Looking back on 15 years of columns about Israel
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For more than 15 years, beginning in January 1998, I've had the honour and privilege of writing a monthly column in The Canadian Jewish News, with the objective of presenting an informative view from Israel. Canada's Jewish community is not the biggest in the world, but you certainly punch well above your weight in terms of upholding Jewish values, support for Israel and ensuring continuity. As a result, you deserve and need a reliable source for information and analysis, and The CJN has been that platform.

I do not know what Mordechai Ben-Dat, The CJN's indispensable editor, had in mind when he asked me to contribute, but I saw my mission as providing a fresh view not tied to any political or ideological interest – in other words, to "tell it like it is." Israel is unimaginably complex, both inside and out, but so much of what is provided for external consumption is stripped of the details beyond recognition.

Our politics and society have an infinite number of angles – right, left and centre; religious, secular, haredi; socialist and capitalist, with many stops in between. In the chaos, different coalitions form, split, and reform – in 15 years, we have had six governments consisting of at least a dozen different parties. From the outside, and even from within, it is hard to tell the players without a scorecard.

None of this should be surprising – Israel is an entirely unique experiment in changing history. For 2,000 years, the Jewish People have been scattered among dozens of communities around the world, each with its own traditions, culture and structure. Suddenly, we need to find a way to recombine these different threads back into a single garment in order to live together. The restoration of Hebrew as the common language is, in itself, a miracle, as is the fact that we have more than six million Jewish Israelis who speak it – an auspicious number and a ten-fold increase since 1948.

Since we live with this on a daily basis, many Israelis erase the context, pressing their own agendas, stripping away the complexities and seeking support from the Diaspora Jewish community. I hope that in my columns covering many of these issues, I have managed to provide insights and make sense out of the confusion.

However, for much of the world, Israel's complexities are reduced to "settlements" and "occupation," particularly as presented in the mass media (the CBC is unfortunately no exception). Yes, the battles to define Israel's borders and relations with the Palestinian Arabs are important, but these can only be understood in the wider context, history and realities of the Middle East.

When this history is presented as having started in 1967, and the deeply ingrained combination of incitement and terror are erased, nothing sensible can possibly emerge. Similarly, would-be advisers who erase Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon (now largely Hezbollahstan) from the map, as well as Iraq, Iran and the rest, in order to focus exclusively on the "powerless Palestinians," have zero credibility.

And then there's the political war to delegitimize Israel, exploiting and distorting terms such as "human rights," "international law," "apartheid" and "war crimes" beyond recognition. This war is a direct extension of the military attacks and terrorism that have been used to try to erase Israel from the map from its first day and is often led by radical groups using moral-sounding names related to peace and

human rights.

As a columnist at The CJN, I have tried to analyze the complexities honestly and without ideological spin. And looking forward, the issues are only going to become more complex, both internally and around our borders. Unfortunately, journalists and academics who become instant experts on Israel can be expected to continue to confuse and distort, aided and abetted by the demonization machine.

In this environment, The Canadian Jewish News has made an indispensable contribution – everyone involved can look back in pride at a job well done.

And looking forward, I have no doubt that a new framework will be found to fill this vital function.