

# **ISRAEL NEWS UPDATE**

## **FROM DAVID DOLAN**

*Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: Many who have been watching the Middle East events over the last several months are surprised that an all-out war has not started yet. The events documented by David Dolan below only add to the disbelief that things have not spiraled out of control. When the war does start, many consider that it will start and end in exact fulfillment of Psalm 83 and Isaiah 17 (two prophecies that have never been fulfilled).*

### **David Dolan**

Greetings from south Florida!

Below is my latest news and analysis report, written primarily for several CFI branches around the globe. It focuses on the possibility of a Palestinian civil war, last weekend's serious clashes between Hizbullah militia forces and Israeli forces in Lebanon, and Ehud Olmert's important visit to Washington. It comes as unrest continues to rumble throughout the larger Middle East, especially in Iraq and Iran.

Some have asked if I know Kimberly Dozier, who was critically wounded in Baghdad on Monday. I have met her, and she regularly worked with one of my close journalist friends, Robert Berger, who also reports for my former network CBS. Kimberly also has a home just outside of Jerusalem in a small community near another close friend. Being in our field of work in the always-turbulent Middle East, there is always the possibility of being injured or killed, a risk we simply take for the sake of the news getting out. I faced similar dangers while working in a war zone in south Lebanon in the early 1980s, and while covering the first Palestinian uprising and the Scud attacks on Israel in the early 90s. No doubt I will see some more action ahead. But I still tell folks that I feel more at risk on American highways as I do in Jerusalem!

I am speaking in the Daytona Beach and Orlando areas this coming weekend, and in the Fort Lauderdale area on June 10 and 11. You can see my schedule on my website, [www.ddolan.com](http://www.ddolan.com) I return to the other side of the globe after that. It has been good to see many friend during my US, Canada and Barbados stops.

## **May 2006 Israel News Review**

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### **HAMAS-PLO SHOWDOWN ROCKS GAZA STRIP**

As the Palestinians teetered on the brink of civil war during May, Israel's new Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, held his first inner security cabinet meeting focusing on escalating tensions with Iran. This came one week after Israel's UN ambassador—responding to a deadly Palestinian suicide terror attack earlier in the day in Tel Aviv—warned that ominous war clouds are forming over the Middle East, generated by hostile actions and words coming from Iran and Syria, supplemented by the Al Qaida, Hizbullah and Hamas terrorist movements. Towards the end of May, Olmert traveled to Washington to hold his first official meeting with President George Bush, focusing on the growing crisis in the Palestinian zones and the Iranian nuclear threat. Soon after he returned, Iran's proxy Hizbullah force launched a major rocket attack upon army bases and civilian communities in northern Israel, dramatically illustrating growing tensions in the region.

Fierce armed clashes broke out in the Israeli-evacuated Gaza Strip mid month between members of a new Hamas-run security force, loyal to Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, and Oslo peace process-authorized security forces commanded by overall PA leader Mahmoud Abbas. The gunfire exchanges further intensified after unknown assailants attempted to assassinate the head of the PA Intelligence services in the Gaza Strip, Tariq Abu Rajab. Hamas agents were believed to be behind the bombing of an elevator shaft in the Intelligence headquarters building in Gaza City, which instantly killed one of Rajab's bodyguards and left seven others, and the main target himself, seriously wounded.

Rajab is a close friend of Abbas, and a well-known fierce opponent of Hamas. However, Hamas denied that it was behind the blast, which was instead claimed by a previously unknown group calling itself, "The Al Qaida Organization in the State of Palestine." Israeli officials said this was another worrisome sign that the Iraqi Al Qaida branch has fulfilled its stated goal to establish terrorist cells in the Gaza Strip. The group, known to be allied with Hamas, also issued a written threat to murder Abbas. The threat later prompted an Israeli government decision to send sophisticated weapons and security equipment to aid Palestinian bodyguards protecting the beleaguered PA leader.

Abbas had earlier voiced his strong opposition to the establishment of the 3,000 member Hamas armed force, which was placed under the direct command of the Hamas-controlled Interior Ministry. Abbas also refused to cave in to Hamas demands that all PA security personnel, estimated to be

some 70,000 men, be placed under Hamas control. The PA leader is said to fear the 3,000 recruits are but the first installment in much larger paramilitary force that Hamas intends to set up in order to undermine the current Oslo-sanctioned security force. Although he promised he would not allow civil war to engulf his people, Abbas—himself the target of at least two known assassination attempts in recent months—is obviously well aware that two “official” rival armed forces operating in the Gaza Strip, one stemming from the PLO Fatah movement and the other from the militant Muslim Hamas group, is a sure recipe for intense violence ahead, if not all out civil war.

## **KILLING EACH OTHER**

Internal Palestinian clashes further intensified after the failed assassination attempt upon the PA Gaza security chief. Members of the new Hamas force traded fierce gunfire with PA paramilitary policemen for several hours near the Parliament building in the center of Gaza City. The site of a number of foreign consulates as well, the crossfire caught a top aid to the Jordanian ambassador walking in the area, who was instantly killed. Jordan’s King Abdullah strongly denounced the killing, and called for calm to prevail in the PA zones.

Israeli analysts said the Hashemite monarch is justifiably afraid that the violence will not only spill over into Jordan’s former West Bank (where Fatah forces are significantly stronger than in the Gaza Strip) but also into his own country—with its majority Palestinian population divided between Islamic fundamentalists who identify with Hamas and backers of the more secular PLO Fatah movement that Abbas heads. This came after Jordanian officials revealed that Syrian agents had been caught attempting to smuggle weapons into the country, believed to be headed for Hamas and Al Qaida underground terror cells that have orders from government leaders in Damascus and Tehran to stir up trouble in Amman, with the eventual goal of toppling the Western-leaning Hashemite regime.

Tensions flared still further on May 24<sup>th</sup> after Muslim gunmen shot and killed the top commander of all PA security forces in the central Gaza district, Habil Hodhod, who had been leading the confrontation with Hamas forces. In revenge, masked PLO gunmen seized three Hamas fighters outside a mosque, killing one of them and wounding the other two. This was followed hours later by a disturbing sign that the fundamentalist Islamic movement may ultimately emerge completely victorious in its battle with the more secular and moderate PLO Fatah group. Around 1,000 men wearing Fatah uniforms marched down the streets of Gaza City with banners declaring they were switching their loyalty to the radical Hamas group. The next day, a Hamas militiaman was killed and eight Fatah supporters wounded in yet another round of intense gun battles between the rival

forces.

## **BACK TO THE BALLOT BOX?**

Intensifying armed PLO-Hamas clashes and signs that the Fatah movement may be falling apart prompted PA leader Abbas to make a surprise and dramatic announcement on May 25<sup>th</sup>. He told Hamas PA government officials that if they do not quickly agree to allow him to conduct further peace negotiations with Israel according to principals established by the late PLO leader Yasser Arafat, he would attempt to prevent a full-scale civil war by calling a national referendum sometime in July. Palestinian voters would be asked to decide whether or not the PA should formally abandon the Oslo peace process accords with Israel and revert to all out warfare with the Jewish state, or return to the peace process path that was frozen when massive Palestinian violence began in September 2000.

Abbas said he would draw up a document spelling out the Palestinian Authority's final positions and demands regarding the establishment of a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, with a portion of eastern Jerusalem as its capital. If the proposal was rejected by a majority of Palestinian voters—thus essentially confirming that the January Hamas electoral triumph was not just a fluke but a real reflection of public opinion—he would bow to Hamas demands to destroy the accords. Analysts said Abbas would undoubtedly resign if he lost the referendum, probably leading to the election of an Islamic militant to head the PA.

The bold gamble caught Israeli officials by surprise. However PM Olmert indicated it was actually in Israel's best interests to know for certain whether serious peace talks with moderate Palestinian partners are possible or not, and such a national vote would make that clear this summer. Meanwhile Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniya signaled a slight moderation in the official Hamas position that making lasting peace with Israel is forbidden by the Quran. He told reporters that Hamas would work to put a permanent halt to all Palestinian terrorist attacks upon Israel if Olmert agreed to evacuate every centimeter of Judea and Samaria and Jerusalem's entire walled Old City—a demand he knew would be rejected by the new Israeli Premier who intends to formally annex at least a third of the disputed territories, and keep all of the Old City under Israeli control.

## **BUSH BACKS OLMERT'S PLAN**

While the internal Palestinian clashes were escalating, Ariel Sharon's successor was visiting the American capital city, where he held long meetings with President Bush and other senior government leaders, and also addressed US legislators in the Congressional chambers on Capital Hill—an honor only accorded to America's closest allies. The two leaders held a

joint press conference after their White House meeting, where Bush surprised many Mideast analysts by expressing full support for Olmert's controversial "Convergence Plan" to carry out further unilateral withdrawals from Palestinian-dominated land north and south of Jerusalem, and to then draw up Israel's final borders without Palestinian input.

Bush commended the Israeli leader for his "bold ideas" after making clear that America's "preferred option" is still a negotiated settlement, as Olmert had earlier stated as well. Until Bush publicly supported the Israeli leader's planned unilateral moves if no viable Palestinian peace partner emerges in the coming months, US officials had expressed strong reservations about further one-sided Israeli action, holding out for a resumption of joint Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations instead. Olmert later told Israeli journalists that he was "very satisfied" to receive the President's endorsement, which some American analysts said reflected Bush's conviction that Hamas will not change its basic positions and will continue to dominate Palestinian politics for some time to come.

In his official speech the following day, PM Olmert told the assembled senators and congressmen that Israel would be a "willing partner in peace with the Palestinians" if they really wanted to end their long and bitter conflict with the world's only Jewish state. But with radical forces on the ascendancy in the Palestinian zones, Olmert indicated that he sees no other choice than to unilaterally draw up Israel's final boundaries in the disputed hills of Judea and Samaria, Israel's ancient biblical heartland. "Our deepest desire is to build a better future for our region, hand in hand with a Palestinian partner, but if not, we will move forward, but not alone." The last comment was an apparent reference to desired American support for such a unilateral move, which is bound to be rejected by the entire Arab world and most other countries on earth.

Jerusalem's former mayor received a sustained standing ovation when he vowed that Israel would "not yield to terror." This came after Olmert referred to Daniel Wultz, a Florida teenager who perished in mid-May from severe wounds he received during the Passover holidays when a Palestinian terrorist attacked a restaurant in Tel Aviv. The 16-year-old American, ordering food near the suicide bomber, was severely wounded in the stomach and elsewhere while visiting Israel with his father. Daniel was related to Eric Cantor, a prominent Jewish Republican congressman from Virginia.

Israel's new Premier plans to shift his diplomatic efforts to Europe to gain broader international support for his withdrawal plan. He is scheduled to visit the UK and France in June. Foreign Minister Tsipi Livni will support his efforts during a speech before the European Union Parliament in Strasbourg, and then hold meetings with her foreign minister counterparts at

EU headquarters in Belgium. The Israeli government efforts are designed to lessen stated EU opposition to the unilateral Convergence Plan, with European officials particularly opposed to Olmert's declared intention to establish final Israeli borders somewhere in the disputed West Bank.

## **MORE VIOLENCE IN LEBANON**

In what was widely alleged to be a Mossad undercover response to April's deadly Tel Aviv terror attack that has so far claimed 11 innocent lives (with others still hospitalized in critical condition), a powerful car bomb killed Nidal Majzoub on May 26<sup>th</sup>, a top commander of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad wing stationed in Palestinian refugee neighborhoods in southern Lebanon. The group, which receives most of its funding and operating instructions from Syria and Iran, claimed responsibility for the Passover atrocity, as it has for over six other homicide attacks carried attacks since early 2005.

Two days later, major clashes erupted between Israeli and Lebanese Shiite forces along the Israel-Lebanon border, where thousands of Hizbullah militiamen are stationed. After dozens of Hizbullah mortar shells and rockets reigned down on several Israeli communities and army bases all along the border, Israeli Air Force jets and attack helicopters were ordered to respond more powerfully than at any time since army troops were withdrawn from the troubled country six years ago. They not only struck known Hizbullah positions all along the border—reportedly killing a number of Hizbullah fighters and wounding many others—but they also bombed two bases belonging to the radical Palestinian Popular Front group based in Damascus. One of the bases, located just a few miles south of Beirut, was believed to have been struck to send a loud message to the Lebanese government to quickly reign in the rogue fighters attacking along the border with Israel. The Air Force strike on the other base, a mere three miles from the Syrian border, was designed to send the same message to the Assad regime in Damascus.

The Lebanese government, at least, seemed to quickly get the message. Fearing further escalation of the conflict, officials in Beirut requested an immediate ceasefire via United Nations channels, although they later protested what was termed "Israel's warlike aggression" in response to Hizbullah's assaults. The truce went into effect later the same day after senior Israeli government officials accepted the offer, halting artillery and air bombardments of Hizbullah positions. Two Israeli soldiers and at least two Hizbullah fighters were killed in the exchanges.

The fierce May 28<sup>th</sup> action began when Hizbullah forces suddenly opened fire during the morning at an Israeli army base, wounding one soldier. Subsequent assaults on several border kibbutz communities prompted a general alert, sending thousands of Galilee residents scrambling into sweltering bomb shelters. The Hizbullah operation was interpreted by army

leaders as probable revenge for Nidal Majzoub's death two days earlier. Israeli analysts say the militant Lebanese Shiite group has been working ever more closely in recent years with the radical Palestinian Sunni Islamic Jihad terrorist network at the behest of Iran and Syria.

Responding to the Hizbullah attacks, PM Ehud Olmert warned that Israel would respond even more intensely if Iran's proxy Lebanese force continued firing on civilian and army positions in the Galilee panhandle. Speaking to reporters in Jerusalem, Olmert said Hizbullah would "receive a clear and harsh response with no hesitation if they do not stop," terming the attacks "provocative and dangerous."

Many Israeli analysts say a major Israeli military "clean-out operation" against the radical Lebanese border force is long overdue. In fact, security sources say such action has been planned two times earlier—during the 2003 US-British invasion of Iraq and in early 2005—but was postponed for various reasons. Many anticipated that a reelected Ariel Sharon would launch such action this year, but some are uncertain that Olmert intends to follow through since he hopes to carry on with his unilateral withdrawal plan, which could be scuttled by such an operation since it has a high potential to lead to direct Israeli clashes with Syria, if not an all out war between the two neighboring Middle East countries.

A leading defense expert in the opposition Likud party, the former chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs Committee, Yuval Steinitz, maintained that the relatively tough Israeli military response should have been directed almost exclusively at targets in the Lebanese capital city, instead of mainly upon Hizbullah positions. He averred that the only effective way to fight a terrorist organization in a neighboring country was to attack the national interests of that country, prompting government officials themselves to take action to rein in illegal forces operating there.

Just two days before the short but intense battle, Hizbullah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah vowed that his group will continue its "jihad struggle" against the dreaded Zionist entity. He also vowed to raise funds to help keep Hamas in control of the Palestinian Authority. He was speaking at a rally in the biblical Lebanese town of Tyre to mark the sixth anniversary of what he termed "Israel's defeat" in southern Lebanon. He also pledged support for Iran in its "struggle with the international community to fulfill its right to produce nuclear energy," which Israeli leaders in May again stated was actually a clandestine nuclear weapons program that will have to be dealt with sooner or later if international political negotiations over the serious issue continue to produce no positive results. At his joint press conference with PM Olmert, President Bush stated that "all options remain on the table" if negotiations fail.

As continuing violence and strife troubles the biblical Promised Land, it is good to recall that it is the Lord God of Israel who pledged to restore His ancient people to their land inheritance in days before Messiah's reign from Jerusalem: "*Again I will build you and you will be rebuilt, oh virgin of Israel.*" (*Jeremiah 31:4*).

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**DAVID DOLAN** is a Jerusalem-based author and journalist who has lived and worked 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](http://www.ddolan.com), or by phoning toll free 888-890-6938 in North America, or by e mail at: [resources@yourisraelconnection.org](mailto:resources@yourisraelconnection.org)

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