



News from the Nations

What Ariel Sharon was planning

Former US ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer reported in an article in *Time* magazine that "Ariel Sharon was writing the last and most important chapter of his legacy when he was struck down. My conversations with Sharon last September, as I departed my ambassadorial post in Israel, convinced me that the historic disengagement from Gaza was not his last peace step. I believe he was intent on redefining Israel's eastern border, which would require dismantling many additional settlements in the West Bank, but now immediate peace moves by Israel are highly unlikely".

Iran plans Holocaust denial conference

A former Israeli spy chief has linked Iran's nuclear programme with its hostility to Israel and Jews. In a report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, Ephraim Halevy was quoted as saying that the upside was that no one could have any more doubts about the ayatollahs' régime, as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad followed up his call for Israel's destruction by planning to stage a Holocaust denial conference in Teheran in the near future. Prime Minister Tony Blair told MPs that the British Government had not ruled out "any measures against Iran—Teheran had caused real and serious alarm across the world and there was no point in hiding our deep dismay—we have to decide what measures to take and we obviously don't rule out any measures at all".

EU report on East Jerusalem

The *Jewish Chronicle* reports: "Israel has warned Britain and the EU against a return to a one-sided policy on the Israel-Palestinian conflict, following the leaking of an EU paper strongly critical of Israeli policy on East Jerusalem. The document, drafted by senior EU diplomats in Jerusalem and Ramallah, attracted direct Israeli criticism of Britain. One Israeli source attacked the Foreign Office, describing it as 'unrelentingly pro-Palestinian'. The document denounced Israeli moves such as the separation fence and house demolitions. It urged EU ministers to hold meetings with their Palestinian counterparts in Jerusalem, rather than Ramallah—a move which would certainly anger Israel. In Parliament, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said that 'if East Jerusalem were detached from the rest of the West Bank, a functioning state of Palestine would be nigh on impossible to operate. That would be wholly unacceptable to the international community, as it would be to the Palestinians'".

OIL PRICE THREAT

According to a news report in the *Daily Telegraph*, "Senior officials from Europe, America, Russia and China met recently in London to devise a joint strategy to restrain Iran's nuclear programme. But as Iran threatened retaliation, including hints that it could seek to drive up the price of oil, cracks began to emerge among Western leaders. America and [the three EU countries] that have led the diplomatic talks with Iran for the past two years, Britain, France and Germany, have said that Iran had crossed a 'red line'. They have said they would call an emergency meeting of the governing board of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and push for Iran to be reported to the United Nations Security Council for breaching its nuclear obligations. In London they hope to win the support of Russia and China. Iran has responded defiantly; the economy minister Davoud Danesh Jafari warned that 'any possible sanctions on Iran from the West could disturb Iran's political and economic situation, and raise oil prices beyond levels the West expects'. Iran is the world's fourth largest oil producer, and his comments will be seen as a threat to disrupt world oil markets".

Terrorist plans for Israel

Terrorists belonging to Fatah's Al Aksa Martyrs Brigade planned to blow up the Dimona nuclear reactor or strike simultaneously at several Israeli cities, the state revealed recently in an indictment filed in Beersheba District Court. A resident of the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip was caught near Kibbutz Nir Am. He told police he was told that he was to participate in a multi-pronged "strategic suicide attack" in which other suicide bombers would attack Israeli cities or the Dimona reactor.

Biological warfare threat

American security chief Henry Crumpton, in a recent interview with the Daily Telegraph, said, "Biological weapons pose a far more serious long-term terrorist threat to the West than nuclear weapons", and that it is simply a matter of time before international terrorist groups such as al Qaeda acquire weapons of mass destruction and use them in attacks. He said, "This threat has changed the way we will fight wars in the future, we are talking about micro targets such as al Qaeda which when combined with WMD have a macro impact. It is simply a question of time. With a biological attack, it would be difficult to determine whether or not it was a terrorist attack, and it would be far more difficult to contain . . . The fear that terrorist groups may be able to acquire WMD from rogue states such as Iran or Syria explains Washington's determination to confront Iran over its nuclear programme. If we look at the threats posed by Iran, they have links with Hizbullah (the Lebanese Shia Muslim militia), which is a terrorist organisation with global reach—and the leadership has made a conscious decision to defy international treaties. I am deeply troubled by this". As for taking action to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, Mr Crumpton insisted that "every option is on the table, including military action, I would not rule out anything because of the particularly grave threat we are facing . . . The régime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria also seriously threatens Western security".

Russia "close" to the West over Iran

Iran's resumed nuclear activities have frustrated even traditional allies such as Russia. Mr Putin recently warned against "abrupt, erroneous steps" in the international community's handling of the crisis over Iran's nuclear programme, but said that Russia, the US and Europe held "close positions" on the issue. Mr Putin said that further diplomacy might be needed. He said Teheran had not definitively rejected Moscow's compromise proposal to set up some kind of Russian-Iranian joint venture on Russian territory to provide fuel for Iran's nuclear programme. Later, Mr Ansari, Iran's ambassador to Russia, confirmed that the Iranians were still studying the proposal. He said, "As far as Russia's proposal is concerned, we consider it constructive and are carefully studying it. This is a good initiative to resolve the situation. We believe that Iran and Russia should find a way out of this jointly".

ETHIOPIAN IMMIGRATION TO ISRAEL DELAYED

Implementation of an agreement with the Ethiopian Government to bring 600 Falash Mura (descendants of Ethiopians Jews who converted to Christianity) to Israel each month is being held up because of bureaucratic red tape in Israel, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom told the cabinet recently. Shalom said that Israel was not yet prepared to receive the immigrants. Eligibility for immigration still has to be determined. Foreign Ministry officials said budgetary questions have also not yet been settled. Israel and Ethiopia agreed last November that 600 Falash Mura could immigrate each month, a number that would bring the entire community to Israel by the end of 2007.

Israel warns Iran

According to the *Jerusalem Post*, "Israel raised the stakes in the crisis with Iran when it delivered its strongest warning yet that it will carry out a military strike to halt Teheran's nuclear programme. Defence minister Shaul Mofaz said that Israel will not accept an Iranian nuclear capability. He added that at this stage his government gave priority to diplomatic action, but that Israel was preparing for any eventuality. Acting prime minister Ehud Olmert in his first public comments on diplomatic issues said Israel could not under any circumstances 'allow anyone with these kinds of malicious designs against us to have control of weapons of destruction that can threaten our existence . . . Israel has acted, and will continue to act, in co-operation with the US and Europe'".

Fury over Austrian arms for Iran

Britain and America are furious with Austria for exporting to Iran 800 sniper rifles that could be used against their troops in Iraq. The HS50 Steyr-Mannlicher 50 calibre rifles can pierce body armour from up to a mile, shoot down helicopters and penetrate Humvee troop carriers that have not been fully reinforced. The weapons are highly accurate and fire a round called an armour-piercing incendiary, a bullet that the Iranians manufacture. The Pentagon fears that some will reach insurgents fighting allied forces in Iraq. London has protested to Vienna. The order, worth an estimated £8 million, was placed with Steyr last year, and the company was given government permission to export the weapons. Iran is said to be rearming after a £455 million deal with Russia for missiles and radar to ward off any air strikes on its nuclear facilities.