

# The Paradox Newsletter

by The Rev. Tony Higton

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

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*The newsletter is available free on request to those who send their name and email  
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## Pray for the Peace Talks

After much hard work by US Secretary of State, John Kerry, the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians began again in Washington, after a 3-year break (the September 2010 talks only lasted 16 hours). The main negotiators are Tzipi Livni (Israeli Minister of Justice) and Sa'ab Erekat (Palestinian chief negotiator). There is also a US mediator. The talks are intended to last for nine months and to achieve a solution by the middle of 2014.

Before the talks the Palestinians had demanded Israel should provide a definite proposal about the boundaries of a Palestinian state and Israel had responded by saying the priorities were the recognition of Israel as a legitimate state by the Palestinians and the issue of Israeli security. In response to Palestinian demands Israel released 82 Palestinian prisoners who had been in captivity for over ten years. More releases are to follow.

There are pressures on both sides. The Israelis were both alarmed and furious at a European Union decision published on July 19th. Over the years there has been a widespread perception that Israel is not serious about the peace process. This, linked with the expansion of the West Bank territories (and the violent activity of some extreme settlers) has led to the European Union deciding to block scientific and financial cooperation with Israeli institutions linked to the settlements. This includes "grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU" which amount to 300 million euros. The EU is also moving towards recommending member states label products made in the settlements. There could well be a boycott of goods manufactured over the Green Line. It is noteworthy that the US did not criticise the European decision.

Israeli PM Netanyahu is also clearly concerned about the danger of Israel becoming a bi-national state if there is no two-state solution. This could cause important problems for Israel, for example if, as is likely, an Arab majority developed in Israel, which is a democracy.

Israel is also under pressure from the fact that the Palestinians had started the process of seeking recognition by the UN, without waiting for a peace settlement and could resume it if peace talks are not taking place.

The Palestinians are also under pressure from the turmoil in the

Arab countries and the threat of extreme Islamists. Hamas, which was around the same time officially listed by the EU as a terrorist organisation, has stated that Palestinian PM Mahmoud Abbas does not have the right to negotiate with the Israelis and they regard the talks as futile (Hamas is also worried about the loss of their Egyptian patron Mohammed Morsi). So both the US and the EU want Hamas excluded from the talks but realise that a settlement is only possible if it is with the whole Palestinian people, including Hamas.

The Palestinians are divided. In April the respected Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad resigned because he objected to Abbas unilaterally declaring Palestinian independence at the UN General Assembly, a declaration which would lead to Israeli sanctions against the Palestinians. Reports suggested that Abbas was exercising a semi-autocratic rule in the West Bank which included suppression of opposition. Rami Hamdallah replaced Fayyad, only to resign two months later because of divisions and conflict within the government. Hamas had condemned his appointment by Abbas because it conflicted with the agreement to form a unity government for both the West Bank and Gaza.

Both sides are also under pressure because these peace talks could be their last chance to achieve a two-state solution. There is also a danger that the US would step back and leave the Israelis and Palestinians to their own devices. A senior US official told the press that John Kerry would abandon his initiative if the two sides were not serious about the peace talks. There is a perception in the Arab world that American influence is weakening in the region partly because of hard lessons learnt in Iraq and Afghanistan and partly by what is seen as vacillation over the Syrian chemical weapons situation. Any such weakening would be a cause of great concern to Israel.

However, it is helpful that in April the Arab League for the first time expressed support for minor adjustments to the 1967 borders between Israel and the Palestinians in any settlement. There could be minor, mutually-agreed swapping of land.

#### Israeli opposition to the two-state solution

Some of the Israeli government are against a two state solution. In a meeting of the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) one member shouted at

Tzipi Livni; “This is our land, this is our land.” Livni replied: “This is our land, but the question is if this state will remain ours or not.”

Israeli Tourism Minister, Uzi Landau, quoted Abba Eban, Israeli foreign minister in the 1960’s: “Eban once said that the 1967 border is the border of Auschwitz. What country would like to achieve borders which make it impossible to defend itself?” This shows the concern of many Israelis.

Israeli deputy Defence Minister, Danny Danon, a member of Netanyahu’s Likud Party, stated in June that the coalition government is “staunchly opposed to a two-state solution and would block the creation of a Palestinian state if such a proposal ever came to a vote.” Netanyahu’s office distanced themselves from Danon’s comments and said they were not the view of the government or of Netanyahu.

However, Naftali Bennett, Israeli Economy Minister said that the idea of establishing a Palestinian state had reached a “dead end.” He called on Israel to annex large amounts of Palestinian land in the West Bank. He told a conference of West Bank settlers: “The most important thing in the land of Israel is to build, build, build. It’s important that there will be an Israeli presence everywhere. This land has been ours for 3,000 years. There was never a Palestinian state here and we were never occupiers. The house is ours and we are residents here, not the occupiers.”

Little wonder that Netanyahu said in July that a proposed two state solution would be put to a referendum in Israel. Abbas followed suit, saying he would have a referendum amongst Palestinians. Surveys show that 70% of Palestinians want a two-state solution but 80% think it will never happen. 39% of Israelis would vote for a peace deal, another 16% probably would do so but 20% would vote against.

#### New settlement activity

Since Netanyahu was elected in 2009 the growth of Israeli settlements in the West Bank has been faster than ever. A few days after the peace talks resumed the Israeli cabinet approved special funding going to outposts in the West Bank which a few months earlier Israel regarded as illegal. Shortly afterwards some 1,200

housing units were approved in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Israel is also proceeding with legal justification for seizing property in East Jerusalem belonging to absentee Palestinian landlords.

In late September Israel demolished the Palestinian village of Khirbet Makhoul which had been declared illegal four years ago. The new factor was that the army prevented any humanitarian aid, including tents, being offered to the expelled villagers. The Israeli High Court subsequently stated that the army had gone too far in preventing humanitarian aid. One problem is that it is almost impossible for Palestinians to get Israeli building permits.

Quite apart from issues of justice, this activity on the West Bank does, of course, threaten the peace process.

Prime Minister Netanyahu condemned racism against Arabs including right wing vandalism against Palestinian property on the West Bank. He also condemned segregation between Jewish and Arab schoolchildren in an amusement park near Tel Aviv.

#### Palestinian reactions

Two days after the Peace Talks resumed Mahmoud Al-Habbash, Palestinian Authority Minister of Religious Affairs preached a sermon which was broadcast on Palestinian TV. In it he compared the new peace negotiations with those made by Mohammed with the Quraish tribe of Mecca, which were condemned by many of his colleagues. But Mohammad replied that the peace treaty was essential to buy time so that his forces could increase and successfully attack Mecca. Two years later this happened and Mohammad conquered Mecca.

This month two Palestinian human rights groups, Al-Haq and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, have petitioned the International Criminal Court to investigate alleged crimes committed by Israel in the Palestinian territories. They argue that the ICC can take this action even though the Palestinians have not yet formally signed up to it. This will cause deep concern and antagonism in Israel and could undermine the peace talks. Israel is very worried about the prospect of the Palestinians joining the ICC. The US has pressed the Palestinians not to take such action.

## Threats to Israel

There have been rocket attacks from Gaza which have led to Israeli retaliation. Israeli right wingers called for the government to do a thorough “cleansing” of Gaza. Meanwhile, a water crisis is looming in Gaza. 90-95% of the water from its only aquifer is polluted and the desalinisation of sea water will only provide enough for about 29% of the population. All of this heightens tensions.

In May Israel mounted an air attack on Iranian missiles being transported through Syria to Hezbollah, widely regarded as a terrorist group, which has attacked Israel in the past. In retaliation, shells were fired into Israel from Syria on several occasions. Israel was also concerned that Syria could mount chemical attacks although hopefully that danger has now receded. The situation was worsened when Syrian rebels seized a border crossing in the Golan Heights causing Austrian peacekeepers to withdraw. Israeli experts have warned that Israel is not keeping pace with the rocket-firing potential of Hamas and Hezbollah. Brig. Gen. Meir Elran of Tel Aviv University’s Institute for National Security Studies warned that in a war some 1,500 short- to mid-range rockets could be launched against Israel each day for a whole month.

The new President of Iran, Hasan Rouhani, has projected a more moderate image and has denied that Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons. This has led the West to respond positively and to suspend aggressive attitudes towards Iran. He also tweeted New Year greetings to Iran’s Jews. However Israel is, not unnaturally, suspicious. They point out that Rouhani said in a speech in August: “The Zionist regime has been a wound on the body of the Islamic world for years and the wound should be removed.” President Shimon Peres of Israel also stated that Rouhani had made it clear in a speech that Iran would continue to build long-range missiles. Israel also reminds the world that the real power in Iran is not in Rouhani’s hands but in the hands of the Ayatollah Khamenei whom Netanyahu said led a “messianic, apocalyptic, radical cult.” It is significant that when Rouhani returned to Iran from the UN some crowds applauded him but others threw shoes and eggs at him.

It is obvious that the Peace Process urgently needs our prayers.

How should we pray? –

#### **GIVE THANKS**

1. That the peace talks have resumed.
2. For the skills of John Kerry, US Secretary of State.
3. For the pressures on both sides to be serious about the Peace Process.

#### **PRAY**

1. For the peace talks to be successful in bringing peace with justice with security for both sides.
2. For God to curb extremists on both sides: those who provocatively seek to hinder or torpedo the Peace Process and violent Israeli settlers and Palestinians who might seek to fire rockets, etc.
3. That Hamas will become committed to a peace settlement.
4. For God to bring peace and justice to Syria.
5. For God to frustrate the intentions of extremists throughout the Middle East.
6. For God to foster a new constructive approach from Iran and to prevent it from gaining nuclear weapons.
7. For peace, stability and true democracy in all Middle East countries.
8. For the UN and other countries to act with wisdom and justice towards both sides in order to encourage the Peace Process.
9. Pray for the evangelistic and reconciliation ministry of Rachel Netanel in Jerusalem

**SUPPORT BEIT NETANEL (“House of Netanel”):** the evangelistic and reconciliation ministry of Rachel Netanel in the outskirts of Jerusalem, which seeks to reach Israelis (Jewish and Arab) and Palestinians with the Gospel in their own language and culture, bringing Jews and Arabs together under the love of Jesus, eating and studying together in a family atmosphere. Rachel holds a weekly meeting of some 50 people, group meetings for 10-20 people, bi-monthly meetings for 100-200 and daily individual ministry. Over 2000 people have heard the Gospel. Her newsletter is available through Paradox. Her website is [www.rachelnetanel.net](http://www.rachelnetanel.net)

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