



News from the Nations

Sharp rise in anti-Semitism noted

Anti-Semitism is rising at its most alarming rate since the end of the Second World War, spurred on by a “new generation of professional haters”, a Paris conference was told recently. Speaking at a three-day meeting on “education for tolerance”, jointly organised by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre and UNESCO, the centre’s Rabbi Marvin Hier said: “Not since the end of World War Two has the world seen such a proliferation of anti-Semitism. I believe that you have a new generation of professional haters who are serving as leaders, demagogues, and they are inspiring young people to do their bidding while they often hide”. Rabbi Hier said that it was wrong to blame poverty or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for growing anti-Semitism. “There is nothing new about the oldest hatred”, he said. “Some will hide behind what Israel is doing . . . but those are just excuses: that’s a ruse”.

DE KLERK URGES ISRAEL TO DISMANTLE NUCLEAR ARSENAL

Former South African President De Klerk has urged Israel voluntarily to give up its nuclear arsenal—and to use the promise to do so as a means of extracting concessions from its enemies. Addressing a meeting of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, he said it was unprincipled to argue that it was ‘OK’ for Israel but not other countries to possess a nuclear capability.

Move to block Hamas funds

The US and the European Union are trying to reach agreement to block funding to several organisations connected with the political wing of Hamas, the radical Palestinian group. The action, if agreed, would mark the first time the EU has accepted the US claim that at least some of the millions of dollars flowing from Europe and the Gulf states for Hamas’s political and charitable works is being used to finance suicide bombings and other terrorist actions. The US has designated all of Hamas a terrorist group, but the EU has designated only the group’s military wing, arguing that it also engages in legitimate political and charitable work in the Palestinian territories. But the EU is facing growing pressure from Washington to change that position, including a strongly worded diplomatic protest recently. A spokesman for Javier Solana, EU foreign policy coordinator, said recently that the EU would not follow the US’s lead by banning the organisation entirely. Europe is deeply divided over the Hamas issue, but US officials think France remains the main opponent of broader action.

ANTI-ISRAEL SENTIMENT IN BRUSSELS

Concern over increasing anti-Israel statements in the European Parliament was voiced recently by the head of the Tory group in Brussels. MEP Jonathan Evans said that he felt some of the criticism of Israel verged on anti-Semitism. “In almost every debate about Iraq over the past few months, there has been hostility towards Israel”, he reported to the Jewish Chronicle. “It reached the stage where Israel’s very right to exist was called into question”.

Hamas threatens Israel

Israel and Hamas, the Islamic extremist organisation, recently vowed to fight to their death. After the recent Israeli promise to “wipe out” Hamas, air force helicopters fired rockets at a car carrying a senior member of the organisation’s military wing. The Hamas statement in response called on all foreigners to leave Israel to save themselves before the country was demolished. “We call on all military cells to act immediately and act like an earthquake to blow up the Zionist entity and tear it to pieces”.

Hopes for access to Vatican archives

Jewish leaders said they hoped that a private audience with Pope John Paul II had opened the way for greater access to sensitive Vatican archives from the Second World War. The Pope “gave his blessing” to a request to make more of the Vatican archives available to scholars, a World Jewish Congress spokesman said.

THE COST OF PALESTINIAN UNREST TO ISRAEL

The intifada has cost Israel's economy up to \$10 billion, its representative on the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has told a London audience. Ohad Bar-Efrat, addressing a Friends of the Hebrew University event, said that the intifada, together with the global and technological slowdown, had brought the Israeli economy "to a standstill" over the past two-and-a-half years. One encouraging sign was America's £9 billion package of loan guarantees, which had made "a significant impact on financial stability", lowering Israel's cost of borrowing by about two percentage points. The road map for peace offered further hope, he maintained, whilst the economic plan passed recently by the Knesset had addressed "key policy issues". He told the *Jewish Chronicle* afterwards: "The economic dividends of peace would be very large for the whole area, because a financial package will probably be part of a peace agreement".

Straw warns Iran

Britain warned Iran recently that unless it agreed to "intrusive" inspections of its nuclear programme within two months it could forget enhanced trade and cooperation with Europe. Mr Straw, on a two-day visit to Iran, told the Iranian régime that, if it cooperated by signing a nuclear protocol by the time the European Union resumed discussions of a trade and cooperation agreement with Teheran in September, it could look forward to a new era of economic cooperation. The Foreign Secretary said that concern over suspicions that Iran was using nuclear technology to develop weapons rather than merely serving its power needs was held "not just by the West but by everyone".

Hamas goes global

According to a 'Notebook' report in Time, "Terrorism is a brutally competitive business. The radical Islamists of Hamas find themselves under pressure at home from Hizballah—a lethally efficient militia based in Lebanon and labelled a terrorist group by the US. Hizballah has cultivated an extensive network of operatives in the West Bank and Gaza since the intifadeh started thirty-two months ago. This makes Hamas rather jittery. As a counter move, Hamas is expanding its operations out of the narrow Israeli theatre. Jordanian security officials tell Time that two Hamas agents recently travelled to Afghanistan to recruit the remnants of al-Qaeda's network to join its operations in the Arab world. The Jordanians say this spells danger for many countries in the Middle East, especially since a growing number of Hamas leaders now argue that the best way to strike Israel is to attack US targets in Arab countries. A choice venue for such attacks, they say, would be Iraq, where Hamas would find local groups willing to co-operate in attacks on occupying forces".

EU calls on Iran to open nuclear sites

The European Union ditched its softly-softly policy towards Iran recently, ordering the clerical régime to give weapons inspectors "urgent and unconditional" access to its nuclear facilities. At the same time the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency called on Teheran to accept stricter, more intrusive inspections after finding that Iran had failed to report "certain nuclear material and activities". According to a report in the *Daily Telegraph*, "Lining up behind the United States, EU foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg voiced 'serious concerns' that Iran's atomic energy programme was being used to conceal an attempt to build nuclear weapons. For the first time, the EU backed pre-emptive military strikes against states developing weapons of mass destruction, provided it is done with the full backing of the United Nations Security Council. The joint statement said 'coercive measures could be envisioned' as a last resort if diplomatic efforts have been exhausted and weapons inspectors are unable to do their job".

Israeli intelligence reveals Iraq weapons deals

Israeli security sources suggested recently that the deposed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein managed to bury a small number of dismantled Scud missiles in western Iraq before the coalition military attack. They would have been capable of targeting Tel Aviv had he managed to make use of them. The same sources confirmed that they knew of two arms deals Saddam Hussein had concluded with North Korea in the months before the war. The Spanish navy did impound one shipment of fifteen Scud missiles, fitted with conventional warheads, off the coast of Yemen, but a second shipment, including dozens of Scud engines, was assumed to have got through. Now Israeli military planners are concerned about a growing Iranian influence in post Saddam Iraq. They said Teheran was trying to destabilise the country to make it hard for the Americans to put a stable and democratically accountable government in place.