



News from the Nations

US offers Israel jets for settlement freeze

Benjamin Netanyahu raised hopes for a breakthrough in the Middle East peace process by giving preliminary backing to a US proposal on Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank, according to a report in World News in the *Daily Telegraph*. The Israeli prime minister agreed to present his cabinet with an American offer of incentives in exchange for restoring restrictions on settlement building that lapsed at the end of September. Under the proposal, Mr Netanyahu is expected to resume a freeze on Jewish residential construction in the occupied West Bank for a period of ninety days, and commit to discussing the location of borders for a Palestinian state in the next phase of negotiations. In return, Washington would offer an array of inducements, ranging from twenty fighter jets worth nearly £2 billion to an undertaking to scupper attempts to introduce UN Security Council resolutions opposed by Israel. Mr Netanyahu is understood to have won vital support for the proposal from his inner cabinet after the pro-settler interior minister, Eli Yishai, said he would abstain in any vote. Officials have said any new moratorium would have to be extended to East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in the Six-Day War of 1967 and subsequently annexed. Benjamin Netanyahu responded to this by saying that "Jerusalem is not a settlement. Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Israel."

ISRAELI TROOPS TO PULL OUT OF LEBANON BORDER VILLAGE

Israel is to withdraw troops from part of a village that straddles the country's border with Lebanon, in a move that honours the ceasefire agreement which ended the war between the two countries. Officials said withdrawing from the northern part of the Arab village of Ghajar would mark the final implementation by Israel of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, agreed at the end of the war between Israel and the Lebanese Shia Hizbullah in 2006. The details and timing of the Israeli pull-back, according to a report in World Review in the *Daily Telegraph*, "will be co-ordinated with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, which will take control of the area evacuated by Israel. Ghajar has a population of 2,200 and was captured by Israel from Syria during the Six-Day War of 1967. Even though the residents are Alawites, the Islamic group that rules Syria, most chose to become Israeli citizens. Hatib Balal, a resident of Ghajar said, '... Dividing the village will mean residents in the northern half will be cut off from their land in Israel.'"

Turkey threat

Israel is seen as a "central threat to Turkey" in a policy paper written by Turkey's National Security Council. At the same time, the Security Council removed Syria, Bulgaria, Georgia and Armenia, as well as Iran, from the list of countries that pose a threat to Turkey, according to Turkish media outlets. In response, Israel's tourism minister, Stas Meseznikov, has called on Israelis to refrain from travelling to Turkey. The reason given for Israel's inclusion in the threat list was that its actions could lead to an arms race in the Middle East. The Israeli government refused to respond to the report.

Deadly border

Egyptian border guards recently killed a Sudanese national who was trying to infiltrate into Israel. At the end of October, Egyptian police found fifty-five Sudanese migrants hidden in a container on a truck heading into the Sinai region, where they planned to cross the border into Israel.

Iran smuggles weapons via Nigeria

Nigeria's secret service said recently it had intercepted thirteen containers of weapons from Iran, in what Israeli defence sources believe may be part of a new smuggling route from Iran to Hamas in Gaza. The weapons were in containers labelled as 'building materials.' Iran has recently faced difficulties smuggling weapons across Sudanese territory.

Britain finally to end arrest threat to visiting Israelis

Measures to stop magistrates issuing arrest warrants for foreign politicians and military figures accused of war crimes could be introduced as early as this month. Legislation to reform “universal jurisdiction” will be published as part of a Home Office Police Bill soon. Any arrest warrants would have to be signed off by the Director of Public Prosecutions. During William Hague’s visit to the Middle East recently, Israel said that it was postponing a strategic dialogue meeting on security until Britain could guarantee that senior Israelis would not risk arrest in Britain. The Brown government pledged to change the law, but failed to do so.

VATICAN CONFERENCE ‘HIJACKED’

Israel’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Danny Ayalon, has claimed that the Vatican synod on the Middle East, which was convened recently, was ‘hijacked’ by critics of Israel. Bishops ended the two-week conference of Middle East bishops, organised by the Pope to discuss challenges facing Catholics in their region, with a call for Israel to accept UN resolutions demanding a stop to the “occupation.” The synod also expressed dismay at the Israeli right’s invocation of Biblical authority to oppose any pullout from the West Bank. The conference released a statement saying that it opposes “recourse to theological and Biblical positions which use the Word of God to wrongly justify injustices.”

Sinai fence

Israel will begin building a 155-mile barrier along its southern border with Egyptian Sinai “within weeks” in a bid to curb the entry of illegal immigrants, Netanyahu’s Office said recently. The fence is expected to cost some 365 million dollars.

Bible promises to Israel ‘nullified’ by Christ, claims Vatican

The Pope assembled a meeting of 185 bishops in the Vatican to discuss the huge exodus of Christians from Arab countries in the Middle East and what can be done about it. According to a British church newspaper, “The Vatican Synod has chosen to place the blame for the exodus of Christians squarely on the shoulders of Israel and the so-called occupation. We Christians cannot speak of the ‘promised land’ as an exclusive right for a privileged Jewish people. This promise was nullified by Christ. There is no longer a chosen people—all men and women of all countries have become the chosen people. Lebanese American Archbishop Butros, speaking on behalf of the Synod, said, ‘The Holy Scriptures cannot be used to justify the return of Jews to Israel and the displacement of the Palestinians, to justify the occupation by Israel of Palestinian lands.’ The Bishops have therefore called for Israel to withdraw from territory gained in the Six-Day War. The church of Rome teaches Replacement Theology, that is, that the Jews have forfeited God’s promises to them, which have now been transferred to Christians. The Vatican Synod’s anti-Semitic statements they hope will appease the Arabs and somehow persuade them to stop driving Christians out of their countries.”

Egypt helping Israel root out terror cells

According to a report in the *Jewish Chronicle* recently, Israel is disappointed with Egyptian efforts to stop the smuggling of weapons over the border into Gaza. Joint intelligence efforts between the two countries are ongoing, and there have been successes recently in tracking down terrorists in the Gaza Strip and Sinai. With Israel’s help the Egyptians arrested twenty-five terror suspects living in northern Sinai. They are currently searching for a cell of seven jihadists still at large in the desert. According to a report in *Time* magazine, Egyptian intelligence supplied Israel with information that led to the “targeted assassination.” Israel’s internal security agency reported that Hamas now has missiles with a range of up to eighty miles, smuggled in through the tunnels under the Egyptian border. Hamas and other Palestinian organisations have been stepping up their operations in Sinai in recent months as the border fence and large military presence on the Israel-Gaza border has made it very difficult to launch raids directly from Gaza. Israel are worried that Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups could use Sinai as a launch site for missile attacks against Eilat or a point for suicide bombers to enter Israel.

MINISTER: WE MAY INCREASE GAZA AID

According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, “Alan Duncan [UK Minister of state for International Development] has expressed his frustration at being unable to speak to Hamas to facilitate the delivery of British aid to Gaza. Mr Duncan, who leads on the Middle East at the Department for International Development, said great care had to be taken as Britain had to work within the law set by the European Union, but that discussions on aid were ongoing and that aid to Gaza would be increased if possible.”