

ISRAEL NEWS FROM DAVID

DOLAN

June 23, 2004

Greetings from Jerusalem!

I am back in the land after a long, but productive speaking tour in the UK and the USA, and plan to send out reports on a more regular basis during the remainder of this year. It was so good to see many of you during my travels, but it is also good to be home! Actually I am off to Germany this weekend to share at a Christian Friends conference there (details below), but will return to Jerusalem next week. Before leaving, I am doing an interview with the American-based History Channel, to be aired just before Christmas this year. The topic is "The Apocalypse" so it should be an interesting interview! They heard about my end-time novel, and thought I might be able to share some interesting information about modern Israel and its connections to the biblical "end of days." We will conduct the interview from the roof of my apartment building, with its excellent view of the Old City and nearby Mount of Olives.

I currently plan to return to the United States early next year, to speak on a Messianic Caribbean cruise among other things. I have also been invited to share in Jamaica for the first time. I will send more details soon. I am also scheduled to return to Germany in mid-August and early September, and will share information about that soon as well.

Below is my monthly Israel news and analysis review, written primarily for the British and US branches of CFI. Much has taken place here in the Lord's land since I left on my tour in Mid-March, as usual these days! I am especially happy that terror attacks have declined dramatically in my absence (in the wake of the killing of Hamas leader Sheik Yassin by the way—contrary to many expectations). In fact, the last large-scale terror attack targeting Israeli civilians was the one I personally witnessed near my home on February 22. Although attempts to carry out atrocities continue (the army says 58 planned suicide bombing have been thwarted so far this year), the number is 75% less compared to last year! We thank the Lord, and you who are faithfully praying for Israel, for this positive fact.

GOVERNMENT APPROVES 2005 GAZA WITHDRAWAL

Striking like lightning, Israeli military forces swept into the Egyptian-occupied Gaza Strip during the second day of the famous Six Day War that began on June 5th, 1967. Exactly 37 years later, the Israeli government voted to pull all Jews out of the small coastal zone south of Tel Aviv in the coming year. The decision has far reaching implications for both Israelis and Palestinians.

The historic decision followed a week of high political drama in the never-dull country, climaxing with Ariel Sharon's dismissal of two right-wing ministers from his cabinet who strongly opposed his unilateral withdrawal plan. That set off a fresh wave of political upheaval which threatened to topple Sharon's narrow coalition government, and possibly scuttle his pullout plan. But the Prime Minister had some good news as well—he will not be indicted after all on bribery charges connected to his son's business dealings with a wealthy Likud party land developer.

With several senior Likud party ministers extremely suspicious of Sharon's evacuation proposal, including former PM Binyamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, the current Premier looked like he might lose the crucial 6 June cabinet vote. While he seemed determined to ignore the fact that 60% of Likud party voters rejected his controversial Gaza plan in an early May referendum, he certainly could not do the same if his cabinet adopted a similar negative position.

Pre-vote head counts showed an even cabinet split at best. That prompted Sharon to fire two ministers from the far-right National Union party. The two sacked politicians were popular Tourism Minister Benny Elon and Russian-born Transportation Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who had once been a close associate of Netanyahu. Elon, an Orthodox Jew, was especially known abroad for his enthusiastic embrace of pro-Israel Christians worldwide and promotion of Evangelical tourism to the biblical Holy Land. Despite his dismissal, Elon still showed up for the cabinet vote, even though he was not allowed to participate. He denounced the sackings as "invalid and undemocratic," a view shared by many cabinet ministers, including some who supported the pullout plan.

OSLO THREE

The sackings produced a firestorm of protest from many of Sharon's Likud party subordinates, not to mention most other right wing politicians. Among the fiercest critics were members of the settler-based National Religious Party (NRP), who threatened to bolt the shaky coalition, which would topple it for sure. Lieberman complained that he had been fired solely because of his political opinions, not due to anything he had actually done to thwart Sharon's pullout plan, which he said reminded him of the way things were done in the Kremlin of his youth.

Many political pundits compared Sharon's "cynical" action to that taken by the late Yitzhak Rabin's Labour-led government in 1995. In a bid to secure parliamentary support for the bitterly contested army evacuation of several Arab towns in Judea and Samaria, including Bethlehem and Nablus, Rabin "bought off" a small undecided party by offering instant cabinet positions (including personal Volvos with fulltime chauffeurs) to its two elected legislators. Although the deal resulted in the so-called "Oslo Two" plan's narrow approval by a mere one vote Knesset margin, it forever tainted it as not being authentically sanctioned by the Israeli parliament.

In the end, the cabinet would apparently have approved the Gaza withdrawal plan even if the two National Union ministers had remained in their seats and voted against it. The early June vote was a decisive 14 ministers in favour, with only half as many—seven—opposed.

MORE HURDLES AHEAD

The lopsided result was secured after PM Sharon agreed to a compromise resolution that was acceptable to the three main Likud withdrawal skeptics, Netanyahu, Shalom and Education Minister Limor Livnat. However, analysts said the final resolution could spell more trouble ahead for the embattled Israeli leader. It states that after "preparatory work" is completed to execute the evacuation of nearly 8,000 Jewish residents from over 20 scattered Gaza Strip communities and several in Samaria, the cabinet will "reconvene in order to hold a separate discussion and decide whether to evacuate settlements, which settlements, and at what pace—dependent upon conditions at the time." In other words, the government will vote again on any actual withdrawals before they take place, giving anti-pullout ministers another chance to thwart the plan.

Despite the compromise caveat, NRP leader Effi Eitam indicated that his party might still bolt Sharon's coalition, causing its collapse. Speaking soon after the cabinet vote, he told reporters that he was

“embarrassed to the depth of my soul at the way this decision was taken.” Eitam then denounced what he called “the dark decision to expel thousands of Jews from their homes and to give the Palestinians a terrorist state on a platter of Jewish blood.”

Despite his strong words, a majority of NRP legislators decided to remain in the coalition at least for the next three months. The decision was based on the contention that the six-seat party might still be able to halt or moderate the evacuation process from inside the cabinet, with no chance of doing so from opposition benches. However, after former Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu—the NRP’s spiritual mentor—ruled that the party should immediately quit the coalition “to protest Sharon’s determination to give up sovereignty over historic portions of the Land of Israel,” Eitam and deputy minister Yitzhak Levy resigned from the coalition, leaving it with a dangerous minority of 59 seats in the 120 member Knesset.

PERES TO THE RESCUE?

Israeli political analysts agreed that the government could not survive for very long with only 59 members participating in it. At any rate, most anticipated that the remaining four NRP members would also resign when any actual moves took place to implement the withdrawal decision, possibly along with some other current members of the coalition—including a few Likud legislators.

Therefore Sharon was forced to begin searching for new coalition partners soon after the two NRP ministers jumped off of his listing ship. Analysts say he prefers to form a new “national unity government” with the largest opposition party, Labour, headed by veteran politician and former PM Shimon Peres. Sharon believes that at least one other small religious party, United Torah Judaism would also join such a “broad” coalition, and possible the much larger Shas party as well. Indeed, Sharon made it quite clear after the last general election—when he warned right-wing voters that “painful concessions” would be necessary under his rule—that he would prefer such a government quilt to the one he actually knitted together.

However, the main stumbling block to the formation of such a government was apparently the longtime rivalry between Peres and Netanyahu, who faced each other for the post of prime minister in the 1996 Israeli elections. The 80 year old Labour leader blasted Netanyahu’s economic policies in words that cannot be printed here, adding he would demand that they be significantly altered before he would pull his party into a unity government. In other words, said many political analysts, Labour intends to retreat to the failed socialist

policies carried out when it ruled the country and abandon the free market policies adopted by the US-educated Likud finance minister.

The fierce verbal assault prompted Netanyahu to back away from his initial pledge that he would not actively oppose the formation of a new unity government. He instead stated that the differences between the two big parties were “irreconcilable.” He repeated this contention with greater vigor after Peres spelled out new conditions for joining the Sharon-led government in an interview with the *New York Times* on 18 June. The Labour leader called for direct negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, in other words with Yasser Arafat, a position adamantly opposed by most Likud leaders. He also made clear that his party would insist on the immediate revamping of the Gaza pullout plan, setting out “a specific timetable” for the envisioned evacuations. Finally, he insisted that the uprooting of most “West Bank settlements” also be included in the government plan, which analysts said even Sharon would oppose.

An opinion survey conducted by the *Jerusalem Post* showed that a majority of 21 Likud Knesset members were opposed to Labour joining the coalition even before Peres toughened his conditions for doing so. Only 15 supported the new unity government proposal, and that number was expected to drop to near zero given the new Labour demands.

FALLING AGAIN

In light of the above, it increasingly appears that Israeli voters will be heading to the ballot booths much sooner than the current scheduled date of late 2007, which itself could scuttle or postpone the envisioned withdrawal. However before early elections took place, both the Likud and Labour parties would undoubtedly be forced to endure intense and acrimonious internal power struggles to see who would be chosen to lead their comrades into the premature electoral fray.

Although he is highly respected, most Labour politicians think that Shimon Peres is simply too old to assume the difficult post of prime minister once again. Still, no other potential candidate stands out among the many juniors who would like to think that they are his natural heir. On the Likud side of the coin, indications are growing that Sharon would be forced out as the party’s standard bearer due to his unpopular Gaza pullout scheme. Current polls show he would probably be replaced by the ever popular Netanyahu. Would-be premier Ehud Olmert has become even more disliked by a majority of Likud party rank and file for strongly backing Sharon’s plan.

It is interesting to note that if Sharon is toppled over his evacuation program, he would be the fifth Israeli leader in a row to be forced into early retirement after succumbing to immense international pressure—particularly from the United States and the European Union—to abandon Jewish communities in contested portions of Judaism’s ancient Promised Land.

The first “victim” was of course the late Rabin, cruelly gunned down by a fellow Israeli soon after pushing through the controversial Oslo Two withdrawal pact. Just over a half year later, his unelected successor, Shimon Peres, lost to Netanyahu shortly after the new Labour leader implemented most of that accord. That was followed by the collapse of Netanyahu’s government after he succumbed to Bill Clinton’s repeated arm twisting to hand over most of Hebron to Arafat’s control. Finally Ehud Barak lost his coalition majority in the wake of offering to hand over around 95% of the contested territories to the Palestinian Authority, which contributed to his massive electoral defeat by Sharon in early 2001.

SETTLER HOPES

The above record is part of the reason why many Gaza settlers told reporters they were not overly concerned with the government-sanctioned pullout plan. Mostly observant Jews, they testified that they look toward the God of Israel to help insure they will remain firmly planted in their homes at the end of the day, whatever government official’s decree. Such faith was widely expressed despite recurrent opinion polls that show a significant majority of Israelis agree with Sharon that the time has come to abandon isolated settlements in the mainly Arab-populated, and always tense, Gaza Strip.

Details of the withdrawal plan were released soon after the cabinet vote. A special cabinet committee of eight ministers, headed by national security council chief Giora Eiland, met on 9 June and drafted a working document that proposed a three stage pullout. It included compensation details for Jewish residents forced out of their homes, which is expected to cost the government around one billion US dollars.

Most significantly, families that agreed to leave by the end of this coming August would be awarded extra compensation. This was designed to begin a flood of early departures that would weaken diehard opposition to the population transfer. Gaza settlement leaders, and their backers inside of Israel, strongly denounced the

early departure “bribery” provision, saying they do not expect any families to depart this year.

The entire evacuation process is projected to be completed by the end of September 2005. Details of the plan were being ironed out in June with the aid of Egyptian leaders, working closely with the Palestinian Authority. Meanwhile Yasser Arafat indicated that he would agree to a power sharing arrangement with the radical Hamas movement and other Islamic rejectionist groups after the withdrawal takes place, apparently in recognition to the significant popularity and influence that the groups command in the Gaza Strip.

As the withdrawal plan became more concrete in June, the army continued to conduct various operations inside the teeming coastal zone, especially in the southern border area of Rafah. Illegal Hamas rocket factories were destroyed after an extended-range Kassam missile struck a home in the Israeli town of Sderot. The attack refreshed fears by many in Israel that an IDF pullout will turn the Gaza Strip into an echo of south Lebanon—dominated by the extremist Hizbullah militia, which continues to threaten the northern border region with deadly missile strikes four years after the army was yanked out of the area (Israeli media reports say the group is also sending anti-American fighters through Syria to Iraq). Fears about Hizbullah’s ultimate intentions have grown substantially in recent months amid mounting evidence that its main patron, Iran, is continuing to develop nuclear weapons, despite Tehran’s statements to the contrary.

OFF THE HOOK

While Ariel Sharon contemplates the turbulent waters that lie ahead as he attempts to please Israel’s international allies by uprooting thousands of Jews from their Gaza and north Samaria homes, he can at least rest assured that he will not be forced out of office on bribery charges. The earlier inclination of Israeli state prosecutors to put him on trial for allegedly accepting bribes in exchange for facilitating land deals for powerful Likud businessman David Appel was overturned by new Attorney General Menachem Mazuz. In announcing his decision not to prosecute, Mazuz also questioned the tactics of his predecessor, Edna Arbel, who wanted to go ahead with an indictment. This sparked a new political row in the country, with many speaking either for or against Arbel.

I believe that this month’s main news items give Israel’s faithful Christian friends many items to pray about. While doing so, let’s keep in mind that we are interceding before Israel’s holy Redeemer

and King: *“For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:44)*

The CFI GERMANY CONFERENCE will be held in the lovely southwest town of Altensteig, in the Black Forest. I am scheduled to speak this Friday and Saturday evening, and also on Sunday morning. For more details, go to www.cfri.de or contact:

Harald Eckert
CHRISTLICHE FREUNDE ISRAELS e.V.
(1. Vorsitzender)
Postfach 041
D-85239 Hebertshausen
Tel: 08131-274593; Handy: 0172-6241109
Fax: 08131-274594
E-Mail: harald.eckert@cfri.de
Internet: www.cfri.de

DAVID DOLAN is a Jerusalem-based author and journalist who has lived in Israel since 1980.

- **HOLY WAR FOR THE PROMISED LAND** (Broadman & Holman), his latest book, is an overview of the history of the Israel and of the bitter Arab-Israeli conflict that rages there, plus some autobiographical details about the author's experiences living in the land since 1980. It especially examines the important role that militant Islam plays in the conflict.
- **ISRAEL IN CRISIS: WHAT LIES AHEAD?** (Baker/Revell), which examines the political and biblical prospects for a regional attack upon Israel, settlement in the disputed territories, and related topics, is also available for purchase, along with an updated edition of his popular end-time novel, **THE END OF DAYS** (21st Century Press).

You may order these books at a special discount price by visiting his web site at www.ddolan.com, or by phoning 888-890-6938 in North America, or by e mail at: resources@yourisraelconnection.org

TO RECEIVE THESE FREE ISRAEL UPDATES DIRECTLY, FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS BELOW. YOU WILL ONLY RECEIVE DAVID DOLAN'S UPDATE AND ANALYSIS INFORMATION FROM THIS ADDRESS. THE LIST WILL NOT BE TRADED OR SOLD.

TO SUBSCRIBE (or to unsubscribe), **GO TO** <http://65.194.234.16/subscribe.asp>