



News from the Nations

Israeli minister warns that Iran will be nuclear by 2009

In an exclusive interview recently Israeli minister Avigdor Lieberman told the Middle East reporter of the *Jewish Chronicle*, Anshel Pfeffer, that Teheran is preparing a reactor for military aims: "Israel is working on the assumption that Iran will have a nuclear weapon within 12 months, we have to work on the worst possible case scenario, and that is that Iran will have a nuclear weapon by 2009. The US intelligence report includes that possibility". Mr Lieberman, head of the right wing Yisrael Beitenu Party, has been given the role by Ehud Olmert of coordinating Israeli efforts against the Iranian nuclear programme. "Iran is clearly now our central threat and not only in the nuclear field", he said. "Iran is working full steam on enriching uranium and as President Bush said, if the Iranians are getting nuclear fuel from Russia for their reactor in Bushehr, then they should have no need for an enrichment programme. The Iranians have become more aggressive, in their statements about the destruction of Israel and transferring the Jews to Austria or Alaska, promoting the idea of a world without the State of Israel, and in their continuing support for Hizbullah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. This clearly now is our central threat".

HAR HOMA BUILDING PLAN

Israeli officials say Har Homa, south of Jerusalem, built on territory captured in the 1967 war, will be retained by Israel under any peace agreement. Palestinians want the area relinquished so that it can become part of their capital, and to enable territorial contiguity between Bethlehem and East Jerusalem. But the plans to build 500 apartments are more than just an assertion by Israel of who will call the shots on Jerusalem's future, they are also fuelled by the frenzied real-estate market in the Jerusalem area. Israel insists that Har Homa, where construction began in 1998 and where about 4,600 apartments are inhabited or have been already marketed, is a neighbourhood within the municipal borders of Jerusalem that were extended in 1967, not a settlement. "Israel has never committed itself to freeze construction in Jerusalem and makes a distinction between Jerusalem and the West Bank", says Mark Regev, spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. But Palestinians and most of the international community do not recognise the 1967 annexation and view Har Homa as being just like any other fresh Israeli construction on occupied territory. Israel also confirmed on the eve of a new negotiating session with the Palestinians that it would add 240 apartments to the sprawling settlement of Maale Adumim, east of Jerusalem. It was the third Israeli indication in recent weeks that settlements in and around Jerusalem are to be expanded despite pledges by both Israeli and Palestinian leaders at the Annapolis peace conference to implement Phase One of the road map, which calls for a freeze.

Kosovo independence confrontation

According to a news column in the *Daily Telegraph*, a cold-war-style stand-off over the future of Kosovo loomed as the European Union looked ready to join the United States in defying Russia and Serbia over independence for the breakaway Balkan province. As EU foreign ministers meeting in Brussels headed for "unity" in backing Kosovo's independence, Russia gave warning that such a move would spark "a chain reaction" of instability across the Balkans and beyond. "Those making such plans must think very carefully about the consequences", said Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister. David Miliband, the British foreign secretary, said that the diplomatic war of words could eventually lead to real fighting. Asked if NATO's 16,000 troops in Kosovo would need reinforcements if the situation deteriorated, he said the short answer was yes.

Abbas on borrowed time

Palestinian Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah party are living on borrowed time as Islamists continue to try to topple them from power in the West Bank, an Israeli security source told the *Jewish Chronicle* recently. "The only thing preventing Hamas from pushing Fatah out of the West Bank is the presence of the Israel Defence Force", said Mr Amidror, former head of the National Defence College. "As soon as Israel withdraws, the countdown to Fatah's demise will begin. Fatah has no chance in standing against Hamas alone".

Fatah's map poster

The Palestinian party Fatah is commemorating its 43rd anniversary by publishing and distributing a poster of a map that depicts all of Israel as Muslim Arab Palestine, with no recognition whatsoever of the Jewish State. The map shows a multi-coloured keffiyeh scarf draped over all of Israel. To the right of the map are a photograph of a smiling Yasser Arafat and a graphic picture of a Kalashnikov rifle. The poster was approved by the leadership of Fatah, whose leader is Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority. Fatah has not bothered to offer any explanation to the US Administration.

Palestinian gas project wrecked by Israel

An offshore gas project in the Mediterranean, which could have earned desperately needed revenue for the Palestinian economy, was in ruins after negotiations to sell the fuel to Israel collapsed. Industry sources blamed Israel for the failure of negotiations with the British multinational BG Group after the Jewish state repeatedly reduced its offer price for the gas. This meant that from the off the project would struggle to be economic. Israel also insisted on what insiders called "totally unacceptable security controls" by demanding the ability to stop Palestinian gas from reaching consumers in the Gaza Strip. The failure of negotiations puts back indefinitely the day when the Palestinian economy receives earnings from the Gaza Marine Field, which was discovered eight years ago with hopes that it could lead to Palestinian economic independence. The development comes just days after the international community agreed to commit £3.7 billion over the next three years to bolster the Palestinian economy.

The Testimony, January 2008

Rocky start to Middle East talks

The first peace negotiations in seven years between Israel and the Palestinians began badly recently amid tension over Palestinian militant actions and a land dispute in Jerusalem. Delegates met in an unnamed Jerusalem hotel, following the peace meeting in the US city of Annapolis. Under the Annapolis timetable a full agreement on Israel's borders and a new state of Palestine should be agreed within a year. According to the Daily Telegraph, "in the 90-minute session Israel accused the Palestinians of not doing enough to quash the activities of militants in the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians responded by demanding an immediate end to all settlement activity by Israel on Palestinian land occupied in the 1967 war. The session ended without agreement. An Israeli said the atmosphere was 'tense' while a Palestinian official reported 'not an inch' of progress. At the heart of the tension was an Israeli decision to build 307 new homes in Har Homa, Jerusalem, in an area the Palestinians claim as their future capital. A Palestinian negotiator said: 'to restore the credibility of the peace process, the Israeli government must revoke this order'".

Ceasefire talks with Hamas ruled out

Israel's prime minister and its president have ruled out cease-fire talks with Hamas. Prime Minister Olmert said that until Hamas recognised Israel they would not be partner for peace; there could be no truce talks until Hamas stopped firing Kassams into Israel.

ISRAEL PLANS NEW TOWN ON DISPUTED LAND

Israel is planning to build a dormitory town on the northern edge of Jerusalem. Zeev Boim, Israel's housing minister, issued a statement to the Daily Telegraph confirming that preliminary plans had been drawn up for the construction of 10,000 apartments. If it went ahead it would dwarf all existing Jewish communities near Jerusalem built on land seized by Israeli forces in the Six-Day War in 1967. The plans come less than a week after Washington reacted with anger to an Israeli announcement of 307 new apartments at an existing Jewish community in east Jerusalem. The new dormitory town would be on land near the small village of Atarot, between Jerusalem and the West Bank town of Ramallah. The Palestinians claim Atarot is part of the occupied West Bank while Israel claims it lies within the wider municipal boundaries of Greater Jerusalem.

The threat of Iran

It is interesting to note America's various statements over the years about Iran. In January 2002 President Bush spoke of the need "to prevent terrorists from developing nuclear weapons". In November 2004, then Secretary of State Colin Powell claimed, "Intelligence reports show Iran is developing missile technology that may enable it to deliver a nuclear weapon". In October 2007 Mr Bush said, "We got a leader in Iran who has announced that he wants to destroy Israel". In November 2007 he warned the Iranian president to be careful of being friendly with Vladimir Putin of Russia because he could find himself being used by Russia.