



News from the Nations

US IN TALKS OVER 'EURO ARMY' PLAN

According to a report, Washington recently requested an emergency meeting of NATO over growing fears in America that the European Union's latest plans for its 'Euro army' will undermine the alliance. The meeting in Brussels reflected a growing crisis in transatlantic relations triggered by Britain's recent decision to throw in its lot with Franco-German defence plans. Nicholas Burns, the US ambassador to NATO, told fellow ambassadors at a stormy session that the EU's push for greater military autonomy posted "the most significant threat to NATO's future". Washington was astounded when Britain signed up to Franco-German plans for an EU operational command headquarters separate from NATO. Mr Blair also agreed to the idea of a "vanguard" of EU states forging ahead with joint defence, known as "structured cooperation". In exchange, France and Germany signalled that they would help unblock the impasse over Iraq.

Israeli settlement boost

According to a report, the organisation Peace Now has accused Israeli housing minister Effie Eitam of turning his ministry into a building contractor for the settlement movement, after the Israeli Government recently published tenders for 605 homes in the West Bank. That was almost as many as the total number of tenders issued in the previous nine months. The 'road map' for peace called for a halt to all settlement construction, and both the US and EU have denounced settlement activity as an obstacle to peace.

Queen raises fears over EU constitution

The Queen is growing more concerned about Tony Blair's plans to sign a European constitution that she fears could undermine her role as sovereign. The *Daily Telegraph* has learnt that Buckingham Palace has asked for documents highlighting the constitutional implications of the EU's plans to be sent to her advisers. It is believed that the Palace's concerns focus on whether the Queen's supreme authority as the guardian of the British constitution, asserted through the sovereignty of Parliament, could be altered or undermined by Article 10 of the draft text. This states: "The constitution and law adopted by the union's institutions in exercising competencies conferred on it shall have primacy over the law of the member states". Many MPs say that this will rob the House of Commons of its ultimate authority to override decisions and laws made by the EU. Mr Frank Field, the Labour MP for Birkenhead, said: "It is wonderful that at last the Palace has got wise to this". He said that in most respects the constitution would relegate the Queen to the role of a "glorified head of a county council. If it goes through unamended, the nature of Europe changes from an organisation that draws its powers from member states to one that has a legal character of its own and will be able to act as a state".

The USA takes anti-Syria line

The Bush Administration recently threw its weight behind Israel's attacks on a Palestinian training camp in Syria, terming it "essential". It also vowed to veto any UN Security Council resolution that condemned Israel for the action without denouncing the attack by Palestinian Islamic Jihad on a Haifa restaurant that killed nineteen Israelis. The House of Representatives is scheduled to vote on the Syria Accountability Act, which could lead to the imposition of sanctions on Syria if it does not abandon its support for terrorism, its occupation of Lebanon and its pursuit of non-conventional weapons. It has majority support in both the House and the Senate.

Israel and India

India has become Israel's second largest trade partner in Asia, after Hong Kong, with a total expected trade of \$1.6 billion by the end of 2003. Trade Minister Ehud Olmert said in early September that the government plans to designate India as one of Israel's preferred export markets. Two-thirds of Israel's exports to India are diamonds, and the rest high-tech products, agricultural inputs, communications equipment and biotechnology products.

Police force boost for EU's role in Balkans

Europe's ambitions to play a greater role in providing security in the Balkans will be boosted when European Union foreign ministers agree to send a large police force to the former republic of Macedonia. The decision has wider implications for the civilian arm of the EU security and defence policy for crisis management and conflict prevention. The EU is also being asked to assist in training a police force in the Democratic Republic of Congo and possibly in Afghanistan. The mission in Macedonia, to start on 15 December and last for one year initially, will comprise about 200 police officers seconded and paid by the member states. The EU earlier this year took over the NATO-led military mission sent to the republic after it stepped back from all-out civil war between the ethnic Slav Macedonian majority and ethnic Albanian minority in 2001. The aim of the EU's military operation, called Concordia, is to supervise the implementation of the peace accord. The EU launched its first police mission last January in Bosnia Herzegovina, and could take over the 12,000-strong NATO-led mission if the US agrees.

Israel's nuclear submarine fleet

Israel has acquired the capability of launching a nuclear strike from submarines, according to reports recently. This puts it among the handful of countries able to deliver atomic weapons from land, sea and air. With American help, Israeli technicians have modified US-supplied cruise missiles to carry nuclear warheads. Commentators believe that the disclosure is intended as a message to Iran about the risks of its nuclear ambitions. Both America and Israel believe that Iran is close to acquiring nuclear weapons. This would break Israel's nuclear monopoly in the Middle East and change the strategic balance of the region. America has supplied Israel with Harpoon sea-launched cruise missiles—originally with conventional warheads—for deployment on three Dolphin Class submarines. The diesel electric submarines were bought from Germany four years ago. The Israeli Government does not comment on its nuclear capacity, but experts agree that Israel has the world's sixth largest nuclear arsenal, with some 200 warheads, compared with Britain's 185.

Iran's nuclear start-up delayed

Russia recently announced a year's delay until 2006 for the start-up of Iran's Bushehr nuclear reactor—a move that wins it time to push for greater compliance by Teheran with supervision demands by the International Atomic Energy Authority. Russia's atomic energy ministry said the new timetable was a "technical decision" as a result of detailed work by a commission of experts from Iran and Russia, which is supplying technology and materials for the £600 million contract. President Putin has repeatedly stressed that Russia supports the IAEA's demands, while arguing that Bushehr cannot be misused for military purposes, and that international pressure should not be used to jeopardise Russia's commercial nuclear interests abroad.

UN warns Iran over nuclear weapons

The UN has warned Iran that "time is running out" on nuclear transparency. The chief United Nations nuclear inspector called on Iran to accelerate its cooperation with his agency and allay international concerns by providing full information on its nuclear programme by the end of October. Teheran insists that the programme is aimed at peaceful energy production, but the US maintains it is a front for developing nuclear weapons. In an interview with the *Financial Times*, Mohammed El Baradei, head of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said teams of inspectors sent recently were given access to sites they had requested and had received fresh information from the Iranian authorities. But he stressed that the amount and flow of information remained inadequate. Iran still insists that it would continue enriching uranium despite the IAEA governing board's call for it to suspend such activities.

Russia seeks to allay NATO nuclear fears

Sergei Ivanov, the Russian defence minister, sought recently to allay fears that his country had taken a more aggressive stance on its potential use of nuclear weapons, telling NATO defence ministers that he considered the alliance a partner. Recently, Moscow released a military document that said it might have to reconsider its nuclear posture in response to NATO's "offensive" doctrine, but Lord Robertson, NATO secretary-general, said that Mr Ivanov had assured his NATO counterparts that Russia does not believe the alliance is an offensive organisation. A translation of a document from Mr Ivanov was being reviewed by NATO officials.