



# News from the Nations

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## **Egypt turns blind eye to smuggling into Gaza**

According to a report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, "the Egyptian regime is still enabling Bedouin smugglers to use the tunnels under their border with the Gaza Strip to transfer arms to Hamas. Despite announcements by senior Egyptian officials that they would clamp down on the smuggling, local Bedouin traders are still offering—even after the Gaza cease-fire—to smuggle goods and people under the border. These were the tunnels that enabled Hamas and the other Palestinian organisations to bring through materials to manufacture the missiles fired on Israel. Longer-range Grad and anti-aircraft missiles are also taken through the tunnels, as are regular consignments of marijuana grown in Sinai for the Israeli market. A lot of tunnels were destroyed, according to a Bedouin active in the smuggling, 'but the deeper ones that are well shored up are still standing and the only thing that will stop the tunnel business is a full opening of the crossings, but even that won't stop the arms smuggling. There will still be ways to put arms on the lorries going through the crossings and to bribe the guards'. The smuggled trade in arms, food, cigarettes, alcohol and even people, through the often very sophisticated tunnel network, is simply too profitable to the Rafah locals, and Egypt appears unwilling to take real action to stop it—the gangs that control the network are so powerful that the Egyptian authorities do not want to confront them".

## **Natural gas discovered in Israel**

A US-Israeli exploration consortium has discovered what may be Israel's largest ever natural-gas reserves at the Tamar-1 field off the coast of Haifa. They are enough to keep Israel's electricity grid running for decades to come, resulting in a welcome boost to the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange, which rose considerably. According to a report in the *Jerusalem Post*, the discovery is expected to reduce Israel's dependence on gas imports from Egypt and offshore from Gaza. The Tamar project is a joint venture of four companies: Delek Drilling and Avner Oil and Gas Exploration, owned by Israeli billionaire Yitzhak Tshuva; Isramco Negev 2; Dor Gas Exploration; and US oil operator Noble Energy Inc. Dan Halman, chief executive of the Halman-Adubi Group, says, "If the Tamar site opposite the Haifa coast succeeds in producing the significant quantities of natural gas predicted, we are talking about a revolution which will have an impact on the Israeli economy for the coming generations. The vast reservoir is poised to bring down electricity prices, reduce the country's dependence on gas from foreign countries, in particular from Egypt, and thereby turn Israel from a gas importer into a gas exporter". The potential value of the discovery, \$15.5 billion, would make it the largest find in the country's history, but Halman says that despite all the optimism it is too early to celebrate. Following the announcement of the discovery, shares of Delek Drilling, which holds 15.6 per cent of the Tamar prospect, jumped 41.7 per cent, and shares of Avner Oil Exploration, which holds another 15.6 per cent, surged 21.4 per cent. Shares of fuel exploration company Isramco, which owns 28.7 per cent, leapt 123.8 per cent.

## **Israel has fewer friends than ever**

According to *Newsweek*, "Israel has never been more isolated. Its best friend, the United States, had vetoed 41 Security Council resolutions condemning Israel in the past three decades, but was about to vote for the Jan. 8 resolution denouncing the attack on Gaza when President Bush intervened at the behest of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Still, in the face of unprecedented global criticism, the US didn't dare veto, but merely abstained. Europe, never Israel's close ally, erupted in near unanimous outrage over Gaza, with fits of anti-Semitic violence in France, Sweden and Belgium. Israel is accustomed to attacks from the left and the UN. This time though, Amnesty International has accused Israel of war crimes (using white phosphorus against civilians) and the secretary-general was unusually outspoken. After Israel bombed five UN compounds, Ban Ki-moon called the attack 'heartbreaking . . . outrageous and unacceptable'. His condemnation of Hamas rocket attacks came later, in milder terms".

### **Growing European anti-Semitism**

*As Europe faces up to its demons of financial breakdown and job losses, a wind from the past is blowing through the continent, says a report in Newsweek. "The percentage of Germans who hold unfavourable views of Jews has climbed from 20 per cent in 2004 to 25 per cent today. In France, which has the largest number of Jews of any European nation, 20 per cent of people view Jews unfavourably—up from 11 per cent four years ago. In Spain, the figures are even more striking: negative views of Jews climbed from 21 per cent in 2005 to nearly one in two this year. In Britain, where the numbers have remained around 9 per cent for some time, anecdotal evidence of increased animosity abounds. Anti-Semitism also lies at the heart of the ideology of the British National Party, the fastest-growing political party in Britain and one which has already won a seat on the London Assembly. In local elections last year the BNP doubled its number of local councillors. Alongside the Jew-hating BNP are Britain's anti-Semitic Islamist ideologues. Gordon Brown, Europe's strongest supporter of Israel, and his Labour government have done more than any other to promote British Muslims as government ministers, as MPs and peers, and Downing Street celebrates Muslim festivals and achievements". The report points out also that "anti-Jewish politics resonate in Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. All three countries sent politicians to the European Parliament to set up a far-right grouping alongside anti-Jewish rightists from France and Italy. In Poland, the percentage of those with unfavourable opinions about Jews is up from 27 per cent in 2004 to 36 per cent today and throughout this part of Europe the target is now Israel and its support in America. As jobs are lost and welfare becomes meaner and leaner, the politics of blaming the outsider can only grow. The hard-won European politics of breaking down frontiers and trying to legislate for tolerance will get harder to defend, still less to promote. European populism and the anti-EU nationalism of both the right and the left is now the politics to watch. As America celebrates its first non-white president and the hope of a new politics, Europe may be beginning to revisit its past".*

### **The European Union and Russian Gas**

The European Union recently had to demand to know precisely when Russian gas supplies would be turned back on after an agreement was signed by Moscow to end an energy dispute with Ukraine. The European Commission said that a team of EU inspectors had been on standby to verify the resumption of supplies. Vladimir Putin, the Russian prime minister, said that he had instructed the gas taps to be switched back on following the latest deal, but gave no timetable for deliveries. Meanwhile, questions were raised over the future of a strategic new gas pipeline that would bypass Russia via Turkey, reducing the EU's energy dependency on Moscow. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish prime minister, told the EU that unless Turkey's stalled membership talks were resumed he might block this pipeline. The 2,100-mile link between Turkey and Austria would transport up to 31 billion cubic metres of gas a year.

### **Britain left off EU map sculpture**

Britain has "disappeared from the map" of Europe in a controversial European Union sculpture unveiled recently in Brussels. The Czech Republic, current holders of the EU presidency, has commissioned a large-scale "provocation" for the Brussels building of the Council of Ministers which hosts national leaders during summits. The installation takes the form of a giant jigsaw map representing "clichés and stereotypes" of the EU's member states by different national artists.

### **RUSSIA SELLS AIR-DEFENCE SYSTEMS TO IRAN**

*According to a report in the Jewish Chronicle, "something went wrong with Russia's air-defence systems in 2007, with Israeli fighter jets penetrating Syrian airspace and destroying a secret installation, possibly a nuclear reactor. Syria was protected by the Russian-made air-defence system, the Pantsir. Reports suggested that 14 of the 50 systems delivered to Damascus were earmarked for shipment to Iran. Iran sealed a deal with Russia to purchase the S-300 PMU-2/SA-10E Favorit, the surface-to-air missile system. Iran's strategy to assert its supremacy in the region is built on three separate pillars: a mighty land force capable of absorbing any attack and launching deadly attacks on its own, a strategic ballistic missile arsenal capable of attacking targets as far as Europe and the Indian Ocean, and a nuclear capability. All three have one weakness: they are exposed to air attacks. Russia's air-defence systems sales address that deficiency and improve Iran's ability to repel an air attack against its nuclear installations. Israel or the US may now feel compelled to take out Iran's nuclear sites before the S-300 becomes fully operational and makes Iran's nuclear capability invulnerable".*