



News from the Nations

Israel must respond to UN report

The *Jewish Chronicle* says that "Israel must face up to the fallout from a UN report accusing it of war crimes in Gaza, a top international lawyer and former Israeli diplomat said. It cannot be ignored by Israel. It is too damaging to be ignored as the report will be used in an attempt to prosecute and condemn Israel". Alan Baker, former legal adviser to Israel's Foreign Ministry and ex-ambassador to Canada, said Israel should set up a commission to investigate the report's findings, as there was no mention in the Goldstone report that Israel had acted in self-defence.

Syria reveals it held joint manoeuvres with Turkey

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Mualeem revealed that Turkey and Syria had held military manoeuvres recently. In the same week Ankara cancelled the annual Anatolian Eagle exercise because the IDF was to participate. The manoeuvres were carried out near Ankara. According to the *Jerusalem Post* these manoeuvres were carried out to refute reports of poor relations between the military and political institutes in Turkey over its strategic relations with Syria. These comments were made on the same day that ten Turkish cabinet ministers travelled to Syria for the first meeting of the newly formed Turkey-Syria High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council. It was the second military exercise between the two Muslim countries since April. At the time, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak termed a joint drill between Turkish and Syrian soldiers on their shared border a "disturbing development".

EU clears way for new treaty with Syria

According to a report from an EU observer in Brussels, "The EU is set to take a major step forward in relations with Syria, a former 'axis of evil' country, following an internal agreement on human-rights safeguards. EU ambassadors meeting in Brussels in October finalised the text of a political declaration to be attached to the legally binding text of a new bilateral Association Agreement. The new treaty will help the union 'develop a substantial dialogue on the human rights situation in Syria, which remains a source of concern to the EU. Respect for human rights constitutes one of the essential elements of the agreement', the declaration says. Violation of human rights will therefore directly affect the application of the agreement with partner states. The association treaty is in part a reward for Syria's non-interference in Lebanon's elections earlier this year. EU diplomats also hope the move will help pull Syria away from Iran and to steer militant groups such as Hizbullah and Hamas towards peace. Politically, the move will mark a major shift in EU-Syria relations".

TURKEY-ISRAEL TIES TAKE A HIT

In mid-October Israel reacted "furiously" after Turkey excluded Israel from a joint air force drill with the US and NATO. Turkey also broadcast a new series on their Separation TRT channel, which included scenes of Israeli soldiers attacking Palestinian civilians during Operation Cast Lead. The Israeli ambassador in Ankara, Gabby Levy, protested strongly to the Turkish foreign ministry, while a spokesperson for the Jewish community council in Istanbul expressed concern that it would fuel local anti-Semitism. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan continued to fan the flames, calling on Israel to open up the crossings to the Gaza Strip, and saying that it seemed that Israel was committing crimes against humanity in Gaza.

WCC turns on Israel

The World Council of Churches central committee has renewed its attacks on Israel. It has called on the Israeli Government to dismantle settlements in what the WCC calls the "occupied Palestinian territories". It also repeated its demand for an international boycott of products and services from settlements. The WCC central committee invited "member churches and faithful to give moral and practical support to nonviolent acts of resistance". The statement "reiterates the need for an international boycott of settlement products and services". The WCC denounces the "illegal settlements" and "the separation wall". The WCC claims that Jerusalem "should be open to all and shared by the two peoples and the three religions".

Israel watches diplomatic chess game with alarm

The Jewish Chronicle stated in a recent report that “a weak UN sanctions package will leave Israel alone to deal with Iran’s nuclear threat”. The French and British are leading the EU charge towards “crippling sanctions” which would centre on oil and would seek to prevent Iran making and selling petroleum-based products. “But others—notably Germany—are getting cold feet as they weigh the economic cost to themselves. A UN resolution, even with full EU support, would be unlikely to pass due to the Russian veto. That would leave a coalition of the lukewarm to go it alone. Russia’s move was to convene a meeting with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to discuss how to bust Western sanctions against Iran by bringing in supplies through the north. A look at the map and the calendar explains all. Viewing this chess game with alarm was Israel. Netanyahu allegedly flew to Moscow to discuss the possibility that Russian arms are reaching Iran and to persuade the Kremlin to back UN sanctions. Britain and France apparently want the same thing but privately are preparing for that coalition of the lukewarm. If they leave it till next year they fear Israel and the Arabs will lose faith that an Iranian bomb can be stopped by diplomacy. That leaves the Arab states and possibly Turkey contemplating their own nuclear weapons or hedging their bets by cosying up to Teheran. If there is no sanctions deal, Israel is probably on its own, as country after country falls like leaves in autumn, away from the hard choices approaching”.

Israel has to decide on Iran by spring

The *International Jerusalem Post* reports that, “if everything taking place right now on the Iranian front continues as expected, it is then in the Spring of 2010 that Israel will need to make one of its most difficult decisions ever—to attack Iran or allow it to continue with its nuclear programme. They will then know the results of the dialogue between the world’s leading powers and Iran whether the world will impose real, tough sanctions. Following the disclosure recently of the existence of a secret uranium enrichment facility in a mountain near the holy city of Qom, there is a feeling in Israel that the world is now more serious than in the past regarding the need to talk tough with Iran and if needed to impose tough sanctions as well. The testing of long-range missiles by Iran on Yom Kippur, was on the one hand a flexing of Iran’s muscles in the face of this possibility, but was also a move that will definitely put more world attention on its nuclear programs”. Israel is about to call time; as far as it is concerned, this is the last chance for diplomacy. If it fails again, it will be time to consider those much vaunted ‘other options on the table’.

Iran missiles

Iran test-fired two long-range missiles at the end of September. The Shihab-3 missile can carry nuclear warheads, and puts Israel, US military bases in the Middle East and parts of Europe within striking distance.

Israeli minister cancels UK visit

Israeli ministers and senior officers are being advised to limit their visits to Britain and three other European countries out of fear of arrest. The latest minister to cancel a visit was Strategic Affairs Minister Moshe Ya’alon. Experts on international law from the foreign and justice ministries and the Israeli Defence Force Attorney General’s department have advised cabinet ministers with a security background and senior IDF officers not to visit Britain, Spain, Belgium or Norway while lawyers in these countries are seeking to arrest Israelis on charges of alleged war crimes through ‘universal jurisdiction’ laws. Requests for an arrest warrant for Defence Minister Ehud Barak, who attended the Labour conference in Brighton recently, were blocked as he had diplomatic immunity as a senior minister and an official guest.

ISRAEL’S STATISTICS

Israel’s population numbers 7,465,500: 5,634,300 Jews, 1,513,200 Arabs, and 318,000 “others”, according to the annual report released in September. The report found that Israel’s population has been growing at a steady annual rate of 1.8% since 2003. The growth rate among Jews in 2008 was 1.7% and among Arabs 2.6%. Life expectancy continues to rise. Compared with 2007, life expectancy among men has gone up by 0.4 years to 79.1, and among women 0.6 years to 83, 3.7 years higher among Jews than Arabs.

The Kremlin’s key role

Russia is in a key position to persuade Iran to be more open about her nuclear programme, in helping Iran to build her first nuclear power plant and supplying military hardware. The two also enjoy strong trading relations. There is only one problem: Russia does not really believe in sanctions.