

www.haaretz.com

Last update - 23:15 10/03/2008

## Sarkozy to Peres: France will always be at Israel's side

By The Associated Press

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, a self-proclaimed friend of Israel, said France would always be at Israel's side and insisted the best way for Israel to battle terrorism was to help restart the stalled Mideast peace process, as he welcomed President Shimon Peres for a five-day state visit.

French-Israeli ties have warmed considerably under Sarkozy after the 12-year tenure of his predecessor, Jacques Chirac, whom many saw as more pro-Arab.

But Sarkozy's France has reacted coolly to Israel's recent announcements that it was stepping up housing and apartment construction in the West Bank and in disputed East Jerusalem.

"Israel's security depends on a stop to the colonization," Sarkozy told Peres during their meeting at the Elysee Palace. The comments were relayed to reporters by French presidential spokesman David Martinon.

Earlier Monday, French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Pascale Andreani reiterated that France condemns continued colonization that could threaten the creation of a viable Palestinian state. She urged Israel to refrain from any unilateral action that could threaten the final status of Palestinian territories or the peace process.

For his part, Sarkozy said "my conviction is clear: the best guarantee for Israel's security is the creation of a modern, democratic and viable Palestinian state before the end of 2008," according to Martinon.

On Sunday and Monday, Israel said it plans to build 400 homes in East Jerusalem, and another 750 apartments in Givat Ze'ev, a West Bank settlement just outside of Jerusalem.

Speaking to reporters after his meeting with Sarkozy, Peres said the terror attack that killed eight students at the Mercaz Harav yeshiva in Jerusalem last week would not alter Israel's policy.

"What happened in Jerusalem was a real tragedy for us, but we don't intend to change our policies - namely, not to create new settlements," he said.

Peres also said France and Israel agreed that Iran presented the greatest current danger with its contested nuclear program. Many Western nations fear Tehran is hiding bomb-building ambitions. Iran insists its nuclear plans are peaceful.

Later, at a dinner in Peres' honor Monday evening at the Elysee Palace, Sarkozy pledged that France will always be beside Israel when its existence is thrown into question.

"Those who scandalously call for its destruction will always find

France in front of them to stand in their way," he said.

Israeli flags lined the Champs-Elysee for Peres' state visit. Sarkozy, who took office in May, gave his guest a 19th-century engraving of a portrait of diplomat and writer Chateaubriand, and four old books. Peres dedicated an olive grove at a Holon agronomic school, near Tel Aviv, to the French leader.

During his visit, Peres planned to meet French Jewish leaders and other government officials, and to inaugurate a book fair celebrating Israeli literature. Sarkozy is expected to visit Israel in May.

**Related articles:**

- [In show of love for Israel, Sarkozy makes Peres his first official visitor](#)
- [Sarkozy tells PM: Palestinian refugees will not return to Israel](#)
- [Sarkozy hosts Netanyahu in Paris, backs new sanctions against Iran](#)
- [Peres biography: Israel, France had secret pact to produce nuclear weapons](#)

---

/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=962843

[close window](#)