



ISRAEL MATTERS!

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Presbyterians Consider Divesting From Companies Doing Business With Israel

Israel and Bulgaria Agree to Joint Military Training

Members of the Bulgarian Parliament ratified an agreement between the Defense Ministries of Bulgaria and Israel for partnership in military training. "The agreement is needed in order to strictly regulate the joint military training on the territory of the respective country," Defense Minister, Anyu Angelov, said, stressing the collaboration would not bring any burden to Bulgaria's public expenditures.

According to the Minister, parliamentary ratification had been needed because Bulgaria does not have any other contract with Israel on the status of armed forces.

Ventsislav Lakov, a Minister of Parliament from the far-right, nationalist Ataka party, explained that his party would support ratification because the "Israeli army is small, but very well organized and mobile, as should be the Bulgarian one." "Such organization and mobility do not happen here due to the shortage of funds. We should use the Israeli know how," Lakov said.

In January, 2010, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov visited Israel, where he met with his counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu. It was the first trip of a Bulgarian PM to Israel in 18 years. [Haaretz]

A major body within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted recently to recommend that the church vote to stop investing in three companies "until they have ceased profiting from non-peaceful activities in Israel-Palestine." The vote proposed by the General Assembly Mission Council on whether to continue investing in the corporations -- Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, and Hewlett-Packard -- will happen at the church's General Assembly, a national meeting of church leaders that will take place in late June and early July in Pittsburgh. The assembly meets every two years.

"We have run out of hope that these companies are willing to change their corporate practices [in Israel-Palestine]," said the Rev. Brian Ellison, a pastor from Kansas City who chairs the church's Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee. "We have made diligent effort to engage in conversation. We'd like to do more, to make progress, but substantial change does not seem possible." Ellison said the church has "significant" investments in the corporations.



He said his committee is targeting Caterpillar because its bulldozers have been used in the demolition of Palestinian homes and in the building of the Israeli West Bank barrier. The group wants divestment from Motorola Solutions because it says the company's communication technologies are used by Israeli forces, while it recommends divestment from Hewlett-Packard because it says the company's products have been used by the Israeli Navy to coordinate its blockage of the Gaza Strip. Ellison said HP also provides biometric scanners used at checkpoints.

Caterpillar representatives have said previously that its bulldozers are provided to Israel in accordance with U.S. government policy through the federal Foreign Military Sales program.

The move by the Presbyterian committee attracted strong criticism from Jewish groups, such as the Jewish Council for Public Affairs and the Israel Action Network, an effort of The Jewish Federations of North America.

"We are profoundly disappointed by the General Assembly Mission Council's decision to recommend this report," Rabbi Steve Gutow, president of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said in a statement. "Neither peace nor the long friendship between our two communities is served by this action. It is tragic that national Presbyterian leaders are making the delegitimization of Israel a public witness of their church. Once again, we turn to our friends who will gather in the church's General Assembly this summer to find a path towards peace rather than dissension. The proposed resolution drives a wedge between our two communities, frustrates interfaith cooperation, and undermines our joint efforts to pursue social justice." [The Huffington Post]

Focus: The Israel - Azerbaijan Connection



Iran Fumes Over Flourishing Israel-Azerbaijan Ties

As relations between Israel and Azerbaijan prosper, Iran is making no effort to disguise its fury over the friendship. Recently, the Iranian Foreign Ministry called in Azerbaijan's ambassador and demanded answers over a \$1.5 billion arms purchase from Israel. Iran, Azerbaijan's southern neighbor, has also repeatedly accused the



country of allowing its territory to be used by Israeli intelligence operatives.

"There is no military alliance. But there are naturally shared interests. Azerbaijan

is an enlightened, secular, advanced state," said former Israeli deputy defense minister Ephraim Sneh, who was instrumental in forging the first links between Jerusalem and Baku two decades ago.

Azerbaijan sells Israel a third of its oil, and cooperation on technology and trade is well developed, Sneh noted. "I saw the potential 19 years ago, and worked to bring relations closer as a Knesset member and a minister, because I saw the similarities and joint interests. I'm pleased at how things have developed," he added.

Dr. Ganire Pashayeva, Azerbaijani parliament member and foreign affairs committee member, although she did not mention Iran by name, said that "strategic cooperation between Azerbaijan and Israel will continue" despite opposition from "neighbors in our area." Israeli-Azerbaijani ties are important from defense and economic perspectives, she added.

Lev Spivak, who heads the Israel Azerbaijan International Association, said that relations "are very good between the militaries" of the two countries, adding that the Azerbaijani president's security guards are trained in Israel.

On the cultural level, Jews had lived in Azerbaijan for five centuries free from persecution. After Azerbaijan broke free from the former Soviet Union, some 70,000 of the country's 100,000 Jews moved to Israel, but return to visit often, forming a natural bridge between the two populations, he added. [Jerusalem Post]

Report: Israel Has Access to Azeri Airbases

Top American officials believe that Israel has secured access to airbases in Azerbaijan, possibly as part of its preparation for a strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, Foreign Policy Magazine reported. According to the report, Baku has granted Jerusalem permission to use four abandoned Soviet-era airfields should the need arise.

Israel and Azerbaijan's ties have been growing stronger over the past few months. In February, the two signed a \$1.6 billion arms deal, which will see Israel supply Azerbaijan with sophisticated drones and missile-defense systems, the report said.

The magazine quoted an intelligence officer as saying that Washington is "watching what Iran does closely ... But we're now watching what Israel is doing in Azerbaijan. And we're not happy about it."

Washington, the report said, believes that there is a covert aspect of the Israeli-Azeri alliance and that "the security cooperation between the two countries is heightening the risks of an Israeli strike on Iran."

According to the report, in the event of a strike, access to Azeri airfields would free Israeli fighter jets from the need to refuel in mid-flight during a strike on Iran.

Defense analyst David Isenberg told Foreign Policy that "the ability to use Azeri airfields is a significant asset to any Israel strike." In fact, he added, "being allowed access to Azeri airfields would be crucial," as Azerbaijan is strategically located on Iran's northern border. [Ynet]

Israeli Blood Test May Detect Cancer

Israeli researchers have developed a simple blood test that may provide early detection of many types of cancer. Researchers at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) and Soroka University Medical Center in Beersheva, Israel, designed a device that illuminates cancer cells with less than a teaspoon of blood.

The test uses infrared light to detect miniscule changes in the blood of a person who has a cancerous growth somewhere, even before the disease has spread. Various molecules released into the bloodstream cause it to absorb infrared light slightly differently compared to that of healthy people.

In the latest clinical trial with 200 patients and a control group, the test identified specific cancers in 90 percent of the patients and found other types of cancer, as well. The researchers focused on detection of common cancers, such as lung and ovarian cancer.

Doctors believe it is critical to increase cancer detection in early stages to prevent the need for long, difficult, and costly treatments in more advanced stages. More clinical trials will be conducted in the next 18 months. [Israel Herald]