

The Paradox Newsletter

by The Rev. Tony Higton

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Ministry in Israel and the Palestinian Territories

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Paradox Ministries encourages Christians to understand and pray about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, seeing it through the eyes of both people groups involved, and taking the needs, fear and pain of both sides seriously. Its director, the Rev Tony Higton, who was Rector of a church in the Old City of Jerusalem for a number of years, circulates this email newsletter, speaks at seminars and encourages support of indigenous reconciliation ministry in Jerusalem. The newsletter is available free on request to those who add their email address to our Newsletter update list, available on the top of the ['Newsletter' page](#). Alternatively, send your email address and name to us via our online [Contact Form](#). Please encourage others to join the mailing list.
Tony Higton

TRAUMAS ON BOTH SIDES

Life in Gaza as bad. There is appalling poverty. Unemployment is 60%. Most people exist on UN food handouts. The hospitals are on the verge of collapse. An Israeli wrote about the effects of Israeli pressure on the Strip (lack of water and other necessities, a public health crisis when sewage pumps stopped working, etc): Collective punishment is abhorrent. It is morally reprehensible. It is functionally self-defeating. It destroys the moral fibre of those who order it, practice it, countenance it, turn a blind eye to it and those who are subjected to it.

Another Israeli wrote of the traumas experienced by Israelis within range of Gazan Qassam rockets: Thousands and thousands of people, many of them children and the elderly, are plunged into a reality in which they must fear for their lives day in and day out, in which their livelihoods are crippled, with their schools and even pre-schools under siege. Entire communities are trapped, paralyzed. Whole childhoods are spent in a state of post-traumatic stress. Occasions that should be high points in a lifetime are routinely curtailed or cancelled.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GAZA WALL

The blowing up of the wall between Gaza and Egypt at 3am on January 22nd was clearly well-planned over a period of months. The wall had been weakened so it would fall easily.

From a humanitarian point of view, it allowed the people of Gaza to escape from the confines of the Strip to purchase necessities for life in Egyptian shops. Tens of thousands did so. The Egyptians, partly because they are sensitive to the threat from the extreme Islamists in their own country, and doubtless partly for humanitarian reasons allowed this to last for six days before they ordered the shops to close, cut off supplies to them and began to reseal the border.

From a political point of view, it was a coup for Hamas:

- Showing their organisation, discipline and determination.
- Humiliating Israel and undermining the Israel blockade.
- Impressing Egypt with its strength and its need to be taken seriously.
- Putting strains on the important relationship between Israel and Egypt.
- Allowing terrorists to infiltrate the Sinai and to seek to enter Israel.

Egypt continued walking a tight-rope, negotiating with Hamas and yet refusing to accept them as the legitimate government of Palestine.

Hamas asked Egypt to take over from Israel providing goods for Gaza. This would, of course, remove the economic weapon from Israel. Egypt hasnt rejected the idea but it would face strong opposition from Fatah and the US. It would also have to accept responsibility for the economic welfare of Gaza.

Hamas seems to be true to its foundation charter which states: Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it . There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavours. The Palestinian people know better than to consent to having their future, rights and fate toyed with.

Hamas is enjoying an increased popularity resulting from its recent successes, namely:

- a. Its landslide election victory amongst the Palestinians
- b. Its well-planned takeover of Gaza
- c. Its equally well-planned destruction of the wall between Gaza and Egypt which humiliated both the Israelis and the Egyptians.

THE WINOGRAD REPORT

Meanwhile, in Israel the long-awaited Winograd report blamed mainly the IDF for the failures in the Lebanon War. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert claims the report lifted the moral stigma from him. The importance of this issue is that a stable and credible prime minister is needed if the peace process is to continue. It may be that Olmert will survive in office and be able to facilitate this.

THE DIMONA BOMB

The result of terrorists infiltrating the Sinai became clear at 10.30am on Monday February 4th. For the first time for a year, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a shopping mall in Dimona, the town adjacent to Israel's nuclear facility. Another suicide bomber was knocked out by the blast and was shot dead before he could detonate his own bomb. A 73 year old woman was killed and dozens injured.

Meanwhile, the Syrians have acquired more sophisticated missiles and other military hardware. Hezbollah has smuggled many Katyusha rockets into Southern Lebanon under the noses of the UN security forces.

THE ASSASSINATION OF IMAD MUGHNIYAH

Then on February 12th Imad Mughniyah was assassinated in Damascus. He was the top military commander in Hezbollah. Over the years, in addition to organising attacks on Jewish and Israeli targets, he has organised attacks on American marines and the hijacking of US citizens. Therefore he was at the top of the FBI's Most Wanted list. His death is a huge blow to Hezbollah and must be worrying for Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah, because Mughniyah was part of his personal security forces.

Israel has denied any involvement in this daring attack in the middle of Damascus. Others think the assassination was carried out by the US or Syria, or resulted from internal strife in Hezbollah. The Kuwaiti daily newspaper Al-Rai blames an Arab state funded by the Gulf States.

Even if Israel is not responsible, and some Israelis doubt that, Hezbollah is making it a reason for an attack on Israel or possibly a Jewish target elsewhere. It can hardly do otherwise if it is to retain credibility in the Arab world. The Israelis have mounted Patriot air defence missiles near Haifa.

Nasrallah has promised that Mughniyah's blood will lead to Israel's fall. An Iranian military leader stated: In the near future, we will witness the

destruction of the cancerous germ of Israel by the powerful and competent hands of the Hezbollah combatants.

ISRAELI INCURSION INTO GAZA

The Israeli town of Sderot has been on the receiving end of a total of 7694 rockets which have caused injury and death and which have made the population live in constant fear. No country can allow its innocent civilians to be indiscriminately attacked in this way. Some Israeli response was inevitable.

Over 100, including children, died in the recent Israeli incursion into the Strip. Israel claims that 90% of those killed were militants. But BTselem, the Israeli human rights group, claims that from 27 February to the afternoon of 3 March, 106 Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip. At least fifty-four of the dead (twenty-five of them minors) did not take part in the hostilities. In addition, at least forty-six minors were wounded.

Israel has come under widespread criticism for a disproportionate response to the rocket attacks from Gaza. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon told the Security Council: While recognizing Israel's right to defend itself, I condemn the disproportionate and excessive use of force that has killed and injured so many civilians, including children. I condemn Palestinian rocket attacks, and call for the immediate cessation of such acts of terrorism, which serve no purpose, endanger Israeli civilians, and bring misery to the Palestinian people.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert responded to this criticism by saying: I hear criticism and claims that civilians are being hurt and that Israel is using too much force. Israel is defending its residents in the south, and with all due respect, nothing will prevent it from protecting them - and no one has the right to preach to us over actions that are in self defence.

Israeli Minister of Defence, Ehud Barak had sought legal advice from the Attorney General on the legality of Israel moving Palestinian civilians from the rocket-launching areas. The answer is that it is not clear if it is legal.

However, the question is whether military action or rocket attacks are the best way forward for the sides carrying the out. The idea that either side can beat the other into submission seems mistaken. The people of Gaza, not just the militants, have received punishment. The rocket attacks from Gaza have not ceased.

One unfortunate development is that, because of the Israeli attacks, Mahmoud Abbas broke off peace talks with Israel and the Egyptian Head of

Intelligence cancelled his visit to Israel. This effectively gives the Hamas militants a victory and encourages their intransigence.

A CEASEFIRE?

It appears that Hamas wants a ceasefire, so long as it doesn't appear to be a defeat for them. And 64% of Israelis support the idea of the government having talks with Hamas. A Hamas spokesman in Gaza said: We will halt our fire in exchange for a complete end to Israeli military operations in Gaza and in the West Bank, and a lifting of the blockade on Gaza. Otherwise, we have no intention of halting our activities against Israel. The Israeli and Fatah negotiating teams were due to re-establish contact today and Condoleezza Rice has stated she believes a peace deal could still be achieved this year.

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STOP PRESS: ATTACK ON YESHIVA

After this letter was written, news came of the deadly attack on the Mercaz Harev yeshiva (religious school) in Jerusalem in which eight students, most between the ages of 15 and 19 were shot dead by a terrorist. Hamas has claimed responsibility. Mahmoud Abbas condemned the attack. Gaza residents were out on the streets celebrating. Israel said it would continue the peace talks, despite the attack. Some fear that because the yeshiva is a flagship of the Jewish religious right there could be revenge attacks.

PRAYER TOPICS

1. Pray that both sides will recognise the futility of violence and will find a way to achieve a ceasefire without appearing to lose face.
2. Pray that the peace talks between Israel and Fatah will indeed resume.
3. Pray that Israel and Hamas will find a way to talk which does not appear to imply the violence has been successful.
4. Pray that Egypt and moderate Arab states will resume their peace initiatives and co-operate positively with the western powers.
5. Pray for the suffering innocent people on both sides: the fearful, the injured and the bereaved.

REMEMBER THE NEW PARADOX WEBSITE

See our new website www.prayerforpeace.org.uk for extensive information on the following:

- The History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.
- The History of Anti-Semitism.
- The History of Anti-Arabism.
- The Call to Justice in the Holy Land (for both Palestinians and Israelis).
- The Call to Reconciliation in the Holy Land.
- A serious but constructive Critique of Christian Zionism (and a suggested biblical basis for balanced, caring Christian Zionism in the light of the call to justice and reconciliation).
- A Critique of Dispensationalism (an erroneous view of the End Times).
- Paradox's Theological Position.
- Abbreviations and Glossary (including brief definitions of the main peace plans etc., in recent decades, whos who, etc).
- Advice to Clergy and Ministers on stimulating interest in and prayer for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.
- Prayers for use in church,
- Tony Higton's relevant background experience, plus
- Back copies of Paradox Newsletters.

TONY HIGTONS BLOG

Visit my blog on www.prayerforpeace.org.uk/blog and have your say. I welcome sensible contributions, including disagreements. This is a complex area and, although I am seeking to be balanced and caring, I don't claim infallibility! True, I have some experience of living in Jerusalem and being directly exposed to the conflict and the issues it raises, but I am still learning. I am well aware that I am neither Israeli nor Palestinian, neither Arab nor Jewish! But as a Christian and fellow human being, I am passionately concerned for reconciliation and justice, and for the welfare of both people groups. My aim is to stimulate informed, balanced prayer which takes seriously the needs, pain and fears of both sides in the conflict. I also want to facilitate the spread of the Gospel of the Prince of Peace who shed his blood to bring about reconciliation.

Please tell others about the website and blog and it would help if you were to link your own website to it.

BEIT NETANEL UPDATE - THANK YOU TO ALL WHO DONATED

We thank God that in 2007, in addition to the 141,200 sent to Israel towards the purchase of the Beit Netanel Ministry Center in Jerusalem, 8020 was also sent to support the ministry of Rachel Netanel. Bank charges have been 140 and other expenses (largely the cost of a display board for meetings and of printing leaflets) have been 462.21. (A fair amount of Gift Aid is still to be added to that figure).

However, 150,000 raised other than through Paradox was in the form of interest-free loans, which, of course, have to be repaid. So we shall be grateful to receive more gifts to offset those loans, or regular gifts for Rachel Netanel's on-going ministry.

Please send your gift by cheque made out to Paradox Ministries and sent to the Rev Tony Higton, The Rectory, 47 Castle Rising Road, South Wootton, Kings Lynn, Norfolk PE30 3JA. If you are a UK taxpayer please Gift Aid your donation using the form attached to this email OR take out a standing order to support the ministry regularly using the form attached to this email.

Any gift, however small or large, is most welcome. Each gift is an investment in extending the Kingdom of Jesus, Lord and Messiah, among Jewish and Arab people in Jerusalem and facilitates reconciliation.

Tony Higton