

Israel Update - November News Update

By David Dolan

Mon 11/26/2007 7:52 AM

Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: David Dolan does a great service in providing Middle Eastern news from a Christian and Biblical perspective. I encourage the reader to subscribe to his newsletters and to support his ministry as our news correspondent.

Shalom from Florida!

I am in the final week of my US speaking tour, preparing to return to Jerusalem in December. Meetings scheduled for this week and next weekend on the west coast of the Sunshine state and in the Fort Lauderdale area are listed on my web site, www.ddolan.com

My DVD, *FOR ZION'S SAKE*, will be broadcast again this coming weekend on the Sky Angel Two satellite network. It covers Israel's ancient and modern history, and also contains portions of Hebrew music songs that I recorded in Israel with Barry and Batya Segal and others. It will be screened on Sunday, December 2 at 9:30 PM EST, which is 6:30 PM in the west.

Below is this month's Israel news and analysis report, covering this weeks Israeli-Palestinian summit near Washington DC, and important new security developments. Israel remains on an extra high military alert due to ongoing tensions with Hamas, Syria and Hizbullah and Iran, which I detail in the report.

NOVEMBER 2007 ISRAEL NEWS REVIEW

Jerusalem • 11/25/2007

PEACE SUMMIT IN AMERICA

As final preparations were made for the Israeli-Palestinian peace parlay to be convened just outside of Washington DC, indications were rife that the short conference would prove to be a huge disappointment, if not a total bust, for its US sponsors. Senior Palestinian and Israeli officials voiced deep skepticism that the ballyhooed international gathering would do anything more than give the two sides a new platform from which to spell out their extremely divergent visions of what a final peace accord should look like.

Disputes over the text of a joint Israeli-Palestinian "common declaration" remained unsettled up to the final deadline, along with the list of who exactly would even attend the conference. The joint declaration is supposed to serve as a basic guideline for future peace negotiations. Analysts said the failure to agree on its wording after months of give and take between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators amply illustrated how difficult it will be to make any real progress on the final status issues.

American officials expressed satisfaction that steady State Department pressure upon Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries had convinced them to send delegations to the summit. Still they were embarrassed when a senior Saudi official said Arab participants would not even shake hands with Israeli leaders at the conference. Syria's last minute decision to send its deputy foreign minister was welcomed by both Israeli and US officials, although discussions about the disputed Golan Heights are not expected during the short international gathering.

Many continue to speculate that the real reason for the series of high level American government visits to the turbulent region this year, especially by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, has precious little to do with a non-existent final peace accord between Israel and her Palestinian antagonists, but far more to do with probably imminent US military action to halt Iran's headlong rush to acquiring nuclear weapons. They say that until the Iranian-Syrian-Hizbullah-Hamas doomsday threat to Israel's very existence is fully and finally dealt with, talk of a final status Israeli-Palestinian peace accord remains utopic at best.

FANTASY LAND

Just one week before the scheduled start of the long heralded Israeli-Palestinian peace conference at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis Maryland, just outside of Washington DC, the actual dates for the event were still not even settled, let alone any concrete details of what was expected of the White House sponsored international gathering. Although the summit dates were finally announced just before the American holiday of Thanksgiving—November 27 and 28—savvy Israeli and Arab pundits continued to scratch their heads over the seemingly Alice in Wonderland timing of the Bush Administration's controversial peace push that is supposedly designed to bring a final end to the long and bitter Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is under scrutiny by several official police investigations over alleged criminal activity (yet another probe was begun in November). This has contributed to his fall to unparalleled low levels in Israeli popular opinion polls this year. Experts say Olmert's legal problems do not exactly add to the stable political environment that all agree is necessary to secure widespread public and legislative support for any controversial final peace deal, especially since an accord will undoubtedly involve the uprooting of tens of thousands of Jews from their homes.

The Prime Minister's political woes were compounded during the month by the lukewarm support for the American summit that he received from his chief government partner, Defense Minister Ehud Barak. The Labor party leader, whose continuation in Olmert's coalition government is essential if it is to survive, expressed strong misgivings over the US-sponsored summit. Barak warned that regional tensions might only be exacerbated by a failed or stalemated gathering; a sentiment echoed by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and other Middle East leaders.

Political commentators also note that Olmert's Palestinian counterpart, Mahmoud Abbas, is still reeling from the Hamas coup that ousted the Palestinian Authority from the Gaza Strip

last June. Fears are growing that the militant Muslim group may soon attempt to wrest power from Abbas in Judea and Samaria. The violent Hamas seizure of the Gaza Strip alone seems to make this the absolutely least likely time to pursue a final peace accord, say many bewildered analysts. On the eve of the summit, Hamas warned Abbas not to make any concessions to either Israeli or American leaders.

Just before he departed for the United States, PM Olmert again defended his decision to participate in the international parlay despite huge problems at home (a prolonged teachers strike for one thing, which has left hundreds of thousands of Israeli students at home for many weeks and their frustrated parents at wits end). He told reporters in Jerusalem that “the status quo with the Palestinians simply cannot continue.” He opined that the political stalemate that followed the collapse of the Oslo peace accords in the year 2000 “will lead to results that are much worse than a failed conference.”

However Israeli opposition politicians and political analysts largely agree that maintaining the status quo under the present political circumstances, while indeed not entirely satisfactory, is still much better than a failed summit that has the large potential of sparking off another round of major Palestinian street violence, if not another Middle East war.

Peace conference skeptics noted that the official Palestinian position on what should constitute a final status accord actually stiffened in the run-up to the Annapolis summit, with Palestinian leaders announcing they will never recognize Israel as a Jewish state. The hard-line Palestinian position was later endorsed by an Israeli-Arab political movement that includes the three Arab parties with seats in the Israeli Knesset.

The announcements seemed to indicate that both the Palestinians and legislators representing over one million Arab citizens of Israel plan to cling to the traditional PLO demand that several million Palestinians living elsewhere, especially in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, be allowed to move to ancestral family locations inside of today’s Israeli borders. Jewish Israeli politicians from left and right agree that this would ultimately lead to Arabs forming a majority in their democratic state, effectively destroying its Jewish character from within.

WAR CLOUDS STILL GATHERING

While the Middle East media was overflowing during November with conflicting reports about the vapid summit, military tensions remained extremely high between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas group, and also in the north with both Syria and the Lebanese Hizbullah militia.

Near the Gaza Strip, Israeli Defense forces were beefed up in anticipation of a possible major operation into the Hamas-ruled coastal zone, designed to halt continuing Palestinian rocket attacks upon Israeli communities in the area. Meanwhile the Israeli government allowed the resumption of some agricultural shipments to European markets from the area, which were halted when the radical Muslim group seized power in a violent coup against the Palestinian Authority last June.

However at the same time, the government announced that Israeli generated electricity supplies to the zone would be gradually cut back beginning in early December, in response to the ongoing firing of Palestinian Kassam rockets into nearby Israeli population centers, especially into the battered town of Sderot. This came as Israeli Arab leaders joined their Palestinian cousins in declaring that they would never recognize Israel as a Jewish state.

NUCLEAR CLOUDS?

Full security alerts were called several times during the month around Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor as Israeli officials picked up unspecified signs that Damascus might be preparing to attempt a destructive missile strike on the Negev Desert facility, potentially releasing deadly radiation that could affect many parts of Israel and beyond.

Israeli media reports said that American-made Patriot missile batteries were deployed around the reactor in early November in preparation for a possible Syrian Scud D missile attack upon the strategic facility. Built in the 1960's, it is located not far from Israel's fourth largest city, Beersheva, in the Negev Desert. The reports added that red alerts about a possible imminent Syrian strike were put into effect over two dozen times during a seven day period beginning on November 4. Iran has also vowed to target the site if either Israeli or American forces attempt to attack its burgeoning nuclear program.

Military experts say the results of a direct missile strike on the Dimona reactor would be extremely disastrous, releasing deadly radiation into the local atmosphere that could end up fatally poisoning tens or hundreds of thousands of people in the immediate vicinity of the attack, along with residents of nearby Jordan. Deadly radiation would probably also quickly spread into the Arab Gulf countries a few hundred miles to the east, and also to Iraq. Iran itself would probably feel the effects, along with other countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan beyond it, given that the prevailing winds normally flow from the Mediterranean Sea in the west toward the east.

Foreign press reports revealed that Israeli air force jets had successfully knocked out Syria's entire air defense radar system in a strategic missile strike on September 6. The action reportedly came just minutes before IDF warplanes bombed a Syrian nuclear facility that was in the final stages of construction in the eastern desert, not far from Iraq.

Direct American military involvement in the dramatic Israeli operation was reported by several Israeli and US media outlets during the month. United States officials would not publicly comment on the reports. US military sources told me that American air force jets had accompanied the Israeli warplanes during their mission, but had not dropped any bombs on the destroyed site. A well-known Israeli weapons expert said pre-attack satellite pictures taken of the site indicated that Syria had actually been constructing a nuclear weapons factory, not a reactor as was widely reported in the media.

HIZBULLAH MANUEVERS

Israeli military forces conducted large-scale ground and air maneuvers in the north of the

country in early November to test their readiness to face a possible new round of fighting with Hizbullah and/or Syrian forces. Israeli naval vessels stationed in the Mediterranean Sea also participated in the coordinated exercises.

Several days later, Hizbullah said that it conducted its own massive war maneuvers not far from the Lebanese border with Israel. Although the reported military exercises were apparently carried out under the noses of thousands of international UN peacekeeping soldiers that are supposed to prevent the militia from visibly operating in the area, UN soldiers took no overt action. UN officials claimed they did not see any unusual activity in the area, which may have been due to the fact that the militiamen reportedly carried out their war preparations unarmed. Lebanese press reports said that Hizbullah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah monitored the border exercises on sight, which reportedly involved hundreds of highly trained militia fighters.

The United Nations issued a report the last day of October ominously revealing that the Lebanese Shiite Hizbullah militia had fully rearmed after last year's war with Israel. Released by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon as required by Resolution 1701 which ended the 2006 war, the report said that the Iranian and Syrian backed force was now fully rearmed with weapons more advanced than those it deployed during the conflict. It revealed that the rogue militia now had rockets capable of striking most parts of Israel, including Tel Aviv. It added that the Lebanese force has three times as many land to sea missiles than it did before the war broke out in July 2006. One such missile struck and largely destroyed an Israeli ship patrolling off the coast of Beirut during the early stages of the 34-day conflict.

Pointing out the obvious, the UN report stated that Hizbullah's post war weapons acquisitions had mostly come via illegal smuggling from nearby Syria. Picturing the situation as "grave" and a "threat to Lebanon's fragile stability," Ban Ki-Moon noted that Israel considers the Hizbullah's illegal arms acquisitions as "a strategic threat to its security and the safety of its citizens." In fact, many Israeli military analysts fear that Hizbullah may now have the capability to strike the Dimona nuclear reactor, which the group's Iranian paymasters have already publicly listed as a prime target. They worry that the Shiite regime in Iran may desire to spark off a new Hizbullah-Israel conflict, *which could easily involve Syria, in order to deflect a possibly pending American assault on Tehran's outlawed nuclear program.

Despite the fact that it is clearly Hizbullah and Syria that are severely violating a key component of the UN ceasefire accord, the UN report also blasted Israel for what Ban Ki-Moon described as its "continuing violations of Lebanese air space." He charged that such overflights "undermine the credibility of the UN, and damage efforts to reduce tensions, build confidence and stabilize the situation in southern Lebanon." However Israeli analysts pointed out in response that IDF jets would not need to conduct constant surveillance flights over Lebanon if Hizbullah was not overtly smuggling in copious amounts of Syrian and Iranian rockets and other weaponry in obvious preparation for another round of attacks upon northern Israel's civilian population centers.

In a subsequent briefing to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, the head

of the IDF's military intelligence branch warned that Hizbullah is "getting stronger every day" as it "learns how to live with the beefed up UN force" now stationed near Israel's border with Lebanon. Brigadier General Yossi Baidatz also warned that Syria is smuggling in large amounts of state of the art Russian-made anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons to Hizbullah. He added that Syria is also continuing to "update its Russian-supplied weapons arsenal" while its main Mideast ally Iran moves ever closer to possessing the ultimate weapon--nuclear warheads. He said the latest intelligence assessments predict that Iran will possess the doomsday bomb within a space of just two years, adding that hopes the extremist Shiite regime will be internally overthrown before then are undoubtedly pipe dreams.

With the region moving far more in the direction of a major war than imminent peace, it is reassuring to note that *"The Lord has built up Zion, He has appeared in His glory. He has regarded the prayer of the destitute; He has not despised their prayer (Psalm 102:16).*

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, or by phoning toll free **888-890-6938** in North America, or by e mail at: resources@yourisraelconnection.org

Dolan's New DVD, "For Zion's Sake" is now available for purchase. Click the title under "Bookstore" for more details.