

2023 ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

by Fr. Dave Heney

On Saturday, October 7th, Israel was suddenly attacked by a Palestinian army led by Hamas, a political-military group in Gaza, a region of southern Israel that borders Egypt. Over 270 young people attending a music festival were murdered along with hundreds more in nearby villages, including whole families. Since then, thousands of civilians have died on both sides of this horrible conflict.

Hamas has attacked Israel before ...in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2018, and 2021. These were mainly missile attacks leading to massive Israeli retaliation, and then usually an Egyptian brokered cease-fire. The recent attack added Palestinian Hamas units attacking civilians along with a much more massive missile barrage.

WHAT IS THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT?

In the 1930's and 1940's there were large and growing populations of Jews and Arabs in this area that was under a United Nations mandate and managed by Great Britain. Both groups were often in conflict. In 1947 the UN recommended a partition between Jews and Arabs that the Jewish leaders accepted. Jewish communities had used the previous decades to build the infrastructure of a state before declaring itself a state in 1948 with those UN borders. That same year, and in 1967, and 1973, Arabs nations were badly defeated in their wars to destroy Israel.

The basic issue since 1948 has been the desire of Palestinians for a sovereign state and the desire of Israelis to be safe from attack. In the 1993 Oslo Accords, initiated by Israel, the Israelis gave back partial authority to Palestinian leaders over land in the West Bank and Gaza. This would hopefully lead to a *Two-State Solution* with Israel and a fully sovereign Palestine state alongside each other and at peace.

WHAT ARE THE TWO MAIN OBSTACLES TO PEACE?

The main problems are the presence of Israeli settlers in the future Palestinian state area, and the very harmful division of the Palestinian people into two geographical sections each with heavily armed political groups, Gaza led by Hamas, and the West Bank led by Fatah. These two groups are violently opposed to each other. Neither Fatah nor Hamas use much of their resources to build the infrastructure of a state. Negotiating a future Palestinian state is a challenge when the Palestinians themselves are so fiercely divided.

WHAT IS HAMAS?

Hamas is a political and military organization founded in 1987 that took total control of Gaza in elections in 2006 after Israel voluntarily pulled all Israeli citizens out. There have been no elections since. Hamas has a *One-State Solution* to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which seeks the complete destruction of the State of Israel so that the entire region becomes one Palestinian state under Hamas. The US declared Hamas a terrorist organization in 1997. They get hundreds of millions of dollars of aid from around the world, but mostly from Iran. Much of the money goes to buy armaments. All the top leaders of Hamas live outside Gaza and in other Arab nations.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW IN THE ARAB WORLD?

Most of the population across the Middle East are young people, however political corruption has prevented Arab economies from producing jobs. Some countries sadly have over 50% youth unemployment. In early 2011, young people in several countries revolted. This *Arab Spring* resulted in the governments of Tunisia and Libya falling, and Egypt's government even falling twice. The revolt still continues in Syria. All surviving Arab governments fear further youth unrest and so are now focused on creating jobs and economic progress. This economic focus has helped Saudi Arabia surpass Egypt as the leader of the Arab world. The Saudis are shifting their economy away from oil and into other sources of economic revenue for their young people.

WHAT ARE THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS?

By far, the most economically prosperous country in the region is Israel. Arab nations want to share in that prosperity, so beginning in 2019, the US government established a peace treaty process, called *The Abraham Accords*, between Israel and Arab nations. So far, Morocco, Bahrain, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates have made peace with Israel. Egypt and Jordan made peace decades ago. Saudi Arabia recently began the process to make peace with Israel as well. About five other Arab nations also signaled their willingness to make peace with Israel soon.

WHAT IS IRAN'S ROLE?

Iran is the leader of the radical Islamic goal of forcing the whole world to join its radical interpretation of Islam. It is a rich country with a large military and represents a deadly threat, especially to the US and Israel. Moreover, they have been trying to develop nuclear weapons for decades. If Iran has nuclear weapons, every Arab nation in the region will get them as well, probably purchased from North Korea. None of the Arab nations have sufficient security capability so it is likely that their nuclear weapons will fall into the hands of terrorist groups.

Iran desperately wants to stop more Arab nations from making peace with Israel. Therefore, they funded and trained the Hamas terrorists in the present war against Israel in an attempt to derail the Saudi-Israel peace treaty.

However, Saudi leaders always resist any kind of pressure, so this Iranian plan will certainly backfire and not derail the final Israel-Saudi peace treaty, just delay it. This war is a major and deeply tragic Iranian and Hamas miscalculation.

WHAT WILL THE US DO?

The US will honor its long-standing agreements with Israel to provide logistics for their defense as well as political support at the UN and in Congress. It will also make sure that no other states or forces enter the conflict, like Iran, Syria, Turkey, or Lebanon.

WHAT WILL ISRAEL DO?

Because none of the earlier cease-fires have led to any change in Hamas violent behavior, Israel may choose to continue fighting until all the Hamas leadership is destroyed. As usual Israel asks all civilians to leave the area before bombing, and Egypt could help in accepting Gaza refugees there. This campaign would also liberate the Gaza region from severe autocratic Hamas rule, and allow the 2 million Palestinian people there to finally vote for their own leaders once again.