

# A WORLD IN MOTION



ISSUE 188 | 15 FEBRUARY 2018

## P1 | ISRAEL-IRAN

Israel launched its most intense aerial assault against Syria and their allies, after targeting a drone in their airspace and losing an F-16.

## P2 | KENYA

Tensions between re-elected President Kenyatta and opposition leader Odinga continue to dog Kenyan politics, dividing the nation.

## P3 | AFGHANISTAN

The recent intensification and increase in terror attacks points towards a possible power struggle between the Taliban and the Islamic State.

## P4 | PUBLICATIONS

Three books by Mike Burnard, available to order.



## THE NUMBERS:

### ISRAEL-IRAN



90 seconds

The time the drone was within Israeli airspace before being shot down by a helicopter



1982

The last time Israel lost a jet to an enemy combatant



15+

The estimated number of anti-aircraft missiles fired at the downed F-16



6+

The estimated casualties from Israeli airstrikes (Syrian and non-Syrian military personnel)

## ISRAEL AND IRAN COME TO BLOWS IN SYRIA



By Donnelly McClelland

Israel launched its most intensive air strikes yet against Iranian forces in Syria on Saturday [10 February] after intercepting what it said was an Iranian drone and the rare downing of an Israeli F-16 warplane. The incidents marked the most serious confrontations in Syria between Israel and Iranian-backed forces that have established a major foothold in the country while fighting in support of President Bashar al-Assad in a nearly seven-year-old civil war. (*Reuters*)

### Israel's 'red line'

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed Israel's resolve to his Cabinet on Sunday: "We made it unequivocally clear to everyone that our rules of action have not changed one bit. We will continue to strike at every attempt to strike at us. This has been our policy and it will remain our policy." Since the start of the Syrian war, Israel has largely remained on the side-lines of the conflict – their airstrikes have generally been limited to suspected weapons shipments believed to be headed for Lebanese Hezbollah (the Iranian and Syrian-allied militant group). Hezbollah and its backers in Iran do not recognise the Jewish state and have sworn its destruction.

Israel has long warned of the growing presence and threat of Iran in Syria, especially along their northern border and the disputed Golan Heights region. Israel fears that Iran could use Syrian territory to stage attacks or create a land corridor from Iran to Lebanon that could allow an easier transfer of weapons to Hezbollah. Saturday's retaliatory strikes, which were said to have

successfully hit air defence and Iranian targets, marked the toughest Israeli aerial assault in Syria in decades.

According to European officials who spoke with Channel 10 news, Mr Netanyahu spoke a number of times in recent weeks with German chancellor Angela Merkel, French president Emmanuel Macron, and UK prime minister Theresa May, warning them of the Islamic Republic's aggression in the region. In those conversations, it is reported that Mr Netanyahu stressed that Israel preferred a diplomatic solution to the problem, but that if that did not work, it would be forced to use military means.

### International reactions

The weekend's confrontation brought a variety of responses. The downing of the Israeli aircraft was hailed as a symbolic triumph by forces loyal to the Syrian government. Hezbollah called the incident the "start of a new strategic phase" that would aim to limit Israel's air superiority in the region. These comments came despite reports that Israeli airstrikes killed six Syrian and non-Syrian members of President Assad's regime, according to the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, and inflicted damage to Syrian air defences.

Tehran insisted that Iranian personnel are only in Syria to advise the government of Bashar al-Assad and that Iran has no conventional armed forces in the country. It also denied it had sent a drone into Israeli airspace. According to Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency, Ali Shamkhani (the secretary of Iran's supreme national security council) was quoted as saying: "The 'Zionists' [Iran's terminology for Israel] failed to inflict damage on Iranian-Syrian bases." Hossein Salamai, the deputy head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, warned: "Iran can create a hell for the 'Zionists'."

In a phone call with Mr Netanyahu, Russian President Vladimir Putin (President Assad's ally in the Syrian war) stressed the need to avoid a "dangerous escalation". Russia also called on

# NEWS HEADLINES



**South African** President Jacob Zuma has resigned, with immediate effect. Mr Zuma said he disagreed with the way the ANC had shoved him towards an early exit after the election of Cyril Ramaphosa as party president in December, but would accept its orders. His statement came after the ANC gave him an ultimatum to resign or be recalled. The ANC had announced that their MPs would vote with opposition parties in support of a motion of no confidence against Mr Zuma if he did not resign.



Morgan Tsvangirai, **Zimbabwe's** veteran opposition leader who fought Robert Mugabe's regime for many years has died, losing his battle with cancer. He was 65. Arrested, beaten, charged with treason, and eventually made prime minister – Tsvangirai never achieved his aim to become president, but did get to see Robert Mugabe's exit.



The world's most powerful operational rocket, **SpaceX's** Falcon Heavy, blasted off on its highly anticipated maiden test flight, carrying CEO Elon Musk's cherry red Tesla Roadster toward an orbit near Mars. About two minutes into the flight, the two side boosters peeled away from the centre core and made their way back toward Earth for an upright landing. Both rockets landed side by side in unison on launchpads.

nations to "unconditionally respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and other countries of the region".

The White House issued a statement backing Israel's "right to defend itself from the Iranian-backed Syrian and militia forces in southern Syria" and called on Iran and its allies to "cease provocative actions". White House National Security Council spokesman Michael Anton said Israel should have no doubts about the US stance. "We support Israel's security, and the idea that we are 'on the side-lines' when its security is threatened is very far from the case," Anton said. "We have a very close relationship with our Israeli national security counterparts at all levels." A Western diplomat in the region said: "My impression is that it seems to be contained at this point. I don't think anybody wants to escalate further."

## FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Israeli restraint (and the lack of civilian casualties) is one of the most glaring observations from the weekend's confrontation, which has received very little coverage in mainstream media. Syria and its allies celebrated the downing of the Israeli jet,

with absolutely no mention of civilian casualties from Israel's retaliatory strikes, reportedly the "toughest in Syria, in decades". One can be sure that had there been, they would have highlighted it to the world. In what has been a ferocious war – with innumerable cases of civilian casualties, incidents of chemical warfare and towns laid siege to the point of starvation – Israel's precision attacks on only military targets stands out like a beacon. War is brutal, but how a nation wages war says a lot about that nation.

Israel has often borne the brunt of worldly criticism and condemnation, but seldom, if ever, are they credited when they show restraint or wage war in an ethical manner. From a Christian perspective, one could applaud the way in which Israel dealt with the incursion and subsequent loss of their jet – their response was measured and precise. Christians often identify closely with Israel because of their Judeo-Christian history; how much more so when Godly virtues are displayed in action, whether or not the

**PRAY > For Israel's leaders as they continue to defend their borders > For influential leaders in the region to make wise decisions regarding their relationship with Israel > For believers in the region to demonstrate Christ's love across barriers**

## KENYA'S TENUOUS POLITICAL SITUATION



By Andrew Richards

**K**enya opposition leader Raïla Odinga took a symbolic presidential oath of office on the Bible in front of thousands of ecstatic supporters in a direct challenge to President Uhuru Kenyatta's rule. "I, Raïla Omolo Odinga, do swear that I will protect the nation as people's president, so help me God," he said as the crowd cheered. Kenyan authorities shut down television and radio stations as more than 10,000 supporters of Odinga watched him take a symbolic presidential oath in Nairobi park. Odinga's supporters insist that he, not Mr Kenyatta, is Kenya's legitimate leader, and that Mr Kenyatta's election was neither free nor fair. Mr Kenyatta's election victory in August was annulled by the Supreme Court over irregularities, but he then won a re-run, which Odinga boycotted over a failure to revamp the electoral commission and was sworn in for a second term in November. (eNCA)

### Kenyatta vs. Odinga

Kenya's 2017 presidential election was something of a rarity in Africa. Not that elections are not held elsewhere on the continent, but it was rare that irregularities in the vote lead to an election re-run, with two presidents being sworn in: Uhuru

Kenyatta as legitimate victor, and Raïla Odinga sworn in by the opposition as the "people's president". What makes the Kenya election so unique is that President Kenyatta allowed the 'treasonous' act of swearing in an illegitimate president to pass without punishment – apart from filing treason charges against the lawyer who illegally swore in Odinga.

As with almost every election campaign in the world, the final months before election day were marked by opposition parties clashing with one another. This was not the first time Odinga stood as the opposition against Mr Kenyatta, and it's also not the first time he lost against Mr Kenyatta. During the 2013 elections, Odinga, after losing, challenged the results of the vote. Odinga lost the 2017 election by 44.94% to 54.17%, and once again Odinga challenged the results. But after a re-run of the election (which Odinga boycotted), Mr Kenyatta won again.

Tensions between Mr Kenyatta and Odinga go as far back as Kenya's independence, when Mr Kenyatta's father, Jomo Kenyatta, was Kenya's first elected president, after gaining independence in 1963. Odinga's father, Jaramogi Ajuma Odinga, was the country's first vice-president. The elder Odinga later became an opposition leader and his son, after failing three attempts at the presidency, continues to bear this mantle today.

### Election violence and Kenya's future

Kenya's 2017 presidential election is not unique when it comes to pre-election violence and post-election treason, but to date it has never led to civil war. Kenya's recent history is marred by election violence. In 1992, 779 people were killed and more than 56,000 displaced. Elections in 1997 saw more than 200 killed and the displacement of over 100,000. Then in 2007,

# NEWS HEADLINES



A military offensive launched last month by Congolese troops against Ugandan militants in eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo** is likely to force nearly 370,000 people from their homes, the United Nations said.



**US** President Donald Trump has said he will expand and update the US nuclear arsenal in a departure from nearly 50 years of US policy. Mr Trump said the move was a response to other countries' decision to increase their nuclear stockpiles – a likely reference to North Korea, which has been testing nuclear weapons and missiles at a surprisingly rapid rate.



An unholy war of words has broken out among **Vatican** and Catholic officials over the Holy See's rapprochement with Communist China. The exchanges came as the Vatican and China moved closer to an accord on the appointment of bishops in what would be an historic breakthrough and a precursor to a resumption in diplomatic relations after 70 years. Any deal was bound to be controversial because of concessions the Vatican would have to make to a government that has kept religion under its thumb.

election violence left 1,300 people dead and displaced more than 650,000.

The current tension has again brought the country to the brink of civil war, and if history is any indication, Kenya could be in for darker days. In neighbouring South Sudan, conflict between President Salva Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar led to a civil war that has to date claimed the lives of more than 300,000 people and displaced up to 3.5 million civilians. Could this be Kenya's future?

## FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

If one considers the hypothetical scenario, where civil unrest in Kenya leads to civil war, analysts raise two crucial questions: together with civil war in South Sudan, what would another war in East Africa mean for the future of democracy, and would Somalia's al-Shabaab (and other Islamic terrorist organisations) take advantage of the chaos as happened in Syria? Putting it simply, with the civil war in South Sudan already claiming the lives of thousands, would Kenya become the 'Syria of Africa', if war breaks out?

We asked INcontext International's East Africa director, Aron Mwasile, to help us understand the major implications of Kenya's post-election tensions.

"If things become worse, it could result in civil war, but for now people are calm. President Kenyatta is handling the situation very wisely: he could have used the military to stop the swearing-in of Odinga, but he allowed it to take place, even though it was a criminal offence (treason), punishable by death. If Mr Kenyatta continues to handle the situation as he has so far, civil war is not likely," said Mwasile.

Mwasile concludes that if radical Islamic elements exploit the violence in Kenya, Christian activities in the region would suffer: "Kenya is still the favoured headquarters for many Christian mission organisations for the East Africa region. The challenge of al-Shabaab is that they will try and exploit any tension in the country, even going so far as to join the opposition in a civil war. If this happens, all mission movements in the country, and wider region, will be affected, possibly setting back mission activities by several years."

It therefore becomes crucial that Christians pray for peace in Kenya.

**PRAY > For Godly wisdom for Kenya's leaders, especially for Mr Kenyatta and Mr Odinga > For a peaceful resolution to the political tensions > For ethnically diverse believers to be peacemakers**

## TERROR GROUPS' POWER STRUGGLE IN AFGHANISTAN



By Conrad Bornman

The Islamic State group and the Taliban are competing to take credit for a horrific spike in violence in Afghanistan over the last month, and analysts say both insurgent groups are growing in strength as security forces wither under their relentless attacks and a feuding government struggles to win over citizens. (*Associated Press*)

### Recent attacks

More than 130 people were killed in four separate attacks over a two-week period in Afghanistan. The Taliban claimed two of the attacks and the Islamic State (IS) claimed the other two. The Taliban's siege of the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul resulted in at least 22 people dead, and two days after the attack on the hotel, an ambulance packed with explosives was detonated at a busy checkpoint in the city, killing more than 100 people.

In the first of two IS-claimed attacks, IS militants stormed the offices of British aid agency, Save the Children, in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad. At least four people were killed, and

dozens injured. They also claimed responsibility for the attack on the Marshal Fahim Military Academy base in the centre of Kabul. This recent spike in attacks has raised concerns of a possible deadly competition between the two terrorist groups. Authorities say both terror groups are growing in strength and renewed popularity in Afghanistan. The success of the US and its allies in driving IS fighters out of Iraq and Syria has pushed many towards Afghanistan.

### Power struggle

The recent intensification and increase in terror attacks points towards a possible power struggle between the Taliban and the IS, using different methods. Analysts also point to different goals: the Taliban, with its nationalist thrust, tries to continually remain in the forefront of Afghan consciousness through prominent attacks; IS, meanwhile, has a more international approach, often specifically selecting foreign-influenced targets. This trend of outdoing each other could see attacks escalate and become more violent. Both groups aim to destabilise the US-backed Afghanistan government and attempt to impose a strict version of Islamic Sharia rule. The two groups have, on occasion, clashed on the battlefield. In April 2017, IS militants attacked the Taliban in the northern Jawzjan province, with heavy casualties on both sides.

### Winning "hearts and minds"

A culture structured along ethnic and tribal lines, Afghanistan has traditionally been very hostile towards foreign powers and influence. Winning the "hearts and minds" of Afghani locals is something

## FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

### INcontext Website:

[www.incontextinternational.org](http://www.incontextinternational.org)

Please visit our website for up-to-date information on events around the world.

If you have any questions or comments relating to the articles in this publication or on the website, please feel free to contact us at any time.

## INcontext Team Details



### Contact:

#### General - Mike:

Mobile - 0828657380

[mike@incontextministries.org](mailto:mike@incontextministries.org)

#### AWIM - Andrew:

[andrew@incontextministries.org](mailto:andrew@incontextministries.org)

#### Communication & Prayer - Donnelly:

[donnely@incontextministries.org](mailto:donnely@incontextministries.org)

#### Seminars - Eric:

[eric@incontextministries.org](mailto:eric@incontextministries.org)

#### Events - Hanlie:

[hanlie@incontextministries.org](mailto:hanlie@incontextministries.org)

#### Projects - Gustav:

[gustav@incontextministries.org](mailto:gustav@incontextministries.org)

#### Travel /IT- Stefan:

[stefan@incontextministries.org](mailto:stefan@incontextministries.org)

#### Book orders - Beatrice:

[lom@incontextministries.org](mailto:lom@incontextministries.org)



## INcontext Banking Details

### SOUTH AFRICA

Bank: ABSA

Name: INcontext

Cheque acc no: 4078983933

Branch: Durbanville (632 005)

that even the Afghan central government has failed to accomplish, perhaps because of their close cooperation with foreign powers. If the Taliban and IS, who both have similar goals, are competing to win local support, it is important to consider the differences between the two insurgent groups, which cause them to compete rather than cooperate.

The Taliban grew out of the traditional Pashtun tribal way of life in Afghanistan, and they practice a form of Sunni Islam called Deobandi. Taliban means 'student' in Arabic, and it is widely speculated that the group first emerged from religious seminaries that preached a strict variation of Sunni Islam. The group enforces extreme laws that its members are expected to adhere to. Women over the age of 10 are prohibited from receiving an education, and televisions and social media are banned. IS was established in Iraq and Syria (after 2014), and only became a force in Afghanistan when Taliban commanders defected and swore allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The renegade commanders were mostly those who had grown dissatisfied with the leadership of Mullah Mohammed Omar (leader of the Taliban at that time).

Although both groups practice extreme versions of Sunni Islam, they vary in degree, with the Taliban slightly less extreme than the Wahhabi-Salafist tradition practiced by IS. The Taliban predominately engages in guerrilla warfare, making them extremely difficult to face using conventional combat techniques, while IS is far more structured and similar to a conventional army. IS has also managed to harness the power of social media in ways no preceding terrorist group has.

It is clearly evident that both the Taliban and IS remain grave threats to the development of democratic institutions in Afghanistan, together with other active terror groups like al-Qaeda. Added to the complexities, the US under President Trump's administration has also committed more soldiers and resources to Afghanistan.

## FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

While much of the mainstream media coverage has focused on the wars in Syria and Iraq, together with the rise and fall of IS in these two countries, the tide in Afghanistan was slowly turning away from the fledgling democratic government, back towards extremism.

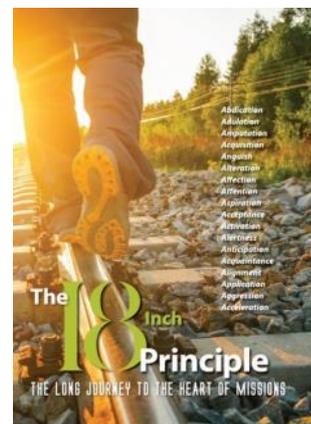
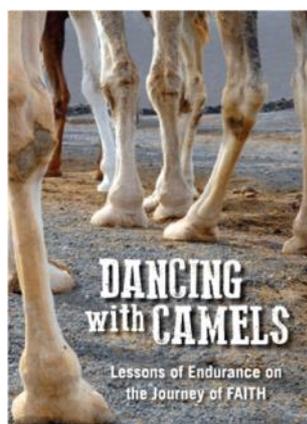
It has never been easy for the Church in Afghanistan, which has faced persecution almost from the outset, but in a sense, this has worked to their advantage. The Church in Syria and Iraq has suffered huge losses under the relentless, severe persecution of IS, since it was a visible Church. The 'underground' Church in Afghanistan, is not as easily targeted by the terrorist groups. But the surge in attacks in Afghanistan has certainly made the operation of the Church logistically more challenging. One leader stated: "Unfortunately the security of Afghanistan becomes worse every day, and this has an influence on our ministry. Not long ago we could travel between provincial towns by car, but now there are Taliban and IS military checkpoints everywhere. We are forced to fly."

The ideology of radical Islam cannot and will not be defeated by any military intervention or weapons – it is a spiritual battle, and the deception of Islam can only be exposed by the Truth of the Gospel. The Church in Afghanistan may be small and 'underground', but they are there, and they need the larger Body of Christ to continue upholding them in prayer and encouragement. As the same leader says: "We do our ministry in Afghanistan and God keeps our staff safe. We are always in prayer and ask that you pray for the security of [our] country and the house churches in Afghanistan."

**PRAY > For the Afghan government to experience breakthrough in the many issues the nation faces > For Afghan church leaders as they travel throughout the country, training and strengthening believers > For believers to continue growing in maturity and boldness**

## AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS

### 3 BOOK TITLES BY MIKE BURNARD



**EACH BOOK IS AVAILABLE FOR R100 (POSTAGE EXCLUDED).**

To place an order, email [lom@incontextministries.org](mailto:lom@incontextministries.org)  
OR visit our website shop [HERE](#).