

# Opinion – The International Community Should End the Israel-Hamas War

Written by Melisse H Pinto

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MELISSE H PINTO, MAR 8 2024

The horrendous loss of innocent life in the current war in the Gaza Strip justifiably arouses extreme moral outrage in the global community. The barbaric attacks on Israeli civilians by Hamas on October 7 were unconscionable. The Israeli government has a right and duty to defend its people. But, the Israeli response has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths in Gaza and the human suffering is enormous. Many in the world community call for a ceasefire to alleviate the crisis. But even if a ceasefire can be achieved, it is unlikely that it will lead to a lasting peace. In fact, it is almost impossible for the warring parties to escape the dilemma they face – a dilemma which was created by forces beyond their control.

Before the end of the First World War, the land on which Israel exists had been controlled by Arabs and Muslims going back over 1400 years. In the nineteenth century the rise of ethnic nationalism combined with continuing, and in some cases worsening, anti-Semitism in Europe led to the development of the idea the Jews needed a homeland, a nation state, not only to protect their way of life but literally their very lives. Eventually the movement settled on Palestine, the Biblical home of the Jews. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the Ottoman empire was generally tolerant of Jewish immigration and many Jews moved to the region. When the Ottomans lost World War One, they lost most of their territory and Palestine was put under the control of Great Britain by the victorious western powers. British rule was based on a protectorate. It was meant to help the region achieve sovereignty during an interim period. And this is when the foundation of the current tragedy was laid.

Britain ruled Palestine as a colonial possession, and this was much resented. During the war, Great Britain had promised independent states in Palestine to both the Arabs and Jews. During the 1920s and 1930s Britain intermittently let large numbers of Jews settle in Palestine. As more and more Jews came, the Arab population began to resent what they saw as a takeover of their territory. There was growing violence and Britain wavered back and forth in its policy.

After World War Two the unrest between the two groups intensified. Many Jewish Holocaust survivors wanted to go to Israel; the need for a Jewish state was even more apparent. The British tried to keep them out, but not entirely successfully. The British dumped the problem on the newly created United Nations which decided to divide Palestine between a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Jews were relatively happy with this solution. They would get their state. But the Arabs justifiably argued that a European dominated United Nations did not have the right to take their land and give it to a European people. It echoed the extreme abuses of European colonialism and even the Crusades.

The partition of Palestine was reflective of the power dynamics in the international system at the time; it was an act of the dominant western powers. The UN was undoubtedly trying to be fair to both sides and provide them both with sovereign self-determination. When the date for the partition came, in an attempt to prevent the creation of the Jewish state, the Jewish forces were attacked by various Arab forces and the result of this war was that the new state of Israel controlled more territory than it was originally allotted by the United Nations. Israel's neighbors pledged destruction of the state of Israel; they said they would drive it into the sea. Israel became a garrison state with a strong military, constantly ready to fight. Since then, there have been several wars, recurrent conflicts and acts of

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terrorism.

No Palestinian state was created. Most of the territory meant to be a new state for the Palestinians became part of Jordan. After the Six Day War in 1967, Israel gained territory, most notably the West Bank area which had been controlled by Jordan. Israel has controlled this territory ever since and has ruled it as an occupying power. There is no question that the Palestinians have suffered under this occupation. There has been violence, loss of life, imprisonment, loss of property, and loss of opportunity for a fulfilling life. The Israelis justified the harsh treatment on the grounds the Palestinians wanted to destroy Israel and had to be tightly controlled. There have been several major uprisings.

Over time, the general international consensus has come to rest on the idea of a two state solution, with the West Bank and Gaza becoming a Palestinian sovereign state. Many Israelis have been willing to agree to this. But there has always been the fear that an independent state would use its power to attempt to destroy Israel. The unjust situation of the Palestinians has continued, with the Israelis reluctantly accepting the status quo up until the October 7 attacks.

The Palestinians have a right to a decent life with their own lives, freedom and destiny protected. The Palestinians want an independent state for the same reason the Jews did. They cannot rely on other nations to protect them. It is a tragic dilemma. Both the Palestinians and the Israelis have just causes. It is not a question of one side or another, but how can they be simultaneously achieved. They cannot do it themselves. There is not enough trust.

The only solution is for the international community to step in to stop further bloodshed. The United States, as de facto leader of the free world, should convene a peace conference with the goal of not only stopping this current conflict but repairing the damage done by the major powers when they sowed the seeds of this tragedy in the first place. A global coalition must create an international force to rebuild Gaza and develop the West Bank. It will take a large influx of resources and expertise and enough military force to keep the peace. Instead of spending billions on current and future wars over this issue, spend it now on building a safe, free and just life for both the Palestinians and Israelis. One can even argue that the Palestinians are owed reparations for the tragic situation the old-world order created. If the world community is civilized and moral, it is the only thing it can do, and it is in the long interest of the peace and prosperity of everyone.

World leaders must recognize that the security and prosperity of every nation is ultimately dependent on the security and prosperity of all the world's peoples. All humanity is equal in their right to justice. True peace demands it. Domination causes war; liberation can help end it. Look upon this as an opportunity to take a major step in the direction of creating a true new world order based on equality in self determination and right to life of all humanity.

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## About the author:

**Melisse H Pinto** is a retired professor of political science (Vermont State University) with a PhD from SUNY Buffalo.