



# News from the Nations

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## **Obama and Israel will boycott Durban Conference**

*Advisers to President-elect Barack Obama have assured Jewish leaders that the United States will not take part in the so-called Durban II Conference, the Jewish Chronicle records. The now notorious 2001 Durban Conference became a forum for extreme anti-Israel sentiment and anti-Semitism. A senior executive from an international Jewish body said he had been told that "President Obama is fully aware of the dangers of participating in this conference".*

## **Attack designed to hurt Israel-India ties**

The targeting of Israelis and Jews in the recent terrorist attacks in Mumbai was intended to strike a blow against Indian national symbols and its international relations, according to an Indian and Israeli intelligence assessment reported in the *Jewish Chronicle*. Evidence found among the terrorists' equipment proved that the target was selected and located well in advance. The close ties between the defence establishments of India and Israel were well known to the planners. Israel has sent two top security officials from the Shin Bet to Mumbai to participate in the investigation. The attack came as Israeli security services are on one of the highest levels of alert in the state's history. "There are threats coming from many different directions, including Hizbullah, al-Qaeda and Global Jihad", an Israeli Counter-Terror Bureau official said. As a result, since the Mumbai attacks Israel has been beefing up security in Asian countries.

## **Pope to visit Israel?**

Once again it is being said that Pope Benedict XVI is to visit Israel this year at the invitation of President Shimon Peres, in an attempt to end the recent period of tension over the beatification of former Pope Pius XII. The Vatican indicated in October that it plans to accelerate the process of declaring Pope Pius XII a saint. The visit, which is yet to be formally announced, is set to take place in early May. President Peres officially invited the pope a few weeks ago, following a meeting with Archbishop Antonio Franco, the papal nuncio in Jerusalem, who indicated that such an invitation would be positively received. Archbishop Fouad Twal, the Roman Catholic leader in Jerusalem, said, "The supreme pontiff wishes to pray with us and for us and to acquire a first-hand knowledge of the hard conditions in our region". The pope is also scheduled to take in a visit to the Palestinian Authority, where he plans to meet the Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas. He also plans to travel to Jordan.

## **ISRAEL WANTS CLOSER CO-OPERATION WITH EU**

*Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni is trying to "bridge the gap" between what she called a European perception of her state and what Israel "really" is, by strengthening ties with the EU. Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad argues that the continued presence of settlers in the occupied territories meant that the EU should not upgrade its relations with Israel, saying, "We asked for a meeting with representatives of those countries to express our deep concerns ahead of the debate on the strengthening of relations with Israel". Ms Livni has thus far met with European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso to discuss including Israel in key EU projects. Israel is already involved in the EU's high-tech research programmes, but also wants a role in customs, the environment, health and other areas. In addition, the foreign minister also met with NATO officials gathered in Brussels for their ministerial meeting, and signed an agreement aimed at strengthening and expanding military co-operation with the Atlantic alliance, including the fight against militant extremism.*

## **No Middle East peace deal in 2008**

A year after the US convened the Annapolis peace conference to push for a Mideast peace agreement by the end of 2008, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice conceded that the goal could not be reached. According to a political report in *Israel Today*, Ms Rice said, "Peace . . . while it will not come in a single dramatic moment, it will come. Israel has offered the Palestinians at least 93 per cent of Judea and Samaria and parts of Jerusalem in peace talks, so there has been progress toward the US goal of the creation of a Palestinian state".

### **Putin says era of cheap gas is ending**

*Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin warned consumers that the “era of cheap gas” is coming to an end, in a speech to a meeting of gas exporting countries, held in Moscow. Members of the loose group of gas producers known as the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) also signed a joint charter at the meeting. The thirteen-member body denied that it planned to form a ‘gas OPEC’, but the new group will monitor the gas market and conduct joint research. Russian Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko told the government in a report that Russia has no intention of creating a cartel of producers. Gazprom deputy chairman Mr Medvedev said, “This is a gas non-OPEC”. The meeting highlighted the differences between the oil and gas markets. The Nigerian petroleum minister, Mr Ajumogobia, told Reuters, “The state of gas development is very different from oil. With oil you have one international oil price, with gas you have domestic, international export price, etc. Gas transport involves the construction of expensive pipelines and is sold through long-term contracts. Oil is bought by the barrel, with shorter dated time frames, but with the growing use of liquefied natural gas (LNG) a spot market is now starting to develop”. The new headquarters will be based in Doha, Qatar, which fought off competition from Petersburg, Teheran and Algiers. Russia, Qatar and Iran have the largest gas reserves in the world, with Russia laying claim to seventeen per cent of total global reserves. The comments followed warnings from Russia recently that gas supplies to Europe could be cut if Ukraine fails to resolve its payment row with Gazprom. Putin’s warning coincided with his latest attempt to gain a stranglehold on energy supplies to the West by forging an alliance with other suppliers, including Iran and Libya. Only two per cent of Britain’s gas comes from Russia, but that is expected to rise as other sources run out. In what has become almost an annual event, state-controlled Gazprom claims it is owed around £1.3 billion by Ukraine for gas supplies, and has said it will cut off supply to the country unless the situation is resolved by January. Ukraine transmits eighty per cent of Russian gas exports to Europe via its pipelines, and a similar dispute in 2006 led to an interruption of supplies across the continent.*

### **Russia signs nuclear deal with Venezuela**

President Dmitry Medvedev of Russia began his visit to the Venezuelan capital Caracas recently with the signing of a nuclear energy deal that will deepen Moscow’s ties with left-leaning Venezuela. The nuclear co-operation accord involves civilian and peaceful uses of nuclear energy, said Hugo Chavez, the Venezuelan president. Vladimir Putin, the Russian prime minister, proposed nuclear co-operation with Venezuela when Mr Chavez visited Moscow in September. The nuclear deal coincides with the start of joint Russian-Venezuelan naval exercises in the Caribbean, which Washington dismissed as insignificant. Apart from the nuclear deal, other accords included oil exploitation, industrial co-operation, and removing visa requirements for each country’s citizens.

### **EU wants to reopen former Palestinian headquarters**

According to information in a report from Focus on Jerusalem, Israeli officials are concerned about European Union plans for a peace deal in 2009 that includes Israeli concessions on Jerusalem. The EU anticipates a greater role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. “A key part of building the Palestinian state involves resolving the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states”, an EU document says. According to the report, “The EU will work actively towards the reopening of Palestinian institutions, including Orient House”. Orient House was the Palestinian headquarters in East Jerusalem during the Oslo peace process in the 1990s, a symbol of Palestinian claims to the city, and was shut down by Israel after the bombings in Jerusalem in August 2001.

### **EU’S FIRST NAVAL OPERATION**

*The EU sent six warships flying the European Union flag on a mission to the Gulf of Aden recently, marking the first naval operation in EU history, albeit for good reason: Somali pirates have hijacked forty ships in this key shipping lane, taking hostages. The operation marks a sharp departure for EU defence, which historically meant ground peace-keeping and humanitarian missions in Africa and trouble spots like the Balkans. These involve French military forces, while Britain has generally favoured working within a NATO coalition. Naval missions, meanwhile, have been carried out by individual EU states, or with NATO rather than through Brussels. This operation will be run by a British admiral, of symbolic if not also military significance, and puts Europe towards the centre of an ongoing challenge: securing sea lanes. Most important, it gives the EU a chance to show a new kind of military muscle, with relatively little cost or risk.*