Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Israeli ministers gathered in Kibbutz Sde Boker today to commemorate the 33rd anniversary of the death of Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion. Olmert stated that at Israel's declaration of independence, Ben Gurion's hand of peace was met with a declaration of war by the surrounding Arab states. He urged the Palestinians not to refuse his offer of a hand of peace. He outlined his vision for the future, stating Israel was willing to give up much of the territory captured in the Six Day War, in return for an end to violence. Olmert added that if the Palestinian Authority was willing to abide by the three principles outlined by the Quartet (the EU, US, Russia and UN), that he would meet immediately with President Abbas with the goal of establishing a contiguous Palestinian state
.

Quote: *"Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said during a memorial ceremony for David and Paula Ben-Gurion in Sde Boker, "Should a newly established Palestinian government be committed to the Quartet's principles, implement the Road Map and bring about the release of Gilad Shalit - I will offer (Palestinian President Mahmoud) Abbas to meet immediately with the aim of conducting true and open dialogue." "Within the framework of these talks the Palestinians will be able to establish an independent state with territorial continuity in the West Bank; a state that will have full sovereignty with defined borders," he said.*

Over 13,000 Palestinian forces have been deployed along the border of Gaza to enforce the ceasefire. Despite this, several Kassam rockets landed in Israel just hours after the ceasefire was declared. News of the ceasefire has been warmly received in European countries, with the UK even offering to send monitors
to police it.

Quote: *""I welcome the mutual ceasefire in Gaza between the Palestinians and Israel and the public commitments of Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to make it work," Beckett said in a statement. "It is crucial that all sides do what is necessary to sustain the ceasefire because, as recent events have demonstrated, it is civilians who suffer most through violence, she continued.*

It seems just too good to be true. A ceasefire, talk of the Palestinian unity government being formed and European diplomats, including Javier Solana, the High Representative for the European Common, Foreign and Security Policy, to arrive in the region within a week or so. News of the ceasefire took me by surprise, as it seemed there was no context for it. In Lebanon we had a context - the threat of war, and the deal was brokered by the international community. Here, Olmert and Abbas seem to have agreed it on their own. Or have they?

Why the sudden change in policy by both sides? Perhaps Europe has something to do with it.

Source YNet News , Jerusalem Post , Jerusalem Post