



## News from the Nations

### The Hamas-Jihad axis

According to a report in the *Jerusalem Post*, "The Palestinian Islamic terror organisations are changing both pace and direction. This could very well be the moment heralding a turning point for the worse in the internal Palestinian power struggle ...

"For the first time since the founders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad split off from their mother movement, the Gazan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, in the 1980s, they and the leaders of Hamas, another contemporary incarnation of the Brotherhood, have clinched a far-reaching deal on close cooperation. They are even talking about the possibility of merging their military wings, Hamas's Izz al-Din al-Qassam Battalions and Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Brigades.

"The summary of the agreement speaks of coordination toward the establishment of an alternative 'parallel regime' in the Gaza Strip and presenting the new alliance as a counterweight to what remains of the Palestinian Authority and its apparatuses. That is, Hamas and Islamic Jihad are not only dictating a continuation of the intifada, but are also positioning themselves as a potential ruling power. They are picking a fight with the PA while, at this stage, not making any move to physically supplant it, instead suggesting a kind of Gaza-style cohabitation in which the PA is no longer the exclusive authority.

"These are not just empty words. The agreement was reached with the active mediation of the heads of Hizbullah and with the encouragement of Iran. It was sealed at a half-secret meeting in Beirut of members of the exiled leadership of the two movements headed by Hamas's Khaled Mash'al and Ramadan Abdallah Shallah of Jihad. All that has been produced is a short leaflet, stating the decision to carry out joint operations—and immediately afterwards there was a sharp upturn in the curve of attacks throughout the Gaza Strip. So the path has been paved for the cooperation that the two organisations are now trying to establish, and the wheels will be oiled with Iranian cash. The structural relationship that could develop in Gaza between the PA and the Islamists could soon come to resemble that of Hizbullah and the Lebanese Government, in which Hizbullah maintains only a pretence of subordination to the state. And that would be an absolutely terrible model from Israel's point of view".

### FEMINIST BIBLE

*The German Evangelical Church is translating the Bible using feminist language, rewriting passages that appear to discriminate against women and using "unbiased and just" language. 'Disciple' is to be changed to 'disciples and disciples', and 'Lord' or 'Our Father' are to be omitted.*

### Turkish Cypriots form coalition

Two Turkish Cypriot parties recently agreed to form a coalition government with a pledge to work towards reuniting the divided island before Cyprus joins the European Union on 1 May. Mehmet Ali Talat, head of a party that backs the United Nations peace plan for Cyprus, said he had sealed a two-party coalition accord with Serdar Denktash, a critic of the UN blueprint.

### UN anti-Semitism resolution sought

*The World Jewish Congress is launching a campaign to push for a UN resolution specifically condemning anti-Semitism. It is seeking one million Jewish signatures on a worldwide petition to back such a resolution. The WJC move, adopted recently in New York, came after a UN resolution condemning racism, originally tabled by Ireland, was withdrawn when it appeared that it would gain insufficient support.*

### NATO to have peacekeeping role?

The next NATO secretary general, Dutch Foreign Minister Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, believes the organisation should play a role in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. De Hoop Scheffer, who took over at NATO's Brussels HQ on 1 January 2004, envisages the organisation's troops in a peacekeeping role in the Palestinian territories in the framework of a peace deal. This proposition has met with very little enthusiasm in Washington, Europe and Israel.

**Fears of Russian resurgence**

What really divides New from Old Europe is not America and Iraq but the fear of a resurgent Russia on their doorstep, according to a *Newsweek* report. The report states that the real divide between New and Old Europe centres on Russia. From the vantage point of most European capitals, Russia is on the upsurge, gaining in economic prosperity and trending closer to the West. Europe is happy to have a reliable supplier of oil and gas. Berlin and Paris, especially, were pleased to find in Moscow an ally against what they perceive to be the Bush Administration's run-amok non-diplomacy in the world. Contrast this with the view from the countries in the east. The Kaliningrad region, a Russian enclave on the Baltic squeezed between Poland and Lithuania, is an economic disaster zone, a hub of organised crime—and a major Russian military base. Failed states like Belarus and Moldova, Russia considers part of its 'near abroad', where economic and social conditions get worse. And President Putin? To East Europeans he is an ex-KGB authoritarian whose new coalition in the Duma includes both the aggressively nationalist new Homeland party and the rising Liberal Democratic party of the notorious Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, all speaking of Russian influence. These fundamentally divergent takes on Russia are a wedge dividing the New Europe from the Old, East from West. Former foreign minister of Estonia, Toomas Ilves, says: "We are much closer to the other members of the EU in our relations with the United States than people think. The real problem splitting Old and New Europe is the West's dangerous, naive and appeasement-minded attitude toward Russia".

**Israel's demographic time bomb**

*The demographic time bomb poses the greatest threat to Israel. Contrary to the accepted estimates, there may already be more Arabs than Jews between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, according to one of Israel's leading demographers. "There is no doubt", says Professor Sergio Della Pergola of the Hebrew University, "that even sovereign Israel's Jewish population is struggling, now more than ever, to hold its own against the faster growth of its Arab counterpart". According to data published by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, the country's overall population—not including the Palestinians of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—now stands at 6,716,000 after growing by 1.9 per cent (124,100 souls) in 2002. Some 5,143,000 of these citizens are Jews (76.8 per cent of the population) and 1,291,000 are Arabs (19 per cent). (According to non-CBS estimates, 230,000 of those Israeli Jews live in the territories, which are also home to 3.5 million Palestinians.) The percentage of Arabs in Israel's population has remained steady since the establishment of the state in 1948. However, Professor Della Pergola says the constancy of that ratio is deceiving, because it has been maintained despite the influx of over 2.5 million Jewish immigrants over the past five-and-a-half decades. Judged solely on the basis of their rate of natural increase, Israel's Jews (with a birthrate of 1.4 per cent) cannot compete with their Muslim (3.4 per cent) and Druse (21 per cent) compatriots. Now that aliyah has fallen back to the scope of the 1980s, before the onset of mass immigration from the former Soviet Union, unless some unexpected development occurs, the Arab-Jewish ratio is likely to change in the Arabs' favour. Also, about four per cent of the country's population, 282,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union who entered Israel under the Law of Return, are neither Jews nor Arabs, though in general sociological and political terms they are counted in the camp of 'Jews and others'. In addition, in calculating the ratio of Jews in the population, the CBS data does not factor in the 230,000 foreign workers (mostly Christians) who resided in Israel at the end of 2002, which would bring the Jewish percentage further down. The question is asked, What effect, if any, do these data have on the widely held projection that the number of non-Jews living in Israel and the territories (the entire area from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River) will surpass the number of Jews by 2010?*

**ISRAEL'S ELECTORAL BALANCE**

*Professor Della Pergola also commented on the future electoral balance of Jewish and Arab voters, giving a picture that is slightly different from that normally given. Here a number of big questions come into play. Will Israel continue to hold onto the territories? Will it claim sovereignty there? Will it give Palestinians the vote, in order to remain a democracy? If all the answers are yes, the date on which the critical electoral balance changes in the Arabs' favour may be a few years after 2010, because half of the Palestinian population is too young to vote.*