It seems there is talk of war amid rumours of peace in the Middle East today. Yesterday Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert landed in Egypt for talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. But it seems the trip has been more of an embarrassment to Olmert than anything else. Israelis protested over the planned visit, complaining that Mubarak has not visited Israel in his 25 year presidency despite the two countries having signed a formal peace agreement. Olmert was also forced to apologise for the deaths of four Palestinians during an IDF raid in Ramallah. When quizzed on Olmert's remarks in Germany last year that Iran wanted to have nuclear weapons like Israel, the Egyptian President seemed to confirm that his country was also preparing to develop nuclear weapons , in light of Iran and Israel's declarations.

Quote: *"Mubarak, on the other hand, said that if Iran attains nuclear weapons, his country cannot sit idly by on the sidelines. "Egypt's stance is clear. We declared this stance in Baghdad in the early 1990's in the presence of then President Saddam Hussein: The Middle East should be free of weapons of mass destruction - atomic, biological and chemical. "We don't want nuclear arms in the area but we are obligated to defend ourselves. We will have to have the appropriate weapons. It is irrational that we sit and watch from the sidelines when we might be attacked at any moment," Mubarak stated.*

Meanwhile, the talk of peace continues. Javier Solana, the High Representative for the European Common, Foreign and Security Policy, met with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in an effort to push for peace in the Middle East. Both Solana and Rice are due to travel to the region this month.

Quote: *"Rice reviewed her plans at the State Department with Solana, the senior European Union diplomat who will make his own, separate trip to the area this month. They also had lunch at the White House with Stephen Hadley, President George W. Bush's national security adviser. "We will try to see how we can give a push to the peace process," Solana said. He declined to say whether Rice would try to set up a peace conference.*

Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ismael Haniyeh and President Abbas have also met, and discussed the need to speed up talks on forming the Palestinian unity government. And of course the European Union will meet in January to discuss the implementation of Spain's new peace initiative. I think world leaders are still attempting to get a peace deal on the table before March , when Iran will have completed its nuclear facility at Bushehr. The US sent a second aircraft carrier to the Gulf.

Quote: *"Officials decided to send the Stennis strike group on top of a carrier group already in the region on a request late last year from the US Central Command, the military unit in charge of activities there as well as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a senior Pentagon official said Thursday. He spoke on condition of anonymity because the Defense Department prefers not to publicly announce upcoming ship movements for security reasons. Pentagon officials said last month that the extra ships would serve as a show of force to Iran, at odds with the United States over its nuclear program and alleged support of violence in Iraq.*

Source Jerusalem Post , YNet News , Jerusalem Post , YNet News