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By Eric Chabrow, **CIO INSIGHT**



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Tuesday, April 15, 2008 6:51 PM/EST

Israel Treats American CIOs Royally

A delegation of American CIOs just returned from a six-day visit to Israel, where they toured the nation as if they were heads of government, industrial chieftains or Hollywood stars.

Like all honored guests, they made the obligatory visits to **Yad V'sham**, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, and **S'derot**, the border town that's under constant bombardment by Hamas from the Gaza Strip.

These business technology leaders met a wide array of Israelis. They ranged from ordinary citizens to young soldiers (the vast majority of Israeli high school graduates are drafted into the Israel Defense Force for at least three years) and their parents, to former military and intelligence commanders, scientists, academics and government officials, including two members of the **Knesset** (Israel's parliament). And, they had a 20-minute audience with Prime Minister **Ehud Olmert**.

Why were these American CIOs given the royal treatment? Israelis see these CIOs as being influential businesspeople and prominent members of their communities, and wanted them to see the Jewish state as more than a place of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, but as a leading center of global business and high-tech development, especially in IT security and the Internet. (One CIO observed that the highway linking Tel Aviv and Haifa resembled the Junipero Serra Freeway between San Francisco and Cupertino with its numerous high-tech company office buildings, big-box electronics outlet and McDonald's coupled with a rugged, semi-arid terrain.)

The tour was sponsored by the **America-Israel Friendship League**, a nonpartisan, nongovernment-supported and not-for-profit organization aimed at strengthening ties between the people of the United States and Israel.

Within hours of their arrival, the jet-lagged CIOs found themselves in a private room at a Tel Aviv restaurant, dining with Israel's most successful high-tech entrepreneur, **Yossi Vardi**, who founded and helped build more than 50 tech companies in areas of software, energy, Internet, mobile technology, electro-optics and clean water. In fact, one Vardi venture invented the pioneering Internet chat software IRC.

In the following days, the CIOs discussed nanotechnology with computer scientists at **Technion**, Israel's MIT, in Haifa, and visited security software maker Checkpoint Software in Tel Aviv. One

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evening, they dined with top business execs from Israeli technology companies, including Nice Systems, maker of emotion-sensitive software and call-monitoring systems, and defense integrator Elbit Systems. The final night's dinner was hosted by **Niv Ahituv**, the academic director of Netvision Institute of Internet Studies at Tel Aviv University, with guests from academia, venture capital and the judiciary.

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The CIOs found their briefings, especially those with business-technology leaders and academics, valuable, resembling business gatherings the CIOs engaged in back home. The military and intelligence meetings proved highly informative, such as a briefing by a former Mosad leader on preventing corporate espionage that captured the imagination of the delegation. However, they were unbalanced from a regional political perspective as only the Israeli side was presented. When I posted a blog about the **CIO takeaway** from a meeting with Danny Rothschild, a retired Israeli military intelligence chief, a reader from Amman, Jordan, complained: "The whole trip is another pro-Israel propaganda."

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That complaint has some validity. No doubt, the tour sponsor is pro-Israel, yet as the CIOs learned, there's much more to Israel than the Arab-Israel conflict. And that's an important point. Israel is too often viewed as one dimensional, and that's an unfair representation.

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Besides, these CIOs are smart enough to recognize propaganda; they weren't hoodwinked. They discovered they had more in common with the Israelis they met—professionally and personally—than most of them had realized. And some saw the promise for mutually beneficial joint efforts.

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Take delegation member Stephen Levin, CIO for university services at the University of Minnesota, who sees the potential for collaboration between Technion and his school. "There is a lot of food for thought on how to bring the two worlds together," he says.

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AIFL paid the expenses for most tour members as well as this blogger.


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Posted by Eric Chabrow on April 15, 2008 6:51 PM

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Comments (3)

Martyn Richard Jones :

Of course, it makes absolute economic sense that Israel should want to actively encourage much more tech trade with a developed market such as the USA; the commitment to how much they spend on "wining and dining" is naturally related to the economy and the economic needs; times are tough, and tough times call for tough spending and going to new levels in attracting punters.

Other people do the "treat like royalty" thing as well, e.g.: India for one, and small economies too, such as Wales and the Spanish autonomous community of Catalunya (similar in size and economy as Israel).

Golden rule No. 1: Get paid (even if one has to act like a courtesan from time to time).

Posted by [Martyn Richard Jones](#) | [April 23, 2008 11:06 AM](#)

Elena Alexseeva :

They might close some deals and then outsource all the development, including R&D, to Eastern Europe or India like it happens all the time.

Posted by [Elena Alexseeva](#) | [April 23, 2008 12:20 PM](#)

John Graffio :

I applaud the Israelis for stepping up to the plate and showcasing their achievements and offerings. What if the forces that engender violence and strife in the Middle East took the long

view, instead training impressionable youth in technology that can serve world markets instead of local battles? There are enough weapons in existence that no one group will be able to attack another and not suffer crippling counter-attacks. So, what if every nation in the Middle East could host a delegation like the Isrealis? I know this idea is incredibly naive, but I just can't get it out of my mind.

Posted by John Graffio | [April 27, 2008 12:00 PM](#)

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