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LILLEY: Canadians need a new and better perspective on Israel

Simple slogans about a two-state solution show little understanding about reality on the ground

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Brian Lilley

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A bombed-out home at Kibbutz Re'im in southern Israel near the border with Gaza on Monday January 22, 2024. Brian Lilley/Toronto Sun

TEL-AVIV — Sitting on the balcony of my hotel in Tel-Aviv, it starts to dawn on me how close myself and my fellow travellers are to everything. We are less than an hour's drive to Jerusalem, less than an hour to Ramallah in the West Bank and, if roads were open, less than an hour to Gaza City.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

And, as we are continually reminded, we are 15 seconds away from rockets falling upon us at any moment, just five seconds if we are closer to the border with Gaza.



If an alarm sounds, take a breath and walk, don't run, to the nearest bomb shelter is the advice. The bomb shelters are everywhere here, ubiquitous doesn't seem to cover it — simply put, you can't swing a dead cat without hitting a bomb shelter in much of this country.

Which is rather telling and sad all at the same time.

Who should have to live like this? Who should have to set up their society for the inevitability of missiles and rockets falling down on you that bomb shelters in Tel-Aviv are more common than bus shelters in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Calgary, Winnipeg or Edmonton?

That's the reality in Israel, though, and the public doesn't seem bothered by this at all, it is part of life, though it shouldn't be.

To put things in perspective for Canadians, Israel has less than half the land mass of Nova Scotia, it is less than a third the size of New Brunswick and has a population of just over 9 million, which is more people than who live in all of Quebec. Land wise, you could fit 60 Israels inside Quebec's land mass.



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Yet this tiny strip of land, with such a large population, has seen thousands of rockets a year fall from the sky. They don't arrive magically out of thin air, they are launched by a variety of terrorist groups with one aim: Eliminating Israel.



In response to these rocket attacks, in response to the terrorist attacks of Oct. 7, the rest of the world tells Israel to show restraint.

There was no restraint shown by Hamas as they poured into Israel that day committing barbaric acts, butchering whole communities. In my hotel, there are hundreds of displaced people, forced to move due to the war including some from the communities that were attacked.

Some hope to return home one day, others aren't sure if they will be able to due to the physical destruction where they once lived or the mental anguish the attacks caused.

Restraint, though, that's what Israel needs to show.

If Mississauga were launching rockets into Toronto, calling for the death of all who lived there, would Toronto need to show restraint? If Burnaby attacked Vancouver with vicious attacks by land, air and sea, would Vancouver need to hold back in responding?

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

These aren't questions we have to deal with as Canadians. We can't even fathom the idea and in fact, it sounds ridiculous.

Here in Israel, this is reality.

More than 20 years of rockets being launched mixed with intermittent waves of suicide and terror attacks followed by the invasion of Oct. 7.

Person after person has told me they want peace but they don't know what that looks like in the current context. They also aren't sure their Palestinian neighbours want peace as they continue to support the actions of groups like Hamas.

As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is blasted around the world for saying he cannot support a two-state solution, the leaders of Hamas state openly that they never want a two-state solution and they don't want a ceasefire. Israel is being pressured to accept a ceasefire, the other side doesn't want a long-term solution the other side says they will not abide by.

There is no easy solution to this conflict but there is absolutely no solution that involves Hamas or anyone else that cannot accept the very existence of Israel.

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