



News from the Nations

Netanyahu pledges to face down Iran

Stabilising the Israeli economy, dealing with the Iranian threat and establishing a dialogue with the Obama administration will be the first priorities of Netanyahu's new government, which was sworn in recently, with thirty ministers and eight deputy ministers, the largest government in Israel's history, and based on a coalition of six parties. A *Jewish Chronicle* report shows concern in Jerusalem with Obama's policy of "engagement" with Iran and the Arab world, and a team seeks an early meeting in Washington between the two leaders as a matter of urgency. This meeting could take place next month if Mr Netanyahu travels to the US to attend a conference of the Israel lobby, AIPAC. Relations with the Obama Administration will be a key factor in dealing with the pressing concern of Iran. Israel needs to know urgently the Administration's long-term plans regarding Iran if, as most Israeli experts believe is inevitable, Mr Obama's engagement policy fails. Military planners have stressed that an Israeli strike without US assistance or support will be extremely difficult.

Israeli strike on Sudan

According to a report in *Time* magazine in March, Israel was responsible for an air strike which took place during Operation Cast Lead in January against an arms convoy in the Sudan. The magazine reported on an arms smuggling route between Iran, Sudan and Gaza.

Why did Britain go to Geneva?

Two contrasting aspects of the Middle East conflict were brought home in Geneva and Israel. According to a report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, "In Geneva there was the circus of the UN's conference on racism; and in Israel, the revelation to the *Jewish Chronicle* that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu will agree to the principle of a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Jewish groups in Geneva were in uproar over the response among UN officials to the anti-Semitic opening-day speech by Iranian president Ahmadinejad. None of the UN hierarchy joined the walk-out, and UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay later refused to meet Jewish groups who wanted to question the way the UN handled the event. Few of the articles in the British media bothered to note that several European countries, including Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, as well as President Obama's USA, Canada and Australia, had decided to have no truck with the meeting. So why is it that the foreign secretary, David Miliband, agreed to a British delegation attending the event and that it was allowed to take place at all?" The *Guardian* did a report, as well as noting Ahmadinejad's tirade against Israel, and his claim that Zionists had penetrated into the political and economic structure of Western countries, including legislation, mass media, companies, financial systems and security and intelligence agencies—words which could have been written by Hitler himself. Littlejohn in the *Daily Mail* said, "Geneva was always going to be little more than a platform for Islamic and African tyrants to pour hatred on the Jews". It was notable and welcome that delegates from Fatah joined the walkout in Geneva, as did those from Jordan and Morocco. The reality of Binyamin Netanyahu's acceptance of a two-state solution is likely to matter more, because this would be a guarantee by the US to protect Israel in an attack which might be launched by Iran.

Israel ponders going it alone with Iran

The *Jewish Chronicle's* analysis regarding an attack on Iran is that it would almost certainly cause a chain reaction in which proxies Hizbullah and Hamas will use Iranian-supplied weapons to engage the IDF on two fronts. The debate is, Can Israel actually pull it off? It says, "Five squadrons have been equipped with F-151 and F-161 fighter bombers, specifically designed to carry heavy payloads on long-range missions. Retired General Professor Yitzhak Yisrael, who headed the air force's Intelligence Department, has said that Israel is 'technically capable' of neutralising the Iranian threat—but other experts are less certain".

Israel ups its strike capability

According to an analysis in the Jerusalem Report, "Excellent intelligence meant Israel had early warning of an arms shipment containing suspected long-range missiles for Hamas, and was able to identify it among hundreds of ships crossing the Red Sea and convoys traversing the desert. Israeli planes and ships operated extensively along the Sudanese coast during the 1980s, smuggling out Ethiopian Jews heading for Israel. Today that is where most of the Hamas-bound arms shipments come from. Many links from that period are still in place and Mossad maintains close relations with its counterparts in Ethiopia, keeping an eye on the activities of both Iran and al-Qaeda in East Africa. Hundreds of pilots have trained for 2,000km missions and practised air-refuelling over the Mediterranean. The squadrons now are much more flexible in adapting themselves at very short notice, they would have only had a few days warning at most. A satellite-based, real-time information system integrates all the planes into one network, enabling them to receive the coordinates of a moving target hundreds of kilometres away while in the air. Former Israeli Air Force generals pointed out these capabilities and the fact that the Iranian nuclear installations are within the same range as Sudan. All these factors will be crucial to a successful attack against Iran. Iran has a formidable air-defence system and is on high alert. Its nuclear infrastructure is mainly in underground fortified bunkers, and will take a concentration of heavy bombing to take it out".

Iran lacks defence against Israeli missile strike

A new report detailed in the *Jerusalem Post* has assessed that Israel could use ballistic missiles to attack Iranian nuclear facilities, rather than air power. The report also warns that such action could trigger a response that would escalate to include the use of weapons of mass destruction: "Abdullah Toukan of the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies wrote that Israel's use of Jericho III missiles to strike Iran's nuclear site could look much more feasible than using combat aircraft, as Iran still lacks an adequate missile defence system. Of the possible routes for an air operation, Toukan presented a northern route hugging the Syrian Turkish border as the least risky from an Israeli perspective. Forms of retaliation from Iran include efforts to destabilise Iraq, supporting the Taliban against American-backed forces in Afghanistan, threatening US military forces and nearby countries that host them, such as Qatar and Bahrain, as well as possibly cutting off oil supplies".

New Israel boycott fears

Jewish groups fear that a government-backed meeting about the labelling of products from the West Bank may lead to a new 'back door' boycott of Israeli exports to Britain. A meeting was held after invitations went out to major retailers, consumer groups and a small number of non-governmental organisations. Oxfam is the only group believed to have confirmed that it would attend.

Britain's U-turn on war crime law

Senior Israeli officials have attacked the British Government for reneging on its promise to change a law that allows private citizens to bring war crimes charges against Israeli officers. The failure to alter the legislation effectively bars Israeli top brass from entering Britain for fear they would be arrested on arrival. A spokesman said: "Both Blair and Brown governments promised that they would bring the necessary legislation to Parliament but it is clear now that they never really meant to fulfil that promise. The British hypocrisy is breathtaking—how can they allow people to bring charges against our officers? Don't they know that their officers will be next?".

ARMS STILL BEING SMUGGLED INTO GAZA

Explosives are still being smuggled into Gaza, despite Operation Cast Lead and the international coalition set up to stop the flow of weapons. According to the Jewish Chronicle, Israeli intelligence reports have revealed that, since the end of the operation, twenty-two tons of explosives, forty-five tons of explosive-making materials and hundreds of missiles and mortar bombs have been smuggled into Gaza through the tunnels beneath the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. This has been happening despite the efforts of eight NATO members, including the UK, who have set up a coalition to fight the smuggling. Furthermore, Palestinians have been working hard to repair old tunnels and construct new ones. Another report published by the Washington Institute takes Egypt to task for failing to halt smuggling from the Sudanese border to the Sinai desert and Gaza. There is evidence that Egyptian forces are taking steps to arrest and punish smugglers, but, even when the Egyptians to uncover a tunnel, they rarely demolish it.