

Victorious Hamas and the Russian invitation

Nigel Bernard

The victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections reflect the hatred of Israel as prophesied by Scripture. It may also, however, help prepare the way for Israel dwelling safely. The possible implications of the election are considered in this article, together with the significance of the invitation by President Putin for Hamas to visit Moscow.

REGARDING THE DAYS prior to A.D. 70 Christ prophesied: "and great earthquakes shall be in divers places" (Lk. 21:11). At the time of the end it may well be that there will also be such earthquakes, both physical and political. The recent victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections was described by the journalists Matthew Campbell and Uzi Mahnaimi as a "political earthquake".¹ Hamas has extreme views concerning Israel. Its accession to power and democratic mandate left many world leaders shocked. In Genesis 16 the angel prophesied concerning Ishmael, "And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren" (v. 12). The Arab supporters of Hamas, with their "wild" gun-toting victory celebrations and their fighting "against" defeated Fatah supporters, showed that this verse continues to be fulfilled today.

Origins

Hamas was formed in 1987 during the first intifada. Hamas, which means 'zeal' in Arabic, provided an Islamic and more militant alternative to the more secular Palestinian Liberation Organisation. In 1988 Hamas published a charter, or "covenant", which was openly anti-Semitic, calling, amongst other things, for the obliteration of Israel. In 1992, 400 Hamas activists were expelled to South Lebanon by Israel. Here they subsequently received terrorist training by the Iranian-backed Hizbullah. In 1993 the first Hamas suicide bomb was detonated. There have been 427 Israelis killed in fifty-eight suicide bombings in the last six years.

Fatah failings

As Campbell and Mahnaimi show, the victory of Hamas in the elections owed much to the failings of Fatah and the late Yasser Arafat. Fatah had failed to function effectively as a government. It had been unable to stop the second intifada in 2000 and proved powerless against Israeli retaliation. There was widespread corruption, especially with regard to aid money. Fatah also did not engage with its younger members. Add to this the general lack of security and safety, unemployment and the border restrictions imposed by the Israelis and it is not difficult to see how Hamas was able to gain the support of the majority. Hamas had a track record of providing health facilities and social welfare for its people. This helped generate positive support for Hamas in addition to the disillusion felt towards Fatah.

Effects

What will be the long-term effect of the victory of Hamas? One possibility is that its coming to power will force it to adopt a conciliatory attitude to Israel. The Palestinians currently receive \$1.1 billion in aid, but foreign donors have said that Hamas must recognise Israel and renounce violence if this aid is to continue. The threat of economic ruin may force the hand of Hamas, although some claim it will find money from other sources if necessary. A more conciliatory approach would presumably be encouraged by the Palestinian Authority's president, Mahmoud Abbas, who belongs to Fatah. We know from Ezekiel 38 that Israel will "dwell safely" (v. 11) prior to Armageddon, and perhaps the victory of Hamas may, ironically, turn out to further the fulfilment of this prophecy. Indeed, Hamas has in any case held to a unilateral ceasefire since last spring.

The outcome of the Israeli election to be held in March will be another factor to watch. The new

1. Campbell, M. and Mahnaimi, U. (2006), "Gunning for Israel", *The Sunday Times*, 29 Jan., pp. 20-21.

political party Kadima, a centrist party set up after Likud disowned the Gaza withdrawal, has added a new perspective to Israeli politics. The subsequent illness of Ariel Sharon served only to add to the uncertainty. Whatever the outcome there is evidence to suggest that there would be popular backing for talking with Hamas. A recent poll found that sixty-seven per cent of Israelis were not opposed to negotiation with Hamas.²

Russia

There has, however, been a more ominous development since the victory of Hamas. This concerns Russia. We know from Joel 3 that, when Russia invades, the Palestinians will be on their side against Israel. They will take from Israel "silver and . . . gold" and "goodly pleasant things" (v. 5). We should therefore be expecting the Palestinians and Russia to be on the same side. The so-called international Quartet consisting of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations had supposedly agreed not to speak with Hamas until it recognised Israel and renounced violence. But Russia suddenly broke ranks. As the *Financial Times* reported, "US officials admit they were blindsided and dismayed by Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, when

he proposed on Thursday [9 February] inviting Hamas to Moscow for talks".³ An Israeli minister, Meir Sheetrit, spoke of Putin "stabbing Israel in the back". Russia defended its decision by claiming that Hamas had achieved a valid democratic victory.

Conclusion

Events are certainly moving fast in the Middle East. Whatever happens in the short term we know that Israel is to be invaded by Gog, who will then be defeated by Christ and the saints on the mountains of Israel. Gog will come from the north, but at one point he will lead forces from the direction of Egypt when "tidings out of the east and out of the north shall trouble him" (Dan. 11:44). When this happens, "he shall go forth with great fury to destroy, and utterly to make away many". This will be an attack on Israel from the rear. But, as we have seen, this will not be the first time that Russia has stabbed Israel in the back.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Dinmore, G. and Spiegel, P. (2006), "Israel and US on back foot over Hamas", *Financial Times*, 11/12 Feb., p. 7.

Tarshish and Dedan

Recent developments

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The British navy has recently launched a new technologically advanced ship, consistent with its role as the latter-day Tarshish. Saudi Arabia's economy is growing rapidly, and she is encouraging British companies to trade with her. This reflects the close link between Tarshish and Dedan as depicted in prophecy.

IN EZEKIEL 38 we read of "Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish" (v. 13) being grouped together at the time of the end. Dedan refers to Saudi Arabia and Tarshish refers to Britain. In this article we will consider two recent events which relate to this verse. Firstly, we will consider the launch of a new British naval ship which will strengthen Britain in its role as the Tarshish sea power. Secondly, we will reflect on a recent speech made by the Saudi Arabian ambassador to

Britain, which shows that the link between these two countries is set to strengthen.

Ships of Tarshish

Tarshish will have a significant navy at the time of the end. Some ships will be destroyed as the judgements of God are carried out: "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind" (Ps. 48:7). Other ships will be used to bring Jews back to the Land of Israel: "Surely the isles shall wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD [Yahweh] thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He hath glorified thee" (Isa. 60:9). Therefore, as the country referred to by Tarshish, Britain will have a significant navy at the time of the end. It might be thought that Britain's naval power has faded compared with, for example, the days of