



*Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel*

## **LDFI Update November 2010**

### **Hamas leader calls for violent uprising in the Middle East**

Hamas leader Khaled Mashal told a Syrian audience of Hamas supporters opposed to the peace talks that only armed resistance would keep the Palestinian cause alive.

As well as being a worrying threat to Israel, this is likely to be a new attempt by Hamas to challenge the authority of their Fatah opponents. Fatah and Hamas split in June 2007, when a short lived Palestinian unity government collapsed with a violent coup by Hamas against Fatah in Gaza. Repeated Egyptian attempts to reconcile Fatah and Hamas have been unsuccessful.

The Fatah dominated Palestinian Authority has been taking measures against Hamas militants over past months, a factor which has contributed to improved security – and economic - conditions in the West Bank. Palestinian police also arrested a number of Hamas militants after the killing of four Jewish settlers in the West Bank at the end of August, just before the peace talks restarted.

Hamas / Fatah divisions could make it difficult to implement any peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. However, reconciliation could put an end to peace talks if Hamas continues to refuse to recognise Israel and renounce violence. In the meantime, Israel hopes that continuing improvements to the economic and security situation in the West Bank and progress with peace talks will strengthen the Fatah party with the Palestinian people, making it easier for any future peace agreement to be implemented.

### **Discussions on settlement freeze continue**

Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is in continued negotiations with US President Barak Obama over a proposed 90 day building freeze in the West Bank.

The US is drafting a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in which the US would make security guarantees to Israel in exchange for Israel renewing the settlement freeze which expired at the end of September. Peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority have been on hold since then. The MoU is being based on discussions held between Benjamin Netanyahu and US Secretary Hillary Clinton at their meeting in New York this month. It is believed that the final version has been delayed due to discussions over the inclusion of East Jerusalem. Palestinian President Abbas has reportedly insisted he would not return to talks unless the new building freeze included East Jerusalem, even though it was not included in the previous freeze.

Prime Minister Netanyahu is facing growing opposition to extending the settlement freeze from within his own Likud party. Four Likud ministers and a larger group of Knesset Members, known as the 'Likud rebels' are mounting a campaign to convince other Cabinet Ministers against supporting the settlement freeze. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Netanyahu said that he remained confident that the Cabinet would agree to the US proposal.

Meanwhile, calls for Israel to extend the settlement freeze have come both from former Likud leader and Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, and Kadima opposition leader Tsipi Livni. Ehud Olmert called on Netanyahu to accept the freeze so that they can discuss the important core issues of the final border, status of Palestinian refugees and Jerusalem. Tsipi Livni said "The government talks tough but Israel's interests are being damaged. They spoke of security, and damaged security. We can't rally the world by constantly saying no. We need to say 'Yes' from time to time too."

### **Referendum before land concessions**

The Knesset passed a Bill on Monday 21 November requiring a referendum to be held before Israel gives up land as part of a peace agreement. The Bill, proposed by Likud House Committee chairman Yariv Levin, calls for a referendum that passes with the agreement of a majority of the public and a vote in favour by at least 60 Knesset Members (MKs), in the event of an agreement with Syria on withdrawing from the Golan Heights and/or with the Palestinian Authority over East Jerusalem. Prime Minister Netanyahu added an amendment preventing a referendum if the Knesset approves a withdrawal with a majority of 80 MKs.

According to Tamir Sheafer, political scientist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, although the Bill was proposed with a view to delaying a peace deal, it may well help push forwards such a deal, with the Government being able to make a direct appeal to the Israeli public.

### **UK Government to reform law of Universal Jurisdiction**

LDFI welcomes the Government's announcement that it will reform the law of Universal Jurisdiction so that arrest warrants for foreign politicians and military officials would have to be signed off by the Director of Public Prosecutions and not local magistrates. A number of politically motivated arrest warrants have stopped senior Israeli politicians visiting the UK, including Tsipi Livni, the leader of Israeli Opposition Party Kadima, and preventing important dialogue between the UK and Israel.

### **LDFI Chair received peerage**

LDFI is pleased to congratulate LDFI Chairman Monroe Palmer OBE on the news that he has been appointed to sit in the House of Lords as a Liberal Democrat life peer.

Cllr Palmer said "I am excited about my new role and feel very privileged...I would like to inform people on my views on the conflicts in the Middle East and I want to do my best to bring peace to that region."