

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

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below for the details.**

A FRAGILE CEASE-FIRE

The good news is, of course, that Israel and Hamas have established a ceasefire in Gaza which is supported by the various terrorist groups. It began at 6.00am on Thursday June 19th and is for a period of six months, after which it is hoped it will be extended to the West Bank.

This is despite the fact that Israel and Hamas do not accept each others legitimacy and do not speak to each other directly.

Israel has removed some of its blockade against Gaza, which has created great hardships and has undermined support for Hamas a factor in the ceasefire agreement. Hamas has agreed to renew negotiation about the release of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. They have agreed to an Egyptian request to provide a letter and video tape from Shalit. Clearly there is a danger that Hamas will use the ceasefire to strengthen its position and increase its arsenal, but the Egyptians (who themselves dont want Islamic militants on their doorstep) have promised to prevent arms smuggling. Egypts deep involvement is a very significant and encouraging factor in this situation.

On the other hand, the Israeli public does not favour a massive and very costly ground offensive against Hamas in Gaza. The humiliation in the recent Lebanon war is a major factor in their thinking.

Nevertheless, some Israelis believe that the ceasefire is too great a concession because it shows Hamas that it can achieve de facto recognition and a change in Israels policy without recognising her legitimacy and through the rocket bombardments. However, by the same token, Hamas has shown a willingness to negotiate with Israel. Also Israel has not been required to recognise Hamas officially and she could arrest replacement prisoners at any time.

The fragile nature of the ceasefire is illustrated by the fact that since it began Israel has closed the border with Gaza six times in retaliation for rocket attacks, which it deems to be an effective weapon against Hamas. The fact that Hamas condemned the rocket attacks as contrary to Palestinian interests seems to confirm that. Hamas also threatened to arrest anyone breaking the cease-fire. However, the borders have since been re-opened for import of fuel and food together with building materials. [Since writing this paragraph there has been another rocket attack on the Israeli town of Sderot with no casualties].

The horrific terrorist attack by the Palestinian bulldozer driver in Jerusalem appeared to be his own initiative, despite claims to the contrary by PR-hungry Palestinian factions.

ISRAEL-SYRIA TALKS

There are good prospects of the two countries holding direct talks, rather than through Turkish intermediaries. Prime Minister Olmert and Syrian President Assad have been invited to France this month. However, Ehud Barak, Israeli Defence Minister, has stated that there will be no direct talk with Syria this year, especially if the Americans are not involved. Richard

Jones, US Ambassador in Israel, stated that the Americans would not be involved in these negotiations. It does seem likely that Olmert and Assad will have talks during their visit to France.

Assad has said that Israel is willing to talk because of its humiliation in the recent Lebanon war. He claims that Israel did not ask Syria to break off relations with Hamas, Hezbollah or Iran as a condition of peace talks. In fact, Terje Roed-Larsen, the UN secretary-general's special envoy, criticised Israel for this, especially in view of Assads interference in Lebanon. According to French officials, though, Syria is ready to reconsider its relationship with Iran, because of the latters involvement in Iraq. It is also seems that Syria is less willing to be involved in Lebanons turmoil now its (Syrias) relationship with the West is thawing (including a possible agreement of association with the EU. Nor does Syria want Hezbollah to be strong enough to stand alone.

ISRAEL HEZBOLLAH DEAL

On Sunday 29 June the Israeli cabinet approved a deal, mediated by the German government, whereby Hezbollah will return the bodies of two IDF soldiers Eldad Regev and Ahud Goldwasser and provide information on Israeli airforce navigator Ron Arad who was shot down in 1986. For its part, Israel will release Samir Kuntar, who was involved in a terrorist attack in Israel in 1979, and the bodies of Lebanese killed during the Lebanon war, including eight Hezbollah members. It will also provide information about the fate of four Iranian diplomats missing since the 1980s. Israel will also release a number of Palestinian prisoners. Some Israelis criticise the decision because it will strengthen Hezbollah politically, weaken Mahmoud Abbas, the chief Palestinian negotiator, and will encourage further abductions. But the price paid by Israel is less than that demanded by Hezbollah. The exchange should take place by mid-July, probably in Germany.

ISRAEL AND IRAN

Israel estimates that Iran will be able to make nuclear weapons within two years and continues to hold out the possibility of a strike against Iran. Military analysts believe that, whereas Israel could not destroy all of Irans secret underground nuclear facilities, yet it could hinder its nuclear programme.

However, Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, threatened retaliation. This would include missile attacks (it could be pre-emptive attacks) and also disruption of oil supplies through the Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf. Iran is the worlds fourth largest oil supplier. This and the

subsequent rise in oil prices is a very effective deterrent against the US approving an Israeli attack on Iran.

An anonymous Pentagon source claimed that America was also afraid that Iran would make a missile attack on the US, but this was later contradicted by the Pentagon

The Israelis held their second military exercise this year from May 28-June 12 and many saw this as a dress rehearsal for an attack on Iran. Also, of course, Israel has made similar attacks in both Iraq (1981) and Syria (2007). Israel would need considerable America assistance for such an attack.

PRAYER TOPICS

1. That the cease-fire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza may last, spread to the West Bank and lead to more in-depth peace negotiations, as Hamas recognises it is in its own interests to stop the violence.
2. That Israel will exercise restraint in both Gaza and the West Bank in order to further peace.
3. For frustration of the efforts of extremists on both sides, including those firing rockets into Israel.
4. That talks between Syria and Israel will lead to peace, justice and good relationships between the two countries, and greater stability in the region, as each country recognizes this is in its own interests.
5. That the exchange between Hezbollah and Israel will strengthen the cease-fire between them.
6. That Mahmoud Abbas will not be marginalised by the negotiations between Israel and Hamas and Hezbollah, but will be able to play a major role in achieving peace with justice for both the Palestinians and Israelis.
7. For political stability in Israel despite Ehud Olmerts vulnerability because of corruption charges.
8. For the people of Gaza to gain relief from their severe economic problems and to pressurize the authorities to opt for peace.
9. For those suffering from the effects of violence: fear, pain, bereavement.
10. For Gods purposes in the Middle East to be furthered even in these years of tortuous and fragile negotiation.

WHY NOT VISIT THE PARADOX WEBSITE

See our website www.prayerforpeace.org.uk for extensive information on many issues to do with the conflict in the Holy Land: history, religious beliefs, theology, prayer topics, advice to Ministers, news updates, etc

HAVE YOUR SAY ON TONY HIGTONS BLOG

www.prayerforpeace.org.uk/blog

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

For further details see the attached General Information & Donation form.

DONATIONS FOR BEIT NETANEL, JERUSALEM

If you would like to offset the 150,000 in interest free loans (raised other than through Paradox and in addition to our donations of 141,200) for the purchase of the Beit Netanel Ministry Center in Jerusalem, or to give towards Rachel Netanels 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.

For further details see the attached General Information & Donation form.

Tony Higton