



News from the Nations

ISRAEL AND SETTLEMENT WITHDRAWAL

Prime Minister Olmert told Gaza evacuees in Nitzan recently that more settlements will be evacuated. The prime minister said he was "convinced that we made the right decision to carry out the disengagement plan, and it is better for Israel that you are not living in the Gaza Strip at this time". A significant majority of Israelis would oppose a unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank following the events in the Gaza Strip, according to a Midgam poll sponsored by the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, taken before the escalation in the north. The poll found that 58.5 per cent would oppose the withdrawal, and only 35.9 per cent would support it. Asked whether what happened in Gaza should impact Israel's decision on the future of the West Bank, 63.9 per cent said yes and 32.1 per cent no. The poll also found that 65 per cent of Israelis do not believe that disengagement enhanced Israel's security and 79.6 per cent oppose withdrawing from West Bank land that can be used to fire Kassam rockets on Israel.

US back India nuclear deal

According to *The Times*, the US House of Representatives backs an agreement to forge closer strategic ties with India by allowing civil nuclear cooperation for the first time in thirty years, but insists that Congress oversees the final deal. It obliges India to separate its military and civilian nuclear plants and open up the latter to international inspectors. Before congress votes on the agreement, India must now negotiate safeguards for its facilities with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Israel and India seal radar deal

India and Israel have finalised a \$1 billion deal for the supply of three Phalcon airborne early-warning radar systems to India, both sides say. The Israeli-made system, fitted on Russian Ilyushin aircraft, will be delivered within forty-four months of an Indian advance payment. Israel's cabinet approved the transaction in July, and the deal was signed in Delhi. The joint secretary of India's defence ministry, C. R. Mahapatra, signed the accord with Israel Livnet, the vice-president of the Israeli Aircraft Industrial Corporation. Indian defence ministry spokesman Amitabh Chadravarty said Israel would buy Ilyushin-76 cargo aircraft from Uzbekistan. These would be fitted with new engines in Russia, then mounted with the Phalcon system in Israel. Phalcon is a competitor of the US-made Awacs system. "The Phalcon deal is the biggest leap forward yet for Israeli military exports", said Amos Yaron, director of the Israeli defence ministry. Israel and India signed a preliminary agreement last October, after the US lifted objections that the sale might endanger peace on the subcontinent. Defence analysts say the Phalcon system will give India a greater edge in conventional weaponry over its regional rivals, China and Pakistan. Phalcon can detect low-flying objects from a distance of hundreds of kilometres, day or night, in all weather conditions. In addition, India and Israel have signed their first joint weapons-development agreement, under which both states will work on a new generation Barak II ship-borne anti-missile defence system. Israel and India will share the initial \$330 million investment in the system.

Christian aid and Israel

According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, "Christian Aid's effort to foster better relations with the Jewish community appears to have foundered. Initial meetings between Jewish organisations and the charity late last year were positive, with an understanding that Christian Aid would consult with communal groups ahead of relevant public statements or briefings to avoid conflict. However, Board chief executive Mr Benjamin has complained that 'there has been no serious attempt at incorporating our concerns'. Mr Benjamin highlighted a May Christian Aid briefing paper on EU aid to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, which was sent to MPs before being presented to the board. Mr Benjamin claimed it 'not only represents a missed opportunity to genuinely promote peace while addressing real hardship, it actually provides comfort and encouragement to those who want to achieve the very opposite'. He said, 'It seems Christian Aid have a blind side that does not allow them to see the situation with Israel in a broader context. I think they are not really interested in hearing our side. They are just going through the motions'".

China's new best friends

China's growing economic and diplomatic power, along with its energy-hungry, mercantilist foreign policy, is beginning to alarm the Bush Administration. The United States is not pleased by the fact that China has become the superpower buddy of choice for many repressive governments whose countries are rich in natural resources, as the following examples show:

Iran: *China has a \$70 billion natural-gas contract with Iran, plus deals to build tankers and power plants.*

Pakistan: *China is the top source of arms for President Musharraf's government and a partner in developing projects that include a nuclear power plant and megaport at Gwadar.*

North Korea: *China provides a third of its neighbour's food and most of its fuel, but has played a key role in six-party talks to thwart Kim Jong Il's strategies with nuclear weapons.*

Sudan: *China owns forty per cent of Sudan's oil infrastructure.*

Venezuela: *President Chavez has received \$250 million in development assistance and \$1 billion more in oil investment from China. To help keep the oil flowing, the two are planning a Panama Canal bypass.*

Angola: *China has extended a \$2 billion line of credit to the government of President Santos to rebuild schools, housing and infrastructure.*

Zimbabwe: *The Mugabe régime is a paria, but China covets the coal and platinum it controls. In return for tax breaks and mining rights, Beijing's cash and arms prop up the government.*

Burma: *European and US sanctions have isolated the military régime, but Beijing cares more about Burma's gas fields, timber and strategic location on the Indian Ocean.*

Observations on the Lebanon war

An article in the *Daily Telegraph* makes the following pertinent observations on the Lebanon war: "It won't be a 'durable' ceasefire, it won't be 'sustainable', not while the ayatollahs are in power in Iran. This war isn't about border security, or prisoner exchanges, or the status of the Shaba Farms [disputed territory on Israel's northern border]. It isn't really about Lebanon at all, for Hizbullah is not in any meaningful sense an indigenous Lebanese phenomenon. The paramilitaries, rather, are creatures of Teheran: the Levantine branch of the Islamic Revolution. The Iranian Hydra has many heads. The mullahs sponsor militias and political movements across the Muslim world, in the old Silk Road Khanates and as far afield as Bosnia. You can lop off the head called Hizbullah. You can even cauterise the wound, by demilitarising southern Lebanon. But, as long as the monster's heart continues to beat in Teheran, the head will grow back. We must recognise the magnitude of what we are up against". Meanwhile, with Iran increasingly drawn into the Middle East crisis, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Hizbullah, a key ally of Teheran, would not disarm, despite calls to do so.

World Council of Churches fuels anti-Semitism

A British church newspaper comments: "At its first meeting since it was appointed in February 2006 the executive committee of the World Council of Churches has approved new 'programmatic directions', namely 'the ecumenical movement in the 21st century; unity, mission and spirituality; public witness; justice and diakonia; ecumenical and faith formation; interreligious dialogue and cooperation'. The Executive Committee statement on what it calls Israel/Palestine is a strongly worded and blatantly biased attack on Israel: 'One side is positioning itself to unilaterally establish final borders on territory that belongs to the other side; the other side is increasingly confined to the scattered enclaves that remain. On one side there is control of more and more land and water; on the other there are more and more families deprived of land and livelihoods. On one side as many people as possible are being housed on occupied land; on the other side the toll mounts of refugees without homes or land. One side controls Jerusalem, a city shared by two peoples and three world religions, the other—Muslim and Christian—watches its demographic, commercial and religious presence wither in Jerusalem. From both sides, military forces or armed groups strike across the 1967 borders and kill innocent civilians. On both sides, authorities countenance such attacks. Finally, the side set to keep its unlawful gains is garnering support from part of the international community. The side that, despairing at those unlawful gains, used legitimate elections to choose new leaders is being isolated and punished'".