

‘Whether the Word of God is True’: Christian Zionist Discourse and the Polarization of U.S.
Support for Israel

Major Research Paper
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Abstract

This Major Research Paper analyzes the ideology and discourse of American Christian Zionists in the post-Cold War period, to better understand the processes driving the growing partisan divide on support for Israel in the 21st century U.S. Drawing from secondary sources, I argue that the key discursive themes and rhetorical strategies of American Christian Zionists in this period have popularized a hawkish interpretation of what it means to be “pro-Israel” that is firmly associated with the American right-wing. Based on a religiously inspired worldview that frames politics in Manichean terms, Christian Zionists assert that those who put pressure on Israel to make peace with the Palestinians, or who otherwise do not unconditionally support Israel’s foreign and defence policies, are agents of Satan against God’s will. I further argue that Christian Zionist discourse has significant parallels with rhetoric increasingly found among the more “mainstream” portions of the Western far-right, particularly regarding Muslims, Jews, Israel, and conspiracy theories. While these similarities have been influenced by existing polarization in the U.S. and elsewhere on Israel and other issues, they also work to reinforce and amplify such divisions between the more “pro-Israel” right and a more critical left. If this gradual but real erosion of bipartisan support for Israel in the U.S. continues, it will have critical implications for the trajectory of the U.S.-Israeli “special relationship” and the Middle East more broadly.

Keywords: Israel, U.S. foreign policy, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Christian Zionism, political polarization, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism.

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Section 1: Introduction

For decades, the famous idea of the U.S. and Israel as having a “special” relationship, with historical and even moral significance, has endured. As the first state to *de facto* recognize the Israeli Declaration of Independence on May 14, 1948, the U.S. government gradually warmed to view Israel as both a strategic ally and a friendly fellow democracy in an unstable Middle East.¹ U.S. foreign aid to Israel began to increase substantially under the John F. Kennedy administration in the early 1960s and onwards, to the point where Israel is now the largest recipient of cumulative U.S. military aid in history, ahead of Egypt by over \$60 billion.² The U.S. has collaborated extensively with Israel in the development of its high-technology and military industries, playing a key role in the creation of Israel’s Iron Dome antimissile system, among other projects.³ Washington also provides Israel with considerable diplomatic protection internationally, having obstructed numerous United Nations (UN) resolutions and other measures critical of Israeli policies towards Palestinians, both within its formal borders and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).⁴

Beyond official government policy, support for Israel in the U.S. has historically been even more robust at the Congressional level, and especially widespread among the broader public for which Congress is supposed to represent. Officials in the departments of State and Defense originally viewed Israel with suspicion in its early years, believing that supporting the

¹ Dennis Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 14-17.

² Amnon Cavari and Elan Nyer, “Trends in US Congressional Support for Israel,” *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, no. 121 (2016): 14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep04767>.

³ Arnon Gutfeld, “From ‘Star Wars’ to ‘Iron Dome’: US Support of Israel’s Missile Defense Systems,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 53, no. 6 (2017): 934-38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2017.1350844>.

⁴ Creede Newton, “A history of the US blocking UN resolutions against Israel,” *Al Jazeera*, May 19, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/19/a-history-of-the-us-blocking-un-resolutions-against-israel>.

new state would interfere with U.S. interests in the Middle East.⁵ Meanwhile, both Congress and the U.S. public shared a positive view of Israel right from its establishment, which influenced official U.S. policy in turn.⁶ While differing in degree based on religious, political, and other affiliations, the U.S. public as a whole has long viewed Israel as an important ally and even a friend to the U.S., with strategic worth and shared political and cultural values that merit U.S. support.⁷ Notably, there existed among Congress and public opinion alike a bipartisan consensus between Republicans and Democrats on support for Israel, with Democratic opinions originally being even more favourable than those of Republicans.⁸

However, starting in the 1980s and 1990s, and especially since the beginning of the 21st century, this bipartisan consensus has begun to gradually erode in the face of shifting partisan attitudes towards Israel. Democrats, though still supportive of Israel overall, increasingly favour U.S. policies that either side more with the Palestinians or are more “even-handed” in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁹ More progressive Democrats, meanwhile, are now considerably less sympathetic to Israel.¹⁰ On the other hand, Republicans have grown exceptionally supportive of Israel and its foreign policy decisions.¹¹ Beyond this widening opinion gap between the two parties, attitudes towards Israel have also changed along other demographic lines, particularly based on religious affiliation. Evangelical Christians generally

⁵ Dana H. Allin and Steven Simon, “The Moral Psychology of US Support for Israel,” *Survival* 45, no. 3 (2003): 123-26, <https://doi.org/10.1093/survival/45.3.123>.

⁶ Kenneth Kolander, *America's Israel: The US Congress and American-Israeli Relations, 1967-1975* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2020), 11-14, <http://muse.jhu.edu/book/75971>.

⁷ Michael J. Koplow, “Value Judgment: Why Do Americans Support Israel?” *Security Studies* 20, no. 2 (2011): 298-300, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2011.572690>.

⁸ Kolander, *America's Israel*, 13-15.

⁹ Jonathan Rynhold, “Democrats’ Attitudes Towards the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Middle East Policy* 27, no. 4 (2020): 50-52, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12526>

¹⁰ Rynhold, “Democrats’ Attitudes,” 51-54.

¹¹ Peter Hays Gries, “How Ideology Divides American Liberals and Conservatives over Israel,” *Political Science Quarterly* 130, no. 1 (2015): 56-62, <https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12288>.

hold highly favourable views, while Catholics and Mainline Protestants are becoming more critical of Israel and sympathetic to the Palestinians.¹² Within the American Jewish community, which largely votes Democratic, attitudes towards Israel are now increasingly divided, markedly so among the younger generations, shifting away from historically widespread and strong support.¹³ These trends are unfolding in a context of polarization in the U.S. between the political left and right more broadly, exemplified by the 2016 electoral victory of Donald Trump.¹⁴ Additionally, Israeli politics have taken a rightward pivot in the 21st century, notably under Benjamin Netanyahu's 12 years as Prime Minister, while the prospects for a viable two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict appear to be diminishing.¹⁵

Research Questions and Central Argument

This growing polarization of attitudes in the U.S. towards Israel is the issue that drives this essay. These partisan divisions are especially puzzling given the seemingly uniquely high levels of support for Israel in the U.S. compared to other countries, hence the frequent description of the U.S.-Israeli relationship as “special,” one that surpasses other domestic political disagreements.¹⁶ What are the processes that have led to, and sustain, this trend of Israel becoming a divisive issue in U.S. politics? How is it that the bipartisan consensus between Democrats and Republicans towards Israel is breaking, with the party that is more supportive of

¹² Koplow, “Value Judgement,” 11-13.

¹³ Allan C. Brownfeld and Chemi Shalev, “Jewish Voters Are Turning Away from Israel and AIPAC,” *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 39, no. 7 (2020): 11, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A641903717/AONE?u=otta77973&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=366b37a1>.

¹⁴ Cas Mudde, *The Far Right in America* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 37-38, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315160764>.

¹⁵ Robert Owen Freedman, *Israel Under Netanyahu: Domestic and Foreign Policy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 180-84, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.4324/9780429342349>.

¹⁶ Ilai Z. Saltzman, “Not So ‘Special Relationship’? US-Israel Relations During Barack Obama’s Presidency,” *Israel Studies* 22, no. 1 (2017): 50-52, <https://doi.org/10.2979/israelstudies.22.1.03>.

Israel shifting from the former to the latter by an increasing margin? How does polarization towards Israel reflect wider polarization in the U.S. on other issues? What does it even mean to be “pro-Israel” in this new context? These are the research questions that broadly guide this essay.

The issues of U.S.-Israeli relations and changing attitudes in the U.S. towards Israel are large, and an analysis of them in their entirety is beyond the scope of this essay. Because of these limits, I will be focusing specifically on Christian Zionism in the U.S. as a qualitative case study, to better understand the nuances of partisan divisions over Israel and their implications for the U.S.-Israeli “special relationship.” A broad term popularized only in recent decades, Christian Zionism refers to those Christians who advocate for the “restoration” of the Jewish diaspora to the territory of biblical Israel, as well as general support for the modern state of Israel.¹⁷ This essay is thus particularly concerned with how the discourse of Christian Zionists, a significant demographic and successful movement in the U.S. with such a concerted focus on Israel, can help explain this growing partisan divide.

My central argument is that Christian Zionist discourse has helped polarize what it means to be “pro-Israel” in the 21st century U.S., through a focus on morality, Islam, Judaism, and Western civilization that parallels rhetoric found within the contemporary Western far-right. These discursive processes have helped promote a conception of “pro-Israel” as meaning uncompromising support for Israeli territorial maximalism and hawkish military policies. This belief translates, in turn, to specific support for the Israeli right-wing, including former Prime

¹⁷ Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1-3, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195368024.001.0001>.

Minister Netanyahu, who generally support continued settlement expansion in the OPT and oppose a Palestinian state.¹⁸

Christian Zionist discourse in the U.S. is framed by a dichotomous, religious worldview that groups states and political actors as either with God or with Satan, based principally on whether they align with the movement's interpretation of being pro-Israel. In the post-Cold War and especially post-9/11 context, this dichotomy involves the othering of Islam and those who support Israeli territorial concessions as "evil," while Jews and Israel have now become "insiders" grouped with Western, Christian civilization. These same themes and strategies increasingly exist within the mainstream portion of the contemporary far-right, though under a more secular framework.¹⁹ This Christian Zionist discourse, combined with the rise and normalization of such far-right movements in the West, including Israel, facilitates the processes by which being pro-Israel is seen as a right-wing phenomenon that requires supporting right-wing policies. Ultimately, by contributing to the erosion of bipartisan support for Israel in the U.S., this Christian Zionist discourse could have the unintended, ironic effect of undermining the U.S.-Israeli "special relationship," and Israel's national security interests, in the long term.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Jonathan Rynhold asserts that there have primarily been "three [academic] approaches to U.S.-Israeli relations, one focused on American national interests, another on the influence of the

¹⁸ Asher Schechter, "We've Won: How Trump Empowers Israel's Far Right," *World Policy Journal* 34, no. 1 (2017): 39-41, <https://muse-jhu-edu.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/article/652802>.

¹⁹ Daniel Odin Shaw, "Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed: The Alt-Right on Building Christendom Without Christ," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18, no. 54 (2019): 87-89, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A610843949/AONE?u=otta77973&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=ef454260>.

pro-Israel lobby, and yet another on political culture.”²⁰ The first two approaches have largely dominated, with scholars tending to focus on Israel’s strategic benefits to U.S. interests, or the “pro-Israel lobby’s” level of influence on U.S. policy, as famously and controversially discussed in works by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt.²¹ Studies on U.S.-Israeli relations that focus on political culture do exist, highlighting the ideological and cultural underpinnings of the “special relationship” and their deep roots in U.S. and Israeli identity, which at times seemingly contradict U.S. national interests. However, as Rynhold notes, much of these works are specific to the Cold War period and do not account for changes in U.S. attitudes towards Israel and the U.S.-Israeli relationship.²²

I plan to bridge these gaps by analyzing Christian Zionist discourse in the U.S. from a constructivist perspective, with a focus on the post-Cold War era, thus providing a contemporary version of the “political culture” approach to understanding the U.S.-Israeli relationship. In international relations theory, constructivist approaches assert that identity and other ideational factors have an important impact on state behaviour, especially on the way that states understand themselves and each other.²³ As Walt notes, constructivists regard “the interests and identities of states as a highly malleable product of specific historical processes,” and “pay close attention to the prevailing discourse(s) in society.”²⁴ The material dimensions of international relations emphasized by realists, and to a lesser extent, liberals, are still important, such as states’

²⁰ Jonathan Rynhold, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in American Political Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2-3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316146729>.

²¹ Dov Waxman, “Beyond Realpolitik: The Israel Lobby and US Support for Israel,” *Israel Studies Forum* 22, no. 2 (2007): 99-103, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41804983>.

²² Rynhold, *American Political Culture*, 4-5.

²³ Stephen M. Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 110 (1998): 40-42, <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/magazines/international-relations-one-world-many-theories/docview/224038646/se-2?accountid=14701>.

²⁴ Walt, “One World, Many Theories,” 40.

economic and military power and their strategic interests. However, constructivists note that these factors are interpreted and judged by states and other international actors through ideas, identities, and norms.²⁵ Consequently, the fact that Israel and the U.S. mutually see each other as allies and “friends” rather than enemies or liabilities informs how both states understand what their strategic interests are. These states’ domestic political context and culture play an important part in this identification.

There are several advantages to this approach. First, as noted above, certain aspects of the U.S.-Israeli relationship seemingly defy more conventional, realist understandings of state behaviour as determined primarily by the pursuit of self-interest. While many scholars assert that a close relationship with Israel has provided the U.S. with tangible benefits, numerous others have also pointed to multiple instances where support for Israel conversely hurt U.S. interests, especially during the Cold War.²⁶ Even so, the U.S. continues to strongly support Israel diplomatically, financially, and militarily to an extent that is difficult for some to comprehend, even when this policy has appeared at times to isolate the U.S. and damage its image abroad.²⁷ Thus, while material interests are a vital part of understanding U.S. policy towards Israel, they do not explain the full picture.

Concentrating on the post-Cold War period for this analysis is salient given the changing nature of U.S.-Israeli relations in this timeframe, compared to their relative consistency during the Cold War. Indeed, shifts both geopolitically and in the domestic contexts of Israel and the

²⁵ Stefano Guzzini and Anna Leander, eds., *Constructivism and International Relations: Alexander Wendt and his Critics* (London: Routledge, 2005), 3, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.4324/9780203401880>

²⁶ William L. Cleveland and Martin P. Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 6th ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2017), 336-38.

²⁷ Ishaan Tharoor, “The U.S. Conversation on Israel is Changing, no Matter Biden’s Stance,” *The Washington Post*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/17/biden-israel-palestinians-change/>.

U.S. alike have inevitably affected their relationship and strategic calculations. For example, Mearsheimer and Walt assert that with the absence of the Cold War and a bipolar international system, no strategic reason exists for the U.S. to continue supporting Israel to the extent that it does currently.²⁸ Of special importance is that it is in this period when attitudes towards Israel in the U.S. begin to polarize, notably in the early 2000s and beyond.²⁹ With identity-based issues taking an increasingly important role in the 21st century, constructivism's "[attentiveness] to sources of change" is especially useful for understanding the role of domestic political attitudes in shaping U.S. foreign policy in this era.³⁰

This essay rests on and combines three main methodological pillars. First, it uses the Christian Zionist movement as a case study to gain insights into the dynamics of changing attitudes towards Israel in the U.S. more broadly. I have selected Christian Zionism for two reasons. First, a larger lens that examines general U.S. attitudes towards Israel, or even the views of U.S. conservatives or Christians, would be unfeasible given the limited scope of this essay, which I acknowledge constrains the applicability of my analysis. Secondly, as Christian Zionism is a major and well-publicized movement in the U.S. that takes an active and specific interest in Israel and U.S. policy towards it, focusing on this group thus provides access to a large pool of pre-existing scholarship on this subject.

The second approach that I use in this essay is a traditional "literary assessment." I have conducted my analysis of the U.S. Christian Zionist movement in the post-Cold War era based

²⁸ Ariel Ilan Roth, "Reassurance: A Strategic Basis of U.S. Support for Israel," *International Studies Perspectives* 10, no. 4 (2009): 378-80, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2009.00384.x>.

²⁹ Amnon Cavari, "Religious Beliefs, Elite Polarization, and Public Opinion on Foreign Policy: The Partisan Gap in American Public Opinion Toward Israel," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 25, no. 1 (2013): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edr053>.

³⁰ Walt, "One World, Many Theories," 40-41.

on my research and review of scholarly secondary sources. By drawing on this literature, I specifically assess the most significant rhetorical themes, ideas, narratives, and strategies of the movement's discourse, including the worldview through which its members understand and interpret themselves, the U.S., Israel, and international relations. I also conduct a similar, but much briefer and more limited analysis of related rhetoric among the contemporary Western far-right. Finally, this essay has a "historical explanatory" lens in that it attempts to understand the causal processes that have contributed to divisions in the U.S. regarding Israel, through its focus on Christian Zionism. I have hence also drawn on literature concerning the history and nuances of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, survey data on public opinion towards Israel, and broader polarization between Democrats and Republicans.

Essay Structure

This essay unfolds in 5 parts. In Section 2, I provide background context and a historical analysis of Christian Zionism, particularly its role in U.S. relations with and attitudes towards Israel. I assess the Anglo-American roots of Christian Zionism and its development in the U.S. until the end of the Cold War, examining the ways that the movement and its ideas intertwine with U.S. political culture as a whole. In Section 3, I analyze the discourse of the Christian Zionist movement in the post-Cold War era. I first focus on the movement's religious worldview, its biblical interpretation of what support for Israel entails, and its Manichean framing of politics in terms of good and evil. After, I discuss how this worldview combines with rhetoric on Islam and Judaism. In Section 4, I develop my argument even further by highlighting how Christian Zionist discourse parallels the conspiratorial rhetoric on Islam, Judaism, and Israel that is

increasingly found among far-right movements in the West. Finally, I conclude in Section 5 by offering remarks on the potential geopolitical implications of the findings from my analysis.

Section 2: Context and Historic Analysis of American Christian Zionism

Definitions

There is a notable confusion, and at times, lack of consensus, when it comes to defining some of the groups referenced in this section and throughout the essay, including Evangelical Christianity, Christian Zionism, and the American Christian Right.³¹ Not only do these terms describe broad demographic groups comprising millions of people, but there also exist significant overlaps between them. Such semantic difficulties have often led to gross generalizations that inhibit a more nuanced understanding, by way of depicting these groups as monolithic caricatures despite their vast numbers and cultural and political influence.³² It is thus vital to define these groups for ease of reference in a way that simultaneously accounts for their complexity. In this essay, I will be using scholar Samuel Goldman's definition of Christian Zionists as those who support "a Jewish state in some portion of the biblical Promised Land who draw their main inspiration from Christian beliefs, doctrines, or texts."³³ It should be noted that although their religious beliefs are their "main inspiration" for supporting such a Jewish state, many other factors also underly Christian Zionist motives, such as a genuine belief in Israel's strategic usefulness to advancing U.S. interests.³⁴

³¹ Donald M. Lewis, *A Short History of Christian Zionism: From the Reformation to the Twenty-First Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 1-2.

³² Rynhold, *American Political Culture*, 95.

³³ Samuel Goldman, *God's Country: Christian Zionism in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 2-4.

³⁴ Martin Durham, "Evangelical Protestantism and Foreign Policy in the United States after September 11," *Patterns of Prejudice* 38, no. 2 (2004): 152-54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220410001692349>.

Evangelical Christianity refers to a subsection of Protestantism formed in the 19th century Anglosphere. It is defined by its belief in salvation from being “born again,” the Bible’s central authority as the direct word of God, and the need to spread the “good news” of Jesus Christ to the rest of humanity.³⁵ Fundamentalism is a movement within Evangelism, founded in the U.S. at the turn of the 20th century as a reaction to modernist changes within Mainline Protestantism, and which holds a literalist interpretation of the Bible.³⁶ Whereas Catholics or moderate Evangelicals may read biblical prophecies as allegory, Fundamentalists see them as literally true and with imminent, tangible consequences. The majority of Evangelicals and Fundamentalists tend to hold conservative political views, and are a key part of the wider American “Christian Right” movement.³⁷ They have also had a vital influence over the trajectory of Christian Zionism, and are the religious demographics most supportive of Israel in the U.S., aside from American Jews.³⁸ While most Christian Zionists are either Evangelicals or Fundamentalists, one should not conflate these groups as identical. There exist notable Evangelical leaders and groups that are critical towards Israel and its policies, including former President Jimmy Carter.³⁹

Christian Zionism in the U.S.: A Brief History

Christian Zionism has deep roots, with the movement itself even predating the organized Jewish Zionist movement of the late 19th century.⁴⁰ Its ideological foundations date back most

³⁵ Rynhold, *American Political Culture*, 95.

³⁶ Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 38-41.

³⁷ Jeremy D. Mayer, “Christian Fundamentalists and Public Opinion Toward the Middle East: Israel’s New Best Friends?” *Social Science Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2004): 698-89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0038-4941.2004.00240.x>.

³⁸ Paul D. Miller, “Evangelicals, Israel and US Foreign Policy,” *Survival* 56, no. 1 (2014): 8-9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2014.882149>.

³⁹ Randall Balmer, “Pro-Israel and Anti-Semitic: Understanding Evangelical Support for Israel,” *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 25, no. 1/2 (2020): 101-103, <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/scholarly-journals/pro-israel-anti-semitic-understanding-evangelical/docview/2448438498/se-2?accountid=14701>.

⁴⁰ Lewis, *A Short History of Christian Zionism*, 5-6.

notably to the Protestant Reformation in 16th century Europe, but go even further back to the early centuries of Christianity itself.⁴¹ The Reformation put a special emphasis on the study and interpretation of Scripture at the individual level, as the way in which believers could find personal salvation themselves rather than through the Catholic Church.⁴² The British Puritans who built the initial European settlements in the present-day U.S. were especially ardent in their study of the Bible. They focused particularly on the scriptures that make up the Hebrew Bible, to which they ascribed a special significance.⁴³ The early Puritan settlers that would establish New England, such as writers Increase Mather and John Winthrop, made frequent reference to the biblical Promised Land, comparing the stories of the ancient Israelites to their own trials of fleeing from religious persecution to a “new land.”⁴⁴

With the development of the U.S. as an independent state, and later an international power, so did Christian Zionist beliefs progress and flourish. Indeed, the movement and its ideas were intertwined from the beginning with U.S. national identity. As Winthrop’s “city upon a hill,” the moral value of the U.S. was frequently linked by early Puritan writers and American political thinkers to either its status as the “New Israel” or its resemblance to biblical Israel.⁴⁵ Christian Zionist ideas would also meld with the nascent concept of American Exceptionalism, which views the U.S. as unique, inherently superior to all other polities, and imbued with a righteous and divinely sanctioned task to shape the world in its image and make it a better

⁴¹ Lewis, 10.

⁴² Rynhold, *American Political Culture*, 9-11.

⁴³ Rynhold, 9-12.

⁴⁴ Goldman, *God’s Country*, 13-18

⁴⁵ James Roberts and Martyn Whittock, *Trump and the Puritans: How the Evangelical Religious Right Put Donald Trump in the White House* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2020), 106-108.

place.⁴⁶ For early Christian Zionists, such as the 19th-century evangelist William E. Blackstone, the U.S. had a special part to play in biblical prophecy due to its moral superiority over other states. The U.S. would fulfill this role as a “modern-day Cyrus” by restoring to the Jewish diaspora the lands promised to them through God’s covenant with Abraham.⁴⁷ Thus, they saw the U.S. as exceptional and holding God’s favour, but for the ultimate purpose of aiding His original chosen people. In the future, the modern state of Israel would continue to often be the one exception to the rule of American Exceptionalism.

Premillennial Dispensationalism

Critical for the trajectory of Christian Zionism in the U.S. was the development of a fatalistic school of Christian eschatological thought known as Premillennial Dispensationalism (from here on, “Dispensationalism” or “Dispensationalist”). First articulated and popularized by Irish writer John Nelson Darby in the 1830s, this subset of Evangelical eschatology would come to have an enormous impact on Christianity, politics, and culture in the U.S., especially in the 1970s and beyond.⁴⁸ Like Fundamentalists, Dispensationalists interpret biblical prophecy, particularly that found in the books of Revelation, Daniel, and Ezekiel, to be literally true and as having imminent consequences.⁴⁹ Based on these prophecies, Dispensationalists believe that God has divided world history into seven separate “dispensations,” with humanity living through the penultimate “Church Age” since Christ’s resurrection.⁵⁰ At an unknowable but tangible point in

⁴⁶ Rynhold, *American Political Culture*, 10-12; see also Hilde Restad, “American Exceptionalism is Still a Powerful Idea,” *LSE Blog*, March 2016, <http://bit.ly/1LEdzQt>.

⁴⁷ Ariel Yaakov, “Israel in Contemporary Evangelical Christian Millennial Thought,” *Numen* 59, no. 5-6 (2012): 462, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685276-12341235>.

⁴⁸ Sean Durbin, “From King Cyrus to Queen Esther: Christian Zionists’ Discursive Construction of Donald Trump as God’s Instrument,” *Critical Research on Religion* 8, no. 2 (2020): 119, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303220924078>.

⁴⁹ Durbin, “Trump as God’s Instrument,” 118.

⁵⁰ Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 13-16.

the future, the Church Age will end in a battle between the forces of Christ and Satan. After, the former will return in the Second Coming and establish His Millennial Kingdom on Earth, ushering in the Kingdom Age. Before Christ's reign, however, the world will descend into a seven-year period of chaos, warfare, and suffering known as the Great Tribulation.⁵¹ Christ's true believers will be lifted to His side beforehand and spared these Earthly trials through the Rapture.

The Jewish people and Israel, both biblical and modern, play a vital, even primary role in Dispensationalism. According to this eschatology, the lands of biblical Israel will be at the centre of the end times and related cosmological events. It is there that the Antichrist will emerge, deceiving Jews that he is the Messiah while causing mass destruction during the Great Tribulation.⁵² Christ will return to Earth at the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem's Old City, defeating the Antichrist in the Battle of Armageddon with His army of the faithful. He will then establish His Millennial Kingdom directly in Israel, which the Jewish people will help to administer.⁵³

Dispensationalists believe that biblical prophecy necessitates the return of the Jewish diaspora, as descendants of the ancient Israelites, to their Promised Land. They will fulfill their covenant with God, which Dispensationalists see as still valid, by reinstating the Kingdom of Israel and rebuilding Solomon's Temple.⁵⁴ This reestablishment of the Jewish people in the lands of biblical Israel is of utmost importance for Dispensationalists in ushering the end times and realizing God's will regarding His original chosen people. However, at least according to

⁵¹ Spector, 14-15.

⁵² Ariel, "Israel in Evangelical Thought," 459-60.

⁵³ Ariel, 461.

⁵⁴ Ariel, 476-80.

conventional versions of this eschatology, most Jews would perish during the Great Tribulation, while the remainder would convert to Christianity before serving Christ.⁵⁵

Jewish Zionism: The Turn of the 20th Century and Beyond

When the Jewish Zionist movement gained political traction in late 19th century Europe under the leadership of Theodor Herzl, there was notable support and “intense interest” in the U.S. among Christian Zionists and the broader public, albeit constrained by anti-Semitism.⁵⁶ Prominent dispensationalists like Blackstone, for example, petitioned the U.S. government to support this apparent “restoration” of the Jewish diaspora, seen as the vehicle through which an exceptional U.S. would fulfill its unique role in history and prophecy.⁵⁷ Yet, in this earlier period, including the mid-20th century, active U.S. support for Jewish Zionism was not an Evangelical, “conservative,” or Dispensationalist phenomenon, but instead one found more among mainline Protestants and some Catholics.⁵⁸ The conviction that God promised biblical Israel to the Jews was important, as was the case for Baptist President Harry Truman, for instance.⁵⁹ However, other factors also drove this support for Jewish Zionism, including beliefs that it aligned with U.S. values of liberal democracy and national-self determination, and a sense of cultural affinity with Jews in Palestine, viewed as sharing a similar “pioneering” colonial spirit.⁶⁰ Given the influence of socialist ideas in the development of early Israeli kibbutzim, and

⁵⁵ Goldman, *God's Country*, 4-6.

⁵⁶ Rynhold, *American Political Culture*, 15.

⁵⁷ Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 19-22.

⁵⁸ Goldman, *God's Country*, 7.

⁵⁹ Mark R. Amstutz, *Evangelicals and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 129-131.

⁶⁰ Amstutz, *American Foreign Policy*, 128-133.

the strong role of the Labour Party in Mandate Palestine and then Israel, support was markedly strong among more liberal U.S. Christians.⁶¹

The establishment of the independent state of Israel in 1948 had great significance for Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christian Zionists in the U.S., and particularly for those who believed in Dispensationalism. The latter was gaining traction in the early 20th century U.S., thanks to the wide dissemination of the Scofield Reference Bible, which accessibly annotated Scripture with Dispensationalist commentary.⁶² But these more conservative Christian Zionists were relatively inactive politically, due to both a belief in the passive role of humans in God's plans,⁶³ but also a general retreat from political life after the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial and heightened conflict with modernist Christians.⁶⁴ The 1967 June War, in which Israel defeated five Arab states and occupied, among other territories, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, was a turning point in the Christian Zionist movement more broadly, but especially for its conservative Evangelical and Fundamentalist members.⁶⁵ To these Christian Zionists, the creation of a Jewish state in the lands of biblical Israel, and its supposedly unnatural victory over the many enemies that surrounded it, were more than just a confirmation of the Bible's truth. They also interpreted these events as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, a display of God's intervention in human affairs, and a sign that the end times were imminent.⁶⁶

Events in the Middle East in the 1960s and onwards thus had an important role in pushing conservative and Evangelical Christian Zionists to become more politically active, towards Israel

⁶¹ Rynhold, *American Political Culture*, 59-60.

⁶² Miller, "Israel and US Foreign Policy," 60.

⁶³ Goldman, *God's Country*, 6.

⁶⁴ Yaakov, "Israel in Evangelical Thought," 465.

⁶⁵ Durbin, "Trump as God's Instrument," 119.

⁶⁶ Amstutz, *American Foreign Policy*, 123-24.

as well as other issues.⁶⁷ These changes occurred at a moment in which the Christian Right was on the rise as an assertive and influential movement, reacting to progressive counterculture and social change in the U.S. during the 1960s and 70s, including protests against the Vietnam War and the legalization of abortion.⁶⁸ As these Christians became more vocal on domestic issues like liberal social values and the role of religion in public life, their enthusiasm for Israel's military successes drove them to provide political and philanthropic support to this state and Jews hoping to emigrate there.⁶⁹

After the 1977 victory of the right-wing Likud party brought Menachem Begin to power in Israel, the Israeli government would begin to form a pragmatic, effective, and gradually enduring relationship with conservative Christian Zionists in the U.S.⁷⁰ Consequently, U.S. support for Israel was one of the main policy pillars of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, a major Christian Right movement throughout the 1980s.⁷¹ It was in this period that key Christian Zionist organizations, such as the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ), Bridges for Peace, and Christian Friends of Israel were founded, as well as when Christian tourism from the U.S. to Israel spiked.⁷² These developments within Christian Zionism also coincided with growing U.S. support for Israel at the official level. Indeed, it was after the 1967 June War, and especially during the administration of Richard Nixon, when U.S. economic and military aid to Israel would increase dramatically.⁷³ In the context of the Cold War, the former relied on the

⁶⁷ Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 21.

⁶⁸ Tristan Sturm, "Religion as Nationalism: The Religious Nationalism of American Christian Zionists," *National Identities* 20, no. 3 (2018): 308-309, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2016.1255187>.

⁶⁹ Ariel, "Israel in Evangelical Thought," 466-72.

⁷⁰ Mayer, "Israel's New Best Friends?" 699.

⁷¹ Rynhold, *American Political Culture*, 99-100.

⁷² Ariel, "Israel in Evangelical Thought," 469-72.

⁷³ Cleveland and Bunton, *Modern Middle East*, 336-37.

latter as a strategic partner to counterbalance Soviet influence in the Middle East, fears of which were augmented by the Iranian Revolution, among other geopolitical changes.

Meanwhile, political developments in the Middle East, combined with the newfound Evangelical enthusiasm for fusing “prophetic speculation with geopolitics,” helped propel Dispensationalist and Christian Zionist beliefs into the broader U.S. cultural spotlight.⁷⁴ Evangelical writers like Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, and Jerry B. Jenkins became major bestsellers through their literary treatment of contemporary world politics through an eschatological lens, in such works as the *Left Behind* series and *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the bestselling non-fiction novel of the 1970s.⁷⁵ Evangelical television networks like Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) would help to further raise attention to issues concerning Israel under a religious interpretation, including via the highly popular talk show *The 700 Club*. The rise of Evangelicals Jimmy Carter and then Ronald Reagan to the presidency, with the latter alluding to the influence of biblical prophecy on his personal beliefs, further represented the ascendancy of this group to the heights of U.S. politics and influence.⁷⁶

By the 1990s, Christian Zionism thus had significant momentum as a powerful and popular force in U.S. politics, that worked to ensure the government’s maintenance of its special relationship with Israel. At this point, the strong role of Evangelicals and especially Fundamentalists as comprising both the majority of the Christian Zionist movement, as well as the conservative base of the Republican Party, was solidified.⁷⁷ Additionally, it was in the 1990s

⁷⁴ Durbin, “Trump as God’s Instrument,” 119.

⁷⁵ Miller, “Israel and US Foreign Policy,” 12-13.

⁷⁶ Ariel, “Israel in Evangelical Thought,” 467-68.

⁷⁷ Todd Gitlin, “For The Love of Sin: Toward an Understanding of Trump’s Base,” *Salmagundi*, no. 204 (2019): 73-75, <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/scholarly-journals/love-sin-toward-understanding-trumps-base/docview/2327261353/se-2?accountid=14701>.

that the Evangelical movement and its member denominations would grow to become the “single largest religious group” in the U.S.,⁷⁸ passing mainline Protestants to constitute about a quarter of the U.S. population by 1996.⁷⁹ Mainline Protestants, Catholics, and other Christians, including many moderate, non-Dispensationalist Evangelicals, had meanwhile grown ever more critical towards Israel and sympathetic to the Palestinians since the June War, in the context of punitive Israeli policies in the OPT.⁸⁰

Christian Zionist organizations and networks proliferated in the 2000s and beyond. Groups established in these years include the Christian Israel Public Action Campaign (CIPAC), the Eagle’s Wings ministry, the Fundamentalist Christian Coalition, and the revived Christians United for Israel (CUFI), the “largest Evangelical pro-Israel interest group.”⁸¹ Prominent Christian Zionist elites, such as Robertson, Falwell, and Lindsey, but also John Hagee, Gary Bauer, Mike Evans, and Robert Jeffrees, would continue to push for pro-Israel policies by the U.S. government, and publicly urged their followers to do the same. They also furthered their alliance with conservative Israeli politicians, such as a younger Netanyahu and the late Benny Elon.⁸² Meanwhile, Christian Zionist Congressional activity would carry on under the auspices of politicians such as Michele Bachmann, Tom DeLay, Dick Armey, Lindsey Graham, and Mike Pence. The electoral victories of Evangelical President George W. Bush appeared to consolidate

⁷⁸ “5 Facts About U.S. Evangelical Protestants,” *Pew Research Center*, Washington, D.C., March 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/5-facts-about-u-s-evangelical-protestants/>.

⁷⁹ Durham, “Protestantism and Foreign Policy,” 146-7.

⁸⁰ Shapiro, “Taming Tehran,” 366.

⁸¹ Amstutz, *American Foreign Policy*, 135-37.

⁸² Colum Lynch, “What’s Next for Christian Zionists?,” *Foreign Policy*, July 19, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/19/christian-zionists-israel-trump-netanyahu-evangelicals/>.

the gains of Christian Zionists in U.S. politics even more, a trend that would fervently re-emerge in new form under the Trump administration.⁸³

Democratic support for Israel would likewise remain, as evidenced by the continued voting patterns of Congressional Democrats, wider survey data on Democratic sympathies, and bipartisan groups such as the Israel Allies Caucus Foundation.⁸⁴ However, by the end of the Cold War, the seeds of polarization regarding Israel had already been planted. They would grow even further after failed Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, two Palestinian Intifadas, wars in Lebanon and Gaza, and further geopolitical changes. It is to this context I now turn to in Section 3.

Section 3: Christian Zionist Discourse in the Post-Cold War U.S.

In this section, I analyze the discourse and ideology of the Christian Zionist movement, among its leadership and “rank-and-file” alike, in the post-Cold War era U.S. I discuss the main rhetorical themes and strategies employed by Christian Zionists to justify both their own support for Israel, as well as that of the U.S. government. First, I assess the religiously informed framework through which Christian Zionists interpret what U.S. support for Israel means in substance. In particular, I assert that a Manichean and cosmological understanding of the world as divided into the forces of God and Satan guides how Christian Zionists identify allies and threats, as well as “good” and “evil” policies, with “support for Israel” as the determining factor. I then examine how this theological worldview, and its accompanying processes of othering, apply to two main themes in Christian Zionist discourse: the threat of Islam, on the one hand, and the Jewish role in “Judeo-Christian” civilization, on the other.

⁸³ Nilay Saiya, “Onward Christian Soldiers: American Dispensationalists, George W. Bush and the Middle East,” *Holy Land Studies* 11, no. 2 (2012): 184-86, <https://doi.org/10.3366/hls.2012.0044>.

⁸⁴ Rynhold, “Democrats’ Attitudes,” 49.

The Bible as a Framework: God, Satan, and Prophecy in the Pro-Israel Struggle

As noted by this essay's running definition of the movement, Christian Zionists are principally inspired in their support for Israel by their religious beliefs. Hence, Christian Scripture and theology are not only foundational to the movement's discourse and ideology, but also form the overarching framework for its members' understanding of the world. Additionally, although it is vital to differentiate Evangelicals as a whole from Christian Zionism, the enduring prominence of the former in the latter, particularly in its Fundamentalist and Dispensationalist forms, has influenced the religious and political dimensions of Christian Zionism and its rhetoric. Thus, biblical literalism and references to prophecy and Scripture, especially the Old Testament, play an important role in the movement's discourse.

Among other reasons, Christian Zionists primarily validate their support for Israel, and their lobbying for a continued and unconditional U.S.-Israeli special relationship, through biblical passages that they interpret as God's direct decree for their advocacy. The sheer authority and centrality of the Bible, from which such Scripture is read, are justification enough. Hence, for Christian Zionists like Republican Senator James Inhofe, policy towards Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is "not a political battle at all," but rather "a contest over whether the Word of God is true."⁸⁵ This biblical rationale is key for other social issues in which the broader American Christian Right takes an active interest, such as sexual minority rights and abortion. But for Christian Zionists, the focus is centred ultimately on Israel.

There are several specific pieces of Scripture, and aspects of theology and prophecy, that Christian Zionists reference the most when anchoring their support for Israel in their religious

⁸⁵ Mayer, "Israel's New Best Friends?" 699.

worldview. As Dispensationalism is now a key force in the movement, given the necessity of a Jewish restoration in the lands of biblical Israel for ushering the end times, the prophetic Scripture in the New Testament books of Revelation, David, and Ezekiel is commonly alluded to. However, the texts and narratives of the Book of Genesis, where God forms His covenant with Abraham and his descendants, are even more prominent. One of the most important and cited passages is that of Genesis 12:1-3. Scholar Steven Fink has even described this passage's frequent appearance in Christian Zionist discourse at the mass and elite levels, and its importance in the movement's general culture, as the "Genesis 12:3 narrative" underlying support for Israel.⁸⁶ In this passage, God tells Abraham that He will "bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."⁸⁷

For Christian Zionists, Genesis 12:1-3 provides clear evidence that supporting the modern state of Israel, as constituting such a form of "blessing," is decreed by God as a duty for all Christians.⁸⁸ By blessing Israel, Christian Zionists and the U.S. will be blessed in turn, thus linking the latter's military, economic, and cultural power and prosperity with its policies towards Israel above all else.⁸⁹ Additionally, the movement views the idea of God actively cursing those who "curse" Israel as a tangible consequence for the U.S. if it makes the wrong choices. The biblical stories of Israel's total victory over ancient peoples such as the Hittites, and

⁸⁶ Steven Fink, "Fear Under Construction: Islamophobia Within American Christian Zionism," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (2014): 28, <http://doi:10.13169/islastudj.2.1.0026>.

⁸⁷ Alice Bach, "Inside the Christians United for Israel Summit in Washington, D.C., 20-22 July 2010," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 81, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2010.XL.1.078>.

⁸⁸ Durbin, "Trump as God's Instrument," 119.

⁸⁹ Göran Gunner, Robert O. Smith, and Tory Herman, *Comprehending Christian Zionism: Perspectives in Comparison* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 23-25.

God's instructions to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 7 to "utterly destroy them," give life to the clear fatality of such a curse.⁹⁰

A Scripturally Informed Conception of "Pro-Israel"

While it is clear so far that the religious beliefs of Christian Zionists guide them to support Israel, the meaning of this "support" and being "pro-Israel," both for the movement and more broadly, remains less evident. Indeed, despite being anchored by a common dedication and affinity towards Israel and its people, those who self-identify as part of the "pro-Israel" community have widely diverging interpretations of what this support entails in substance. For progressives, such as members of the liberal Jewish lobbying organization J-Street, supporting Israel means advocating for negotiations with the Palestinians to implement the two-state solution and resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁹¹ Criticisms of the Israeli government and its hawkish policies, particularly concerning Palestinians and settlements in the OPT, are therefore both a valid and essential way in which such advocates express their pro-Israel beliefs.⁹² Similarly, the religious framework and conservative ideological underpinnings of Christian Zionism, heavily influenced by a literalist reading of the Bible, translate to specific policy preferences that its members push the U.S., and in some cases, Israel, to adopt.

Within the Christian Zionist movement, two general interpretations of what it means to support Israel are dominant. Both are united by a conviction that the territory comprising Israel,

⁹⁰ Bach, "Christians United for Israel Summit," 81-82.

⁹¹ Joze M. Pelayo, "The Israeli Lobby in American Foreign Policy: How Growing Partisan Support for Israel Could Change the Status Quo," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 23, no. 2/3 (2018): 147-51, <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/scholarly-journals/israeli-lobby-american-foreign-policy-how-growing/docview/2116607547/se-2?accountid=14701>.

⁹² Dov Waxman, "The Israel Lobbies: A Survey of the Pro-Israel Community in the United States," *Israel Studies Forum* 25, no. 1 (2010): 12-13, <https://doi.org/10.3167/isf.2010.250104>.

including at the minimum West Bank and Gaza, was promised by God to Abraham and his descendants in an eternal, irreversible covenant. They view the modern state of Israel as the fulfillment of this promise.⁹³ The first conception of being “pro-Israel” interprets such support principally as ensuring that the Israeli government has the autonomy to make its own decisions without obstruction or pressure. This general belief underlies both forms of support for Israel among Christian Zionists, but is predominant in this first version. Thus, the movement as a whole tends to be highly critical of U.S. policies towards Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that appear to put too much, if any, pressure on the former.⁹⁴ They put specific emphasis on Israel’s requirement for and right to self-defence, especially in the context of terrorist and military attacks by Hamas, Hezbollah, and other militant groups, and tensions between Israel, Iran, and other states in the Middle East.

According to this view, as Israel is faced with many surrounding state and non-state actors that are either ambivalent or openly hostile towards it, it should be able to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure its survival. Such actions are valid and even encouraged, whether in the form of disproportionate reprisals against Hamas that affect civilians in Gaza, or pre-emptive strikes against Iranian nuclear sites and personnel.⁹⁵ U.S. pressure on Israel for certain policy changes, such as the freezing of settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, would hence appear to contradict God’s will by potentially endangering the safety of this divinely sanctioned state. Furthermore, following God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3,

⁹³ Bach, “Christians United for Israel Summit,” 88.

⁹⁴ Tristan Sturm, “Christian Zionism as Religious Nationalism Par Excellence,” *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 24, no. 1 (2017): 17-19, <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/magazines/christian-zionism-as-religious-nationalism-par/docview/2096541246/se-2?accountid=14701>.

⁹⁵ Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 52-55.

such use of power by the U.S. would put it in the camp of those who “curse” Israel, and who will be cursed by God in turn.⁹⁶

Christian Zionists thus overwhelmingly oppose the two-state framework for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on principle, viewing it as an unjust secession of God’s promised land, and a potential security threat if hostile actors were to take control of such a Palestinian state.⁹⁷ At the same time, some notable Christian Zionist elites, such as Ted Haggard and even Hagee, have stated that they would potentially support an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement and a Palestinian state. However, their support would hold only if Israel were to ultimately make such a decision on its own accord and would not feel its national security to be compromised by it.⁹⁸

The second Christian Zionist conception of support for Israel is more territorially maximalist and politically hardline. It goes further beyond the issue of the U.S.’s normative role towards Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though it does align with the first in that it is strongly against U.S. pressure on Israel to make policies that are against its will or perceived national interest. This second interpretation argues that, because of God’s binding covenant with Abraham and the special role of the Jewish people and Israel in biblical prophecy, any territorial compromise, or threat to the existence of a “Greater Israel” beyond its pre-1967 borders, is morally anathema.⁹⁹ Indeed, these compromises would directly block the fulfillment of such prophecy, as laid out in Dispensationalist eschatology. Those Christian Zionists who follow this

⁹⁶ Mohd Afandi Salleh and Hafiz Zakariya, “The American Evangelical Christians and the U.S. Middle East Policy: A Case Study of the Christians United for Israel (CUFI),” *Intellectual Discourse* 20, no. 2 (2012): 142, <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/scholarly-journals/american-evangelical-christians-u-s-middle-east/docview/1285239531/se-2?accountid=14701>.

⁹⁷ Durham, “Protestantism and Foreign Policy,” 156-57.

⁹⁸ Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 172-75.

⁹⁹ Gormly, “Robertson’s 700 Club,” 265-67.

understanding believe that Scripture requires the full restoration of the Jewish diaspora across the territorial expanses of ancient Israel, which some assert span from the Nile to the Euphrates. An additional obligation for the Dispensationalist timeline is the reconstruction of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, which would necessitate the destruction of the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock.¹⁰⁰ The fulfillment of these requirements would be impossible under a two-state solution.

Therefore, Christian Zionists who fall into this second "pro-Israel" camp advocate not only for Israel's right to defend itself against internal and external threats and a seemingly hostile international community. They also oppose all acts, even by the Israeli government, that could lead to a two-state solution or the concession of any Israeli "sovereignty" over occupied lands, even if this sovereignty is of a religious nature, rather than one recognized under international law. What differentiates these even more hawkish Christian Zionists from others in the movement, then, is that they are not afraid to extend their criticisms to the state of Israel itself. This difference is especially notable when and if Israel takes a more conciliatory tone towards peace with the Palestinians, or is not seen as acting harshly enough against opponents like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran.¹⁰¹ Such tendencies also distinguish them from more centrist pro-Israel groups more broadly, such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the largest pro-Israel lobby in the U.S. AIPAC generally supports Israel's policy decisions, regardless of their implications for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the personal views of its members.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Gormly, 267.

¹⁰¹ Faydra L. Shapiro, "'Thank You Israel, for Supporting America': The Transnational Flow of Christian Zionist Resources," *Identities* 19, no. 5 (2012): 626-28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2012.735616>.

¹⁰² Pelayo, "Partisan Support for Israel," 10-12.

God vs Satan: The True Agents of Good and Evil Policies

Another key aspect of the Christian Zionist religious worldview is a generally pessimistic understanding of human agency, largely derived from Dispensationalism, which has vital implications for how the movement frames policies towards Israel. It should be noted that Christian Zionists do not believe that humans, not even God's faithful, can directly influence biblical prophecy, or "help move God's plans forward," by their own will.¹⁰³ The specific date at which the end times will occur is unknowable to humans, although it is inevitable in the tangible future. However, humans are not entirely passive subjects in this prophetic timeline, either. Individual and state actors can choose whether they will stand with God, and act according to His desires for the world as interpreted by Christian Zionists, or if they will stand in His way. Even if humans behave in ways that defy God's plans, He will still prevail in the end. So, although Christian Zionists assert that they cannot directly speed up prophecy, they argue that it is certainly better to be on God's side and avoid incurring His wrath when the Rapture does occur.¹⁰⁴

In particular, Christian Zionist leaders have expressed that, when the Last Judgement occurs, gentile nations will be evaluated based on how they have treated Israel and the Jewish people.¹⁰⁵ Those state and non-state actors whose obstruction of prophecy was in vain will be punished in the end. Thus, despite a more fatalistic understanding of history and free will, Christian Zionists are fervent in their "pro-Israel" activism, not to push forward prophecy, but to act in alignment

¹⁰³ Shapiro, "Taming Tehran," 370-71.

¹⁰⁴ Shapiro, 371.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas R. Getman, "When and How Did Evangelicals Become Zionists?" *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 37, no. 3 (2018): 38, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A544404148/AONE?u=otta77973&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=38bbcaef>.

with God's vision regarding His chosen people. Following God's decree in Romans 15:27 that gentiles must share their material boons with Jews in thanks for the latter's "spiritual blessings,"¹⁰⁶ CUFI, the CBN, and others have donated millions to Israeli social programs, Jewish immigrants to Israel, and in some cases, settlements like Ariel.¹⁰⁷ Christian Zionists also extensively lobby the U.S. government to ensure that its policies follow their desired trajectory, occasionally sending thousands of letters, emails, and calls to the White House and members of Congress to protest pressure on Israel or supposed inaction against Iran.¹⁰⁸

Such beliefs in God's specific plans for and favouring of Israel, and limited human agency in world history, combine with a central element of the Christian Zionist worldview: a Manichean division of the world into the forces of Good and Evil.¹⁰⁹ According to Christian Zionism, a cosmological struggle between God and Satan is the underlying force behind all aspects of world affairs, even those seemingly unrelated to religion or driven by non-believers.¹¹⁰ Members of the movement, particularly those in the second, more hardline "pro-Israel" camp, frequently attribute geopolitical and domestic changes to what they see as God or Satan's intervention, based on this moral binary with a specific focus on issues that touch Israel.¹¹¹

For Christian Zionists, Israel is the axis around which states and individuals are determined to be forces of Good or Evil, influenced respectively by God or Satan. Since God has promised Israel to the Jewish people, made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, and

¹⁰⁶ Durbin, "Trump as God's Instrument," 119-20.

¹⁰⁷ Gunner, Smith, and Herman, *Comprehending Christian Zionism*, 24-28.

¹⁰⁸ Bach, "Christians United for Israel Summit," 90-91.

¹⁰⁹ Sturm, "Religious Nationalism Par Excellence," 8-14.

¹¹⁰ Eric K. Gormly, "Evangelical Solidarity with the Jews: A Veiled Agenda? A Qualitative Content Analysis of Pat Robertson's 700 Club Program," *Review of Religious Research* 46, no. 3 (2005): 257-60, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512555>.

¹¹¹ Durbin, "Trump as God's Instrument," 125.

sworn that He will bless and curse gentiles based on whether they bless or curse Israel, policies and actions deemed “anti-Israel” are seen as a direct challenge against Him.¹¹² Israel and God’s will are consequently conflated with one another, as are Israel’s interests and those of the U.S. Consequently, seemingly multifaceted or unexplainable phenomena affecting certain states and individuals stem directly from God’s judgement, as reward or punishment based on the behaviour of these actors towards Israel.

On the other hand, the movement views Satan as another central figure with clear agency over world events, a foil to God’s virtue and a representation of all that is Evil. Actions contrary to Christian Zionist understandings of being “pro-Israel” are hence not simply questions of policy, interest maximization, or human rights, but are ultimately rooted in Satan’s attempt to counter God’s influence and spread his own.¹¹³ U.S. foreign policy towards Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then, is key to a high-stakes, cosmological drama between the forces of Good and Evil.

Natural Disasters and Assassination: Contingency or Divine Intervention?

This binary worldview has informed the rhetorical strategies used by Christian Zionists in the U.S. when it comes to their government’s policy choices related to Israel. These overarching tendencies, to frame contemporary events through Scripture and the moral dichotomy between God and Satan, come up frequently in the movement’s discourse, popularized by Dispensationalist writers in the 1970s but continuing with force after the Cold War.

¹¹² David L. Johnston, “American Evangelical Islamophobia: A History of Continuity with a Hope for Change,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 51, no. 2 (2016): 230-31, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecu.2016.0018>.

¹¹³ Durbin, “Trump as God’s Instrument,” 120-21.

Thus, in the wake of the stagnating Oslo peace process and the Second Palestinian Intifada, Christian Zionist elites like Evans and Robertson argued that the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 were, in truth, God's punishment for weak U.S. support towards Israel.¹¹⁴ Not only that, but they also viewed the tragedy as a sign that the U.S. was either on the verge of losing, or had already lost, God's favour. Hagee claimed that further attacks would continue if the U.S. persisted down this "path" of "[dividing] the land of Israel," then under Bush II's "Roadmap to Hell."¹¹⁵ Similarly, Christian Zionist writer William Koenig has published books dedicated to God's many interventions in the U.S. as a consequence of Washington's work to establish an Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, including "all recent history of major catastrophes on American soil."¹¹⁶ He, among others, has claimed that Hurricane Katrina was a direct response to supposed U.S. pressure for, or at least support of, Israel's unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005.¹¹⁷ This religiously informed rhetoric frames U.S. policymakers' decisions on Israel as having much wider and fatal consequences for the American people as a whole.

These interpretations have also extended beyond the scope of the U.S. government, not simply to the "anti-Israel" policies of other countries, but even towards Israel itself.¹¹⁸ For example, Robertson received considerable criticism, from Israeli officials and even some fellow Evangelicals and Christian Zionists, for his 2006 comments on Israeli Prime Ministers Ariel Sharon and Yitzhak Rabin, shortly after the former's incapacitating and eventually fatal stroke. Robertson claimed that God had not only personally caused Sharon's stroke to punish him for the Gaza withdrawal, but also caused Rabin's 1995 assassination for agreeing to the creation of a

¹¹⁴ Sturm, "Religion as Nationalism," 312-13.

¹¹⁵ Fink, "Fear Under Construction," 38-39.

¹¹⁶ Sturm, "Religious Nationalism Par Excellence," 16-17.

¹¹⁷ Shapiro, "Christian Zionist Resources," 626; 630.

¹¹⁸ Shapiro, 626.

Palestinian state via the Oslo Accords.¹¹⁹ While he was condemned for these comments, among many others, he remains at the time of writing highly influential in the Christian Zionist movement.¹²⁰ In essence, then, this rhetorical strategy places states and politicians on the movement's moral binary of those with or against God. Christian Zionists base this categorization not on whether such state and non-state actors recognize Israel's legitimacy and right to exist, but on whether they actively push for policies that support Israeli territorial maximalism vis-à-vis the Palestinians.

More recently, this religious worldview and discursive use of Scripture have become especially apparent in the movement's justification of support for former President Trump, during, between, and after the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. In the aftermath of his surprise victory over Hillary Clinton, widely seen as an electoral upset, scholars, journalists, and many others have pondered the seeming paradox that Evangelical Christians voted in such high numbers for Trump. They note that Trump's reputation appears to largely contradict Evangelical values, as a two-time divorcee known for lying and infidelity, and not for his religiosity.¹²¹ While the Christian Right, and particularly Evangelicals, have formed the Republican Party's loyal base since the 1980s, the figure of 81% of white Evangelicals voting for Trump in 2016 was notable, being even higher than the share received by Bush II, a practicing born-again Christian.¹²² Furthermore, this demographic continued to be Trump's most supportive constituency by far throughout his presidency.¹²³ Multiple factors underly this support, such as Trump's appeal as a

¹¹⁹ Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 150-52.

¹²⁰ Sturm, "Religious Nationalism Par Excellence," 13-14.

¹²¹ Michael Massing, "Making Sense of Evangelicals' Support for Trump," *The Guardian*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/07/evangelical-americans-trump-supporters-progressives>.

¹²² Colter Louwse and Ron Dart, "Donald Trump and the Christian Zionist Lobby: Letter from Canada," *The Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 16, no. 2 (2017): 28, <https://doi.org/10.3366/hlps.2017.0167>.

¹²³ Gitlin, "For the Love of Sin," 74.

“defender” of conservative Christian values in the U.S., in a context where the Christian Right feels “under siege.”¹²⁴

For the Christian Zionist movement, however, religiously framed justifications specific to Trump’s position on Israel hold critical importance. Christian Zionists like Evans, Perry Stone, and former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have frequently cast Trump as a modern-day Cyrus the Great, the Persian King who freed Jewish exiles from their Babylonian captivity, and have made similar comparisons to Queen Esther.¹²⁵ Both appear in the Bible as unlikely figures that help God to advance His will. They have notably influenced a common rhetorical tactic in Christian Zionist discourse, which is to claim that God uses certain humans, particularly gentiles, non-believers, or those otherwise “ungodly,” as His instruments, acting through them to further His agenda for the world. Beyond Trump, Christian Zionists have also identified historical figures that were guided directly by God, even if unknowingly, because of their pivotal role in the establishment of the modern state of Israel. Such conduits include Arthur Balfour, Harry Truman, and Richard Nixon, among others. On one highly controversial occasion, Hagee even claimed that Adolf Hitler was a “hunter” mentioned in Scripture, sent to drive the Jewish diaspora to Palestine, remarks that led then-presidential candidate John McCain to reject Hagee’s endorsement.¹²⁶

Accordingly, despite his moral flaws, Trump’s fervently “pro-Israel” Middle East policies are proof for Christian Zionists that God used him for divine purposes à la King Cyrus, thus

¹²⁴ Philip S. Gorski, “Why Evangelicals Voted for Trump: A Critical Cultural Sociology,” *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2017): 338-44, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-017-0043-9>.

¹²⁵ Hanne Amanda Trangerud, “The American Cyrus: How an Ancient King Became a Political Tool for Voter Mobilization,” *Religions* 12, no. 354 (2021): 18-20, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050354>.

¹²⁶ Durbin, “Trump as God’s Instrument,” 121.

necessitating their strong support.¹²⁷ Sean Durbin notes that Hagee attributed Trump's seemingly "impossible" successes in the Republican primaries, and his eventual victory over Clinton, to God's intervention, favouring Trump due to his "bold" articulation of his support for Israel.¹²⁸ Christian Zionist rhetoric on Trump and U.S.-Israeli relations would be exceptionally partisan and polarizing in this context, especially through strategic comparisons with the previous presidency of Barack Obama. Although policy towards Israel under Obama remained substantively consistent overall with previous administrations, his famously poor relationship with Netanyahu, exacerbated by his efforts on the Iran nuclear deal, provided fodder to Christian Zionist claims that Obama was anti-Israel.¹²⁹ They argued that years of Obama's anti-Zionism had cursed the U.S., as per Genesis 12:1-3, evidenced by domestic social discord, the Great Recession, and the further decline of U.S. hegemony internationally.¹³⁰ God had chosen Trump to redeem the U.S. by realigning its policies on Israel with His will, including moving the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, imposing new sanctions on Iran, and recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. The long-term interests and prosperity of the U.S. thus become inseparable from Israel's.

This religious framework guiding Christian Zionist discourse paints support for Israel in stark, binary, and highly partisan terms. Supporting Israel equates to blessing Israel. One can only sufficiently bless Israel through policies championed by the U.S. and Israeli right-wing, which are conflated with God's will. Ultimately, I assert that for Christian Zionists, the U.S. partisan divide between progressives and conservatives is aligned now more than ever with their

¹²⁷ P.R. Kumaraswamy, "Trump Legalizes Israeli Settlements," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 7, no. 2 (June 2020): 123-24, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1177%2F2347798920901881>.

¹²⁸ Durbin, "Trump as God's Instrument," 124-25.

¹²⁹ Bach, "Christians United for Israel Summit," 84-89.

¹³⁰ Durbin, "Trump as God's Instrument," 125-126.

Manichean understanding of the world as divided into the forces of Satan and God, respectively. At the least, Christian Zionists understand support for Israel as being unconditional, necessitating the complete lifting of any pressure on the Israeli government to make peace with the Palestinians. At the most, being “pro-Israel” translates to active support for Israeli territorial maximalism, including the annexation of the OPT and the rejection of the two-state framework.¹³¹ Thus, despite increasing U.S. aid to Israel under a 2016 memorandum of understanding,¹³² Obama’s yet insufficient support placed him firmly against God in the Christian Zionist moral binary, explaining accusations by Lindsey and others that he could be the Antichrist.¹³³ As will be discussed next, the frequent accompanying claims that this supposed Antichrist is also a secret Muslim are not a coincidence, but rather a key form of Christian Zionism’s religious worldview in action.

Muslims and Islam: The Islamofascist Threat Against God

Muslims and Islam writ-large have taken on an increasingly prominent role as a theme in Christian Zionist discourse. Compared to other demographic groups in the U.S., it is Christian Zionism’s main base, Evangelical Christians in general and white Evangelicals in particular, that holds the most negative attitudes towards Islam.¹³⁴ As discussed by David L. Johnston and Thomas S. Kidd, such distrustful views and overall prejudice towards Muslims in the U.S. have

¹³¹ Mae Elise Cannon, “In Their Own Right: Evangelical Rejection of Palestinian Human Rights and Dignity,” *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 25, no. 1/2 (2020): 59-60, <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/scholarly-journals/their-own-right-evangelical-rejection-palestinian/docview/2448458339/se-2?accountid=14701>.

¹³² “The Evolution of US-Israel Relations,” *The International Institute for Strategic Studies* 22, no. 8 (2016): ix, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2016.1254425>.

¹³³ Miller, “Israel and US Foreign Policy,” 13.

¹³⁴ “How the U.S. general public views Muslims and Islam,” *Pew Research Center*, Washington, D.C., July 2017, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/how-the-u-s-general-public-views-muslims-and-islam/>.

existed among Evangelicals and the wider public since as early as the 17th century.¹³⁵ However, geopolitical changes in the latter half of the 20th century, such as the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and the proliferation of highly publicized Islamic terrorist groups, further galvanized such attitudes towards Islam. After the Cold War, the broad concept of “radical Islam” replaced the Soviet Union in the minds of conservative Evangelicals as the ultimate enemy of a then hegemonic U.S.¹³⁶ This view would sharply solidify after the September 11 terrorist attacks by Al Qaeda, the War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan, the rise of Daesh, and continued Israeli and U.S. tensions with Iran, among other issues, all of which Christian Zionists link strongly back to Israel.

Overall, Christian Zionists view Islam as a dangerous, foreign, and often evil or Satanic other, based on their Manichean worldview in which treatment of Israel by state and non-state actors, including broad religious movements, is the key indicator of their identity as Good or Evil. In particular, Christian Zionists interpret Muslims in general, although especially “radical Islamists” and the leadership of Muslim-majority states, as not only hostile to the U.S., but diametrically opposed to Israel’s existence. Several factors fuel this understanding, including inflammatory rhetoric by the leadership of Iran, Syria, and other states, military conflicts between Israel and Islamist groups like Hamas, and a perception of Palestinian officials as duplicitous and unwilling to negotiate with the Israelis.¹³⁷ It should also be noted that there exists a strong tendency among Christian Zionists to conflate not only Arabs and Palestinians with

¹³⁵ Johnston, “American Evangelical Islamophobia,” 224-26.

¹³⁶ Sturm, “Religion as Nationalism,” 309-11.

¹³⁷ Roberts and Whittock, *Trump and the Puritans*, 110-11.

Muslims, but Islam as a whole with the different forms of radical Islamism that drive certain terrorist groups.¹³⁸

This generalization and “othering” of Muslims occur frequently in the movement’s discourse, and are based above all on the supposed “threat” of Islam. Principally, Christian Zionist leaders such as Robertson have characterized Islam as a violent religion at its core, with Falwell once claiming that the Prophet Mohammed was a terrorist.¹³⁹ Writer Chuck Missler, for example, had claimed that the ultimate goal of Muslims and Islam is to dominate the world under an Islamic Caliphate, where non-Muslims would be forced to convert or submit.¹⁴⁰ Walid Shoebat has taken such ideas even further, using his supposed insider knowledge as a “former Palestinian Muslim terrorist” to argue that Islamic terrorism is not an aberration from Islam, but actually represents its “true teachings.”¹⁴¹

As such, Christian Zionists view the Palestinian leadership and Palestinians in general with specific suspicion, a mistrust exacerbated by the 2006 electoral victory of Hamas, its seizure of power in Gaza, and failed Israeli-Palestinian peace talks blamed squarely on Palestinian deceit. They argue that the ultimate goal of the Palestinians, who are once more reduced to a Muslim monolith, is to destroy the state of Israel, a first step for Muslims to eventually conquer the U.S. and the entire world. Thus, Israel also has a key strategic role for Christian Zionists as the final bulwark against this irrational Islamic aggression. Asserting that all Muslims have a binary view of Israel and the U.S. as the “Great Satan,” Christian Zionists like Hagee have used such rhetoric on Islam’s nefarious nature to argue that Israel cannot reasonably and morally

¹³⁸ Mayer, “Israel’s New Best Friends?” 706.

¹³⁹ Rynhold, *American Political Culture*, 102.

¹⁴⁰ Fink, “Fear Under Construction,” 34-35.

¹⁴¹ Fink, 28-29; 32-34.

negotiate or concede land. A hawkish military response is the only optimal policy choice regarding the Palestinians, Iran, and other Islamic threats.¹⁴²

Given that Islam's violent core firmly places it on the side that "curses" Israel according to Genesis 12:1-3, Christian Zionists use rhetorical strategies to paint Islam on the side of Satan, as per their moral binary. First, despite their similarities and common roots as Abrahamic religions, Christian Zionists fervently work to differentiate and distance Islam from Christianity, as well as Judaism. In particular, they are strongly opposed to any claims that Muslims share the same God, heritage, or traditions as Christians and Jews. They assert that since the Allah of the Quran supposedly decrees the destruction of Yahweh's chosen people, the Jews, Bush II was inherently mistaken when he praised Islam as a peace-loving religion that worships the same God as he does.¹⁴³ At the worst, Allah is either a pagan Moon God, according to Christian Zionists Vincent Kuhn and Eleanor Davis,¹⁴⁴ or Muslims directly worship and are agents of Satan.¹⁴⁵ Some Dispensationalists have even raised the notion that the Antichrist who will lead the world into the Great Tribulation will be Muslim, deceiving the Islamic *ummah* by taking the form of the Mahdi, a Messianic prophet in Islamic eschatology.¹⁴⁶ Hence, in addition to a cosmological clash between the forces of good and evil, the Battle of Armageddon could also be one between Christians and Muslims, the allies and enemies of Israel, respectively.

Beyond distancing Christianity and Judaism from Islam and portraying the latter as Satanic, another key rhetorical tactic of Christian Zionists is to compare Muslims with the Nazis.

¹⁴² Gormly, "Robertson's 700 Club," 263-64.

¹⁴³ Durham, "Protestantism and Foreign Policy," 148-50.

¹⁴⁴ Shapiro, "Taming Tehran," 369-70.

¹⁴⁵ Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 91-93.

¹⁴⁶ Johnston, "American Evangelical Islamophobia," 233-34.

Figures like former Republican Senator Rick Santorum make this link by referring to Muslims, radical or not, as Islamofascists, grouping Islam with the Italian and German extreme-right and racist regimes of the 1930s.¹⁴⁷ This strategy plays an important role in helping Christian Zionists emphasize the supposed broad anti-Semitism that is inherent to Islam. Bauer, Hagee, and Robertson have all directly asserted that violent Islamofascism is at least as threatening to Israel and the Jews today as Hitler and the Nazis were in the past, if not much worse.¹⁴⁸

Claims that supposed Islamofascists such as the late PLO leader Yasir Arafat are the successors to Nazism, the U.S.'s enemy during World War II and one of the most cited examples in the U.S. of absolute evil, also have a specific and practical purpose. In so doing, Christian Zionists create a salient narrative to justify hawkish U.S. policies in the Middle East. Lindsey, for example, delegitimized the 2007 Annapolis Conference for U.S.-brokered negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians by likening it to the 1938 Munich Agreement, in which Great Britain and France allowed Nazi Germany to take control of the Sudetenland.¹⁴⁹

These comparisons imply that, when crafting its approach to the Middle East, including policies on Israel, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Islamic terrorism, and Iran, the U.S. must remember these lessons from the past, lest it be doomed to repeat them. Just as appeasing the Nazis was a mistake that cost millions of lives, Christian Zionists argue that a peace agreement with the Palestinians may lead to a second Holocaust and mass destruction.¹⁵⁰ The U.S. should thus avoid neutrality in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and stand firmly with Israel, as per Ted Cruz's avowed policy promise during his 2016 campaign for the Republican presidential

¹⁴⁷ Spector, *Americans and Evangelicals*, 64-72.

¹⁴⁸ Spector, 71-2.

¹⁴⁹ Rynhold, *American Political Culture*, 106-7.

¹⁵⁰ Fink, "Fear Under Construction," 37.

nomination.¹⁵¹ The only appropriate response to Islamic terror, whether by Palestinians or others, is the use of strong military force against those state and non-state actors that would threaten Israel in any way.

The movement's attitudes towards and rhetoric on Iran are a particularly instructive case of this othering. Iran takes on an exceptionally critical role for Christian Zionists as the gravest contemporary threat that Israel faces, on an existential level. Alice Bach has noted that during CUFI's annual summit in Washington in 2010, Iran featured as one of the most discussed themes, surpassing any talk of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even for those workshops and speeches that did not at first glance appear to relate to Tehran.¹⁵²

Christian Zionists express concern over Iran for multiple reasons, chiefly due to its political tensions with the U.S. and Israel and its associated hostile rhetoric. Such conflict was especially the case under the conservative presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from 2005 to 2013, who called for the destruction of the "Zionist regime" and denied the gravity of the Holocaust.¹⁵³ Compounded to these issues are the development of Iran's nuclear program, and its use of proxy forces such as Hezbollah to assert its bid for regional dominance in the Middle East vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. These factors lead Christian Zionists to fear that an Iranian attack on Israel is imminent, which Pastor Hagee sees as the fulfillment of prophecy in the form of the Gog-Magog War.¹⁵⁴ Of all the Muslim-majority states and Islamic actors that have been compared to Nazism, Iran and its leadership are among the most commonly cited in Christian

¹⁵¹ Durbin, "Trump as God's Instrument," 123-24.

¹⁵² Bach, "Christians United for Israel Summit," 81-4.

¹⁵³ Salleh and Zakariya, "Case Study of the Christians United for Israel," 157.

¹⁵⁴ Durbin, "Trump as God's Instrument," 119.

Zionist discourse. Christian Zionists have dubbed Iran as the Fourth Reich,¹⁵⁵ and either Ahmadinejad or Ayatollah Khamenei as the “new Hitler,” imminent threats to Israel’s existence that could usher in a Third World War.¹⁵⁶

U.S. policy towards this contemporary revival of the Nazi regime thus becomes especially partisan under this interpretation, particularly because of the Iran nuclear deal, a key policy platform of the Obama administration that divided Democrats and Republicans. The latter was extremely opposed to the deal, alongside AIPAC and the Israeli government, leading Netanyahu to express his dissent during a joint session of Congress at the invitation of then-Republican House Majority leader John Boehner.¹⁵⁷ This was a notable case not only of Israeli intervention in U.S. foreign policy, but also of Congressional Democrats, traditionally highly “pro-Israel,” voting in support of something that Israel viewed as an existential threat.¹⁵⁸ To Christian Zionists, the deal was effectively a gift to Iran in the form of tacit U.S. permission to develop nuclear weapons for its ultimate goal of destroying Israel and conquering the West, in the name of a Satanic religion that drives them to irrationally hate the U.S. and Israel.¹⁵⁹

Iran’s role in Christian Zionist discourse hence serves as the ultimate epitome of the Muslim threat to all that is good and godly. This rhetoric, combined with a similar demonization of Palestinians and other groups associated with Islam, reflects and reinforces partisan divisions in the U.S. over its policies towards Israel and Muslim-majority states in the Middle East. Once again, Christian Zionist discourse works to justify the movement’s preferred U.S. policies in the

¹⁵⁵ Bach, “Christians United for Israel Summit,” 87.

¹⁵⁶ Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 68-73.

¹⁵⁷ Cavari and Nyer, “Congressional Support for Israel,” 10-12; 34-38.

¹⁵⁸ Ben White, *Cracks in the Wall: Beyond Apartheid in Palestine/Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 75-76, <http://doi:10.2307/j.ctvqhtht>.

¹⁵⁹ Durbin, “Trump as God’s Instrument,” 123.

region, which largely tend to be approaches favoured among the contemporary U.S. political right. In the case of its rhetoric on Islam, the movement paints a dire context of a Jewish state surrounded by anti-Semitic, barbarous, and dogmatic enemies. Accordingly, a hawkish policy towards the latter, as well as unconditional support and allyship with the former, become the only moral options.

Judaism and the *Judeo-Christian Western Civilization*

This Christian Zionist othering of Islam and Muslim-majority states is coupled with an inverse treatment of the Jewish people, Judaism, and Israel. Taking a page out of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, Christian Zionists in the post-Cold War period, such as Pastor Hagee, have grouped Jews and Christians in the West into an integrated Judeo-Christian Civilization, unified against the Satanic and evil forces of Islam.¹⁶⁰ As with Islam, Arabs, and Islamic terrorism, it should be noted that the tendency to conflate the Jewish people as a whole with Israel is widespread and often intentional in the movement, given the prevalence of eschatological beliefs requiring the restoration of the Jewish diaspora to Israel.¹⁶¹ When Christian Zionists discuss the morals of the Jewish people and the necessity for the U.S. to support them, they are often implicitly referring to Israelis and the more conservative Jews behind groups like AIPAC, rather than the majority of liberal and increasingly secular American Jews.¹⁶²

While Jews and Israel are at the heart of the movement's beliefs, its relationship with them has not been without its share of difficulties, at times major. Indeed, Christian Zionists have

¹⁶⁰ Salleh and Zakariya, "Case Study of the Christians United for Israel," 148-49.

¹⁶¹ Amstutz, *American Foreign Policy*, 141-42.

¹⁶² Roberts and Whittock, *Trump and the Puritans*, 108.

not been immune to the broad, historic influence of anti-Semitism on both Christendom and the wider U.S. public, most notably before the Holocaust.¹⁶³ On the one hand, Christian Zionists do not follow the supersessionist beliefs that Christ's crucifixion invalidated God's covenant with the Jews, nor that Christians have replaced Jews as God's chosen people, views that have served as an impetus for Christian anti-Semitism.¹⁶⁴ Nonetheless, there does exist a more "functional" interpretation of the Jewish role in Dispensationalism, in which the value of the Jewish people is rooted solely in their ability to initiate biblical prophecy, which would eventually lead to their eradication or conversion.¹⁶⁵ Such views were especially dominant in the pre-World War II era. Similarly, missionary efforts to convert Jews to Christianity, based on a belief that they need to be "saved," continue to exist among some Christian Zionists, which has at times caused discord between this movement, Jewish groups, and the Israeli government and Knesset.¹⁶⁶

However, since at least the 1967 June War and the establishment of ties between Christian Zionists and the state of Israel in the mid-1970s, these general attitudes began to adjust. In the post-Cold War context, it was the September 11 attacks, as well as the Second Intifada and a related rise in suicide attacks within Israel, that chiefly catalyzed these changes. Cultural affinities have long been a rationale for Christian Zionists and Americans alike to support Israel. But these events, along with remorse over centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, contributed to what Tristan Sturm describes as a process in which Christian Zionists have come to conceptually view Jews and Israel as "insiders," contrasted with a rhetorical exclusion of Islam.¹⁶⁷ In the wake

¹⁶³ Chip Berlet, *Trumping Democracy in the United States: From Ronald Reagan to Alt-Right* (London: Routledge, 2018), 77-79; 112, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315438412>.

¹⁶⁴ Rynhold, *American Political Culture*, 129-31.

¹⁶⁵ Sturm, "Religious Nationalism Par Excellence," 9-10.

¹⁶⁶ Ariel, "Israel in Evangelical Thought," 473-76.

¹⁶⁷ Sturm, "Religion as Nationalism," 310-12.

of the September 11 attacks, for example, Robertson's *The 700 Club* extensively promoted the narrative that Israel and the U.S. were intimately linked by a common struggle against Islamic violence. The television program juxtaposed scenes of sympathetic Israelis, who had already faced years of Palestinian attacks in cafés and buses, with footage of Palestinians supposedly celebrating the fall of the World Trade Center.¹⁶⁸

Christian Zionists in the U.S. have thus rhetorically coupled Judaism, Christianity, and their followers together in the form of a “Judeo-Christian Civilization” that is in an existential battle against its hateful Muslim counterparts. In comparison to their distancing tactics vis-à-vis Islam, Christian Zionists have conversely underlined the Jewish roots of Christianity, the debt Americans and Christians alike owe to Judaism and Israel, and the hardships that Jews have suffered.¹⁶⁹ The former Republican governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee aptly summarized these tendencies when discussing his Jewish friends' perplexity at his deep support for Israel, noting that Christ was Jewish and that “if there weren't a Jewish faith, there wouldn't be a Christian faith.”¹⁷⁰

Many Christian Zionists have even reinterpreted some of their guiding Dispensationalist beliefs to better account for the fate of the Jewish people during the end times. According to one such eschatological adjustment, Christians will instead only be raptured after they have faced the Great Tribulation together with Jews and non-believers.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, the movement's leaders have also tended to justify their support for Israel in major conferences more on the shared

¹⁶⁸ Gormly, “Robertson's 700 Club,” 262-63.

¹⁶⁹ Daniel E. Zoughbie, *Indecision Points: George W. Bush and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014), 128, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/10020.001.0001>.

¹⁷⁰ Sturm, “Religious Nationalism Par Excellence,” 16.

¹⁷¹ Sturm, 9-11.

Scripture of Jews and Christians in the Book of Genesis, rather than referring to New Testament prophecy. Such restraint is likely an acknowledgement of the ambivalence and discomfort among some Jews and Israelis towards their supposed role in the end times.¹⁷²

This eschatological adaptation adds important nuance to the evolution of Christian Zionism. Scholarship and media coverage have commonly generalized the movement as holding a monolithic, extremist, and utilitarian view of the Jews and the land of Israel based solely on biblical prophecy.¹⁷³ The above-mentioned changes make sense given the now decades-long relationships and networks forged between Israelis and U.S. Christian Zionists, accompanied by the latter's ever-deepening admiration for Israel. Such theological and rhetorical adjustments have thus helped the movement adapt to this new context, creating a narrative in which Jews and Christians, as well as Americans and Israelis, are co-civilizationists, with this Judeo-Christian civilization finding its necessary other in Islam.

At the same time, the movement's ambiguous conflation of the state of Israel with the broader Jewish diaspora takes on markedly partisan dimensions in the context of polarization in the U.S. under the Trump administration and beyond. Because they also interpret being "pro-Israel" as entailing unconditional support for the state of Israel's actions, Christian Zionists are prone to view any criticisms of the Israeli government and its policies as inherently anti-Semitic.¹⁷⁴ There is validity to this concern, as some critiques of Israel do indeed have anti-Semitic undertones and intentions, particularly among contemporary neo-Nazi groups.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 24-31.

¹⁷³ Gunner, Smith, and Herman, *Comprehending Christian Zionism*, 80.

¹⁷⁴ Durbin, "Trump as God's Instrument," 131-33.

¹⁷⁵ Benjamin Bland, "Holocaust Inversion, Anti-Zionism and British Neo-Fascism: The Israel-Palestine Conflict and the Extreme Right in Post-War Britain," *Patterns of Prejudice* 53, no. 1 (2019): 90-94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2018.1536347>.

However, there also exist many cases where Christian Zionists have used the claim of anti-Semitism politically to delegitimize genuine concerns over Israel's human rights record towards the Palestinians, particularly those raised by international institutions like the UN.¹⁷⁶

Accordingly, they frame these criticisms of Israeli policies, such as its use of force in Gaza during the 2021 Israel-Palestine crisis, as driven ultimately by Satan, who Hagee claims created anti-Semitism to obstruct God's plans.¹⁷⁷

Christian Zionists have also used these rhetorical strategies, of conflating Jews with Israel and criticisms of the latter's policies with anti-Semitism, to once more justify their support for Trump, this time in light of rising incidents of anti-Semitism in the U.S. and abroad.¹⁷⁸ In response to claims that Trump has emboldened an increasingly assertive radical-right, epitomized by the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Christian Zionists assert that the then-President was the "best friend" to American Jews because of his policy record on Israel.¹⁷⁹ In this way, Trump's own problematic rhetoric regarding Jews, including his refusal to denounce white supremacists and a private utterance that Jews are "only in it for themselves," are forgiven in turn by his "blessing" of Israel.¹⁸⁰

This paradoxical but growing association of controversial right-wing figures in the U.S. with militantly "pro-Israel" platforms, despite their clear support for and affiliations with far-right beliefs and actors, illustrates the extent to which Israel has become a divisive, partisan issue in

¹⁷⁶ Josh Kaplan, "Contesting Anti-Semitism: Human Rights, Israel Bashing, and the Making of a Non-Problem," *Anthropological Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (2010): 437-38 <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.0.0126>.

¹⁷⁷ Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 90.

¹⁷⁸ Kaplan, "Contesting Anti-Semitism," 432-35.

¹⁷⁹ Durbin, "Trump as God's Instrument," 131.

¹⁸⁰ Jonathan Chait, "Report: Trump Said Jews Are 'Only in It for Themselves,'" *New York Magazine*, September 23, 2020, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/09/trump-anti-semite-said-jews-are-only-in-it-for-themselves-racism.html>.

the U.S. As I have outlined in this section, Christian Zionist discourse, principally the application of its theological and Manichean worldview to U.S. and Israeli policy, Muslims, and Jews, has adapted and contributed to these divisions through such methods as pardoning Trump's faults. Next, I turn to a key aspect of how the movement's discourse has further reinforced this polarization: namely, the increasing parallels its overarching narrative and rhetoric shares with that of the Western contemporary far-right.

Section 4: A Discursive Link with the Western Far-Right?

Thus far, I have argued that in the post-Cold War era, Christian Zionist ideology and discourse have helped transform what it means to be "pro-Israel" into a hawkish policy pillar of the Republican Party. Alongside this evolution of the movement's rhetoric on Israel have occurred significant ideological and organizational shifts in movements and parties on the contemporary political right in the West, most notably in the 1980s and beyond. For ease of categorization, I will follow Cas Mudde's conceptual framework in referring to this broad movement as the Western far-right, comprising extreme and radical-right groups whose "core ideology... combines nativism, authoritarianism, and populism."¹⁸¹

In this section, I assert that these separate but linked processes have led to a convergence between key aspects of Christian Zionist discourse and rhetoric increasingly prominent among the Western far-right, especially its growing mainstream and moderate portions. These discursive similarities have significant implications for the future of U.S. support for Israel at the official level and among broader public opinion. They reflect growing political polarization between Democrats and Republicans in the U.S., as well as between the political left and right in Europe,

¹⁸¹ Mudde, *The Far Right*, 1-3.

Israel, and elsewhere. However, they are in turn an important mechanism that helps sustain the U.S. partisan divide regarding Israel. Below, I will analyze the far-right's heavy focus on Islam, its changing attitudes towards Jews and Israel, and its conspiratorial and apocalyptic framework, underpinned by essentialist notions of race and culture. Throughout, I will discuss how these rhetorical elements demonstrate important parallels with Christian Zionist thinking and discourse when it comes to Israel.

Islam at the Gates of Vienna: The Muslim Threat to the West

Similarly to Christian Zionism in the U.S., anti-Islamic attitudes and rhetoric grew in importance for Western far-right movements in the 1980s and 1990s, with the fall of the “evil empire” of the Soviet Union, and have exceptionally flourished since the early 21st century.¹⁸² In Europe, these sentiments developed in no small part from rising immigrant rates from Muslim-majority states.¹⁸³ However, this period's spike in Islamic terrorist activity, notably in Europe, and related media coverage have also been vital contributors, especially for the U.S. in the context of the War on Terror and the September 11 attacks.¹⁸⁴

In Europe, far-right parties both nationally and supranationally have effectively made skepticism towards Islam a key pillar of their policy platforms, through such proposals as limiting or banning Muslim immigration, the building of mosques, and the wearing of the veil.¹⁸⁵ Grassroots movements like the English Defense League and the “Stop Islamization of Europe” network have also emerged specifically to fight against Muslim influence, while in the

¹⁸² Farid Hafez, “Shifting Borders: Islamophobia as Common Ground for Building Pan-European Right-Wing Unity,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 48, no. 5 (2014): 481-82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2014.965877>.

¹⁸³ Hafez, “Shifting Borders,” 480-82.

¹⁸⁴ Benjamin Lee, “Why We Fight: Understanding the Counter-Jihad Movement,” *Religion Compass* 10, no. 10 (2016): 262, <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12208>.

¹⁸⁵ Hafez, “Shifting Borders,” 494-95.

Netherlands, Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom has become a successful "single-issue anti-Islam party."¹⁸⁶ In the U.S., meanwhile, the anti-Islamic far-right has had considerable successes. Firstly, it has gained ground in the form of the counter-jihad movement, comprising a national network of "think tanks" and other organizations, including ACT! For America, Jihad Watch, the Middle East Forum, and the Tea Party movement, and which has also forged links in Europe. Secondly, it has co-opted much of the Republican Party, particularly its more hardline factions, as demonstrated by the rise of Trump and his appointment of officials like John Bolton and Steve Bannon, figures in the counter-jihad movement.¹⁸⁷

Despite the heterogeneity of these far-right movements, they are united by a view of Islam as a direct, existential threat to Western civilization, culture, and the white race, references to which are increasingly replaced by the less directly racialized idea of a "European" culture.¹⁸⁸ Like Christian Zionists, these far-right actors similarly argue that Islam is a fundamentally militant dogma that encourages terrorism, and is utterly incompatible with Western culture and values, including democracy, freedom, tolerance, and even liberalism.¹⁸⁹ They pay specific attention to the supposed demographic menace that Muslims pose to Western states, with Trump claiming, for example, that Muslim immigrants are unwilling and unable to assimilate into U.S. society.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Ed Pertwee, "Donald Trump, the Anti-Muslim Far Right and the New Conservative Revolution," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43, no. 16 (2020): 211-13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1749688>.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Marinov and Daniel Stockemer, "The Spread of Anti-Islamic Sentiment: A Comparison Between the United States and Western Europe," *Politics & Policy* 48, no. 3 (2020): 416-18, <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12354>.

¹⁸⁸ Lee, "Why We Fight," 260-61.

¹⁸⁹ Rosemary Hancock, "National Security, Islamophobia, and Religious Freedom in the U.S.," *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 4, no. 1 (2018): 11-13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20566093.2017.1390657>.

¹⁹⁰ Marinov and Stockemer, "Anti-Islamic Sentiment," 421-22.

In essence, the far-right highly generalizes Muslims as a foreign, racialized, nefarious other, pitted against a rational and enlightened Western civilization. They essentialize Islam as a homogenous movement, viewing Muslims as an unthinking, culturally backwards, and indoctrinated mass, who all work in tandem to promote Jihad against the West, consciously or not.¹⁹¹ Once more, comparisons between Islam and Nazism are also common, with National Rally leader Marine Le Pen drawing parallels to Muslims “praying on French streets [with] the invasion of France by Nazi Germany.”¹⁹² Following this logic, if Western states fail to stand up to this Muslim threat through a proud assertion of their traditional values, cultural patriotism, and military might, they will ultimately lose in their civilizational clash with this Islamic other. Indeed, the message that the European far-right transmits to the U.S. is that Europe, the front-line of this battle, has already been lost to Islam. Thus, those across the Atlantic must now do what they can to learn from this defeat and prepare by taking a tougher stance on Islam, of which anti-Sharia legislation implemented in many U.S. states is an example.¹⁹³

To be sure, there are some important differences between the contemporary Western far-right and U.S. Christian Zionists when it comes to their discourse on Islam. Chiefly, the role of religion is notably more absent for the former, who instead prefer to fuse the cultural, religious, and “racial” elements of Islam and the West into broad civilization blocks.¹⁹⁴ Religion consequently takes a more secondary role as one aspect of the wider Western and Islamic “cultures.” In addition, some far-right groups like the French National Rally use their rhetoric

¹⁹¹ Lee, “Why We Fight,” 260.

¹⁹² Hafez, “Shifting Borders,” 485; see also Marinov and Stockemer, “Anti-Islamic Sentiment,” 422-23.

¹⁹³ Marinov and Stockemer, “Anti-Islamic Sentiment,” 417-20.

¹⁹⁴ Monika Bobako, “The Palestinian Knot: The ‘New Anti-Semitism’, Islamophobia and the Question of Postcolonial Europe,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 35, no. 3 (2018): 100-107, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276417708859>.

on Islam to paint themselves as the defenders of more progressive values, such as the rights of women and sexual minorities, a notable departure from Christian Zionism's strong social conservatism.¹⁹⁵ However, the far-right's dichotomous depiction of an enlightened West facing an evil and irrational Islamic threat closely mirrors Christian Zionist rhetoric of Islam as satanic and destructive.

Conspiratorial Thinking

Scholars of the far-right have highlighted the key role that conspiracy theories, as well as a more general “political paranoia,” play in the discourse of these movements.¹⁹⁶ Although far-right intellectuals, politicians, and rank-and-file internauts have articulated various versions of conspiracy theory, several overarching elements stand out as critical. In general, those on the far-right view multilateral institutions, especially the UN and the European Union (EU), as dominated by a cabal of cosmopolitan, leftist, “managerial” elites, who use such organizations as covers for malicious plots of world domination, in the form of a unified global government.¹⁹⁷ In the 21st century, the sinister intentions and role of “radical” Muslims have also been integrated as crucial components of this master narrative, as the implementors of either their own plans or those of “cultural Marxist” elites.¹⁹⁸ For example, one such theory claiming that the Muslim Brotherhood was plotting to take over the U.S. government proliferated in the 2000s, notably

¹⁹⁵ Bodo Kahmann, “‘The Most Ardent Pro-Israel Party’: Pro-Israel Attitudes and Anti-Antisemitism Among Populist Radical-Right Parties in Europe,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 51, no. 5 (2017): 400-401, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2017.1394663>; see also Lee, “Why We Fight,” 261.

¹⁹⁶ Andrew Fergus Wilson, “The Bitter End: Apocalypse and Conspiracy in White Nationalist Responses to the Islamic State Attacks in Paris,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 51, no. 5 (2017): 412, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2017.1398963>.

¹⁹⁷ Iskander Rehman, “Rise of the Reactionaries: The American Far Right and U.S. Foreign Policy,” *The Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2018): 33-38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1406706>; see also Rita Abrahamsen et al., “Confronting the International Political Sociology of the New Right,” *International Political Sociology* 14, no. 1 (2020): 94-107, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olaa001>.

¹⁹⁸ Hafez, “Shifting Borders,” 490-92.

with Obama's rise to the presidency and related speculation over his "true" nationality and religion.¹⁹⁹

One broad far-right conspiracy theory that has gained considerable discursive traction in the context of the European refugee crisis in the 2010s focuses on migrants from the Middle East, particularly so-called "Muslim invaders" from Muslim-majority states.²⁰⁰ Many on the far-right, especially those in the counter-jihad movement, claim that these migrants are either the knowing or unwitting agents of leftist international elites.²⁰¹ According to this theory, these elites and their organizations orchestrated Muslim migration to Europe to eradicate the continent's indigenous cultures, leading to a Europe dominated by Islam and Shariah Law, or in more radical versions, the destruction of the white race in Europe.²⁰² Bat Ye'or, a notable Swedish-Israeli writer in the counter-jihad movement, is responsible for the most widely known articulation of this conspiracy theory, outlined in her book *Eurabia*. Within, she argues that EU officials, through the now-defunct Euro-Arab Dialogue, allowed Muslims from the Arab League to invade Europe demographically and spiritually, with the ultimate goal of forcing Christians and Jews into submission, or "dhimmitude."²⁰³ Thus, the far-right's anti-Islamic attitudes take narrative form through such conspiratorial thinking, in which the world is divided into a "decadent,"

¹⁹⁹ Pertwee, "The Anti-Muslim Far Right," 215-22.

²⁰⁰ Wilson, "The Bitter End," 426-28.

²⁰¹ Ivan Kalmar, "Islamophobia and Anti-Antisemitism: The Case of Hungary and the 'Soros Plot,'" *Patterns of Prejudice* 54, no. 1-2 (2020): 188-89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2019.1705014>.

²⁰² Wilson, "The Bitter End," 427-29.

²⁰³ Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, "When the Elders of Zion Relocated to Eurabia: Conspiratorial Racialization in Antisemitism and Islamophobia," *Patterns of Prejudice* 52, no. 4 (2018): 322-27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2018.1493876>.

decaying West run by weak liberal elites in an alliance with a duplicitous and violent Islamic other.²⁰⁴

These conspiratorial beliefs, and their ideological underpinnings, also show up in the discourse of U.S. Christian Zionism, albeit in different ways. Divergences do exist, particularly the stronger role of anti-Semitism in far-right conspiracy thinking, which at times makes implicit or explicit overtures to a “superconspiracy” of “world Jewry” in plots to destroy the West through Muslim proxies.²⁰⁵ This concept is apparent in the rhetoric of Hungarian President Viktor Orban who makes constant reference to such a supposed plot carried out by Jewish billionaire George Soros.²⁰⁶ In addition, the importance of their religious beliefs to their overall worldview also influences the different ways in which Christian Zionists interpret conspiracy theories compared to the broader, more secular far-right. Hence, while the latter conjures vague images of Obama and the Clintons as “demons” due to their status as global elites, for Christian Zionists, the Antichrist plays the principal role behind such plots.²⁰⁷ Robertson, for instance, is a proponent of the Illuminati conspiracy theory, which claims that an ancient secret society is plotting to create a totalitarian “New World Order” under the auspices of Satan.²⁰⁸

Despite their differences, however, conspiratorial rhetoric in Christian Zionist discourse does have significant overlap with that found among the far-right, albeit with added religious and eschatological influences and emphases. As with the far-right, Christian Zionist versions of conspiracy focus especially on Islam, Muslim migrants, multilateral institutions, Western

²⁰⁴ Rehman, “Rise of the Reactionaries,” 39; see also Abrahamsen et al., “Sociology of the New Right,” 100-101.

²⁰⁵ Wilson, “The Bitter End,” 422-27.

²⁰⁶ Kalmar, “Hungary and the ‘Soros Plot,’” 189-193.

²⁰⁷ Gorski, “Why Evangelicals Voted for Trump,” 343-45; see also Berlet, *Trumping Democracy*, 41

²⁰⁸ Durham, “Protestantism and Foreign Policy,” 155-56.

“traitors on the inside” with progressive social values, and the global managerial elite. The UN and the EU are again popular targets, with authors LaHaye and Jenkins depicting the future Antichrist in disguise as the head of the former, leading the world into chaos by establishing a Satanic one-world government, and from there, the Great Tribulation.²⁰⁹ Indeed, Christian Zionists often blur the line between conspiracy theory and prophecy. Specifically, Robertson and Hagee have combined racially charged suspicions and theories regarding Obama with claims that he, and Democrats in general, are agents of Satan, whose “tolerance” entails a plot to destroy the U.S. and Israel by arming Hezbollah via Iran.²¹⁰ Striking, then, is the extent to which Christian Zionist apocalyptic and conspiratorial thinking parallel that of the far-right, but with the specific aim of justifying support for Israel in a framework that is simultaneously conservative and anti-internationalist.²¹¹

From the Holocaust to Jerusalem: Changing Attitudes Towards Jews and Israel

Besides their varying levels of religiosity, one of the most marked differences between the discourse of Christian Zionists and the far-right consists of attitudes towards Jews, and particularly the role of anti-Semitism. While anti-Semitic tendencies in Christian Zionism have existed, and still linger in some subtle ways, the movement is especially attentive towards anti-Semitism as a whole, notably as interpreted in the form of criticisms towards Israel. For the far-right, on the other hand, attitudes towards Jews are much more contentious, with a long history and continued prevalence of deep anti-Semitism, most evidently among neo-fascist groups such as the Proud Boys and the British National Party.²¹² After WWII and even more so in the 21st

²⁰⁹ Berlet, *Trumping Democracy*, 111-15.

²¹⁰ Durbin, “Trump as God’s Instrument,” 130-31.

²¹¹ Rehman, “Rise of the Reactionaries,” 40-43.

²¹² Bland, “Holocaust Inversion,” 96-97.

century, however, views towards Jews and Israel began to transform significantly. Such opinions now serve as a decisive demarcating line between those at the extreme end of the spectrum, such as Andrew Anglin of *The Daily Stormer*, and those who are relatively more “moderate” and “mainstream,” including Breitbart News.²¹³ These changes are ultimately intertwined with the increased importance of anti-Islamic rhetoric more broadly, the rising popularity and mainstreaming of far-right parties, and the changing political context in Israel.

For many on the far-right, especially European parties like the Sweden Democrats that are attempting to widen their base of support, a widely emergent tendency has been to distance oneself from and denounce anti-Semitism, while sharply targeting Islam and Muslim migrants.²¹⁴ As Reza Zia-Ebrahimi critically notes, the far-right’s discourse on Islam largely extends its anti-Semitic rhetorical elements under a new form, evidenced by the growing replacement of Jews with Muslims as the archetypical all-powerful, wicked, but oppressed enemy of the West.²¹⁵ The Jewish people and Israel, who are once more conflated, are thus framed as cultural and even racial insiders within the West, as common victims of Islamic violence. For example, Le Pen had once claimed that the only anti-Semitism that still exists in Europe stems from Muslims and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.²¹⁶ This statement highlights not only the extent of the attitude shift among portions of the Western far-right towards Jews, but also the continued existence of anti-Semitic proclivities, in this case by erasing the very tangible and chronicled capacity for white Europeans to still be anti-Semitic.

²¹³ Sam Kestenbaum, “The ‘Alt-Right’ Hates the Jews. But It Also Loves Them — and Israel,” *Forward*, January 16, 2017, <https://forward.com/news/359889/the-alt-right-hates-the-jews-but-it-also-loves-them-and-israel/>.

²¹⁴ Kahmann, “The Most Ardent Pro-Israel Party,” 397-400.

²¹⁵ Zia-Ebrahimi, “Conspiratorial Racialization,” 330-6.

²¹⁶ Hafez, “Shifting Borders,” 487.

This two-part rhetorical strategy regarding Muslims and Jews explains some seemingly surprising trends in recent years among the Western far-right, particularly regarding Israel itself. Far-right opinions of Israel have become considerably more positive, driven in part by a concurrent right-ward shift in Israel's political culture, its hawkish foreign policies, and ongoing clashes with Palestinians, essentialized as a conflict between white Jews and Arab Muslims.²¹⁷ The far-right has increasingly viewed Israel under Netanyahu as an example of a Western nation on the frontlines that is standing up for itself against the Muslim threat, rather than allowing leftist values like diversity to destroy the West from within, as allegedly is the case in Europe.²¹⁸ Hence, far-right parties from Germany, Austria, Belgium, and Sweden, the latter of which was formerly a white nationalist group, visited Israel, including settlements in the OPT, to sign a declaration protecting Israel's "right to defend itself against [Islamic] terror" in 2010.²¹⁹ In the U.S., meanwhile, radical-right actors such as neo-Nazi Richard Spencer have even praised Israel as a model to emulate, an ethnic nation-state that has refused assimilation and submission.²²⁰

As outlined in this section, there are notable convergences between the key discursive themes and strategies of Christian Zionists in the post-Cold War era U.S., and those similarly found among the contemporary Western far-right, regarding Islam, Jews, Israel, and conspiracy. While the far-right tends to have a much more secular worldview, both movements frame the world as divided into a conflict between Judeo-Christian civilization and a fundamentally violent Islamic threat, which necessitates a powerful response to combat. And while divisions remain in the far-right concerning its anti-Semitic past and present, much of the movement's sizable "moderate"

²¹⁷ Bobako, "The Palestinian Knot," 103-104.

²¹⁸ Kahmann, "'The Most Ardent Pro-Israel Party,'" 400-402.

²¹⁹ Hafez, "Shifting Borders," 485-7; Kahmann, "The Most Ardent Pro-Israel Party," 402-403.

²²⁰ Kestenbaum, "The 'Alt-Right.'"

and “mainstream” portions have denounced anti-Semitism and linked it with Islam, shifting their rhetoric in support of Jews and especially Israel. Much in the same manner as Christian Zionists, these parties and actors now conceive of Jews as insiders in this Judeo-Christian civilization. In all, these rhetorical similarities conceptually link strong support for Israel, particularly for its conservative governments this century, with policy preferences and talking points associated with the right, from opposition to “mass” immigration to skepticism of multilateralism. This hawkish framework of being “pro-Israel” is therefore not just a phenomenon of Christian Zionism, but extends more broadly to other, deeply polarizing right-wing movements.

Section 5: Conclusion and Implications

In this essay, I have explored some of the dynamics that drive and reinforce growing polarization in the U.S. regarding support for Israel, by way of analyzing the discourse of the Christian Zionist movement in the post-Cold War era U.S. As the largest bloc of supporters for Israel in the U.S., the rhetoric of this movement has helped make salient a conception of being “pro-Israel” that is increasingly associated with the values of the U.S. political right more broadly. The movement interprets support for Israel, under its religious and Manichean worldview, as entailing unconditional defence of Israeli territorial maximalism. To Christian Zionists, being “pro-Israel” involves opposing both a Palestinian state and external pressure on Israel to make policy changes or negotiate, and support for a powerful military response against Israel’s enemies, such as Hamas and Iran. Effectively, this conception translates to directly siding with the Israeli right-wing. Anything less than this version of being pro-Israel goes against God’s will and plans for the world, and is equivalent to siding with the forces of Satan and evil, unconsciously or not.

Thus, Christian Zionist discourse has directly clashed with the values and rhetoric of the U.S. left-wing, in an already broadly divisive political context. This more hawkish vision of being pro-Israel alienates Israel's more centrist and progressive supporters in the U.S. Such changes are notably evident within the traditionally firmly pro-Israel Democratic Party, where anti-Zionist views as articulated by politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are on the ascent in the party's more progressive wing.²²¹ While this gradual, and still nascent, erosion of bipartisan U.S. support for Israel is due to many factors, this essay has highlighted a few of the processes that influence and reinforce such polarization. In particular, Christian Zionism's dichotomous, religious discourse on Muslims and Jews, and its parallels with rhetoric among portions of the Western far-right, help propagate the notion that support for Israel is a concept specific to the political right and the Republican Party. It is hence possible that many self-identified Democrats, and others on the U.S. political left, will be more inclined to take a more critical stance towards Israel simply because of their opposition to other seemingly "conservative" political positions.²²²

At the same time, it is essential to note that such changes also depend, in turn, on political developments in Israel itself, especially if the prevalence of the Israeli right-wing remains or if Netanyahu returns to power. As Rynhold notes, the political context in Israel is an important factor driving growing disapproval and support among Democrats and Republicans, respectively, demonstrated by Netanyahu's strong stance against the Iranian Nuclear Deal.²²³ Naftali Bennett's ascension as Prime Minister does represent the Israeli right's continued influence, given his years as a key figure in the far-right among religious settlers and nationalists. However, his

²²¹ Rynhold, "Democrats' Attitudes," 55-58.

²²² Amnon Cavari and Guy Freedman, "Partisan Cues and Opinion Formation on Foreign Policy," *American Politics Research* 47, no. 1 (2019): 45-50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X17745632>; Rynhold, "Democrats' Attitudes," 53.

²²³ Rynhold, "Democrats' Attitudes," 54-55.

dependency on a “coalition of Israeli centrists,” including an Israeli-Palestinian party, and his promise to not annex any territory in the OPT during his leadership,²²⁴ may indicate changes in Israeli politics, which have worried Christian Zionists like Evans.²²⁵

If such an erosion of bipartisan support for Israel *does* hold, it will have significant effects. For one, U.S. policy towards Israel may oscillate widely depending on the party affiliation of future presidents and the composition of Congress. The influence of Christian Zionists will be considerably more restrained under Democratic presidencies, who may make related foreign policy decisions that differ sharply from those advocated for by groups like CUFI. Such maneuvers were already apparent under the Obama administration, which maintained close, but at times fraught, relations with Israel. Obama’s team noticed and took advantage of domestic partisan divisions by inviting progressive pro-Israel and Jewish organizations like Americans for Peace Now to policy discussions, at the expense of more conservative groups like AIPAC, as well as those of Christian Zionists.²²⁶ The Trump presidency, on the other hand, represents the other extreme that could increasingly become the norm among Republican administrations. Trump’s implementation of strongly pro-Israel policies stemmed in part from his need to consolidate support among his Evangelical voter base, who he himself acknowledged had approved of acts like moving the U.S. embassy in Israel more than American Jews.²²⁷

²²⁴ Stuart Winer, “Islamist Ra’am Said Ready to Give Crucial Support for a Lapid-Bennett Government,” *The Times of Israel*, May 10, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/islamist-raam-said-ready-to-give-crucial-support-for-a-lapid-bennett-government/>.

²²⁵ Column Lynch, “What’s Next for Christian Zionists,” *Foreign Policy*, July 19, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/19/christian-zionists-israel-trump-netanyahu-evangelicals/>.

²²⁶ Waxman, “The Israel Lobbies,” 15-18.

²²⁷ Roberts and Whittock, *Trump and the Puritans*, 107-8; Berlet, *Trumping Democracy*, 20.

More generally, the solidification of support for Israel as a partisan issue could facilitate an eventual recalibration of the U.S. relationship with Israel in the long term. It is true that the current administration of Joe Biden, long a staunch supporter of Israel, looks to maintain the status quo on Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,²²⁸ even maintaining some Trump-era decisions like recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights.²²⁹ However, the U.S. also faces a rapidly changing geopolitical context in which it is well past its unipolar moment. With great powers like Russia and hegemonic challengers like China growing more assertive on the global stage, including in the Middle East, the U.S. has and will continue to re-evaluate its policies in the region to adapt to this new situation.²³⁰

Thus, Israel's continued strategic value to the U.S. is the subject of fierce debate more broadly. With the international popularity of the U.S. already damaged by its foreign policy decisions in the Middle East, including in Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan, scholars and journalists alike have argued that U.S. policy towards Israel only further harms U.S. interests.²³¹ Authors like Daryl Glaser make the case that U.S. support for Israel in the face of the latter's treatment of Palestinians, both within Israel and in the OPT, contradicts stated U.S. commitments to liberal-

²²⁸ Ishaan Tharoor, "The U.S. Conversation on Israel is Changing, no Matter Biden's Stance," *The Washington Post*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/17/biden-israel-palestinians-change/>.

²²⁹ Jacob Magid, "Amid Uproar, US Denies Change in Policy Recognizing Golan Heights as Israeli," *The Times of Israel*, June 25, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/amid-uproar-us-denies-change-in-policy-recognizing-golan-heights-as-israeli/>.

²³⁰ Alon Ben-Meir, "Common Strategic Interests Balancing Support for Israel Against Other American Interests," *American Diplomacy* (2010): 2-3, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A227946200/AONE?u=otta77973&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=1845e1ef>.

²³¹ John Mearsheimer, "The U.S. should Act as an Honest Broker," *Palestine - Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 15, no. 1 (2008): 147-50, <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/u-s-should-act-as-honest-broker/docview/235707073/se-2?accountid=14701>.

democratic principles and human rights.²³² They raise concerns that this seeming hypocrisy damages the image of the U.S. abroad, irritating European allies and feeding rhetorical attacks by rivals that U.S. hegemony is morally bankrupt, unfair, and self-serving.²³³ Some even claim that U.S. support for Israel emboldens anti-American terrorism, such as the September 11 attacks.²³⁴ Although existing studies on this issue have not provided conclusive support for such an argument, the fact that these questions are being raised alone is significant.²³⁵

If strong military, financial, and diplomatic support for Israel cease to be an unanimously accepted pillar of U.S. foreign policy, then Washington will have more latitude to weigh the merits of its relations with Israel, and its role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and adjust accordingly. Were such a strategic adjustment to occur, the consequences would be critical for Israeli national interests. Such ideas as making the billions of dollars of U.S. military aid to Israel conditional on a freeze of settlement building or other requirements have already gained support from figures like Democrats Bernie Sanders and Pete Buttigieg,²³⁶ as well as J-Street.²³⁷ These reductions in aid would be significant, especially for the maintenance and development of Israel's systems for civilian defence. Additionally, Israel's possibility of finding one or more

²³² Daryl Glaser, "Does Hypocrisy Matter? The Case of US Foreign Policy," *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 2 (2006): 266-68, <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/does-hypocrisy-matter-case-us-foreign-policy/docview/204919411/se-2?accountid=14701>.

²³³ "China Says US Ignoring Palestinians' Plight by Blocking UN Meet," *France 24*, May 14, 2021. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210514-china-says-us-ignoring-palestinians-plight-by-blocking-un-meet>.

²³⁴ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Middle East Policy* 13, no. 3 (2006): 30-33, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2006.00260.x>.

²³⁵ Daniel Meierrieks and Thomas Gries, "'Pay for It Heavily': Does U.S. Support for Israel Lead to Anti-American Terrorism?" *Defence and Peace Economics* 31, no. 2 (2020): 170-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2018.1560558>.

²³⁶ Tal Axelrod, "Sanders Floats Leveraging Aid to Israel to Push for Policy Changes with Palestinians," *The Hill*, October 28, 2019, <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/467772-sanders-floats-leveraging-aid-to-israel-to-push-for-policy-changes>.

²³⁷ Ariel Kahana, "J Street supports conditioning US security aid to Israel," *Israel Hayom*, April 19, 2021, <https://www.israelhayom.com/2021/04/19/j-street-supports-conditioning-us-security-aid-to-israel/>.

patrons to fill this gap currently looks bleak. Israel also risks losing key diplomatic protection from the U.S., including the latter's numerous vetoes against UN resolutions critical of Israel's settlements and track record on peace and human rights. The U.S. decision in 2016 to abstain from one such resolution condemning Israeli settlements could be a precursor of what is to come, which would leave Israel considerably more isolated internationally than it is already.²³⁸

Critically, instability in U.S. attitudes and policies towards Israel may have vital geopolitical effects on the regional balance of power in the Middle East. Ariel Roth raises the point that if Israel sees itself as losing or on track to lose its closest, most powerful ally, this perception may have the unintended consequence of leading it to take unpredictable and unilateral acts out of a sense of isolation and self-preservation.²³⁹ If this logic were to drive Israel to escalate its military tensions with Iran, for example, such action would deepen instability in an already volatile Middle East and ultimately threaten U.S. interests, including maintaining a stable oil supply and preventing regional conflict. Thus, the division of attitudes towards Israel in the U.S. is not simply a domestic issue with minimal effects on grand strategy and geopolitics. Rather, these trends, which include the polarizing discourse of Christian Zionists, the largest block of "pro-Israel" Americans, will affect the trajectory of the U.S.-Israeli "special relationship," Israel's national security and conflict with the Palestinians, and the wider Middle East. They deserve our careful attention now and in the coming years. Dismissing these changes as mere "domestic politics" may weaken our ability to understand broader geopolitical changes until they become obvious with hindsight.

²³⁸ Kristina Daugirdas and Julian Davis Mortenson, "United States Abstains on Security Council Resolution Criticizing Israeli Settlements," *The American Journal of International Law* 111, no. 2 (2017): 477-79, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26568856>.

²³⁹ Roth, "Reassurance," 385-87.

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