

The 2014 Israeli-Hamas War

By Fr. Dave Heney

I have followed events in the Middle East for over 30 years, especially the last 10 since I lead our annual Holy Land Pilgrimage there every year ...although we go nowhere near Gaza. I will lead a new group to the Holy Land next June as well, no matter what is going on. If God sent His son to this troubled area, then I will go there too, along with all those who feel the call to travel with me.

Both Israel and Palestine are not the same places they were 10 years ago or even just five years ago. The region is dynamic and changes quickly as events develop. Staying current is important. We should not bring old ideas to a new situation.

There is a remarkable new event has never happened before in the Middle East.

For the first time ever, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and other Arab states are supporting Israel in the current conflict. How did this happen?

The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is not the conflict we see in the news today. The Palestinians are *divided* into several opposing groups among themselves. Not all are at war with Israel.

On one side is Israel, angry at around 4,000 deadly missiles launched from within Gaza. These primitive missiles cannot be aimed at specific targets. They can land anywhere among families living in the villages of southern Israel.

On the other side is Hamas, a rather small political and military *subgroup* located within Gaza and within the much larger Palestinian Authority (PA), which is in the West Bank. After years of often violent conflict with the PA leadership, Hamas recently signed a peace agreement with their fellow Palestinians to negotiate with Israel. The political wing of Hamas agreed but the military wing did not. Even Hamas is divided! However, many Palestinians felt that peace now had a chance.

For decades, the peace framework was to create a **two-state solution** where Israel would return to its pre-1967 borders, along with some "land-swaps," where some Israeli settlements in the West Bank would remain with Israel and some Israeli land would go to a new Palestinian state. Palestinians would get a **sovereign** state and Israel would get **safety and security** within its pre-1967 borders.

Israel would love to have a sovereign, stable, prosperous, and peaceful Palestinian State as a neighbor and trading partner. Just as Israel created, out of a desert with no oil, a prosperous state that joined the global economy, so also could a future Palestinian state, and ensure the success and well-being of millions of Palestinian families.

This is what the majority of Arab youth want. 50% of the Middle East is under the age of 30 and about 50% of them are unemployed. When Egypt experienced economic growth, the profits went to the upper elite, not to poor. *The Arab Spring was largely about youth demonstrating for jobs.* There were no

“death to Israel” or “death to America” chants during the Arab Spring in Egypt, Tunisia, or even Syria. Egyptian Arab youth overthrew Hosni Mubarak for his failure to provide jobs. When Ibrahim Morsi, his successor and an Islamic Fundamentalist, made the economy even worse, he was overthrown as well.

To foster Palestinian political and economic independence, *Israel completely pulled out of Gaza in 2005*, even forcibly removing Israeli settlers and leaving their business infrastructure for Palestinians to enjoy and develop further. This was to be the start of an economic turnaround for very poor Palestinians.

Millions of dollars poured into Gaza from around the world, including the US. (After the US declared Hamas a terrorist group, our donations stopped) However, money poured in from others, such as Qatar, Turkey, and even Iran.

This was a golden opportunity to begin the road to peace and sovereignty in Palestine and especially Gaza. However, the Hamas leadership used the millions to acquire missiles, arm soldiers, and build tunnels, rather than build schools, hospitals, universities, industries, harbors, or factories. Donations were used to attack Israel continually.

No country can tolerate such attacks. We certainly did not after 9-11. The small number of Israeli casualties is due to Israeli investment in missile defense, and shelters to protect its people. Hamas built shelters only for its leaders and other elite groups, not their people.

While there are certainly plenty of areas of tension between Israel and Palestine, such as settlements, check-points, and blockades, there are certainly peaceful ways to resolve seemingly intractable issues, as the Soviet Union and the USA did throughout the Cold War.

But which Palestinians can Israel talk to? Remember they are seriously divided into Hamas and the PA. There are also several extremely violent smaller groups within Hamas that do not want a two-state solution at all. They want a **one state of Palestine that covers the entire area**, which means **they want Israel utterly destroyed**. No trading partner wanted. This is not a recent conflict, but the 67th year, since 1947, of their war to annihilate Israel.

It was these groups that derailed the recent peace process by kidnapping and murdering three Israeli teenagers in mid-June and then launching missiles toward southern Israeli villages, and even Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, the largest cities in Israel. They derailed the peace process in 2008-9 and in 2012 in the same way. They know how to stop peace!

Israel seeks to destroy Hamas combatants, munitions, and the almost 40 tunnels discovered so far. Their battleground is the Gaza infrastructure of offensive weapons. Amazingly, Israel signal days ahead which buildings they will target by emailing and telephoning residents to leave. They also drop a flare over the building as a last warning for residents to leave. What country at war has ever done that?

Hamas tells their people to stay and suffer highly public injuries, or even death, because the Islamic fundamentalist battleground is not Israel, but your TV set. They want the world to see Israeli missiles hitting innocent people in Gaza. Those people are innocent victims of Hamas policy.

SOMETHING NEW THIS TIME...

Arab states are aligning with Israel against Hamas. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and most importantly, Egypt, have refused aid to Hamas and are openly supporting Israel.

They believe that Hamas does not help the Arab people. The young people of the Middle East are desperately poor and getting poorer. They do not want war. They want jobs. Egyptians are tired of four years of turmoil within their own country. They do not want turmoil on their border either.

I stand with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel who together want to end radical Islamic extremism in Gaza for good. Now is the time for Palestinians to enter the global economy in a stable, peaceful, and prosperous new state. Israel and the rest of the Arab world will help.

*Fr. Dave Heney, August 5th, 2014
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