

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

OLMERT'S DEPARTURE AND THE PEACE PROCESS

After less than three years in office, Ehud Olmert has resigned as Prime Minister in the face of persistent allegations of corruption. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni has been elected the new leader of the Kadima party in place of Olmert. Only if she can construct a viable coalition out of various factions will she be able to become Prime Minister. If she is unsuccessful there will be a general election early next year. This is an important matter for the peace process. Livni has been deeply involved in the peace negotiations. If there were a general election which brought in a new more right wing government, this might prove a hindrance to the talks.

Before he resigned Olmert warned that if the peace negotiations failed there could be increasing pressure, particularly amongst the Palestinians and the international community for a single bi-national state. This has been raised several times recently, although may be a political ploy to apply pressure to Israel which would see a bi-national state as meaning the end of a safe Jewish homeland, in that the country would very soon have an Arab majority.

Before Olmert resigned, Livni stated: Now most Israelis understand that having two states in the lands comprising historic Palestine is an Israeli interest Nobody, nobody can afford in the region a terror state, a failed state or an extreme Islamic state between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean sea. Olmert had proposed to the Palestinians that they would receive 93% of the West Bank (allowing Israel to retain settlements like Maaleh Adumim) plus 5.5% of Israeli land adjacent to Gaza. It has just been announced that Olmert offered Abbas sovereignty over the Jordan Valley in exchange for Israel retaining control over the West Bank settlements of Ariel, Ma'aleh Adumim, and the Gush Etzion bloc.

There would be compensation for the Palestinian refugees and the return of a few thousand to Israel. He advocated that this could be achieved over a decade, starting now. Olmert, did not go as far as accepting Israeli responsibility for what happened to the Palestinians in 1948 but he did say: I join in expressing sorrow for what happened to the Palestinians and also for what happened to the Jews who were expelled from Arab states.

Olmert also proposed that Israel and the Palestinians involve the international community (the U.N., U.S., EU and Russia, Jordan, Egypt, the Vatican and possibly the king of Morocco) in discussions concerning sovereignty over Jerusalem and its holy sites, though the decision would be made only by Israel and the Palestinians. Livni was more cautious about Olmert's proposals and believed more detailed discussions were required.

Ehud Barak has said that some Arab areas of East Jerusalem, together with nearby villages could become part of a Palestinian capital but a few days ago Olmert controversially stated that Israel would have to withdraw from East Jerusalem if it wanted peace. Some Israelis fear that many Israeli Arabs would exercise their right to move to West Jerusalem and that many Jewish people might move out of the frontier territory of West Jerusalem.

HINDRANCES TO THE PEACE PROCESS

Peace Now claims that there is an increase of development by Israel of the settlements on the West Bank with 1000 new buildings being built. Its latest report states that: Israel is erasing the Green Line through intensive construction intended to create territorial continuity between settlement blocs and isolated settlements in the heart of the West Bank, with this construction approaching Palestinian cities such as Bethlehem and Ramallah.

Israeli TV recently showed filmed evidence of Jewish settlers rampaging through a Palestinian village shooting at Palestinians, destroying property and painting the Star of David on buildings. IDF soldiers were shown

witnessing this behaviour. The settlers were responding to the stabbing of a 10-year old boy but there is no evidence the Palestinians attacked were responsible. Ehud Olmert said the government would not allow settlers to carry out pogroms against non-Jews and added: The phenomenon of [settlers] taking the law into their own hands and lashing out with violence and brutality is unforgivable, and will be dealt with by the law enforcement authorities. Sadly, Israeli courts tend to be soft on settlers who take such action, as do the police and the IDF.

On the other hand, Mahmoud Abbas said, shortly after Israel released 199 Palestinian prisoners, that peace would only be achieved when all Palestinian prisoners had been released. Hamas is demanding that over 1000 be released.

One tragic happening occurred at a checkpoint on the road to Nablus. A young Palestinian woman had suddenly gone into labour and urgently needed to get to hospital. Despite her agonised cries and the pleas of her husband, she was kept waiting at the checkpoint for an hour. Eventually paramedics were called but by the time they arrived the baby had died. Afterwards the IDF squad commander was imprisoned and there are calls for criminal proceedings.

One Israeli commented: The occupation kills - never has this slogan sounded so true as on that night, two weeks ago, at the Hawara checkpoint south of Nablus. No convoluted excuse or explanation from the Israel Defense Forces spokesman (military sources were quoted the day after the incident, making this outrageous comment: "This baby would have died anyway") can erase the simple, chilling fact that for officers and soldiers in the occupation army we have established, human feeling has become alien, at least when it comes to Palestinians. Or the fact that there are still officers and soldiers in the IDF who behave with such lack of feeling toward a woman in labor who is about to lose her child. Sadly, several other such incidents have been documented.

It would, of course, be possible to record similar harrowing stories resulting from Palestinian terrorism, but the fact is that none of this behaviour is justified. Rather it is inhuman and only serves to hinder the process towards peace with justice for both people groups.

A number of rockets have been fired into Israel from Gaza and in Jerusalem a young Palestinian drove into a group of pedestrians. His family claim it was an accident but the Israelis say they are certain it was a terrorist attack, like the earlier incident where a bulldozer was used. Six such attacks have taken place in Jerusalem this year, all of them apparently individual initiatives. By the nature of the case they are almost impossible to prevent and they engender an atmosphere of fear amongst Israelis.

THE PALESTINIAN SITUATION

On a positive note, even Israel acknowledges that security and law and order on the West Bank has improved under the control of the Palestinian police. Armed militia have been eliminated from West Bank cities and even the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade has virtually disappeared. Many Hamas and Islamic Jihad charities, which encourage support of the radical organisations, have been shut down or taken over by the PA

However, grinding poverty persists in the Palestinian areas and encourages radicalism. The economy is still struggling. Israeli Gross National product is 10 times that of the West Bank (and 20 times that of Gaza). Unemployment is very high. The corruption amongst the Palestinian leadership with respect to overseas aid contributes to the poverty.

Egypt is seeking to bring reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas but Hamas is angry at the Egyptian refusal to open the Rafah crossing point between Gaza and Egypt. Meanwhile the PA military Chief of Staff has said recently that the PA must be ready to use force to bring Hamas into line, after its takeover of Gaza.

Pro-Palestinian peace activists successfully broke the Israeli blockade of Gaza using a small boat. The Israelis decided that to intervene would cause a PR disaster so they allowed the boat through.

ISRAEL AND SYRIA

Indirect talks between Israel and Syria continue and, if they succeed, could have an important effect in the Middle East by weakening the influence of Hezbollah, Hamas and Iran and strengthening moderate influence amongst Sunni Arabs. Israel is demanding that Syria breaks off relations with Hezbollah and Hamas and distances itself from Iran. Syria is demanding the return of the Golan Heights from Israel. A Kuwaiti newspaper reported that senior Hamas leader Khaled Meshal was asked by the Syrians to leave Damascus for Sudan, although this has been denied by Hamas.

However, Syria and Israel cannot agree on the route of the border and the Syrian president claims he will not sever links with Hezbollah, although Foreign Minister Walid Moualem stated yesterday that Syria was not supplying arms to Hezbollah. Israel has warned citizens travelling abroad that Hezbollah intends to abduct Israelis.

Two days ago Ehud Olmert stated that Israel would have to withdraw from the Golan Heights if it wants peace with Syria. However yesterday Syrian President Bashar Assad said the Syria-Israeli talks will not weaken Syrians

relationship with Iran. He added that he didnt trust the Israelis because they had carried out many massacres since 2000.

ISRAEL AND IRAN

The war of words between Iran and Israel continues. In a speech to the UN, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called Israel a germ of corruption which must be wiped off the map. Israeli Pensioners Affairs Minister Rafi Eitan responded by saying: It could very well be that a leader such as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad suddenly finds himself before the International Criminal Court in The Hague. This was interpreted by Iran as a threat to kidnap Ahmadinejad, especially as Eitan was involved in hunting down former Nazi officials. Irans ambassador at the UN called the comments: vicious threats ... in blatant violation of the most fundamental principles of international law.

The US has installed and will run an early warning radar system in Israel to detect Iranian missiles. Before this Israel could only detect missiles six minutes after launch, by which time they would be half way on their journey. The new system can detect them moments after launch.

Former IDF chief Moshe Ya'alon said recently that military action between Israel and Iran was inevitable. Israel has asked the US to facilitate an Israeli air attack on Iran. Israel would need permission to over-fly Iraq and more advanced refuelling tankers for its fighters. In addition it would need bunker buster bombs which weigh 2.2 tons each, can penetrate six meters of reinforced concrete. Iran has responded to Israeli threats by warning that such an attack would lead to a world war.

However, Iran is suffering economic problems with an inflation rate around 25% and Ahmadinejad faces re-election on June 12, 2009. It is possible that the Iranian people could react against the radicalism of the likes of Ahmadinejad.

PRAYER TOPICS

1. That the new government in Israel will be the one which will serve Gods purposes.
2. That Israel will act with integrity and justice over West Bank settlements and that both sides will be willing to make appropriate compromises to achieve peace with justice.
3. For a curbing of settler violence against Palestinians and of Palestinian terrorism such as the recent vehicle attacks in Jerusalem.

4. For the IDF to act with justice and humanity at all checkpoints.
5. For the alleviation of Palestinian poverty and the curbing of political corruption.
6. For success in the Israel-Syria talks .
7. For a reaction by the Iranian people against radicalism and anti-Semitism.

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