

Christian Zionism: A Foreign Policy Challenge

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In my view, the “passionate attachment” of American Christian Zionists to the modern State of Israel, and their inveterate antipathy toward the Arab and Muslim world, challenges the United States’ capacity to properly defend our national interests. Christian Zionist influence in the Executive Branch, and in the Congress, poses a serious challenge to the formulation and implementation of American foreign policy.

The Bush Administration’s reckless foreign policy in the region -- preventive war against Iraq, blank check for Zionist expansion, and crusade against the Arab and Muslim world – is not the result of any “intelligence failure.” Rather, it is the result of a national policy failure, or we can say a national political failure. And this policy failure, or political failure, is a direct result of the actions of politicians and their advisors in the Executive Branch and in Congress, and the influence of Zionist lobbies, Christian and Jewish alike.

That the foreign policy of the Bush Administration is dominated by militant (Revisionist) Zionist Neoconservatives is beyond argument. That this Neoconservative neoimperial, and neocolonial, foreign policy is staunchly supported by the Christian Zionist lobby is also beyond argument.¹

Today I shall first comment briefly on American foreign policy and the Middle East. Second, I shall comment on Christian Zionism as an ideology. Third, I shall comment on Christian Zionism and the Israeli Right. Fourth, I shall comment on Christian Zionism and the Republican Party.

1. American Foreign Policy in the Middle East

The use of Christian Zionist support to promote imperial policy is nothing new. In fact, the technique was developed in early Victorian England by Lord Palmerston. President Bush’s neoimperial policy parallels the old British imperial policy of Lord Palmerston.

Back in 1840, Palmerston devised a Middle East policy for the British Empire that promoted a Jewish entity in historic Palestine linked to the Turkish Empire as a

¹ President Bush’s own speeches are often sprinkled with Biblical and religious references as he promotes an image of sanctimonious piety to appeal to his Christian Right voter base. The President’s chief speechwriter is conveniently inclined toward Christian Zionism. See, Mike Allen, “For Bush’s Speechwriter, Job Grows Beyond Words,” *Washington Post*, October 11, 2002, p. A35.

counterweight to Egypt and Russia.² At that time, in line with the Palmerston policy, various Christian clerics and movements in England, who supported British imperial policy, obligingly called for the “restoration” of Jews to Palestine.

Just as in Victorian England, today in the United States pro-Zionist “Christian” clerics and religious movements political support, and political cover, for the Neoconservative neoimperial policy in the Middle East.

And today, Bush’s Neoconservative advisors call for a US-Israel-Turkey axis in the Middle East. Their policy of active destabilization of the Arab world, cloaked under calls for “democratization” and “modernization,” is designed to tighten the US-Israel-Turkey axis as a “stabilizing” regional force.

We are far from traditional American approaches to the Middle East.

During the 19th century, American policy in the Middle East was based upon a constructive engagement with the Arab and Muslim world. Our policy was an implicit rejection of British and European imperialism. The American University of Beirut, the American University in Cairo, and Roberts College in Turkey indicated our constructive cultural engagement. The development of fair and mutually beneficial commercial relations in the region indicated our constructive economic engagement.

Writing just after World War II, in 1947, an American expert on the region warned that “the political divisions which prevail in the Near East today should not blind us to the underlying cultural and psychological unity of the region as a whole. Unifying forces invariably come to the fore in the Near East when foreign interests are involved...the far-reaching interdependence of the local states and territories imposes on the interested foreign power the obligation to approach the entire region as a unit...any foreign policy in the Near East which is not a comprehensive regional policy is an invitation to bankruptcy...our lack of a considered regional policy, and our single-minded concentration on a given objective without due regard to its potential implications, have left us bewildered and helpless time and again.”³

The expert I just quoted was Ephraim A. Speiser, Professor of Semitics at the University of Pennsylvania, and Director of the American School of Oriental Research in Baghdad. I would point out that during World War II Professor Speiser was the head of

² See, Frederick Stanley Rodkey, “Lord Palmerston and the Rejuvenation of Turkey, 1830-1841, Part I, 1830-39,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. I No. 4, December 1929, pp. 570-593 and “Part II, 1839-1841,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. II, No. 2, June 1930, pp. 193-225. See also, Albert M. Hyamson, “British Projects for the Restoration of Jews to Palestine,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, Number 26, 1918, pp. 127-164 and Alexander Schölch, “Britain in Palestine, 1838-1882: The Roots of the Balfour Policy,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, Autumn 1992, pp. 39-56.

³ Ephraim A. Speiser, *The United States and the Near East*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947, pp. 226-227, 230.

the Near East Section of the Research and Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic Services, the OSS, which was the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Any doubt about the pervasive influence of Christian Zionist ideology in the US Congress was erased last year, by the leader of the Republican Party in the House of Representatives. On May 1, 2002, Texas Congressman Richard Arme, on national television, bluntly told MSNBC talk show host Chris Mathews that he supported the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Israeli-occupied Palestine.⁴

Former Congressman Arme and many of his colleagues in the House of Representatives espouse the Christian Zionist idea that Palestine does not belong to the Palestinians because, according to them, the Bible says it belongs to Israel. The same mindset is found in the Senate of the United States and is espoused by Senators Imhofe and Brownback, among others.

2. What is Christian Zionism?

What is Christian Zionism?

Well, Christian Zionism is not mainline American Christianity. In fact, mainline Christian churches in the United States reject it.⁵ But “Christian Zionist” ideology is aggressively promoted by a minority of “fundamentalists” who are linked to the Jewish Zionist lobby in the United States, and who are also allied to the most militant extremist elements of the Israeli political spectrum.

Let’s go back to the 1980’s for a moment.

After about five years of organizational activity in the United States, the Christian Zionist lobby held its first “National Prayer Breakfast for Israel” in Washington, DC on February 6, 1985. The event attracted many important political personalities and political activists.

The keynote speaker did not pull any punches. He said, and I quote:

⁴ On the Israeli policy of mass expulsion or “transfer,” see: Israel Shahak, “L’Idée du “transfert” dans la doctrine sioniste,” *Revue d’Études Palestiniennes* (Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington, DC), No. 29, Automne, 1988, pp. 103-132 and his “A History of the Concept of “Transfer in Zionism,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Spring 1989, pp. 22-37. For background on the problem of West Bank “settlers,” see: Merle Thorpe, Jr., *Prescription for Conflict, Israel’s West Bank Settlement Policy*, Washington, DC: Foundation for Middle East Peace, 1984.

⁵ For background on Christian Zionism, see: Regina Sharif, “Christians For Zion, 1600-1919,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. V, Nos. 3-4, Spring/Summer 1976, pp. 123-141; Mayir Vereté, “The Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought 1790-1840,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume Eight, Number One, January 1972, pp. 3-50; Mohammed Taleb, “Visages du sionisme chretien,” *Revue d’études Palestiniennes, nouvelle série*, 21, automne 1999, pp 46-57 and 22, hiver 2000, pp. 65-83.

“A sense of history, a sense of poetry, and a sense of morality imbued the Christian Zionists who more than a century ago began to write, and plan, and organize for Israel’s restoration...The writings of Christian Zionists, British and American, directly influenced the thinking of such pivotal leaders as Lloyd George, Arthur Balfour and Woodrow Wilson.”

The keynote speaker was none other than the Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations at the time: Benjamin Netanyahu.

Who are leading Christian Zionists?

The influential network of Christian Zionist preachers and advocates includes: Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Hal Lindsay, Jimmy Swaggert, Jim Bakker, Tim LaHaye, Kenneth Copeland, Oral Roberts, Herbert Armstrong, John Walvoord, Rex Humbard and Mike Evans.⁶

Jerry Falwell says, “Right at the very top of our priorities must be an unswerving commitment and devotion to the State of Israel.”

Pat Robertson says, “The future of this Nation may be at stake, because God will bless those that bless Israel. And God will curse those that curse Israel.”

Oral Roberts says, “What a fulfillment of prophecy...What a future Israel has.”

Mike Evans says, “For Biblical reasons, first and foremost, we support the State of Israel.”

Just a few months after the first National Prayer Breakfast for Israel I just mentioned, the first International Christian Zionist Congress was held at Basel, Switzerland, in August 1985. The meeting was held in the same hall that Theodor Herzl used for his first Zionist Congress at the end of the 19th century.

The 1985 Christian Zionist Congress declared “that Judea and Samaria are...and by Biblical right...ought to be part of Israel.” The Congress also called for the censure and punishment of “any incidents of anti-semitism in any form including anti-Zionism and anti-Israel activity...”⁷

Christian Zionists, such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, follow the bizarre cultic theology spread in parts of the United States during the mid-19th century by the defrocked Anglican priest from the United Kingdom, John Nelson Darby. Not all Christian Zionists espouse Darby’s peculiar eschatology but it must be noted that those who do are among the most politically active in support of a “Greater Israel” (*Eretz Israel*).

Simply put, Darbyism is a form of Zionism, and that is why his followers currently call themselves “Christian Zionists.” Darbyites believe that they must facilitate the return of Jews to modern day Israel in preparation for the End.

⁶ Isa Nakhleh, *Encyclopedia of the Palestine Problem*, New York: Intercontinental Books, 1991, Vol. 2, pp. 976.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 976.

Because the apocalyptic Darbyite cult underlies an influential sector of the Christian Zionist influence in Congress, and in the Administration, it must be understood for what it is. You can explain the behavior of a Tom DeLay and dozens of members of Congress, as well as some Senators, when it is understood that they themselves are Darbyite Christian Zionists, or they hold similar Christian Zionist views that call for the “restoration” of Jews to the Holy Land.⁸

All Christian Zionists share a general millenarian concept that Jews must be “restored” to the Holy Land. They say that such Jewish colonization in the Middle East, including the establishment of the modern state of Israel, is called for by the Bible. To support their views, many Christian fundamentalists make use of the so-called “Scofield Bible,” an edition edited and annotated by a Darbyite.

How did 19th century Darbyite ideology get to the United States? Quite simply, during a series of visits to the United States and Canada between 1859 and 1872, Darby promoted the teachings of the religious cult he himself created. A simple Internet search of the name “John Nelson Darby” will flood your desktops with ample data about him and his cult, I can assure you.

You will find that this bizarre 19th century millenarian cult, the inner circle of which was formerly called the “Plymouth Brethren,” has no relationship, at all, to the traditional Christian churches established in the United States during the 17th and 18th centuries. This cult has nothing to do with the traditional Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Mennonite, Amish, and all other such authentic Christian churches that have for centuries transmitted authentic spiritual values here in our great Land. As I noted, Darby left the Anglican Communion in order to found his own cult.

Darbyite cultists often refer to themselves as “Dispensationalists.” This term is derived from John Nelson Darby’s bizarre, and one can say blasphemous, teaching that God divided history is divided into seven periods that Darby calls “dispensations.” Just how Darby knew that God divided history into seven periods we are not told.

In fact, such human pretension to know God’s plans runs counter to a traditional Christian reading of the Bible. For example, reading from the King James Bible, in Acts (of the Apostles) Chapter 1, Verse 6 we find a question posed to Jesus: “...they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” We read in Verse 7 that Jesus replied, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.”

But despite Jesus’ own words, as stated in a traditional translation of the Bible, Darby claimed that mankind has been in the seventh and final “dispensation” or age since about the 19th century. Darby said that because humankind lives in the final age, the so-called “End Times” are near, and the return of Jews to the Holy Land is required.

3. Christian Zionists and the Israeli Right

⁸ See, for example: Mathew Engel, “Meet the new Zionists,” *Guardian* (London), October 28, 2002.

The alliance between the Christian Zionists and hardline (Revisionist) Zionist Neoconservatives, on the one hand, and the Israeli Likud Party, and other extremist Israeli political parties such as Moledet, on the other hand, has not gone unnoticed around the world.

During the past year, a raft of articles appeared in prominent European newspapers and magazines detailing this international strategic political alignment. European journalists, and politicians, regularly refer to what they call the “Likud wing” of the Republican Party, the “Likudniks” in the Bush Administration, and the “Christian Right.”⁹ Detailed analysis of the Neoconservative influence on the Bush Administration has now appeared in the press all the way from Europe to Japan.

Over the past two decades, American Christian Zionists have developed complex and close relations with a range of extreme right wing Messianic Jewish circles in Israel including the Gush Emunim, the “Settler’s” movement, and the old-line Jabotinsky right wing nationalists of Begin’s Herut Party.

For our purposes today, the relevant background on the Israeli link to contemporary American Christian Zionists dates to the 1967 war. In the wake of the war, extremist elements in Israel formed the “Movement for Greater Israel,” and the “settler” movement that established Kiryat Arba near Hebron. The extremist Gush Emunim settler organization grew out of this environment.¹⁰

In the years after 1967, the Gush Emunim became the leading edge of the Israeli New Right. The components of this New Right were three: Labor party factions supporting the Movement for Greater Israel, the new religious-nationalist activists, and the old-line Jabotinsky nationalist right converted into the Begin-led Herut party.

From 1974 to 1977, three Labor Party leaders vied for supremacy, and each had his Gush Emunim supporter within his ministry. Prime Minister Rabin had General Ariel Sharon as his special advisor. Defense Minister Shimon Peres had Yuval Ne’eman, later leader of the pro-Gush Emunim *Hatechiyah* party. Foreign Minister Yigal Allon was the patron of the fanatic settler network behind Kiryat Arba.

By the time that the Likud came into power in 1977, the power of the Gush Emunim over the government was complete because Begin was a long-time supporter of the settler movement.

Now in 1978, a key Israeli operational guide for targeting and manipulating Christian Zionists in the United States appeared. Entitled, *American Fundamentalism*

⁹ See, for example, the following opinion piece by a former British Minister of Defense: Peter Kilfoyle, “Defending Ourselves, Only a united Europe can counterbalance an increasingly paranoid and hawkish America,” *Guardian* (London), September 23, 2002.

¹⁰ For background, see: Amnon Rubinstein, *The Zionist Dream Revisited, From Herzl to Gush Emunim and Back*, New York: Schocken Books, 1984; Janet Aviad, “The Messianism of the Gush Emunim,” in Jonathan Frankel, *Jews and Messianism in the Modern Era, Metaphor and Meaning*, Studies in Contemporary Jewry, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Volume VII, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 197-216.

and *Israel: The Relation of Fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel*, it was written by the late Israeli scholar, Yonah Malachy, and published by the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Malachy presents a detailed analysis of the Dispensationalist Fundamentalists, the Adventists, and the Pentacostalists, all of whom embrace the Zionist concept of the restoration of Jews to the Holy Land in the form of Greater Israel (“*Eretz Israel*”).

Given the Begin government in Israel, it is not surprising that U.S. Christian Zionists were easily led to interface with leading extremist political and religious circles in Israel. Christian Zionist clergy in the United States assimilated the theological-political views of the most extreme Israeli religious nationalist leaders. A peculiar Christian Zionist literalist emphasis on the Old Testament, paralleling extremist Israeli Jewish messianism, rather than upon the good news of the New Testament, is characteristic of this mindset.¹¹

In 1979, Jerry Falwell made an important visit to Israel which advanced the political alliance between the Christian Zionists in the United States and the Likud Party in Israel. This Falwell visit to Israel spurred the development of the Christian Right-Israeli Right political alignment in the early 1980s. This political alignment between the Israeli New Right and the Christian Zionists would, of course, enhance the position and influence of the Jewish (Revisionist) Zionist Neoconservative policy network in Washington during the Reagan years.¹²

High level coordination between Christian Zionist leaders in the United States and extremist political leaders in Israel is an on-going process.

In recent weeks, this September and October, Israeli Tourism Minister Benny Elon, who is linked to the most extreme political elements in Israeli society, made a special trip to the United States to interface with key Christian Zionist circles. In Memphis, Tennessee he met with the well-known evangelical leader Ed McAteer, and a number of key Christian Zionist leaders McAteer had organized for the visit.¹³ McAteer was a co-founder of the Moral Majority with Jerry Falwell and he is a founder of the Christian Roundtable organization which has branches in all 50 states. The Elon-McAteer political axis plays a key role in lining up Christian Zionist support in the United States for the extremist proponents of Greater Israel.

4. Christian Zionists and the Republican Party

Prior the 1980 elections in the US, the Israeli New Right made preparations to form political relationships with the Christian fundamentalist groups in the United States. The plan was that these Christian Zionists would form an activist political base to penetrate the Republican Party and lobby Congress and the White House in support of the

¹¹ For an excellent overview of Jewish Messianism see, Jonathan Frankel, ed., op. cit.

¹² For background on the Jewish Zionist lobby see, for example, Paul Findley, *They Dare to Speak Out*, Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1985; Seth P. Tillman, *The United States in the Middle East*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982.

¹³ Nathan Guttman, “We can’t lose Jerusalem,” Ha’aretz, October 4, 2003

right wing Likud Party's expansionist "*Eretz Israel*" (Greater Israel) policy. The vector of a pro-Likud foreign policy was the Neoconservative policy network.

Because the Carter Administration attempted to pursue a more evenhanded policy in the Middle East in the face of an omnipotent domestic pro-Israel Zionist lobby, hardline Jewish Zionist policy intellectuals, formerly associated with the Democratic Party as "Scoop Jackson Democrats," repackaged themselves in order to penetrate the Republican Party. The Neoconservatives piggybacked on the so-called "Conservative Movement," which for decades sought to take over the Republican Party.

A few weeks before the 1980 elections, one of the leading international Christian Zionist organizations, called the "International Christian Embassy-Jerusalem (ICEJ)," established an office in Jerusalem. The idea was that Christian Zionists needed an "embassy" in Jerusalem to organize their activities while awaiting the return of Jesus. On September 20, 1980, Mayor Teddy Kollek hosted the opening ceremony, and this organization became a pivotal international Christian Zionist support mechanism for the Likud's "*Eretz Israel*" ("Greater Israel") policy

During the 1980s, the Christian Embassy's Washington, DC office established itself as a focal point for Christian Zionist political and lobbying activity in the United States.

During the 1990s, the so-called "National Unity Coalition for Israel" (NUCI) emerged as an important lobbying arm of the American Christian Zionists. It is not surprising that this organization has close links to the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, to Neoconservatives in Washington think tanks, and to highly-placed Neoconservative operatives inside the Bush Administration.

On Capitol Hill, the National Unity Coalition for Israel works in parallel with the well-established and influential American Israel Political Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and Religious Right organizations such as the Christian Coalition, to dominate Congress when it comes to legislation and policy relating to the Middle East.

Dick Armeý's protégé, and now House Majority Leader, Tom DeLay, openly espouses Christian Zionist ideology using such coded terms as "Judea and Samaria" to describe today's occupied Palestine. Speaking to the Israeli Knesset on July 30 of this year, DeLay emphasized that, "The common destiny of the United States and Israel is not an artificial alliance dictated by our leaders." DeLay was reportedly hosted by the Christian Embassy on his visit.

Christian Zionist influence over Republican Congressman and Senators has reached such a level that Republicans in Congress routinely introduce and vote for

inflammatory and irresponsible resolutions and bills diametrically opposed to the US national interest and security requirements in the Middle East.¹⁴

Owing to the Bush Administration's preventive war against Iraq, and failure to constructively address the Palestine Question, confidence in America has collapsed in the Arab and Muslim world, not to mention in Europe.

Our European allies are deeply disturbed by the extremist foreign policy advocated by the Christian Zionist lobby. They are increasingly coming to see the Bush Middle East policy of preventive war against Iraq, regional destabilization, and no constructive action on the Palestine Question, as threatening their own security interests. In the dangerous world in which we live, we cannot afford to alienate our European friends and allies, any more than we can afford to alienate our friends and allies in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Conclusion

So, ladies and gentlemen, "What is to be done?"

Quite simply, we as a Nation must return to traditional principles of foreign policy such as anti-imperialism and respect for the rule of law. We must begin to rebuild our international position on the basis of "good faith and justice toward all nations" to use George Washington's phrase.

Our intelligence community, our diplomats, and our uniformed military know full well that solving the Palestine Question must be the primary concern when it comes to the issue of root causes of instability in the Middle East. We must insist on a just solution to the Palestine Question, we must halt our unjustifiable neoimperial occupation of Iraq, and drop the plans to destabilize the entire region.

To do this, Americans generally, and the Republican Party in particular, must reject the bigoted delusions of the Christian Zionists and must reject their influence over American foreign policy. Just as essential, the Republican Party must jettison the Neoconservative policy network.

Today, Republicans, Democrats, and Independents – Christians, Moslems, and Jews -- who oppose the extremist policies of the Neoconservatives and Christian Zionists must work together in a broad front. We must support a non-partisan foreign policy that promotes peace and justice in today's world through international cooperation and the rule of law, not the rule of force.

¹⁴ See, for example, Larry Witham, "Religious vote credited in GOP wins," *The Washington Times*, November 7, 2002.

As John Bassett Moore, a great American authority on international law and Legal Advisor to the Department of State, said almost a century ago:

“...besides exerting an influence in favor of liberty and independence, American diplomacy was also employed in the advancement of the principle of legality. American statesmen sought to regulate the relations of nations by law, not only as a measure of protection of the weak against the aggressions of the strong, but also as the only means of assuring the peace of the world.”¹⁵

Thank you for your kind attention.

¹⁵ John Bassett Moore, *American Diplomacy*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1913, p. 251-252.