



News from the Nations

QUARTET BACKS SHARON'S WITHDRAWAL PLAN

International leaders recently threw their weight behind Israeli Prime Minister Sharon by endorsing his plan for a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip after it was rejected by his Likud party. A high-powered meeting of diplomatic representatives of the US, European Union, Russia and the United Nations (the Quartet) welcomed Mr Sharon's withdrawal plan as a "rare moment of opportunity in the search for peace in the Middle East". The Likud party overwhelmingly rejected the plan for a withdrawal from most of the twenty-one Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip, and also from two settlements in the West Bank. But the Quartet urged Mr Sharon to push through the original proposal, saying his initiative "must lead to a full Israeli withdrawal and complete end of occupation in Gaza".

Hizbullah and Gaza

Israeli security officials think the latest round of violence in the Gaza Strip is the work of Hizbullah. Even though the Lebanese militant group has never operated openly in the Palestinian territories, Israeli officials say that the recent two ambushes killing thirteen soldiers bear Hizbullah's fingerprints. Weapons used were hallmarks of Hizbullah's eighteen-year-long war against Israel in south Lebanon, which ended in 2000. Israeli intelligence officials believe Hizbullah is taking advantage of a leadership vacuum in the West Bank and Gaza, and is now directing or funding up to ninety per cent of the Palestinian attacks on Israelis.

Gas off Gaza

Despite losing a Likud party vote on his plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon says he intends to push ahead with the initiative, which even if successful will leave Gaza in the lurch. According to a *Newsweek* report, for several years British Gas has been drilling in the Mediterranean. The company believes that the Palestinians have a potential money-maker off the Gaza coast: a medium size natural gas reserve of about 30 billion cubic metres. British Gas argue that the Palestinian Authority would earn about \$30 million annually from this, and, if the money does not go to Arafat's cronies, it could greatly help this overcrowded, poverty-stricken sliver of land get on its feet. However, British Gas will invest the required \$350 million needed to construct a pipeline only if it can market the gas to Israel, and the Israeli prime minister fears the money Israel would pay the Palestinians for the gas (Israel plans to convert nearly all its power stations to natural gas over the next twenty years) would end up financing terrorist attacks against the Jewish state. Instead, Sharon is leaning towards importing gas from Egypt. Without an agreement, Gaza's gas will stay untapped.

Former archbishop's views on Israeli policy

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey recently attacked the Israeli Government's "indefensible" policy towards the Palestinians in an interfaith lecture sponsored by Sir Sigmund Sternberg. He said "Palestinian anger at fifty years of unfulfilled hopes" was "central to our present crisis. Let us make no mistake about it, the plight of the Palestinian people is the emotional epicentre of our current troubles, and healing this deep wound will go a substantial way to creating a more peaceful world".

Teachers' conference condemns Israel

Britain's biggest teaching union has condemned Israel's security fence as an "apartheid wall" and brushed aside an amendment that would have also condemned Palestinian suicide-bombings. Delegates to the National Union of Teachers' annual conference in Harrogate recently overwhelmingly backed a motion describing the security fence as "incompatible with a viable Palestinian State". The conference called for an "immediate halt in construction of the barrier, and demolition of that which has already been built". Delegates refused to debate an amendment tabled by the union's ruling executive which would also have criticised Palestinian suicide-attacks. Not one speaker expressed support for Israel during the nine-minute discussion on the Middle East.

Support for the Authorised Version

According to the English Churchman, "At a well-attended thanksgiving service recently, one of the most important developments in British history, and one which would have far-reaching consequences throughout the English-speaking world, was remembered. In 1604, at the Hampton Court Conference, King James decreed that a new translation of the English Bible would be embarked upon. This translation, when completed in 1611, quickly became the dominant translation across the denominational spectrum, superseding all others. As it had the royal sanction it became known as the Authorised or King James Version. It remains to this day the definitive English translation. No other book, whether religious or secular, has had such an impact on the English language. More significantly . . . as a faithful, accurate and majestic translation of God's holy, inspired and infallible Word . . . it has been the principal means of blessing to countless numbers of people throughout the world. The speaker at the service spoke principally on the quality of the translation and the need for a standard and definitive English translation—so that what God gave by inspiration we have in our hands today in the Authorised Version . . . The Authorised Version is based upon the best textual tradition; it is the best translation because it follows the principle of formal equivalence and it is the best from the point of view of its literary qualities. The King James Version draws heavily on the previous groundbreaking work of the English Reformer and martyr, William Tyndale. Truly, said the speaker, this 'grand old Bible' is 'in a language so that the ploughboy can understand but not in the everyday language which the ploughboy speaks'. A translation of the Bible must have 'a dignity and quality that sets itself above the mundane and profane'".

Jewish delegation to Libya

A delegation of Jews will be visiting Libya to further efforts to seek redress, including property compensation, for the 38,000 former Libyan Jews who left the country following the establishment of the State of Israel, the *Jerusalem Report* learned. (Both Libya's President Qadhafi and his son Seif al-Qadhafi have made statements supporting the rights to compensation of former Libyan Jews.) This visit is as a result of secret meetings in Rome between Jewish community heads and Libyan intelligence officials in recent weeks, and occurs at a time of rapprochement with the West over weapons of mass destruction.

THE KILLING CONTINUES IN KOSOVO

Two UN peacekeepers died in an ambush as the fallout continued from the worst wave of violence to sweep Kosovo since the 1999 war. NATO troops and international police arrested almost 200 suspects in the previous week's riots, in which ethnic Albanian mobs targeted the Serbian minority, leaving twenty-eight dead. UN agencies estimate that almost 4,000 Serbs were displaced, 366 homes destroyed, and forty-one churches burned.

Sanctions on Syria

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom recently welcomed US President Bush's decision to impose economic sanctions on Syria. "This is an important decision that demonstrates US determination to wage an unyielding war not only against terrorist organisations but also against states that support them", he said in a statement. The Syrian and Lebanese Governments criticised the US sanctions on Syria as wrong and unfair, but Syria said it still seeks dialogue with the Bush Administration.

US BILL AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM

A bill that would require the US secretary of state to submit an annual report on global acts of anti-Semitism to the Senate Foreign Relations commission and the House Commission on International Relations was introduced recently in the Senate. The *Global Anti-Semitism Review Act of 2004* calls on the US to document all bias crimes against Jews around the world and describe the action taken by the host government to each crime, including law enforcement and efforts to promote tolerance education. The bill was introduced by Senator George Voinovich (Republican, Ohio).

Chill in Turkey-Israel ties

Turkey has reportedly cancelled all contracts with Israel—including the transfer of water—in response to Jerusalem's policy towards the Palestinians. According to a report in Lebanon's *al-Mustazbal* daily, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan has instructed the country's security establishment not to sign any deals with Israeli companies. Government sources in Ankara told *al-Mustazbal*: "This is a new policy, negating all military or strategic cooperation with Tel Aviv".