



News from the Nations

Man with a plan

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's aides say he is crafting a proposal for a "phased approach" to breaking the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock. In an interview in the *Wall Street Journal* in March, Defence Minister Ehud Barak said, "Netanyahu might propose a Palestinian state with temporary borders, a concept Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has consistently rejected."

Can Israel's leader make peace real?

According to *Time magazine*, "Pressure is growing on Israel to compromise, but it is difficult to imagine worse timing given the upheavals on its borders, Hamas entrenched in Gaza and Hizbullah in Lebanon. Netanyahu is on record supporting a demilitarised Palestinian state. But few details have been filled in. We will soon learn more, the future of the Jewish state is at stake."

Israel's flotilla request to Turkey

Israel has asked the Turkish government to prevent the sailing of another flotilla to mark a year since the *Mavi Marmara* incident. Israel says it has no problem with the transportation of humanitarian aid to Gaza through legal channels. According to a government spokesman, "The passages to Gaza are open . . . the quota for 220 trucks cannot even be filled as there is no need for more aid. Under these conditions, such an aid campaign could only be seen as provocation."

Israel rethinks its quake preparation

The recent earthquake in Japan and its devastating results have renewed the debate regarding Israel's preparedness for a major quake, which geologists claim is only a matter of time. According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, "Big quakes tend to hit Israel every 80–100 years. The last significant quake was in 1927 so the next one could be imminent . . . In addition to earthquakes, there is also a risk of a tsunami on Israel's shores. While prevalent in the Pacific, tidal waves in the Mediterranean are rare, and only one case was recorded in the last century, of a relatively small one in 1956 caused by a quake in the Aegean Sea. Despite this, an Israeli geologist believes that a major quake in the eastern Mediterranean could create a major tidal wave that would come crashing down on the coastal region. The third major risk is damage to two nuclear reactors, at Soreq River and near Dimona in the Negev desert. In an interview with a reporter for the *Jewish Chronicle*, the deputy director general of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission said the reactors in Israel are one-hundredth the size of those in Japan, and the cooling systems are much simpler. 'We are taking all necessary measures to ensure their safety.'"

Arab press says "The West wants our oil"

Western military intervention in Libya is being labelled by much of the Arab press as an oil grab, according to *Israel Today*: "The US-led coalition that invaded Iraq in 2003 was accused of the same thing. 'There is no doubt that material interests are the main motivation for this military intervention and that it is being fuelled by oil, according to Tunisian news, also the Algerian news agrees—the real battle is about oil: it has nothing to do with the Libyan people' . . . Newspapers and television commentators across the region noted that while the Western powers were quick to intervene in Libya, which has a lot of oil, they have taken a far more passive approach to deadly uprisings in Yemen and Syria, countries that are not major oil producers."

CHANGES IN EGYPT'S POLICIES WITH ISRAEL

Egypt has suspended construction of an underground steel wall along the Egypt-Gaza border that it had been building over the past year in an effort to stop weapons smuggling through tunnels into the Gaza Strip, Israeli defence officials told the Jerusalem Post. According to the officials, Egypt suspended construction of the underground barrier following the revolution in the country in February which toppled Hosni Mubarak's régime. Israel has urged Cairo to continue the previous government's tough position on smuggling and to work to take action to prevent the flow of arms to the Gaza Strip.

Is Israel ready for UN battle?

September is the month in which Palestinian leaders are likely to seek recognition for an independent state within the pre-1967 borders, if no progress is made on the peace process by then. According to a Comment and Analysis report in the Jewish Chronicle, "This time, not only are the Palestinians assured of a massive majority in the General Assembly but signs began to emerge that the US will not use its Security Council veto to prevent the resolution on an independent Palestinian state from passing to the Assembly. Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said that a 'diplomatic tsunami' is heading towards Israel, and when the wave arrives, things could get nasty. Israel is briefing its envoys around the world to explain that Israel will have no option but to respond with unilateral action. This is likely to mean Israel annexing the 'settlement blocs'—the West Bank areas whose status would be decided in negotiations. To understand what might happen next, log on to Facebook [see item below]. Young Arabs are getting organised. They know—and Israel knows—that the UN vote could be an opportunity for the Arab spring to blossom in the West Bank. Alon Pinkas, ex-Israeli consul general to the US, told the Jewish Chronicle, 'What will we do if thousands of Arabs march out of the West Bank and into Jerusalem? We will not have an answer.' Meanwhile Britain, France, Germany and other European governments will, in the coming weeks, use the Quartet (the EU, US, Russia and the UN) to draw up the framework of a peace treaty, using the pre-1967 borders as a basis."

FACEBOOK PLAN FOR A THIRD INTIFADA

- March to Erez (Gaza border crossing) and entrances to Jerusalem for mass demonstrations, following the example of Egypt's Tahrir Square
- Mass demonstration near the settlement of Beit El outside Ramallah
- March is dedicated to the Palestinian martyrs and the heroes of the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere in the Arab world
- We will reverse the Nakba State of Israel (catastrophe) of 1948 and Free Palestine together
- Our advice to the Jews of Israel: "Run for your lives"; and May 15 is the Day of Resurrection. We will take revenge on this day.

Brace for trouble

The EU peace initiative is about to kick off, according to World News in the *Jewish Chronicle*: "At this time a new peace initiative doesn't seem to be the right moment. The uprisings that have engulfed the region have narrowed down the room for compromise even more. Israel can hardly be expected to make concessions when the regional order seems poised to collapse, its peace treaty with Egypt is under serious strain, Iran's ascendance appears unstoppable and America's influence appears eclipsed. The turmoil in the Mid-East means many things—but one thing that should be self-evident is that it proves the moral bankruptcy of four decades of European foreign policy in the region, including the morbid obsession with forcing Israel into ever-growing concessions for the sake of a peace that exists only in the Western mind. So brace for trouble."

UN says PA is ready for statehood

The Palestinian Authority could function as a state but has been held back by the "occupation" and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from fully achieving this goal, Robert Serry, the UN's special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, said on 12 April. The *International Jerusalem Post* notes that "His statement and the report come as the Palestinians are preparing to ask the United Nations in September for unilateral recognition of statehood, a move that would need the support of the Security Council. It follows reports from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that lauded Palestinian state-building measures . . . One government official added that he appreciated the progress the PA had made in its economy and state-building efforts—Israel has been a partner in these reforms, the official said, but there is still much work that needs to be done."

The new Egypt

According to a report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, "In an interview with Egyptian state television, Foreign Minister Al-Arabi said that, while Egypt remains committed to the peace accords it signed with Israel, that did not mean that the two countries should have warm relations. Relations between Israel and Egypt should be conditional on progress in the peace process." Another cause for concern for Israel is the signs of a thawing in the relations between Egypt and Iran. Al-Arabi said, "We will open a new page with all countries, including Iran, also talks with Iran's proxy Hezbollah, despite their attempts to carry out terror attacks in Sinai last year." A senior Israeli diplomat recently said, "Losing Mubarak was a tragedy—let's hope that the military can hold onto their influence for as long as possible."