



News from the Nations

UK government ignores Israel's case on Gaza

According to a report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, "An internal UK government briefing note on Israel's recent action in Gaza is written almost entirely from the Palestinian perspective. The private memo was prepared by the Foreign Office and the Home Office's research and information unit, headed 'The British government position on the situation in Gaza'. It contained only two mentions of Hamas and gives no explanation or context as to how or why Israel launched its operation in December. The first highlighted point of the advice note states, 'The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have called publicly and privately for an immediate and permanent cease-fire. Israel's military action is not proportionate'. Mr Miliband is quoted from an interview with Channel 4: 'We Supported the EU statement that said Israel's action was disproportionate, we can't be clearer than that'".

MORE NATIONS TO DROP OUT OF DURBAN II CONFERENCE?

Britain and Italy could join Canada and Israel in refusing to attend the Durban II Review Conference in April unless they receive cast-iron guarantees that it will not turn into an anti-Semitic, anti-Israel arena of hate. The conference, to be held in Geneva, is a follow-up to the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in 2001. This time a number of countries are awaiting a final decision by America.

Mubarak's balancing act over Gaza

According to the *Jerusalem Report*, "The Egyptian government faces both domestic and regional condemnation in the wake of the conflict in Gaza. The outcome of that conflict may well determine Egypt's role in the region. Unlike the war between Hizbullah and Israel, the crisis is on the Egyptian border. Egypt's nagging fear is a lawless Gaza threatening the internal stability of Egypt as a whole. The prospect of Palestinian and Egyptian militants joining forces and turning a reasonably peaceful relationship with Israel into something approaching hostile is the stuff of nightmares for Mubarak, who will have to remain on alert once the dust settles in Gaza. Egypt is working for peace while trying to work realistically with the situation in Gaza, where the radical group Hamas took over the territories next to Sinai. Egypt is trying to support Palestinian humanitarian needs, but not allow a radical group to control the situation. Even more alarming for Egypt is the prospect of being lumbered with the Gaza Strip itself, a territory which it occupied from 1948 to 1967. Israel, say many Egyptians, would love nothing more than to dump Gaza and its troubles back into Cairo's lap. A taste of what that would entail came when a flood of Gaza residents poured into Egypt after Hamas destroyed sections of the barrier between the Palestinian territory and Egypt in January 2008. While Egypt's stability is not under imminent threat, says the Royal Institute's Shehadi, whatever the outcome, Egypt must be seen to play a key role".

Iran's satellite launch

Iran's launch of a satellite in February demonstrated a new and advanced capability that allows Teheran to fire ballistic missiles carrying nuclear warheads all the way to Western Europe, according to Ben Israel, the former head of the Israel Space Agency. What is cause for concern is the Iranians' increasing ability to fire long-range ballistic missiles.

Kremlin spending on defence increases

Russia's defence budget has risen by 34 per cent since last year, and its armed forces are being completely overhauled, according to the most authoritative survey of global military trends. The Kremlin is transforming its army into an entirely professional force as part of the most ambitious military modernisation since the Cold War. According to World News in the Daily Telegraph, "Russia's official defence budget will be £27 billion this year, compared with £20 billion in 2008— this increase, one of the largest in peacetime history, will leave the Kremlin's defence budget almost double the level of 2006. Over the same period, by contrast, Britain's defence spending has risen by only 1.5 per cent after inflation".

Turkey's new tilt

Has Turkey shifted away from the United States and Israel and toward Arab radicals? This is the question asked in Newsweek. Its military has had close ties with Israel's, and Ankara has acted as a go-between for Jerusalem and Arab capitals. But after Israel's Gaza campaign, Turkey is taking a strong anti-Israel and anti-Western stance. Prime Minister Erdogan has called the assault a "crime against humanity". He has also blasted the West for remaining "spectators". Other signs of a shift have Washington worried. Turkey is strengthening ties with Iran, including intelligence-sharing on Kurdish insurgents. Erdogan told a Washington think tank that "those who possess nuclear weapons should not ask Iran not to produce them". In August, Turkey also blocked the transit of US warships into the Black Sea. Turkish policymakers insist Ankara is not taking sides; "We have more than one dimension in our foreign policy", said Erdogan's chief foreign-policy adviser, Ahmet Davutoglu.

TURKEY STOPS ANTI-SEMITIC ATTACKS

The other side of the Turkish government is shown by the fact that it has launched a series of measures to combat the anti-Semitism that hit Turkey recently, and has started trying to mend severely strained ties with Israel. Following strong condemnation of anti-Semitism by President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan, the State Religious Affairs Department instructed clerics in all mosques to refrain from delivering sermons that could provoke anti-Jewish feelings. Israel and Turkey are also trying to defuse the tension caused by Turkey's harsh attitude over the Gaza crisis.

Israel's desalination programme

According to a report in the *Jerusalem Post*, plans are already in place for desalination plants to help meet Israel's water needs. The report states: "There are two desalination plants up and running: Ashkelon (105 million cu.m/yr since 2005) and Palmahim (30 cu.m/yr since 2007) with tenders to increase output by 15 million cu.m/yr each by the end of the year. There are several more plants in various stages of planning and construction:

HADERA: 100 million cu.m/yr starting late this year and expanding to 127 million shortly thereafter.

ASHDOD: Mekorot's 100 million cu.m/yr plant has been resurrected with a completion goal of 2011.

SOREK: A 150 million cu.m/yr plant is in the tender phase and planned for 2012. When built, it will be the biggest reverse osmosis desalination plant in the world.

SHOMRAT: 50 million cu.m/yr. This is the Galilee plant also resurrected. It is in the planning stages with a completion goal of 2013. The National Planning and Building Council also recently approved setting aside land in Hadera's new industrial area for a desalination plant for the Palestinians. The country's three main natural water sources—Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee), the mountain aquifer and the coastal aquifer—are so far below the 'red' lines that new 'black' lines had to be created last year. The black lines indicate the point at which further pumping from any of the three will result in rapid, vast and irreparable damage [and] the country is rapidly approaching those black lines".

Beijing lends Russia \$25 billion

Russia has obtained \$25 billion in loans from China in return for agreeing to supply oil from new fields in eastern Siberia for the next twenty years as Moscow seeks funds to see its oil industry through the financial crisis. As recorded in the *Financial Times*, Transneft, Russia's oil pipeline monopoly, said China had agreed to lend it \$10 billion, and to lend Rosneft, Russia's state-controlled oil group, \$15 billion, in return for twenty years' worth of oil supplies, amounting to 300,000 barrels of oil a day. The deal will alleviate the severe refinancing needs of Russia's two state energy groups, but will also provide China with an important new secured supply of oil to fuel economic growth. Analysts warn that Russia could have to divert crude supplies headed to the West in order to meet the terms of the deal.

Israel tracks Iranian freighter

An Iranian freighter, recently tracked by Israel, was believed to be carrying weaponry for Hamas. It docked in the Red Sea after Egypt refused it entry to the Suez Canal.

Israel abandons importing water

Water importation to Israel is not being seriously considered as a solution to the current water crisis. In 2004 Israel signed an agreement with Turkey to import fifty million cubic metres a year. But in 2006 the two countries set aside that agreement. While Turkey had apparently prepared its facilities for the operation, Israel decided adequate means to transport the water could not be found. A fleet of ships was considered, but it would have taken too long and cost too much to build. The government decided it was wiser to invest that money in desalination plants.