

International Intelligence

Israeli Commentator Urges Talks with Syria

Writing in the Feb. 22 issue of the daily *Ha'aretz*, Israeli commentator Ari Shavit called for Israel to open peace talks with Syria. He wrote: "For the past eight years, Israel has not taken a genuine diplomatic step regarding Syria. Emissaries have come and gone, trial balloons have been floated, but a firm decision to extend a hand to Damascus has not been made. Why? Because an unwise U.S. administration encouraged irresponsible Israeli governments to turn their back on the Syrians. Because the local peace lobby preferred virtual negotiations with a virtual Palestinian Authority instead of a concrete attempt to find out whether we can reach a true settlement with our northern neighbor."

"Peace with Syria is not an enthusiastic prospect... But peace with Syria will divorce [Lebanese Hezbollah leader Hassan] Nasrallah from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, isolate Iran, and surround Israel with a ring of cold but stable peace arrangements. In a gradually darkening Middle East, peace with Syria might light a torch of hope and create a meaningful strategic turning point... It is not certain that an attempt to arrive at peace with [Syrian President Bashar] Assad will be successful. But the diplomatic paralysis is dangerous, and locking the gates is a serious mistake. Those who choose to live in the Middle East must always balance power with generosity. The time for generosity has arrived."

Russia Wants More Talks on Kosovo

Voicing concern over the increasing tensions in Serbia in reaction to Kosovo's declaration of independence on Feb. 17, and the endorsement of that declaration by many leading nations, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters in Moscow on Feb. 22 that "talks on Kosovo's status should be restarted," and warned that the unilateral dec-

laration could have consequences which "could harm Russia's relations with the EU and the U.S.A." He said the Kosovo issue has prevented the international community from dealing with other outstanding problems.

Another senior politician of Russia, Sergei Mironov, the speaker of the Russian Federation Council, dismissed accusations by some Western politicians that Russia has tacitly encouraged the ongoing riots in Serbia, and denounced the violence. "Russia has never instigated and is not going to instigate anyone. Moreover, I believe that there is no need to set anything on fire. Generally, when people start pogroms with good intentions, that is not what is needed. What is needed is a balanced, clear and very calm position," Mironov told reporters in Barnaul, Russia.

"When the administration of Serbia says it will never recognize Kosovo's independence and will never recognize the jurisdiction of Kosovo as an independent state, it is one thing, and they have state leverage to realize this decision. And when such protests and riots begin, they just let themselves down. The whole world will look at that and say, 'Look what they have done.' They are doing everything wrong. Russia, of course, has nothing to do with it," said Mironov.

Turkish Troops Invade Northern Iraq

After eight hours of air and artillery strikes on camps of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the mountainous, snow-bound region of northern Iraq the night of Feb. 21, about 10,000 Turkish troops entered northern Iraq and penetrated 10 km on Feb. 22. The PKK is a separatist group which has carried out terrorism within Turkey and elsewhere. It now finds refuge in the Kurdish region of Iraq.

"The target, purpose, size, and parameters of this operation are limited," Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said. "Our armed forces will come back in the shortest time possible as soon as they achieve their objectives." Iraqi Foreign Minister

Hoshyar Zebari told the AFP that the Turkish troops destroyed five bridges across a remote mountain river on the Iraqi border during the incursion on Feb. 22. He added that "we don't expect that a large incursion is taking place, as it's a remote and inhospitable region." He estimated that "hundreds, rather than thousands" of Turkish troops were involved in the operation.

In Brussels, the European Commission asked Turkey to "refrain from any disproportionate military action," and European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana said that Turkey's action was "not the best response." Britain urged Turkey to withdraw its forces "as early as possible" and avoid harming civilians, while Germany warned Ankara of the "risk of destabilization."

Uproar over French 'Coup' on Lisbon Treaty

Protests over the virtual "coup d'état" methods used by the French government to pass the dictatorial Lisbon Treaty, are growing, and even statements by President Nicolas Sarkozy are feeding the outrage.

A citizens' group started by a French lawyer is collecting signatures in support of a case before the European Court of Human Rights, which would seek to cancel the just-completed process of having only parliaments ratify the "treaty," and instead force the holding of referenda. So far, over 1,100 Frenchmen have signed the petition.

President Sarkozy is admitting that the government was forced to take extraordinary measures, in order to ensure that the treaty passes. Sarkozy avowed in a Feb. 10 speech that he was forced to comply with the desire of "our partners" in the European Union to see France enforcing a parliamentary-only vote. "Had that condition not been fulfilled, no agreement would have been possible," he said.

In 2005, along with the Dutch, French citizens rejected the so-called European Constitution, which has now been retooled as the Lisbon Treaty. It was fully expected that they would have rejected the treaty as well.