



ISRAEL MATTERS!

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ISRAELI CABINET RESPONDS TO CONTINUED GAZA ROCKET FIRE

Rockets Not Mentioned in U.N. Report

The United Nations Security Council met recently to address a Libyan draft statement that called on Israel to end its siege of Gaza and ensure "unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people."

The Israeli mission lobbied member countries to amend the draft statement to include condemnation of Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel, which the original failed to mention. Many delegations, including France and the United Kingdom, called for the amendments to include reference to the rocket attacks. US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad said the Libya statement was "not acceptable," because it "doesn't talk about the rocket attacks ... on innocent Israelis."

Israeli counselor Gilad Cohen addressed the council in response to Syria's condemnation of Israel in support of the draft. "It is hence the height of hypocrisy, cynicism and indecency for ... Syria to address the council and condemn Israel for merely defending itself against the very Hamas terrorists that it supports," said Cohen. "Damascus is home and headquarters to numerous terrorist organizations, including Islamic Jihad and Hamas - the latter [of] whose political leader, Khaled Mashaal, lives there while continuing to orchestrate the killing of Israelis."

Cohen also criticized the Libyan Ambassador who acted as president of the council for his "deeply regrettable" usage of the term "genocide" to refer to the situation in the Gaza Strip.

At the February 10th cabinet meeting, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said there will be no peace between Israelis and Palestinians as long as Gaza terrorists continue launching rockets at Israeli towns. "There is no hope for any kind of peace or the vision of the Palestinian state which includes the Gaza Strip without real change on the ground," Livni told reporters.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said "We need to act in a methodical and organized fashion, over time. That's what we're doing, that's what we'll continue to do. We'll continue to go after all terror operatives, their handlers and their dispatchers." The prime minister went on to say that in recent months, approximately 200 terrorists had been killed in the Gaza Strip, and hundreds of others had been wounded, asserting



this was "... a result of initiated, aggressive, planned and comprehensive activity by the IDF and the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency)."

Interior Minister Meir Sheetrit called on the IDF to choose a Gaza neighborhood to make an example of, warn residents to evacuate and wipe it out. "That is how those in Gaza will understand that we are serious," he said, adding that all the Hamas leaders must be brought to justice, "or we must bring justice to them." Sheetrit went on to say that the IDF must act decisively and with greater force against those responsible for terror activities. "It is inconceivable that we are living in a country where citizens are wounded every day but we are not responding with the appropriate force," he said.

Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz said, "Our goals in Gaza are not clearly defined." He went on to say, "we need to act decisively against the four centers of gravity: The leadership, the military wing, the infrastructure, and the money."

Environment Minister Gideon Ezra said that the IDF must act at the right time to surprise the enemy. "One of the lessons learned from the Second Lebanon War was that we must not talk too much."

Regarding the possibility of a ceasefire with Hamas, Vice Premier Haim Ramon said that as soon as "Hamas stops firing Kassams there will be a tahadiya (a period of calm)," stressing, "we will not negotiate with them."

Israel Looks to Electric Cars

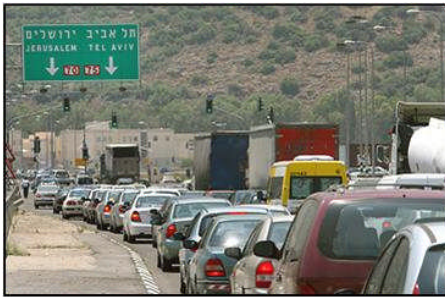
The Israeli government has announced a major initiative to push the nation's drivers toward electric cars, a move meant to both lessen dependence on foreign oil and address the environmental and health hazards of gas-burning vehicles.

The Israeli attempt is far more sophisticated than anything tried before. It aligns policy makers and a major car company with a company prepared to build hundreds of thousands of electric charging stations across the country. In an interview with TIME magazine, Israeli President Shimon Peres called the project, "an experimental lab, a pilot project, before it's applied to other, bigger industrialized nations."

Automaker Renault-Nissan will manufacture the cars and Better Place, a California start-up, will build the infrastructure, which may

eventually consist of 500,000 charging points and up to 200 battery-exchange stations. A pilot involving a few dozen cars will start later this year in Tel Aviv. A few hundred vehicles are expected to be on the road by 2009, with production scaled to the mass market by 2011. Israel slashed the tax rate on cars powered by electricity to 10% to encourage consumers to buy the vehicles once they are available.

This plan is different in that it focuses on the infrastructure for recharging cars instead of the vehicles themselves. Consumers will buy cars from Renault-Nissan, then subscribe to a Better Place service that includes use of a battery and electricity from charging stations. The business model proposes to add electrical outlets to at least 500,000 of Israel's three to four million parking spots. Doing so, people can charge their cars whenever they need to. The model presumes most people seldom drive more than 100 miles at a time, so wiring workplaces and public spaces like shopping malls should keep most cars charged. For longer drives, customers will be able to pull into a battery-swap station and get a fresh battery. Better Place, and not individual drivers, owns the batteries, which should keep the price of the cars comparable to gas-powered vehicles. The planners have their sights set on China saying if the plan works in Israel, "it will work even better in China. Their pollution is killing them and the rest of us, too."



Canada Won't Attend U.N. Conference on Racism

Canada has announced that it will not take part in a major United Nations conference on racism next year because the event is likely to descend into "regrettable anti-Semitism." Officials said they believed Canada was the first nation to announce it will not attend the conference in Durban, South Africa. Israel and the United States walked out of a similar meeting at the same venue in 2001 in protest over draft conference texts branding Israel as a racist and apartheid state.

"(We) had hoped that the preparatory process for the 2009 ... conference would remedy the mistakes of the past. Despite our efforts, we have concluded that it will not. Canada will therefore not participate," Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier said in a statement.

Jason Kenney, the secretary of state for multiculturalism, said the government was sure the conference would "showcase the same regrettable anti-Semitism" as the 2001 meeting. "Our government sees no value in allowing Canada's participation to continue to dignify or legitimate such hateful and un-Canadian propaganda."

The Canadian government strongly supports Israel. B'nai Brith Canada praised Ottawa for pulling out of "a farce of conference" that it said "pays lip service to anti-racism but in fact provides a platform for the promotion of hatred and bigotry." The Canadian Jewish Congress also commended the government for its principled stand.

'Sopranos' Star on Birthright Visits Israel

Jamie Lynn Sigler, 26, who played Meadow, the daughter of Tony Soprano, on the HBO show "The Sopranos," grew up in a Jewish home in Jericho, N.Y. But it was only touring in Israel recently that she said she felt a spiritual and emotional connection to her roots. "It's one of the most beautiful, inspiring places I've ever been to," she said. "I now have a greater understanding and motivation about preserving my Jewishness." Sigler said she was especially moved during her visits to the Western Wall, where she was surprised by her tears, and to Yad Vashem, where the Holocaust suddenly felt deeply personal.

On the birthright trip her group was accompanied by a small group of Israeli soldiers. Through them, Sigler said she heard about a much different life than the one she and her friends lead in America. She was taken by their sacrifices and the pride they have in their country and history. "I would want to move here and join the army" too.

We hope you continue to enjoy reading *Israel Matters!* We look forward to your comments. Send them by email to Ed and Randy Berns, Co-chairs of the TBS Israel Affairs Committee, at: redberns@sbcglobal.net