

ISRAEL UPDATE FROM DAVID

DOLAN

APRIL NEWS REVIEW

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Shalom from Jerusalem,

Below is my latest Israel news and analysis report, written primarily for several CFI branches around the world. It covers important developments that occurred here during April, especially fresh news connected to the government's planned pullout from the entire Gaza Strip and northern Samaria, which is now expected to begin in mid-August. It contains further information about what is likely to occur here both before and during the controversial evacuation. I also take a glance up north at continuing dramatic developments in Lebanon, and examine how they might affect the scheduled withdrawals.

I have just completed a new DVD--VIDEO, filmed here in Jerusalem. Around one hour in length, it mainly reviews the miracle that is modern Israel, including some of my personal experiences while living here since 1980. It also features several songs in Hebrew that I recorded with a small local choral group a few years ago. The editing process is just beginning, and we hope that it will be available sometime in August.

I hope to see some of you during my planned speaking engagements in Norway, beginning the middle of next week, and after that in Charlotte, North Carolina and in the Philadelphia area. My speaking schedule is posted on my web site, www.ddolan.com <http://www.ddolan.com/> I plan to send out my May news review to you from the United States.

To all who are celebrating the Feast of Passover this week, a happy Pesach to you!

HOT SUMMER AHEAD

By David Dolan

The Israeli government's unilateral Gaza Strip/Northern Samaria withdrawal plan continued to stir strong emotions and produce daily headlines during April as the countdown proceeded for the summer

pullout to begin. Meanwhile cabinet ministers considered a proposal to postpone the 25 planned settlement uprootings for three weeks, until after the special Ninth of Av Jewish fast day in mid-August. This came amid indications that preparations for the contested evacuations are falling behind schedule. Security forces were kept busy during the month quelling a growing spate of anti-withdrawal demonstrations, while keeping a wary eye on unsettling developments in southern Lebanon that could potentially derail the planned pullback.

With his Likud political party severely divided over the planned evacuations, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon defended his controversial plan in several speeches and media interviews during April. His main argument echoed the one he made while securing reluctant cabinet approval for his pullout scheme last June; the United States will back Israel's right to retain three large settlement blocks near Jerusalem and Tel Aviv when peace talks eventually resume with the Palestinians, if all Gaza Strip and isolated northern Samaria communities are evacuated in the coming months.

Sharon's contention was strengthened during a state visit to George Bush's Texas ranch on April 11. The American President reaffirmed his indirect pledge of April 2004 to support Israel's official position that it will never abandon the towns of Ariel in central Samaria, Ma'ale Adumim due east of Jerusalem, and Ephrat in the Judean hills south of the capital city, along with satellite communities around the three bustling towns.

During a joint press conference held by the two leaders after their meeting, Bush also impressed some Israeli political analysts by noting that Israel's pre-1967 borders were actually mere ceasefire lines from the 1948-49 Arab attempt to wipe out the nascent Jewish state: "As I said last April, new realities on the ground make it unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final-status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949." The US leader went on to state that it is "realistic to expect that any final-status agreement will be achieved only on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities. Those changes on the ground, including existing major Israeli population centers, must be taken into account in any final-status negotiations."

VAIN GLORIOUS?

Israeli officials were well satisfied with the American President's supportive statements, even though there are no indications that final-status negotiations are anywhere on the horizon. However, they

were less thrilled when George Bush reiterated decades-old US government opposition to any settlement expansion. With Sharon standing at his side, he told reporters that Israel must not conduct "any activity that contravenes the Road Map obligations or prejudices final-status negotiations." He added that Israel "should remove unauthorized outposts and meet its Road Map obligations regarding settlements on the West Bank."

In response, the embattled Israeli leader repeated earlier pledges to dismantle all unauthorized outposts. But he was considerably fuzzier on the hot-potato settlement growth issue: "We accept the principal that no unilateral action by any party can prejudice the outcome of bilateral negotiations" was as far as he would go. However, he made clear that he does not consider the Road Map to be in operation yet, since the Palestinian Authority has barely begun to carry out its first obligation under the international peace plan-to disarm and dismantle all illegal Palestinian terror groups, especially members of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Fatah-linked Al Aksa Martyr's Brigades. Sharon said that "recent violence against Israel showed that terror is still continuing," adding that PA leader Mahmoud Abbas "must take more steps" to cripple Palestinian terror groups.

While fully concurring with their veteran party leader that PA officials have so far failed to take anything but cosmetic steps to curb the terrorist networks operating in their midst, several Likud withdrawal opponents maintained that Sharon was attempting to pull too many political eggs out of the American basket. They noted that Abbas and his PA colleagues had firmly condemned the President's statements concerning large settlement blocks, as did many regional Arab and Islamic leaders. Understanding that universal Arab demands regarding Jerusalem and Jewish settlements are unbending, the proposition that Israel can retain any of the land it captured in 1967 as part of a future peace deal is also strongly contested by the other official Road Map sponsors, especially Russia and the European Union. Therefore, they added, the current White House position - while comforting to Israeli ears - is hardly the final or definitive word on the matter, and should certainly not be presented as the main justification for the risky unilateral withdrawal that the government is planning.

MOUNTING TROUBLE

Prime Minister Sharon himself warned that civil violence was likely to rock Israel due to fierce opposition by many citizens to his unilateral evacuation plan. Speaking from his Jerusalem office just before heading to the United States, he told the American NBC television

network that "the tension here, the atmosphere here, looks very much like the eve of civil war." He went on to decry the physical threats that he has received over his pullout plan, pointing out that "all my life I was defending the lives of Jews. Now for the first time, security steps are being taken to protect me from Jews." Sharon's second comment angered many withdrawal opponents, with one Likud legislator saying it was the PM who "radically changed his spots and adopted the opposition's Gaza retreat plan, which endangers the lives of many Jews."

Possibly presaging some of the civil strife that may lie just ahead, scores of youthful pullout opponents blocked several major roads with burning tires during April, including the main Ayalon motorway through central Tel Aviv. The traffic disruptions led to angry scenes in several places as frustrated motorists left their cars to chase away the protestors. Nocturnal anti-pullout activists succeeded in placing heavy chains and locks on the entrance gates of over 150 schools in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area, shocking local officials and government ministers. The protestors placed printed signs at each padlocked school proclaiming that "Jews Do Not Expel Jews."

Anti-withdrawal groups have warned of many more public disruptions ahead - openly admitting that their main goal is to wear out security personnel before the scheduled settlement uprootings even begin. Some have acknowledged that this is a potentially dangerous strategy, given that Israeli police and army personnel are the frontline wall that defends the country against its many internal and external enemies. Military analysts warn that wearing them down just might be enough to tempt Hizbullah to lash out along the northern border, given that leaders of the radical Lebanese militia have already expressed some desire to disrupt the withdrawal, which they see as part of Sharon's Zionist plot to annex most of Judea and Samaria.

Just how effective this strategy could be was amply demonstrated on April 10th when one anti-pullout group managed to tie up some 3,000 security personnel in and around Jerusalem's walled Old City for the better part of the day. The nationalistic "Rehava" group had earlier announced that thousands of religious Jews would stream onto the Temple Mount to hold a prayer vigil against the planned Gaza/north Samaria retreat. In the end, the group only managed to mobilize some 60 protestors outside of Dung Gate after police officials made clear they would not allow any Jews onto Judaism's most hallowed site that day. But hundreds of Arabs did respond to repeated calls from Hamas and other quarters for Muslims to gather on the Mount and around the Old City to "defend Islam's sacred shrines." In fact, Muslim demonstrations were sparked as far away as Indonesia,

where thousands gathered in the streets to chant anti-Israel slogans.

STILL PRAYING FOR A MIRACLE

When cabinet ministers accepted PM Sharon's proposal to start evacuating Gaza settlements on July 25th, they were warned by several prominent religious leaders that the date was extremely inappropriate. The day before is the annual Fast of Tamuz, when observant Jews begin their annual three-week mourning period to commemorate various disasters and divine judgments that have befallen the Jewish people over many centuries. The fast climaxes each year on the ninth of the Hebrew month of Av - the traditional date when both the first and second temples were destroyed by Israel's ancient enemies. During this three-week mourning period, religious Jews do not hold or attend weddings, receive haircuts, or move into new homes.

Even though the house-moving prohibition is due to the fact that acquiring a new residence is normally a joyous occasion, rabbinical authorities warned that forcibly moving some 3,500 Jewish adults and an estimated 5,500 children out of their Gaza and northern Samaria homes during the three-week period was strictly forbidden under Jewish law. On top of that, the main component of many of the commemorated disasters that have befallen Jews over the years has precisely been forcible removal from their homes, often followed by death. That the Likud Premier and his cabinet decided to deploy Israeli soldiers and police officers to uproot thousands of Jews from 25 communities during the annual mourning period only added to the deep disgust many felt over the government's pullout plan.

Just days after he was met with angry chants of "traitor, traitor!" while visiting the Gaza Strip Jewish community of Neveh Dekalim, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz recommended that the evacuations be postponed until August 15th, the day after the Tisha b'Av fast. The proposal was sharply criticized by deputy premier Shimon Peres and other Labour politicians, who noted that Sharon's cabinet ministers had understood that the emotive withdrawal would coincide with the annual mourning period when they initially approved the plan.

Mofaz made clear that even if the evacuation is delayed by three weeks, it would remain illegal for Jews slated to be uprooted to remain in their homes after July 20th - an obvious attempt to persuade the residents to leave on their own volition. However as of April 25th, only 108 out of the 1,700 plus families scheduled to be transported from the Gaza Strip - most of them secular Jews - had publicly agreed to move to other locations. Most of the rest vow to cling to

their homes until the bitter end, especially since the government is currently only offering them temporary caravan accommodations, along with what most consider to be paltry financial compensation.

POWER PLAYS

With many analysts expecting the collapse of the Likud-Labour government soon after the scheduled withdrawal takes place (given basic Labour opposition to most of Sharon's policies apart from the unilateral pullback plan), Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu sounded increasingly like he is anxious to replace Sharon as party leader. Opinion polls showed that he has a good chance of doing so whenever mandated party primaries are held. However the aging Sharon, now 77, announced in April that he intends to stand as party leader again even if the elections are not brought forward from their current November 2006 date.

Netanyahu angered Sharon for the umpteenth time when he delivered his strongest warnings yet during April over the pending Gaza/northern Samaria pullback. He decried the fact the Likud PM had not taken the divisive issue to the electorate in a national referendum, as many Likud legislators demanded, and said it was a waste of a bargaining chip to unilaterally withdraw from disputed territory while receiving nothing from the Palestinians in return. He also warned that trusting the Egyptian army to patrol Gaza's southern border after the IDF evacuates the sensitive area would produce a flood of weapons smuggling into the teeming, fenced-off Gaza Strip.

Sharon shot back with harsh words at his Finance Minister during a subsequent cabinet meeting, prompting some analysts to speculate that Netanyahu might be dismissed from the government. However the PM apparently realized that such a move would produce an even uglier revolt inside his fractured party, if not its complete dissolution, and a reconciliation meeting was instead quickly arranged between the two veteran politicians. Although tensions cooled after that, Netanyahu later told reporters that "to describe our relationship as harmonious and rosy would do it injustice."

BULLETS AND BOMBS

Literal bullets were flying in the Gaza Strip once again during April, along with resumed rocket attacks on Jewish communities in and around the coastal zone. Israeli officials reported a 300% jump in violent Palestinian security violations from the number occurring in March. Several IDF soldiers were wounded by Arab sniper fire during

the month as February's tenuous Palestinian "timeout" ceasefire continued to crumble. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for planting a roadside bomb that seriously wounded an Israeli-Arab tracker near a security fence. A few days earlier, an IDF officer and a civilian Israeli contractor were injured by rifle fire while carrying out construction work near the southern border fence with Egypt.

In the most severe violation yet of the two month old ceasefire, Palestinian groups launched over 80 rockets at Israeli civilian communities and army outposts after three unarmed Arab teenage boys were shot dead near the southern border fence. Although Palestinian Authority officials initially claimed that the young victims were merely playing football in the restricted border zone, they later revealed that two other teenagers spotted with them admitted that the youths were attempting to pick up smuggled weapons along the border fence. However, an internal IDF investigation of the incident blasted soldiers at the scene for apparently "shooting to kill" above the legs of the victims, instead of following standing orders not to kill unarmed suspects.

While violence escalated during the month, reports mounted that elected PA leader Mahmoud Abbas was nearing the end of his short but troubled rule. With Israeli leaders pointing to multiplying evidence that he was doing precious little to reign in terrorist groups, and many Palestinians terming him an Israeli stooge, or blasting him for failing to halt growing lawlessness in most Arab towns and villages, the beleaguered PA leader's days in power seemed increasingly numbered. This may help explain why his armed PA security services mostly sat on the sidelines while dozens of Palestinian gunmen rampaged through Ramallah, Jenin and other locations on several occasions during April, shooting up public buildings and taking over various roads.

NORTHERN DARKNESS

Israeli government and military leaders warned during April that the Lebanese Hizbullah militia was planning major action in the coming weeks along Israel's northern border. This came as Syrian forces completed their UN-mandated pullout from the religiously-divided country, leaving Hizbullah to fend for itself without its longtime Syrian protectors. Meanwhile Russia announced that it was proceeding with the sale of lethal anti-aircraft missiles to Syria despite protests from Washington and Jerusalem.

Defense officials told the Knesset Foreign Affairs Committee in April that Hizbullah was planning to launch cross-border attacks upon

Israel before the Lebanese national elections, currently scheduled for late May. Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told lawmakers that he ordered IDF forces on full alert for such violence, while adding that Israel was "in control" of the situation. The comments came just one day after an unarmed Hizbullah drone surveillance aircraft flew over several Israeli border communities for half an hour - including the towns of Nahariya and Acre - before returning safely to Lebanon. The security breach was an embarrassment for the IDF, causing some analysts to question the claim that military leaders had a firm handle on the situation.

There is One who is definitely in absolute control of all things - Israel's Eternal Father! May all who love Zion continue to give Him no rest, "until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning." (Isaiah 62:1).

David Dolan
Jerusalem

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

* **HOLYWAR 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 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

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