

Aliyah Annotated: Do Most Israelis Feel Safe?

On the rare occasion that I get to talk to people from home (the 10-hour time difference is killer), I am often asked about Israeli opinions on political issues, safety in Israel and life in Jerusalem.

So this week, I answer your Frequently Asked Questions.

What Do Israelis Think About the Iran Deal?

Generally, I have found that there are two camps of thought that most Israelis fall under.

The first camp, which is by far the more popular opinion, strongly opposes the deal. Their mantra is, "A bad deal is worse than no deal." They are sure that the deal is not tough enough on Iran, as not enough safeguards exist to ensure that Iran will not build a nuclear weapon.

Inspections of the nuclear facilities are too infrequent and give Iran too much advance notice; Iran is allowed to refuse inspections at certain sites; and the agreement protects Iran from sabotage of its nuclear installations. Moreover, Iran has stated its goal of wiping Israel off the map, and to not hold them to their word would be foolish. To put it bluntly, Israelis often associate the Iranian regime with the Nazi regime, but with the added power of nuclear weapons. They think that to accept the Iran deal could be to blatantly ignore our cries of "never again."

Another camp says that the Iran deal is an "OK" deal. Not good, but not terrible. While maintaining a somewhat skeptical point of view, they argue that a deal led by the U.S. and signed by other important world powers shouldn't be the end of the world, as it will be monitored. They generally trust that

the world powers would not let Iran develop a nuclear weapon. On the bright side, they argue, postponing Iran's nuclear advancement by "buying time" is a good thing, and this deal should put the bomb off for around 10 years.

I have yet to hear someone who thinks the deal is a good deal, although according to *Haaretz*, a left-wing Israeli newspaper, 10 percent of Israelis were in favor of the agreement a day after it was signed.

What Do Israelis Think About U.S. President Barack Obama?

Again, there are generally two camps.

Most Israelis do not think that Obama truly has Israel's back as much as he contends. They believe that the only leader who will have Israel's back 100 percent of the time is the prime minister of Israel. They contend Israel needs to do what it needs to do, and Obama is being overly sensitive about Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's outspoken, legitimate concern for his country. Netanyahu is rightfully threatened by the idea of a nuclear Iran and simply wants to convey that concern to America's government and people.

Another group, generally the more left-wing camp, respects Obama—sometimes even more than their own prime minister. They often blame Bibi for deepening the divide between Israel and her strongest ally, the U.S. But then again, the people in this group will often blame Bibi for *everything* that is not going well for Israel, both domestically and internationally.

Do You Feel Safe?

I do feel safe. In fact, when I walk in downtown Jerusalem, I feel much safer than when I used to walk in downtown Seattle. But like everywhere, safety depends on the specific location. When I was living on Mount Scopus two years ago, I was living next to an Arab area and there was not one day that I could walk somewhere without being honked at and catcalled by Arab

men. I am not generalizing—it was literally only Arab men, never women and never Jews. Where I'm living now, Arabs try to scare us by driving by, honking their horn, and shrieking (loudly) out the window while they pass. Both types of harassment make me feel uncomfortable, but not unsafe.

Due to the liberal values upon which I was raised in the U.S., I still think that the diversity within Jerusalem is a great strength, even though it sometimes makes life tense. Most people, whether they are Jewish, Arab, Muslim, Christian, white, black, Asian and so on, are just living their lives and trying to get by. You can generally tell who is friendly by observing their body language and facial expressions, which seem to be largely universal.

The other day, I walked by a playground where a little Muslim boy was playing, under the watchful eye of his mom. He was adorable, so I smiled and waved at him. I looked up at his mom and found her smiling back at me. It's so strange that we live in a world where this is considered a "cool moment." But as Israelis say, "cacha." That's just how it is, and we might as well relish these moments and hope for the day when all will feel safe in Jerusalem, no matter our race, ethnicity, religion, or color.

Is It Too Tense to Stay in Jerusalem?

After ulpan (Hebrew language immersion school), I am planning on staying in Jerusalem. Professionally, as a writer, it makes sense that I'm in Jerusalem. This is where the action happens, there's never lack of material, and being here is inspirational for my writing. I find purpose in sharing with the world the beauty of Israel. To have my articles about Israel seen by thousands of people around the world motivates me.

On a more personal level, being in Jerusalem fosters constant reflection on my reasons for being here, and it is through

reflection that I am finding self-knowledge and meaning. Being in a city so central to my Jewish heritage, everywhere I turn I am reminded why I am here and what it means to be a Jew, an Israeli, and simply alive.

Don't get me wrong—I know through living here previously that life in Jerusalem isn't easy, and it's much less of a “young person's city” than Tel Aviv. It's sometimes tense. Apartments are old and small. It's more precarious than anywhere in Israel that isn't next door to Gaza. And for more secular people, it can sometimes feel stifling. I'm sure there are even more hardships that I have yet to experience.

But none of these concerns overshadow the amazing things Jerusalem has to offer—a diverse community, countless institutions that truly want us to succeed here, many amazing social and business ventures, and the most thriving Jewish community in the world. Jerusalem is truly a remarkable city, if not *the* most remarkable.

I feel so fortunate to be able to begin my life in Israel, fulfill my passions here, and continue to explore the limitless potential Israel has to offer.

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