



LIES ABOUT ISRAEL LEAD TO LIES ABOUT EVERYTHING

SEBASTIAN CEVALLOS

Why would someone who lives in Ecuador—that’s me—be preoccupied with... Israel? The countries are separated by two continents and an ocean. Nothing that happens in Tel Aviv has much, if any, effect on what happens to me in Cuenca.

Except for this: I always want to know the truth about things. And I hate lies. And there are more lies told about Israel than about any place in the world. I have come to realize that if you believe lies about Israel, you will believe lies about almost anything. And if you know the truth about Israel, you’re likely to think straight about most things.

In other words, Israel is a kind of truth test. Fail this test, and you’ve fallen into a fantasy world of untruth, a funhouse mirror of the real world.

That’s a pretty bold statement, I know. But I stand by it—and I’m not even Jewish. In fact, only about 1,000 Jews live in the entire country of Ecuador. So how did Israel even get on my radar? you might ask. That’s easy.

Israel is very hard to ignore, no matter where you live. Did you ever meet someone who didn’t have an opinion about the Jewish state? So, sometime during my high school years, Israel got my attention. And I started to do some research.

At first, I thought, “Wow, this is a complex issue.” Was Israel the victim or the aggressor in the Middle East? Did it oppress its minority population or was it a bastion of civil rights? Was it a colonizer of Palestinian land? Or did it have legitimate claim to that land? Why did the United Nations pass resolution after resolution condemning Israel, but say nothing about Syria or North Korea? Why did Israel’s neighbors pledge themselves to its utter destruction?

All this attention, focused on a country you have to squint to see on a globe, a country one-tenth the size of my own and with one-half the population. It was all very confusing. So I pushed on. And the more research I did, the clearer the picture became.

Israel has free speech, a free press, and independent courts. It has open and fair elections. Its neighbors don’t. Women have full rights and are active in every profession, including the military. That’s not true of any of its neighbors.

Neither is this: Tel Aviv hosts one of the largest gay pride parades in the world, and the only one in the Middle East. A fifth of Israel’s citizens are Arab Muslims. In fact, they have their own political party. The holy sites of all religions are fully protected within its borders. Can’t say that about its neighbors.

More research led to even more revelations. Israel has repeatedly offered the Palestinians their own state, and every time, those efforts were rejected. Why? For one simple reason: the Palestinians have never accepted Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. And the wall Israel built to separate themselves from the Palestinians? The wall most of the world condemns? The only reason the Israelis built it was to stop waves of suicide bombings. It worked. The bombings stopped.

This stuff isn't hard to find out. Nor was it hard to find out—despite the lack of Western media coverage—how many Syrians fled to Israel during the Syrian civil war to have their injuries treated and lives saved in Israeli hospitals.

And then I realized that Israel is like a North Star of truth, a way to set your moral compass. If you can't locate this star, you're guaranteed to get lost in a sea of lies. How many rockets does Hamas have to launch, how many times does Iran have to threaten to blow Israel off the face of the earth, before this becomes clear to you?

Yes, life is complicated. As young as I am, I know that. There are shades of gray. But some things are pretty close to black and white. They just are.

Why anyone who values freedom and democracy wouldn't wish Israel well, wouldn't be willing to take its side when it's threatened, I find hard to understand. I guess not everyone is interested in truth.

Well, I am—which is why Israel means so much to me. Even in Ecuador.

I'm Sebastian Cevallos for Prager University.