



News from the Nations

Bush instruction to troops in Iraq

President Bush has authorised American troops to take all necessary steps to “stop” Iranian agents from organising attacks inside Iraq. The Bush Administration believes Teheran is fuelling the insurgency by supplying Shia militias with weapons, money, bomb-making equipment and expertise. A list of 31,690 alleged Iranian agents active inside Iraq was released by an exiled opposition group. The dossier detailed the position supposedly held by each operative, most of whom are affiliated to Iraq’s Shi, according to a report in the *Daily Telegraph*. American intelligence assessments say that Teheran is increasingly trying to stir chaos within neighbouring Iraq. By tying down US forces in Iraq, Teheran limits Mr Bush’s military options for retaliation against its nuclear programme. Mr Bush said, “It makes sense that if somebody is trying to harm our troops, or stop us from achieving our goals or killing innocent civilians in Iraq, that we will stop them”, but he said US forces would not carry out attacks inside Iran.

North American Jews

Some 15,000 North American Jews would like to emigrate to Israel, but Nefesh B’Nefesh lacks the funding to facilitate their coming, according to Mr Ayalon, who became the organisation’s co-chair recently. Ayalon said at least \$45 million would be needed to bring those 15,000, all of whom have contacted Nefesh and are at various stages of the application process.

Iran taking control of Basra by stealth

Iranian intelligence is preparing for complete dominance of southern Iraq when the British withdraw by penetrating Basra’s security network and political parties, reveals a report in the *Daily Telegraph*. Iraqi intelligence sources disclosed to the *Daily Telegraph* that “Iran plans to reap the huge financial rewards presented by the southern oilfields and prevent Western businesses from gaining a foothold inside Basra. British and American political and military leaders are concerned over Teheran ‘giving help’ to terrorists who continue to kill troops every week. Commanders are anxious that once they pull out of Basra the Iranian-backed militias will take over the political and security structures, undoing four years of work. Only the Iraqi army stands in the way of the militias. A showdown between the Baghdad-controlled Iraqi army and Iranian-backed Basra militias is expected. Iran has found it easy to build alliances with fellow Shias, who form the majority in southern Iraq. While the Iranians give support to fellow Shias in Iraq, there is evidence that the minority Sunni population has received support from fellow Sunnis in Saudi Arabia. There are worries this could lead to a full-blooded sectarian war that could spread amongst the two branches of Islam throughout the Middle East. When the army withdraws from the city, they can only watch and hope, but it appears there are greater powers at work. Iran has always known Britain’s presence was transient and is well prepared for the departure—and for the next round of almost inevitable conflict”.

DECISION TIME ON IRAN’S NUCLEAR THREAT

Current estimates put nuclear arms in Iran’s hands in 2010. If world diplomacy fails to thwart Iran’s nuclear programme, can Israel really stop it militarily? Israeli Prime Minister Olmert refuses to come to terms with a nuclear Iran, and claims that Teheran must be stopped, even at a heavy price, from obtaining weapons of mass destruction and rocking the balance of power in the Middle East. According to the Jerusalem Post, “Nine countries are known to have or are suspected of having nuclear weapons: the US, France, UK, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel. Adding Iran to the mix will not only constitute an existential threat to Israel, but will also impair its operational independence. Israel currently has invested most of its intelligence-gathering resources into the Iranian issue. The Mossad holds the ‘Iran File’ and the Foreign Ministry is spearheading diplomatic efforts”. At the end of the day, as one former IAF commander involved in the successful strike on Iraq’s Osirak reactor in 1981 points out, “It is solely up to the prime minister to decide what course of action Israel will take—military or diplomacy. The way things looks now, D-Day might not be too far away”.

Israeli and US leaders comment on Iran

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said recently, "There is still time—though not unlimited amounts—to stop Iran from going nuclear". He said that a diplomatic solution to the Iranian issue was "preferred by us . . . whoever believes that the diplomatic solution is preferable must start now to pressure Iran". Mr Olmert said there was a large international coalition, including Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, that did not want to see a nuclear Iran. Earlier, former Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu told a conference that "radical Islam has already taken over the Palestinian leadership and is now attempting to do the same in Lebanon. It challenges the US efforts in Iraq—it's a political, moral and cultural threat, on Christianity and Judaism as well as on the moderate branches of Islam . . . Our primary mission is to harness all possible elements for the delegitimation and isolation of Iran . . . this will bring about either a stop to the nuclear programme or a receptive public opinion for action against it". Leading American neo-conservative Richard Perle said that President Bush would order an attack on Iran if it became clear to him that the régime was set to acquire nuclear weapon capabilities while he was still in office. Former CIA director James Woolsey said that a US or Israeli attack on Iran was a bad scenario, but the worst would be to allow a nuclear Iran.

EU plans to licence all cross-border trading

According to the *English Churchman*, "Every business trading with companies in other EU member states will shortly have to apply for a licence allowing them to continue trading. These licences will be issued only at the discretion of the European Commission. This new scheme, which will give the EU absolute control over cross-border business activities, is likely to come into effect within the next few months. It is possible such a scheme will later be extended to cover all businesses, including those trading only within their own countries. The EU's plan, which has been kept quiet by officials fearful of a storm of protest, only recently came to light as a result of enquiries. It also follows the admission of the German European Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry, Gunther Verheugen, that the cost of compliance by industry to EU regulations is already some €600 billion a year, more than three times the Commission's own estimate of the benefits of a single market, at €165 billion a year.

Meeting in Jerusalem

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni recently reaffirmed their commitment to the road map as the best way to advance the stalled peace process, at a meeting in Jerusalem. Rice told reporters of the *Jerusalem Post*, "One of the great values of the road map is that it has international support. It is the Quartet's document. It is Israel's document. It is the Palestinians' document. It has, therefore, a very important function".

Trouble over the pipeline

German Chancellor Angela Merkel is determined to ensure that what began as a regional row between Russia and Belarus over oil prices does not build into a Europe-wide energy crisis. For weeks Russian President Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko have been in a clash over Russian plans to increase its price for energy to Belarus, which ended when Putin cut off shipments through the Druzhba pipeline, which carries 1.2 million barrels of Russian oil through Belarus to customers across Europe. Suddenly countries like Germany and Poland were drawn into the fray. Germany gets about one third of its oil imports from Russia, most of it through Druzhba. Poland relies on the pipeline for 96 per cent of its oil imports, while Europe as a whole depends on Russia for over 30 per cent of its oil needs. Merkel and EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso called Russia's move "unacceptable". As Minsk and Moscow continued to bicker, Poland and Germany said they had enough oil in reserve to tide them over until a solution was reached, but the episode has highlighted just how dangerously dependent many European countries are on Russian energy. Many governments are seeking to diversify their fuel sources, and Merkel in particular has put energy policy at the top of her agenda. Feeling like pawns in Putin's brinkmanship has led some to entertain new possibilities. "In the long run the fear of blackmail will be bigger than the fear of nuclear power".

Hamas leader interview

Khaled Mashaal said in an interview with Reuters in January that Israel is a "reality" and "there will remain a state called Israel, this is a matter of fact", but the significance of his words was immediately downplayed by both Israeli and Hamas officials. "The problem is not that there is an entity called Israel", he said, but that "the Palestinian state is non-existent".