

Christian Zionism and U.S. Policy

By Florence Steichen

Christian Zionism, a powerful force in American politics, is one of the expressions of Zionism, a secular ideology.

Zionism can be dated to the first Zionist Congress, which met in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland, and set as a goal the creation of a Jewish homeland in all of Palestine and beyond, according to a map presented to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. This was a political rather than a religious endeavor. Well aware that the land was inhabited, the Zionist colonization plan included use of military force to control the land. Ben Gurion, who was to become the first prime minister of Israel, wrote to his son in 1937, 10 years before the partition plan, that the Arabs would have to go, and would need an opportune moment, such as a war, to make that happen.



Artist's depiction of the Rapture, a literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation.

The term "Christian Zionism" was popularized in the mid-twentieth century, following the coining of the term "Zionism" in 1890. Christian Zionism is by no means monolithic, including those who support Israel and its expansion into occupied Palestine and those who promote "the ingathering" of the Jews that they see as a prerequisite for the coming of the Messiah. According to this latter group, when the battle of Armageddon takes place, faithful Christians will be raptured into heaven, and Jews who have not converted will be destroyed, as depicted in the Left Behind series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, and *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey.

In spite of this dire prediction, the government of Israel welcomes the help of Christian Zionists, and counts on them to promote legislation in the U.S Congress favorable to Israel.

Christian Zionists base their religious beliefs on a literal interpretation of select biblical texts such as Deuteronomy, which includes the promise of God to give the land to the descendants of Abraham; Genesis 12:3, which says God will bless those who bless the Chosen People and curse those who curse them; and the Book of Revelation, which is not about the End Times, as they mistakenly believe. (The Book of Revelation was written to encourage Christians suffering persecution in the late 1st century to persevere because good will eventually overcome evil. There will be a new heaven and a new earth, according to Rev. 21, and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.)

Christian Zionist theology, based on literal biblical interpretation, has been discredited by contemporary biblical critics who study the textual, compositional, and historical environment of the Old and New Testaments.

Regarding biblical literal interpretation, Archbishop Michel Sabbah, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, wrote a pastoral letter in 1993, entitled "Reading the Bible Today in the Land of the Bible." He addressed the Christian community in Palestine, concerned that the Bible seemed to mandate that Israel control the whole land of Palestine.

Sabbah emphasized that "the Word of God can be used only in the struggle for truth. ...If it fosters division or hatred among us, this would mean that we have deformed the divine Word, making it a weapon of death, not of truth."

But Christian Zionists have held a variety of beliefs. In 1818, President John Adams wanted the Jews in Judea to be an independent nation because he believed that they would gradually become Unitarian Christians.

William Eugene Blackstone, author of *Jesus Is Coming*, published in 1878, illustrates the diversity among Christian Zionists. He believed the Jews did not need to convert to Christianity either before or after the return of the Messiah. Blackstone advocated strongly for the resettlement of the Jewish people in Palestine, because he believed that Palestine rightfully belonged to the Jews.



U.S. presidents participate in the National Day of Prayer. President Bush attending in 2005.

Photo: Mcnamee/Getty

Harry Truman was a Christian Zionist devoted to reading the Bible and also a political Zionist concerned about the 1948 election. Against the advice of his advisors, Truman promoted the UN partition of Palestine vigorously, to ensure Jewish votes in the 1948 election, especially in New York, Pennsylvania, and California.

In March 1948, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff listed Zionist objectives, including the extension of Jewish sovereignty over all of Palestine, and the expansion of Greater Israel into Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, leading to Jewish military and economic hegemony of the entire Middle East. This agenda would ensure armed clashes in which the U.S. was destined to become embroiled. That would be welcome news to the Christian Zionists anticipating the battle of Armageddon.

In American politics, Christian Zionists and political Zionists pursue the same agenda, and their combined influence is immensely powerful. K.C. Boyd reports in "God's Foreign Policy" (Alter.net.org, August 8, 2013) that John Hagee, founder of the million-member Christians United for Israel, can deliver the support of 50 million evangelical Christians to advance the Zionist agenda in Washington.

"Whenever issues regarding the division of Jerusalem or the return of land in the disputed (sic) territories come up, John Hagee and other leading Christian Zionists call on an army of ready foot soldiers to exert immediate pressure on their political representatives..."



Texas A&M Chancellor John Spencer Sharp, Israeli Education Minister Shai Piron, Israeli President Shimon Peres and Texas Governor Rick Perry meet in Jerusalem on 23 October 2013.

Photo: Debbie Hill, UPI/Newscom

There are more than enough demographic reasons for politicians to support Israel.

John Hagee is currently involved in plans by Texas A&M University to take over a college in Nazareth, the city in present-day Israel with the highest number of Palestinian citizens. Texas A&M, the sixth largest university in the United States, is working at raising \$70 million to assume control of the Nazareth Academic Institute. Texas Governor Rick Perry and Texas A&M Chancellor John Sharp announced the plans to establish an international 'peace campus' there."

Omar Barghouti, founding member of the Palestinian Campaign for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, calls it "another project by Israel to further colonize whatever space is left of the Palestinian space within the state of Israel." (Stickland, Patrick O., "U.S. Christian Zionists plan to take over Palestinian University in Israel." Electronic Intifada. November 6, 2013)

Whatever the motive for unconditional support of Israel, the results have led to a military build-up by the U.S. in the Middle East. Among other things, the U.S. pre-positions weapons in Israel to have in the region when desired. And more importantly, on behalf of the U.S., Israel has tested the effectiveness of its weapons in Palestine and also in Southern Lebanon where Palestinian refugees live. These weapons include white phosphorus and DIME (dense inert material explosives).

"A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm", written by American neocons in 1996 for Israel, contains strategies for getting American cooperation on a missile defense system, which would "broaden Israel's base of support among many in the United States Congress, who may know little about Israel, but care very much about missile defense." [emphasis supplied]

"A Clean Break" includes the recommendation that Israel "remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. This is an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right since Iraq's future could affect the strategic balance in the Middle East profoundly." The Project for a New American Century produced a similar document written by some of the same people, emphasizing the necessity of a strong military buildup by the U.S.

A conservative estimate of total direct aid to Israel from 1949 to 2013 is \$130.2 billion. This does not include the costs of the wars on Iraq, widely believed to have been undertaken for the benefit of Israel, and additional costs hidden in the U.S. defense budget.

In addition to the financial costs, U.S. Zionist policies toward Israel negatively impact U.S. security in the Middle East. In January 2010, General David Petraeus voiced concern to Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, Admiral Michael Mullen, that the "stymied Israeli Palestinian peace process was directly responsible for a rising number of U.S. casualties and setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan." (Americans for Middle East Understanding, Lest We Forget, June 2011)

Professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, co-authors of *The Israel Lobby*, state: "The combination of unwavering support for Israel and the effort to spread 'democracy' throughout the region has inflamed Arab and Islamic opinion and jeopardized not only U.S. security but that of much of the rest of the world."

In recent years, Israel invited active U.S. intervention in Israel's domestic and foreign policy to overcome domestic opposition to "land for peace" and to lure Arabs—through money, forgiveness of past sins, and access to U.S. weapons—to negotiate. This strategy, which required funneling American money to repressive and aggressive regimes, was risky, expensive, and very costly for both the U.S. and Israel, and placed the United States in roles it should neither have nor want.

One of the most far-reaching effects of U.S. policy influenced by Zionism—Christian and political—is the demise of the two-state solution, independent Palestine and Israel living side by side. Ariel Sharon, architect of the settlement project in occupied Palestine, stated that Israel would build settlements across the West Bank so that in 25 years no one could separate Israel and the West Bank. That's the situation now.

Where do we go from here? The BDS campaign is intended to compel Israel to confront the reality that the international community condemns its continuing occupation and denial of human rights of the Palestinians. Boycott, divestment, and sanctions is a way that we can promote equality as a basic human right. As Israel becomes increasingly isolated, it will find it must change course and grant basic rights to all. It worked in South Africa.

Then it will be time for negotiations to determine the political configuration: one democratic state with equal rights for all, or perhaps a regional confederation.

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