

Israel News

From David Dolan – June 30, 2011

Shalom from Jerusalem

I am back in Israel this week after being in the United States for some speaking engagements and family matters. I anticipate an interesting summer ahead here! This month's news and analysis report, posted below, reflects the explosive situation in much of the Middle East, especially in nearby Syria. I examine the Golan Heights border clashes which left scores dead and injured in early June, plus the deteriorating situation in Syria itself and the prospects for more upheaval ahead. Failing Palestinian Authority attempts to form a new unity government with the rival Hamas movement are also detailed, along with news about the expected international flotilla sailing to the Gaza Strip later this week which could produce more casualties on both sides. Late reports suggest that various acts of apparent sabotage and international government opposition to the flotilla sailing is literally taking the wind out of the planned action.

Details of my planned October-November visit to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are being finalized by my hosts, Christian Friends of Israel UK. I will send those out with next month's mailing and post them on my web site, www.ddolan.com My new American scheduler, Bill Sharman, is starting to put together a USA speaking tour beginning next winter at a conference in Florida. If any of you are interested in having me share at your venue, please contact him at alohashalom@gmail.com (no, he doesn't live in Hawaii, but used to!). I recently finished writing my new novel, titled *Millennium: The Lord Reigns!* I hope to have an electronic version ready for purchase by early autumn, and plan to also have printed copies with me when I visit the UK and for sale on my web site. Thanks to all who have been praying for this work, and for those helping me edit and produce it.

PALESTINIANS ON THE MOVE

By David Dolan

Violent Palestinian demonstrations were staged in many locations the first week of June as the forty-fourth anniversary of the dramatic Six Day War was marked in the turbulent Middle East. Hundreds of Palestinians living in Syria and their supporters marched to the Golan Heights border with Israel on June 5th, as they did the month before, sparking off another deadly clash with Israeli security forces. Israeli officials said the Assad regime—still ferociously suppressing a growing anti-government protest movement inside the autocratic country—was behind the latest border storming which left scores dead and injured. Israeli media reports said a leaked Syrian government document proved that the Assad regime had ordered the protestors to head to the international security fence and attempt to tear it down. The provocative action was said to be supported by Iran, which continued to help its ally brutally crush the popular uprising still gaining steam in Syria.

In neighboring Lebanon, a new government cabinet was unveiled that is dominated by members of the radical Iranian-backed Hizbullah movement. Opposition Lebanese politicians charged that their country has become a virtual vassal state to Tehran and Damascus. Analysts said the composition of the new Lebanese government almost guarantees that any future Hizbullah militia attack upon Israel will be met with an IDF response directed at government and military targets all over the country, not just mainly at Hizbullah outposts as was the case during the 2006 conflict.

As hundreds of Palestinians were gathering along the Golan Heights border, their political leaders in Ramallah and the Gaza Strip were struggling to form a viable unity government. However by late June, the attempts were still faltering over demands by the Muslim Hamas group to dump the current

Fatah-backed Palestinian Authority prime minister who is a moderate supported by the US and the EU.

Meanwhile indications grew that the PA may postpone announced plans to unilaterally declare Palestinian statehood at the United Nations in September. This is mainly due to strong opposition to the one-sided proposal from Washington. However it became clear during the month that the White House price tag for helping to derail the PA plan is the quick resumption of frozen peace negotiations with the Palestinians. The Israeli government is resisting pressure to resume talks now because the Hamas terrorist movement is expected to be involved in the PA if serious kinks are worked out in establishing a Fatah-Hamas unity government. Meanwhile a major nationwide security drill was held during June to test Israel's readiness to absorb a massive missile attack upon civilian areas. This came as another international flotilla attempt to break the Israeli naval blockade of the Hamas-dominated Gaza Strip loomed on the horizon, expected to set sail by the end of the month.

On a brighter note, the Tourism Ministry announced that the number of overseas visitors to the land during May broke all previous records, despite the ongoing upheaval in several nearby Arab countries. Tourism numbers had dropped somewhat earlier in the year as the turmoil spread from several North African Muslim countries to the Arabian Peninsula and Syria. Officials are hoping that foreign visitors will continue to flock to Israel despite the regional chaos and ongoing threats of war. The continuing strong tourist stream is helping to keep Israel's unemployment rate well below that of most industrial countries around the world, with officials saying a record low of just 5.8% was reached in April.

MORE CLASHES MAR THE HEIGHTS

As occurred in mid-May, thousands of people living in the boiling country of Syria walked past Syrian army positions on Sunday, June 5th, to assault the border security fence which guards Israeli-controlled territory on the strategic Golan Heights. The date was chosen to coincide with the launching in June 1967 of the Six Day War. On June 5th of that year, Israeli Air Force jets attacked and decimated Egyptian and Syrian air bases after the two Soviet-backed Arab countries revealed plans to launch an imminent military assault on the Jewish state under the leadership of Egyptian strongman Gamal Nasser.

As occurred in mid-May this year, the IDF responded with relative restraint as the pre-announced "demonstration" turned ugly, with hundreds of riled-up young men and women attempting to tear down sections of the border fence while others threw homemade firebombs, rocks and other heavy objects at Israeli security forces. In the ensuing melee, scores of rioters were injured or killed, with several Israeli soldiers suffering physical injuries as well. Syrian Health Minister Wael al-Halki maintained that IDF return fire had killed 23 of the protestors, with around 350 being wounded in the violent confrontation. Israeli officials acknowledged they had no accurate headcount of the dead and wounded, but added that recorded video of the clashes showed some of the fatalities took place when firebombs the rioters were hurling landed in the midst of nearby minefields, setting off several powerful explosions that sent deadly shrapnel hurling into the air.

As the clashes were raging along the border, hundreds of mostly Druze residents of the nearby villages of Kuneitra and Majdal Shams gathered to support the Syrian infiltration. The two villages were under total Syrian government control until the verdant plateau was captured by IDF forces during the Six Day War. With many expecting that the area will return again to Syrian hands sometime in the not-too-distant future, either by military means or as a central part of any peace treaty between Damascus and Jerusalem, the demonstrators appeared to be mainly interested in ingratiating themselves with the despotic Syrian authorities, apparently not fearing reprisals from the democratically-elected Israeli government and its security personnel.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu quickly ordered his United Nations ambassador to file a formal protest against the unprovoked border action, blaming the Assad regime for encouraging the attempted border breach, which is naturally against international law. The Israeli protest note charged that Syrian government authorities egged on the protestors in an apparent attempt to divert domestic attention away from the growing anti-government movement in the repressive country. Israeli officials have been expressing open concern over the prospect that Damascus might stir up regional trouble as a diversionary tactic, especially by employing allied Hizbullah forces to get the job done. A senior Israeli official warned in late June that a fresh Hizbullah missile attack could be launched at any moment.

The Israeli protest move drew a quick response from UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, who promised that the world body would formally investigate the clashes. He also urged restraint upon both sides—as if Israel had anything to do with initiating the rioting and was not simply responding as any sovereign country would if its border was being deliberately violated by hostile mob action.

BEHIND THE SCENE

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak was seemingly incensed at the UN chief's "balanced" comment, telling reporters soon after the statement was issued that "responsibility for the incidents and the casualties falls on those carrying out these provocations, and on all those who encouraged them to act in this way." Another senior Israeli government official told reporters off the record that Barak was mainly referring to the Assad regime, adding that, "One can only suppose that there was a decision taken in Syria to exploit the situation to change the subject from what is going on inside of Syria." An unidentified government source in Damascus later affirmed this contention by leaking an internal memo that was picked up by Arab media outlets. The document revealed that the regime had indeed encouraged, if not organized, the deadly border clashes. The web site of the opposition Reform Syria group posted a similar report, saying that most of the border "protestors" were poor people paid the equivalent of \$1,000 apiece by the embattled regime to head to the Golan Heights border, with the authorities promising \$10,000 to the family of anyone who was killed, as the late Saddam Hussein offered to Palestinian "martyrs" killed by IDF forces during the Al Aksa terrorist uprising.

Leaders of the Iranian-linked Hizbullah movement were joined by their Hamas counterparts in hailing the people who marched to the Syrian-Israeli border. Both Islamic groups blamed the United States for stirring up the pot by backing Israel, insisting the "protestors" were merely voicing their opposition to this long-standing reality. However, the terrorist group's verbal support did not stop Hamas militiamen from preventing a similar clash along the Gaza Strip border with Israel, nor did it halt Lebanese soldiers from doing the same thing along their own shared border. Security forces in both Egypt and Jordan also prevented protestors from gathering along their uncontested borders with Israel.

Analysts said Hamas leaders ordered their militiamen to prevent planned marches along the border fence with Israel because they did not wish to place any further obstacles in the difficult path of reconciliation with the ruling Fatah party, whose leaders have asked Hamas to halt rocket attacks upon Israeli civilian targets at this time. Meantime violent protests were held in various Arab neighborhoods in the eastern half of Jerusalem, including Abu Tor south of the Old City and in the often-troubled Silwan neighborhood adjacent to the disputed Temple Mount. Demonstrations also took place in other Arab cities north and south of Jerusalem and in Gaza City.

In a related matter, the Palestinian news agency Wafa released a report that claimed 14 people were killed and 43 wounded when internal clashes broke out at a Palestinian refugee neighborhood in southern Syria. The violence began when parents of some of the slain border rioters accused the Popular Front PLO group of organizing the Golan Heights clashes which left their children dead,

blasting the fact that they had sacrificed their lives as part of a political show which had absolutely no chance of actually altering the situation on the ground.

ASSAD SKATING ON THIN ICE

Meanwhile officials in Jerusalem were closely monitoring the deteriorating domestic crisis in Syria, worried as noted before that it might spill over into diversionary armed attacks against Israel. The news that thousands of civilians living in northwest Syria were so distressed by the horrendous government crackdown that they felt they had to flee for safety into nearby Turkey only underlined how dangerous the situation has become, many said. Security reports in Israel say that around 1,700 Syrians have already been killed in the spreading anti-regime upheaval, several hundred of them soldiers and policemen who refused orders to fire on their own people. Financial and political sanctions leveled earlier against the Assad regime by the European Union and the United States were further strengthened in late June to include several military leaders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, who were accused of aiding Assad's agents in their atrocious treatment of Syrian anti-government protestors.

Analysts said a full-scale civil war in Syria would be markedly different than the one raging in Libya since the Assad regime is heavily armed with Russian made weapons, including sophisticated anti-aircraft missile systems, plus long-range Scud and SS-21 missiles that can carry chemical and biological warheads. Both deadly agents are known to be in Assad's substantial arsenal. On top of this, Syria has one of the largest armies on earth despite the fact that the country has less than 20 million residents. Unlike relatively isolated Libya, it also has a significant ally in Iran. While not expecting NATO military intervention due to these facts, Israeli government officials would still like to see American President Barack Obama take a stronger public stand against the regime. As of late June, the US leader had only spoken out twice about Assad's hellish crackdown even though it has been far more severe than in Libya or other countries that have received stronger rebukes from the White House.

The Syrian dictator delivered only his second speech since the "Arab Spring" uprising crisis erupted in his country last March. To no one's surprise, Bashar Assad defiantly vowed to remain in power and defended his regime's appalling military crackdown against his own citizens, which is being led by his ruthless brother and brother-in-law. The despot denounced as mere "rumors" media reports that well over a thousand people have been killed by his security forces, maintaining that he wants to have "peace and tranquility based on partnerships with the people." Israeli Middle East analysts said if that was truly the case, his regime's vicious suppression campaign would not be taking place. They added that among the dead are many Syrian soldiers and policemen who were killed on orders of their own commanders when they refused to fire upon their fellow citizens.

HARD TO RECONCILE

Scheduled talks in Cairo between Palestinian Authority and Hamas leaders, designed to finalize details of their May 4th national unity pact, were postponed several times in June as serious conflicts continued to emerge between the rival Palestinian groups. The planned unveiling of a new "national unity" PA cabinet including Hamas representatives was put off earlier in the month after Hamas demanded that current Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad step down. They accused the government official of harming the Palestinian economy by issuing tough new financial regulations, despite the fact that many western economists have strongly commended Fayyad's reforms. Israeli analysts say the real reason Hamas extremist leaders want to see him removed from office is that the relatively moderate political leader is expected to support any future peace accord with Israel that allows Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem to remain intact, along with some settlement blocks near the capital city. Of course, Hamas wants to see all of Jerusalem fall under Palestinian Islamic control, not to mention Tel Aviv, Haifa and all other Israeli cities.

During his visit to Beirut, PA President Mahmoud Abbas told Lebanese state television that he has the right to choose who will head up the new unity cabinet. Hamas officials rejected the claim, declaring that the unity government proposal will continue to go nowhere if Abbas keeps insisting on keeping PM Fayyad at its head. PA leaders shot back that Hamas is deliberating wrecking the unity accord on orders of Iran, which helps arm and fund the militant group. Despite this charge, Hamas leaders appear to be adhering to their controversial commitment to Abbas to halt all rocket fire upon Israel, at least for the time being. Despite the lack of attacks in recent weeks, Israeli armed forces have been busy gearing up for a possible new Palestinian uprising later this summer in the run up to the planned September PA declaration of Palestinian statehood. At the same time, a major countrywide drill was held mid-month to test Israel's readiness to absorb a massive enemy missile blitz upon civilian centers, which government and military leaders warn is likely to occur in any future new regional war.

Instead of meeting in Cairo, PA and Hamas leaders headed to Turkey to explain why they have not yet been able to form a unity cabinet, which is supported by the recently re-elected government headed by controversial Prime Minister Erdogan. The Turkish Muslim politician told overall Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal that his government "recognizes the legitimacy" of the radical Islamic movement and rejects the label of "terrorist group" given to it by the United States and some other countries. Instead, he averred that Hamas is made up of "resistance fighters who are struggling to defend their land." Of course, Erdogan did not mention that the Palestinian group regularly attacks Jewish civilian targets, blowing up public buses and firing rockets and mortar shells at schools, shops and homes, which seems to be the very definition of terrorism.

RECOGNIZE US

While visiting Lebanon and Turkey, PA leader Abbas reiterated that he is planning to make a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood at UN headquarters in Manhattan this coming September. However in his Lebanese TV interview, he admitted for the first time publicly that such a declaration might be mute given that the Obama administration has announced it will veto any Security Council resolution endorsing the one-sided pronouncement. The American leader made his position clear during his late May meeting with PM Netanyahu in Washington, pleading for the Palestinians to re-enter peace negotiations with Israel instead of making unilateral declarations. Germany has also indicated that it will oppose the planned PA move, as have several other EU countries.

During his TV interview, Abbas claimed he has received the support of 116 UN member nations out of the current total of 192. However in an apparent reference to Obama's statements, he added that "negotiations are my preferred choice" for finally achieving Palestinian statehood. Israeli government officials dismissed the comments, saying that Abbas is not really interested in returning to peace talks at this time. They added that this was confirmed by his willingness to enter into a political alliance with a terrorist group that strongly rejects all attempts to make peace with Israel.

Mahmoud Abbas is not the only regional leader seeking international recognition. In an Israeli television interview conducted in late June, PM Binyamin Netanyahu repeated his May White House call for the Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. He said that the long and bitter Israeli-Palestinian conflict would end once and for all if Abbas would simply utter the phrase "I will accept the Jewish state." Noting that he endorsed the establishment of a Palestinian state next to Israel in 2009, the Israeli Premier said "Abbas must do what I did two years ago. He must stand up to his people and say, 'I will accept the Jewish state.' They can call their state Palestine or Arafat-land. I'm not talking about what they call it; but what it is. For them, it is the nation state of the Palestinian people. Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people. This means that the Palestinians go there, and Jews come here."

Opinion surveys showed in June that PM Netanyahu's popularity ratings were enhanced by his late-May public clash with President Obama after the US leader called for Israel to open peace negotiations with an offer to return to the 1967 pre-war ceasefire borders. Surveys showed that a majority of Israelis were pleased with Netanyahu's public response that such borders were "indefensible" and had to be adjusted to reflect new realities on the ground—a position earlier endorsed by the Bush administration. The Premier's obviously warm welcome during his stirring speech before Congress was praised by most commentators, even by some who disagree with the Likud leader's political positions.

FLOTILLA REDUX

Israeli military forces were busy during June getting ready for a new international attempt to break through the Israeli naval blockade of the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. Although the number of vessels expected to participate in what is being billed Freedom Flotilla Two dropped during the month as several governments around the world intervened to prevent their flagged ships from joining the joint sailing, it is still anticipated that many will do so, setting sail from around 22 countries. Among those ships that have been readied for the contentious voyage is the US-flagged Audacity of Hope, expected to carry around 35 American passengers including noted poet and author Alice Walker.

The US State Department issued a strong warning against the announced sailing on June 24th, saying it violated American law. The statement called the intended flotilla operation "irresponsible and provocative," noting that the Gaza Strip is ruled by a group labeled as a terrorist organization by the government. Therefore it added that any attempts to aid Hamas could result in fines or even jail terms. On top of this, the State Department pointed out that "established and efficient mechanisms exist to transfer humanitarian assistance to Gaza," urging that these methods be employed instead of the confrontational flotilla, which is expected to be turned back by IDF naval forces as occurred last year with deadly consequences.

With many serious dangers lurking on both land and sea, the tiny country of Israel is once again being tested to its core. While this is obviously a difficult process, it also sparks off fresh opportunities to "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord" (Isaiah 55: 6-7).

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.

TO RECEIVE THESE FREE ISRAEL UPDATES DIRECTLY, FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS BELOW. YOU WILL ONLY RECEIVE DAVID DOLAN'S UPDATE AND ANALYSIS INFORMATION FROM THIS ADDRESS. THE LIST WILL NOT BE TRADED OR SOLD.

TO SUBSCRIBE or to unsubscribe, go to: <http://www.ddolan.com/subscribe.asp>