



## News from the Nations

### Western officials rap Israel's anti-Hamas steps

Israel's decision to stop further revenue transfers to the Palestinian Authority contradicts understandings with the Quartet (Russia, Europe, America and the UN) that these transfers would continue until a Hamas government was formed, Western diplomatic officials said in February, as reported in the *Jerusalem Post*. They said this "about face" could lead some countries to rethink their own stand regarding Hamas. "Israel broke with the Quartet position", one Western diplomat said. "Now I don't know if there will be a unified Quartet position". According to the officials, the Quartet Statement of 30 January that called for all members of a future PA government to be committed to non-violence, recognise Israel and accept all previous agreements with Israel, also urged measures "to facilitate the work of the caretaker government to stabilise public finances". The Israeli decision to take steps against the PA now, rather than waiting until Hamas formed a government, works against this goal, the officials said, and as a result there was concern that the whole Quartet framework toward Hamas could now fall apart. Diplomatic officials said that Quartet envoy James Wolfensohn had been attempting to raise money for an interim PA government on the premise that the \$60 million monthly payments from Israel would continue. "Any fundraising among Japan, European and Arab countries was dependent on Israel continuing the payments", one official said.

### "Be fair with us", says Hamas

*What does Hamas want? One of the movement's leaders claims that they are eager to engage with the West, if not Israel. He was quoted by Newsweek as saying, "My message to the West, to America, to Europe, to everybody, is this: Hamas wants peace. We hate warfare, we don't want to fight. Our problem is with the Israeli occupation. Israelis are killing our children. The West has been oppressive too—you are biased toward Israel, you support Israel. You are in the position and capable of telling Israel, 'Enough'. You are capable of telling Israel to withdraw. Why is the West concerned about the security of Israel and not concerned about our security? Stop your support for Israel, stop calling us terrorists. The European Union and America should cooperate with us. We have ways of creating understanding among our people. We are facilitators, helpers, aides. The presence of Hamas is a guarantee of safety and stability in the region. Any money that is given to us will be channelled to the correct path. We are honest people—we are open to the world. The PLO has negotiated with Israel for 30 years, and what did Israel do? It did not reciprocate. We would be happy to work under the Irish model. But is Israel prepared to respect our political wing? Is Israel ready for such a formula? The West has nothing to fear from Hamas. We are not going to force people to do anything. We will not impose Sharia. Hamas is contained. Hamas deals only with the Israeli occupation. We are not Al-Qa'eda".*

### IRAN'S NUCLEAR MOTIVE

*France's foreign minister accused Iran recently of developing a secret military nuclear programme, in the most uncompromising statement yet by a top European official about Teheran's nuclear ambitions. Philippe Douste-Blazy said, "Today it is very simple, no civil nuclear programme can explain Iran's nuclear programme. So it is a clandestine military nuclear programme". Ali Larijani, Iran's top security official, dismissed Mr Douste-Blazy's intervention as "propaganda".*

### Teheran tries to cleanse nuclear site

Iran's Revolutionary Guards have taken the extraordinary step of cutting down thousands of trees in Teheran to prevent United Nations inspectors from finding traces of enriched uranium from a top secret nuclear plant. Western intelligence sources said that more than 7,000 trees that may have contained incriminating nuclear traces have been lost in a popular parkland area in the city near the Lavizan atomic research centre. According to a report in the *Daily Telegraph*, the official explanation for the destruction of the trees was to create a national park.

#### **Al-Qa'eda moves into West Bank and Gaza**

Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, has warned that al-Qa'eda has infiltrated the West Bank and Gaza, from where it could launch "disastrous" attacks on Israel and its neighbours. Israeli army officers and intelligence analysts have already warned several times over the last year that al-Qa'eda has established cells in the Palestinian territories, a claim that the Palestinians have denied. According to *al Hayat*, an Arabic-language newspaper, Mr Abbas admitted recently that Palestinian security forces have picked up traces of al-Qa'eda operatives. "We have indications about the presence of al-Qa'eda in Gaza and the West Bank. This is intelligence information", he said. The revelation will underscore growing concern in Israel that al-Qa'eda and other hostile militants are surrounding the Jewish State. Israel has previously warned that al-Qa'eda is active in neighbouring Jordan to the east, as well as in the Sinai peninsula under Egyptian control to the south. To the north, the Israeli army also frequently clashes with Shia Hizbullah militants based in Lebanon. Al-Qa'eda is a largely Sunni Muslim group. King Abdullah of Jordan has even declared that al-Qa'eda has infiltrated Israel itself. "If they succeeded in infiltrating the West Bank and Gaza, and if no one watches over them, the result could be disastrous for the entire region", Mr Abbas said. The Israeli Government, led by acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, has already dismissed the Palestinian Authority as a "terrorist entity" after a landslide victory for Hamas.

#### **More Jewish settlers may leave the West Bank**

Israel's ruling Kadima party will start working towards a new round of pullouts of Jewish settlers from the occupied West Bank if it wins this month's general election. Avi Dichter, a former head of the Shin Bet internal security service and one of Kadima's top candidates for the election, said that, although the next government would uproot some settlers, it would not hand over control of the evacuated areas to the Palestinian Authority; the new disengagement will be from the settlements, not the land.

#### **ISRAELI FURY AS MOSCOW PLANS TALKS WITH HAMAS**

According to *World News*, Israel has reacted furiously to Russia's plans for talks with Hamas, the Islamic movement that won the recent Palestinian election but which Israel wants shunned as a terrorist group. Moshe Katsav, Israel's president, said the Russian move endangered the peace process in the Middle East. Israel was particularly angry because the decision ran counter to the tough statement made by Russia, Europe, America and the UN after Hamas's unexpected victory. Israel accused Moscow of contradicting the Quartet statement, and questioned Moscow's fitness to take part in future peace talks. Recently there were the first signs of international backing for Russia's move, as a French foreign ministry spokesman said the talks "may contribute to advancing the peace process". America and Europe categorise Hamas as a terrorist group and are legally barred from talking officially to its senior members. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ioanov said, "Sometime in the future, many leading states will start supporting Hamas and have some contacts".

#### **Teheran to infiltrate UN nuclear watchdog**

According to the *Daily Telegraph*, Iran has formed a top-secret team of nuclear specialists to infiltrate the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, the UN-sponsored body that monitors its nuclear programme. Its target is the IAEA's safeguards division, and its aim is to obtain information on the work of IAEA inspectors so that Iran can conceal more sensitive areas of its nuclear research, according to the information recently received by Western intelligence. Western intelligence officials believe that the Iranians are now taking advantage of their access to the IAEA to spy on its inspection procedures so that they can conceal sensitive areas of their nuclear operations from the outside world. "The Iranians are getting increasingly concerned about the effectiveness of the IAEA's inspections", a senior Western intelligence official told the *Daily Telegraph*. "For this reason they are deliberately targeting the IAEA so that they can be better prepared when the inspectors visit their facilities".

#### **Call for international supervision of Temple Mount**

According to the *Jerusalem Post*, "Israel and the Palestinians should allow the international community to supervise the Temple Mount and Jerusalem's other holy sites, according to a study carried out by a liberal think tank released in January, which said, 'The strong connection of members of all monotheistic religions to the city on the one hand, and the lack of trust between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the other, justifies some international intervention in overseeing the area, especially from the security standpoint and with regard to preserving the holy sites'".