

Is Israel Already the Fifty-First State?

By Roger L Simon

Guilt is known to be a Jewish trait and I have to admit I am not immune to it. This is my fifth visit to Israel, first in a decade, but each time I have asked myself why I don't move here. I'm supposed to, aren't I—take Aliyah, to ascend, as it's translates. It's my ancestral home, isn't it, from 3500 years?

And yet I never have and at this point it should be obvious, even in fantasy, that I never will.

Still, I take all their problems personally and read the Israeli press religiously, railing against their own inane liberalism that mirrors ours and enjoying their triumphs, when they occur. In a sense I am a dual national but in reality I am not. I don't even speak Hebrew, only can read the letters and that not always.



Nevertheless, a great many Israelis speak English, you could almost get by on it and some do, and the presence of America looms heavily here. On my most recent trip, when I was still at PJ Media, one of the loyal readers, a man who had made Aliyah and chose to call himself by his Hebrew name Menahem, complained vociferously at my calling Israel the fifty-first state. He may have had a point, but that presence has only grown in ten years and is even greater in this era of Donald J. Trump as you can see from the photo I took above that is displayed on the Friends of Zion museum in this time of sweeping antisemitism.. Virtually everyone here, saving the usual grumps, credits our new president with the ceasefire and the freeing of the hostages.

The tragedy of the hostages pervades the society. You see evidence of it everywhere you go, from the moment you get off the plane. Virtually the first thing you encounter arriving at

Ben Gurion is a long corridor leading to customs lined with photos and descriptions of those incarcerated in Gaza. Nearly every Jerusalem street corner has the same.

Sheryl and I stopped by a make-shift booth a hundred or so feet up the sidewalk from Benjamin Netanyahu's home with displays and photos of the hostages that had been erected there, obviously, to remind the prime minister of his responsibility to "Bring Them Home," words seen everywhere in the city in English and Hebrew, even though Bibi is not living there at present, his surprisingly unprepossessing home being under reconstruction.

So far we have not experienced any three am visits from the Houthis, but the hotel we have been staying at has a well marked security area with an arrow pointing down a spiral stair to the basement. The hotel itself is surprisingly full with groups of religious Jewish Americans from places like Flatbush and Monsey, New York, a Hasidic community. These are people who come to Israel no matter the situation, although tourism is down for obvious reasons.

You sense that moving about Jerusalem with its myriad tourist sites. The city itself, however, has grown considerably. Some of the modern architecture is exceptional, like the newish National Library we were taken to by a man who had made Aliyah. They take being the People of the Book seriously here. Other new buildings are of the humdrum sort we see all over the Western world these days.

The most beautiful part of Jerusalem, not far from our hotel, is Yemin Moshe, an exquisite, classically Middle Eastern neighborhood of narrow alleys overlooking the Old City built at the end of the Nineteenth Century. This is where Saul Bellow came to write his book on Jerusalem as a guest of the Israeli state. On other visits I had fantasies of staying there and writing myself but that was not to be. I will have to imagine things from Nashville.

I am about to launch the more dramatic part of my trip (the Gaza border will come later), having been invited to Gush Etzion this evening in Samaria (West Bank to the State Dept.) to observe a training session for local drivers on how to avoid terror attacks on the road, dodging rocks set up as traps and so forth. I will write more of this after I've seen it but this trading was established by Shurat HaDin, the [Israel Law Center](#). (You should click on the link because what these people do is genuinely extraordinary. I will have more to say about them later,)

It strikes me Israel is the most misunderstood country in the world, not just because the president of Ireland can't figure out something so elementary as the difference between genocide and self-defense. All over Europe the hatred of Jews (and therefore the Jewish state) is rising again. In Britain it almost seems as if the days of the Norwich blood libel are returning. It's genuinely spooky. The cliché goes that the Euros love us when we're down, the more down the better (i.e. Auschwitz) but hate us when we're strong and successful. This is one case when the cliché is true for the simple reason such envy is typical human behavior. It is why G-d made the commandment about not coveting. Hard to do for anyone.

As I write this the hostage for prisoner exchange is supposed to be continuing. Amidst this, some Palestinian prisoners, apparently women, have opted to stay in Israel. Who could blame them? Trump has come up with the idea of transferring one and a half million Gazans to Jordan and Egypt. Some locals here—not surprisingly “la classe journaliste”—pooh-pooh this, but as usual, the people, as some have already told me, see it otherwise.

Donald knows best. Hasn't everybody learned that yet? It's not that complicated.

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