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ISRAEL-PALESTINE IN DEMOCRATIC PARTY DEBATE 04-14-16

BLITZER: Thank you, Secretary.

Senator, let's talk about the U.S. relationship with Israel. Senator Sanders, you maintained that Israel's response in Gaza in 2014 was, quote, "disproportionate and led to the unnecessary loss of innocent life."

(APPLAUSE)

What do you say to those who believe that Israel has a right to defend itself as it sees fit?

SANDERS: Well, as somebody who spent many months of my life when I was a kid in Israel, who has family in Israel, of course Israel has a right not only to defend themselves, but to live in peace and security without fear of terrorist attack. That is not a debate.

(APPLAUSE)

But -- but what you just read, yeah, I do believe that. Israel was subjected to terrorist attacks, has every right in the world to destroy terrorism. But we had in the Gaza area -- not a very large area -- some 10,000 civilians who were wounded and some 1,500 who were killed.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Free Palestine!

SANDERS: Now, if you're asking not just me, but countries all over the world was that a disproportionate attack, the answer is that I believe it was, and let me say something else.

(APPLAUSE) (CHEERING)

SANDERS: And, let me say something else. As somebody who is 100% pro-Israel, in the long run -- and this is not going to be easy, God only knows, but in the long run if we are ever going to bring peace to that region which has seen so much hatred and so much war, we are going to have to treat the Palestinian people with respect and dignity.

(APPLAUSE) (CHEERING)

SANDERS: So what is not to say -- to say that right now in Gaza, right now in Gaza unemployment is somewhere around 40%. You got a log of that area continues, it hasn't been built, decimated, houses decimated health care decimated, schools decimated. I believe the United States and the rest of the world have got to work together to help the Palestinian people.

That does not make me anti-Israel. That paves the way, I think...

BLITZER: ... Thank you, Senator...

SANDERS: ...to an approach that works in the Middle East.

(APPLAUSE) (CHEERING)

BLITZER: Thank you. Secretary Clinton, do you agree with Senator Sanders that Israel overreacts to Palestinians attacks, and that in order for there to be peace between Israel and the Palestinians, Israel must, quote, end its disproportionate responses?

CLINTON: I negotiated the cease-fire between Israel and Hamas in November of 2012. I did it in concert with...

(APPLAUSE)

CLINTON: President Abbas of the Palestinian authority based in Ramallah, I did it with the then Muslim Brotherhood President, Morsi, based in Cairo, working closely with Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Israeli cabinet. I can tell you right now I have been there with Israeli officials going back more than 25 years that they do not seek this kind of attacks. They do not invite the rockets raining down on their towns and villages.

(APPLAUSE)

They do not believe that there should be a constant incitement by Hamas aided and abetted by Iran against Israel. And, so when it came time after they had taken the incoming rockets, taken the assaults and ambushes on their soldiers and they called and told me, I was in Cambodia, that they were getting ready to have to invade Gaza again because they couldn't find anybody to talk to tell them to stop it, I flew all night, I got there, I negotiated that.

So, I don't know how you run a country when you are under constant threat, terrorist tact, rockets coming at you. You have a right to defend yourself.

(APPLAUSE)

That does not mean -- that does not mean that you don't take appropriate precautions. And, I understand that there's always second guessing anytime there is a war. It also does not mean that we should not continue to do everything we can to try to reach a two-state solution, which would give the Palestinians the rights and...

BLITZER: ... Thank you...

CLINTON: ... just let me finish. The rights and the autonomy that they deserve. And, let me say this, if Yasser Arafat had agreed with my husband at Camp David in the Late 1990s to the offer then Prime Minister Barak put on the table, we would have had a Palestinian state for 15 years.

(APPLAUSE) (CHEERING)

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator, go ahead -- go ahead, Senator.

SANDERS: I don't think that anybody would suggest that Israel invites and welcomes missiles flying into their country. That is not the issue.

And, you evaded the answer. You evaded the question. The question is not does Israel have a right to respond, nor does Israel have a right to go after terrorists and destroy terrorism. That's not the debate. Was their response disproportionate?

I believe that it was, you have not answered that.

(CHEERING)

CLINTON: I will certainly be willing to answer it. I think I did answer it by saying that of course there have to be precautions taken but even the most independent analyst will say the way that Hamas places its weapons, the way that it often has its fighters in civilian garb, it is terrible.

(AUDIENCE REACTION)

I'm not saying it's anything other than terrible. It would be great -- remember, Israel left Gaza. They took out all the Israelis. They turned the keys over to the Palestinian people.

CLINTON: And what happened? Hamas took over Gaza.

So instead of having a thriving economy with the kind of opportunities that the children of the Palestinians deserve, we have a terrorist haven that is getting more and more rockets shipped in from Iran and elsewhere.

BLITZER: Thank you, Secretary.

Senator.

SANDERS: I read Secretary Clinton's statement speech before AIPAC. I heard virtually no discussion at all about the needs of the Palestinian people. Almost none in that speech.

(APPLAUSE)

SANDERS: So here is the issue: of course Israel has a right to defend itself, but long term there will never be peace in that region unless the United States plays a role, an even-handed role trying to bring people together and recognizing the serious problems that exist among the Palestinian people.

That is what I believe the world wants to us do and that's the kind of leadership that we have got to exercise.

CLINTON: Well, if I -- I want to add, you know, again describing the problem is a lot easier than trying to solve it. And I have been involved, both as first lady with my husband's efforts, as a senator supporting the efforts that even the Bush administration was undertaking, and as secretary of state for President Obama, I'm the person who held the last three meetings between the president of the Palestinian Authority and the prime minister of Israel.

There were only four of us in the room, Netanyahu, Abbas, George Mitchell, and me. Three long meetings. And I was absolutely focused on what was fair and right for the Palestinians.

I was absolutely focused on what we needed to do to make sure that the Palestinian people had the right to self-government. And I believe that as president I will be able to continue to make progress and get an agreement that will be fair both to the Israelis and the Palestinians without ever, ever undermining Israel's security.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: A final word, Senator, go ahead.

SANDERS: There comes a time -- there comes a time when if we pursue justice and peace, we are going to have to say that Netanyahu is not right all of the time.

(APPLAUSE)

CLINTON: Well...

BLITZER: Secretary.

CLINTON: ... you know, I have spoken about and written at some length the very candid conversations I've had with him and other Israeli leaders. Nobody is saying that any individual leader is always right, but it is a difficult position.

If you are from whatever perspective trying to seek peace, trying to create the conditions for peace when there is a terrorist group embedded in Gaza that does not want to see you exist, that is a very difficult challenge.

BLITZER: Senator, go ahead.

SANDERS: You gave a major speech to AIPAC, which obviously deals with the Middle East crisis, and you barely mentioned the Palestinians. And I think, again, it is a complicated issue and God knows for decades presidents, including President Clinton and others, Jimmy Carter and others have tried to do the right thing.

All that I am saying is we cannot continue to be one-sided. There are two sides to the issue.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Secretary.