



# News from the Nations

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## Israel dismisses EU resolution

Israel's top diplomats were dismissive of an EU resolution calling for Jerusalem to be the "future capital" of both Israel and a Palestinian state. Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon described the resolution as "just words"; Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Avigdor Lieberman accused the Swedish Government, which proposed the original resolution, of attention grabbing. The resolution did say that the EU does not recognise Israel's annexation of the parts of Jerusalem captured during the Six-Day War, but this is a reiteration of the EU's long-standing position. Britain voted in favour of the resolution, and this position remains unchanged. A Foreign and Commonwealth Office spokesman said, "We strongly and consistently support the vision of two states living side by side in peace and security, based on 1967 borders with Jerusalem as a shared capital, and a fair settlement for refugees".

## TURKISH VISIT

Turkish President Abdullah Gul told the Israeli Minister of Industry, Trade and Labour, Binyamin ben-Eliezer, that Turkey was interested in again playing a "central role" in talks between Israel and Syria and between Israel and the Palestinians. They have vowed to improve their bilateral relations. Mr ben-Eliezer met Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. He also held an unscheduled meeting with President Abdullah Gul. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan was on a visit to Libya. Mr Davutoglu said Turkey was prepared to resume the role of moderator in talks with the Syrians, a role it had abandoned early last year.

## Withdrawal referendum

The Knesset voted on 9 December to advance an amendment that would require a referendum on any withdrawal from sovereign Israeli territory such as the Golan Heights. The amendment was initially approved in a first reading by the previous Knesset.

## Syrian overture

Syrian President Bashar Asad on 13 November called for resuming peace talks with Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said he is ready for negotiations "without preconditions" but rejected the proposed Turkish mediation. Netanyahu told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee recently that he received messages through French President Sarkozy that the Syrians are willing to resume peace talks and are not insisting that Israel first agree to retreat from the Golan Heights. Mr Netanyahu also said that he preferred to continue using the French as a go-between instead of the Turkish Government.

## Iran's nuclear smuggling network in Taiwan

United Nations officials are investigating claims that Iran has established a new smuggling network using companies based in Taiwan to acquire specialised equipment that could be used to make nuclear weapons, according to a report in World News in the *Daily Telegraph*. "Teheran is reported to have intensified its efforts to import the technology in response to mounting international pressure to freeze its uranium enrichment programme, which many Western governments believe is aimed at building nuclear weapons. Recent intelligence reports show that officials from Iran's defence ministry have held meetings with companies based in Taiwan to buy hundreds of pressure transducers, which can be used to produce weapons-grade uranium. Western intelligence officials say Iran has responded by concentrating its efforts on Taiwan and has managed to acquire 100 transducers. They were originally manufactured in Europe and sold to a company in Taiwan, which sold them to Iran's defence ministry. UN officials are investigating whether the European companies are undertaking proper checks of end-user certificates for their equipment. The Iranian government, which has consistently denied trying to develop nuclear weapons, recently announced its intention to build 10 more uranium enrichment plants, and to start work on enriching its uranium stockpile to a higher level than previously achieved. The UN is considering imposing a new round of sanctions."

### **Lowest water level**

The level of the Sea of Galilee stands at 214.37 metres (703 ft) below sea level (at the end of October 2009). This is below the danger mark or 'red line' set at 213 metres (698 ft) below sea level, and only 50 cm (20 inches) above the black line (maximum danger mark). The Dead Sea, in comparison, has fallen to 422 metres (1,384 ft) below sea level.

### **HUMANITARIAN AID**

*Aid to the Gaza Strip increased by close to 900 per cent in 2009 compared with the previous year, the head of the IDF's Gaza Coordination and Liaison Administration, Colonel Moshe Levi, said in November. The aid is supplied by various international organisations—the International Red Cross, UNRWA, World Food Programme—and is imported into the Gaza Strip from Israel via the Kerem Shalom Crossing near the Egyptian border.*

### **Israel now plans to demolish West Bank settlements**

Israel has drawn up secret plans to demolish West Bank settlements built in defiance of a ten-month construction freeze, according to a report leaked to the *Daily Telegraph*. Hard-line settlers have said they will ignore the moratorium. Residents have blocked roads and clashed with police recently. The plan details how Israeli aircraft would monitor breaches and soldiers would be on alert for settlers refusing to back down. More than 500,000 Jews live in some 100 settlements built on 'occupied territory' in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

### **Netanyahu warns Palestinians**

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has warned that Israel might undertake its own unilateral moves in the West Bank if the Palestinians make good a threat to declare statehood unilaterally.

### **Egypt builds underground barrier**

*To date, smugglers entering the Gaza Strip from Egypt through tunnels beneath the Philadelphi Corridor are as busy as ever. The Jerusalem Post estimates that the number of functioning tunnels ranges from several hundred to 1,000, with between 350 and 500 currently operational. Attempts by Egypt's border guards to close tunnels, and even Israeli bombing raids, have failed to prevent a thriving trade, according to a recent report in the Daily Telegraph. "Egypt has begun building a wall 100 ft underground along its border with the Gaza Strip to block tunnels used to smuggle contraband and weapons into the territory, it has been claimed. In Rafah, the border town which has become the centre for a major smuggling operation, engineers have brought in earth-moving equipment and are placing deep steel tubes at short intervals into the ground. The government has not confirmed the claims, but a security source said the plan was to build a blast-proof impenetrable steel wall of sheets two inches thick across stretches of the frontier known to be used by smugglers. Another official said engineers were installing tunnel detection equipment along the border, which is about seven miles long. Witnesses said trucks had been arriving at the border laden with steel; one border guard said the construction workers were digging holes by day and inserting the metal sheets by night, and that the holes were being dug and then filled with sand. According to another theory the pipes were to be used to shoot water into tunnels to flush out smugglers. Israel and Egypt have made strenuous efforts to counter the tunnels built since Israel began to enforce a semi-blockade of Gaza. The Israelis allow some basic supplies through, and Egypt opens the Rafah crossing once a month for up to three days to allow people to cross. The construction of a wall would provoke a renewal of the criticism Egypt has faced from parts of the Middle East for being complicit in Israeli policies. The security source said the barrier's components were made in the United States and the project would take a year and a half to complete. The US government has no role in any project in the Gaza-Egypt border that would involve a barrier or a wall."*

### **Teheran's efforts to import uranium**

According to a report in the *Daily Telegraph*, Iran was attempting to import 1,350 tons of uranium from Kazakhstan, in violation of United Nations sanctions. "An intelligence report said Iran was preparing to take delivery of purified uranium ore from the former Soviet republic in £280 million deal that could be completed within weeks. Any importation of uranium would be needed to maintain its enrichment programme. Concern about Iran's nuclear programme was heightened when Teheran confirmed in September that it was building a nuclear fuel enrichment plant near the city of Qom. Israeli politicians believe Iran is close to developing nuclear missiles and have drawn up plans for air strikes if diplomacy fails to thwart the threat. Israel believes the Qom site is so deep that a ground assault could be necessary to disrupt its operation."