

Terror Returns to Israel amid Regional Upheaval

By David Dolan

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The peace of Jerusalem was temporarily shattered in late March when terrorists managed to launch a major attack on a crowded city sidewalk. The details are below in this month's news and analysis report. With violent unrest still gripping much of the Middle East and North Africa, and in particular now spreading in a major way into Syria after Western nations began to enforce a no-fly zone in Libya, much of the March report looks at the escalating crisis in the region. The Palestinian rocket and mortar blitz upon many Israeli cities and towns over the past couple of weeks is also examined in detail, with a substantial IDF military reaction possible at any time if the firings continue. A potentially massive oil find in the Israeli Negev Desert is also detailed in this month's news review—some good news amid the gloom.

I am becoming increasingly convinced that the ongoing political upheaval affecting more and more area countries will probably lead to major military action in the region, possibly even an Israeli clash with Syria and/or Hizbullah forces in Lebanon, and maybe even the long-anticipated showdown with Iran over its festering uranium enrichment nuclear program. I will be sharing about that in May when I speak in the vicinity of New York City and in central New Jersey—see my web site for details if you live there, www.ddolan.com Meanwhile I have had several e mails from friends who knew the Scottish Christian woman that was killed in last week's terrorist explosion near the central Jerusalem bus station. My condolences go out to all who knew her in Israel, the UK, and Africa.

Many have written to say you are enjoying seeing me in an eight part TV production about the history of Israel and the current situation in the land, which was shot last October in Israel and is being broadcast on the *Zola Levitt Presents* TV program. The shows are also viewable all over the world via their web site. I continue to work on my new novel as the weight of the news allows, and hope to have it ready for reading by late this summer or early autumn (late winter early spring for all in the other hemisphere!)

TERROR RETURNS TO ISRAEL AMID REGIONAL UPHEAVAL

As the Middle East and North Africa continued to writhe from scores of separate but connected political and military earthquakes during March, terror returned once again to the streets of Jerusalem for the first time in several years. A Christian woman originally from Scotland lost her life in the assault that also left dozens injured; several of them critically. Many security analysts warned that Israel could be witnessing the beginning of a new wave of Iranian-inspired Islamic terrorist attacks designed to destabilize the country and further harm the tourism flow, which reached record levels last year before the regional turmoil began in January.

The unsettling possibility of more terrorist atrocities just ahead was apparently buttressed by a new wave of Grad rocket and mortar attacks during the month from the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. For the first time ever, one rocket struck a city in the southern outskirts of the Tel Aviv metropolitan area. The illegal weapons also targeted the large Israeli cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Beersheva and many other civilian targets. It was the heaviest sustained bombardments upon Jewish civilian centers since the Israeli-Hamas Cast Lead conflict ended in early 2009. Security experts warned that all of this strongly signals that it may be a very hot spring and summer ahead for the Jewish state—in more ways than just the weather.

Both before and after the latest terrorist outrage occurred on March 23, Israeli government and military officials were keeping a close and vary eye on the growing regional chaos that threatens to bring down more pro-Western Arab governments in the coming weeks or months, along with one or two enemies of Israel like Libya's Muammar Qaddafi. The US-led military campaign against one of Israel's oldest regional adversaries was quietly welcomed in Jerusalem even though the Israeli government had nothing to do with the UN-approved action in response to Qaddafi's brutal slaughter of his own citizens.

Growing street protests in neighboring Syria—reportedly leaving over a hundred protestors dead at the hands of the regime's ruthless forces by late March—were also being closely monitored in Jerusalem, as were similar anti-regime demonstrations in Iran. In both countries, security forces cracked down hard on the protestors

unlike in Egypt during the dramatic ousting of President Hosni Mubarak in February. Government officials were also being kept abreast of continuing anti-government demonstrations in Jordan, whose peace treaty with Israel could be undermined by any serious outbreak of sustained street violence.

Israeli officials were encouraged when American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pointed a direct finger at Iran's extremist clerical regime for being behind a violent Shiite revolt in the strategic Gulf Sunni-ruled state of Bahrain, the home port for America's powerful Fifth Fleet. Al Qaida was thought to be playing a major role in growing unrest further south in the troubled Arabian Peninsula country of Yemen.

Despite the fires raging all around the explosive region, there was some good news reported about Israel in the international press during March. Many media outlets noted that the compassionate Jewish state was the first country to set up an emergency field hospital in northern Japan to treat victims of the Asian country's massive earthquake and subsequent devastating tsunami tidal surge. At the same time, an Australian newspaper reported that Israel is sitting on some of the largest shale oil deposits on earth, enough to make the country a net fuel exporter in the future, although costs for recovering such oil are usually greater than in most regular oil fields around the globe.

TERRORIST STRIKE CENTRAL JERUSALEM

A powerful bomb exploded on March 23 at a bus stop just across the street from Jerusalem's central bus station, killing one woman standing nearby the hidden explosive device and injuring around 50 others, six of them Americans. Two people were critically wounded; meaning they may eventually succumb to their wounds. Five other bystanders near the bus stop where the explosion occurred were seriously wounded, with the rest mostly suffering from various degrees of shrapnel wounds and shock. Police reported that the bomb, which destroyed the city bus shelter and damaged two nearby buses, contained copious amounts of steel balls, nail and screws to maximize the destructive and deadly impact of the blast.

The attack took place near the city's western entrance on one of the most consistently crowded sidewalks, located directly between the central bus station and the largest public auditorium in Jerusalem, *Binyamei Ha Umma*, the site of the Christian Embassy's annual Feast of Tabernacles celebrations and many other large public events. Police said the bomb had been hidden in a paper bag left at the base of a public telephone on the side of the bus shelter.

Onlookers said the explosive device was placed next to the bus shelter by an unidentified man who calmly walked away from the scene after pretending to use the phone. Security sources later confirmed the accounts, saying the blast was therefore not set off by a suicide terrorist as was frequently the case during the deadly Al Aksa Palestinian attrition war that left nearly one thousand Israelis dead and thousands more injured during the first half of the last decade, and resulted in an even greater number of Palestinians casualties. Police suspect that the bomb was either set off by a timer or, more likely, via cell phone—meaning the perpetrator was probably still within eyesight of target zone when the reverberating blast occurred.

Always prepared for such heinous terrorist explosions, Jerusalem paramedics rushed to the scene to treat the wounded while police forces cleared away onlookers in case a second explosive device or a suicide bomber was present at the site. Bystanders reported scenes of panic and chaos in the minutes after the blast occurred. The loud explosion was heard all over the center of the city and its western neighborhoods. Two shaken women went into premature labor while other people ran from the scene, some covered by blood from their shrapnel wounds. Among the injured were several children.

LOCAL AND FOREIGN EFFECTS

One day after the latest terrorist assault shattered the peace of Jerusalem, military sources said two suspects belonging to the Palestinian Islamic jihad group were apprehended near the Arab city of Jenin in

Samaria. Along with the radical Hamas movement, the group had earlier praised the terrorist attack as “a natural response to ongoing Israeli crimes” against the Palestinian people—an apparent reference to escalating IDF military activity against terrorist squads who fired dozens of rockets and mortar shells into many Israeli cities and towns during March.

The British Foreign Office confirmed that the sole immediate fatality was a visiting British student-tourist named Mary Jean Gardner. They said the 59 year old Christian woman from Orkney Scotland was in Jerusalem studying at the Mount Scopus campus of Hebrew University, where she resided in a dormitory. She was learning the ancient holy language in order to return to her missionary posting in Togo Africa where she hoped to help translate the Hebrew Bible into the local language. The death of a foreign student in a terrorist blast brought back painful memories of an atrocious attack inside of the university’s Frank Sinatra cafeteria during the Al Aksa uprising which also took the lives of several foreign and Israeli students who were dining there.

While naturally expressing deep shock and condolences to the victim’s family and friends, Israeli government officials also expressed concern that the death of a foreign student in such a blast—especially at a crowded public site frequented by both Jewish and Arab Israeli citizens and many long-term foreign nationals—might further reduce the flow of overseas tourists to the country. Numbers had reached record levels in 2011, with almost three and a half million people arriving in the Holy Land from abroad. However the figures were already down in February from last year’s monthly total, apparently due to the growing regional turmoil which has received massive media attention all over the world for nearly three months. In early March, before the Jerusalem terror attack took place, tourism officials launched a \$10 million dollar overseas media campaign designed to boost flagging tourism to the land.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority government headed by Mahmoud Abbas wasted no time in publicly denouncing the attack as “harmful to Palestinian interests,” which was not exactly the clear condemnation that the Israeli government was hoping for. Soon afterwards, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu warned the terrorist groups that they will “discover that the government, the Israel Defense Forces and Israeli public have the iron will to defend the country and its citizens

It had been over three years since a major terrorist assault took place in the contested Israeli capital city. However just three weeks before the late March atrocity shook the city, a municipal worker was severely injured when a bomb placed in a garbage bag on Hebron Road exploded near him, ripping off one of his arms. Other isolated terrorist incidents have occurred as well, including the attempted kidnapping last October of an Israeli security guard in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan, located near the southeastern corner of the sacred Temple Mount.

The last major assault directly involving terrorist offenders took place in 2008 when two Palestinians driving bulldozers attempted to run over nearby civilian pedestrians. The separate assaults took place in two Jerusalem locations, one further east on Jaffa Road and the other near the King David hotel. The last attack taking many lives occurred just one block from my home in February 2004, when a Palestinian homicide bomber blew up a packed city bus leaving eight passengers dead and dozens injured. One month before that, a suicide terrorist destroyed a bus near the Prime Minister official office not far from the central bus station, leaving ten people dead.

SHOWDOWN LOOMING IN GAZA?

As mentioned above, Palestinian militiamen operating inside of the fenced off Gaza Strip sharply stepped up their rocket and mortar attacks as March progressed, hitting several new targets for the first time in the process. Schools and many businesses were shut and emergency alarm systems were activated as rockets were fired at several large Israeli cities, including Ashkelon, Beersheva and the city of Rishon Letzion—located just eight miles south of Tel Aviv and considered a suburban bedroom community with most residents working in the heavily populated metropolitan area.

Military officials instructed local residents in the affected cities and towns to stay off the roads unless absolutely necessary while keeping close to area bomb shelters. At least two other Israeli towns suffered their first ever rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip, including Gedera which is just 17 miles southeast of Tel Aviv and due east of the port city of Ashdod, which was also the recipient of several Iranian-produced grad rockets.

Although they are hoping to avoid it, Israeli officials warned that another major IDF military operation may become necessary if the mushrooming rocket and mortar barrage did not come to an end very quickly. This came after the Hamas movement denied that it was behind most of the firings, claiming that Islamic Jihad activists armed by Iran were carrying out the almost daily assaults. Islamic Jihad fighters belonging to the so-called *Al Quds* (Jerusalem) *Brigades* took responsibility for at least some of the assaults in a statement handed to journalists based in Gaza City.

Whoever is ultimately behind the attacks, Israeli leaders repeated what they have clearly stated many times before—Hamas will be held ultimately responsible for all armed assaults emanating from the Gaza Strip since the powerful Muslim fundamentalist group is in overall control of the crowded Palestinian coastal zone.

Speaking at a press conference with visiting American Secretary of Defense Robert Gates just hours after Palestinian rockets struck near the strategic port city of Ashdod, Defense Minister Ehud Barak demanded that Hamas control groups under its overall authority, especially the Islamic Jihad terrorist militia, or pay the direct and swift consequences. After meeting privately with Gates, PM Netanyahu stated he was ready to order that “full force” be used against Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip, telling the visiting American official that “no country could accept such attacks.” Two days later, he ordered that new anti-rocket Iron Dome defense system be deployed near Beersheva to bolster the city’s defenses.

In the meantime, the Israeli Air Force bombed dozens of Islamic Jihad and Hamas targets as the hostile rocket fire upon Jewish civilian centers escalated. Israeli army tanks stationed outside the border fence opened fire as well on a number of nearby areas from where rocket and mortar fire was detected. Just back from an overseas trip, Defense Minister Barak ordered stepped up security measures in all military outposts in the widening vicinity of the rocket fire. He did this while holding emergency meetings with senior military leaders to discuss the options for halting the rocket blitz. The Grad rockets are of especial concern, being considerably more powerful and destructive than the Kassam rockets usually fired by Hamas terrorists.

THE REGION IS ERUPTING

The pace of regional developments was so swift and furious during March that Israeli officials themselves had trouble keeping up with all of the monumental developments swirling around them. Possibly most intriguing was said to be the growing violent unrest in nearby Syria, which could easily lead to a major war with the heavily-armed Arab police state if the besieged regime were to attempt to divert public attention away from the fierce government crackdown on protestors by focusing on a longtime external enemy. Media reports said over one hundred protestors had been killed by late March, with untold numbers injured. Scenes of the violent crackdown were broadcast on some Arab satellite networks that are viewable in Syria, while state-controlled television naturally channels pretended that all was calm.

The main fear in Jerusalem is not that Syria might suddenly open fire with its powerful long range Scud D missiles capable of carrying chemical or biological warheads (both of which are known to be in Syria’s massive arsenal), but that it could unleash its Lebanese Shiite Hizbullah militia to fire rockets and missiles at Israel, in coordination with Iran and its Islamic Jihad and Hamas allies. If so, Israel could be facing rocket barrages from both north and south like in a conventional war, with Hizbullah’s weapons fully capable of striking Tel Aviv and all other major Israeli cities and industrial centers.

Some Israeli analysts speculated that such a concerted Islamic assault might trigger off Israel's long-planned action against Iran's festering nuclear sites, hopefully with the public backing of the United States and its coalition allies. Given Hillary Clinton's strong statements during March against the Iranian regime—echoed a bit more softly by President Barack Obama—it is hoped that any such action would at least be privately endorsed by Western leaders, along with moderate Arab countries that fear a nuclear-armed Iran more than they dislike the Jewish state or America.

Iranian Revolutionary Guard forces wasted no time in violently suppressing anti-regime street protests in Tehran and other Iranian cities during the month. This came as Shiite protestors stepped up their demonstrations against the Sunni royal family ruling the strategic island state of Bahrain, connected by a bridge to nearby Saudi Arabia. Fearing for the stability of their own reign, and well aware that many foreign oil workers in the east of the country are also Shiites who look to Iran as a spiritual leader, Saudi leaders sent in their own heavily-armed military forces to support the Bahraini government attempts to quell the unrest. Israeli officials were also following fast moving developments in Yemen, concerned that the ousting of the pro-Western regime there might embolden Al Qaida members and lead to growing terrorist acts against the Saudi family regime.

UPHEAVAL SPREADS TO LYBIA

With regional events speeding forward like an out of control wild fire, Israeli leaders were watching the deteriorating situation in Libya with deep interest and some anxiety. They were especially impressed that French President Nicolas Sarkozy seemed to be stepping up to the Western leadership plate to take on the notorious Arab dictator who has sponsored outrageous terrorist assaults against civilians and soldiers around the world over the years, especially Americans. Apparently fearing a flood of war refugees from the nearby oil-rich North African country, France joined Italy in enforcing a UN-sanctioned 'no fly zone' over Libyan skies, significantly aided by an initial burst of US military activity designed to neutralize Qaddafi's anti-aircraft missile systems and other threatening targets.

As the regional turmoil spread even further during the month, Israeli officials were hoping that both Paris and Rome might at least privately back any significant Israeli military activity against Iran, and/or Syria, Lebanon and against Muslim jihad forces warring from the Gaza Strip. If the Obama administration at least provided some military support for any major IDF operations, it would go a long way toward easing Israeli government concerns that the coalition of enemies surrounding the country might one day succeed in significantly harming the world's only Jewish state.

Meantime concerns over Egypt's future direction in the wake of the mass street revolt against ousted President Hosni Mubarak eased somewhat when 74 year old former Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa emerged as the probable front-runner in national elections expected to take place before the end of this year. Although he has often been critical of Jerusalem in his public and private pronouncements, the highly educated veteran diplomat is thought to be among the most moderate of all potential presidential candidates, and has not taken any public stand against the existing peace treaty with Israel. Officials in Jerusalem certainly prefer him to Muhammad Elbaradi, the former head of the UN's International Atomic Agency who was widely criticized for being too soft on Iran's rouge uranium enrichment program when he headed up the UN agency. Of course, they would prefer either man over any candidate that the radical Muslim Brotherhood movement might put forward.

OIL IN THOSE ROCKS!

As if providing a divine soothing balm in the midst of the intensifying regional strife, the Israeli public was proud of the fact that their country was the world's first to set up an on-site medical tent in the earthquake and tidal wave-stricken northeast portion of Japan. Volunteer civilian and military medical personnel and rescue experts had already more than proven their top level skills in their significant response to the devastating earthquake that ruined much of the Haitian capital city last year. Hated by much of the world and occasionally

berated by Japanese government leaders over the years, many Israelis expressed pride and satisfaction in the tiny country's willingness and ability to extend a warm hand to others in their time of great need.

Adding to the country's cheer amid the growing regional trauma and gloom, the Melbourne-based *Australian* newspaper reported during March that a leading international oil expert believes Israel has massive deposits of marketable oil supplies inside of shale rock formations underneath the southern Negev Desert—which many see as a possible fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

The expert, Harold Vinegar, was the former chief scientist for the global Royal Dutch Shell conglomerate. He told the Australian newspaper that he and his research colleagues “estimate that there is the equivalent of 250 billion barrels of oil there. To put that in context, there are proven reserves of 260 billion barrels of oil in Saudi Arabia.” However Vinegar did acknowledge that it is usually more expensive to develop shale deposits, but pointed out that extracting oil from such places as the North Sea, Siberia and Alaska is also quite expensive, along with deposits from deep under the ocean floors. Employing new low-water-use technology, Vinegar believes that Israel can become a significant player in the worldwide oil market for the first time in its short modern history.

As you pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for endangered people around the Middle East, keep in mind that He who ultimately watches over the holy city and all of Israel is always fully awake, guarding His special land and His chosen children like a loving father who is ever alert in His heavenly outpost: “Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep (Psalm 121:3).

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).
- **David Dolan is currently working on his new novel with the probable title [THE LORD REIGNS](#).** 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. To schedule David Dolan for a speaking engagement, e mail alohashalom@gmail.com

DOLAN'S NATIONALLY TELEVISED DVD, "FOR ZION'S SAKE" is also available for purchase. Click the title under "BOOKSTORE" for more details.

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