

## Guns, Missiles and Culture

My wife, Kim, and I just returned from visiting our two children in Israel who are in school there, Kaila and Joshua. We joined one of Joshua's college classes for a trip to Sderot, which was the epicenter for Gaza-launched Hamas missiles against the civilian population in Israel. Sderot, only 3 miles from the Gaza border, is so close that the iron dome system is ineffective. We also visited a collective farm, a kibbutz, only one mile from the border. It was an amazing realization. Sderot, with a population of 25,000, has 15 seconds of warning when the Arabs in Gaza target the civilians in Israel's nearby town. The central playground has a colorful play animal, which in actuality is 12 inches thick of concrete. It is a place for children to run into if they are on the playground and missiles are inbound. Every bus stop is a missile shelter, and many homes and schools have a second roof over the structure which is reinforced concrete. All of this costs an enormous amount of money and is only necessary because Israel is surrounded by a bloodthirsty group of terrorists who seek to drive every Jew and Christian out of the Middle East, to kill them or, among the moderates, simply to subjugate the non-believer.

The ultimate irony of Israel is that this is a modern, clean, friendly, prosperous country, that grants more rights to the Arabs living within its midst than any Arab nation does. On more than one occasion, we drove into areas administered by the Palestinian authority. We traveled to Qumran to see where the world's oldest Bible was discovered. The Bible, in virtually the form identical to the ones we utilize today, was written over 2,000 years ago by the aesthetic sect of Jews. This is part of the continuous connection that Jewish people have to the land of Israel.

Arabs are routinely seen walking the streets in Israel, they attend Israeli universities, are treated in Israeli hospitals, and occupy seats in the Knesset. In fact, something like 23% of parliament members are Israeli Arabs. When we traveled across the so-called green line into the Palestinian administration zone, it was much easier than when we recently crossed the border to and from Canada. The border crossing looks vaguely like a toll booth in the U.S., and the cars zip back and forth with no visible checking. In fact, the entire security situation seems more relaxed than is seen in the United States. It is much more difficult for me to get into my own courthouse to practice law than to go into any public building in Israel. What is going on here? Israeli security tries hard to get ahead of the ball and to be proactive in identifying terrorists and protecting its borders. Arabs enjoy freedom and democracy which they cannot imagine within Gaza, the areas controlled by the Palestinian authority, or any other Arab nation. Arab women walk the streets of Jerusalem in colorful head scarves and American jeans. In Israel, Arab women enjoy full rights and are not banned from an education, driving a car, or walking alongside their husbands.

Bob Dylan's words came back to haunt me when he wrote about Israel in his song *Neighborhood Bullies*: "He has made a garden of paradise in the desert sand, in bed with nobody and under no one's command." My other favorite line from the Dylan song which characterizes Israel well is:

Well, he's surrounded by pacifists who all want peace  
They pray fortnightly that the bloodshed must cease

Now, they wouldn't hurt a fly. To hurt one they would weep.  
They lay and they wait for this bully to fall asleep  
He's the neighborhood bully.

Those Arabs who argue that Jews should not live just east of Jerusalem in areas contiguous with the Jewish towns of Ma'aleh Adumim and Kader enslave their own Palestinians in camps throughout the Middle East. While Israel absorbed its Jewish refugees kicked out of Arab nations beginning in 1948, the Arab world has used Palestinian Arabs as pawns in its international blame-game. If I am critical of Israel for anything, it is for being bad at propaganda. Israel never thought that it had to rely upon telling its story loudly and often because the truth of its situation speaks for itself. While the Israelis were wrong about that, they now understand that they must inform the world of their story.

The Arabs on the West Bank of the Jordan River and in Gaza do not oppose 3,000 Jewish homes east of Jerusalem alone. They oppose any Jew living in any Arab country, in any Arab territory, or in Israel itself. Any Arab from the West Bank can easily come into Israel to work or travel. However, I would be risking my life to go to the cities of Jericho, Ramallah, Jenin, or any other city administered by the Palestinian authority. This double standard should be so obvious as to be ludicrous.

What does all of this have to do with guns? Israel is a nation where citizens are not afraid to carry guns. One of my friends who lives in Kader carries a pistol in a holster underneath the driver seat of his car. Another friend of mine has an assault rifle on the wall in the office at his home. Yet, the rate of gun violence in Israel is extremely small, one of the smallest in the world. Israel does have strict registration requirements and the government knows who owns guns and for what purposes. The culture is different. When an Israeli goes into the military or into public service, which virtually all men and women do except the most religiously observant, they learn about their country's history. I witnessed at an archaeological site about 30 new recruits being lectured by one of their officers. The lecture was not about how to storm a mountain or dig a foxhole, but rather was about the biblical history of Israel. The armed forces are used as a method to educate and inform young people about the nation's history and values. Israelis love to argue and debate, but no discussion ends up in someone pulling out an assault rifle or in murdering a group of children.

We need to revisit and think about our gun culture in America, including legal requirements to license and train gun users, but just as importantly it is high time that we require all young people to serve our nation in some way before they go off to college to enjoy their 4 years of drinking and smoking weed. Perhaps if we asked for something back from our young people we would help to develop a more homogenous culture based upon shared values.

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