



# ISRAEL MATTERS!

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## Netanyahu: Palestinian Alliance is Mortal Blow to Peace and Prize for Terrorism

Rival Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas have signed a landmark reconciliation pact ending a four-year rift that had divided the territory envisioned for a future Palestinian state. The deal plunged Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking deeper into uncertainty as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called it a “mortal blow to peace.”

The agreement, which followed years of bitter acrimony between the two Palestinian movements, was made possible in large measure by the political changes sweeping the Arab world and the deadlock in U.S.-brokered peace talks with Israel. A unity government foreseen by the accord would also allow the Palestinians to speak with a single voice if they go ahead with plans to ask the United Nations to recognize Palestine as a state during the annual General Assembly session in September.

With the signing, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, whose Palestinian Authority governs the West Bank, joined forces with Khaled Mashaal, the Syrian-based head of Hamas, which rejects Israel's existence and is backed by Iran. The alliance set off ecstatic celebrations in the Palestinian territories — and warnings from both the Obama administration and international mediator Tony Blair that the new Palestinian government must recognize Israel or risk international isolation.

Abbas brushed off the criticism and instead used the occasion to deliver a scathing attack on Israel, saying “We reject blackmail and it is no longer possible for us to accept the (Israeli) occupation of Palestinian land.” Both Palestinian leaders emphasized a united Palestinian direction, with Mashaal declaring the pact means the Palestinians will have “one leadership, ... one decision.” “The common national goal is to establish a Palestinian state, independent with sovereignty on the West Bank and Gaza Strip with Jerusalem as the capital, without settlements, without giving up a single inch of it and with the right of return” of Palestinian refugees, the Hamas leader said.

Netanyahu denounced the new Palestinian alliance as “a mortal blow to peace and a big prize for terrorism.” “Israel continues to want peace and seek peace but we can only

achieve that with our neighbors that want peace,” the Israeli leader said. “Those of our neighbors that seek the destruction of Israel and use terrorism are not partners to peace.”

The Palestinians have been torn between rival governments since a previous unity arrangement collapsed into civil war in June 2007. In five days of fighting, Hamas overran the Gaza Strip, leaving Abbas' Palestinian Authority in charge of the West Bank. Reconciliation is essential for Palestinian dreams to establish a state in the two areas. The pact provides for the creation of a joint Palestinian caretaker government ahead of national elections next year. But it leaves key issues unresolved, such as who will lead the government or control the competing Palestinian security forces, and makes no mention of relations with Israel.

In his speech, Abbas rejected Israel's opposition to the pact, saying the reconciliation with Hamas was an internal Palestinian affair. “They are our brothers and family. We may differ, and we often do, but we still arrive at a minimum level of understanding,” he said. Abbas said Israel cannot continue to act as “a state above the law” and called for an end to construction in Jewish settlements on lands the Palestinians want for a future state. “Mr. Netanyahu, you must choose between settlements and peace,” he said.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Mark Toner said it was important that Palestinians ensure that their agreement is implemented “in a way that advances the prospects of peace rather than undermines them.” He said the U.S. was still waiting to see what the agreement actually means in practical terms, but stressed Hamas' inclusion in the government must be accompanied by recognition of the state of Israel, a commitment to nonviolence and acceptance of previous agreements. “If Hamas wants to play a meaningful role in the political process there, and indeed in the peace process, they need to adhere to these principles,” Toner said. Blair agreed. “I think the central question people ask is, ‘Does this mean a change of

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heart on behalf of Hamas or not?" he told The Associated Press.

Unlike Fatah, which has negotiated several partial peace accords with Israel, Hamas does not accept a place for a Jewish state in an Islamic Mideast, though leaders like Mashaal say they would accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza as an interim step. Hamas, which is considered a terror group by Israel, the U.S. and European Union, has sent dozens of suicide bombers into Israel, killing hundreds, and thousands of rockets have been fired from Gaza at Israel, many by Hamas. Israel has retaliated with strikes into Gaza that have killed dozens of Palestinian civilians.

The Quartet of Mideast mediators — the U.S., the EU, the United Nations and Russia — has long demanded that Hamas renounce violence and recognize the principle

of Israel's right to exist. Hamas' continued refusal to accept these conditions could jeopardize hundreds of millions of dollars in international aid. Palestinian political activist Mustafa Barghouti said Hamas, by signing the accord, "showed a sign of moderation." "I hope the United States starts seeing the situation not through Israeli eyes. I hope the United States can have its own independent policy," he said.

Uprisings toppled or weakened some of the leaders who had patronized Hamas and Fatah, and angry Palestinians, inspired by Arab youth movements in Egypt, Syria and elsewhere, had begun to take to the streets to demand an end to the Fatah-Hamas rift. "The general atmosphere in the region imposed a different reality," said Cairo-based Mohammed Sobeih, the Arab League official handling Palestinian affairs. "Everybody believed that the continuation of the division is dangerous, destructive and none will be able to bear it any longer." (AP)

## Red Cross: No Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

The Gaza Strip is not suffering from a humanitarian crisis, the deputy head of the Red Cross in Gaza said recently. Mathilde Redmatn, who had been assigned to Congo and Colombia in the past, said that the "fabric of life" in the region was problematic. "There are two peoples, one living under closure and one living under daily rocket fire, which violates international law," she said. Her comments were made available on Thursday by the IDF Spokesman's Office.

"There is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza. If you go to the supermarket, there are products. There are restaurants and a nice beach. "Israel has the legitimate right to protect the civilian population; this right should be balanced with the rights of 1.5 million people living in the Gaza Strip," Redmatn said.

Redmatn condemned Gazan rocket attacks on southern Israel, while also calling on the government to allow more materials to enter the Strip. "Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip is against international law because it is directed at civilians," she said.

"We conduct confidential or bilateral dialogue with Hamas on the matter. As time passes, the dialogue also develops." "Our goal is not to negotiate peace, but to ensure the well-being of the civilian population," Redmatn said.

"We understand and recognize Israel's right to security, but it needs to maintain the balance between that and the right of Palestinians living in Gaza to a living and to proper medical care. Of course this is also the responsibility of Hamas to its citizens and therefore we also have relations with them." (JPost)

## Israeli Wine Comes of Age



For many years, kosher wine from Israel was more similar to cough syrup than to anything someone might actually want to drink. Most Israeli wineries produced sweet, sacramental wine. That kind of wine is still produced and sold in Israel today.

There are also more than 200 wineries of all sizes producing some 50 million bottles of wine in Israel. Half of all wine purchases in Israel are made for the Passover holiday. "We are a relatively small producer of wine and yet we're getting international recognition," said Jonathan Livny, a wine critic who writes for the largest wine blog in Israel. "We're moving away from cabernet and merlot and producing wines from newer clones that might be more suitable to the Israeli climate and where Israel might have its own story to tell."

Recently, one of Israel's largest wineries, the Golan Heights Winery, was declared "best winery in the world" at the Vin-Italy competition. It also won two gold medals -- one for a white dessert wine called Heightswine, which is similar to Canadian ice wine.

"That title may be somewhat of an exaggeration, but it is no exaggeration at all to say that of the 3,700 wines in the competition, the Golan Heights Winery proved to be the very best," Israeli wine critic Daniel Rogov wrote on his blog. "This is the very first time that any Israeli winery has won what might well be considered 'best winery of the show' and that is no small achievement." The Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon, also from the Golan Heights Winery, was listed in Wine Spectator's 100 best wines of 2010.

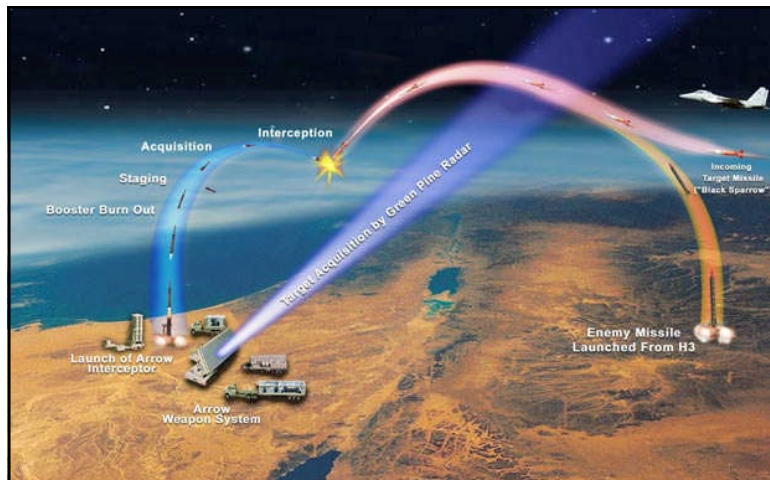
Israeli wineries offer tasting rooms and tours and there are wine festivals in the spring and summer months. (AOL News)

## Israel Allows Glimpse of Defense Advances

The Israeli military recently allowed foreign reporters rare access to the heavily guarded Palmachim Air Force base, south of Tel Aviv, in what military officials described as an effort to showcase Israel's technological advancements in the field of air defense and to underscore the array of threats to the country from rockets and missiles. The invitation came soon after the unveiling of Israel's new Iron Dome anti-rocket missile defense system. Two batteries of the system successfully intercepted and destroyed in midair most of the Katyusha-type rockets fired by Palestinian militants from Gaza against cities in southern Israel in a flare-up of hostilities during April.

The reporters were also given access for the first time to one of the base's inner sanctums: the main command-and-control center of the Arrow system that is designed to identify, locate, and destroy ballistic missiles from enemies farther afield, such as Syria and Iran.

Against a backdrop of various batteries, launchers and missiles on display in a courtyard of the base, Brig. Gen. Doron Gavish, commander of the Air Defense Corps, said that over the last 10 years Israel has been developing a "basket of tools" and a new security concept to contend with the changing threats. He added that last month's operation of the radar-guided Iron Dome system, which is still under evaluation, was the first time in military history that a missile destroyed a short-range rocket. The system, developed by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd., an Israeli company, is also being marketed abroad.



The multi-tier battle against rockets and missiles represents a shift in Israel's military doctrine, officials said, with the threat ranging from relatively crude, short-range rockets fired out of Gaza with a 12- to 25-mile capability to long-range ballistic missiles to be intercepted in the atmosphere or in space.

Senior military officers described a "new era" in defense, since rockets and missiles have become the "main effort" of Israel's enemies and the civilian population is on the front line. About 4,000 rockets were fired into Israel by the Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah organization during the month-long war in 2006, and rocket fire from Gaza is a persistent danger.

Alongside the traditional pillars of Israeli overall military doctrine, including deterrence and attack capabilities, the new focus is on active air defense, early warning and passive defense, exemplified by bomb-proof secure rooms inside individual homes. A new Ballistic Picture Control Center, responsible for detecting incoming threats and alerting the population, became fully operational at the end of 2010.

In general, Israel has about a minute's warning for every 100 kilometers, or 62 miles, a rocket travels. That means when rockets fly the short distance from Gaza into southern Israel, the warning time is mere seconds.

The nature of the battlefield began to change in 1991 when, during the Persian Gulf war, Iraq fired 41 Scud missiles at Israel. The American Patriot surface-to-air missile system was deployed in Israel. But the Patriot was originally built as an anti-aircraft system and was quickly modified to deal with incoming missiles, initially with poor results.

The Arrow has its origins in President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative. After Mr. Reagan began his "Star Wars" program, Israel joined in the research and development effort. The Arrow system, which is made at Israel Aerospace Industries, has been partly financed by the United States. The Arrow 2 intercepts missiles higher up, and one battery can cover major parts of Israel. The latest generation, known as Arrow 3, is now being developed. The Arrow has been successful in intercepting ballistic missiles in live-fire tests [see diagram, above], but has not yet been used in a real field of battle.

Inside the command and control center, known as the Cube, officers practice intercepting incoming missiles in simulations on large computer screens. One officer demonstrated a simulated interception of incoming ballistic missiles from Lebanon and Syria. The mostly radar-based system identifies the incoming missiles heading for central Israel and a defense plan is drawn up, determining the type of response and the point of interception. If a missile is identified as heading for an unpopulated area, or the sea, no action is taken. But if a response is required, the officer approves the defense plan and authorizes the system to carry it out by the deceptively mundane act of pressing the F2 button. (NY Times)