



News from the Nations

Financial Times sees Israel as key cause of problems in Middle East

According to a report in the *International Jerusalem Post*, the *Financial Times* views Israel as the key cause of problems in the Middle East, according to a study published by a London-based media-monitoring organisation recently. "A study published by *Just Journalism* accuses the international business newspaper's editorial coverage of ignoring the Iranian threat, downplaying other issues and viewing Israel as primarily responsible for the perpetuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The report, titled 'Financial Times 2009: A year of Middle East editorials', analysed 121 editorials from the paper's hard copy and website published in 2009". The *Financial Times* has declined to comment.

US renews links with Syrians
President Barack Obama has nominated Robert Ford as the first US ambassador to Syria in five years as he seeks to engage Damascus as part of a wider Middle East peace push. According to the Jerusalem Report, the announcement was made just before William Burns, the US under secretary of state for political affairs, held "candidate talks" with Bashar al-Assad, Syria's leader. Syria remains key to peace with Israel, which still occupies the Golan Heights.

Egyptian security

Egypt is stepping up security on its maritime frontier with Gaza in a bid to prevent smuggling by sea, as work continues on a barrier along the land border.

Russian arms flood Latin market

Latin America is becoming the hottest new market for Russian arms, and Washington seems to be the unwitting facilitator. According to a new report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and repeated in *Newsweek*, "Russia has inked deals with Venezuela, Peru, Brazil, Mexico and Colombia—worth a total of \$5.8 billion in 2008—in exchange for access to oil and gas reserves, and is actively negotiating with Bolivia, Uruguay and Ecuador. Though Latin American defence spending is modest and US allies Mexico and Colombia have the biggest defence budgets, Russia is making big inroads in a region that Washington thinks of as its backyard. Venezuela has emerged as Russia's preferred client, buying \$4 billion in tanks, fighter jets and assault rifles since 2007. Last year Moscow also extended \$2.2 billion in credit to Caracas for the purchase of Russian weapons. In turn, Russian oil companies will be given ample access to Venezuelan oilfields. The US is at least partly to blame for Russia's recent upsurge. Since 2006 Washington has aggressively cut back weapons sales to countries judged unstable or soft on terror—Russia seems more than happy to rush in to fill the demand".

Israel oil and gas search

The Canadian Bontan Oil and Gas Company, which has been searching for natural gas off the coast of Israel, announced in early February that it has found prospective resources of up to six trillion cubic feet of it in two places called the "Mira" and "Sarah" prospects. The two finds could be worth as much as \$6 billion. The Canadian company "will have an indirect 71.625-per-cent interest in these prospects via its 75-per-cent equity interest in the Israel Petroleum Company, which has acquired a 95.5 per cent interest in the drilling licences, as well as an adjoining exploration permit from the current operator subject to approval by the government of Israel", the *International Jerusalem Post* reported.

BERLUSCONI WANTS ISRAEL TO JOIN THE EU

Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi visited Israel for a three-day tour in early February, saying he wants the Jewish state to join the EU. The Italian leader took seven cabinet ministers along on the trip to underline the importance of bilateral ties. He said, "This shows that we consider Israel one of the European countries, and as long as I am one of the shapers of politics, my greatest dream is to include Israel among the European Union countries as we are part of a Judeo-Christian culture that is the basis for European culture". According to this report, the same point was made by Mr Netanyahu: "I can think of few peoples who have contributed more to Western civilisation than our two peoples. In both Rome and in Jerusalem, the foundations of Western culture were laid".

The ties that bind

Israel's government has approved Prime Minister Netanyahu's National Heritage Plan, which aims to reconnect Israelis to their national, cultural and religious history. Netanyahu first presented the plan during his speech at the Herzliya conference in February. The plan proposes a comprehensive renovation effort on more than 150 historic sites, and the creation of two new cross-country hiking trails connecting them. Following pressure from the Shas religious party, prior to the cabinet meeting, Netanyahu announced that he was adding two places to the provisional list of heritage sites: the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron and Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem. Netanyahu said that development of the heritage plan will be coordinated by Cabinet Secretary Hauser, and will involve twelve government ministries. It will be implemented over the next five years at an estimated cost of approximately \$160 million. Two-thirds of this will come from the state and one-third from external agencies like the Jewish Agency and the Jewish National Fund. Netanyahu said, "A crisis in values is threatening our collective identity. A new generation of Israelis, for whom the Zionist experience is foreign, take their lives here for granted and is being raised in an environment of cultural shallowness with dwindling knowledge and spirituality. Zionism for them lacks charm and vitality—success in the values arena begins with the ability to tell the story of the link between the nation and the land".

EU still funding Palestinian terror

The British Taxpayers' Alliance pressure group has joined the Israeli campaign against European Union funding for the Palestinian Authority's education system, which they claim includes incitement against Israel. Two years ago the Alliance published a report highlighting how British aid to the Palestinian Authority, supplied by the Department for International Development, financed educational programmes which exhort children to become Jihadists and praise suicide bombers. In a more recent report the Alliance continued to highlight similar content in the Palestinian curriculum. It said that in 2008 DFID aid to the Palestinian territories reached £64 million. In addition, Britain contributed €52 million out of the €420 million of aid given to the Palestinians by the EU. Since the Oslo agreements were signed the Palestinians have received more aid per capita than the people of Europe in the Marshall Plan after the Second World War.

SABRE RATTLING

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said in February that it was vital to resume peace talks with Syria, because otherwise war was likely to break out. Syrian President Bashar Assad responded by claiming that Israel was pushing the Middle East toward a new war.

Peace pressure

Following heavy international pressure, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas agreed to a US proposal to hold talks with Israel in the format of indirect negotiations conducted by US special envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell.

Nerve centre for Hamas

According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, the full extent of the Hamas political and propaganda operation in Britain has been revealed in a shocking new report into the Palestinian terror organisation's supporters in this country. According to the Jerusalem-based Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre, "Britain has become a hub for Hamas activities in Europe, including virulently anti-Semitic propaganda aimed at children". The report identifies Britain as a vital strategic centre for the terror group, and names key Hamas activists in this country, who cannot be named for legal reasons. The report also accuses Hamas of involvement in the legal moves to arrest Israeli opposition leader Tzipi Livni as a war criminal. As a centre of the Arabic-language media, the UK has acted as the perfect base for spreading the Hamas message worldwide, according to the think tank researchers. A London-based satellite television channel is accused in the report of supporting the firing of Kassam rockets into Israeli territory.

Petition to Number 10 Downing Street

Recently the UK Government agreed to promote Israeli goods made in Judea and Samaria only if they stated that they were 'Made in Palestine' or the 'Occupied West Bank', or 'Made by Palestinians'. This is effectively a boycott of Israeli-made goods from this region, and could easily expand to cover other areas of Israel. It punishes not only Israeli companies and Jews but also Israeli Arabs. The ICEJ (International Christian Embassy Jerusalem) UK has initiated a petition on the prime minister's website calling for a reversal of this decision, and for as many as possible to sign to bring about a change.