

Israel News from David Dolan

Week of July 29, 2012

Shalom from Zion!

Actually, Israel is one of the only places in the turbulent Middle East where relative *shalom* is currently in effect. The main news in Israel during July was once again not something happening inside the Jewish State, but further major upheaval taking place in yet another Arab country located along Israel's borders, this time Egypt. The military ouster of President Muhammad Morsi from power after just one year in office, and its subsequent dramatic effects in the largest Arab country on earth, naturally dominated the Israeli news headlines all month. Israeli officials expressed strong concern that Egypt might be plunged into an ugly civil war. This came as violence escalated in the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula. Details of the seismic events unfolding in Egypt, the ongoing conflict in Syria, and the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process are below in this month's Israel news report.

I am pleased to announce that the publisher of one of my novels, 21st Century Press, has just released an electronic version of my first novel, titled *THE END OF DAYS*. The publisher noticed an increase this year in novel sales, which it published in 2005, probably connected to the fact that it begins with a military showdown between Israel and Syria involving Hizbullah, Iran and others. This in turn leads to the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy about the destruction of Damascus found in Isaiah 17. It is also the prequel for my second novel, *MILLENNIUM: THE LORD REIGNS*, which was published in 2011. The Amazon version for Kindle sells on the popular site for \$9.99. It will soon also become available for purchase on my web site, www.ddolan.com

TURMOIL SPREADS IN THE EXPLOSIVE MIDDLE EAST

By David Dolan

The turbulent Middle East continued to boil during July, with the Islamic fundamentalist president of Egypt being deposed by the military as fighting continued to rage in Syria and Iran continued to enrich uranium in defiance of much of the international community. While quietly welcoming the ouster of Muhammad Morsi from power in Cairo, Israeli officials expressed concern that civil war might now engulf Egypt as it has neighboring Syria, possibly spilling over Israel's shared southern border with Egypt next to the Sinai Peninsula.

Israeli warplanes once again became directly involved in the Syrian conflict during July, this time bombing a shipment of sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles that were earlier delivered to the Assad regime by Russian naval vessels. The missiles had been unloaded at a Syrian Mediterranean seaport used by the Russian navy. This came as the Kremlin vowed once again to back the Assad regime to the hilt. Military analysts said stepped up support from the Russian government and Iran, and also from Tehran's surrogate Lebanese militia force, have been turning the tide of battle in Assad's favor. Meanwhile thousands of Syrian civilians continued to pour over their shared borders with Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq to escape the fighting.

American Secretary of State John Kerry finally managed to persuade Israeli and Palestinian Authority negotiators to travel to Washington DC near the end of the month to focus on the possibility of restarting long-stalled peace negotiations between them. It took six trips to the region this year before the senior US diplomat was finally able to show some results from his intensive efforts to get the moribund peace process moving forward again. However most Israeli and Palestinian pundits said they were skeptical any real peace negotiations will actually take place, given the sharp divisions between the two sides on several core issues like the future of Jerusalem and what to do with several hundred thousand Israeli Jews who are currently residing in disputed territory claimed by the Palestinian Authority. The ongoing bitter split between the PA and the radical Palestinian Hamas movement is also an obvious major impediment to reaching a final peace accord at this time.

American media outlets reported during July that President Barack Obama has put forward a proposal regarding the Temple Mount in Jerusalem that echoes one floated earlier by Bill Clinton when he served as America's leader. It would give the Palestinian Authority and Jordan sovereign control over the Old City's Temple Mount, while everything underneath would remain under Israeli control. Israeli archeologists have conducted occasional digs under the elevated Temple Mount surface for several decades, with news reports saying they have discovered relics from the ancient Jewish temples at the site. Israeli archeologists announced during July that they had uncovered the remains of what many believe to be one of King David's palaces at a dig west of Jerusalem. A house that many archeologists say possibly belonged to the ancient Jewish prophet Elijah was also uncovered in the Jordan Valley.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made clear once again during July that his main goal at present is not to bring a final end to the conflict with the Palestinians, but to halt the nuclear enrichment program that is racing ahead in Iran. Media reports said he is putting quiet pressure on the Obama administration to bolster its earlier warnings that international military action will be taken if the Shiite Islamic Iranian government does not curtail its uranium enrichment activities, which the United Nations says has increased in velocity in recent months. Meanwhile an Israeli television network reported that Netanyahu believes some form of military action will become unavoidable by the end of this year if the uranium enrichment program continues, as most Middle East analysts predict it will.

MORSI OUSTED FROM POWER

Almost exactly one year after he was voted into office, Egyptian President Muhammad Morsi was booted out by the American-backed Egyptian army on July 3rd. The dramatic development came after several days of massive street protests in Cairo and other cities against Morsi, who was the first democratically elected President to ever serve in the large Arab country. The protestors, who included many secular Egyptians and members of the over eight million strong Coptic Christian community, demanded that the army drive Morsi from power. Speakers at the huge rallies pointed out that the Sunni Muslim leader had acted like a dictator on several occasions, overruling the elected parliament while ignoring protests from opposition politicians, judicial officials and military leaders.

Muhammad Morsi had served as a member of parliament from the year 2000 until 2005. He was a representative of a Muslim political party linked to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement. He had earlier been granted a government scholarship to study in the United States, where he received his PhD. In the wake of Hosni Mubarak's ouster from power in February 2011, Morsi was elected chairman of a new Muslim Brotherhood party that was dubbed the "Freedom and Justice Party." He became the party's candidate for president in the two-round Egyptian presidential election that was held in May and June of last year. In the final ballot, he defeated Ahmed Shafik, who had briefly served as Mubarak's last prime minister before the veteran leader was violently tossed out of office. Morsi triumphed with just 51.7 per cent of the national vote. Some opposition candidates declared that the election had been rigged in his favor in several locations.

Just five months after his electoral victory, Morsi announced that he was granting himself virtually unlimited powers in order to "protect the Egyptian people" from supposed unnamed threats against them. They included the power to legislate without judicial review, a move that was strongly denounced by the country's judges, many non-Muslim Brotherhood politicians and large sections of the vibrant Egyptian media. Morsi's announcement that he was assuming virtual dictatorial control in the Arab world's largest country sparked off fierce street protests, which led him to cancel the decree several weeks later. However many people pointed to evidence that the far reaching powers were still being deployed until Morsi was tossed out of office on July 3rd.

On the last day of June, mass street protests erupted once again across Egypt. Hundreds of thousands of protesters gathered in central Cairo demanding Morsi's departure. This came after widespread disruptions of electricity and fuel supplies occurred in many places during the second half of June. Muslim Brotherhood supporters maintained that military, political and business supporters of the former Mubarak government were behind the disruptions. Whatever the case, the resulting anti-Morsi rallies gave Egyptian military commanders the excuse they needed to seize power back from Morsi's Islamic fundamentalist party.

Military leaders announced that if the protesters demands that Morsi leave office were not met by July 3rd, the American-linked military would overthrow him, which it did. Claiming they were not staging a coup, army leaders then published a plan that included the temporary suspension of the Egyptian constitution, the dissolution of the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated parliament, and the establishment of a temporary emergency government headed by the Chief Justice of the Egyptian Supreme Court. The plan was publicly backed by Morsi's defense minister, General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, along with opposition leader and former Arab League Secretary General Muhammad El Baradi, and several religious leaders including Coptic Christian Pope Tawadros and a well-known Muslim cleric who serves as the Grand Imam of an Islamic university in Cairo.

CIVIL WAR IN EGYPT?

Naturally enough, the large Muslim Brotherhood movement and its supporters did not take Muhammad Morsi's ouster from power lying down. Pro-Morsi rallies were held in many Egyptian cities and towns as rumors circulated that the toppled President was being held in an undisclosed location by the army. In response to the rallies, additional large demonstrations were held by opponents of the dethroned Islamic fundamentalist leader.

Security forces struggled to keep the pro and anti-Morsi demonstrators separated, but there were still violent clashes and chaos in many locations, including in the Sinai Peninsula next to southern Israel. The Egyptian media was rife with speculation that a full on civil war may be brewing in the deeply divided nation, which has one of the highest birth rates of any country on earth.

It quickly became clear that the new man ruling Egypt was Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, who had served as an army general for many years before joining the Morsi cabinet as one of its few members not connected to the Muslim Brotherhood movement. In reaction to two weeks of widespread unrest, al-Sisi went on television and radio to encourage millions of Egyptians to take to the streets once again on July 26th to show support for the military action that ousted Muhammad Morsi. He stated that Egyptians must come out to demonstrate in order to give him the mandate he needs “to restore order as I confront violence and potential terrorism.” Soon after Al-Sisi spoke, a band of Muslim militants attacked a police station in the increasingly lawless Sinai Peninsula, killing two Egyptian soldiers and wounding several other people. Four of the armed attackers were shot dead by soldiers and policemen at the scene.

The call for Egyptians who backed the military’s action against Morsi to take to the streets prompted supporters of the ousted leader to organize their own rallies, where speakers demanded that the uprooted leader be reinstated to power. Violent clashes between supporters and opponents of the army intervention took place in Alexandria and other Egyptian cities. Military helicopters hovered over many of the anti-Morsi rallies, especially over Tahrir Square in Cairo. Many people in the large crowds held portraits of General Al-Sisi, dressed in his army ceremonial uniform.

WORLD CONCERN OVER EGYPT

International reactions to Muhammad Morsi’s ouster came quite swiftly, with many leaders noting that the country of 84 million people, half of them under the age of 20, is strategically located at the apex of Africa and Asia. Some pointed out that the economically vital Suez Canal lies entirely within Egyptian territory. The mushrooming Arab country receives 1.5 billion dollars in mostly military aid each year from the United States. The aid money was mandated by the peace treaty that then American President Jimmy Carter brokered between Egypt and Israel in 1978.

When news broke concerning Morsi’s ouster, it initially appeared that the Obama administration would react by condemning the military action. Indeed, a rebuke was issued by the State Department spokesman, who averred that Morsi was freely elected in the first democratic vote ever held in Egypt. However the American government had earlier denounced Morsi for acting like a dictator and for failing to quell violent Muslim fundamentalist attacks upon Coptic churches and the overall Christian community, which had been escalating ever since he was sworn in as President last summer.

Some American politicians demanded that the Obama administration immediately cut all financial aid to Egypt, in compliance with a law which states that all foreign US aid be halted to any allied country that is subjected to a military coup. The White House resisted this call, noting that Egypt is a very important US ally in a region that has become increasingly turbulent in recent years. However as a gesture of at least some unhappiness with the Egyptian military’s move, President Obama decided to halt the transfer of four new American-built F-16 jets that were scheduled to be delivered soon to the Egyptian air force.

On the same day as the pro and anti-Morsi rallies were taking place all over Egypt, military leaders confirmed earlier media reports that the deposed President was indeed being detained by them. They added that Morsi is now facing criminal charges, including murder. Similar charges were leveled against former President Hosni Mubarak after he was tossed out of office in February 2011. An Egyptian judge was given the task of investigating the raft of allegations of illegal activity that were raised against Morsi. Included in the allegations is the contention that Morsi secretly conspired with the radical Palestinian group Hamas, which the charges say helped him escape from an Egyptian jail in early 2011. Several Arab inmates and prison officers were killed while the jailbreak was taking place, and a number of others were wounded. Morsi and his conspirators then reportedly kidnapped some nearby soldiers and held them for ransom after allegedly setting fire to the jail building and to other nearby structures.

The Muslim Brotherhood movement issued swift condemnations of Morsi’s dramatic dethronement. The movement’s spokesman, Gehad El-Haddad, called for massive public protests to both continue and intensify. Speaking about the criminal allegations leveled against the ousted president, he stated that, “At the end of the day, we know all of these charges are nothing more than the fantasy of a few army generals and a military

dictatorship. We are continuing our protests on the streets.” A leading Muslim Brotherhood politician, Muhammad El-Beltagy, told a pro-Morsi rally that his supporters must be ready to die for their cause: “It is either victory over the coup or martyrdom.” The large crowd then began chanting that “Our blood and our souls are for Islam!”

OVER 100,000 KILLED IN SYRIAN WAR

The United Nations formally announced what the world media had been reporting already last month—that over 100,000 people have perished in the Syrian sectarian war. Fighting continued in many places during July. Military analysts said the tide of battle is now clearly going in Syrian dictator Bashar Assad’s direction. Most say this is mainly due to the increasing number of heavily armed and well trained Shiite Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Lebanese Hizbullah combatants who have joined the fray this year. Continuing Russian arms shipments to the Assad regime are also playing a factor in helping the regime reach its goal of defeating mostly Sunni Muslim opposition forces.

The United States government confirmed Middle East media reports that Israel was behind an attack on a batch of Russian missiles earlier this month in the Syrian port city of Latakia. The Kremlin maintains a naval base in the coastal city, which is its only outpost located on the strategic Mediterranean Sea. According to an anonymous American government source who spoke with the *New York Times* newspaper, Israeli warplanes bombed the Soviet-era missiles that had earlier been unloaded at the port. He added that the recent arrival of the Russian-built missiles on Syrian territory was of intense concern to both the United States and Israel. The source explained that the missiles have a longer range and a greater firepower than previous ones that have been unloaded at the port from Russian naval vessels. He also told the American newspaper that the missiles would have basically neutralized Israeli and American air force jets operating in the region, with the ability to both attack and destroy the warplanes from stationary positions in Syria. The Obama administration has warned that NATO forces might be ordered to enforce a no fly zone over Syria if the blood soaked war there continues to rage.

KERRY GETS THE BALL ROLLING

American Secretary of State John Kerry announced the second half of July that he had succeeded in persuading Israeli and Palestinian peace negotiators to travel to Washington for face to face talks. However the former senator, who has worked on Middle East issues for many years, including the peace processes between Israel and the Palestinians, Egypt and Jordan, made clear the talks would not be negotiations about the core issues dividing the two sides to the conflict. Instead, the Washington talks will focus on how best to resume the long-stalled negotiating process. Still, many Israeli pundits predicted that if the talks about talks go well, Kerry will attempt to keep the parties together in the American capital city in order to more quickly get the core negotiations going. At the same time, many Israeli and Palestinian pundits expressed great skepticism that the first round of talks would succeed, given the continuing Palestinian demand for a prior total cessation of all Jewish home building in the disputed territories, which in their definition includes the eastern half of Jerusalem where several hundred thousand Jews reside today.

Despite its limited scope at present, the Secretary of State congratulated himself for what he termed “a significant step forward.” However he also acknowledged the many obstacles in the way of a final peace accord, including the continuing Hamas rule in the Palestinian Gaza Strip. Hamas itself issued a rapid condemnation of Kerry’s announcement, saying in a statement that Israel must disappear from the regional map, not live in peace with a Palestinian state next door. Iran and Hizbullah echoed those sentiments.

Grumbles over the possible resumption of the moribund peace process were heard from some Israeli government cabinet ministers. Members of the Jewish Home party in particular are known to oppose the resumption of the peace process at this time. Party leader Naftali Bennett has said he does not believe that a peace deal is possible at all with the Palestinians if they continue to demand control over portions of Jerusalem and at least most of the rest of the disputed territory that Jordan held until the 1967 Six Day War. Opinion surveys taken by both Israeli and Palestinian newspapers in the wake of Kerry’s announcement revealed that both publics are also skeptical that any fresh negotiations will actually end the long and bitter dispute between the two ethnically related peoples.

The Israeli negotiating team in Washington is being headed by Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, who formerly served as both Foreign Minister and chairman of the centrist Kadima Party. She had made the negotiation of a final peace deal with the Palestinians a central plank in her new party’s platform. The Palestinian delegation is

being led by veteran PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat, who was heavily involved in pounding out the American-brokered Oslo Accord that was signed between the late Israeli Prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat on the White House lawn in 1993.

In an apparent gesture of good will, the Israeli cabinet voted on July 27th to release all remaining Palestinian prisoners who were not directly involved in planning or carrying out deadly terror attacks on Israeli civilians. Erekat welcomed the decision, but said it should have occurred soon after the original Oslo pact was signed. He added that the Palestinian Authority will continue to work for the release of all Palestinians prisoners who remain behind bars, whatever crimes they were convicted of by Israeli courts. The Israeli cabinet decision to release many Palestinian prisoners came just one day before Israeli and Palestinian teams were set to begin their technical pre-negotiation talks in the American capital city.

As the reality of war and the talk of peace swirled in the region during July, the God of Israel remained firmly enthroned in heaven. He is the same Sovereign Lord who *“forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what are His thoughts. He who makes the dawn into darkness and treads of the high places of the earth, the Lord of Hosts is His name (Amos 4:13).*

DAVID DOLAN is a Jerusalem-based author and journalist who has lived and worked in Israel since 1980. His latest book, a novel titled MILLENNIUM: THE LORD REIGNS is available for purchase at his web site, <http://www.ddolan.com/> in both printed and electronic versions at special introductory prices. His first novel, THE END OF DAYS, which is a companion work to the new novel, is available for a very low price of just \$5.00.

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 authors 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).

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