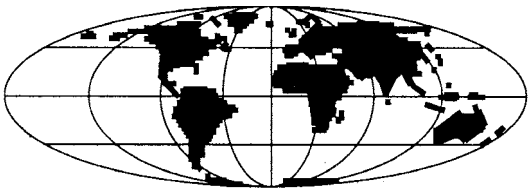

News from the Nations

TURKEY'S TOUGH HURDLE

Turkey faces the toughest hurdle yet in its uphill struggle to join the European Union, according to a report on its progress towards meeting several demands necessary for accession. The Daily Telegraph *notes: "The European Commission report [will be] seized on by European leaders who oppose Turkish admission. By the end of this year such opponents, who include Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, want to suspend Turkey's accession negotiations, at least in part, in punishment for Ankara's refusal to meet key pledges such as opening its ports and airports to traffic from Cyprus . . . Turkey has until the end of the year to comply, but insists it cannot open its ports unless the Greek Cypriot government stops blocking other EU nations from engaging in direct trade with the Turkish-occupied north of Cyprus. Cyprus refuses to allow any such linkage".*

Tunnel vision

Israelis are talking about building a ten-kilometre moat filled with Mediterranean seawater along the Egypt-Gaza border, in an attempt to stop militants and weapons smugglers from infiltrating. The plan was first considered seriously at the start of the second intifada in 2000, and in 2004 the defence ministry opened bids for construction. The project was later dropped for fear that it would require destroying hundreds of Palestinian houses along the canal route, or possibly contaminate water supplies in Gaza and Egypt. But after the summer conflicts, with militants using tunnels from Gaza to Israel to kill and capture Israeli soldiers, the idea has risen again.

Iran will become fully nuclear soon

According to a report in the *Financial Times*, "Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad . . . promised a 'celebration of Iran's full nuclearisation' before the end of the Iranian year next March and said the US and its allies had 'finally agreed to live with . . . an Iran possessing the nuclear fuel cycle'. [Mr Ahmadi-Nejad's claims] came at a news conference . . . in the run up to next month's municipal council elections when his government faces its first nationwide popularity test. The US State Department said Mr Ahmadi-Nejad's comments should represent 'a cold jolt to the rest of the world'. But a more sober picture of Iran's nuclear progress was painted by an International Atomic Energy Agency report on Iran obtained by the *Financial Times* [which] confirms that Iran is now principally using two 'cascades' of 164 centrifuges apiece to enrich uranium. This means the country still falls well short of the 3,000 or so centrifuges that would be needed to enrich uranium on an industrial scale . . . the president was also keen to assert Iran's success in developing its nuclear programme, as western powers struggle to even agree a draft sanctions resolution with Russia and China nine months after the issue was referred to the UN security council. Mr Ahmadi-Nejad said he would respond to requests from 'many American people to talk to them' with a letter explaining Iran's policies—even though he received no response when he wrote in May to President George W. Bush. He may be seeking to gain political capital from the belief in Iran's political class . . . that the balance of world power is shifting away from the US. He claimed 'the Iranian nation is the most popular in the world . . . with widening political influence'".

Iran critical of Israel

Israel has been strongly criticised at a London conference discussing hopes for a Middle East free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. A senior Iranian strategist defended his own country's controversial nuclear programme while calling on the international community to exert pressure on Israel to abandon its nuclear arsenal, which he estimated at between 100 and 200 weapons. He told the conference that Israel was the only Middle East state not to have signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty; that Israel "continues to defy the will of the international community"; and that Israel's nuclear weapons had given it a "false confidence and the audacity to reject any peace plan that is just and fair without any hesitation and impunity". There was a call for Israel at the conference to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The conference was held under the auspices of London University's School for Oriental and African Studies and the nuclear watchdog group Pugwash.

Israel to allow Palestinian groups into Gaza

Israel is on the brink of a policy U-turn that would authorise 1,500 armed Palestinian soldiers of the Badr Brigade based in Jordan to move into the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Although Israel sees the move as a way to counterbalance the growing power of Hamas, such a policy shift could worsen the violence between rival Palestinian factions. But the United States, which is behind the initiative, hopes that the arrival of the troops, trained and equipped to relatively high standards by the Jordanian armed forces, will restore badly needed order in the so-called occupied territories. The Badr Brigade has never been allowed into the area because Israel has regarded it as an enemy force, but the rise to power of Hamas has led to a rethink because the Badr Brigade is loyal to Fatah, the faction of the moderate Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas that Israel now supports. The reason behind Israel's U-turn was spelled out by Yuval Diskin, the head of Israel's domestic spy service, the Shin Beth, who said that, unless moderates from Fatah become more powerful in the West Bank and Gaza, Israel would have to stage wide-scale incursions to neutralise the growing strength of Hamas and its militant supporters. "Israel must prepare for a wide military confrontation in the Gaza Strip if moderate sources in the Palestinian Authority do not get stronger", he said.

DON'T TRUST THE EU

Mr Klein, national president of the Zionist Organisation of America, commented in the Jerusalem Post *recently, "EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana makes the breathtaking claim that Hamas seeks 'the liberation of their people, not the destruction of Israel'—this despite the fact that its charter calls for the murder of Jews (Article 7), the destruction of Israel (Article 15) and cites in support of its programme the classic anti-Semitic forgery, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion (Article 32). Solana has proven by his own example that Israel cannot put its trust in the statements and policies of the EU. Israel must never trust the judgment of people like him, who are either astonishingly naive or malicious, if not both. His statement, as foreign policy chief of the EU, is the best reason why the United States must put an end to attempting to forge a common policy toward the Arab war on Israel with the EU, United Nations and Russia, all of whom have proven their bias and lack of honesty in their dealings with Israel".*

France protests Israeli jets

France has complained to Israel about the "hostile attitude" of its air force in Lebanon. It followed an incident in which French peacekeeping troops came within seconds of firing on Israeli fighter jets that entered Lebanese airspace. Michele Alliot-Marie, the defence minister, said that French troops had been within "two seconds" of shooting down the aircraft. She said that the flyover in October had been the latest in a string of incidents in which Israeli warplanes had "adopted a hostile attitude" to French and German forces. The Israeli military denied knowledge of such an incident, but Amir Peretz, the defence minister, said that overflights were necessary to monitor Hizbullah "arms smuggling".

Blair speaks on the Middle East

Middle East peace is "the core" of fighting global terrorism and extremism, Tony Blair said in a speech recently at the Lord Mayor's banquet in London. The prime minister called for moderate Arabs and Muslims to unite behind a push for peace in Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. Noting that Iran helped "the most extreme elements of Hamas in Palestine and Hizbullah in the Lebanon", he warned that it would face isolation unless it withdrew support for terror groups and met its "international obligations". Conservative Friends of Israel political director Robert Halfon observed that "the West is going to need to make some tough choices and consider the use of military response, as a last resort, to deal with Iran". Israel was also urged to "halt settlement activities and the construction of the barrier on Palestinian land", which were "contrary to international law and may threaten the viability of an agreed two-state solution".

Plutonium find in Iran

According to a *World News* report, unexplained traces of plutonium and enriched uranium discovered at an Iranian waste facility prove that Teheran is pushing ahead with its illegal nuclear development programme, atomic inspectors said recently. A report by the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna accused Iran of persistently refusing to comply with undertakings it had given on nuclear proliferation. The report, which has been discussed by the IAEA's thirty-five-nation board of governors, confirmed Iran's claims that it is well advanced with its uranium enrichment programme, which many Western intelligence officials believe is part of a clandestine weapons programme.