



# News from the Nations

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## **Iran could get Russian missile system**

According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made a lightning trip to Moscow recently in an effort to persuade Russia not to sell advanced missile systems to Iran and Syria: "At the core of the talks was an Iranian request to purchase the advanced and long-range S-300 anti-aircraft missile system that would severely curtail the Israeli Air Force's freedom in the skies if a military strike was launched against Iran's nuclear installations. The S-300 is one of the most advanced multi-target anti-aircraft missile systems in the world today. It has a reported ability to track up to 200 targets simultaneously while engaging up to 12 at the same time. It has a range of about 200km and can hit targets at altitudes of 90,000ft. While Russia has yet to sell the system to Iran, Tehran claimed last year that Moscow was to equip them with S-300 systems, and media reports have quoted senior Israeli officials as saying that they will be delivered by the end of 2008. While Mr Olmert did not receive a guarantee from Russian President Dmitry Medvedev that the system would not be sold to Iran, the Israeli and Russian leaders did decide to upgrade bilateral defence relations and to establish a new mechanism to co-ordinate issues of mutual interest such as arms deals in the Middle East. Mr Olmert also urged his Russian counterpart to use his leverage in Tehran in getting the Iranians to suspend their enrichment of uranium, a key component of a nuclear bomb".

## **Britain's fight to stop EU-Russian talks**

Britain, in alliance with Poland, Sweden and the Baltic states, has narrowly prevented the European Union from reopening trade and aid talks with Moscow. According to World News in the *Daily Telegraph*, EU partnership and co-operation negotiations were halted following the Russian invasion of Georgia in August and Moscow's occupation of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. After Russia pulled back some troops, Italy and Germany pressed for "business as usual" on improving trade, energy and political ties. Mr Berlusconi, the Italian prime minister, went as far as calling for Russia to be given EU membership. "I consider Russia to be a Western country and my plan is for the Russian Federation to be able to become a member of the EU in the coming years", he said at a Brussels summit in October. David Miliband, UK Foreign Secretary, warned Italian, German and French colleagues that the EU could not begin new talks just one day after the acrimonious breakdown of internationally brokered peace negotiations, and they should be delayed. One of the topics at the forthcoming Nice summit will be energy security for European countries dependent on Russian supplies. President Sarkozy of France said, "It's wiser to talk to our Russian neighbours on issues such as energy security and I am in favour of dialogue". Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, has also dropped her critical tone of the Kremlin's actions in Georgia recently and has signed a bilateral energy deal with Moscow. Germany is heavily dependent on Russian oil and gas, and has traditionally been reluctant to risk offending the Kremlin. Lech Kaczynski, the Polish president, said that a resumption of talks would represent a "victory for Russia".

## **Israel has the right to keep nukes**

*In what is seen as a rare statement of support for Israel, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said in October that there was no reason for Israel to surrender its alleged nuclear capabilities in the face of Iran's continued race towards nuclear power. Speaking at a conference in France reported in the Jerusalem Post, Scheffer said he did not believe the international community would be able to stop Iran from developing a nuclear bomb. "I am not positive about the world being able to stop Iran from fulfilling its ambitions—the Security Council is rather incapable of coming to further conclusions on further sanctions". According to foreign media reports, Israel has an arsenal of several hundred nuclear bombs. Government officials in Jerusalem, meanwhile, expressed concern that Scheffer's uncertainty reflected the opinion of more and more of the international arena. The officials, however, said it was the concern that Iran might obtain nuclear arms that led to Scheffer's comment about not seeing very many arguments for "the Jewish state to abandon its nuclear potential".*

### **Turkey heading two ways**

*Turkey is a US ally but also depends on Russia. No wonder its foreign policy is confused. According to a World Affairs report in Newsweek, "When the USS Mount Whitney, flagship of the US Sixth Fleet, steamed into the port of Poti with a cargo of humanitarian aid, Georgians lined the quayside to cheer. All around lay the wreckage of Russia's occupation. [The ship's captain,] Owen Honors, insisted the warship's visit was not a show of force—it was a show of solidarity. Washington wanted it the other way around, but was refused by the once loyal US ally Turkey—who made it clear it would not allow heavy US warships through the Bosphorus. Ankara finds itself at the centre of bewildering crosscurrents, it's a strategic ally of the United States and Israel, but it also tries to maintain friendly relations with Syria and Iran. It is a candidate for European Union membership but has divisions with the Union over Northern Cyprus. Its borders with the Caucasus, and cultural ties with Turkic republics in Central Asia, make Turkey a key part of Europe's hopes for energy independence from Russia, but it is heavily dependent on Russian gas and trade—no wonder Turkey refuses to choose sides. Russia has been Turkey's No. 1 trade partner since 2003 with trade expected to top \$38 billion in 2008. Hundreds of Turkish firms, i.e. building contractors, operate in Russia and there are more than 2 million visitors from Russia to Turkey each year. Russia also provides half of Turkey's coal and 65 per cent of its gas through the world's longest undersea gas pipeline, Blue Stream. As a result Turkey is highly reluctant to provoke Russia. But Turkey also has an alliance with Georgia that is crucial to Ankara's energy supplies, and Europe's. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline brings a million barrels of Caspian crude oil from Azerbaijan via Georgia to the Turkish Mediterranean oil terminal of Ceyhan, and a parallel gas pipe to Erzurum provides much of eastern Turkey's energy needs. An Austrian consortium has been planning to extend that gas pipeline as far as Vienna, in order to break Russia's stranglehold on the Continent's energy supplies—a project called Nabucco—and Turkey has provided training and NATO-standard equipment for Georgia's army; it is also engaged with Georgia on ambitious regional projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, due to connect Europe with Central Asia by 2011. With such ties at stake, Turkey can't walk away from Georgia, and it insists it remains a Western ally, even if it's one that has to bow to Russia in times of conflict".*

### **Russia to build eight new submarines**

Russia is to build eight nuclear submarines by 2015 as part of an ambitious plan to overhaul its ailing navy. Senior military officials said that the new ships would be equipped with the Bulava-30 ballistic missile, designed to evade defence shields. Recently, President Medvedev announced the construction of a new missile defence system and the mass production of warships and multipurpose submarines. Mr Putin, the prime minister, said that defence spending would increase by 27 per cent next year to £54 billion. General Vladimir Popovkin, a deputy defence minister, said he hoped to accept the Bulava-30 for service next year.

### **Trade links between India and Israel**

An Israel-India Forum was organised recently by the Confederation of Indian Industry and the Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy of Tel Aviv University: "Although full diplomatic relations were only established between the countries in 1992, bilateral trade has grown to more than £2bn, and is expected to increase to more than £7bn in four years if the countries enter into a free-trade agreement now on the agenda" (*Jewish Chronicle*).

### **NEW RADAR GIVES ISRAEL EXTRA TIME**

*An American radar system capable of detecting Iranian missiles from thousands of kilometres away, and providing the Israel Defence Force with critical minutes to prepare for an attack, arrived in Israel recently. The radar system was brought to Israel on 12 transport planes, together with a crew of 120 soldiers who will assemble and activate it in the Negev. The high-powered radar is called the FBX-T and will be hooked up to the US military's Joint Tactical Ground Station, which tracks ballistic missiles around the world. The data will be processed and transferred to an IDF command centre. The FBX-T can detect a ballistic missile shortly after launch and estimates the time and exact location of its impact. These capabilities will cut the Arrow's response time. The decision to deliver the radar to Israel was made during a visit by Defence Minister Barak to Washington in June. According to Mr Shapir, the decision to deploy the radar was the US's way of telling Israel that it was opposed to a military strike against Iran. "Giving Israel a radar system is the American way of saying, 'We will help you defend yourselves but we want you to sit quietly and not to attack Iran' ". This is the first time there will be a permanent American military presence on Israeli soil.*