

# Israel News From David Dolan

Week of November 1, 2010

Shalom from Jerusalem,

Below is my latest Israel news review covering events that took place in the region during October. The main focus is the failure to get the Palestinian Authority to return to the negotiating table. This came as senior PA leaders said they plan to unilaterally declare statehood next year even if there is no final peace accord by then with Israel. The Iranian leader's visit to Lebanon and a Roman Catholic synod in Rome which questioned Israel's right to exist are also examined.

I recently finished filming an eight part series on the history of Israel that will be broadcast on the *Zola Levitt Presents* television program beginning in January. Along with host Jeff Zeif, we filmed on the Golan Heights, at Megiddo, at the smallest portion of pre-1967 Israel near Netanya (only nine miles across and often referred to as the "narrow hips") in Jaffa, Independence Hall in Tel Aviv and on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. My planned tour next May will also visit most of those sites and more...details are posted on my web site, [www.ddolan.com](http://www.ddolan.com)

## PA PLANS TO DECLARE STATEHOOD NEXT YEAR

By David Dolan

It became apparent during October that American government efforts to get the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table with Israel have failed. This came as Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu made clear that he would not cave in to US pressure to freeze home construction once again in the disputed territories, as demanded by Palestinian Authority leaders before peace talks can resume. In fact, the government issued new building permits for several hundred apartment units to be constructed in contested areas near Jerusalem. PA officials denounced the move, and later revealed that they are planning to unilaterally declare the formation of a Palestinian state in the middle of next year.

Earlier in the month, PM Netanyahu offered to reissue the building ban if the PA would agree to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. The offer was strongly rejected by PA officials, who termed it "racist." This came as more rockets were fired into Israeli territory from the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. Unrest also continued in sections of eastern Jerusalem, especially in the Silwan neighborhood adjacent to the City of David southeast of the Temple Mount. However the intensity of clashes between Arab stone throwers and Israeli security forces and local Jewish residents was far less than in September.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made his scheduled visit to Lebanon during the month, telling mainly Shiite audiences that Israel will soon be destroyed. This came as leaked American government documents revealed that Iranian and Lebanese Hizbullah forces have been operating inside of Iraq in recent years, conducting covert attacks against Iraqi, American, and British military forces. Meanwhile a mysterious explosion inside an Iranian military base was said to have destroyed many Iranian surface to surface missiles in early October.

## BACK TO SQUARE ONE

A war of words between Palestinian and Israeli government officials escalated during October after it became evident that American-sponsored peace negotiations would not be resuming anytime soon. Meanwhile an Arab newspaper reported in late October that the Israeli government is continuing to hold discussions with American officials concerning the details of a final peace settlement, including the

formation of permanent borders and which Israeli settlement communities would be allowed to remain in place as part of a final status peace accord. Any agreement reached between Washington and Jerusalem would then be handed to the Palestinian Authority for approval. The newspaper, *Asharq Al Awsat*, said one proposal being considered is to transfer formal sovereignty over the eastern half of Jerusalem to the Palestinian Authority, which would then lease the land back to Israel for a period of 99 years.

The latest peace process roadblock came as Prime Minister Netanyahu delivered a speech that many analysts said was partially designed to demonstrate to the United States government that the PA is not really interested in pursuing any form of serious negotiations at this time.

In his speech before the Israeli Knesset on October 11, the Premier offered to extend his government's construction moratorium in Judea and Samaria if the Palestinian Authority formally recognizes Israel as the "Jewish national home." He said such PA recognition of what is quite clearly an established fact on the ground would serve as a vital "confidence building measure" that would enhance his government's public commitment to negotiate an historic final status peace accord with the PA. He averred that such a Palestinian move would "deliver a positive message" to Israeli Jews that PA Fatah party officials are finally willing to move beyond the PLO's 1964 charter declaration that the Palestinians would work with other Arab and Islamic forces to secure Israel's ultimate destruction.

The Israeli leader revealed that he had conveyed his offer to PA President Mahmoud Abbas via a third party, presumably the United States. However he also disclosed that Abbas had flatly turned him down. This revelation did not surprise most Arab and Israeli political analysts who have been consistently stating since Barrack Obama was sworn in as America's President in January 2009 that the time is not ripe for either the Israeli or Palestinian governments to engage in serious final status peace negotiations. They add that this fact had already been established when former President George W. Bush failed in his attempt to secure an accord before the end of his term in office.

## **THE JEWISH STATE**

PM Netanyahu began his parliamentary speech by stating that it was "not by chance that the portrait of the State visionary, Benjamin Zeev Herzl, hangs here on the wall of the Israeli Knesset. In 1896, Herzl wrote in his book, *The Jewish State*, that 'The Jews who are seeking a state will have a state.' Finally, we will live as free people on our own land. In 1947, on the eve of the establishment of the State of Israel, David Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary: 'The state that will be established will be Jewish in its purpose, designation and objective; not a state of those Jews who reside in the country but a state for the Jews, for the Jewish people. The State of Israel is, therefore, both the nation-state of the Jewish people and a democratic country for all its citizens, Jews and non-Jews alike, enjoying full equal rights.'"

The Prime Minister upset some Arab Knesset members by proclaiming that "There is no country in our region that protects the individual rights of its citizens and the rights of their minorities like Israel's democracy does. There is no other democracy in the Middle East, and there is no other Jewish state in the world." Netanyahu added that "The combination of these two values – a Jewish state and a democratic state – expresses the foundation of our existence and the essence of the State of Israel."

Concerning the faltering peace process, the Israeli Premier noted that "From the first day of my government's tenure, I called on the leaders of the Palestinian Authority to enter into direct peace talks with us without preconditions. I outlined the principles for a peace agreement with the Palestinians: A demilitarized Palestinian state which recognizes the state of the Jewish people and lives beside it in peace." PM Netanyahu insisted that he was not merely mouthing slogans by demanding that the Palestinian Authority must recognize Israel as a permanent Jewish state before any final peace deal can be secured. "When I say recognition, I mean Palestinian recognition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. This is not just stubbornness. This is the root of the conflict and therefore a central foundation for

resolving it.” He pointed out that “For one hundred years, the Palestinians have taught entire generations to believe that there is no Jewish people, and that this land is their homeland alone. The refusal to recognize the rights of the Jewish people and its historic connection to its land is the root of the conflict, and without dealing with it, there will be no end to the conflict.”

The Likud party leader also made clear that he will not sign any final peace accord unless it includes “significant guarantees” that Israel’s security will not be harmed in any way. “In order for a compromise to lead to peace and not war, it must be accompanied by two fundamental components: recognition, and security arrangements. I am not willing to make do with peace on paper, nor are the citizens of Israel willing to make do with that.” He went on to note that the United Nations resolution that ended the 2006 conflict started by Hizbullah militia forces operating in southern Lebanon did not prevent the Hamas militia from “firing thousands of missiles at Israel,” or halt “the smuggling tens of thousands of additional missiles by Iran into hostile territory surrounding us.”

PM Netanyahu reminded his Knesset colleagues that his government “removed hundreds of roadblocks and checkpoints” in Judea and Samaria. “We also encouraged impressive growth in the Palestinian economy – impressive by any standards, especially given the fact that at the same time the entire world was mired in recession and economic crisis.”

Hours after Netanyahu delivered his Knesset speech; senior PA peace negotiator Saeb Erekat said Palestinian leaders “forcefully reject all these Israeli games.” He also told reporters that “the racist demands of Netanyahu cannot be tied to the request to cease building in the settlements for the purpose of establishing a state.”

### **PALESTINIANS TO DECLARE STATEHOOD NEXT YEAR**

PA leaders stated during October that they will announce the formation of a sovereign Palestinian state in the coming months whether Israeli leaders accept such a unilateral act or not. The first indication that a statehood declaration is in the planning stages was given by PA leader Mahmoud Abbas during an Arab League summit meeting in Libya early in the month. He told his Arab colleagues that he is “considering” such a move. His statement came after the Arab League formally backed his decision to withdraw from US-sponsored face to face peace talks with Israel due to the resumption of home building in the disputed territories.

Later in the month, PA Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad told an Italian newspaper reporter that a unilateral statehood declaration would be issued in August next year. “The deadline is next summer, when the Israeli occupation of the West Bank must end.” He added that “In 2011 we celebrate 66 years of the United Nations and the United Nations will celebrate the birth of our nation.” He maintained that the Palestinian Authority is doing “everything we can to build national institutions in the West Bank in preparation for an independent Palestinian state.”

When asked how such a statehood declaration would affect the Hamas ruled Gaza Strip, Fayyad declared that “the people of Gaza must be involved in our national project.” Admitting that there are what he termed “gaps” between the PA and Hamas, the Palestinian Prime Minister went on to maintain that “the real gap is the wall that closes off the Gaza Strip.” He did not mention that the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had been given a fair chance by Israeli leaders to establish a viable government in the Gaza Strip, which was not overturned by any Israeli action but by the militant Iranian-backed Hamas coup in June 2007 which ousted PA officials from the coastal zone.

### **EU MAY SUPPORT UNILATERAL DECLARATION**

Israeli political analysts said they doubted that a unilateral PA statehood declaration with defined borders would be endorsed by the United States and many other world governments. In fact, the American State

Department issued a statement which echoed PM Netanyahu's position that only direct peace negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders can bring about the creation of a Palestinian state. Analysts added that any unilateral PA statehood declaration would certainly not force the Premier to withdraw IDF soldiers from contested land even if UN peacekeeping troops were to be stationed in Judea and Samaria, as PA leaders insist will occur. Nor will it help resolve the issue of what to do with nearly 300,000 Israelis currently living in areas that the PA regards as inside its future sovereign borders, including Jerusalem's Old City and surrounding neighborhoods.

PM Netanyahu characterized the proposed unilateral PA statehood declaration as "an irresponsible move" that may result in "a worsening of the conflict and an increase in terror." Still analysts said the Premier was quite concerned over indications from France and Spain that the European Union might support such a one-sided statehood declaration at the United Nations. While visiting Jerusalem and Ramallah in early October, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner told reporters that while a unilateral declaration is "not the preferred way" to help the Palestinians establish an independent state; it may turn out to be "an acceptable route." The French official was accompanied on his visit by Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos, who has since been assigned to another cabinet position. Moratinos, who served in the past as the EU's Middle East peace envoy, said he agreed with his French colleague's statement. Prime Minister Netanyahu's office said that the PM had asked the two European officials to pass along to PA leaders Israel's contention that direct peace negotiations with his government is the only realistic method to establish a viable Palestinian state.

Analysts said Spanish support for a PA statehood declaration could prove crucial at the UN since Spain's next door neighbor Portugal won a rotating seat on the UN Security Council in early October, beating out Canada for the position by securing massive international Muslim support. Israeli officials expressed private unhappiness that the Obama administration did not do more to back Canada's bid despite the fact that the country is among the closest US allies in the world. Canadian officials admitted that pro-Israeli stance expressed by Canadian Prime Minister Steven Harper was the main reason that the country did now win a seat on the powerful Security Council.

Meanwhile some Israeli Knesset members are working on new legislation that would require a national referendum vote before the government could relinquish any land in Jordan's former West Bank, including in Jerusalem, or the Golan Heights that was captured from Syria forces in 1967. The eastern half of Jerusalem and the strategic Golan plateau, which feeds vital fresh water in the Sea of Galilee, were formally annexed by Israel in the early 1980s. The proposed referendum law is not being sponsored by the Netanyahu government even though many members of the ruling coalition say they will support it. Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who heads the coalition Labor party, has come out strongly against the legislation, maintaining it needlessly throws another obstacle in the way of negotiating successful peace accords with the Palestinians and Syria. Opinion surveys show a substantial majority of Israeli voters oppose giving up any part of Jerusalem or the Golan Heights.

## **MORE TROUBLE FROM IRAN**

Israeli security forces shot dead a senior Hamas militia commander in the city of Hebron the second week of October who they said was behind the brutal murder of four Israeli civilians in August, including a pregnant mother. A Hamas spokesman denounced the action as "a slap in the face for all those who are still betting on their relations with the occupation." Several weeks later, the West African nation of Nigeria reportedly intercepted 13 cargo containers which were filled with Iranian weapons bound for Hamas operatives. Israeli security officials said the weapons were meant to be smuggled into the Gaza Strip via tunnels under the southern border with Egypt, and possibly also by sea. Intercepted from a ship parked at the port in Lagos, the containers were reportedly filled with rocket launchers, hand grenades and landmines. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad paid a state visit to Nigeria last year and has increased trade with the large country.

The Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* reported that recent satellite photos posted at Google Earth show Hizbullah forces stationed at a Syrian missile base in the city of Adra, northeast of Damascus. The Lebanese Shiite operatives were thought to be receiving instructions at the base about how to maintain and fire powerful Scud D missiles that are known to be in Syria's heavy weapons arsenal. Israeli officials said earlier this year that Scud D missile parts were being smuggled into Lebanon on Syrian commercial trucks. Israeli Military Intelligence Commander Yossi Baidatz told a Knesset committee that "Hizbullah has thousands of rockets of all kinds and ranges." The Scud Ds are an improved version of the Scud C missiles that were fired at Israel by Saddam Hussein in 1991.

The Iranian leader visited Lebanon on October 13 where he issued more existential threats against Israel and blasted the United States and its allies for imposing economic sanctions on his country. After being awarded an honorary doctorate in political science at Beirut University—which one Lebanese politician termed equivalent to giving a Nobel peace prize to a mass murderer like Adolph Hitler or Pol Pot—Ahmadinejad said that "all of Lebanon has become a university for jihad." Many Lebanese Christian and Sunni Muslim politicians publicly opposed the visit, which was widely seen as a move to strengthen the Shiite Hizbullah movement said to be plotting to take over the entire Lebanese government with the backing of Iran and Syria. Israeli officials denounced the visit in strong terms. A Foreign Ministry spokesman said Ahmadinejad had gone to Lebanon "like a landlord coming to inspect his domain." Binyamin Netanyahu's chief spokesman Mark Regev told reporters that "Iran's domination of Lebanon through its proxy Hizbullah has destroyed any chance for peace, has turned Lebanon into an Iranian satellite and made Lebanon a hub for regional terror and instability."

Israeli officials strongly denounced several statements made at a synod gathering of Roman Catholic bishops held at the Vatican in October. They were particularly insulted when the head of the Greek Melkite Church in the United States, Archbishop Salim Butros, maintained it was "unacceptable" for Israel to put forward "biblical positions that use the word of God to wrongly justify injustices." Echoing traditional Catholic doctrine that was officially repudiated during the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, he went on to maintain that "We Christians cannot speak of the Promised Land as an exclusive right for a privileged Jewish people," since "this promised was nullified by Christ." Going even further, the Archbishop declared that, "The concept of the promised land cannot be used as a base for the justification of the return of Jews to Israel and the displacement of Palestinians." An Israeli official noted that the New Testament quotes Jesus as saying that He had come to confirm and fulfill the ancient Jewish biblical laws along with the teachings and oracles given by the Hebrew prophets, not to erase or nullify them.

Whatever political and religious leaders say or do, the God of Israel will have the final say regarding His ancient covenant people and Promised Land. *"The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty! The Lord has clothed and girded Himself with strength. (Psalm 93:1)*

**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).
- **Dolan is currently working on his new novel with the probable title [THE LORD REIGNS](#).**

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