



News from the Nations

Iran's nuclear programme set back

The *Stuxnet* virus, which has attacked Iran's nuclear facilities and which Israel is suspected of creating, has set back the Islamic Republic's nuclear programme by two years, a top German computer consultant who was one of the first experts to analyse the program's code told the *Jerusalem Post* in December. He said that it would take two years for Iran to get back on track, and suggested that "This was nearly as effective as a military strike, but even better since there are no fatalities and no full-blown war. From a military perspective, this was a huge success." Widespread speculation has named Israel's Military Intelligence Unit 8200, known for its advanced Signal Intelligence capabilities, as the possible creator of the software, as well as the United States.

Greek government to build border fence

To curb an explosion of illegal immigration into Greece, which now accounts for ninety per cent of all illegal immigrants entering the European Union, Athens announced plans to build a 7.5-mile fence along part of Greece's border with Turkey. In 2010 alone, about 100,000 people illegally entered Greece, fleeing war-ravaged states like Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq, sometimes at a rate of 245 a day. Humanitarian agencies criticised the move, urging Greece to continue its deployment of border-patrol teams, which have helped decrease illegal crossings by forty-four per cent since October.

Possible Syrian nuclear facility identified

According to the *International Jerusalem Post*, "A compound in western Syria with buildings and hundreds of missile-shaped items has been identified as functionally related to a nuclear reactor Israel destroyed northeast of Damascus in 2007." Satellite footage of the site in Masyaf was obtained by the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security and shows a compound built in a ravine and surrounded by what appears to be a line of trenches . . . Several years ago, a military base near Masyaf was mentioned as a possible hiding place for weapons of mass destruction that Saddam Hussein might have sent to Syria before the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 . . . IAEA director-general Yukiya Amano told the [Agency's governing] board that he recently sent a letter to Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem urging him to grant inspectors access to the sites. 'Syria has not cooperated with the agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Deir Alzour site and some other locations' Amano said."

IRAN THE FOCUS OF ARAB FEARS

The quarter-of-a-million diplomatic cables recently published confirm that behind the scenes there is a united front of the US, Israel and many Arab states against Iran's nuclear ambitions. They also reveal discord and different assessments within diplomatic ranks. While the Obama Administration is still pursuing a policy of diplomacy and sanctions towards Iran, it seems that the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Bahrain have little faith in this course, and have been urging the Americans for some time to launch a military strike against the Iranian nuclear installations. Saudi King Abdullah has "painted a nuclear Iran as an existential threat and invoked the wellbeing of his grandchildren . . . he was worrying that Iran was surrounding Israel and threatening its existence."

Israel's ambassador says, "We can't rely on Europe"

A stark warning that Israel cannot rely on the support of European leaders in the battle against the delegitimisation and demonisation of the Jewish state was issued recently by Israeli ambassador Ron Prosor. According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, at a packed meeting at London's New West End Synagogue the envoy warned, "When push comes to shove, no-one in Israel really thinks that Europe will come to its aid. Israel is facing a new kind of warfare, aimed at attempting to cast it out of the family of nations, as our adversaries are crossing the line every day." He said it was also important to state that the international campaign in favour of a Palestinian right of return "would not result in a two-state solution but in the destruction of the State of Israel."

Europe threatens to recognise Palestine

Europe's foreign ministers have threatened to recognise an independent Palestinian state to punish Israel's refusal to halt 'illegal' Jewish settlements. A quote from the Daily Telegraph has warned of "the EU readiness, when appropriate, to recognise a Palestinian state, increasing international pressure on Israel following the effective collapse of direct Middle East talks." Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas recently called on the EU to take a step towards recognition of the State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders. "There is growing frustration with Israel after its refusal to commit to a new settlements freeze, and patience is running out," said a European diplomat. Talks recently with EU countries, including the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Sweden, Ireland, Greece, Luxembourg and Finland urged a tougher EU stance. At the beginning of December, Brazil recognised a Palestinian state on territory captured by Israel during the Six-Day War of 1967. Washington's Middle East envoy, George Mitchell, visited Israel in December in an attempt to save negotiations.

Oil sparks new Israel-Turkey crisis

According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, "A new agreement on exploration rights at sea between Israel and Cyprus has once again pushed Israel's relationship with Turkey into a diplomatic crisis. The Ankara government's latest gripe with Israel is a new treaty, signed recently between Israel and Cyprus, demarking areas of oil and gas exploration rights between the two countries. Turkey does not recognise the Greek-Cypriot government of Nicosia, supporting instead the breakaway Turkish minority on the island, and now claims that the agreement between Jerusalem and Nicosia is 'a challenge to Turkey's regional interests.' The agreement with Cyprus is another sign of the warming of ties between Israel and Turkey's regional rival, Greece. They have also held two joint military exercises in recent months, signed a series of cooperation agreements, and prime ministers Netanyahu and Papandreou have visited each other's capitals. The new closeness with Greece has not been lost on Turkey's leaders."

Palestinians go to UN

According to World News in the *Jewish Chronicle*, "2011 will be the year that the Palestinians turn to the United Nations to help obscure the reality of their own rejectionism as the root cause of the Israel-Palestine conflict and to use in-built majorities to make life as difficult as possible for the State of Israel. The opening move, it seems, will be made imminently. The Palestinians are pushing for a United Nations resolution declaring that settlements are against international law and thus form the main stumbling block to meaningful negotiations, thus making it difficult for the Americans to block it. Senior Palestinians now favour making a unilateral declaration of statehood on 1967 lines, possibly in July or August, and then getting the United Nations to give them formal recognition as an independent state, setting the 1967 border as the legal boundary between Israel and the Palestinian territories."

"Western Wall never part of temple mount"

The Western Wall belongs to Muslims and is an integral part of Al-Aksa Mosque and Haram al-Sharif (the Islamic term for the Temple Mount complex, meaning the Noble Sanctuary), according to an official paper published in November by the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Information in Ramallah and reported in the *Jerusalem Post*. In the past, Palestinian leaders and officials have also denied Jewish rights to the Wall, insisting that a Jewish Temple never stood in the area. The new document claims that the Western Wall, or Al-Buraq as it is known to Muslims, constitutes Waqf property owned by an Algerian-Moroccan Muslim family, and that there is not one stone in the wall that belongs to the era of King Solomon. According to this document, the "Zionist occupation" falsely and unjustly claims that it owns this wall, and Jews never used the site for worship until the Balfour Declaration of 1917. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesman Mark Regev called on the Palestinian leadership to disassociate itself publicly from the study, saying, "This is not the sort of statement to be expected from a partner in peace."

Iran's loaded invitation

Iran is asking select nations to visit its nuclear facilities ahead of international talks on its nuclear programme. According to Time magazine the move is considered as an attempt to ease pressure on Teheran. The US State Department deems it a "ploy" and no substitute for full cooperation with the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency. While China and Russia are among those invited, the US, which has pronounced suspicions about Iran's nuclear programme, is not.