

In some ways, Israel is indeed what many have been conditioned to see: A conflict zone.

Directly to the north is Syria, whose civil war has left more than 200,000 people dead and terrorist groups manning the Golan Heights along Israel’s border. Next door, Lebanon is run by the Iranian proxy Hezbollah, the leader of which has encouraged world Jewry to immigrate en masse to Israel, as the concentration of Jews there would make it easier to dispose of them in one fell-swoop.

To the South, Hamas-ruled Gaza continues to pose a major military threat, as evidenced by last summer’s seven week conflict—the third in six years—which saw thousands of rockets fired indiscriminately at Israeli population centers. For its part, Sinai is increasingly descending into anarchy, with large swaths of territory taken over by jihadists, including those loyal to the Islamic State.

Notwithstanding this context, the international community persists in pressuring the Israeli government to make concessions to a Palestinian leadership which rejects the Jewish state’s right to exist—in any borders—and which insists on maintaining maximalist positions such as the Right of Return, which would see millions of fourth-generation “refugees” flood Israel, effectively creating a 23rd Arab-majority nation.

It is because of the Palestinian Authority's obstinacy and irredentism, that Israel is required to maintain control over a large portion of the West Bank. While unpalatable, the IDF became entrenched in Palestinian cities only after the second Intifada, in which thousands of Israelis were killed and maimed by suicide bombers while sipping coffee in Tel Aviv's cafes or riding public buses in Jerusalem. To this day, rarely a week goes by without a security incident of some sort, be it a stabbing or car ramming attack, or the thwarting thereof.

This is not to paint Israel as perfect—it is simply to provide context for Jerusalem's reluctance to make further irrevocable concessions to an unrepresentative Palestinian leadership while the region burns. It also partially explains the recent landslide election victory by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which puzzled many abroad.

While it is easy to criticize Israel from an external perch, the circumstances appear much less black and white from the inside looking out. Quite simply, a plurality of Israelis, like Netanyahu, view reality in stark objectivity, recognizing, in survival mode, that the country is surrounded by implacable enemies. For this reason, Netanyahu is considered by many as the most suitable candidate to defend Israel against its many threats that are otherwise the cause of the rest of the Middle East imploding.

Moreover, Israelis have watched the Left's land-for-peace paradigm literally explode in their faces, given that territories vacated by Israel in the past have all been occupied by terror groups, and are no longer willing to take “bold risks” in the prevailing climate.

But there is another, less-discussed reason the country chose Netanyahu; namely, that he has contributed perhaps more than any other politician in transforming Israel from a stagnant socialist bureaucracy into the “Start-Up Nation” flourishing today.

As the Financial Post’s Lawrence Solomon recently wrote, “...under Netanyahu’s influence, starting in the late 1990s with his first term as prime minister, Israel systematically began dismantling the welfare state, tackling both the social safety net and the vested corporate interests.

“[Netanyahu] sold off Israel’s interests in state enterprises, abolished foreign exchange controls and otherwise liberalized the economy, attracting foreign capital and turning Israel into an entrepreneurial marvel....”

Despite the widespread conception that Israel is isolated, Solomon points out that the country’s economic development has, in fact, enabled Jerusalem to forge close ties with superpowers such as China and Russia, emerging economies such as India and Nigeria, and even Arab countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

It is this “other” Israel that much of the mainstream media ignores, leaving that phenomenon unknown to the public at-large. Coupled with the success of the Palestinian propaganda machine in white-washing Israel’s many positive aspects, the country continues to be viewed primarily through the prism of conflict. Calls throughout the globe to boycott the Jewish state drown out its immense contributions in the fields of science, arts, culture, literature, and the like.

Overlooked is the development by Israeli companies of so many life-altering technologies, such as drip-irrigation systems which have helped feed millions of people throughout Africa and Asia; the newly-launched ReWalk bionic assistance suit that enables paraplegics to stand upright and even climb stairs; and the “Pillcam,” an ingestible device which identifies diseases by photographing the digestive track.

Israeli companies have been instrumental in the development of ground-breaking products such as the USB flash drive, the computer microprocessor, the cell phone, instant messaging, as well as staple applications like Waze, Viber, and Get Taxi.

It is for this reason that I encourage people to attend a one-of-a-kind upcoming conference in Montreal: “Israel's High-Tech Miracle & Canada: Innovation for Humanity.” The April 29 event, organized by the Canadian Institute for Jewish Research, will provide individuals—Jewish and, perhaps more importantly, non-Jewish alike—with the opportunity to see this “other” side.

A small sample of those taking part includes Prof. Itzhak Ben Israel, chairman of the Israel Space Agency, the Jewish state being one of a handful of countries ever to successfully launch a satellite into orbit. Likewise on hand will be Mr. Haim Rousso, Executive Vice President of Elbit Systems, a company whose technology was used to create the Iron Dome anti-missile defense system, which has saved thousands of Israeli and, in turn, Palestinian lives.

Also participating is Mr. Barry Fishman, the former CEO of the Canadian branch of Teva Pharmaceuticals, the largest generic drug maker in the world and responsible for such revolutionary medications as Copaxone, the best-selling treatment for Multiple Sclerosis. Mr. Pierre Boivin, current President and CEO of Claridge Investments and former chief of the Montreal Canadiens hockey club, will also be speaking.

These pioneers will be joined by numerous academics from across the country, who will convene to offer a counterpoise to the growing de-legitimization of Israel on campuses throughout North America; Jerusalem’s Ambassador to Ottawa, Mr. Rafael Barak, will deliver one of the keynote addresses.

Whatever its faults, Israel is so much more than meets the eye; it is, by any

objective measure, a technological wonder to which other countries are increasingly turning for life-saving goods and services. Against all odds, the Jewish state has become a living, breathing embodiment of what can be accomplished when a people comes together to create rather than to destroy; it is a tribute to human ingenuity, a beacon of hope in an otherwise desolate region.

I encourage everyone to look past the stereotypes and experience the “other” Israel first-hand.

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