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KINSELLA: Israel feels more like an open wound than a country these days

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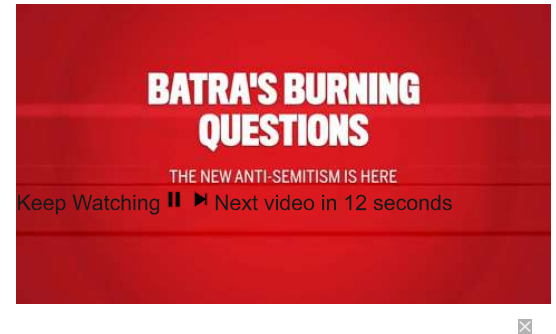


National Institutions Building, Jerusalem. PHOTO BY WARREN KINSELLA /Toronto Sun/Postmedia Network

JERUSALEM – One of the first things you notice about this country, when you come here, is the people. Not the beautiful sights, so much, these days. The people.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

At your hotel, there aren't any spare rooms. They're all full. In the mornings at the included breakfast, you see exhausted parents trying to corral their kids, who are wearing pajamas all the time and look sadder than a child ever should.



Out on the streets, the restaurants and shops are mostly empty. Fewer people than usual can be seen walking around.

And outside the cities like Jerusalem, you see soldiers everywhere – lots and lots of them, so young, carrying around M-16s and Glock and Sig Sauer sidearms. The citizens you meet, meanwhile, don't smile much. They look sad and anxious. Some of them carry guns, too.

Why are the hotels so full? Simple. They're full of refugees.

When Hamas attacked in the South and slaughtered 1,200 people and incinerated their homes, the survivors needed somewhere to live. So, they moved to hotel rooms in the cities, where they've been trapped for months. Many don't want to return with their kids to the kibbutzim, so near are they to the border with Gaza.

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Israeli soldiers lining up for shawarma at a gas station outside Tel Aviv. PHOTO BY WARREN KINSELLA /Toronto Sun/Postmedia Network

Same with the ones from the North, the ones within easy rocket and missile range of Hezbollah. They'll likely never be allowed back – thousands and thousands of them. Families with kids, the elderly.

And why so few people on the streets, in the shops and restaurants? Because the tourists are staying away in droves. Because many Israelis are unenthusiastic to be out somewhere and caught in an attack, that's why.

All over Old Jerusalem, near the holiest places in Christianity and Judaism and Islam, are bilingual signs recalling who was shot to death or stabbed to death on that spot. There are a lot of those signs.

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And why the sad faces? That, too, is obvious. Because everyone knows someone who was killed or taken hostage. Everyone has a relative in the army, because service is mandatory here. Everyone feels completely and totally abandoned by those they formerly considered friends and allies.

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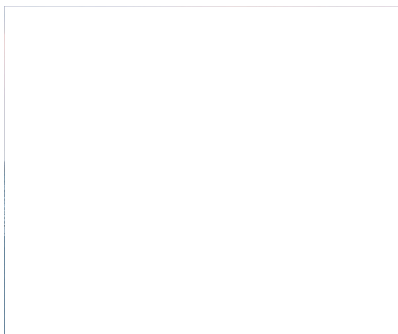
Like, say, us – Canadians.

As they live refugee lives in cramped hotel rooms far from their homes, Israelis watch the news carefully. (There's not much else to do.) They see the hate rallies in our streets. They see the attacks on Canadian synagogues and Jewish community centers and businesses. They see our kids – white, privileged kids hiding behind masks – camping out at universities, mouthing tributes to actual terrorists.

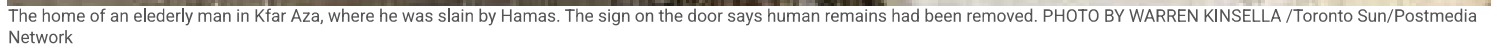
The Israelis see all that, and they feel utterly and completely alone. They feel abandoned by those they considered allies and friends, like Canadians. And they wonder if Oct. 7, 2023 is some new Kristallnacht, a reprise of what followed it. They wonder if Hamas and Iran and their Satanic brethren will finish what the Nazis started.

Over and over, Israelis expressed bewilderment to us, Canadian media. Why do so many in the West regard us as a war-mongering, white supremacist, Islamophobic apartheid regime led by a fascist? Why?

STORY CONTINUES BELOW







The home of an elderly man in Kfar Aza, where he was slain by Hamas. The sign on the door says human remains had been removed. PHOTO BY WARREN KINSELLA / Toronto Sun/Postmedia Network

It's true: lots of people think Israelis fully support the government of Benjamin Netanyahu and the senior leadership of the armed forces and the intelligence agencies. But they don't. They just don't.

Every single Israeli I met, every one, expressed barely-controlled rage about Netanyahu and his generals and advisors. They want all of them gone. They want to clean out the stables.

They are livid Netanyahu et al. didn't foresee Oct. 7 coming. They are shocked, still, that it happened. Some openly detest Netanyahu for it.

Similarly, the notion that Israel is a far-Right theocratic backwater that hates Muslims? It's absurd. It's wrong. Almost all of the men, women, children and babies slaughtered on Oct. 7 were farmers and rural people who live off the land. Mostly socialistic, atheistic people who wouldn't ever vote for Netanyahu.

 Memorials to some the hundreds slain at the Nova Music Festival.

Memorials to some the hundreds slain at the Nova Music Festival. PHOTO BY WARREN KINSELLA /Toronto Sun/Postmedia Network

Their families are the ones who protest every single day outside Netanyahu's official residence here, because they don't think the government has done enough to get back the hostages.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

And 20% of Israel's population? It's Muslim. Muslims were also murdered and kidnapped in the Oct. 7 attack. They are mourned and missed here as much as Jews are.

So, does Israel possess military might? Yes, of course. But Israelis want peace more than land. Over and over since 1967, they've ceded land to hostile Muslim forces, betting that it will foster peace. Every time, they've lost the bet. Case in point: a ceasefire existed until Oct. 6. It was broken by Hamas. Not Israel.

Are the Israelis as militaristic as the campus Intifada claim? Well, after Iran bombarded Israel with hundreds of missiles, rockets and drones less than a month ago, not one Arab nation (apart from Syria) would've objected if Israel had bombed Iran's regime back to the Stone Age. But Israel didn't. They fired off a few warnings, and then withdrew. The Allies didn't do that in Dresden or Hiroshima.

 Rita Lifshitz shows photo of kibbutz family, her neighbors. The mother and children were all slaughtered. The father is still believed to be a Hamas hostage.

Rita Lifshitz shows photo of kibbutz family, her neighbors. The mother and children were all slaughtered. The father is still believed to be a Hamas hostage. PHOTO BY WARREN KINSELLA /Toronto Sun/Postmedia Network

At Rita Nir Oz, a kibbutz where many residents were murdered or kidnapped, we were led around by Rita Lifshitz. She stood in front of the ruined home of her octogenarian father-in-law, a pro-Palestinian Israeli who used to take sick Gazans to hospital. They kidnapped him.

Rita looks like she hasn't smiled in seven months. She probably hasn't.

Casting her gaze over the charred ruins of her father-in-law's home, she whispers just loud enough to be heard: "It's like a holocaust."

Israel doesn't feel so much like a country, these days. It feels like an open wound.

It needs healing.



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