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The New Israel and the Old

Why Gentile Americans Back the Jewish State

Walter Russell Mead

ON MAY 12, 1948, Clark Clifford, the White House chief counsel, presented the case for U.S. recognition of the state of Israel to the divided cabinet of President Harry Truman. While a glowering George Marshall, the secretary of state, and a skeptical Robert Lovett, Marshall's undersecretary, looked on, Clifford argued that recognizing the Jewish state would be an act of humanity that comported with traditional American values. To substantiate the Jewish territorial claim, Clifford quoted the Book of Deuteronomy: "Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the Lord swore unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them."

Marshall was not convinced and told Truman that he would vote against him in the upcoming election if this was his policy. Eventually, Marshall agreed not to make his opposition public. Two days later, the United States granted the new Jewish state *de facto* recognition 11 minutes after Israel declared its existence as a state. Many observers, both foreign and domestic, attributed Truman's decision to the power of the Jewish community in the United States. They saw Jewish votes, media influence, and campaign contributions as crucial in the tight 1948 presidential contest.

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Since then, this pattern has often been repeated. Respected U.S. foreign policy experts call for Washington to be cautious in the Middle East and warn presidents that too much support for Israel will carry serious international costs. When presidents overrule their expert advisers and take a pro-Israel position, observers attribute the move to the "Israel lobby" and credit (or blame) it for swaying the chief executive. But there is another factor to consider. As the Truman biographer David McCullough has written, Truman's support for the Jewish state was "wildly popular" throughout the United States. A Gallup poll in June 1948 showed that almost three times as many Americans "sympathized with the Jews" as "sympathized with the Arabs." That support was no flash in the pan. Widespread gentile support for Israel is one of the most potent political forces in U.S. foreign policy, and in the last 60 years, there has never been a Gallup poll showing more Americans sympathizing with the Arabs or the Palestinians than with the Israelis.

Over time, moreover, the pro-Israel sentiment in the United States has increased, especially among non-Jews. The years of the George W. Bush administration have seen support for Israel in U.S. public opinion reach the highest level ever, and it has remained there throughout Bush's two terms. The increase has occurred even as the demographic importance of Jews has diminished. In 1948, Jews constituted an estimated 3.8 percent of the U.S. population. Assuming that almost every American Jew favored a pro-Israel foreign policy that year, a little more than ten percent of U.S. supporters of Israel were of Jewish origin. By 2007, Jews were only 1.8 percent of the population of the United States, accounting at most for three percent of Israel's supporters in the United States.

These figures, dramatic as they are, also probably underestimate the true level of public support for Israel. When in a poll in 2006 the Pew Research Center asked whether U.S. policy in the Middle East was fair, favored Israel, or favored the Palestinians, 47 percent of the respondents said they thought the policy was fair, six percent said it favored the Palestinians, and only 27 percent thought it favored the Israelis. The poll was conducted during Israel's attacks against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, when U.S. support for Israel was even more controversial than usual around the world. One must therefore

conclude that many of those who tell pollsters that the United States' policies are fair to both sides actually favor policies that most non-U.S. observers would consider strongly and even irresponsibly pro-Israel. The American public has few foreign policy preferences that are this marked, this deep, this enduring—and this much at odds with public opinion in other countries.

In the United States, a pro-Israel foreign policy does not represent the triumph of a small lobby over the public will. It represents the power of public opinion to shape foreign policy in the face of concerns by foreign policy professionals. Like the war on drugs and the fence along the Mexican border, support for Israel is a U.S. foreign policy that makes some experts and specialists uneasy but commands broad public support. This does not mean that an "Israel lobby" does not exist or does not help shape U.S. policy in the Middle East. Nor does it mean that Americans ought to feel as they do. (It remains my view that everyone, Americans and Israelis included, would benefit if Americans developed a more sympathetic and comprehensive understanding of the wants and needs of the Palestinians.) But it does mean that the ultimate sources of the United States' Middle East policy lie outside the Beltway and outside the Jewish community. To understand why U.S. policy is pro-Israel rather than neutral or pro-Palestinian, one must study the sources of nonelite, non-Jewish support for the Jewish state.

THE CHILDREN OF DAVID

THE STORY of U.S. support for a Jewish state in the Middle East begins early. John Adams could not have been more explicit. "I really wish the Jews again in Judea an independent nation," he said, after his presidency. From the early nineteenth century on, gentile Zionists fell into two main camps in the United States. Prophetic Zionists saw the return of the Jews to the Promised Land as the realization of a literal interpretation of biblical prophecy, often connected to the return of Christ and the end of the world. Based on his interpretation of Chapter 18 of the prophecies of Isaiah, for example, the Albany Presbyterian pastor John McDonald predicted in 1814 that Americans would assist the Jews in restoring their ancient state. Mormon voices

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shared this view; the return of the Jews to the Holy Land was under way, said Elder Orson Hyde in 1841: "The great wheel is unquestionably in motion, and the word of the Almighty has declared that it shall roll."

Other, less literal and less prophetic Christians developed a progressive Zionism that would resonate down through the decades among both religious and secular gentiles. In the nineteenth century, liberal Christians often believed that God was building a better world through human progress. They saw the democratic and (relatively) egalitarian United States as both an example of the new world God was making and a powerful instrument to further his grand design. Some American Protestants believed that God was moving to restore what they considered the degraded and oppressed Jews of the world to the Promised Land, just as God was uplifting and improving the lives of other ignorant and unbelieving people through the advance of Protestant and liberal principles. They wanted the Jews to establish their own state because they believed that this would both shelter the Jews from persecution and, through the redemptive powers of liberty and honest agricultural labor, uplift and improve what they perceived to be the squalid morals and deplorable hygiene of contemporary Ottoman and eastern European Jews. As Adams put it, "Once restored to an independent government and no longer persecuted they would soon wear away some of the asperities and peculiarities of their character and possibly in time become liberal Unitarian Christians." For such Christians, American Zionism was part of a broader program of transforming the world by promoting the ideals of the United States.

Not all progressive Zionists couched their arguments in religious terms. As early as 1816, *Niles' Weekly Register*, the leading American news and opinion periodical through much of the first half of the nineteenth century, predicted and welcomed the impending return of the Jews to an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. The magazine projected that the restoration of the Jews would further enlightenment and progress—and this, clearly, would be good for the United States as well as for the Jews.

Widespread gentile support for Israel is one of the most potent political forces in U.S. foreign policy.

Prophetic Zionists, for their part, became more numerous after the American Civil War, and their views of the role a restored Jewish state might play in the events leading up to the apocalypse became more highly developed. Books and pamphlets highlighting the predicted restoration of the Jews and speculating on the identity and the return of the “lost tribes” of the ancient Hebrews were perennial bestsellers, and the association between Dwight Moody, the country’s leading evangelist, and Cyrus Scofield, the important Bible scholar, put the future history of Israel firmly at the center of the imagination of conservative American Protestantism.

These groups of gentile Zionists found new, if sometimes unsavory, allies after 1880, when a mass immigration of Russian Jews to the United States began. Some of them and some assimilated German American Jews hoped that Palestine would replace the United States as the future home of what was an unusually unpopular group of immigrants at the time. For anti-Semites, the establishment of a Jewish state might or might not “cure” Jews of the characteristics many gentiles attributed to them, but in any case the establishment of such a state would reduce Jewish immigration to the United States.

In 1891, these strands of gentile Zionists came together. The Methodist lay leader William Blackstone presented a petition to President Benjamin Harrison calling on the United States to use its good offices to convene a congress of European powers so that they could induce the Ottoman Empire to turn Palestine over to the Jews. The 400 signatories were overwhelmingly non-Jewish and included the chief justice of the Supreme Court; the Speaker of the House of Representatives; the chairs of the House Ways and Means Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee; the future president William McKinley; the mayors of Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington; the editors or proprietors of the leading East Coast and Chicago newspapers; and an impressive array of Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic clergy. Business leaders who signed the petition included Cyrus McCormick, John Rockefeller, and J. P. Morgan. At a time when the American Jewish community was neither large nor powerful, and no such thing as an Israel lobby existed, the pillars of the American gentile establishment went on record supporting a U.S. diplomatic effort to create a Jewish state in the lands of the Bible.

SHARED COMMANDMENTS

ANY DISCUSSION of U.S. attitudes toward Israel must begin with the Bible. For centuries, the American imagination has been steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures. This influence originated with the rediscovery of the Old Testament during the Reformation, was accentuated by the development of Calvinist theology (which stressed continuities between the old and the new dispensations of divine grace), and was made more vital by the historical similarities between the modern American and the ancient Hebrew experiences; as a result, the language, heroes, and ideas of the Old Testament permeate the American psyche.



Instruction in biblical Hebrew was mandatory for much of early U.S. history at Columbia, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. James Madison completed his studies at Princeton in two years but remained on campus an extra year to study Hebrew. Colonial preachers and pamphleteers over and over again described the United States as a new Canaan, “a land flowing with milk and honey,” and reminded their audiences that just as the Hebrews lost their blessings when they offended God, so, too, would the Americans suffer if they disobeyed the God who had led them into their promised land. Today, Old Testament references continue to permeate U.S. political writing, oratory, and even geography—over one thousand cities and towns in the United States have names derived from Scripture.

The most dramatic religious expression of the importance of the Old Testament in American culture today is the rise of premillennial dispensationalism, an interpretation of biblical prophecies that gives particular weight to Old Testament religious concepts such as covenant theology and assigns a decisive role to a restored Jewish state (with Jerusalem as its capital) in future history. An estimated seven percent of Americans seem to hold this theological position (making this group almost four times as large as the American Jewish community), and a considerably larger group is influenced by it to a greater or lesser degree. Proponents of this view often (although not always) share the view of some Orthodox Jews that the Jews must insist on a state that

includes all the territory once promised to the Hebrews; they oppose any territorial compromise with the Palestinians and support Jewish settlements in the West Bank. But this is a minority view, even among U.S. supporters of Israel.

Progressive Christian Zionism, on the other hand, is related to Christian ethics rather than prophecy. Much of it is rooted in guilt and a sense that Christians' past poor treatment of the Jews is now preventing Jews from accepting Christianity. For well over a thousand years, the Jews of Europe suffered extraordinary and at times unspeakable cruelties at the hands of Europe's Christians. Although some American Protestants perpetuated this history of intolerance and anti-Semitism, many liberal American Protestants from the nineteenth century forward saw rejecting this past as one of the defining tasks of the reformed and enlightened American church. Such Protestants could (and comfortably did) deplore Catholic anti-Semitism as a consequence of the regrettable corruptions of the church under the papacy, but the anti-Semitic words and deeds of reformers such as Martin Luther could not be dismissed so easily. Many members of the liberal American Protestant churches considered it a sacred duty to complete the work of the Reformation by purging Christianity of its remaining "medieval" features, such as superstition, bigotry, and anti-Semitism. Making amends for past sins by protecting the Jews has long been an important religious test for many (although by no means all) American Protestants.

By contrast, most American Christians have felt little or no guilt about their communities' historical relations with the Muslim world. Many Muslims view Christian-Muslim conflict over the last millennium as a constant and relatively homogenous phenomenon, but American Protestants do not. They generally deplore the cruelties of the Crusades and the concept of a holy war, for example, but they see them as Catholic errors rather than more broadly Christian ones, and in any case, they view the Crusades as long past and as a response to prior Muslim aggression. They also generally deplore the predations of European powers in more recent centuries, but they see them as driven by Old World imperialism rather than Christianity and as such something for which they bear no responsibility. (An important exception deserves to be mentioned: Many U.S.

missionaries active in the Middle East forged deep ties with the region's Arab inhabitants and strongly supported Arab nationalism, both from a dislike of European colonialism and out of the hope that a secular nationalist movement would improve the position of Arab Christians. This missionary community contributed both to the development of the Arabist contingent in the State Department and to the backlash in mainstream Protestant churches against Israeli policies in the occupied territories after the 1967 war.)



By 1948, many Christians in the United States felt a heavy burden of historical debt and obligation toward the Jews, but not the Muslims. If anything, they believed that the Islamic world was indebted to American Christian missionaries for many of its leading universities and hospitals and that American Christian support before and after World War II had helped promote the emergence of independent Arab and Muslim states that was then taking place.

CHOSEN COUSINS

THE UNITED STATES' sense of its own identity and mission in the world has been shaped by readings of Hebrew history and thought. The writer Herman Melville expressed this view: "We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world." From the time of the Puritans to the present day, preachers, thinkers, and politicians in the United States—secular as well as religious, liberal as well as conservative—have seen the Americans as a chosen people, bound together less by ties of blood than by a set of beliefs and a destiny. Americans have believed that God (or history) has brought them into a new land and made them great and rich and that their continued prosperity depends on their fulfilling their obligations toward God or the principles that have blessed them so far. Ignore these principles—turn toward the golden calf—and the scourge will come.

Both religious and nonreligious Americans have looked to the Hebrew Scriptures for an example of a people set apart by their mission and called to a world-changing destiny. Did the land Americans inhabit once belong to others? Yes, but the Hebrews similarly conquered the land of the Canaanites. Did the tiny U.S. colonies armed only with the justice of their cause defeat the world's greatest empire? So did David, the humble shepherd boy, fell Goliath. Were Americans in the nineteenth century isolated and mocked for their democratic ideals? So were the Hebrews surrounded by idolaters. Have Americans defeated their enemies at home and abroad? So, according to the Scriptures, did the Hebrews triumph. And when Americans held millions of slaves in violation of their beliefs, were they punished and scourged? Yes, and much like the Hebrews, who suffered the consequences of their sins before God.

This mythic understanding of the United States' nature and destiny is one of the most powerful and enduring elements in American culture and thought. As the ancient Hebrews did, many Americans today believe that they bear a revelation that is ultimately not just for them but also for the whole world; they have often considered themselves God's new Israel. One of the many consequences of this presumed kinship is that many Americans think it is both right and proper for one chosen people to support another. They are not disturbed when the United States' support of Israel, a people and a state often isolated and ostracized, makes the United States unpopular or creates other problems. The United States' adoption of the role of protector of Israel and friend of the Jews is a way of legitimizing its own status as a country called to a unique destiny by God.

More than that, since the nineteenth century, the United States has seen itself as the chosen agent of God in the protection and redemption of the Jews. Americans believed that the Jews would emerge from their degraded condition as they moved from city slums to the countryside—just as American immigrants from all over Europe had built better lives and sturdier characters as Jeffersonian farmers. Liberal Christians such as Adams believed that this would bring the Jews in time to the light of liberal Protestantism as part of the general uplift of humanity. And prophetic Zionists hoped that mass conversions of Jews to revivalist Christianity would trigger the apocalypse and the return of Christ. Either

way, the United States' special role in the restoration of the Jews fulfilled gentile Americans' expectations about the movement of history and confirmed their beliefs about the United States' identity and mission.

SETTLER STATES

THE UNITED STATES and Israel also have in common their status as "settler states"—countries formed by peoples

who came to control their current lands after displacing the original populations. Both states have been powerfully shaped by a history of conflict and confrontation with those they displaced, and both have sought justifications for their behavior from similar sources. Both the Americans and the Israelis have turned primarily to the Old Testament, whose hallowed pages tell the story of the conflict between the ancient Hebrews and the Canaanites, the former inhabitants of what the Hebrews believed was their Promised Land. Americans found the idea that they were God's new Israel so attractive partly because it helped justify their displacement of the Native Americans. As Theodore Roosevelt put it in his best-selling history of the American West, "Many of the best of the backwoodsmen were Bible-readers, but they were brought up in a creed that made much of the Old Testament, and laid slight stress on pity, truth, or mercy. They looked at their foes as the Hebrew prophets looked at the enemies of Israel. What were the abominations because of which the Canaanites were destroyed before Joshua, when compared with the abominations of the red savages whose lands they, another chosen people, should in their turn inherit?" (Roosevelt himself, like his cousins Franklin and Eleanor, was a Christian Zionist. "It seems to me entirely proper to start a Zionist State around Jerusalem," he wrote in 1918.)

Besides a direct divine promise, two other important justifications that the Americans brought forward in their contests with the Native



Americans were the concept that they were expanding into “empty lands” and John Locke’s related “fair use” doctrine, which argued that unused property is a waste and an offense against nature. U.S. settlers felt that only those who would improve the land, settling it densely with extensive farms and building towns, had a real right to it. John Quincy Adams made the case in 1802: “Shall [the Indians] doom an immense region of the globe to perpetual desolation . . . ?” And Thomas Jefferson warned that the Native Americans who failed to learn from the whites and engage in productive agriculture faced a grim fate. They would “relapse into barbarism and misery, lose numbers by war and want, and we shall be obliged to drive them, with the beasts of the forest into the Stony mountains.”

Through much of U.S. history, such views resonated not just with backwoodsmen but also with liberal and sophisticated citizens. These arguments had a special meaning when it came to the Holy Land. As pious Americans dwelt on the glories of ancient Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon, they pictured a magnificent and fertile land—“a land flowing with milk and honey,” as the Bible describes it. But by the nineteenth century, when first dozens, then hundreds, and ultimately thousands of Americans visited the Holy Land—and millions more thronged to lectures and presentations to hear reports of these travels—there was little milk or honey; Palestine was one of the poorest, most backward, and most ramshackle provinces of the Ottoman Empire. To American eyes, the hillsides and rocky fields of Judea were desolate and empty—God, many believed, had cursed the land when he sent the Jews into their second exile, which they saw as the Jews’ punishment for their failure to recognize Christ as the Messiah. And so, Americans believed, the Jews belonged in the Holy Land, and the Holy Land belonged to the Jews. The Jews would never prosper until they were home and free, and the land would never bloom until its rightful owners returned.

The Prophet Isaiah had described the future return of the Jews to their homeland as God’s grace bringing water to a desert land. And Americans watched the returning fertility of the land under the cultivation of early Zionist settlers with the astonished sense that biblical prophecy was being fulfilled before their eyes. “The springs of Jewish colonizing vigor, amply fed by the money of world Jewry, flowed on to the desert,” wrote *Time* magazine in 1946, echoing the language of



Isaiah. Two years later, following the Jewish victory in the 1948 war, it described the Arabs in terms that induce flinching today but represented common American perceptions at the time: “The Western world tends to think of the Arab as a falcon-eyed warrior on a white horse. That Arab is still around, but he is far less numerous than the disease-ridden wretches who lie in the hot streets, too weak, sick and purposeless to roll over into the shade.” Americans saw a contest between a backward and incapable people and a people able to settle the wilderness and make it bloom, miraculously fulfilling ancient prophecies of a Jewish state.

The Jews had been widely considered eastern Europe’s most deplorable population: ignorant, depraved, superstitious, factionalized, quarrelsome, and hopelessly behind the times. That this population, after being subjected to the unprecedented savagery of Nazi persecution, should establish the first stable democracy in the Middle East, build a thriving economy in the desert, and repeatedly defeat enemies with armies many times larger and stronger than their own seemed to many Americans to be striking historical proof of their own most cherished ideals.

THE RIGHT TURN

ALTHOUGH GENTILE support for Israel in the United States has remained strong and even grown since World War II, its character has

changed. Until the Six-Day War, support for Israel came mostly from the political left and was generally stronger among Democrats than Republicans. Liberal icons such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Martin Luther King, Jr., were leading public voices calling for the United States to support Israel. But since 1967, liberal support for Israel has gradually waned, and conservative support has grown.

A variety of factors had come together in the 1940s to make progressive gentile Zionism a powerful force in U.S. politics, especially on the left. First, the impact of the Holocaust on American Protestantism

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was extraordinary. Germany had once provided intellectual leadership for the American Protestant church, and the passive acquiescence with which most German Protestant churches and pastors greeted Nazi rule shocked mainstream American Protestantism to its core. Anti-Nazi German Protestants became moral and theological heroes in the postwar United States, and opposition to anti-Semitism became a key test by which mainline American Protestants judged themselves and their leaders. This profound shock intensified

their humanitarian response to revelations about the death camps and the mass murder. The suffering of the displaced, starving, and impoverished Jewish refugees in chaotic postwar Europe made it inevitable that American Protestants, who had for a century campaigned for Jewish rights, would enthusiastically support steps seen as securing the safety of Europe's Jews.

A second factor was the strong support of African Americans for the Jews at a time when blacks were beginning to play a larger role in U.S. electoral politics. During the 1930s, the African American press throughout the United States had closely followed the imposition of Hitler's racial policies. African American leaders lost no opportunity to point out the similarities between Hitler's treatment of the Jews and the Jim Crow laws in the United States' segregated South. For African Americans, the persecution of the Jews was made real to them through their own daily experiences. It also provided them with

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important talking points to persuade whites that racial discrimination violated American principles, and it thus helped build the strong alliance between American Jews and the civil rights movement that existed from 1945 through the death of King. Even during World War II, the black activists W. E. B. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Philip Randolph supported the precursor of the Israeli Likud Party in its effort to create a Jewish army. The civil rights leader Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., went further, raising \$150,000 for the militant Zionist group the Irgun Zvai Leumi—which he called “an underground terrorist organization in Palestine”—at a New York City rally.

The Soviet Union’s support for an independent state of Israel also helped. At Yalta, Joseph Stalin told Franklin Roosevelt that he, too, was a Zionist, and in May of 1947, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko announced before the United Nations that the Soviet Union supported the creation of a Jewish state. This backing, however short-lived, strengthened the view of many American leftists that the establishment of a homeland for the Jews was part of the general struggle for progress around the world. Indeed, in the decades after the war, many American liberals saw their support for Israel as part of their commitment to freedom, anticolonialism (the Jews of Palestine were seeking independence over British opposition), the struggle against racial and religious discrimination, secularism, humanitarianism, and the progressive tradition in U.S. politics. Israel at the time seemed to be an idealistic secular experiment in social democracy; American Jews and American gentiles alike went to Israel to experience the exhilarating life of labor and fellowship of the kibbutz. In 1948, therefore, when Truman decided to support the creation of Israel, he was thinking about not just the Jewish vote. Support for Israel was popular with the blacks in the North, who were attracted to the Democratic Party by the New Deal and Truman’s own slow progress toward supporting civil rights. The cause of Israel helped with voters on the left otherwise tempted to support Henry Wallace and the Progressives. And it also helped Truman compete among conservative, churchgoing, Bible-reading southern voters against Strom Thurmond’s Dixiecrats. Support for Israel, in fact, was one of the few issues that helped pull the fractious Democratic Party coalition together.

Since the 1967 war, however, the basis of Israel's support in the United States has shifted: backing for Israel has tended to weaken on the left and grow on the right. On the left, a widespread dislike of Israel's policies in the occupied territories and a diminished concern for its security in the wake of its triumph in the war led many African Americans, mainline Protestants, and liberal intellectuals, once among Israel's staunchest U.S. allies, toward growing sympathy with Palestinian views. Increased identification on the part of blacks with anticolonial movements worldwide, the erosion of the black-Jewish alliance in U.S. domestic politics, and the rising appeal of figures such as Malcolm X and the leaders of the Nation of Islam also gradually reduced support for Israel among African Americans. The liberal Protestant churches, for their part, were newly receptive to the perspectives of those missionaries sympathetic to Arab nationalism, and as the mainstream churches became more critical of traditional American ideas about the United States' national identity and destiny, they distanced themselves ever further from traditional readings of the Old Testament. (On the other hand, relations between American Catholics and the Jews began to improve after the 1967 war, largely due to the Catholic Church's new theological approach toward the Jews since the Second Vatican Council.)

On the right, the most striking change since 1967 has been the dramatic intensification of support for Israel among evangelical Christians and, more generally, among what I have called "Jacksonian" voters in the U.S. heartland. Jacksonians are populist-nationalist voters who favor a strong U.S. military and are generally skeptical of international organizations and global humanitarian aid. Not all evangelicals are Jacksonians, and not all Jacksonians are evangelicals, but there is a certain overlap between the two constituencies. Many southern whites are Jacksonians; so are many of the swing voters in the North known as Reagan Democrats.

Many Jacksonians formed negative views of the Arabs during the Cold War. The Palestinians and the Arab states, they noted, tended to side with the Soviet Union and the Nonaligned Movement against the United States. The Egyptians responded to support from the United States in the 1956 Suez crisis by turning to the Soviets for arms and support, and Soviet weapons and Soviet experts helped Arab armies prepare for wars against Israel. Jacksonians tend to view international

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affairs through their own unique prism, and as events in the Middle East have unfolded since 1967, they have become more sympathetic to Israel even as many non-Jacksonian observers in the United States—and many more people in the rest of the world—have become less so. The Six-Day War reignited the interest of prophetic Zionists in Israel and deepened the perceived connections between Israel and the United States for many Jacksonians. After the Cold War, the Jacksonians found that the United States' opponents in the region, such as Iraq and Iran, were the most vociferous enemies of Israel as well.

Jacksonians admire victory, and total victory is the best kind. The sweeping, overwhelming triumph of Israeli arms in 1967 against numerically superior foes from three different countries caught the imaginations of Jacksonians—especially at a time when the United States' poor performance in Vietnam had made many of them pessimistic about their own country's future. Since then, some of the same actions that have hurt Israel's image in most of the world—such as ostensibly disproportionate responses to Palestinian terrorism—have increased its support among Jacksonians.

When a few rockets launched from Gaza strike Israel, the Israelis sometimes respond with more firepower, more destruction, and more casualties. In much of the world, this is seen as excessive retaliation, an offense equal to or even greater than the original attack. Jacksonians, however, see a Palestinian rocket attack on Israeli targets as an act of terrorism and believe that the Israelis have an unlimited right, perhaps even a duty, to retaliate with all the force at their command. Since the 1950s, when Palestinian raiders started slipping across the cease-fire line to attack Israeli settlements, many Palestinians and Arabs have, with some justification, seen these incursions as acts of great courage in the face of overwhelming power. But such sneak attacks against civilian targets, and especially suicide bombings, violate basic Jacksonian ideas about civilized warfare. Jacksonians believe that only overwhelming and total retaliation against such tactics can deter the attackers from striking again. This is how the American frontiersmen handled the

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Native Americans, how the Union general William Sherman “educated” the Confederacy, and how General Douglas MacArthur and Truman repaid the Japanese for Pearl Harbor. Jacksonians genuinely cannot understand why the world criticizes Israel for exercising what they see as its inalienable right of self-defense—for doing exactly what they would do in Israel’s place.

In the eyes of the Palestinians and their supporters, the Palestinians—exiled, marginalized, occupied, divided—are heroic underdogs confronting the might of a regional superpower backed by the most powerful nation on earth. But for Jacksonians, Israel, despite all its power and all its victories, remains an endangered David surrounded by enemies. The fact that the Arabs and the larger community of one billion Muslims support, at least verbally, the Palestinian cause deepens the belief among many Jacksonians that Israel is a small and vulnerable country that deserves help. Ironically, some of the greatest military and political successes of the Palestinian movement—developing an active armed resistance, winning (largely rhetorical) support from organizations such as the Arab League and even the General Assembly of the United Nations, shifting the basis of Palestinian resistance from secular nationalism to religion, and winning support from powerful regional states such as Saddam’s Iraq and Iran today—have ended up strengthening and deepening American gentile support for the Jewish state.

CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD

ANOTHER IMPORTANT factor leading to increased American support for Israel is that since 1967 a series of religious revivals have swept across the United States, with important effects on public attitudes toward the Middle East. One consequence has been that even as the mainline, liberal Protestant churches have become more critical of Israel, they have lost political and social influence. Another consequence has been a significant increase in prophetic Zionism, with evangelical and fundamentalist American Christians more interested now in biblical prophecy and Israel’s role in the lead-up to the apocalypse than ever before.

Many evangelical and fundamentalist Christians had shown relatively little interest in Israel immediately after its war of independence. Biblical prophecy, as they understood it, clearly predicted that the

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Jews would rebuild the Temple on its original site, and so with the holy sites of Jerusalem in Arab hands, the countdown to the end of time appeared to have slowed. Meanwhile, the secular and quasi-socialist Israel of the 1950s was less attractive to conservative Christians than to liberal ones. With their eyes fixed on the communist menace during the peak years of the Cold War, evangelical and fundamentalist Christians were less actively engaged in U.S. policy in the Middle East than they had been in the nineteenth century.

The Six-Day War changed that; it was a catalyst both for the evangelical revival movement and for the renewal of prophetic Zionism. The speed and decision of the victory of Israel looked miraculous to many Americans, and Israel's conquest of the Old City meant that the Temple site was now in Jewish hands. The sense that the end of time was approaching was a powerful impetus for the American religious revivals that began during this period. Since then, a series of best-selling books, fiction and nonfiction alike, have catered to the interest of millions of Americans in the possibility that the end-time as prophesied in the Old and New Testaments is now unfolding in the Middle East.

Since the end of the Cold War, an additional force has further strengthened the links between the state of Israel and many conservative American Christians. As the religious revival gave new power and energy to evangelical and fundamentalist churches, their attention turned increasingly outward. Past such revivals led to waves of intense missionary interest and activity; the current revival is no different. And as American Christians have taken a greater interest in the well-being of Christians around the world, they have encountered Christianity's most important rival worldwide, Islam, and have begun to learn that the conditions facing Christians in a number of Muslim-majority countries are not good.

Interest in the persecution of Christians around the world is a long-term feature of Christianity, and not only in the United States. The same church leaders involved in efforts to protect Jews in Europe and the Ottoman Empire were often engaged in campaigns to protect Christians in China, Korea, Japan, and the Ottoman Empire, among other places. The rise of communism as the twentieth century's most brutal enemy of religion ultimately led American Christians to build organizations aimed at supporting believers behind the Iron Curtain. Since 1989, the

persecution of Christians by communists has diminished (although not disappeared), and so increasingly the center of concern has been the Muslim world, where many Christians and people of other faiths or of no faith suffer legal and social discrimination—and where, at times, Christians are beaten and murdered for what they believe. Laws in many Islamic countries, moreover, forbid proselytizing and conversion—issues of vital concern for evangelical Christians, who generally believe that those who die without accepting Christ will suffer in hell and that spreading the Christian faith is one of their central moral duties. Mainstream media generally do not make the foreign persecution of Christians a major focus of their news coverage, but that does not prevent this issue from shaping the way many Americans look at Islam and, by extension, at the conflict between Israel and some of its neighbors.

U.S. opinion on the Middle East is not monolithic, nor is it frozen in time. Since 1967, it has undergone significant shifts, with some groups becoming more favorable toward Israel and others less so. Considerably fewer African Americans stand with the Likud Party today than stood with the Jewish army in World War II. More changes may come. A Palestinian and Arab leadership more sensitive to the values and political priorities of the American political culture could develop new and more effective tactics designed to weaken, rather than strengthen, American support for the Jewish state. An end to terrorist attacks, for example, coupled with well-organized and disciplined nonviolent civil resistance, might alter Jacksonian perceptions of the Palestinian struggle. It is entirely possible that over time, evangelical and fundamentalist Americans will retrace Jimmy Carter's steps from a youthful Zionism to what he would call a more balanced position now. But if Israel should face any serious crisis, it seems more likely that opinion will swing the other way. Many of the Americans who today call for a more evenhanded policy toward the Palestinians do so because they believe that Israel is fundamentally secure. Should that assessment change, public opinion polls might well show even higher levels of U.S. support for Israel.

One thing, at least, seems clear. In the future, as in the past, U.S. policy toward the Middle East will, for better or worse, continue to be shaped primarily by the will of the American majority, not the machinations of any minority, however wealthy or engaged in the political process some of its members may be. 🌐