

# RICE SUMMIT WILL LEAD TO PALESTINIAN STATE?

Chief negotiator expects meetings this month to result in 'bold' moves

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*Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: There will be a very high price to pay (in the form of God's judgment) by those who are selling Israel down the path of land withdrawal. The Bible predicts that world leaders will divide Israel's land, but doing so will bring the wrath of God on their heads.*



Saeb Erekat

*Joel 3:1 "For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, 2 I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land. (NKJ)*

[Click here to listen](#) to a related song written by our assistant pastor, Jeremy McLellan.

JERUSALEM - The Palestinians are expecting a summit slated for later this month mediated by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to lead to final status negotiations and the establishment of a Palestinian state, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told WND in an interview today.

"I seriously believe Israel and the Palestinians will use the summit to move in the direction of final status negotiations and a solution,

because I think we are realizing the only way to create peace is a Palestinian state," Erekat said.

Erekat was referring to a trilateral summit planned for Feb. 19 and announced yesterday by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. The talks will include Olmert, Rice and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. Olmert described the summit as a "significant" bid to restart long stalled Israeli-Palestinian talks.

Israeli and Palestinian diplomatic sources told WND Olmert is expected to use the summit to offer Abbas far-reaching concessions.

Asked if he expects the summit to pave the way toward an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, Erekat replied, "I don't want to create any expectations, but I will say I believe the summit will bring about bold and strategic initiatives in the direction of a Palestinian state."

The new momentum created by the summit comes after WND broke the story last month that, according to top European and Egyptian diplomatic sources, Israel has been conducting behind-the-scene negotiations to hand over most of the West Bank to Abbas' security forces.

The sources, who said they were directly involved in behind-the-scene negotiations, said one proposal being considered is for the EU and Jordan to supervise the transfer of the northern West Bank to Abbas' security forces, which reportedly are receiving aid, weapons and training from the U.S.

The sources said major changes in Israeli-Palestinian affairs are expected within a few weeks to two months.

According to an aide to EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana, speaking on condition of anonymity, there will be a "historic political evolution and movement in negotiations in the next few weeks and few months, unseen since the Camp David peace talks in 2000."

During the Camp David talks, then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered then-Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat a state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and eastern sections of Jerusalem.

According to the diplomatic sources, still being debated in the

purported West Bank negotiations is the role of Hamas, which leads the PA and maintains the majority of seats in the Palestinian parliament. Negotiations between Abbas and Hamas leaders for a national unity government have mostly fallen through.

So far, Hamas has refused to recognize Israel but recently offered a 10-year truce with the Jewish state. In a series of interviews last week, Hamas leaders told WND that during any 10-year truce period they would build a large Palestinian army and plan for the destruction of Israel.

Olmert yesterday said he would negotiate with a Palestinian government that includes the Hamas terror group as long as Hamas recognizes Israel.

Olmert's office denied the WND reports on negotiations to evacuate the West Bank.

"There were no negotiations regarding a West Bank withdrawal. This would go contrary to other things we have said in the recent past," said Olmert's spokesperson, Miri Eisin.

"Perhaps the officials talking to WorldNetDaily were referring to general expectations for movement in the Israeli-Palestinian arena," Eisin said.

But the European and Egyptian sources stood by their statements that Israel agreed in principal to transfer West Bank security control to Abbas.

Israeli leaders previously have denied reports of pending withdrawals only to later carry them out. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, elected in 2001 on a platform against unilateral withdrawal, at first denied media reports Israel was planning to evacuate the Gaza Strip but later announced his Gaza withdrawal plan.

Olmert was elected prime minister on the platform of carrying out a withdrawal from the West Bank, but after this summer's Lebanon war, he has stated a West Bank withdrawal would not occur.

Olmert in August called the policy of unilateral withdrawal a "failure" and said it was "no longer relevant." But he can argue handing the West Bank to Abbas in an agreement is not unilateral.

Contradicting Olmert, Israeli Interior Minister Roni Bar-On of Olmert's Kadima party said last summer, "The withdrawal plan is not dead, though its implementation has been postponed. The plan is now on the shelf or in the freezer, but when the time comes it will be accessed."

### **Olmert's party proposes handing West Bank to Europe**

At Israel's prestigious Herzliya Conference last month, Knesset Member Shlomo Breznitz, reportedly a close confidante of Olmert, said the West Bank should be transferred temporarily to the Europeans and that most of the territory's Jewish communities should be evacuated.

"The only way to get out of the impasse is to transfer the territories, for a limited time, to an international mandate, that will run them until the establishment of a Palestinian state," said Breznitz at the conference.

The Herzliya Conference is attended by Israel's top leadership and regularly maps out the country's agenda for the coming year. In 2004, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced his plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip at the conference.

Breznitz told Israel's Maariv daily newspaper the West Bank should be transferred to the European community and not the U.S. because, he said, after the invasion of Iraq, America "lost its status as an honest broker in the view of the Palestinians and the Arab states."

Breznitz said his West Bank transfer proposal received a warm reception from European and Palestinian officials.

"I have reason to believe, and I don't want to expand on this, that the Palestinians will support the proposal. Ambassadors and diplomatic representatives from European countries who were shown the proposal also believe that without international help it will not be possible to resolve the conflict," said Breznitz.

According to the Israel Resource News Agency, Olmert regularly consults with Breznitz and is known to spend vacation time with the Breznitz family.

### **Israelis against West Bank withdrawal**

Several recent public opinion polls showed the majority of Israelis now oppose a West Bank withdrawal. The leaders of Egypt and Jordan have expressed reservations about withdrawal plans, fearing terrorism can spill over into their respective countries.

Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000. It had occupied a small section of Lebanon's border with Israel following repeated attacks by Palestinian terrorists in the area. Since the withdrawal, Hezbollah has staged numerous attacks against Israel, including rocket bombardments of civilian population centers, raids against military outposts and ambushes and kidnappings of Israeli troops. Hezbollah built an arsenal in south Lebanon of more than 13,000 short- and medium-range rockets capable of hitting central sections of the Jewish state

Israel withdrew last August from the Gaza Strip. Since then, rockets have been fired almost daily into nearby Jewish communities, Hamas has been elected to power and both Israeli and Palestinian officials have stated al-Qaida has infiltrated the territory. Israel says the Palestinians have smuggled hundreds of tons of heavy weaponry into Gaza and are preparing for a large-scale confrontation.