

World watchman

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Settlement building

“Construction begins on 544 West Bank homes.”

“State Department condemns east Jerusalem building.”

THE FIRST headline above from JerusalemPost.com (21 Oct. 2010) indicates that religious Jews are in no mind to compromise their home-building programme for peace with the Palestinians. We commented last month on the stalling of the current round of peace talks due to settlers building homes on territory reclaimed by Israel following the Six Day War in 1967, an area of land often referred to in the media as “the occupied territories.” The impasse has continued over this issue, with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas claiming that he will walk away from the talks unless Israel reinstates the building freeze that expired at the end of September. The Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is attempting to play down the new building, stating that “it has no real effect on the map of a possible [peace] agreement.”

Earlier this month Mr Netanyahu offered to renew the freeze if the Palestinian Authority (PA) agreed officially to recognise the State of Israel, but the PA leadership refused, claiming that this was “unfair” and “unnecessary.” It is difficult not to have some sympathy with Israel over this issue; one would presume that it is a fundamental prerequisite for two parties negotiating a peace settlement that they both

acknowledge the right of the other party to exist! However, with a few notable exceptions, the general view of the nations of the world, and the media, is that it is Israel that should compromise, not the PA.

238 of the new homes are in east Jerusalem, with outline approval for a further 1,600 homes being granted by the Israel Interior Ministry. This development has evoked an angry response from Russia, France and the USA. The French and Russian governments have asked the Israelis to reconsider the decision to allow the building to proceed. An official US State Department statement said they were “disappointed,” and that the building plans were “contrary to what we are trying to do.”

At the other end of the continuum of views we heard that “These Jerusalem neighbourhoods are not settlements” (Kobi Kahlon, Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem). “Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, it is not a settlement,” said US Congressman Gary Ackerman, chair of the house sub-committee on the Middle East and south Asia. “It has been

the singular geographic focus of the hopes and aspirations of the Jewish people for three millennia.”

These diverse and diametrically opposed views confirm what we already know as students of God’s Word, that Jerusalem is indeed a “burdensome stone” (Zech 12:1) to the nations. To man there appears to be no peaceful solution to this problem. The ante is always upped, the positions polarised, whenever the issue of Jerusalem is broached. We know where this is heading: the nations will gather together to try to sort this problem out once and for all (v. 2).

God’s settlement plans

WE are in a wonderfully privileged position because of our association with the God of Israel, and we should be looking for opportunity to fulfil our duty as watchmen and warn of the ‘approaching sword’ whenever and wherever the opportunity is presented to us.

Our heavenly Father has clearly stated the boundaries of His land and His people.



Israeli West Bank settlement of Gilo

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Through a combined reading of Ezekiel 47, 48 and Zechariah 9 (amongst other passages of Scripture) we know that the Jewish kingdom will extend far beyond the boundaries of the Land as we see it today, and will ultimately form the nucleus of that worldwide Kingdom for which we watch and pray. Yes, our God's settlement plans go far beyond the land of Israel, even to the ends of the earth!

Is war in the Middle East already under way?

GROWING evidence suggesting increasing covert military operations against Iran has come to light in recent weeks. The US and Israel are thought to be the most likely source of these attacks, reports *DEBKA-Net-Weekly* (debka-net-weekly.com; 22 Oct. 2010). As well as established economic sanctions against the Iranian régime, we are now seeing hi-tech cyber attacks, and even conventional attacks on key infrastructure and military targets, alongside increased deployment of high-profile military hardware to the region.

The *Stuxnet* computer 'worm' has infiltrated Iran's nuclear and defence computer network. This piece of malicious computer code is now affecting more than 30,000 computers and is seriously hindering the processing at Iran's huge uranium enrichment plant at Natanz, as well as the overall functioning of the Bushehr nuclear plant.

Who is behind this ingenious attack? Some analysts believe Israel is the most likely candidate, with the prime suspect being the ultra-secretive cyber-warfare division of the Israeli Defence Force, Unit 8200. Israel

was the first country to invest heavily in devising means of attacking its enemies' strategic computer systems by employing teams of specialist computer hackers to devise precision-guided military-grade cyber-missiles. A file in the *Stuxnet* worm has been identified with the name Myrtus, which may be an allusion to the book of Esther, where Haman (of Persia!) attempted to wipe the Jews from the face of the earth, but his evil plan was providentially pre-empted through the work of Mordecai and Esther. The Hebrew word for Esther is similar to the word for myrtle (*New York Times*, 29 Oct. 2010).

Cyber-warfare is a growing national threat, reports the *Telegraph Online* (telegraph.co.uk; 30 Oct. 2010). In particular, the Russians and Chinese are implicated in thousands of attacks every year. Hostile cyber attacks on the UK from foreign states, particularly Russia, exceed 1,000 per month, reported the head of Britain's GCHQ intelligence listening post, Iain Lobban. British Prime Minister David Cameron recently announced a £1 billion budget for cyber defence in the UK's Strategic Defence Review, and President Obama has set up Cyber-Command, an intelligence department whose role is to design systems to withstand computer-borne attacks.

In addition to the cyber-sabotage and the economic sanctions, Iran has also suffered a setback at its top-secret missile base. On 12 October, the day before Iranian President Ahmadinejad's visit to Beirut, three massive explosions ripped through the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's (IRG) base at Imam Ali, destroying a number of missiles, launchers and warheads, as well as killing more

than eighteen personnel. These Iranian missiles were aimed at Israel and at US targets in Iraq.

DEBKA-Net reports that Iranian authorities are looking for traces of an infiltrator as well as systematically sifting through the rubble searching for evidence of a precision-guided missile. Apparently Israel has designed and used just such a missile, which uses the access shafts leading straight down from the surface to destroy targets deep underground. This would suggest the Iranians have ruled out an accidental cause for the explosions.

In addition to this, the USA has deployed a second aircraft carrier to its Bahrain base, significantly increasing military hardware in the region. There are now more than 160 strike aircraft within a few minutes of Iranian airspace, in addition to the hostile Israeli presence a further 400 miles to the west.

With the events of the last month, Iran has suffered some serious setbacks in her desire to bully her way to dominance in the region. Whilst not publicly discussing these issues, the Iranian régime is smarting and the tension is growing. With such a powerful US presence in the Gulf and no apparent support at present from Russia, it is unlikely that Iran will consider any significant retaliation, but if for some reason that presence was reduced or removed, and Russian support increased, the situation could alter. We await further developments.

“Have you come to take plunder?”

UNDER the headline “All at sea—carriers may not have planes” the *Daily Telegraph* (18 Oct 2010) reported

that "Britain's aircraft carriers may operate for a while without planes following government cuts, the Defence Secretary admitted."

Headlines like this, along with the ongoing financial turmoil in the USA, the prospect of more quantitative easing, the need to focus on balancing the books and bad military experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, perhaps point to the reason why the Tarshish power described in Ezekiel 38 appears to have no appetite or ability for a conflict with the northern invader. The combination of straitened financial conditions and extreme reluctance to embark on overseas military campaigns may account for this.



Picture: © iStockphoto.com/Paul Mckeown

The aircraft carrier HMS Ark Royal, planned to be scrapped under UK government proposals.