

# Latest Holy Land Security Update

By Fr. Dave Heney



## *Is it safe to go to the Holy Land?*

For well over a hundred years there has been tension in the Holy Land, but it is *only* between Israelis and Palestinians, and not with Christian tourists. Both sides welcome us! After all, we bring tourist dollars. During our tour, we mainly visit Christian sites.

I monitor the situation there every day, on the *Jerusalem Post* and *Al-Monitor.com* websites, which you can too, if you like. You can also read my full description of Middle East issues in my 21-page article “*Middle East: Problems and Promises*” on my website at [daveheney.com](http://daveheney.com).

Let me also confirm that I *never* cancel our annual archaeological trip. *We go every year*. If Our Lord chose to visit this ancient troubled area, then I will too.

In Jerusalem, we always try to visit the Muslim site called the *Temple Mount*. There are frequent routine small demonstrations there about two or three times a week. They are predictable, and so we simply reschedule our visit around them if time permits.

Every city and region in the world has its safe and unsafe places to visit, whether in New York, Los Angeles, or Jerusalem. We only visit places that are considered safe. Our Catholic travel agency was founded in Jerusalem in 1930, and is well known there for generations and well situated to monitor the situation accurately, and update us accordingly.

## **Your Quick Summary of Today’s Middle East Issues:**

**Middle East Poverty:** Muslim scholars have wondered for centuries why the Middle East is so poor and backward. About 50% of the area is now under the age of 30 ...and about 50% of them are unemployed. Muslim scholars remember that centuries ago, Islam ruled all North Africa, Southern Europe, and the whole Middle East as one *Islamic State*. It is gone now and so they ask, “*What went wrong?*” One extreme answer came from a radical Islamic movement that started a few decades ago. Rather than joining the world economy, it wants to restore the ancient *Islamic State* by promoting only *the very strictest interpretation of Islam and eliminating all non-Muslims, and even non-strict Muslims as well*.

**Iran:** In 1979, Iran became the first country led by these radical Islamic rulers, and promote this extreme version of Islam with its large military, economic, and future nuclear forces to restore former Islamic glory. Iran made most of the roadside bombs that injured or killed US troops and supports radical violent Islamist groups throughout the Middle East.

**Al-Qaeda and ISIS:** Both sought the same goals of restoring former Islamic glory, Al-Qaeda through terrorism such as the 9-11 attack, and ISIS by reconquering land, as it did in Iraq and Syria. Fortunately, all the land ISIS conquered in Iraq and Syria was restored by Iraq, Turkey, and US led military

cooperation. However, both ISIS and Al-Qaeda will continue isolated terror attacks around the world. Fortunately, courageous joint counter-terror efforts by the world community have stopped almost all attacks. A few will tragically succeed, however, there is no doubt that ISIS and Al-Qaeda are fading. Islamic youth are turned off by their senseless violence.

**The Arab Spring:** Most of the population of the Middle East is under 30 years old, and many are unemployed due to massive corruption and greed of their leaders. In 2011, they began popular revolts that toppled the governments of Tunisia, Libya, and even twice in Egypt! The Syrian people's revolt tragically continues because of Iranian support of the government. The Arab Spring was not a pro-democracy movement but an anti-corruption effort to raise the standard of living of young people. Arab leaders now know that they must serve for the needs of their people, or they will be toppled too!

## **Islamic Competition: Arab vs. Non-Arab**

Islam is divided into two religious variations: *Sunni* Islam and *Shia* Islam. About 80% of Arab Muslims are *Sunni*, and are mostly led by Saudi Arabia. About 20% of Muslims are *Shia*, and mostly live in Iran, however Iranians are not Arabs, but Persians. In addition, Turkey, a *Sunni* nation wants to lead the Muslim world as well, but they are also not Arabs, but Turks.

*Shia Iran, Sunni Saudi Arabia, and Sunni Turkey are all competing to lead Islam in the Middle East. However, the new pro-American leadership in Saudi Arabia, seeking to provide for the youth, wants to bring the whole Middle East peacefully into the modern world and join the world economy, while anti-American Shia Iran wants to eradicate all Sunni Muslims and keep Islam ancient and traditional. Turkey is still trying to find its role. However, a possible Iranian nuclear weapon is changing everything!*

**Iran Nuclear Agreement:** If Iran gets nuclear weapons, then Arab countries will want them too, leading to massive instability. For years the US negotiated with Iran to contain its nuclear program. This was a noble goal, although the inspection of nuclear sites was limited only to known sites and not secret ones. The final nuclear deal was an *executive agreement* between leaders and not a formal treaty requiring congressional approval. It certainly never stopped Iran in its terrorism against *Sunni* Muslims, which greatly angered Arab nations. However, the massive terrorism expenses of Iran also angered their youth by robbing them of the economic aid they needed. Iranian youth by the many hundreds of thousands twice demonstrated to overthrow the regime there in 2009 and 2016.

In 2017, the US ended its nuclear deal with Iran, increased diplomatic and economic pressure, and began a new relationship with the new pro-American leadership in Saudi Arabia. This has opened amazing new hopes for Middle East peace.

## **New Arab-USA Comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian Peace Plan**

All Arab governments deeply fear another "*Arab Spring*" and Iranian nuclear and terrorist aggression. Providing for Arab youth and confronting Iranian aggression have created a new opening for peace.

*In return for the 2017 US opposition to Iran, Saudi Arabia has agreed to help lead the new Arab-USA plan to end Israeli-Palestinian hostility. The Saudis want to lead the Middle East peacefully into the world economy, and generate new business resources besides oil. Arab leaders believe the Palestinian-Israeli*

conflict is a drag on much needed Arab economic prosperity. This new peace plan has both economic and political sections. The economic plan was released in 2019 and the political section in early 2020.

The Arab-USA peace plan supports an Israeli-Palestinian “Two-State” Peace process that seeks to establish *both* a secure State of Israel and an *eventual* secure State of Palestine generally along the 1967 borders if basic security concerns are met. This progression toward a Palestinian State parallels the slow journey that Israel itself took to statehood in 1947-1948. *These two nations at peace would prosper enormously with a joint political economic and prosperity plan.*

This goal is so important that most Arab leaders and Arab people want this prosperity plan whether the present Palestinian leaders cooperate or not.



### What prevents Israeli-Palestinian Peace?

A big problem is that Palestinian areas are divided into two regions, the **West Bank**, and **Gaza Strip**. Each is ruled by rival factions that are deeply opposed to each other. The Gaza Strip is ruled by a political-military-group called *Hamas* that the US long ago declared a terrorist group. The West Bank is ruled by *Fatah*, a deeply corrupt organization. They often attack and murder each other’s officials.

Some Israeli leaders want a *One Israeli State* solution while Hamas, Iran, Al-Qaeda, ISIS and some Palestinian leaders want a “*One Palestinian State*” solution.

Both are enormous fantasies, and not facing reality. Can anyone expect the amazingly prosperous 10 million Israelis, or 5 million Palestinians to disappear? There is no peace among politicians with this fantasy.

The Jewish people *progressed* from their UN sponsored land in 1947 to full statehood in 1948, despite enormous worldwide anti-Semitic opposition that continues to this day ...and yet they built an amazing economic powerhouse from a virtual desert. Ironically, Palestinian politicians enjoy enormous worldwide support to this day and yet their people remain in poverty. They should build a state before they have a state just as the Israelis did. What Palestinian people desperately need from their leaders are decisions that are rooted in reality.

Unfortunately, many Palestinian leaders are blatantly corrupt, and siphon off some of the billions of foreign aid that is meant for their people. Yasser Arafat, the founder of the Palestinian movement, died with *6 billion dollars in his personal account*. The present leader, Mahmoud Abbas, is also a billionaire. Meanwhile, the people are still in poverty, which I witness myself every year. Some Palestinian politicians resist any move toward peace in order to get more foreign aid. Of course, some Israeli leaders are also corrupt, but they are often caught and held accountable.

Many Arab leaders believe the Palestinian leaders are not interested in peace or a two-state solution but only greed, and the eradication of Israel.

## **The Meaning of the Embassy Move to Jerusalem**

Moving the US Embassy is simply facing reality. In 1995, *our Congress declared Jerusalem as Israel's capital*. However, the move was delayed every year in the hope of peace. It took all these years for the US to see that Palestinian leaders were not acting in good faith, or facing reality. While Israel would recognize Palestine, Palestinian leaders would not recognize Israel. *The Arab-USA peace plan allows a future Palestinian State capital in East Jerusalem*. Gradually, more and more countries are following the US lead and moving their embassies there as well. The new Arab and USA peace plan "*The Abrahamic Accords*" is already producing results for peace.

## **The Abrahamic Accords**

This long-awaited Saudi Arabia and US plan was released in 2020 and has already made progress. Several Arab States have formalized relations with Israel. They recognize their future lies in providing for the economic needs, social dignity, and honor of their own Arab people, and that goal lies with trade with the main economic powerhouse of the Middle East which is Israel.

Many Arab states have also concluded that the Palestinian unbridgeable gap between the violent Hamas terrorist leaders in Gaza and the deeply corrupt Fatah leaders in the West Bank is a drag on the Arab future. They believe the Palestinian leaders in both areas are deeply corrupt and not interested in peace.

*The Abrahamic Accords* are a recognition of the Arab world's desire to move forward for the prosperity and dignity of their own people.

## **The Recent 2021 Hamas-Israel Conflict**

Hamas recognizes that the Arab world is moving on and no longer believes in Palestinian leaders, whether Hamas or Fatah, and took advantage of a small Jerusalem land dispute between Palestinian and Israeli families to escalate the conflict to a massive missile barrage on southern Israeli towns. Their Iranian provided missiles are unguided, and so are never sent toward Jerusalem where they might hit the Temple Mount or even Arab neighborhoods. Most are shot down by Israeli defense forces.

The Hamas offensive is designed to stop *The Abrahamic Accords* of Arab states and Israel. However, Arab leaders know what their people want, and even what the Palestinian people want, and it is not war. Israel may decide to continue their defense until assured that Hamas is permanently ended. This is the best hope for peace for Palestinian and Israeli people, and Arab peoples throughout the Middle East.

Respect for the needs of Arab youth, fear of radical Iran, a deep desire for economic prosperity, and future trade with prosperous Israel are the driving forces of peace now.