



News from the Nations

Warning signals to Iran

There is growing speculation that Israel is gearing up for a pre-emptive strike. The latest indication was the sailing of an Israeli submarine through the Suez Canal for military drills in the Red Sea. Israel has three German-made Dolphin-class submarines that can reportedly fire nuclear-tipped cruise missiles. The subs are usually based in the Mediterranean, but, according to *Israel Today*, "It is doubtful that cruise missiles would have the 1,000-mile range to hit Iran from there. The Red Sea would put the subs in much closer range to the Persian Gulf. That Egypt allowed the sub to sail through the canal also points to growing strategic ties with Israel. Both countries feel threatened by a nuclear Iran. Meanwhile, Washington is sending mixed signals about whether it would stand in the way of an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Jerusalem's signals are more clear: if the international community fails to stop Iran's nuclear programme, Israel will".

EGYPT'S NEW MILITARY REQUIREMENT

The International Jerusalem Post reports that the Egyptian military have expressed interest in purchasing the Russian-made advanced S-300 and S-400 air-defence systems, as they are concerned about Teheran's missile capability. The S-300 is highly effective against aircraft and has a reported ability to track up to 100 targets simultaneously, while engaging up to twelve at the same time. It has a range of about 200 kilometres and can hit targets at altitudes of 27,000 metres. The S-400 is a more advanced model that is effective not just against aircraft but also against long-range ballistic missiles and cruise missiles. Its range is reportedly 400 kilometres. Egypt is also working on improving its air force, and recently received approval from the Pentagon to buy twelve Apache Longbow attack helicopters.

Fatah resistance

The Palestinian Fatah movement's congress, held in the West Bank city of Bethlehem, adopted in August a provision in its platform saying, "The Palestinians have the right to resist the Israeli occupation by all possible means".

Jordan backs Obama efforts

Jordan's foreign minister, Nasser Judeh, on 5 August strongly backed the Obama Administration's efforts to garner confidence-building measures toward Israel from Arab states, bolstering the US approach in the face of public opposition from other Arab leaders. Judeh stressed that Jordan is "committed to creating the right atmosphere" and supporting the "vision" of the US, which wants to see conditions for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations toward a two-state solution set by gestures from Arab states and Israel.

Turkey in Russian gas deal

Russia has won support from Turkey to build a gas pipeline through the country's waters, which will challenge European efforts to reduce energy dependence on Moscow. The *Daily Telegraph* reported that "The South Stream pipeline rivals the Nabucco project, which is backed by the European Union and the United States, and would provide a gas supply not subject to Russian control. At a signing ceremony in Ankara in early August, Mr Putin, the Russian Prime Minister, and his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, sought to portray the South Stream project as helping energy security in Europe. Under the deal, part of the pipeline will be built through Turkish waters in the Black Sea. South Stream will eventually run from Russia to Bulgaria, before delivering gas to European consumers". Mr Putin acknowledged the Russian plan was in competition with Nabucco, but said the projects could co-exist. "The more infrastructure projects the better, because that will create reliability and stability of energy supply to Europe", he said.

Hizbullah's rockets

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak reported in August that the militant Lebanese Islamic group Hizbullah has stockpiled 40,000 rockets, and he warned that Israel would get tough in the case of a conflict with Lebanon. "We cannot accept that a neighbouring United Nations member state should have in its government representatives of a militia that has more than 40,000 rockets", he said.

Calls for settlement freeze

According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, Israel was visited by four high-ranking American officials, who seemed to have pushed Netanyahu's government to the brink of an agreement on freezing settlement building. US Defence Secretary Robert Gates, National Security Adviser Jim Jones, Special Envoy George Mitchell and Middle East Negotiator Dennis Ross all repeated the requisite statements on America's commitment to Israel's security, and tried hard to infuse a friendly atmosphere into the talks. They even began to sound tough about imposing time limits on talks with Iran. Their insistence on the settlement freeze in the West Bank was resolute, and Mr Netanyahu had little choice but to agree. Mr Netanyahu also met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy on 24 June in Paris, where he was pressed to halt settlement construction completely. And on 26 June foreign ministers of the G8 wealthy nations called on Israel to halt all construction in the West Bank.

BUILDING OF SETTLEMENTS ON HOLD IN WEST BANK

Israel has now halted settlement building in the West Bank for the time being in an apparent concession to international pressure. Ariel Attias, the housing minister, said the decision not to approve any more building was part of a "waiting period" rather than a "freeze". Barack Obama, the US President, has been putting Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu under pressure to end settlement expansion. Citing an historic opportunity to forge peace in the Middle East, Mr Obama has been pushing both Israel and the Arab world to make gestures of good faith. The US Administration has been unusually outspoken in its demands that Israel halt building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where Palestinians hope to create a state.

Israel reassures Jordan

As reported in the International Jerusalem Post, a delegation of Israeli security officials travelled to Jordan in mid-August in an attempt to assuage concerns that Israel plans to transfer Palestinians from the West Bank to the Hashemite Kingdom. "The purpose of the visit was to ensure that strategic ties between the countries are not harmed. The delegation was led by several officials from the Defence Ministry's Diplomatic-Security Bureau, who met with senior officials close to King Abdullah II. The visit was scheduled as part of Israeli efforts to ease Jordanian concerns regarding a proposal National Union MK Arye Eldad made in the Knesset two months ago that Palestinians be given Jordanian citizenship. At the time, Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh summoned Israel's envoy to Amman, Ya'acov Reuven, and issued a strong protest 'over a debate in the Knesset on a motion on a so-called two states for the two peoples on the two banks of the Jordan River' . . . Political analysts in Amman said the monarch was 'extremely nervous' because of the growing rumours. They said that the king and other members of the royal family were convinced that the new government in Israel was quietly pushing for the idea of transforming Jordan into a homeland for the Palestinians". Israeli defence officials said that despite Israeli assurances that the Netanyahu government was not planning on evicting Palestinians to Jordan, Amman's anxiety was still high. "The visit was aimed at assuaging those fears and ensuring that strategic relations between the countries stay on track".

Clinton's nuclear deal with India

America is to build two nuclear power stations and supply arms to India as part of a growing strategic pact between the two countries. S. M. Krishna, India's external affairs minister, said that India had agreed to buy US defence equipment under an arrangement that would allow Washington to monitor its 'end use' to prevent weapons technology being sold to rogue régimes, and would "pave the way for greater defence cooperation" between the two countries. The deal, which could be worth £24 billion to US companies, puts America ahead of its rivals as India prepares to modernise its armed forces, including the purchase of 126 fighter aircraft. The growing strategic partnership reflects Washington's need for a democratic partner in Asia to support its counterterrorism efforts, and as a check on China's expanding influence in the region.

Give back Golan Heights, says minister

British Foreign Office Minister Ivan Lewis has called for Israel to give back the Golan Heights as part of a peace settlement with Syria. Mr Lewis, on his first visit to the Middle East, made the call during a press conference in the Syrian capital Damascus. Mr Lewis, who is Jewish and the MP for Bury South, said, "We think that there is now a very important opportunity for one of the world's great conflicts to begin to come to an end". He said that any solution should include a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel and a "comprehensive peace between Syria and Israel, which includes the return of the Golan Heights".