



WHY DON'T YOU SUPPORT ISRAEL?

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When I was Prime Minister of Canada, I was often asked this question: “Why do you support Israel?”

My response, in effect, was always the same: *Why wouldn't* I support Israel?

Why wouldn't I support a fellow democratic nation where open elections, free speech, and religious tolerance are the everyday norm? Why wouldn't I support a country with a vibrant free press and an independent judiciary? Why wouldn't I support a valuable trading partner and a well-spring of amazing technological innovation? Why wouldn't I support our most critical ally in the Middle East, and in the international struggle against terrorism?

In a rational world, in a world where simple common sense prevailed, the question “why do you support Israel?” would be like asking “why do you support Australia?” or... “Canada?”

But we don't live in that rational, common-sense world. So the case for Israel has to be made over and over. I, for one, am happy to make it.

Let me start with this:

Every military action Israel has ever taken has been to protect itself. Israel is not an aggressor state; it's a defensive state. This has been true from its founding to this day.

As a fledgling nation in 1948, Israel was immediately attacked by its Arab neighbors. Their goal was not to contain the tiny new country; it was to annihilate it. No nation came to Israel's aid—not the United States, not my country, Canada, not the United Kingdom—no one. They all thought Israel would lose. But it didn't lose. It won.

In 1967, Israel's neighbors again sought to utterly destroy the Jewish State, a nation that had then existed for two decades. Again, Israel prevailed. And It survived another all-out attack in 1973.

Those are the big wars, but I'm not sure there has been a single day in Israel's entire history when some act of terror has not been waged against it—inside or outside its borders.

There have been two bloody waves of terror, so-called *intifadas*, in the late 1980s and the early 2000s, when Israelis were blown up on buses, at pizza parlors and celebrating weddings. There have been incursions from terror groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon. There have been thousands of rocket attacks from Hamas in the Gaza Strip—even after Israel completely

withdrew from that territory in 2005.

In between the wars, in between the terror, Israel has sought peace with its neighbors. And it has achieved peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. For others, however, every Israeli gesture for peace is met with incitement and violence.

I recount this history for one reason: Any nation that has endured what Israel has endured could easily have become a police state. But through it all, Israel has never abandoned its commitment to the rule of law, to democracy, to tolerance. One-fifth of its citizens are Muslim. They enjoy the same rights as Jewish citizens. They occupy key positions in the nation's courts, press and government. And they have their own parties representing them in the Knesset, Israel's parliament. To say that Muslims in Israel are the freest Muslims in the region is an understatement.

How about this as a human rights test: Prisoners in Israel, be they Jewish or Arab, are well-treated, well-fed, and have access to the best possible medical care. Parents and spouses of these prisoners know where they are and that they are safe. Who else in the region but Israel can make that claim?

Through all the wars and all the terror, Israel has survived and, especially in the last twenty years, it has thrived. It's known as "start-up nation," and with good reason. Key components of your cell phone and your laptop were designed in Israel. A drug or a medical device that has saved your life or the life of a loved one may have been developed in Israel. Yet there are leftist politicians, activists, artists, academics and college students who devote their lives to denouncing Israel, calling for boycotts, demanding it be cut off from academic and professional societies.

Do they denounce the Palestinian leadership that hasn't held an election in well over a decade? Do they denounce the leadership of Hamas, who use women and children as human shields to protect their fighters? No. They denounce free, vibrant, democratic, innovative Israel.

With all the brutal and violent regimes, not only in the Middle East, but around the world, how is one to explain singling out Israel for condemnation? Sadly, only one explanation fits: anti-Semitism. Do these haters of Israel question the legitimacy of any other democratic nation? Of any nation, for that matter? Of course, the answer is "no." Somehow, they only manage to oppose the Jewish one.

The State of Israel has now existed for 70 years. It is one of the freest, most prosperous, most successful nations on earth.

Why do I support Israel? Why wouldn't I? Why wouldn't anyone?

I'm Stephen Harper, 22nd Prime Minister of Canada, for Prager University.