

Israel News from David Dolan

Week of May 24, 2010

Shalom!

I am preparing to return to Israel after an absence of several months, hosting a tour there beginning next week. I am looking forward very much to being back in the Promised Land once again. This coming November will mark 30 years that I have lived in the land, well over half of my life. It was nice to see some of you during my speaking engagements on both coasts of the United States, in Texas and in Australia. When I was in Dallas two weeks ago, I taped two television programs that focused on current events in Israel and the prospects of war with Iran. The interviews will be broadcast very soon on the *Zola Levitt Presents* program, and can be viewed on their web site, along with many television stations in the United States and on some cable channels all over the world. My daily radio reports, titled *Eye on the Middle East*, are now airing on over 700 radio stations all over America. They can also be heard on the *Friends of Israel* web site, the group that sponsors the broadcasts.

Below is my latest monthly Israel news update. As the headline declares, it mainly deals with the prospects for war in the Middle East this summer. It has become fairly clear that Iran is working overtime to ratchet up tensions in the region in an apparent attempt to engulf Israeli military forces in local armed conflicts, with the goal being to deflect a possible IDF strike on its rogue nuclear program. While Israeli government and military leaders are preparing for any possibility, as detailed below, it seems that they are doing all that they can to thwart Iran's nefarious designs. I have heard of plots to assassinate Israeli military and political leaders in order to spark off a conflict—please pray that these plots come to nothing.

ISRAEL NOT PLANNING ATTACK ON SYRIA

By David Dolan

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu forcefully stated during May that his government is not planning any military action against either Syrian or Hizbullah forces in the coming weeks and months. However he again charged that the extremist Shiite regime ruling Iran is pushing the leaders of Syria and Hizbullah to wage war against Israel in order to deflect a possible IDF attack upon Iran's burgeoning nuclear program.

A senior Israeli military leader said that the relatively small Hizbullah militia force currently has more deadly weapons at its disposal than many countries possess. This statement came after an IDF military intelligence officer revealed that Syria is smuggling M-600 medium range missiles into Lebanon that are capable of striking the main army headquarters in central Tel Aviv.

Meanwhile Russian media reports said that the Kremlin plans to sell highly sophisticated weapons to Damascus, including jet fighters. The two countries were close allies during the Soviet era, with the Kremlin pushing Syria to go to war against Israel in both 1967 and 1973. A senior Israeli official said that North Korea is also sending weapons of mass destruction to Syria after helping the country build its first nuclear reactor, which Israeli warplanes destroyed in 2006. Israeli officials also rebuked their Russian counterparts for coddling the radical Palestinian Hamas movement which rules the Gaza Strip.

Syrian President Bashar Assad claimed during May that Israeli President Shimon Peres had offered him the full return of the Golan Heights if he agreed to sever all ties with Iran and stop smuggling weapons to Hizbullah. However Peres denied that he had made such an offer, although he did confirm he had sent a message to Assad via Russian leaders.

The Obama administration assured concerned Israeli leaders that the US will not support efforts by Egypt, Turkey and other nations to focus international scrutiny on Israel's nuclear program. Although officially allied with Israel, both Muslim governments have been urging the Americans to place Israel's reported nuclear weapons in the spotlight.

Indirect peace talks finally got going between Palestinian Authority and Israeli negotiators during May, mediated by the United States. But a former Israeli Foreign Minister predicted that the talks will fail since the Palestinians remain bitterly divided between supporters of Hamas, who reject all peace talks with the "Zionist enemy," and PLO Fatah party backers who generally back the peace process.

SYRIAN WAR TALK ROCKS REGION

Israel's senior government leaders again strongly denied Arab media reports that they are planning a summertime military offensive against Lebanon's Hizbullah militia force and/or Syria. During a visit to the IDF's Northern Command outpost on May 11, Prime Minister Netanyahu charged that Iran is "spreading lies in order to escalate regional tensions." He added that Israel "wants security, stability and peace, and has no intention of attacking its neighbors, contrary to the false rumors which have been spread on the subject."

The Israeli leader also said that he is "ready to enter peace talks with Syria without preconditions, just like we are now doing with the Palestinians." However Syrian dictator Bashar Assad told the Lebanese *As Safir* newspaper one week later that "We do not trust the Israelis, and are ready for war or peace at any moment." He added that "armed resistance" to Israel was a necessary tool in the regional Muslim arsenal.

In the same interview, Assad claimed that Israeli President Shimon Peres sent him a message via Russian President Dimitry Medvedev in mid May, offering a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, which IDF forces captured from Damascus in June 1967. Assad maintained that Peres made clear that such an evacuation of nearly 20,000 Jewish residents living on the strategic plateau, located just above Israel's Upper Galilee region which is home to several hundred thousand Israelis, would take place if Syria severs all ties with Iran and stops supporting terror groups like Hizbullah and Hamas.

Peres' office in Jerusalem later confirmed that a message to Assad was delivered by the Russian President when he visited Damascus in mid May. However the statement did not include an offer of a total Israeli withdrawal in exchange for the conditions mentioned by Assad. Instead Peres stressed that "Israel has no plans to attack Syria" and is "prepared to immediately engage in peace talks with the Syrians." But he also sternly added that Israeli government leaders would "not allow Syria to continue to two-time Israel by demanding a withdrawal from the Golan Heights on the one hand, while setting up Iranian missiles on the mountains of the North on the other."

Israeli officials expressed alarm over media reports stating that the Kremlin has sealed a massive weapons deal with Syria. The reports said the deal is worth over one billion US dollars, and would include new MIG-29 warplanes, Pantsir anti-aircraft missiles and artillery systems. The Israeli media said government officials fear that at least some of the weapons are actually being paid for by Syria's main regional ally, Iran, and may later be transferred to the hostile Shiite country.

A senior official in the Foreign Ministry told reporters off the record that "We have raised concerns with the Russians as to their weapons sales to the region, at the highest level." He added that "We have seen Russian weapons that have been given and sold to different countries harboring terrorist groups. We think it is a problem when states that oppose peace and reconciliation and are part of the extremist axis receive military support."

MORE MISSILES DELIVERED TO HIZBULLAH FORCES

Israeli military officials revealed during May that yet another powerful type of missile is being smuggled into Lebanon from Syria. Brigadier General Yossi Baidatz, who heads the IDF's military intelligence research department, told a Knesset parliamentary committee that medium-range M-600 solid fuel rockets are now in Hizbullah's deadly arsenal. The rockets are patterned after an Iranian rocket known as the Fateh-110. It can deliver a half ton warhead to a distance of well over 200 miles, meaning most Israeli cities and military bases are well within striking distance of the Syrian rocket. More ominously, the rocket can also reach Israel nuclear reactor in Dimona, near the Negev Desert city of Beersheva.

Baidatz said Syria's transfer of even more powerful Scud D missile parts to the Iranian-funded Lebanese militia was only the "tip of the iceberg" of what amounts to a very dangerous ongoing smuggling operation over the western Syrian border with Lebanon. He confirmed media reports that the Syrians have been cleverly disassembling the large missiles and then secretly spiriting them into Lebanon in food trucks and other civilian vehicles. Once the missile parts are delivered to Hizbullah militiamen, they are reassembled by Syrian and Iranian experts.

A report published by the American *Time* magazine during May maintained that Hizbullah forces are itching for a new fight with Israel. The article said that "Recent conversations with Hizbullah fighters reveal an organization at the peak of its military powers, with an army of well-trained, disciplined and highly motivated combatants wielding advanced weaponry, cultivating new tactics and brimming with confidence."

In light of increasing talk of a possible large-scale military conflict in the Middle East in the coming months or years, military and medical exercises have been held in Israel every month this year. One of the latest drills featured a simulated nuclear attack on Tel Aviv. The IDF's Home Front command staged the exercise at the large Sheba Medical Center to test the hospital's readiness to treat victims suffering from various radiation injuries. Participating doctors and nurses used radiation monitors to help rid the volunteer "victims" of simulated radiation poisoning.

Home Front commanders said the exercise was very successful, helping both the military and the health system to prepare for a possible future nuclear attack. A week-long nationwide

military exercise involving all branches of the IDF aided by local police forces, government officials and medical personnel is currently underway. Hizbullah officials said they were mobilizing their forces, claiming the drills might be a cover for an imminent IDF attack.

Meanwhile, notorious Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's chief of staff, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, told reporters on May 19 that, "If the Zionist regime attacks Iran, the Zionists will have no longer than a week to live." Israeli analysts said this might be a hint that Iran already has some sort of nuclear warheads aimed at Israel—probably relatively small ones controlled by Iranian Revolutionary Guard units operating in Lebanon. The ominous statement came just two days before a major American naval strike force set sail from Virginia to the Persian Gulf under orders from President Obama. Officials said at least four aircraft carriers will be in the area by late July. For the first time ever, a German frigate will join the force under direct US command.

CUTTING TIES WITH HAMAS

Egyptian newspaper reports said that the government headed by President Hosni Mubarak has decided to cut off all contact with the radical Palestinian Hamas movement. Egyptian diplomats had been negotiating with Hamas leaders in an attempt to breach the deep rift between the group and the Palestinian Authority, which was violently ousted from the Gaza Strip by Hamas fighters in June 2007. An unnamed senior Egyptian official quoted by the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Mesryoon* said the decision to sever all ties was in response to "the organized media campaign that Hamas officials are waging against Egyptian figures, by defaming them in Arab satellite television stations and in Arab media." Hamas officials complain that Egyptian soldiers have been preventing needed commercial goods from crossing into Gaza from the nearby Egyptian-ruled Sinai Peninsula. Egypt says its efforts are aimed at preventing more Iranian-supplied weapons from being smuggled into the Gaza Strip via illegal tunnels dug under the international border. Hamas leaders also alleged that some 30 Hamas detainees are being tortured in Egyptian jails.

Israeli diplomats warned Turkey and several European countries that a planned Mediterranean Sea aid convoy scheduled to sail to the Gaza Strip will not be allowed to pass Israeli naval vessels that regularly patrol coastal waters. Pro-Hamas activists from Turkey, Greece, Ireland and Sweden are planning to accompany the aid, packed on several large boats.

Naor Gilon, who heads the European desk at the Israeli Foreign Ministry, said the planned mission was "provocative" in that it deliberately ignored longstanding government regulations for the transfer of foreign aid into the Gaza Strip. "Israel has no intention of allowing these sailboats to land in Gaza," he told journalists. Gilon added that several European diplomats had expressed sympathy for his position, saying they would try to prevent their country's citizens from participating in the planned trip. Israeli officials did allow over 30 tons of construction materials to enter the coastal zone during May, designed to help rebuild a hospital that was heavily damaged in the Cast Lead military operation in January 2009. Hamas fighters had used the hospital's grounds as a launching pad for Kassam rockets during the conflict.

Israeli officials rebuked the Kremlin for “coddling” Hamas leaders, saying that Russia should know better than to lend its prestige to a known terrorist group. The officials pointed out that Russian civilians have been repeatedly attacked by Muslim terrorists, mostly from Chechnya, just as Israeli citizens have been the victims of many Hamas assaults. Russian officials have been calling for Hamas to be formally included in peace talks with Israel despite the fact that the radical Iranian-backed group has expressed total opposition to the peace process and continues to formally call for Israel’s complete destruction.

Turkish officials announced that they will allow Russia to construct four expensive nuclear power plants in their country. Costing over 20 billion US dollars, the four power plants will be built along Turkey’s southern Mediterranean coast. Russia will own and run the plants, selling electricity to the Turkish government to pass on to its citizens. Russia has also announced its desire to build similar facilities in Syria and Iran. During his visit to Damascus, Russian President Medvedev said his government is hoping to construct a nuclear power plant in Syria, a proposal that Israel is expected to vigorously oppose.

An unnamed Israeli diplomat was quoted in the local media stating that the Russian nuclear deal with Turkey “is obviously not something that people here are overjoyed about.” However he added that Russian reactors in Turkey are not “nearly as worrisome” as Iran’s rogue nuclear program, which has also received Kremlin assistance over the past few years.

INDIRECT PEACE TALKS BEGIN WITH THE PA

President Barrack Obama’s special Middle East envoy, former US senator George Mitchell, arrived back in Jerusalem in mid May to formally launch American-mediated peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The so-called “proximity talks” are a form of shuttle diplomacy, meaning US mediators are traveling back and forth between the Israeli negotiating delegation that is operating out of Jerusalem and the Palestinian delegation located in Ramallah, due north of Israel’s capital city.

Veteran PA negotiator Saeb Erekat said he wants the talks to focus on final status issues, especially the volatile issue of Jerusalem’s future status and the permanent borders of a Palestinian state. He added that “Israel is now facing two options: Peace or settlements. Israel cannot combine the two together.” Another member of the PA delegation boasted to Arab media outlets that the Obama administration had “accepted most of our demands” for the resumption of peace talks, especially that Israel halt all Jewish home construction in the eastern half of Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu told a gathering of his Likud party leaders that he will do everything possible to ensure that the indirect peace talks end in a final peace treaty with the PA. He recalled that the world said that “if the Likud came to power, there would not be peace. But the Likud brought peace with Egypt that has lasted for 33 years.” Netanyahu added that “the threats to Israel have not disappeared, but the advantages of a lasting peace with our neighbors are clearer than ever.” Apparently alluding to his decision to freeze all settlement construction in the disputed territories and parts of Jerusalem, the Premier stated that his government has “proven our willingness to take difficult steps for peace.” But he also said Israel “needs leaders on the other side with the courage of Anwar Sadat and King Hussein.”

Defense Minister Ehud Barak echoed Netanyahu's comments, telling a meeting of his coalition Labor party activists that Israel is "ready to make tough decisions" in exchange for a final peace accord with the PA. But he added that he doubts any real progress can be made via indirect negotiations. "Because a real breakthrough cannot be reached in proximity talks, we must get to direct negotiations on all the core issues of the conflict as soon as possible." Barak added that "The Americans are making a significant investment diplomatically and politically on challenges that also interest us in the wider Middle East, Afghanistan and Iraq. And the Americans are trying to impose sanctions on Iran, and stop North Korea and other hostile countries. That is why they expect Israel, as a friend, to do our part for the greater good by reaching a peace accord with the Palestinians."

Israeli media reports said US officials are pushing hard for the proximity talks to be quickly ditched in favor of direct negotiations. They are also trying to get the two sides to agree to a shared negotiating agenda. The reports said Netanyahu wants to focus first on relatively easy to resolve issues such as environmental concerns, water sharing and various economic issues. The PA wants the talks to jump directly to the emotive issue of Jerusalem, the establishment of a Palestinian state and the drawing of its permanent borders. Israeli officials point out that previous direct peace talks have always broken down over those explosive issues, so rushing to address them first is a likely recipe for rapid failure.

Israel's former foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, predicted the negotiations would come to nothing since the Palestinian people are deeply divided between the majority who dwell under PA control north and south of Jerusalem, and the nearly one-third who are ruled by the militant Hamas movement. Other former and current government officials have stated in past months that the time is hardly ripe for a final peace accord with the Palestinians, given that Iranian leaders are vowing to annihilate Israel and are backed by Syria, Hizbullah and Hamas, who all possess deadly rocket and missile arsenals.

Israel's current Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, also indirectly poured cold water on the "proximity" peace negotiations, saying the PA has so far reciprocated Israeli government goodwill gestures with what he called "slaps in the face." He then listed some of the government's gestures: "We took the unilateral step of deciding on a moratorium, a construction freeze in Judea and Samaria. We recognized two states for two peoples. We removed a dramatic number of roadblocks...I think we made countless gestures, and what did we get in return? The glorification of terror." Lieberman was apparently referring to several recent PA sponsored civic events that were named in honor of PLO terrorist leaders responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Israeli Jews. He added that "Mahmoud Abbas himself called us" to ask that Israel continue the January 2009 Cast Lead military operation against Hamas forces in the Gaza Strip until the radical group was completely ousted from power.

With wars and rumors of wars again rising high on the Middle East agenda, it is reassuring to recall that the sovereign God of Israel, the Creator of the Universe, revealed long ago that He had deeded the Promised Land to the Jewish decedents of Jacob forever: "*He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations...saying "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion of your inheritance" (Psalm 105: 9, 11).*

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).

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

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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