



News from the Nations

US MUST GO AFTER PUTIN TO STOP IRAN'S NUKES

Garry Kasparov, the former world chess champion, who has become one of the most outspoken critics of Vladimir Putin, said recently that the only way to block Iran's path to nuclear weapons was to tackle the Russian prime minister's ongoing dealings. The only way to do that was for the Obama Administration to make plain to Putin that unless he changed course there would be grave consequences. "Iran will not stop its pursuit of nuclear weapons unless Russia is ready to join the sanctions, because, apart from the nuclear technology and the anti-missile defence systems, Russia is a main energy supplier. At the end of the day, selling nuclear technology to Iran, selling anti-missile defence systems, brings cash, and if America or Israel, or both, at a certain point attack Iran, the oil price goes up, so for Putin it is a win-win situation". Kasparov was arrested and briefly jailed in late 2007 after anti-Putin protests when he made a short-lived bid to challenge for the Russian presidency.

Israeli policies not supported by all Jews

A Jewish-run ship was recently organised to sail with the aim of breaking Israel's naval blockade. The ship had been co-ordinated by British Jews for Justice for Palestinians and European Jews for a Just Peace with four crew members and eight other Jewish members, which included a Holocaust survivor. The vessel was a supply boat to the blockaded Gaza Strip. It was intercepted by Israeli forces without incident.

Iran's Bushehr success

Iran has begun gearing up its first nuclear plant. Russian engineers have loaded nuclear fuel that has been enriched in Russia into the core of the Bushehr reactor, enabling the Islamic Republic to produce electricity within about two months. This will complete a forty-year endeavour to produce nuclear power, initiated by Shah Reza Pahlavi, who was overthrown in 1979. The *International Jerusalem Post* reports that John Bolton, a former US ambassador to the UN, has recently expressed grave concerns about the \$1 billion project. The article states: "Iran is on the verge of achieving something that Saddam Hussein was not able to achieve, and that is getting a second route to nuclear weapons. It's a very significant step forward for the Iranian nuclear programme. The Obama Administration, after initially opposing the Bushehr project, consented in recent months to Russia pushing forward with it. There were several reasons behind this change in policy. From the US perspective Bushehr constitutes proof that Iran does not need to enrich uranium locally to produce energy. It can achieve its peaceful energy goals by importing nuclear fuel from Russia. If it insists on enriching its own uranium after Bushehr is up and running, the US, the EU and other countries, including Russia, can put more pressure on Iran to stop its enrichment activity—but Russia is already one of several countries ignoring or partially ignoring the campaign to level sanctions against Teheran. Some countries, such as Syria, Venezuela and even Turkey, have flouted sanctions for ideological reasons. It is noted that China, some East Asian countries and recently Switzerland, continue to do business with Iran out of economic considerations. In addition to its clear economic incentives, Russia has geopolitical motivations—seeking to increase its influence in the Middle East vis-à-vis the US. [Recently] Russia's navy chief, Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky, announced that his country's naval supply and maintenance site near Syria's Mediterranean port of Tartus would be modernised to accommodate heavy warships after 2012. This is the same Syria that enjoys close ties with Iran and supports anti-American forces in Iraq. The sides have signed an agreement under which Russia, with international oversight, will be responsible for disposing of the reactor's used fuel. This understanding was central in convincing the US not to oppose the completion of the project. But it is not entirely clear to what extent the large quantities of fissile material set to be produced can be tracked. Nor is it clear that Russia can be trusted to dispose of that spent fuel. And what happens if Iran cuts ties with Russia?"

The Arab target: Iran

While the European Union and other Western governments have been calling upon Israel to end their blockade unconditionally, the players in the region see the political reality differently. According to the Jewish Chronicle, "Tony Blair, in his role as international envoy, acknowledged that, while Israel would make major changes in its restrictions of shipments into Gaza, the naval blockade would remain in place". In a seemingly unrelated development, Saudi Arabian diplomats were doing some denying of their own. A recent report in The Times stated that "Saudi air-defence systems were shut off in a secret exercise to prepare for a possible Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear installation using Saudi airspace as a corridor, bolstered by previous reports on discreet co-operation between the two countries. The Saudi royal family cannot allow itself to be seen aiding the Zionist enemy in its plans to attack another Islamic nation, but Iran's designs to become a regional nuclear power threaten the Saudis, the Egyptians and the rest of the moderate Arab states as much as they do Israel. None of them believes that new sanctions voted upon by the UN Security Council will stop Iran in its tracks. The lines have now been drawn. Turkey, which voted against the sanctions, has for now joined Syria in the Iranian camp. Lebanon, which abstained despite the Hizbullah component in its government, is in the balance. For the time being, Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Fatah are all facing the joint enemy—Iran and its proxies, Hamas and Hizbullah".

Syria's response to US engagement

Russia has agreed to provide Syria with its P-800 Yakhont supersonic anti-ship cruise missile. Russian Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov announced the deal during talks in Washington with US Defence Secretary Robert Gates, noting that his country was honouring a contract that had been signed back in 2007. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, "The Yakhont is about nine metres long, weighs close to three tons, has a range of 300 kilometres, can carry a 200-kilogram warhead and has the ability to cruise at just a few metres above sea level at over twice the speed of sound, which makes it a highly difficult missile to intercept. Israel is concerned that the missile will be transferred by Syria to Hizbullah, its terrorist proxy in Lebanon, to be used against Israeli naval vessels". Earlier this year it was reported that Syria was supplying Hizbullah with Scud missiles that could strike any part of Israel. "Israel has made its own attempts at deterring Syria. For instance, in April, when it was discovered that Syria was providing Hizbullah with Scuds, Israel quietly warned Assad that his country would be held responsible for any missile strike against Israel".

Blocked

A Lebanese ship recently due to sail to Gaza to break Israel's naval blockade has been delayed. Diplomatic officials in Jerusalem reported that both Cyprus and Greece had been "forthcoming" in keeping the cargo ship, the Bolivian-flagged *Mariam*, from setting sail from one of their ports.

Peace talks' future uncertain

Despite appeals from the international community, Israel allowed its ten-month moratorium on West Bank settlement construction to end on 26 September, leaving the future of peace talks in doubt as splits among Israeli officials over the current path of negotiations became clear. While Israeli leaders agreed to meet their Palestinian counterparts in October, more hard-line Israelis have cooled on talks, calling for a renewed focus on Iran and only small gestures toward peace with the Palestinians.

TUC VOTES TO KEEP UP WEST BANK BOYCOTT

The Trades Union Congress has voted to continue its boycott of Israeli goods from West Bank settlements and strengthen its links with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC). A motion passed at the TUC congress in Manchester stopped short of agreeing to a full boycott of Israel. Israel's ambassador to Britain, Ron Prozor, said, "This appalling decision speaks volumes about the calibre of those who voted for it". But PSC chairman Hugh Lanning said the vote showed British union members were prepared to stand up "in support of an oppressed people". Meanwhile, Australia's National Council of Churches has backed a resolution that urges churches to boycott Israeli goods from the West Bank.

Obama plans visit to Israel

President Barack Obama will visit Israel and the Palestinian Authority in a few months' time if the peace process continues, according to White House officials. Mr Obama has been criticised by Americans and Israelis for not addressing both sides of the conflict directly during the first eighteen months of his presidency. The president visited the region early in his term for a much publicised speech in Cairo, but pointedly left Israel off his itinerary.