

# Israel Update From David Dolan

**By David Dolan**

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Shalom from America,

I am currently in the middle of my U.S. speaking tour. It has been great seeing some of you along the way so far, and I hope to see others as I journey to Colorado, the Chicago area, Albany New York and southern Florida before returning to Israel in early December. My full schedule can be found on my website, [www.ddolan.com](http://www.ddolan.com)

I apologize that you did not get the October news report when it was first sent out early last week (and a couple times since then) for technical reasons. It is posted below. It covers important news from Israel and the Middle East during October. It features the continuing tensions between Israel and Syria amid growing reports that the White House is preparing to launch military action against Iran's nuclear program. Stay tuned for more interesting developments ahead!

## **Israel Destroys Syrian Reactor**

Reverberations from Israel's September air strike against a Syrian nuclear facility continued to rocket around the tumultuous Middle East during October, with Israeli armed forces on full alert in case Damascus orders a delayed military response. Meanwhile a partial lifting of media censorship finally allowed the publication in Israel of the fact that a daring operation had indeed been carried out, which analysts say has at least partially restored Israel's deterrence credibility--severely eroded during the 2006 inconclusive conflict with Lebanese Hizbullah militia forces.

While Israeli leaders kept one eye glued on the tense northern border, American diplomatic efforts to resolve the long and bitter Israeli-Palestinian conflict continued apace. Negotiations reached a serious snag when the Palestinians demanded that Israel agree to iron out full details of a final status peace accord before a planned international conference is held later this year outside Washington D.C.

Fresh revelations of just how far Prime Minister Ehud Olmert appears to be willing to go in order to sign a final treaty with Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas rocked the Israeli political establishment during the month. Several members of Olmert's own Kadima party again threatened to bolt his coalition if the unpopular Premier actually agrees to abandon portions of Jerusalem to Palestinian control, as media reports indicated he is now fully prepared to do.

## **Nuclear Syria**

Senior Bush administration officials confirmed widespread media reports that Israeli jets had bombed and apparently destroyed a Syrian nuclear-linked target in the country's eastern desert in the early hours of September 6.

The Washington Post was among several newspapers that quoted unnamed White House and Defense Department officials saying the target was no less than a nuclear reactor under construction there. The American ABC network reported that a mole operating in the area had taken secret detailed photographs of the inside of the targeted building site, confirming that it was a reactor being constructed along the lines necessary to provide enough material to eventually produce a nuclear bomb.

A Syrian official stationed at United Nations headquarters in New York later confirmed for the first time that the target was indeed some sort of nuclear facility under construction. Earlier, Syrian leaders, including Dictator Bashar Assad, had claimed that the targeted structure was either an agricultural building or an abandoned army base. Speaking before the U.N.'s Disarmament Commission, the Syrian diplomat termed the daring Israeli operation "an act of aggression."

The Post report said that U.S. leaders had known about the construction activity for some time, but had not shared that information immediately with their Israeli counterparts. It added that the Damascus-based Assad regime is seemingly now scrambling to erase all evidence on the ground that a nuclear reactor was being built in the dry eastern desert, not far from the border with Iraq.

American officials quoted in the report said the intensive efforts to clean up the site are probably designed to make it impossible for international inspectors to confirm that an atomic reactor was actually under construction, and whether or not it was being built with nuclear weapons ultimately in mind. The report said air surveillance pictures taken by American and Israeli spy satellites and jets had revealed that the site was probably a small but significant nuclear reactor.

Experts said the reactor had similar features to several others located in North Korea. They added that the isolated Communist regime had probably sold architectural plans for the nuclear facility to Syria, with North Korean engineers overseeing the actual construction process, as several international media outlets reported in September. Some reports said North Korean experts were killed in the dramatic air strike. Other reports claimed that Russian weapons advisors had been killed when Israeli Air Force pilots also bombed recently delivered Russian anti-aircraft missile batteries that were locking onto their jets.

## **Warning To Iran?**

American officials told the Washington Post that the White House had agreed with Israeli leaders that urgent military action was called for to halt the nuclear construction process. The State Department's reported contention that the issue should first be raised with the United Nation's International Atomic Energy Agency before an air operation was launched was overruled by the White House, which was said to concur with Israeli officials that such a move would only give diplomatic cover for the Syrian regime to continue rapid construction activity, as limited U.N. sanctions have apparently done for Iran.

As before, Israeli officials refused to confirm or deny the American news reports, even though

strict military censorship upon the Israeli media and foreign journalists stationed in the country was partially lifted in late September. That at least permitted full publication for the first time of the widely known fact that a major air operation had been successfully carried out by highly trained Israeli Air Force pilots earlier in the month.

Israeli officials again indicated that the censorship restrictions were basically enacted in order to lessen the chances that humiliated Syrian leaders would order a retribution military operation, if not launch an all-out war.

Pointing out that the Syrians are already known to possess a small nuclear reactor for supposedly research purposes only, the Post article said Israeli and American officials believed that the bombed facility was more clearly designed to produce weapon's grade material. It added that U.S. government leaders remain divided as to whether or not the reactor posed an imminent threat to Israel, or to American forces stationed in the region.

### **Nipped In The Bud**

A Syrian nuclear reactor that could potentially help produce future atomic weapons to be used against the small Jewish state was obviously not something that the Israeli government was willing to suffer very long.

Still most Israeli security analysts believe that the daring IAF attack was also carried out soon after Israel confirmed that the building project had a nuclear connection in order to send a loud and clear warning to Syria's main regional ally, Iran: Your own openly declared nuclear program may be subjected to Israeli military action if it is not soon halted voluntarily.

Analysts noted that the air strike against Syria 's nascent reactor came just days before Iranian leader Mahmoud Amadinajed was scheduled to speak at United Nation's headquarters in New York, where he again defiantly declared that his rogue regime will not bow to growing international pressure and sanctions to halt its controversial "nuclear energy" program. Several weeks later, Iranian Brigadier General Mahmoud Chaharbaghi, who commands the country's elite Revolutionary Guard forces, claimed that his country "has 11,000 rockets and heavy cannons aimed at enemy forces" in the region, apparently meaning American and Israeli targets.

Israeli media reports said that P.M. Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak (who personally planned and oversaw the successful bombing operation) hope that the bold Israeli Air Force action will help persuade Shiite extremists ruling Tehran to shut down or at least freeze their nuclear program, which all Israeli officials strongly contend is largely designed for military purposes, and not to increase electricity supplies as Ahmadinejad and other Iranian officials contend.

Speculation that some sort of military strike against Iran's nuclear sites could be imminent grew after Barak warned the Israeli public in late October to prepare materials to seal off security rooms designed to withstand a potential chemical or biological weapons attack. Such "sealed rooms" were standard fare in Israel the first week of the war in Iraq in March 2003, and even more so during Saddam's Scud missile blitz in early 1991.

For the first time since the 2006 war, Lebanese gunners fired upon Israeli military jets flying over south Lebanon on October 24 without causing any damage. The action heightened concerns that some sort of Hizbullah attack against Israel could be pending, probably aided by Syria. The incident came just hours before the U.N. released a formal report stating that the Lebanese Shiite militia had not only fully rearmed following its war with Israel last year, but has actually "increased the capacity" it had at the beginning of that conflict. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon termed the report "deeply disconcerting." The U.N. openly stated that most of Hizbullah's new weapons flow is coming via Syria, financed largely by Iran.

## **Olmert Visits The Kremlin**

Prime Minister Olmert made a lightning trip to Moscow in mid-October to hold urgent talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who had just returned from a state visit to Iran. Senior Israeli leaders were upset when the increasingly autocratic Putin stated his opposition to slapping further U.N. economic sanctions on Tehran, contending that there is "no need" for them since there is no evidence that Iran possesses, or intends to produce, nuclear weapons. The Russian leader added that he would oppose any international military action to curb Iran's nuclear program, which Iranian leaders insist is strictly for energy purposes. Most Western leaders have stated directly or indirectly that they believe the Shiite state is mainly enriching uranium in order to produce nuclear bombs.

In his public remarks, Olmert did not directly blast the statements made by Putin while visiting Iran. However the PM did state that Russia could "help stabilize the Middle East by giving due weight to Israel's security interests." In other words, Russia's actions of late--especially its military anti-tank and aircraft missile sales to Syria, and material support for Iran's nuclear program--are helping to produce further instability in the region, which can only lead to more violence and conflict ahead.

An Israeli Defense Ministry official accompanying Olmert in Moscow told reporters that there has been a "significant retreat in Russian support for continuing diplomatic activity to impose sanctions on Iran via the U.N. Security Council." The international body is scheduled to discuss the issue again in November.

Meanwhile Israeli military analysts reported that the Olmert government is increasingly considering a unilateral military option for dealing with the existential threat that Iranian nuclear bombs would pose to the small state of Israel. Some opined that the air strike on Syria's nuclear reactor was partially meant to send a strong signal that similar action against Iran may be pending, even if all agree it would be a far more difficult undertaking than the September operation against the new Syrian reactor was--targeting several dozen positions instead of just one, all located much further away from Israel's borders.

Senior American officials said again during October that the world's current superpower would not allow Iran to possess such deadly weapons. During a press conference mid-month, President George Bush repeated earlier statements that everything possible would be done to halt the program diplomatically, but if that fails, "all options" would be on the table.

Vice President Dick Cheney echoed the Commander-in-Chief later in the month, saying in a speech before the Washington Institute for Near East Studies that the Iranian regime "continues to practice delay and deceit in an obvious effort to buy time." He said Iranian leaders were openly pursuing technology that would allow them to build nuclear weapons, adding that "our country and the entire international community cannot stand by as a terror-supporting state fulfills its grandest ambitions." Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice supported this position during the month, saying that the Shiite Iranian regime was "simply lying" when it maintains that its uranium enrichment program is for peaceful purposes only.

## **Rice Returns Amid Negotiating Stalemate**

America's senior diplomat returned to the turbulent Middle East yet again during October, ostensibly to further along the recently revived Israeli-Palestinian peace process. This came as puzzled Israeli analysts noted yet again that the current realities do not at all give any indication that a final peace treaty is even remotely achievable in the current political climate. They note that the Israeli scene is dominated by an Israeli premier whose popularity ratings remain at record lows. On the other side, the Palestinians are ruled by a weak PLO leader who lost control over one-third of his people and territory to the radical Islamic Hamas movement last June. Some analysts speculated again that the Secretary of State's frequent visits to the region this year probably have more to do with preparing the diplomatic ground for an American military assault on Iran's nuclear program than with the sludge-filled Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

State Department officials traveling with Rice told reporters at the end of her latest Mideast tour--which as usual included stops in key U.S. allies in the Gulf region--that Olmert and Abbas had agreed to issue a "joint declaration" at a planned peace conference to be held in the United States later this year. They said the declaration would "address all core issues and point to certain avenues to be pursued through negotiations."

Proving once more how difficult it will be to reach a final peace accord in the near future, Palestinian officials publicly disputed the claim that they would be satisfied by such a declaration at this time. Instead, they threatened again to boycott the announced Israeli-Palestinian peace conference currently planned to be held near Washington D.C. in either late November or early December.

Abbas and company basically demand a complete and final detailed settlement of all outstanding issues dividing the two sides before the conference gets underway, a position that Israel strongly rejects. "We won't go to the conference unless we reach an agreement beforehand with Israel on the final status issues and a clear timetable for implementation of any agreement between the two parties" said chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat on Oct 23.

The following day, Defense Minister Barak indicated that he was planning to implement the cabinet's earlier authorization to cut off fuel, electricity and other supplies to the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. Barak's reported decision came after a heavy barrage of Palestinian Kassam rockets were launched into Israeli communities the third week of October.

## **Olmert Can't Do It**

Palestinian leaders are upset with Ehud Olmert's continuing refusal to commit to a final peace process timetable at the planned international parley. PLO leaders want the conference to focus on producing a fixed timetable that would spell out exactly how much Israeli-held disputed territory would be transferred to Palestinian control and when, along with precisely when full independent statehood would be granted.

Aware of how shaky his government coalition is, and how extremely unpopular a total surrender of most portions of Judea and Samaria is with a large majority of the Israeli electorate, P.M. Olmert insists that a more general peace conference goal is more appropriate, or at least realistic, at this stage. Instead of detailing a final accord, he wants both sides to recommit to fully implement the Road Map peace plan put forward by the White House in 2003. In its first phase, it calls for a total Israeli settlement expansion freeze and a complete halt to all Palestinian terror attacks, followed later on by negotiations for a final status peace accord. Just after her latest trip to Jerusalem, Rice confirmed that the American government fully supports Olmert's insistence that both sides pledge to carry out the first phase of the Road Map plan before final status issues are resolved.

Speaking before a Congressional committee in Washington late in the month, the Secretary of State warned the so-called "two-state solution" might collapse as an option if the current peace push does not bear fruit. She said the international conference to be held in Annapolis, Maryland before the end of this year "is needed to give hope to moderate Palestinian leaders" and provide them with "a horizon they can show to their people that indeed there is a possible two state solution." Rice added that the Bush administration will ask Congress to provide more than \$400 million in financial aid to the Palestinian Authority headed by Abbas. She blamed Iran for fanning the flames of conflict in the region, especially by providing what she termed "troubling new support" for Hamas militants working to destroy Israel.

Revelations by Deputy Premier Haim Ramon that Olmert is prepared to cede control to the P.A. over mostly Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem continued to shake the Israeli political establishment during October, even though he also implied this could be part of a deal to cement Israeli control over three large settlement blocks located north and south of Israel's capital city. Opposition leader Binyamin Netanyahu blasted the proposal on several occasions, saying any portion of Jerusalem abandoned to P.A. control would most likely become part of the capital of an Islamic fundamentalist Palestinian state that would threaten Israel's very existence. Olmert's office continued to deny that the Premier is effectively prepared to re-divide the holy city, which came under full Israeli control when the area was captured from Jordan in 1967.

Meanwhile the Palestinian daily Al Quds newspaper published in London reported in early October that Olmert had reached an understanding with Abbas to transfer control to Jordan over the most important real estate located in Jerusalem, if not in the entire world--the hallowed Temple Mount.

The paper said some 90,000 Arab residents of eastern Jerusalem would receive Jordanian citizenship as part of the deal. The story came as former Tourism Minister Benny Elon

resurrected a plan that was once the staple of the nationalist Likud party, which Netanyahu now heads. He called for all Palestinians living in Jordan's former West Bank to be granted full Jordanian citizenship, with Israel gaining official sovereignty over those portions of the area where Israeli Jews reside today. The plan was immediately rejected by Israeli government leaders and was strongly denounced by the Palestinians.

## **Fear No Evil**

Palestinian terrorists brutally murdered the head of the Gaza Strip Bible Society in early October. Rami Ayyad, 31, was the father of two children, with a third on the way. His mutilated body, which had been repeatedly stabbed and his skull crushed, was found in Gaza City, where he ran a Christian bookshop that had come under earlier attack from Muslim radicals. They vow to drive out or kill all Arab Christians who refuse to immediately convert to Islam.

Later in the month, arsonists set a church on fire in Jerusalem, but did little damage. The original Narkiss Street Baptist Church building was destroyed in a raging fire in the early 1980s by suspected Orthodox Jewish arsonists. Fire officials said the recent blaze was set in three locations by arsonists who broke into the Christian facility during the night of October 23. The church premises are currently used by several congregations, including one large Messianic group that meets there on Saturday evenings.

With violence of all kinds gripping the troubled Middle East and indeed the entire world, it is so good to proclaim that *“The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty! The Lord has clothed and girded Himself with strength; indeed the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.” (Psalm 93:1)*

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