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Searching for peace between Israel and the Palestinians

Pat Perriello | Nov. 26, 2012 NCR Today

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has rightly said that no country would tolerate a constant barrage of missiles being directed at it. The United States agrees that Israel has a right to defend itself. A shaky cease-fire has been brokered especially through the efforts of Egypt and the United States. We can all be thankful for this baby step toward peace.

An article from The Huffington Post [1] provides some disturbing human tragedies that should give people pause.

It is difficult to read about the loss of families, including small children, and wonder if there is not a greater need for efforts to achieve peace. Thankfully, the work of Egypt, the U.N. and the United States has lead to this tenuous peace agreement, but a more lasting solution needs to be found.

The data indicate that among the Palestinians, 54 of the 113 casualties have been civilians, and of the 840 wounded, 225 have been children. These figures continue to increase. Casualties among the Israelis have not been as great, in part because of the highly touted Iron Dome missile defense system. Although Israel speaks of its efforts to avoid civilian casualties, the truth is it is almost impossible to do so because of the narrow alleys and crowded conditions that exist throughout Gaza.

What will be necessary to get both parties to seriously explore possibilities for lasting peace? Hamas and Israel, not to mention the United States, don't speak to each other. That might be a place to start. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been talking to all parties connected to the conflict except Hamas. Does that really make sense? Neither Israel nor the Palestinians are going to disappear. It is imperative that both parties accept the existence of the other as a starting point for negotiations. What is being gained by continued hostilities except violence, pain and suffering on all sides?

The outlines of an agreement have been known for some time. The sticking point is getting both parties to bite the bullet and accept the realities of what peace will mean. Concessions will be painful, but both sides will also receive many benefits. Israel will finally have security and the ability to have its people live normal lives without the constant threat of terror. The Palestinians will be rid of their isolation and will be able to have a state in which there can be true economic progress.

It is time for the United States, along with Egypt, the U.N. and a coalition of other interested countries, to bring the parties to the table and insist an agreement be reached. There will need to be guarantees and the U.S. will have a major role to play, but the resolution of this long-standing conflict would be a major blessing for the Middle East and the entire world. This current crisis actually provides an opportunity for peace which should not be squandered.

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[1] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/20/hillary-clinton-middle-east_n_2163259.html