

MID-EAST e-NEWS

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An electronic journal of the Middle East, for those who want to be informed.

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Welcome

What with one thing and another, it has taken almost six months to get back in this particular saddle! I knew something was going on when a friend recently back from the US told me he was watching the news one evening, and the anchor segued to the next item with the words "And now, here's the news from Iraq." There was a pregnant pause, ... and then he came back with "There is no news from Iraq." Well, you know the saying... "No news is good news!"

It's good to be back. I hope y'all are still there!

Write me at pkclark@pmbx.net & let me know what you think.

Annapolis 2007

e-NEWS has been off-line since July, but returns to find a lot going on in the Middle East. This issue is moving back into the saddle gently, with a summary of 'while you've been gone' articles, and an update on the latest attempt at building peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The main feature of this recent conference, in Annapolis, was the commitment of the US to be involved in the process, being, in effect, the arbiter of whether one side or the other has failed to meet commitments. Currently, the only commitment made is what President Bush read out in his welcoming statement, which you can read on page 3; the commitment of Olmert and Abbas to act in good faith.

For those of you who want more background material, I have put online (go to www.morethantourists.com and click on **Documents**) a list of the major documents related to Israel and the conflict over the last century or so. Other documents can be found there, including some relating to Lebanon and Iraq.

Ehud Olmert is aware of Israel's situation, with Arabs forming a significant proportion of its population, and increasingly so. In Israel's Haaretz newspaper he said "*If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights, then, as soon as that happens, the State of Israel is finished.*"

Another view was expressed in an article I received recently. Under the Road Map, or any other feasible program, Israel and the Palestinian Authority are both supposed to cooperate, standing by commitments they have made; otherwise the peace process will fail. If the Palestinian Authority fails to meet up to its commitments, they can expect no Palestinian state; similarly if the Israeli government fails to meet up to its commitments, they can expect no Palestinian state.



ISRAEL/PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: BBC Video looking at previous peace talks

Looking back to the successful peace treaty initiated by Anwar Sadat in 1978, this BBC video also discusses Bill Clinton's attempts to get an agreement between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak in 2000.

A commentator makes two valid points: one, that the two sides were never really close in 2000, and two, that the situation is similar today.

Also, in **Flight over Israel** (another BBC Video) their correspondent shows just how limited and vulnerable is the territory that Israel occupies.

For the videos, go to the web site ([www.do I need to tell you?.No!](http://www.do_I_need_to_tell_you?.No!)) and click on e-NEWS.



IRAQ: The progress being made by Iraqis in restraining violence.

Is Iraq getting better? http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7089168.stm

A Pro-American Sunni Militia? http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7116717.stm

Iraqi refugees returning home? http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7125305.stm

(Paste these links into your browser – Internet Explorer, etc.)

Christian Zionism: 6. Support (b) Justification

(Readers may wish to refer to issue 92 of e-News for the background to this article.)

We have been considering the role of Christians in Israel’s policies and actions. This is part of a lengthy series, and in this issue we consider some questions that arise in the context of self-examination of the issues.

Whatever our position in regards to Israel (and in this topic we are specifically considering its actions as a state in the modern world) then we should be able to answer difficult questions regarding our attitude.

Part of the problem is actually identifying the correct questions. Under the heading of Support, we are asking the general question:

“What freedom of action does Israel’s position in prophecy allow it, and how should believers (and the nations whose behavior they influence) respond?”

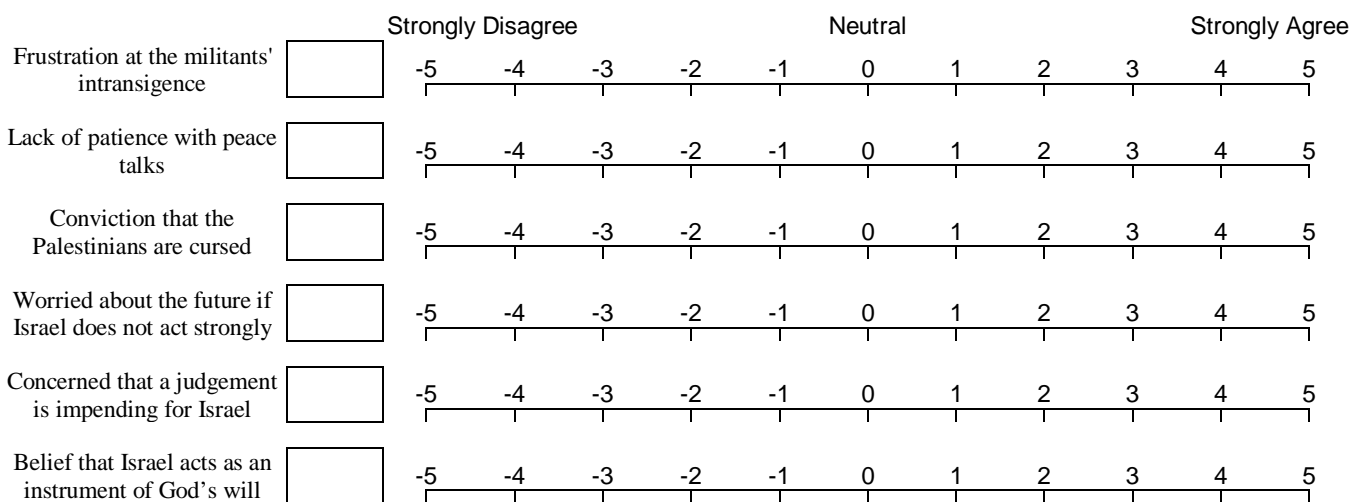
Should we automatically support Israel in its actions, or is it sometimes appropriate to challenge the wisdom and correctness of an action or strategy?

Is this a legitimate question? Sometimes we court resentment by merely asking questions on sensitive topics; not because we have made a decision, but because the question is sensitive. When a large number of people have made up their minds on an issue, peer pressure is usually enough to dissuade all but the most resolute from asking pertinent questions. As a teacher I train my students to continually ask questions about the information they deal with - is it true? how do you know? can you prove it? test it? Is there an alternative?

If we accept that Israel should have total freedom of action in the various matters that concern it, we must ask ourselves why. Why do we have that opinion? Is it frustration at the militants' intransigence; lack of patience with the progress of peace talks; conviction that the Palestinians are under a curse; uncertainty as to the future of Israel if they do not act militarily; concerned that perhaps a time of judgement is impending for Israel; confident that Israel has been chosen of God to act as His right hand in this area?

If we hold the position that Israel must act as any other modern nation is expected to, we cannot simply state that the ball is in their court, that their claim to be unique is theirs to prove. We must also be ready to examine Israel’s position, both geographically and politically, and the claims made – from both an ethnic and religious point of view – to deserve being taken as a special case. We cannot ignore history (as not a few seem to) because we do not like the consequences.

I suspect that if we start asking these questions we might find out that many of our concerns arise (1) from our fallen nature, or (2) from our lack of faith in God's ability to fulfill his promises. Perhaps you can add your own items to this list. Where would you score?



Perhaps the value of this is more in that it leads us towards questions we should be asking. We will consider more of these in issue 94.

Annapolis Statement

As part of President Bush's introductory speech before the conference began he read this text, which had been agreed upon by the participants, Ehud Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas.

The representatives of the government of the state of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, represented respectively by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas, in his capacity as chairman of the PLO executive committee and president of the Palestinian Authority, have convened in Annapolis, Maryland, under the auspices of President George W. Bush of the United States of America, and with the support of the participants of this international conference having concluded the following joint understanding:

We express our determination to bring an end to bloodshed, suffering and decades of conflict between our peoples; to usher in a new era of peace, based on freedom, security, justice, dignity, respect and mutual recognition; to propagate a culture of peace and nonviolence; to confront terrorism and incitement, whether committed by Palestinians or Israelis.

In furtherance of the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, we agree to immediately launch good-faith bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues, including all core issues without exception, as specified in previous agreements.

We agree to engage in vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations and shall make every effort to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008.

For this purpose, a steering committee led jointly by the head of the delegation of each party will meet continuously as agreed.

The steering committee will develop a joint work plan and establish and oversee the work of negotiations teams to address all issues, to be headed by one lead representative from each party.

The first session of the steering committee will be held on 12 December, 2007.

President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert will continue to meet on a biweekly basis to follow up the negotiations in order to offer all necessary assistance for their advancement.

The parties also commit to immediately implement their respective obligations under the performance-based road map to a permanent two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict issued by the quartet on 30 April, 2003 - this is called the Road Map - and agree to form an American, Palestinian and Israeli mechanism led by the United States to follow up on the implementation of the road map.

The parties further commit to continue the implementation of the ongoing obligations of the road map until they reach a peace treaty. The United States will monitor and judge the fulfillment of the commitment of both sides of the road map.

Unless otherwise agreed by the parties, implementation of the future peace treaty will be subject to the implementation of the road map, as judged by the United States.

Some of our readers come to e-NEWS just for the pictures, so here they are for you!

Various views from the Citadel in Amman



Looking across the city to the huge flag in the palace grounds.



The flag framed between two columns of the Byzantine church.



The Umayyad Vestibule, is actually in the shape of a cross.

This(last 6) Month(s)

Sudan	The conflict in Darfur continues to resist a solution. The government is uncooperative with the UN, after having allowed it to operate. Raids by militias continue, and women are particularly targeted. African Union troops are unable to operate widely to improve security. Serious conflict is spreading into Chad.	In the south progress is slow and gradual. The separate peace means a separate visa for travel there. There is a building boom in Juba, and the possibility of a vote for a separate state in 2011. Until then the south's SPLM share government in the capital, Khartoum.
Somalia	Somali rebels continue to fight Ethiopian and Somali government forces. 6 Ethiopian bases in Mogadishu came under attack on Wednesday (Nov 28 th).	Of a 8,000 planned African Union force, only 1,600 Ugandan peacekeepers have arrived.
N Africa	Morocco's king Mohammed VI (since 1999) has gradually introduced more liberal reforms, including a broader press and expanded women's rights.	Algeria is seen as the home of Al Qaeda in North Africa, but has seen successes in catching terrorists, though not preventing all bomb attacks.
Pakistan	Nov.28: President Musharraf leaves his post as head of the army, a step insisted upon by the US. He also promises to drop the (Nov. 3 rd) state of emergency on Dec. 16, before the national elections.	Benazir Bhutto is planning on standing in the Jan 8 election, but Nawaz Sharif threatens to boycott it since results will be manipulated. They recently returned from exile.
Afghan.	November: a group of lawmakers are hit by a bomb at Bagram, 41 killed.	NATO troops continue to battle Taleban in the south, especially Helmand province.
Iran	Nov 21: Tehran newspaper criticizes Pres. Ahmedinejad, saying his behaviour is 'dangerous.'	Iran defies UN sanctions, continues to build heavy water reactor, centrifuges, enrich Uranium. Russia & China express doubt about further sanctions, questioning that Iran is actually planing to build a bomb.
Arabia	Nov. 18: OPEC summit says it intends to keep oil prices stable.	Saudi opts to participate in the Annapolis peace conference.
Iraq	Attacks have decreased markedly since the summer. A key factor is Muqtada As Sadr instructing his Mehdi militia to cease fire. As violence decreased they had been seen as instigators of continued deaths. Daily deaths then drop to a fraction of previously.	Sunni tribal coalitions – and some groups previously fighting as insurgents against the government & US coalition – have been more organized and effective in combatting Al Qaeda.
Turkey	Turkey has increasingly expressed concern about Kurds crossing from northern Iraq into its territory to attack its military or police posts.	More recently Turkey has fired into northern Iraq to deal with groups of PKK fighters it is pursuing. As recently as Dec. 1 st Turkish artillery fired shells at PKK locations.
Lebanon	After long delay, the delay in appointing a new president seems to be coming to an end. Gen. Michel Suleiman has obtained wide compromise support from the main parties, though his appointment will require a constitutional amendment. (A civil servant should wait 2 years before taking high office.)	
Israel	At Annapolis Olmert & Abbas agree to negotiate in good faith; the 'Roadmap' is reinstated; the US commits to mediate and be the judge of whether either party has failed in their commitments.	Olmert (Nov.29): "If the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights, then the State of Israel is finished."
WB & Gaza	Since July, when Hamas used its military force to take physical control of Gaza, the territory has increasingly been sealed off. Lately the Israeli government has attempted to restrict the flow of fuel to Gaza, putting hospitals and basic services in jeopardy.	
		Yemen continues to struggle against rebel attacks. Nov.9: 16 soldiers killed guarding oil installation; July 2: 6 Spanish tourists killed.
		July: After killing 2, the rest of a Korean missionary group is freed by the Taleban.
		King Zahir Shah dies
		Though outwardly a supporter of the 'war on terror' much of the Taleban's support comes from the unruly tribal areas of the NW Frontier. Troops are regularly kidnapped there.
		Libya is gradually opening up to Western commerce. Recently tourists were turned back for not having Arabic translations of the passports; Arabs had their English-language pages defaced, signs of internal squabbles. The Romanian nurses were freed in July.
		Nov. 9: Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) raid an Al Qaeda base, killing 18 and capturing 16.
		Nov. 27: 800 buses provided by Iraqi government take Iraqis home from Syria.
		Nov. 8: Iraqis at public meeting denounce Mehdi militia for killing and torturing their family members.
		Little political progress has been made towards key legislation which will strengthen the country and provide more unity. Internal squabbles prevent progress.
		Nov. 30: Illustrating the difficulty of making political progress in Iraq, two car bombs were discovered on the property of Adnan Dulaimi, a Sunni MP in the current government. Dulaimi is from an important Sunni clan, and leads the Accordance Front party.
		US Deaths in Iraq: 12/31/06: 2,984 1/31/07: 3,073 (79) 2/28/07: 3,150 (77) 3/31/07: 3,237 (87) 4/30: 3,337 (100) 5/31: 3,473 (136) 6/30: 3,563 (94) 7/30: 3,644 (81) 8/31: 3,728 (84) 9/30: 3,799 (71) 10/31: 3,831 (32) 11/26: 3,867 (36)
		Dec. 1: Almost immediately upon PM Olmert's return to Israel from Annapolis, 429 Palestinian prisoners are released from jail.

