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Reframing the picture: how perceptions hurt israel

Analysis by Charles E. McCracken



The olive tree has long been associated with the Jewish people and the land of Israel, but never more so than with the rebirth of the nation in 1948. Like the olive tree, an evergreen known for hardiness and the innate ability to thrive in adverse conditions, Israel flourishes.

The olive branch, universally recognized as a symbol of peace, has a connection to the modern state. Officially incorporated into the State Emblem of Israel in 1949, the olive branches surrounding the menorah represent the Jewish people's longing for peace. Israel's desire for peace is prominent in the insignia of the Israel Defense Force (IDF) that depicts a sword wrapped with an olive branch symbolizing the armed forces of a country dedicated to seeking peaceful resolution before going to war.

Why then, is Israel commonly portrayed as an aggressor? *Understanding what is behind a message that is contrary to reality lies in recognizing that the information has been reframed to conform to an agenda.*

While Israel is routinely at the center of negative press, mainstream and social media have reframed the IDF initiated Operation Defensive Edge as retaliation for the kidnap and murder of three Jewish yeshiva students on June 12, 2014.

Asserting that Israel's response is disproportionate and motivated by revenge, most commentators chose not to report that 250 rockets during six days of incessant attacks from Gaza (with as many as 80 per day) provoked Israel's military action.¹ It is unlikely that any other government in the world would have shown similar restraint in the face of comparable provocation.

Beginning in July 2014, more than 4,562 rockets have been launched against Israel. Since the provocations from Gaza began, rocket attacks have threatened 6 million Israelis with some reaching the major cities of Tel Aviv, Be'er Sheva, Jerusalem and as far away as Haifa.²

Prime Minister Stephen Harper, one of only a few world leaders to recognize the implications of the onslaught, courageously stated,

"The indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza on Israel are terrorist acts, for which there is no justification . . . Canada calls on its allies and partners to recognize that these terrorist acts are unacceptable and that solidarity with Israel is the best way of stopping the conflict."³

Those reporting conveniently forget that in 2005, Israel disengaged from Gaza in a gesture to engender peaceful coexistence with inhabitants of the

Gaza Strip. Jewish towns in Gaza were destroyed; Israel's military infrastructure was dismantled and removed; and, over 9,000 Jewish residents were evicted from their homes. On the basis of this magnanimous act, one would expect the violence and rocket attacks against Israel to have ceased.

Following Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, however, the terrorist group, Hamas, won a landslide election in 2006 and in a violent confrontation with Fatah forcibly ousted the Palestinian Authority in 2007.

From that time until the beginning of Operation Defensive Edge, more than 11,000 rockets were fired on Israel's cities and towns from Gaza.⁴ In June of this year, Mahmoud Abbas created a unity government with Hamas that seemingly correlates with increased rocket attacks against Israel.⁵

In addition to missile attacks, the foreboding threat of recently discovered tunnels covertly dug beneath Israel's border gives terrorists underground access from Gaza into Israel.⁶

News agencies in Israel report discovery of a plot to execute a devastating attack using the tunnel network. According to military sources, the plan was to dispatch 200 terrorists dressed in Israeli uniforms through each of more than 20 tunnels to murder and kidnap Israeli civilians in kibbutzim and surrounding communities of southern Israel. It is this threat that prompted the ground incursion since boots on the ground were required to locate and destroy the vast network of tunnels.⁷



Prime Minister Stephen Harper praying at the Western Wall 2014.01.21.

PMO photo by Jason Ransom

Planned for Rosh Hashanah on September 24, 2014, information also suggests that Hezbollah operating from Lebanon and Syria may have planned a coordinated attack against Israel from the north at the same time. One military spokesman described such an invasion as a "catastrophic event on an apocalyptic magnitude such as the Yom Kippur War, which would have brought the state of Israel to its knees."⁸

Since the beginning of the ground incursion, the IDF has discovered more than 32 highly sophisticated tunnels complete with electricity and telephone lines for communication that are between one to three kilometers long and as deep as 30 meters below the surface. IDF units exposing the tunnels found them packed with explosives, Israeli army uniforms, chloroform and zip-tie shackles to be used in abductions, and caches of weapons with ammunition. Some tunnels had rooms built into the walls for holding hostages.⁹



Photo courtesy www.idf.com/blog



Although Israel is consistently reframed as the aggressor in the current conflict, the facts demonstrate otherwise.

Consistent with its code of ethics, Israel has repeatedly extended the olive branch in an attempt to restore peace and avoid further bloodshed. The state of Israel has honoured at least 11 ceasefires that have all been flatly rejected or violated by their attackers. Check-out the daily diary on the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website for an exhaustive list; here is a brief summary:

- The first, on July 15, 2014 was violated by 50 rocket attacks from Gaza in 6 hours.
- Several humanitarian ceasefires were all violated by continued rocket attacks from Gaza.
- On August 1, a UN proposal for a 72-hour ceasefire was violated by an attack that killed three Israeli soldiers.
- Israel's provision of a 72-hour humanitarian window on August 4 was met with continued rocket fire from Gaza during the interlude.
- On August 5, leaders in Gaza accepted the identical ceasefire

proposal brokered three weeks earlier in Egypt, and then violated it by attacking southern Israel.

- A 72-hour ceasefire was called on August 10 and violated with rocket attacks against Israel. Despite the violation, Israel proposed an extension of the ceasefire for an additional 5 days until August 18.
- On August 18, the ceasefire was once again extended 24 hours, but violated by 50 rocket attacks threatening Israeli cities including Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.¹⁰

Reframing the Gaza conflict, the majority of world leaders and media

outlets have used a disingenuous mantra chanting that Israel has the right to defend itself, but must do a better job of limiting civilian casualties.

Mainstream media reframes the conflict by failing to report that Israel's enemies consistently commit double war crimes by not only launching rockets, missiles and mortars at civilian populations, but also doggedly attacking from their own heavily populated areas. The abundance of video footage showing rockets being fired from the roof of hospitals, mosques, school yards, UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency)

compounds and other heavily populated areas in direct violation of international law is astounding.

In stark contrast, Israel takes unprecedented steps to limit collateral damage and civilian loss of life. It is the only army in the world that announces an impending attack to give civilians an opportunity to escape from danger. Leaflets are dropped at least 24 hours before the strike; and, text messages and phone calls are made to everyone in proximity to the proposed target on the day.



Even as an attack is underway, a non-lethal explosive device is set off in a maneuver called "roof knocking" that alerts civilians that they are in the vicinity of a military target. Video records repeatedly show that when the "roof knocking" blast is heard, residents and neighbors actually congregate in the area causing Israeli officers to abort. When laser-guided ordinance is used, a safe secondary target is always chosen in the event the strike must be aborted at the last moment because of civilians.

Shirley Anne Haber, president of the Toronto based Media Action Group, reminds Canadians that

"Israel does not store bombs or set up rocket launchers in hospitals, schools, mosques and homes, and when it retaliates, they target individual buildings and warn residents first to leave. The

Forcing the public's perceptions of reality to fit a predetermined agenda, involves reframing information where the message distorts Israel's actions as unjustified or a violation of human rights or disproportionately violent.



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devastation we see on TV is limited by the camera lens of the photographer - you don't see the rest of Gaza which remains untouched by the war."¹¹

In other words, *forcing the public's perceptions of reality to fit a predetermined agenda, involves reframing information where the message distorts Israel's actions as unjustified or a violation of human rights or disproportionately violent.* Christians must inform themselves with factual information about the current threat to Israel, as well as Israel's moral obligation to respond to the threat.

Ultimately, how individuals within the Christian community view the modern state of Israel will be determined by their attitude toward the Bible.

Christians committed to a consistent, literal, historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture—where words consistently mean what they normally convey in the context—recognize Israel is distinct from the church and still has a viable place in God's plan and program for history.

This is the plain teaching of the Bible. The apostle Paul asks the rhetorical question "has God cast away His people [Israel]?" He answers "Certainly not!" using the Greek statement, *μη γένοιτο* (me genoitaw)

to communicate that the idea is so absurd and unthinkable, it shouldn't even enter one's mind (Rm.11:1). God's unilateral covenants with Israel are eternal and not limited by time. God promised Abraham,

I will establish my covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you (Gen. 17:7).

The Hebrew word *olam* translated "everlasting" literally means "world" and conveys continued existence to the end of this world. The phrase, *olam v'ad olam*, usually translated "everlasting to everlasting" or "for ever and ever" literally means "from this world to the next" and always describes the concept of eternity. Interestingly, twice in the prophecy of Jeremiah, the land is described specifically as the possession, *I [God] gave to your fathers forever and ever [olam v'ad olam]* (Jer. 17:7; 25:5)¹²

Plainly stated, God promised the land to Israel as a possession not only for all time as reckoned on earth, but for eternity. God isn't about to renege on His promise so vital to the Abrahamic Covenant.¹³

It would seem that based on the clear teaching of Scripture, Christians would naturally support Israel.

That some Christians do not can be traced to a major shift in theology when Augustine began promoting an allegorical versus literal interpretation of Scripture in the 4th century. Although denounced as heresy by

Tertullian two centuries earlier, Augustine's influence propelled the allegorical method into the official hermeneutic of the state Church.



Employing this inconsistent form of interpretation, Augustine was the first to formally propose that Israel was dispossessed and forsaken by God, and that the church had replaced Israel. It is obvious that a flawed interpretation of the Bible results in a flawed view of Israel.

Those holding such a view see no reason to support the modern state of Israel, often act in opposition to Israel (as in the BDS movement) and are convinced that no ethnic or religious group is entitled to the land inhabited by Israel at the present time—especially Israel.¹⁴ Such a conclusion, however, requires hermeneutical gymnastics that willfully ignores the plain teaching of Scripture.

Like an olive tree in the hostile environment of the Middle East, Israel not only survives, but thrives as an island of freedom and democracy in the region. Even with the expensive burden of defending citizens from ruthless attacks, Israel's contributions in science, medicine, technology and agriculture have not only provided hope to impoverished nations, but also enhanced life for those living in the Western world.

God's Word explicitly teaches the importance of supporting Israel

(Gen. 12:3; Ps. 122:6). Christians prepared with the facts and an unwavering commitment to the Word of God can positively influence people in their own faith communities to support Israel.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹<<http://www.idfblog.com/blog/2014/08/05/operation-protective-edge-numbers/>>.
- ²<<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Pages/Israel-under-fire-July-2014-A-Diary.aspx>>.
- ³Stephen Harper urges world leaders to side with Israel, *The Star*, July 13, 2014, <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/07/13/pm_stephen_harper_urges_world_leaders_to_side_with_israel.html>.
- ⁴<<http://www.idfblog.com/facts-figures/rocket-attacks-toward-israel/>>.
- ⁵<http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/palestinians-form-new-unity-government-including-hamas/2014/06/02/c681d5c6-ea46-11e3-9f5c-9075d5508foa_story.html>.
- ⁶The abduction of Gilad Shalit in 2006 and kidnappings and brutal murders of two Israeli soldiers on July 21 and another on August 1, 2014 by terrorists operating from tunnels are horrifying examples.
- ⁷Live Updates: Operation Defensive Edge, Day 11, *Haaretz*, July 18, 2014, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.605855>>.
- ⁸Aryteh Savir, Tazpit, Hama' mega-attack thorough Gaza terror tunnels exposed, *Y-Net News.com*, <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4550733,00.html>>.
- ⁹Paul Miller, Reports: Massive Terrorist Invasion of Israel Thwarted by Security Forces, <<http://www.breitbart.com/Big-Peace/2014/07/25/Reports-Massive-Terrorist-Invasion-of-Israel-Thwarted-by-Security-Forces>>.
- ¹⁰<<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Pages/Protective-Edge-Hamas-violations-of-ceasefires-chronology.aspx>>.
- ¹¹Shirley Anne Haber, Alert Father Saves 30 Kindergarten Children on Israeli kibbutz - my cousin's family...(Algemeiner), email message, August 24, 2014.
- ¹²J. Randall Price, *Is the Modern State of Israel Prophetically Significant?*, <<http://www.raptureready.com/featured/price/16rp.pdf>>.



¹³If Israel has indeed been dispossessed as some contend, none of God's unilateral covenants with Israel have any foundation including the New Covenant (that allows Gentiles forgiveness of sin and indwelling of the Holy Spirit on the basis of their relationship to Israel's Messiah).

¹⁴Knox Open Letter to Evangelicals and Other Interested Parties: The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel, <<http://www.bible-researcher.com/openletter.html>>. If this aberrant theology had been

eradicated shortly after it was popularized, it could never have morphed into the problem it is today. Instead it has re-emerged throughout history and metastasized into the form of Replacement Theology that continues to plague the church with an unbiblical view of Israel.

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