power but also shares borders with Israel’s main enemies, Iran and Syria”.*

## **TURKEY’S ROLE IN THE AFFAIR**

*Turkey has lost no time in leading the international chorus of condemnation for Israel. While the Turkish government says it was not directly involved in sending the Mavi Marmara on its doomed mission, Israeli security officials claim that the charity responsible for chartering the ship does have links to Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party. According to the Daily Telegraph, “Before the Gaza flotilla had even set sail, there were a number of worrying signs that Turkey was growing weary of its unrequited courtship of the West and its ambition to join the European Union—but these aspirations have been thwarted by the stance of Germany and France, who refuse to countenance the accession of a predominantly Muslim state into the EU. Diehard supporters of Kemal Ataturk always scoffed at the prospect of Turkey ever adopting the hard-line Islamist ideology that prevails on the other side of its border with Iran, but it should be noted that many of those involved in arranging the Gaza flotilla have close ties to radical Islamic groups such as Hamas. The West cannot afford to ignore Turkey’s disturbing involvement in the whole affair. Its geographical location alone makes it imperative that it remains a close and valued ally”.*

## **Conference on nuclear arms**

Seven months after the organisation condemned Israel’s nuclear ambiguity, a letter from International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Yukiya Amano, released in May, urged members to help convince Israel to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

## UN Human Rights Council resolution

The UN Human Rights Council, which has been attacked in the past by Israel for allowing the membership of UN member countries with poor human rights records, passed a resolution dispatching an international committee of inquiry to investigate the attack on the Gaza flotilla. A total of thirty-two countries voted in favour of the inquiry, but Italy, which supports Israeli membership of the EU, and the Netherlands voted against. The sole EU member state to support the move was Slovenia, alongside non-EU European countries Norway and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Belgium, France, Hungary, Slovakia and the UK abstained, as did non-EU state Ukraine.

## CHINA'S CRAVING FOR OIL

*China is racing to secure Middle East oil deals, putting it on a possible collision course with US interests in the world's most volatile region. China is now the biggest importer of Saudi oil, the second biggest of Iranian oil, and the largest player in the Iraqi oil game. China is "being very aggressive", says Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies. According to the International news report, "Beijing is betting big in Iraq, which many Western companies are avoiding. Last November the Chinese National Petroleum Company won a large stake in a \$15 billion deal to develop the Rumaila oil field in southern Iraq, thought to be the second largest in the world. China is also ramping up its ties to Iran as many Western firms pull out. China signed \$8 billion in oil and gas deals with Teheran. The country is moving to protect its new oil ties in the Middle East, presenting a challenge to the West. Two Chinese warships that docked in Abu Dhabi in March also sent a blunt message: China is willing to back up its interests with firepower.*

## Treaty for nuclear-free Middle East

*The 189 member nations of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty have agreed on a series of steps towards nuclear disarmament. The twenty-eight-page Final Declaration included a proposal to move toward a nuclear weapons-free Middle East. The proposal was approved by consensus on the last day of the month-long conference, convened every five years to review and advance the objectives of the forty-year old treaty. A report in the Daily Telegraph stated: "Under its action plan, the five recognised nuclear-weapon states—the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China—commit to speed up arms reductions . . . The final document also calls for a conference in 2012 'on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction'. This Arab idea of a WMD-free zone is designed to pressure Israel to give up its long-suspected but never confirmed nuclear arsenal". The only two Arab countries that have signed peace treaties with Israel are Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. Today they are having second thoughts. Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Gheit publicly referred to Israel as "the enemy" during a visit to Beirut; and Jordanian Prime Minister Samir Rifai said that his country will maintain a cold peace until Israel agrees to the terms of the Arab states for a comprehensive agreement; "until then we will not have real peace with Israel".*

## New Palestinian city

Construction in Jewish areas is slow due to the settlement freeze. But six miles north of Ramallah, builders are working nonstop on the first planned Palestinian city, and the settlers are furious. According to World News in the *Jewish Chronicle*, construction crews began building in January. In the first phase of construction they are building 5,000 units across twenty-three neighbourhoods, to house 25,000 people. The first planned Palestinian city is aimed at the middle class, and by the time the first residents arrive in late 2012 it will offer all the amenities of an average Israeli city, including a business district and commercial centre, fully developed infrastructure, parks, hotel and a convention centre. A standard Palestinian complaint in the West Bank is that the Israeli government thwarts plans for Palestinian building while letting settlers build as they wish, but settlers are claiming their government is doing the opposite. They say, "It is amazing that the Israeli government is allowing this to be built when we are not allowed to construct due to the freeze".

## Combustible gas

Offshore natural gas reserves discovered by Israeli companies (see article by Brother Michael Jenner in this issue on page 225, opposite) are fuelling provocations between Israel and Lebanon. The reserves, which may hold twenty-four trillion cubic feet of gas, would allow Israel to end its dependency on foreign fuel, and become an energy exporter. Lebanon has claimed that the gas reserves extend into their territorial waters (see map opposite, where territorial waters are marked with dotted lines).