HAMAS VS ISRAEL: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED
Julie Friedman

During this last major conflict between Hamas and Israel, most of us would agree that it was tragic in many ways, especially given the loss of innocent lives and destruction of property. Hamas indiscriminately fired over 4000 rockets from Arab residential neighborhoods into civilian areas of Israel. Fortunately, Israel had anti-rocket defense systems that destroyed most of those missiles with minimal loss of life and property. Even though Israel, in retaliation, gave advance warning prior to targeting Hamas weapons and leadership with precision air attacks, many Gazans who lived next to the Hamas rocket batteries were killed in the process.

Left-wing and right-wing extremists have stoked anti-Semitism using Israeli behavior as justification for their political views. Often Jews are the targets of their criticism, and not Israeli policy (about which they might disagree). While they come from different perspectives, they attack Israel and Jews without acknowledging the history or the real causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel was legally established as a Jewish state after World War II, along with several other middle eastern countries during the same period. However, from day one, neighboring Arab states attacked Israel and called for its destruction. Pre-Israel Palestine was never a country but rather a geographic area populated by Jews, Arabs and Christians. The territory was controlled by the Ottomans (Turks) and Great Britain before Israel and other nation states in the area were formed. Never was there or is there currently a state called Palestine.

When Israel won the six-day war in 1967, it took over Gaza and parts of Egypt which it later returned. The United States has consistently advocated for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and the establishment of a Palestinian state. Israel on several occasions has offered to give up land for the peaceful establishment of a Palestinian state. It has been rejected by the Palestinian Authority. Hamas continues to call for the complete destruction of Israel.

Those who currently are called Palestinians live in two distinct regions, Gaza to the southwest of Israel and the West Bank in areas between Israel and the Jordan River. Gaza is ruled by Hamas, an internationally designated terrorist group. The West Bank is ruled by the Palestinian Authority, formerly known as the Palestine Liberation Organization.

There have been attempts to unite the two regions under one set of Palestinian leadership. However, the Palestinian Authority has not allowed elections in fear that Hamas will win. Elections are supposed to occur every 6 years but have been delayed since 2013 by Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority leader.

Both groups profess anti-Israel and antisemitic ideologies and have been responsible over the years for attacks on Israel. The latest conflict was triggered in large part by the inter-Palestinian conflict between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. Hamas wants elections because they feel they would win. Abbas has continued to rule and delay elections in order to keep his faction in power.

Israel and the U.S. are stymied with efforts to resolve the conflict given the rocket attacks initiated by Hamas and the history of corruption within the Palestinian Authority.

Israel now has established good relationships with many of the Arab states. It has peace treaties with several Arab countries. It wants peace with Palestinians and is looking for Palestinian leadership who can deliver on proposed peace agreements.

There is more to this situation than meets the eye. Those who are trying to find moral equivalency based on which side has more casualties, are not understanding the facts on the ground and the history of the conflict. Hamas lost the battle but won the support of Palestinians for being the aggressor while the Palestinian Authority stood on the sidelines militarily.

The ones who are most affected (the Palestinian and Israeli people), continue to live in harm's way and are the ultimate victims of the conflict.

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