

Fighting The Good Fight



**Articles on Gaza
by Fr. Dave Smith**

www.fatherdave.org



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Rev. David B. Smith
(the 'Fighting Father')

An Australian Anglican
Parish priest, community worker,
martial arts master, pro boxer, author,
father of four.

www.fatherdave.org

A portrait of Rev. David B. Smith, a man with short dark hair, wearing a black clerical shirt with a white collar, standing with his arms crossed in front of a stone wall.

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Pilgrims light candles at the
Church of the Nativity
Bethlehem

Pray for Gaza *by Father Dave*

Gaza is a grim situation, yet I am full of hope. As a younger man, I never believed that the Berlin wall would fall and I never imagined a day when South Africa would be led by a majority government. And I certainly never thought a black man would ever be elected President of the United States! With God all things are possible, even new life for Gaza. Will you pray with me?

They are raining bombs on Gaza, and it cuts me to the quick! Will you pray with me for these people and for justice?

Here's the brief history, as I see it, that led up to this terrible assault:

- First the occupying force hermetically sealed in the people of Gaza on all sides, creating an enormous open-air prison.
- Then they destroyed Gaza's only power station (claiming that mischief-makers can't work in the dark) thus making the population entirely dependent on Israel, not only for power but for fresh water (which is pumped into the region by electric pumps).
- Then they tightened control at all the checkpoints coming in and going out of Gaza - restricting all exports and imports, including food and medical supplies and most significantly of all, gas - the fuel that could be used to fire stoves to boil impure water and so maintain health standards, as the freshly pumped water became unavailable.

"The idea", Dov Weisglass (the Israeli Prime Minister's advisor) said, '*is to put the Palestinians on a diet*', so that they would recognise their own stupidity in electing the Hamas government. The inevitable result of course was ever-increasing suffering across the entire population - unemployment running rife, disease breaking out, hospitals not being able to operate their machinery or get necessary supplies, and in one case, a whole family drowning in raw human sewerage!

The people of Gaza were expected to put their faith in the peace process - hoping that the Israelis and the Americans would honour their commitment to bringing them freedom, but we knew that they eventually had to break. Sooner or later they had to lose their patience and hit back in whatever way they could.

And they did lose their patience. And they did hit back! They fired their pathetic home-made rockets across the walls of their prison. And this was all the excuse the Israeli government needed to launch a massive aerial assault against the people, targeting police stations, massacring civilians, and killing children while they slept in their beds, all the while wagging their finger and saying to the Gazans, "*You only have yourselves to blame!*"

And the most sickening part of it all, to me as an observer, is to hear my fellow Australians, along with most of the rest of the Western world, chiming in with this sick and paternalistic mantra - "*You Gazans only have yourselves to blame*".

Are we really that stupid? Did we really buy the spin? Is it really even remotely conceivable to see this assault as an act of self-defence?

I think the media has convinced us over the years that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is like one endless and bloody boxing match where the fighters, even if not *equally* matched, are nonetheless fighting a fair stand-up stoush. In truth though, this stoush is more like watching Mike Tyson beat up on a 10-year-old schoolboy. Each round the youngster struggles back to his feet, and then he's immediately knocked straight back down to the canvas!

The only problem with this boxing analogy is that even Tyson wouldn't keep kicking the little fella while he was down, whereas the IDF have never let up on with their raids, housing demolitions, detentions without trial, and extra-judicial killings, even during so-called ceasefires.

Lord, have mercy! This fight needs to end!

I'm sick of seeing the little guy get thumped, but in truth, I've got no desire to see him rise from the canvas to deal a surprise knockout blow to the Israelis either. I don't idealise the Palestinian leadership, I don't want to see the destruction of the State of Israel, and I don't want to see rough justice meted out to the Israelis as a payback for their years of oppression. But something needs to give! This fight can't be allowed to just drag on and on until the lesser opponent eventually drowns in his own blood or makes an equally bloody comeback. But what is it that keeps the whole thing going?

If you're in a boxing match and you are winning every round, perhaps you don't need it to end, but in truth, I can see as many people in the Israeli corner calling for peace as I can in the Palestinian corner. So who is keeping the fight going? Is the referee to blame - President George Dubya? I don't think he can take the entirety of the blame, though he certainly hasn't helped. At any rate, that referee is about to be replaced (thanks be to God)!

Perhaps it's the pugilists themselves who have the greatest vested interest in keeping the fight going, or is it the crowd, made of all three *Peoples of The Book* - people who believe the hype they've been fed by their respective medias and are fuelled with misguided religious zeal, and so bay for blood?

In truth, this tragedy should never have been about religion, except in so far as true religion extols mercy, forgiveness and peace. It certainly should never have been about Jew versus Muslim, Muslim versus Christian, etc. Rather, it's always been a struggle between humanity and inhumanity, justice and injustice, the truth versus the lie. But the problem is that we who believe in humanity, justice and truth remain silent in the face of this horror, and so leave the stage to misguided zealots who would hijack this people's suffering to serve their own ideological agendas.

The path for us at least is clear, and it is NOT to remain silent in the face of this horrific injustice. We must speak out in the name of humanity and love. And those of us who are of a genuine faith must show these people what true religion is about - about mercy, forgiveness and love.

It is a grim situation, yet I am yet full of hope. As a younger man, I never believed that the Berlin wall would fall and I never imagined a day when South Africa would be led by a majority government. And I certainly never thought a black man would ever be elected President of the United States!

With God all things are possible, even new life for Gaza. Will you pray with me, and do whatever you can for the cause of justice and peace in Palestine?



A nun from the Palestinian Rosary Order prepares an altar for mass at Holy Family School, Gaza, 2008. Holy Family School Gaza is a multi-faith school providing education for Muslim and Christian children in Gaza.



"stop the needless sacrifice of the men, women and children to political avarice and a racist ideology"

Gaza's War of Lies (and what you can do about it) *by Father Dave*

The assault on Gaza was not started because of the rocket fire of Hamas and it will not end when and if rockets stop being fired ... Most likely it will only end when the Israeli government perceives that its warring activities are becoming unpopular, either to their own electorate or to the overseas countries that they depend on for support, and this is where we come in, for we have the power to sway the opinion of those supporting countries.

In the 18th Century Jonathon Swift spoke of "a Society of Men among us, bred up from their Youth in the Art of proving by Words multiplied for their Pleasure, that White is Black, and Black is White, according as they are paid. To this Society all the rest of the People are Slaves." (Gulliver's Travels, Part IV, Chapter 5).

Swift was speaking of *lawyers*, but if he were writing today he would no doubt note that *journalists, TV presenters* and other purveyors of the mass media have subsequently joined this devilish 'society of truth-twisters' and

have indeed become so proficient in their art that they can make even the most horrendous act of violence, such as Israel's unrelenting massacre of the civilian population of Gaza, appear as a righteous act of self-defence!

Propaganda, of course, would not have been unknown in Swift's day. Military enterprises have always been multi-layered affairs. The men and women on the front line make up the first layer. The military and political strategists - hidden far from the field of war - make up the second. The propaganda machine is the third layer - serving to justify the brutal activities of their side's war machine while simultaneously vilifying the enemy.

But in times passed the bulk of a nation's military effort would be devoted to the front-line. The king led his troops from the front. He bore whatever risks to life and limb his men bore, and he generally left the moral judgement of his cause to posterity. Nowadays the reverse is true. While not minimising the efforts of those who give their bodies as weapons of war, the real effort in modern warfare, and the key to success, lies in the effectiveness of the propaganda machine that moulds public opinion in support of its warlike purposes. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in Israel's current war on Gaza.

The whole military assault has been built upon a series of media-propagated lies, and if the military machine is to be slowed it will require people around the world to see through these lies. For just as the front line troops will not stop their killing before they get their orders from the layer above them, so the war-mongering generals and politicians will not stop until public opinion turns against their violent designs.

Here are four of the most fundamental lies upon which this latest assault on Palestine has been built:

- That the assault on Gaza took place because Hamas broke a ceasefire.
- That this unprovoked aggression left Israel with no choice but to attack.
- That Israel has no desire to kill civilians, but that Hamas is hiding amongst the civilian population, making civilian casualties inevitable.
- That the assault will stop as soon as Hamas stops firing rockets.

This list is by no means exhaustive of course, but these are certainly four key

lies by which the Israeli government has tried to gain the moral high-ground over her victims. Yet they are easily dismissed.

Lie #1: That the on Gaza took place because Hamas broke a ceasefire.

The Israeli government has claimed that Hamas started the latest outbreak of violence by firing rockets into Israeli cities. The truth is that the rocket attacks were themselves a response to an Israeli military incursion into Gaza that took place a month earlier.

There should be no debate about this. It is a matter of public record. In November 2008 Israeli forces entered Gaza and killed a number of Hamas personnel who were supposedly engaged in building a tunnel out of Gaza. This was the immediate precursor to Hamas' rocket attacks.

Having said that, I don't believe that Israel thereby *broke* the ceasefire, for, in truth, Israel never bought into the ceasefire in the first place. It was always a one-sided ceasefire, upheld by Hamas only, as the Israeli army never lifted its siege upon Gaza, which was a condition of the cease-fire.

For those who have forgotten what is (again) entirely a matter of public record, in 2005 Israel closed off the two border crossings between Gaza and Israel and then severely limited traffic across the third border crossing between Gaza and Egypt. After the election of Hamas to government in 2006, Israel further tightened its grip. For the last 18 months an average of only 70 truckloads of goods per day have been allowed into Gaza. International agencies have estimated that Gaza needs roughly 450 truckloads of supplies each day in order to survive!

The rationale, according to the Prime Minister's office, was to put the Palestinians "*on a diet*". The result of course was widespread suffering across the civilian population. Then, on June 28th 2006, Israel then bombed Gaza's only civilian power plant, making the population entirely dependant on Israel for power, and hence for fresh water, which is pumped into Gaza via electrically-powered pumps. In September of 2006, John Dugard, the UN

Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Occupied Territories declared "*Gaza is a prison, and Israel seems to have thrown away the key*".

In the two years since Dugard's made his analysis, things have deteriorated

a great deal further. Unemployment has risen above 50% (the highest in the world). Both food and fresh water have become increasingly difficult to find. Disease has been breaking out everywhere, as the sewerage system is massively overloaded, and the hospitals have neither the necessary power nor medical supplies to give effective care to the sick and dying.

The lifting of the siege was supposed to be Israel's first contribution to the cease-fire. It never happened. The ceasefire was always a sham.

I imagine two children warring in the playground, both claiming to have stopped fighting. The big child though still has a tight hold on the smaller child's throat, yet is claiming, "*I'm not hitting him any more*". Then he sneaks in another punch, after which the little guy takes a swing, at which point the bully claims the moral right to pulverise his opponent.

Lie #2 That Hamas' aggression left Israel with no choice but to attack.

This is pure garbage. There were lots of choices.

The most obvious option (and the one most likely to lead to real peace) would have been to try genuinely entering into a ceasefire by lifting the siege. It is simply insulting to suggest that all other avenues had been exhausted when at no point since the sealing off of the city in 2005 has the government of Israel halted this collective punishment of the inhabitants of Gaza!

On an entirely different track, another option would have been to allow an International peace-keeping force to enter the region. Palestine has in fact been begging the International community to introduce a real presence into the Occupied Territories for 30 years now. Israel has always refused, but if the real goal had been peace it would have surely been tried.

A third and also very obvious option would have been to enter into open dialogue with the Hamas government. Israel has stubbornly refused to do this, following the Bush government's line of refusing to dialogue with persons you don't already agree with - a strange political maxim indeed for anyone who seriously wants to put an end to war.

Lie #3 That Israel has no desire to kill civilians.

The idea that Hamas is to blame for civilian deaths is sinister. The Israeli

claim is that Hamas militants are *'hiding'* amongst the civilian population. The truth is of course that Hamas are a part of the civilian population.

Hamas, you will remember, before being labelled a *'terrorist organisation'*, was a political movement, democratically elected to govern the people of Gaza and the West Bank. Many of the photos of uniformed dead bodies, seen amongst the first records of Israel's initial action against Gaza, were pictures not of soldiers but of dead policemen, serving the Hamas government in areas such as *traffic control*.

Yes, Hamas has an armed wing that the population now see as their only defence against the brutal Israeli occupation, but Hamas is not fundamentally an army. It is a political movement made up of the citizens from amongst the Palestinian people. These people don't hide amongst the civilians. They are the civilians, and the police, and the government.

To borrow an analogy from the great Israeli peace activist, Uri Avnery, to depict Hamas as hiding amongst the civilians of Gaza is akin to speaking of the way Churchill and his cabinet hid amongst the population of London during the attempted German invasion of Britain in 1940, thus leaving the poor Luftwaffe with no choice but to try to level London in bombing raids - the civilian casualties being no more than an unnecessary tragedy for which the British parliament was solely to blame.

Perhaps that is how the history books would have been written had Germany won the war.

Lie #4 That the attack will stop as soon as Hamas stops firing rockets.

This particular lie is not even being consistently maintained by the political arm of the propaganda machine. Indeed, the designated acting Prime Minister of Israel, Tzipi Livni, stated quite plainly that the true aim of the assault was *"to liquidate Hamas rule in Gaza!"*

The assault on Gaza was not started because of the rocket fire of Hamas and it will not end when and if rockets stop being fired. It may end if Tzipi Livni comes to believe that Hamas has been *'liquidated'* (which is not likely to happen) and it may end when the Israeli cabinet feels that Gaza has been sufficiently punished. Most likely though it will only end when the Israeli government perceives that its warring activities are becoming unpopular,

either to their own electorate or to the overseas countries that they depend on for support, and this is where we come in, for we have the power to sway the opinion of those supporting countries.

And while it may be true that the mass media is almost entirely controlled by members of Swift's '*society of truth-twisters*', there remains yet one avenue of mass communication where ordinary guys and girls like us can still make a noise and be heard - the Internet!

So will you join me, virtual warriors, and publish the facts - in your blogs and amongst your networks and to your mailing lists - and let's do our best to confront this murderous propoganda machine with words of truth.

The window of free speech that the Internet allows us will not remain open forever but it is open now, and this gives us ordinary people who have seen through the lies propagated by the mass media one last great chance to change world history and to stop the needless sacrifice of the men, women and children to political avarice and a racist ideology.

For God's sake join me in publishing the truth, and for the sake of the children of Gaza.



Children and their donkey at sunset, Gaza



Why I marched alongside Muslim radicals in support of Gaza *by Father Dave*

The tragedy in Gaza is not a sectarian religious issue and must not be allowed to become one. It is an issue of injustice and human suffering, and this is relevant to all peoples, and should be especially significant to Christians.

I attended a march and a rally calling for justice for Gaza. When I agreed to go, I hadn't realised that it was being organised by a radical Muslim group, but that would not have put me off even if I had known.

Indeed, if radical Muslims were organising it, this was all the more reason for me to be there and help establish a Christian presence. For the tragedy in Gaza is not a sectarian religious issue and must not be allowed to become one. It is an issue of injustice and human suffering, and this is relevant to all peoples, and should be especially significant to Christians. So I donned my black shirt and clerical collar and hung the largest crucifix I have around my neck, and Ange and I and young Joanna (who runs our Youth Group) set off to the city to join the rally.

I didn't see many familiar faces amongst the thousand or so who were there. Indeed, we looked distinctively white and couldn't join in all the chants, many of which were in Arabic. Having said that, the prevailing chant was 'Free, Free Palestine', and we could join heartily in that one.

I noticed though that there were a number of 'Muslims Unite' placards alongside the 'Free Gaza' banners, and while they were not as numerous, they did spur me to want to show off my cross and to let this crowd know that it was not only Muslims who were concerned about what was happening to the people of Gaza.

Indeed, as the march wore on, I started to pray that the Good Lord might give me opportunity to say something to this crowd. And He did!

As we reached our destination in the heart of the city, I saw the colourful (and somewhat notorious) figure of Sheikh Hillaly - a figurehead in the Australian Muslim community - surrounded by his minders. He was being ushered to the front of the crowd. I figured he might be being lined up as a speaker, so I tried to work my way towards him through the thick crowd.

I know Hillaly vaguely. We've met on a few occasions and even spoke on the same platform once, so I hoped he'd recognise me. Indeed he did. When the Sheikh saw me coming, he reached out and pulled me towards him. He gave me the traditional three-fold kiss and then dragged me up on to the stage with him. I then stood alongside the Sheikh for ten minutes while he spoke in Arabic. I remained rather stoic in my stance, not wanting to join in the cheering when I couldn't understand what was being said, but I was sure that if Hillaly wanted me alongside him, it must have been because he too wanted to present the tragedy of Gaza as being more than just an Islamic issue.

When the Sheikh wound up, the organiser asked me if I wanted to say a few words. I heartily agreed. Here are my exact words (composed while the Sheikh gave his speech alongside me):

Sisters and brothers, Salaman Aleykum (ie. Peace be with you).

This tragedy in Gaza is not a struggle between Christian and Muslim. It is not a struggle between Muslim and Jew. It is a struggle between humanity and inhumanity, between justice and injustice, between truth and the lie.

And so we take our stand with the truth, with justice and with humanity, as our prayers go up for our oppressed sisters and brothers in Gaza. Ensallah (ie. Amen).

My speech was short, but I made my point, and I was thankful for every cheer from the assembled throng.

The guy who followed me to the microphone, I found out later, was the radical guy who organised it. He began by saying, *"We Muslims cannot tolerate the existence of the State of Israel"*. At that point I excused myself to the Sheikh and walked off the stage - a gesture that did not go unnoticed by the crowd.

Even so, as I walked back through the crowd towards my wife and friend, scores of people reached out to shake my hand. One huge Arabic man grabbed me and said, *"it means a lot to us that you are here. Thank you!"*

After that a couple of Muslim parents asked me if I would have my photo taken alongside their kids. I pulled Ange in to the last photo with me, and then it was my turn to say, *"thank you"*.

Did the rally achieve much? I don't know. But I have no doubt at all that I was exactly where God wanted me to be that day, and I thank God for the opportunity to, once again, be a visible sign to the Islamic community that we Christians are not unconcerned about the plight of their fellow Muslims.

Let me say this as clearly as possible: the current crisis in the Middle East, despite all its horror, is a great opportunity for all of us who follow the Lord Jesus to break down prejudicial barriers, by pitching in alongside our Islamic sisters and brothers and so sowing seeds of brotherly and sisterly love while working together for justice.

Let me urge you, my sisters and brothers in Christ, and my sisters and brothers in all the human family, to join the next pro-Gaza rally you hear about. If it's organised by radical extremists, all the better! Let your presence be felt, and let the world know that concern for the suffering of the people of Gaza is not the property of any one religion but is a burden laid upon the heart of all humanity, and a tragedy about which all human beings should be equally concerned.



Civilians run for cover from a poisonous hail of burning white phosphorus during an Israeli airstrike on the UN school, Gaza,

Australia Rejects the Goldstone Report *by Father Dave*

Goldstone Report Timeline

- December 27th 2008, Israel commenced a three-week assault on the besieged city of Gaza, resulting in the death of some 1400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were also left without homes and around 400,000 with no access to running water.
- April 3rd 2009, the United Nations Human Rights Commission appointed respected South African Jewish jurist and former war-crimes prosecutor, Richard Goldstone, to head up a fact-finding mission into the Gaza conflict, to investigate all violations of human rights.

- September 15th 2009, the mission releases its final report (which becomes known as 'The Goldstone Report'). It accuses both Palestinian militants and Israeli Defence Forces of war crimes and possible crimes against humanity.
- The Israeli Government immediately rejects the report as prejudiced and full of errors. Hamas calls upon the world to embrace the report.
- October 15th 2009, the United Nations Human Rights Commission endorses the report, thus forwarding it on to more significant UN bodies for action
- November 3rd 2009, the US Congress resolves that the Goldstone Report is “irredeemably biased and unworthy of further consideration” by a vote of 344 to 36.

November 4th 2009, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly endorses the Goldstone report and calls for independent investigations into the alleged war crimes. The vote is 118 nations in favour of the report with only 18 against and 44 abstentions. Amongst those voting against the Goldstone report were the US, Israel, Germany and Australia.



Judge Richard Goldstone

Letter to a Member of Parliament

28 November 2009

The Hon Stephen Smith MP
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Smith,

re:- Australia's rejection of the Goldstone Report in the UN

While I have been encouraged to see our country expressing some support in the United Nations for Palestinian self-determination, I feel that such statements are almost void of meaning when seen alongside our simultaneous failure to support the Goldstone Report.

I am sure that the decision to reject the report was not ,made without forethought, and yet I find the official explanation - that the report displays an *"unbalanced focus on Israel [and] insufficient attention to Hamas' actions prior to the conflict, especially rocket attacks"* - hard to take seriously.

Given that the Gaza assault resulted in the deaths of more than a thousand Palestinians, compared to only thirteen dead Israelis, one would hardly expect the focus of the report to be on violations committed from the Palestinians side. Moreover, it appears that the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) deliberately targeted the civilian infrastructure of Gaza - a crime to which Hamas could not possibly reciprocate.

As to the actions leading up to the conflict, I appreciate that there has been some debate over who officially broke the ceasefire - whether it was Hamas who initiated rocket attacks or whether these attacks were themselves provoked by the IDF's incursion into Gaza in November 2008, where Israeli forces killed a number of Hamas personnel who were allegedly involved in building a tunnel.

Either way though, it seems meaningless to me to speak of a ceasefire as having ever been in place when the IDF at no time lifted its siege from the city of Gaza - consistently blocking the import of food, medical supplies and building materials - and thus maintaining a constant state of militant hostility

By failing to take account of this it seems that Australia has not only helped to legitimise the assault on Gaza that began last December, but has also served to legitimise the siege, which is ongoing and continues to be the cause of enormous human suffering!

Given the hollow justification for our vote on the Goldstone report, I am forced to conclude that the real basis of our position is either an anti-Palestinian bias at the highest levels of the Australian government or that our position at the UN is simply being dictated to us by our American friends. Either way it is a shameful reflection on Australia's level of commitment to justice and peace.

I would note in closing that there are encouraging signs in North America that the official position on Israel/Palestine is gradually evolving. While the US Congress did vote overwhelmingly to dismiss the Goldstone Report, there were numerous representatives who spoke very strongly in its defence.

Congressman Dennis Kucinich, for example (the Democrat representative of Ohio); warned those who would reject the report that, *"Almost as serious as committing war crimes is covering up war crimes, pretending that war crimes were never committed and did not exist."*

It is shameful to think that our country is involved in helping to cover up war crimes, and it will be an even greater shame if we have to wait until our allies change their position before we are willing to take a stand for justice.

Yours sincerely,



Rev. David B. Smith, B.A. (Hons), B.Th., Dip. A
 Acing Rector, Holy Trinity Dulwich Hill
 Managing Director, Fighting Fathers Ministries
 Marrickville 'Citizen of the Year' 1994 & 2009
 Nominated 'Australian of the Year' 2005 & 2009



“stop the needless sacrifice of the men, women and children to political avarice and a racist ideology”