



News from the Nations

George Mitchell returns to the Middle East

US special Middle East envoy George Mitchell met with Benjamin Netanyahu on 25 April during a shuttle diplomacy visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, as the White House continues efforts to pressure Israel into making additional concessions to the Palestinian Authority, towards a resumption of diplomatic talks.

Israelis' views on Obama's plan

A huge majority of Israelis would oppose an attempt by US President Obama to impose a final-status agreement with the Palestinians. A poll reported in the Jerusalem Post sponsored by the Independent Media Review and Analysis organisation found recently that, when Israelis were asked if they would support Obama imposing a plan dividing Jerusalem and removing the Jordan Valley from their control, ninety-one per cent of Israelis who expressed an opinion said no and nine per cent said yes, a poll taken from 503 Israelis. Eighty-one per cent said it was improper for Obama to try to force such a plan on the two sides, while nineteen per cent of those who expressed an opinion said it was proper.

Israel warns Iran

Ephraim Sneh, former Israeli deputy minister of defence, when asked if Israel should consider a solo attack on Iran without Washington's backing, said, "We don't have permission, and we don't need permission from the US".

US may impose a Middle East plan

Israel's diplomats are coming round to the idea that the White House could try to impose its own peace plan on the Israelis and Palestinians for the first time in four decades. According to a report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, "There have been a number of signals in recent days that the Administration is planning to present its own peace plan. Visits to the region by George Mitchell have been repeatedly postponed, giving rise to the speculation that President Barack Obama has decided to change tack. The Americans are no longer insisting that PM Netanyahu provide a swift answer to their demands on settlements and other subjects as a prelude to a renewal of talks with the Palestinians. This is seen as another indicator that the Americans do not believe that Netanyahu can currently deliver an answer and that a more radical approach is called for. The Obama peace plan is still being worked upon but it is widely supposed to resemble the 'almost agreement' that the sides were close to at the Camp David conference a decade ago. This provided for a Palestinian state on almost the entire West Bank, a partition of Jerusalem with joint rights in the Old City and Temple Mount and creative solutions for the Palestinian refugee problem. Sources close to the PM said that 'we will not be forced into accepting any imposed solution. If the Administration tries that, it will ultimately fail—those who want to continue the Oslo process, who want us to continue to give and give and give, without a Palestinian willingness to recognise our right to a national home, are co-operating with the phased plan for Israel's destruction'. But one adviser admitted that in the end it will depend on the amount of pressure the Americans apply".

'ISRAEL WAS CLOSE TO WAR THIS WINTER'

Syria smuggled long-range missiles to Hizbullah in Lebanon earlier this year, leading to Israeli threats to attack the weapons convoys. The Jewish Chronicle reports: "Such an attack could have escalated into another war on Israel's northern border. Israel passed on messages through third parties that it would not stand by if Syria supplied Scuds to Hizbullah. The Americans also warned Syria that its actions could lead to an Israeli attack that may escalate into a full war. Syria seems to have ignored the warnings and this is the reason that the US has decided to postpone indefinitely returning its ambassador to Damascus. Hizbullah is estimated to be holding 30-40,000 missiles obtained through Syria and Iran over the past few years, despite a UN resolution which ended the Second Lebanon War and forbids arms shipments to Hizbullah. Besides the increase in the number and quality of these missiles, Israeli sources say that the main difference since 2006 is that Hizbullah's missile forces are now under the direct control of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards".

Strike on Iran “off the table” for now

A press report in US Today states, “The United States has ruled out a military strike against Iran’s nuclear programme any time soon, hoping instead that negotiations and United Nations sanctions will prevent the Middle East nation from developing nuclear weapons, a top US Defence Department official said recently”. Military force is an option of last resort. Iran’s leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was quoted by Iran’s state media as saying the country won’t give in to US pressure. A recent Defence Department report to Congress concludes that Iran could develop a missile capable of striking the United States by 2015. Iran already has the largest deployed ballistic missile force in the Middle East, comprising about 1,000 missiles capable of hitting targets up to 1,200 miles away, the report warns. The United States has twenty-five long-range interceptor missiles based in Alaska and California as part of a system designed to defend the nation against attack from North Korea or Iran, and is confident that these are sufficient.

New tensions in Lebanon

King Abdullah of Jordan recently issued an ominous warning about a potential conflict this summer. US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said that Hizbullah’s increasing stock of rockets and missiles is destabilising the region. According to a report in *Newsweek*, “Syria and Iran are passing Scud missiles to Hizbullah. Israel says that the missiles would put Jerusalem within striking range . . . an Israeli attack on Hizbullah could easily spill over into a broader regional conflict. Both sides are flexing their muscles—Israel has made provocative over-flights of Lebanese territory in recent months and Iran has carried out missile tests and even a series of massive war games in the Persian Gulf, and Hizbullah has not denied receiving Scud missiles—which could produce deadly results”.

Anti-Semitism In Venezuela

In a World News report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has criticised the Venezuelan Government for encroaching on the civil and political rights of its people, particularly those of its Jewish community. The report was particularly concerned about the rising number of anti-Semitic incidents, and that the government-controlled media “contributed to creating an atmosphere of intimidation and violence against the Jewish community in Venezuela”. There is a growing Venezuela-Iran strategic alliance, which is primarily anti-American and is anti-Semitic/anti-Zionist. The 12,000 Jews remaining in Venezuela are becoming the scapegoat for the administration and economic crisis that is engulfing a country blessed with oil, coffee and sugar. One third of the Jewish community has fled, fearing Soviet-style state anti-Semitism, which has already begun. A weekly Caracas-Teheran flight was inaugurated by Mr Chavez, who arrived in Iran at the very moment his Special Forces raided the Caracas Jewish School. Within this catalogue of Caracas’s violations of fundamental rights, the report documents the government’s incitement to Jew-hatred as a policy of state.

Terror cells rife in Sinai

Israel’s anti-terrorism Bureau recently warned all Israeli tourists to leave Sinai due to a serious terror threat. Defence officials said that the Egyptian security forces were making a “serious attempt” to clamp down on the terror cells in Sinai, but that a number of terror groups were operating in the peninsular almost at will. The cells in Sinai are co-operating with local Bedouin smuggling rings and Palestinian organisations in Gaza. Egypt has been building a steel barrier beneath the Rafah border to block the smuggling tunnels, but its security forces are reluctant to take on the Bedouin gangs since they have in the past carried out attacks on tourist resorts in revenge.

RACISM IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

A Flame review in the International Jerusalem Post says, “How can peace prevail in the Middle East in the face of Islamic bigotry and hate? A United Nations conference on racism, which took place in Durban, South Africa, declared that Zionism is racism. The meeting was dominated by representatives of Islamic and Arab states and other anti-Israel forces. Islamic anti-Semitism permeates the Arab Middle East and creates an atmosphere in which Jews are reviled and represented as sub-human. How can the Palestinian people embrace peace with a people represented by their religious and political leaders as dehumanised, evil beings? Yet the US and many European nations continue to demand that Israel make one-sided sacrifices for peace with a people steeped in racism and committed to its destruction”.

US arms deal

The US will supply up to nine Lockheed Martin C-130J Super Hercules transport aircraft to Israel in what could become a \$1.9 billion deal, recently announced in the Jerusalem Report.