



News from the Nations

Lebanese border clash

Israeli and Lebanese troops exchanged gunfire in August, killing a senior Israeli officer, two Lebanese soldiers and a Lebanese journalist. UNIFIL, the UN peace-keeping force, supported Israel's assertions that its soldiers were clearing brush on the Israeli side of the line when the Lebanese troops opened fire.

Hizbullah's next target may be Lebanon

Israel has every reason to view developments on its northern border with concern. According to the International Jerusalem Post, "The recent attack by Lebanese soldiers, perhaps with Hizbullah's blessing, could have been a test. This would not be the first time that Hizbullah underwrote a small attack to test Israeli and international will prior to making a major move. The good news to the Lebanese population is that this could encourage Hizbullah to focus on Israel, and prevent them from taking on domestic elements. Otherwise, the possibility that Hizbullah may go for a domestic power grab still exists."

Tension in south Lebanon

The Lebanese army will send an additional brigade to the south of the country—a Hizbullah bastion—after several skirmishes between United Nations peacekeepers and villagers inflamed tensions near the border with Israel. Meanwhile, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said in July that the Israel Navy had deployed ships to prevent two Lebanese aid vessels from reaching Gaza.

Israel's natural gas bonanza

Back in February 2009 it was announced that early signs indicated that the Tamar 1 gas field located in the Mediterranean Sea ninety kilometres (fifty-six miles) off the coast of Haifa contained 3.1 trillion cubic feet (TCF) of gas. That was before estimates of the Tamar reserves were bumped up to 5 TCF. The Tamar gas field was declared to be the largest gas find ever discovered in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, and the largest find in the world in 2009. In June of this year the drilling consortium admitted its initial estimates had been wrong. The field contained reserves, not of 5 TCF of gas, but an immense 8.7 TCF. The *Jerusalem Report* stated: "Going out to sea even farther, at a drilling site named Leviathan [eighty-one miles] from the Haifa coast, the consortium announced in early June that its seismic tests indicated gas reserves of a staggering 16 TCF, making the Leviathan field twice as large as Tamar. Israel is currently ranked fourth in Europe (excluding Russia) in proven natural gas reserves, after Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom—but if Leviathan does contain the amount of natural gas that is indicated by the early tests it will move ahead of the UK and the Netherlands . . . Operational plans are already being drawn up in which the gas extracted from the seabed will be processed onshore in Israel, where it will be converted into liquid natural gas, loaded onto ships and exported around the world. The gas discovery has sparked off controversies, with a claim raised by Lebanese Minister Gebran Bassil that part of the Leviathan field lies in Lebanese territorial waters—he warned that his country 'will not allow Israel or any company working for Israeli interests to take any amount of our gas that is in our zone'. In response the Minister of National Infrastructures Uzi Landau rejected Lebanon's claim outright and said, 'We will not hesitate to use our force and strength to protect not only the rule of law but the international maritime law . . . Israel has sole rights'".

SHOOT-OUT IN LEBANON IS AN OMINOUS SIGN

According to the Jewish Chronicle, "The shooting cannot be disconnected from the increasingly belligerent attitude of the Lebanese army towards the IDF patrols on the border in recent months. Israeli commanders in the region have reported a marked increase in Lebanese soldiers pointing their weapons at the patrols and more efforts to hit Israeli aircraft with ground fire. Even at higher levels, there are ominous developments afoot in the Lebanese army, a direct result of Hizbullah's participation in the national coalition. Exactly four years to the end of the last Lebanese war, Israel faces not only a Hizbullah with more arms than ever, but also potentially another enemy across the border."

Tehran aims at a gas empire

According to Newsweek, "Tehran is trying to take a leaf out of Moscow's playbook and build a regional gas empire of its own, and it could soon be sending gas to Europe and Pakistan. Key to Iran's expansion is the undermining of the EU- and US-backed Nabucco pipeline, conceived to bring Central Asian gas via the Caucasus and Turkey to Europe, bypassing Russia. No major gas-producing country has actually signed up for the pipeline. Meanwhile, Russia has bought 7 billion of the estimated 8 billion cubic metres of gas at Nabucco's main planned source, Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz gas field. Turkmens have no reason to participate as they have just opened a new gas pipeline to Iran . . . It seems the problem-plagued Nabucco, rather than isolating Russia, is fast becoming a way for Iran to make itself Europe's indispensable energy supplier. The US says it won't support Nabucco if Iran is involved, and isn't putting up any hard cash to push for the pipeline's completion. This all means the EU can't afford to be fussy about where it gets its gas—even if it means swapping one unreliable gas supplier, Russia, for the even less predictable Iran."

London aid convoy to Gaza

An aid convoy of more than 500 lorries is due to leave London for Gaza on Yom Kippur, former MP George Galloway has announced. They are expected to travel through Europe as part of the *Viva Palestina* organisation's efforts to deliver medical equipment and educational supplies to Palestinians. 18 September has been chosen as it is the first Saturday after Ramadan. The convoy will join vehicles from Casablanca and Doha, and travel to Rafah on the Egypt-Gaza border.

JERUSALEM BUILDING PLAN ADVANCES

Arab neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem will, for the first time, be subject to Israeli building regulations if a plan by the Jerusalem municipality gets government approval. The proposal has been opposed by Arab representatives as it would extend Israeli authority over the area. The Jerusalem municipality is now advocating a building 'master plan' that will cover the whole of Jerusalem, including the currently unzoned Arab neighbourhoods. This will soon enter the final stages of the process for approval at the Interior Ministry. According to the plan, Arabs will be able to build legally and have illegally built structures legalised.

Netanyahu woos Greece

Israel has bolstered its ties with Turkey's rival neighbour, Greece. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made the first official visit of an Israeli prime minister to Greece in August. It follows a similar visit by Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou to Jerusalem. The two leaders agreed to further cooperation between Israel and Greece in the defence and economic fields. One of the ideas aired by the two prime ministers is the development of a joint tourism package to incorporate visits to both Jerusalem and Athens.

NPT targets Israel as nuclear bad guy

The international community took another step toward reversing the roles of Israel and Iran, and turning the Jewish state into the Middle East's nuclear 'bad guy', when the 189 member states of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) met in New York. The month-long meeting produced an agreement calling for a nuclear weapons-free zone the Middle East. The document stipulated that in 2012 a conference would be held to enforce the decision.

Israelis up in arms over Saudi deal

A US sale of fighters to the Gulf states has sparked concern in Jerusalem. What has worried Israel this time is the scale of the agreement. According to the Israel-friendly Wall Street Journal, the Obama Administration is preparing to sell advanced Boeing F-15 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia.

Church of England reviews stake in Israeli rail

The Church of England is reviewing its investment in a company building Jerusalem's light railway, amid concern that the tramline "will help to cement Israel's hold on occupied east Jerusalem". However, the church has stopped short of endorsing a campaign urged by Palestinian churches to boycott "everything produced" by Israel's West Bank occupation. The boycott call was made in a document known as *Kairos Palestine*, issued by Palestinian Christians last December. This document denounces "Israeli occupation of Palestinian land as a sin against God and humanity". The Methodist Church voted to circulate the document among its members, taking up the call for boycotting settlement goods.