

# David Dolan Update on Israel March 07 News Report

by David Dolan

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## **Shalom from Jerusalem!**

Below is this month's news and analysis report, covering important occurrences during March in Israel and the Middle East. The new Hamas-run Palestinian government is examined, along with a growing leadership crisis in Israel and increasing signs that fresh military clashes between Israel and several of her declared enemies are brewing in the troubled region.

I will be appearing twice as a panelist during the coming weeks on the "Front Page Jerusalem" network radio program broadcast throughout America, coming from the Jerusalem Post newspaper headquarters here in Jerusalem. It can also be heard anytime around the world via their internet web site, at <http://www.frontpagejerusalem.com/> I also continue to do twice weekly "Eye on the Middle East" radio commentary updates for the Friends of Israel group, broadcast during the nationwide "Janet Parshall's America" program and on several other networks. The reports, normally broadcast on Tuesdays and Thursdays, can also be heard via the FOI website, located at <http://resources.christianity.com/default/fois.aspx> FOI director Dr. Elwood McQuaid produces the daily reports on other weekdays. I am also scheduled to be a guest for one hour on the national Dallas-based radio program "Politics and Religion" on Monday, April 16, broadcast live at 3:00 Central time. Meanwhile I continue to report weekly news updates for the Moody Broadcasting Network's "Prime Time America" program, usually on Monday's, and also for the Saturday "Prophecy Today" radio program hosted by Jimmy DeYoung. Both updates can also be accessed anytime on their web sites.

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## **HAMAS CLINGS TO JIHAD AGAINST ISRAEL**

By David Dolan

The new Palestinian unity government, featuring nine Hamas cabinet members and six from the once-dominant PLO Fatah party, was sworn in during March to the applause of many leaders and media pundits around the world. But in Israel, the reaction was mainly consternation when the new government's platform revealed that the radical Hamas movement was not budging one iota from its long declared goal of wiping out the planet's sole Jewish state.

Meanwhile speculation grew that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert may be forced out of office in the coming months after it was learned that he will be chastised in an official interim report concerning last summer's Lebanon war, to be issued during April. This came as indications multiplied that Syria and its surrogate Lebanese Hizbullah militia force, backed by Iran, may be preparing for conflict with Israel in the coming months.

Palestinian leaders expressed satisfaction when their new national unity government was unveiled in mid-March. But Israeli officials quickly noted that the government's published guidelines fell far short of meeting Israeli and international demands that the main coalition party, Hamas, formally renounce terrorist violence, recognize Israel's permanent right to exist as a Jewish-ruled country in the mainly Muslim Middle East, and pledge to abide by all previous peace accords signed between the PLO and Israel.

The new PA government's platform was aptly termed "strategically crafted ambiguity" by Khaled Abu Toameh, a prominent Arab-Israeli political analyst who writes for the Jerusalem Post newspaper. He noted that the official guidelines were apparently designed "to appease not only Hamas and Fatah, but also the Americans and Europeans." Toameh added that both Fatah and Hamas can claim that the platform reflects their own particular views since it "contains many contradictions and ambiguities."

## **FIGHTING WORDS**

The unity government plank that most upset Israeli leaders was the Hamas-inspired proclamation that "the new government stresses that resistance in all forms is a legitimate right of the Palestinian people, and our people have the right to defend themselves against any Israeli aggression." Of course, Hamas leaders realize that Israeli military forces withdrew completely from the entire Gaza Strip in September 2005, having earlier left most Palestinian population centers in Judea and Samaria in full compliance with the 1993 and 1995 Oslo peace accords. They have occasionally returned to carry out operations inside the evacuated areas, but only in response to ongoing Palestinian terrorist and rockets assaults into Israeli cities and towns that were launched from or planned in PA zones of control.

Such IDF action, in response to major violations of Yasser Arafat's written 1993 commitment to halt all Palestinian terrorist violence against Israel, can hardly be termed "aggression," note Israeli leaders. Indeed, military operations are a natural and, unfortunately, entirely necessary reaction to unjustified terrorist assaults against Israel, such as last June's unprovoked Hamas cross border attack next to the Gaza Strip that left two ambushed IDF soldiers dead and one kidnapped. Therefore PA "resistance" to IDF actions that come in response to Palestinian terrorist atrocities and rocket launchings can never be considered as legitimate or acceptable to Israel or to the international community.

The fact that Hamas intends to carry on with its war-mongering terrorist

“resistance” was made clear in a speech delivered to the Palestinian legislature by PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. Speaking just before his new government won overwhelming endorsement from the Hamas dominated body on March 17, the old/new cabinet leader stressed that “all forms of resistance” will continued to be sanctioned by his unity government “until all occupation forces leave our land.” This will apparently include additional terror atrocities, kidnappings and cross border rocket assaults.

## **MORE THAN HOT AIR**

Israeli analysts said PM Haniyeh’s verbal blast reflected another ambiguous plank in the new PA government’s platform. Israel is not referred to even once by name in the official document. Instead it is chillingly referred to as “The Occupation.” This reflects the long-held Hamas position that ALL of “Palestine” is “illegally occupied by Zionist forces.” In other words, Tel Aviv, Tiberius, Haifa and Eilat are all destined for ultimate “liberation” from detested Israeli control, along with Nablus, Jericho, Gaza City and Bethlehem.

This extremist Hamas position, echoed by Iran, Hizbullah and Al Qaida, was reinforced by another statement contained in the new government’s platform: “The key to peace and stability is contingent on ending the occupation of Palestinian lands and recognizing the Palestinian people’s right to self determination.” Khaled Abu Toameh pointed out that the vague statement does not specify which “lands” are supposedly occupied—those upon which Israel was established in 1948 under United Nations auspices, or those areas captured by IDF forces in 1967. This unclear wording allows the formerly dominant PLO Fatah movement and the recently empowered Hamas group to each claim that their conflicting positions are fully reflected in the statement.

Israeli officials were satisfied when the Bush Administration was joined by EU countries in announcing that the new government did not meet the minimum requirements for recognition spelled out by the Quartet members in early 2006. This position was later endorsed by visiting United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, who also repeated calls for the immediate release of Hamas-captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit.

But Israeli officials were unhappy when the new UN chief from South Korea met with three non-Hamas members of the newly installed PA cabinet. This was compounded when non-EU member Norway announced it would fully recognize and work with the PA unity government. Disappointment was also expressed over visiting US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s decision to meet in late March with new PA Finance Minister Salam Fayad, one of several independent non-Hamas members appointed to the PA unity cabinet. Israeli officials argued that holding discussions with such relatively moderate PA cabinet ministers was effectively endorsing the legitimacy of the entire Hamas-led government.

During her latest visit to Jerusalem, Rice announced that she would launch

separate talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders to determine their exact positions on the creation of a Palestinian state, which the Bush Administration strongly advocates. She said the aim of such talks is to lay the groundwork for the formal resumption of negotiations between the two sides, suspended after the Palestinians launched their Al Aksa terrorist attrition war in late 2000. Ironically, her announcement came as thousands of Israelis were preparing to march to the site of an uprooted Jewish community in Samaria called Homesh, which was evacuated by the Sharon government in September 2005. Some of the marchers vowed to stay at the site and begin to rebuild the settlement in violation of Olmert government orders.

## **NOT ENOUGH**

Overall PA leader and Fatah chairman Mahmoud Abbas stressed in his speech to the PA parliament that the new Hamas-led government had agreed to “respect previous peace accords” with Israel that were negotiated and signed by his PLO predecessors. But PM Haniyeh and other Hamas leaders made clear that they only interpret this to mean that the new government “acknowledges” that such accords do in fact exist, but not that they are now suddenly ready to actually implement them.

On top of this, both Abbas and Haniyeh maintained that the so-called “Palestinian right of return” will remain a central demand in any future peace talks with Israel. The Palestinian leadership is also expected to make this a central issue at an Arab League summit meeting in Saudi Arabia the end of March. Most Israeli analysts agree that clinging to this demand would doom peace negotiations from the outset, given that it is apparently designed to destroy Israel from within by swamping the country with millions of Palestinian refugees from the 1948 and 1967 wars and their offspring.

Israeli leaders note that at least two-thirds of all such refugees are already living in Jordan’s former West Bank or in the Gaza Strip—areas designated for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Israeli officials insist that these Palestinians must remain in PA-controlled areas, outside of Israel proper, as part of any final peace accord. If even a substantial minority were allowed to settle inside Israel, it would ensure that the Arab-Israeli conflict continues for many years to come—which is apparently precisely what Hamas and other extremist Palestinian groups and their international Muslim fundamentalist backers desire.

## **NON STARTERS AND GLORIOUS BOMBERS**

Prime Minister Olmert told his cabinet ministers that the new PA government guidelines do not meet any of the three requirements for recognition put forth by the Quartet peace plan sponsors after the initial Hamas-dominated government was formed in early 2006. The Israeli cabinet then voted overwhelmingly to maintain Israel’s boycott of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, although it sanctioned further dealings with overall PA head Abbas. But Olmert made clear he will scale back

contacts with Abbas and other Fatah officials since they have now formally partnered with Hamas, despite the militant group's refusal to alter its core rejectionist positions.

The cabinet decision came just as Hamas terrorists were busy concretely demonstrating that the radical Muslim movement has not changed its spots. Shots were fired at a 42 year old Israeli electrician working on a kibbutz near the Gaza border fence on March 18. He was rushed to hospital with moderate wounds. An official Hamas statement was then issued in Gaza City claiming that the group carried out the attack "on a Zionist agent." It was the first time Hamas has formally claimed responsibility for a terrorist shooting since a ceasefire with Israel went into effect last November. A spokesman for PM Olmert said that "When the PA openly endorses resistance as the only way to end the occupation; no one should be surprised when Hamas followers respond by committing acts of terrorism."

Several days before the attack, Egyptian officials announced that they had arrested a Palestinian wearing an explosive belt, who confessed to being on his way to slaughter Israeli tourists visiting the Sinai Peninsula. Over 100 tourists, many of them Egyptians, have been killed in terror attacks in the area since October 2004.

Further confirming that the governing Hamas movement will authorize future terror attacks against Israelis, a Hamas-run TV station in the Gaza Strip broadcast a "music video" on March 21 that exploited children to promote such deadly homicide assaults. Considered by Israeli media observers to be among the most disgusting things to have ever appeared on Palestinian television, the video features a young girl singing the praises of Re'em Riyahsi, a Palestinian mother of two who killed four IDF soldiers in 2004 when she blew herself up next to a border crossing outpost into the Gaza Strip. Her attack is briefly recreated in the video.

The child singing the female terrorist's praises is supposedly her daughter, named in the video as Duha, who initially expresses confusion when she and her younger brother learn that their mother has killed herself while carrying out a suicide assault. But by the end of the song, the young singer reveals that she now understands that the deadly attack was meant to help achieve the Islamic goal of destroying Jewish rule over Jerusalem. These words are sung while a picture of the Dome of the Rock Muslim shrine flashes on the screen, followed by one of the female attacker dressed in white, supposedly enjoying paradise with Islam's "Messenger Muhammad." Even more distressing, the video ends with the young girl fondling a stick of dynamite, apparently intending to become a female terrorist bomber herself, while repeating three times that she is "following mommy in her steps."

## **BILLOWING WAR CLOUDS**

Israeli military commanders confirmed widespread media reports during March that they are preparing their forces for a possible major incursion into the Gaza Strip in the coming months if Palestinian rockets continue to rain

down upon Israeli cities near the PA zone, and if abducted soldier Gilad Shalit is not released by his Hamas captors. This came as Israeli leaders expressed fresh concerns over a Hizbullah weapons buildup in Lebanon and apparent Syrian war preparations north of the Golan Heights, and as former armed forces chief Moshe Ya'alon said that an Israeli confrontation with Iran had become "inevitable" in the not too distant future.

Defense Minister Amir Peretz—widely expected to lose an internal Labor party leadership challenge this coming May—told visiting UN chief Ban Ki-Moon on March 25 that Hizbullah is receiving large quantities of smuggled weapons from Syria in complete violation of UN resolution 1701, which formally ended last summer's war (officially labeled by the Israeli government in March as "The Second Lebanon War"). He warned that such action "threatens to undermine the stability that exists today in south Lebanon."

The Defense Minister's comments came amid fresh media reports detailing an ongoing and ominous Syrian military buildup along the contested Golan Heights border with Israel. According to Israeli intelligence sources quoted in the reports, the Assad regime has been constructing new military hardware storage facilities and fuel depots not far from the border and moving hundreds of rockets into forward positions. Although UN peacekeeping forces stationed in the area have so far not reported any unusual Syrian military personnel buildup along the border, the construction work and rocket movements are assessed as definite precursors for possible military action in the coming months.

Another disturbing development was reported by CNN during March—the construction by Iran of a strategic electronic listening outpost near the Golan Heights, apparently designed to pick up any early radar indications of Israeli Air Force jets heading east in the direction of Iran. This came just before Iranian Defense Minister Mustafa Muhammad Najjar visited Damascus to sign a "merger pact" with the Assad regime, joining the two countries armed forces into one effective force. While studying the practical effects of the disturbing merger announcement, Israeli military analysts said it definitely strengthens Iran's vow that any Western attack upon its burgeoning nuclear program will be met by a Syrian military response against Israel, among many other threatened belligerent reactions.

The Jerusalem Post headlined a story on March 23 claiming that an American and/or Israeli military strike upon Iran's nuclear facilities is likely before the end of 2007. The report was published just hours before elite Iranian naval forces took captive 15 British sailors operating in the northern Persian Gulf, and one day before UN sanctions against Iran were unanimously stiffened by the 15 Security Council members in New York. The newspaper report stated that US and Israeli officials believe Iran will have enriched enough uranium by the end of this year to produce substantial radiation fallout if an assault upon its nuclear facilities is delayed beyond then. It said elaborate evacuation plans are being formulated by foreign embassies operating in Tehran in anticipation of likely military action

against Iran's nuclear program, which the radical theocratic Iranian regime said will continue despite international demands that it be immediately halted.

## **NUMBERED DAYS?**

With military action seemingly very likely later this year involving Palestinian Hamas and Lebanese Hizbullah forces, and possibly Syria and Iran as well, Israeli political analysts say there could not be a worse time for a deep leadership crisis to be plaguing the country. But that is exactly what is occurring, with the government-appointed Winograd Commission due to publish a scathing report on last year's Lebanon war in late April that will reportedly thrash PM Olmert and DM Peretz for allegedly mishandling the conflict. This comes as serious criminal charges including rape, are pending against President Moshe Katzav, and as fraud and corruption allegations were unveiled against Finance Minister Avraham Herschson.

Calls for both Olmert and Peretz to resign grew during March. Among those demanding that Olmert immediately step down was opposition leader Binyamin Netanyahu, who continues to top opinion polls as the Israeli public's first choice to replace Olmert (who admitted in a mid-March speech to Kadima party officials that he is "an unpopular premier"). Following close behind is Kadima's female foreign minister Tzipi Livni.

The resignation calls were bolstered in late March when testimony given to the Winograd Commission by Deputy PM Shimon Peres was published. The former Labor party leader claimed he would not have gone to war against Hizbullah forces last summer, nor spelled out "unreachable goals," as he inferred Olmert did. Meanwhile opinion surveys suggest that Ehud Barak will oust Peretz as Labor party chief in an internal leadership vote scheduled for early May, prompting the former premier to announce that he may pull his party out of Olmert's coalition if he wins the contest, which analysts say would cause the government to collapse.

With military and political tremors shaking this extremely troubled region like waves rolling in from the sea, it is most comforting to recall that Israel's Sovereign Lord has long ago revealed what the ultimate outcome will be: "Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him." (Isaiah 40:10).

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