



Understanding the USA's Support for Israel within the Context of Christian Zionism

► Arařtırma makalesi / Research article

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Abstract

This article explores the impact of Christian Zionism on American foreign policy towards Israel and its implications for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Highlighting the recent Al-Aqsa Flood operation led by Hamas and the subsequent violence inflicted by Israel, the study reveals how these events have renewed international scrutiny of Zionism and its influence. Christian Zionists, integral to the broader pro-Israeli lobby in the USA, leverage their theological beliefs, rooted in dispensationalist interpretations, to support Israeli policies. Their influence, though significant, is not without limits. Despite their opposition to a two-state solution and efforts to block peace initiatives like the Oslo Accords and the Wye River Memorandum, the USA administration has occasionally pursued policies contrary to their wishes. This article argues that Christian Zionism is not a conspiracy theory but a substantial factor in shaping the USA support for Israel, driven by theological motivations rather than genuine affection for Jewish people. The study emphasizes the need for further research to understand the broader network of pro-Israeli actors and concludes that the Bible's influence on Anglo-American culture will likely continue to support Israel, despite its human rights violations.

Keywords: Zionism, Christian Zionism, Israel, USA, Foreign Policy.

ABD'nin İsrail'e Desteđini Hıristiyan Siyonizmi Bađlamında Anlamak

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Bu makale, Hıristiyan Siyonizminin Amerika'nın dıř politikasında İsrail'e desteđi ve İsrail-Filistin çatıřması  zerindeki etkilerini incelemektedir. Hamas tarafından gerekleřtirilen Aksa Tufanı operasyonu ve ardından İsrail tarafından Filistinlilere y nelik uygulanan řiddet, Siyonizm kavramını yeniden uluslararası toplumun g ndemine getirmiřtir. Amerika'da olduka etkili bir konumda olan İsrail lobisinin  nemli bir parası olarak deđerlendirilebilecek olan Hıristiyan Siyonistler, ABD'nin İsrail'e y nelik politikasını da destekleyen teolojik inanlarını dispensasyonalizm ile temellendirmektedir. Hıristiyan Siyonistler, ABD politikasında belirli bir g ce sahip olmalarına rađmen bu g celeri sınırsız deđildir. İki devletli  z me karřı olmalarına ve Oslo Anlařmalarını ve Wye Nehri Memorandumu gibi bař girişimlerini engellemeye y nelik abalarına rađmen, ABD y netiminin Hıristiyan Siyonistlerin taleplerine zat politikalar izlediđi de g r lmüřt r. Bu arařtırma, Hıristiyan Siyonizminin bir komple teorisi deđil, ABD'nin İsrail'e desteđini şekillendiren  nemli fakt rler arasında olduđunu ve bu akımın teolojik motivasyonlardan kaynaklandıđını  ne s rmetedir. alıřma, İsrail'i destekleyen akt r ve grupların sahip olduđu geniř etki ađını anlamak iin daha geniř kapsamlı arařtırmalar yapılması gerektiđini vurgularken, İncil'in Anglo-Amerikan k lt r hayatı  zerindeki etkisinin, insan hakları ihlallerine rađmen, İsrail'e destek sađlamaya devam edeceđini  ng rmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyonizm, Hıristiyan Siyonizmi, İsrail, ABD, Dıř politika.

Introduction

Due to Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands, the oppression of the Palestinian people and violation of their fundamental rights, the murder of numerous Palestinian civilians, and the Western world's tendency to turn a blind eye to their suffering at the hands of Israel, as well as the lack of accountability for Israeli violations despite substantial documentation by international human rights organizations, and the USA's and its allies' eagerness to provide unconditional support to Israel while it continues to seize Palestinian territories and Judaize sacred places and sanctuaries—with the USA frequently utilizing its veto power at the United Nations Security Council against any resolution draft indicting Israel—the systematic attempts of Israel to undermine the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, despite international agreements such as the Oslo Accords of 1993, Israeli actions to Judaize the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the escalation of illegal Jewish settler assaults on the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the radical Israeli government's intention to further annex the West Bank and all of Jerusalem, the humiliation of Palestinian prisoners by the radical Israeli minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, and the unfair blockade of Gaza for over 17 years, the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) conducted Operation Al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, 2023.

After the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, the Israeli side launched the Swords of Iron operation. While Israel claimed that its objective was to dismantle the military capabilities of Hamas, statements from high-level Israeli political figures, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, suggested a more sinister intent, resembling genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians rather than merely targeting Hamas's military infrastructure. Prime Minister Netanyahu compared Palestinians to Amalekites, a tribe mentioned in the Hebrew Bible that God purportedly ordered the Israelites to completely exterminate.¹ Similarly, Defense Minister Gallant referred to Palestinians as "human animals," a statement that further attempts to justify Israeli actions against Palestinians.² The statistics support these concerns: as of October 20, 2024, approximately 42,603 Palestinians were killed and around 99,795 were injured due to indiscriminate Israeli attacks, with the majority of casualties being women and children.

Immediately after the commencement of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, the USA declared its unconditional support for Israel, rather than seeking to understand the root causes of the operation and the suffering and humiliation experienced by Palestinians at the hands of the expansionist Israeli state. President Joe Biden, who has previously stated that he is a proud Zionist, reaffirmed this support.³ Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Israel shortly after the Al-Aqsa Flood and declared his support for Israel, emphasizing his Jewish identity.⁴ Similarly, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited Israel and extended the 'ironclad' support of the Washington administration to Netanyahu's government.⁵ Following the Al-

¹ Middle East Monitor (MEM), "Netanyahu declares holy war against Gaza, citing the Bible" (Accessed 16 July 2024).

² Emanuel Fabian, "Defense minister announces 'complete siege' of Gaza: No power food or fuel", *The Times of Israel* (9 October 2023)

³ Reuters, "Biden lands in Israel, hugs Netanyahu and Herzog on tarmac" (Accessed 16 July 2024).

⁴ John Hudson, "Blinken invokes Jewish ancestry in address to grieving Israeli public", *The Washington Post* (12 October 2023).

⁵ Joseph Clark, "Austin: U.S. Commitment to Israel is 'Ironclad'", *DOD News* (13 October 2023).

Aqsa Flood, the USA deployed two aircraft carriers, jets, and warships to the region and provided Israel with additional military supplies, arms, and ammunition. The US military forces also intervened directly to defend Israel during Iran's retaliatory attack after Israel's killing of high-level military officers at the Iranian consulate on April 1, 2024, who were allegedly involved in the preparation of the Hamas-led Al-Aqsa Flood operation.

The USA's support for Israel did not end there. Despite Israel's killing and maiming of over 140,000 predominantly women and children Palestinians, the USA did not hesitate to host Prime Minister Netanyahu and even allowed him to deliver a speech to members of Congress on July 24, 2024. While Netanyahu was addressing the US Congress, highly influential American Christian Zionist pastor John Hagee was also present, accompanying Netanyahu as a symbol of his unconditional support for Israel. During his repeatedly applauded speech, Netanyahu referred to the Bible, saying that his country is where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob prayed, Isaiah and Jeremiah preached, and David and Solomon ruled, in an attempt to justify Israel's expansionist policies and illegal occupation of Palestinian territories. He stressed the importance of USA-Israeli cooperation in the fields of security and intelligence. While he claimed that Israeli operations helped the USA avoid deploying boots on the ground, he depicted Israel as the protector of civilization against barbarism, aiming to legitimize his government's ethnic cleansing efforts towards Palestinians. He further demanded additional ammunition from the USA to accelerate Israel's military incursion, saying, "Give us the tools faster, we would finish the job faster." In his speech to Congress, Netanyahu called for a new alliance between the USA and Israel, which he named the "Abraham Alliance." While expressing his gratitude towards President Biden for defending Israel against direct Iranian missile and drone attacks, he also thanked President Trump for developing the Abraham Accords, which were designed to further increase Israeli influence in the region. Additionally, he credited Trump for recognizing Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem and for moving the American embassy to Jerusalem. Netanyahu declared that Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Israel and will never be divided again. Throughout his speech, he frequently referred to biblical accounts to whitewash Israel's indiscriminate killings of Palestinian civilians and illegal expansionism into Palestinian territories.⁶ During his approximately 50-minute-long address, Netanyahu predominantly focused on the deep partnership and cooperation between the USA and Israel, which was enthusiastically welcomed by the congressmen, as his speech was repeatedly interrupted with loud applause.

Benyamin Netanyahu's visit was the highest level of diplomatic engagement from Israel to the USA since the commencement of the Hamas-led Al-Aqsa Flood operation. It is noteworthy that just one week after Netanyahu visited Washington, Israel killed Hamas's charismatic political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, in Iran, along with Iran-sponsored Hezbollah's high-level military commander and founder of the organization's military wing, on the same day.⁷ It is almost unimaginable that such daring and high-level assassinations, which significantly impact the stability and balance of power dynamics in the Middle East, were not approved by Israel's strategic ally, the USA. In other words, the Washington administration likely gave a green light to Israel to eliminate such high-level figures who are

⁶ Haaretz, "FULL TEXT: Netanyahu's 2024 Address to Congress" (25 July 2024).

⁷ Federica Marsi, "Israel war on Gaza updates: Fears of escalation grow after Haniyeh killing", Al Jazeera (31 July 2024).

also affiliated with Washington's main regional concern, Iran. These high-profile assassinations, serving the interests of both the USA and Israel, are just another example of the long-standing close partnership between these two countries.

The strategic partnership between Israel and the USA is a very broad topic, and it is almost impossible to cover every angle of this alliance in a one single article. Therefore, in this study, the reasons behind this close cooperation will be analyzed within the context of Christian Zionism. Just as the Zionist ideology is supported by many Jews who prioritize the return to their homeland, the same ideology is also supported by millions of conservative Christians. According to the theological understanding of Christian Zionists, the re-Judaization of the holy lands promised to Abraham and his offspring, who were blessed by God according to the Biblical account, is a sign of the return of Jesus Christ. These Christian Zionists hold a certain level of influence in both the politics and society of the USA. Within this context, Christian Zionism will be analyzed as one of the reasons behind American support for Israel. Although it is certainly not the only reason, this study suggests that comprehending Christian Zionists' motivations will help to understand one of the reasons behind the USA's support for Israel. Accordingly, this study has implications for scholarly debates situated at the nexus of theological understanding and the discipline of international relations, as well as for policymaking processes and decisions.

1. Understanding the Dynamics of Christian Zionism

The Christian Zionists, who can be regarded as part of the broader pro-Israeli Christian Right movement, are salient actors within the so-called Israeli lobby in the USA. American Evangelist pastor Jerry Falwell⁸, who founded the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Virginia; Gary Lee Bauer⁹, an executive at Christians United for Israel and the Emergency Committee for Israel; conservative Christian leader Pat Robertson¹⁰, former president of the Christian Broadcasting Network; and the renowned Evangelical pastor John Hagee¹¹, founder of Christians United for Israel, organizer of the "A Night to Honor Israel" gatherings, financier of the Israeli Zionist organization Im Tirtzu, and proponent of the idea that the Bible commands Christians to support Israel, are prominent religious figures of the Christian Zionist movement in the USA. Additionally, former Republican Congressman and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, a staunch supporter of Israel, visited Israel and delivered a speech to the Israeli Knesset in 2003, who was described as the farthest right even by far-right Israeli politicians and perceived as worse than Likud by the former head of the Israeli intelligence organization Mossad.¹² DeLay also campaigned against aid to Palestine. Another former Republican Congressman and House Majority Leader, Dick Armey, advocated for the complete annexation of the occupied Palestinian territories by Israel and the total expulsion of Palestinians to neighboring Arab countries.¹³ Republican Senator from

⁸ Christian Heritage, "Jerry Falwell" (Accessed 18 July 2024).

⁹ Israeli-American Council (IAC), "Gary L. Bauer" (Accessed 18 July 2024).

¹⁰ Ben Finley, "Pat Robertson, broadcaster who helped make religion central to GOP politics, dies at 93", *AP News* (9 June 2023).

¹¹ Jewish News Syndicate (JNS), "John Hagee, Christians United for Israel", (1 April 2018).

¹² Lou Dubose – Jan Reid, *The Hammer: God, Money and the Rise of the Republican Congress* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 236.

¹³ Matthew Engel, "Senior Republican calls on Israel to expel West Bank Arabs", *The Guardian* (4 May 2022).

Oklahoma, Jim Inhofe, heavily campaigned against boycott movements targeting Israel and Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. These individuals are among the prominent political leaders of American Christian Zionists. The majority of Christian evangelicals, often described as Christian Zionists and organized into various associations to bolster support for Israel, are significant allies of the pro-Israel camp within the American political spectrum.

2. Dispensationalism

The primary reason behind Christian Zionists' unconditional support for Israel and its brutal policies towards Palestinians, which have been repeatedly condemned by international human rights organizations as well as by the UN General Assembly, is the dispensationalist theological understanding systematized by Christian British cleric John Nelson Darby in the 19th century. Darby interpreted the Old and New Testaments with the belief that mankind has been passing through several periods and that in each of these distinct periods, or dispensations, humanity will experience new tests or challenges. According to dispensationalist theology, in the last dispensation before doomsday, Jesus Christ will return to the Holy Lands promised by God to Abraham and his descendants. He will crush the Antichrist and establish his kingdom, which will rule the world for one thousand years, or a millennium. According to dispensationalists, the return of the Jews to the Holy Lands is a harbinger of the return of Jesus Christ. For this reason, Christian Zionists also politically advocate for the illegal expansionist policies of the State of Israel and the Judaization of the Promised Lands.

Christian Zionism has its roots in the theological understanding of dispensationalism, a biblical interpretation method that emerged in 19th-century Britain, primarily systematized by John Nelson Darby. It could be argued that dispensationalism is a form of premillennialism, which maintains that humanity will undergo a period of worsening hardships prior to the return of Jesus Christ. Dispensationalists believe that Christ's return was prophesied in both the Old and New Testaments and that the repopulation of Palestinian lands with Jews is a significant development in the divinely ordained plan leading to Christ's return. Darby's biblical interpretation in dispensationalism has influenced millions of Christians, including high-level statesmen. It has been speculated that the strong biblical influence in Anglo-Saxon society may have been a factor in British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour's openness to the idea of establishing a Jewish state in Palestinian lands.¹⁴

After dispensationalism was first popularized in Britain, figures such as Dwight Moody, founder of the Moody Bible Institute, and William Blackstone played pivotal roles in disseminating dispensationalist biblical understanding in the USA during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Contemporary fictional series about Armageddon, such as LaHaye's "Left Behind" and Lindsey's "The Late Great Planet Earth," have also contributed to the further popularization of dispensationalist theological interpretation. The foundation of Israel in 1948, immediately following the end of the British mandate, gave momentum to followers of dispensationalist theology. The dramatic Israeli victory over several Arab neighbors during the Six-Day War in 1967 was regarded as a pivotal moment for Christian Zionists, significantly enhancing their political influence. The capture of Jerusalem and the

¹⁴ Irvine H. Anderson, *Biblical Interpretation and Middle East Policy The Promised Land, American, and Israel, 1917-2002* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), 61.

West Bank entirely by Israel has been perceived as the realization of biblical prophecy. Due to these prophetic signs, Christian Zionists, including but not limited to dispensationalists and Evangelicals, have worked to influence the U.S. government to ensure that it operates in accordance with the plan revealed in both the Old and New Testaments.¹⁵ While dispensationalists played a relatively passive role in spreading their religious ideology before the Israeli victory in 1967, Israel's large-scale territorial expansion after the war significantly influenced Christian Zionists to take a more proactive role in politics, finance, and religious propaganda.¹⁶ The Israeli victory and the capture of lands promised in the Old and New Testaments significantly benefited the Christian Right in the USA. During the same period, dispensationalist and evangelical organizations also gained considerable prominence in politics.

In line with their strong support for Israel, American Christian Zionists are described as a strategic asset for the Jewish state, alongside the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Similarly, high-level officials from Israel have claimed that the future of the relationship between the USA and Israel depends more on Christian Zionists than on American Jews.¹⁷

3. Christian Zionist Organizations

Christian Zionists have founded several non-governmental organizations to further deepen U.S. support for Israel. Notably, Christian Zionist preacher John Hagee established Christians United for Israel (CUFI), often described as the Christian counterpart to AIPAC. Additionally, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ), the Christians' Israel Public Action Committee, Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFIC), the Unity Coalition for Israel, and the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel are among the most influential Christian Zionist organizations working to strengthen American support for the state of Israel.¹⁸ While the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (IFCJ), directed by Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, aims to foster cooperation between Jews and Christians and provide comprehensive support for the state of Israel, Christian Zionists continue to be influential actors within the organization. By 2002, the organization developed a partnership with Christian Zionist Republican political strategist Ralph Reed to establish a new movement, 'Stand for Israel.' The objective of this new organization is to connect with people on behalf of Israel and to organize an annual global prayer and solidarity day in support of Israel.¹⁹

Following the Israeli victory in 1967, Christian Zionists took a more proactive role as their interests and religious convictions increasingly aligned with Jewish support for the expansion of illegal settlements and opposition to the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. CUFI's Christian Zionist leader, Pastor John Hagee, explained his movement's support for Israel by stating that, while other nations were founded by mankind, Israel was

¹⁵ Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 190.

¹⁶ Jane Lampman, "Mixing prophecy and politics", *The Christian Science Monitor* (7 July 2004).

¹⁷ Clifford Kiracofe, *Dark Crusade: Christian Zionism and US foreign policy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 138-150.

¹⁸ Daniel Hummel, *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S.-Israeli Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 96.

¹⁹ William Dale, "The Impact of Christian Zionism on American Policy", *American Diplomacy* 9/2 (2004).

founded by God. They also oppose the two-state solution because it would entail giving part of the lands promised to Jews to Arabs, which they believe contradicts biblical prophecy. Consistent with the Old and New Testament prophecies regarding lands promised to Jews, CUFI has funded around \$12 million for Israeli settlers, including those establishing new illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.²⁰

It should be noted that the religious convictions of the CUFI organization and those of its leader, Pastor John Hagee, closely resemble those of other Christian Zionists. Ed McAteer, a prominent figure in the Evangelical movement, also asserted that the lands between the Mediterranean Sea, the Dead Sea, and the Jordan River, including Gaza and the West Bank, fall within Jewish territory.²¹ Similarly, ICEJ executive Malcolm Hedding denied the existence of Palestinians. Furthermore, Hedding emphasized that the territories given to Abraham by God around 4,000 years ago now belong to Israel.²² Likewise, CFIC continues to operate, providing aid to Israeli settlers, including those in illegal settlements located in the occupied Palestinian territories. Specifically, the illegal settlements in the Judea and Samaria regions receive direct support from American churches. American Christian Zionists are funding the construction of infrastructure for illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank.²³

4. Christian Zionists' Support for Israeli Occupation

As previously mentioned, the primary reason behind Christian Zionists' opposition to any form of a two-state solution is that such a solution would entail the concession of lands promised to Jews to Arabs. Just before Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's historic visit to Israel in 1977, Christian Zionists in the U.S. openly demonstrated their fierce opposition to what they perceived as the partition of territories promised to Jews by placing advertisements in newspapers.²⁴ In a similar vein, the Third International Zionist Congress, held in 1996, declared that it would be a mistake for any country to diplomatically recognize the existence of a Palestinian state in any part of the promised lands of Israel. Christian Zionists were determined that the territories given to the Jewish people by God would not be divided.²⁵ Due to their zealous beliefs, American Christian Zionists even claimed that Ariel Sharon, then Prime Minister of Israel, suffered a stroke as a divine punishment for his role in the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.²⁶ According to Christian Zionist understanding, Sharon was retreating from the land promised by God to placate the EU and the UN. These statements clearly illustrate how resolute and steadfast Christian Zionists are in defending Israel based on their biblical interpretations.

The aforementioned Christian Zionist convictions also inspired high-level American legislators. After visiting the West Bank and the Golan Heights—captured from Syria by

²⁰ Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 292-296.

²¹ John Hubers, "Palestinians, Christian Zionists and the Good News Gospel", *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 7/5 (May 2007).

²² Lampman, "Mixing Prophecy and Politics"

²³ Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend*, 227.

²⁴ Mohdafandi Salleh, *The Christian Right and US Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Durham University, School of Government and International Affairs, 2011), 126.

²⁵ Colin Shindler, "Likud and the Christian Dispensationalists: A Symbiotic Relationship", *Israel Studies* 5/1 (Spring, 2000), 153-182.

²⁶ Brennan Linsley, "Pat Robertson apologizes for Sharon slam", *NBC News* (13 January 2006).

Israel and still disputed by the Damascus regime—former Republican House Majority Leader Tom DeLay delivered a speech at an AIPAC conference, asserting that these lands are not occupied territories but belong to Israel.²⁷ Another high-level influential Republican politician, Richard Armev, similarly supported the total annexation of the West Bank by Israel and argued that the Arab population residing in the area should be expelled.²⁸ Furthermore, another Republican politician, James Inhofe, Senator from Oklahoma, asserted that God revealed Himself to Abraham at Hebron and granted the West Bank to him, using this as justification for Israel's claim to occupy all Palestinian lands.²⁹

5. Christian Zionism and Israeli Right

While Israel expanded its territories and illegal settlements on the occupied Palestinian lands, Jewish land grab was supported and justified by Christian Zionists with prophecy of the Old and New Testaments. Naturally, this situation led radical Israelis and Christian Zionists to forge an alliance. Particularly in the wake of the historic 1977 elections, in which, for the first time in Israel's history, the radical political right under the leadership of the Likud Party gained a majority and ended the left-wing rule, Christian Zionists and the radical Israeli Right established a cooperative relationship.³⁰

6th Prime Minister of Israel, and the founder of the right-wing Likud Party, Menachem Begin, granted a private jet for American Christian Zionist pastor Jerry Falwell in 1979. Thanks to Prime Minister Begin, pastor Falwell became the first ever non-Jew who were awarded with highly prized Jabotinsky Medal for his services for Israel and Jews. After an Israeli operation known as Operation Opera, conducted by the Israeli Air Force and targeting the Tuwaitha Nuclear Reactor in Iraq in 1981, Prime Minister Begin allegedly contacted Christian Zionist pastor Falwell to shape public opinion in the USA in line with Israeli interests, even before reaching out to President Reagan himself.³¹ Under the supervision of the Israel Christian Advocacy Council, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu hosted high-level Christian Zionists in Israel in 1996, in an attempt to further cement the ties between the Israeli Right and Christian Zionists. In 2002, right-wing Israeli politician Ehud Olmert, who eventually served as Prime Minister of Israel, and American Christian Zionist Pat Robertson jointly directed the Praying for Jerusalem campaign.³² Israel supported Christian Zionists' tours to its territories, as these visits not only provided income but also helped consolidate Christian Zionist advocacy for Israel. In 2002, Israeli Prime Minister Sharon called for more Christian Zionists to visit Israel to support the Israeli cause during his address at religious festivities held by ICEJ. Similarly, Israeli leader Olmert described Christian Zionists as a vital component of Israel's support network and defense.³³

²⁷ Robert L. Handley, "Cascading activation: Bush's 'war on terrorism' and the Israeli—Palestinian conflict", *Journalism* 11/4 (2010), 445-461.

²⁸ Engel, "Senior Republican calls on Israel to expel West Bank Arabs"

²⁹ Robert O. Smith, *More Desired than Our Own Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21-26.

³⁰ Shindler, "Likud and the Christian Dispensationalists: A Symbiotic Relationship", 153-182.

³¹ Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1986), 75.

³² Chip Berlet, "Pastor Hagee's Armageddon Politics", *Huffington Post* (30 May 2008).

³³ Aaron William Stone, *Dispensationalism and United States Foreign Policy with Israel* (Texas: University of Texas, The Graduate School, Master of Arts in Political Science, 2008), 68.

The alliance between Christian Zionists and the Israeli Right, which has been governing Israel since the historic 1977 Knesset elections, is further evident in various regional issues concerning Israel's national interests. The 2006 Lebanon War, in which Israel heavily targeted Hezbollah—supported by Israel's arch-enemy Iran—serves as a dramatic example. During this conflict, Christian Zionist organizations like CUFI held gatherings to support Israel, while American Christian Zionists described the war as a prelude to the Battle of Armageddon and the return of Christ.³⁴ Acclaimed Christian Zionist author Hal Lindsey even went so far as to call for a nuclear assault against the Tehran regime to ensure the safety and security of Israel. Similarly, Christian Zionist pastor John Hagee implied that the war of Ezekiel, mentioned in the Bible as an epic clash that would take place in Israeli lands during the latter days, in which God would save His people from King Gog and his army from Magog, would be the war between Israel and Iran.³⁵ While Christian Zionist John Hagee confidently claimed that there would be a nuclear confrontation between Israel and Iran, he also accused the Washington administration in 2006 of not actively supporting Israel, further calling for a bombardment of Iran.³⁶

Even though Christian Zionists are concerned not only with Israel but also with advancing a comprehensive conservative agenda in the USA and converting Jews to Christianity in line with their dispensationalist beliefs, an alliance with Christian Zionists is still endorsed by Jewish groups operating in the USA. AIPAC deepened its cooperation with Christian Zionist movements in the USA. The Zionist Organization of America, which has close ties with the Israeli far-right ruling Likud party, established strong connections with the American Christian Zionist religious leader Jerry Falwell. Additionally, Irving Kristol, one of the principal architects of the neoconservative movement in the USA and who himself came from a Jewish background, supported the partnership between Christian Zionists and the Jewish right.³⁷ One of the former executives of the pro-Israeli Anti-Defamation League (ADL) also supported the alignment of interests between Christian Zionists and Jews due to their shared prioritization of the security of the state of Israel. Another ADL executive, who even denounced the extremely conservative agenda of Christian Zionists, asserted that the ADL values the support of Christian Zionists because of the grave threats facing the state of Israel. One of the senior officers from the pro-Israeli Jewish political group, the American Jewish Committee, acknowledged the practical and realistic nature of the alliance between Christian Zionists and pro-Israeli right-wing movements, noting that this alliance currently contributes positively to Israel's national security concerns and interests in a tumultuous region.³⁸

Christian Zionist John Hagee's opening speech at the 2007 AIPAC Conference was another significant manifestation of the alliance between Christian Zionists and pro-Israeli Jews, who are attempting to shape the foreign policy preferences of the Washington administration in line with Israel's national security priorities. Despite Hagee's accusations that Jews lack a proper religious life, suggesting that anti-Semitic movements originate from

³⁴ Brian L. Stuckert, *Strategic Implications of American Millennialism* (Kansas: US Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2008), 44-51.

³⁵ John Hagee, *Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World* (Florida: Frontline, 2006), 18.

³⁶ John J. Mearsheimer – Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 136.

³⁷ Irving Kristol, "The Political Dilemma of American Jews", *The Commentary Magazine* (July 1984).

³⁸ Shalom Goldman, "Christians and Zionism", *American Jewish History* 93/2 (June 2007), 245-260.

Jewish defiance of God and that the Lord directs anti-Semitic attacks to compel Jews to accept Him, members of AIPAC welcomed him for his opening speech at the pro-Israeli organizational gathering. Despite his negative remarks about Jews, Hagee was received favorably by AIPAC's leadership due to his strong advocacy for the state of Israel.³⁹

6. Unholy Alliance

It should be noted that the underlying agenda of Christian Zionists causes considerable concern among Jews. Interactions with Christian Zionists are primarily undertaken by Jews for the benefit of the state of Israel. The true and long-lasting objective of Christian Zionists is to ensure the conversion of Jews to Christianity following their migration to Eretz Israel. Additionally, they vehemently oppose any peace deal that would involve territorial concessions to non-Jews. Overall, their strict religious and political views significantly complicate the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

Jewish journalist and writer Jo Mort, whose expertise lies in the Israeli-Palestinian issue and who is a member of Americans for Peace Now, describes the partnership between pro-Israeli Jews and Christian Zionists as an 'unholy alliance,' given their completely different and conflicting long-term goals despite their current close cooperation. Many so-called moderate American Jews also caution against radical Christian Zionist support for Israeli territorial expansions at the expense of Palestinians, as well as the settlement of these lands with additional Jews, which could further hinder the prospects for peace between the two sides.

As a matter of fact, within the dispensationalist agenda of Christian Zionists, Jews are merely characters in a grand narrative designed by God. Consequently, Christian Zionists do not have a particular affection for Jews beyond their role in their understanding of this divine narrative. Ultimately, for dispensationalist Christian Zionists, Jews face two options: they will either die as Jews or convert to Christianity by accepting Jesus Christ as their savior and Lord. In other words, for Jews who are not inclined to convert to Christianity, the end-times prophecy of Christian Zionists offers a rather unpromising destiny within the overall context of dispensationalist theological understanding.⁴⁰

7. Importance and Limits of Christian Zionism

Christian Zionists can be positioned as an influential group within the broader framework of the pro-Israeli lobby in USA politics. Christian Zionists reinforced rigid and uncompromising approaches both in Tel Aviv and Washington by extending support to illegal Jewish settler expansion on occupied Palestinian lands, while also overtly rebuking any peace deal between Israel and Palestine that involves land transfers. Consequently, the radical and persistent pro-Israeli efforts of Christian Zionists complicated efforts by the USA to pressure Israel into adopting a more lenient course of action. The increase in the number of settlers, fueled by substantial financial aid from Christian Zionists, can be seen as a key factor contributing to the diminished prospects of a peace agreement between the parties involved.

³⁹ Christopher Jones, *Rushing Ahead to Armageddon* (Florida: Xulon Press, 2010), 297.

⁴⁰ Jo-Ann Mort, "An Unholy Alliance in Support of Israel", *Los Angeles Times* (19 May 2022).

Additionally, it should be noted that Christian Zionists also organize religious tours to the region, which serves as a lucrative revenue stream for the Tel Aviv administration.⁴¹

The existence of the Christian Zionist movement supporting Israel also demonstrates that backing Israel is not only carried out by Jews but also by non-Jews. This further supports the idea that a broad coalition of various organizations is behind the pro-Israeli alliance in the USA. This situation creates pressure on non-Jewish policymakers and practitioners in the USA to align their policy preferences with support for Israel. It is also important to recognize that the Bible and Christianity continue to exert a profound influence on Anglo-American culture, which, whether directly or indirectly, drives Christian believers to adopt a pro-Israeli stance in accordance with dispensationalist Christian beliefs. These beliefs suggest that the return of Jesus Christ will follow the repopulation of the Holy Lands with Jews. Although not all Americans are influenced by dispensationalist theology, many Christian Americans were either raised by Bible-reading parents or attended Sunday school where they learned biblical stories from clergy. This has led them to internalize the notion that the assembly of Jews in Palestine is a natural step in the dispensationalist prophetic process. After internalizing such dispensationalist dogmas, many Christian Americans naively believe that it is both appropriate and acceptable for Jewish people to return to Palestinian lands and establish an independent state, which they see as a harbinger of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.⁴²

Although Christian Zionists are firmly devoted to the creation of a Greater Israel encompassing all the lands promised by God to Abraham and his descendants and vehemently oppose the two-state solution because it would involve the cession of a portion of these holy and promised lands to outsiders, it is important to recognize that the influence of Christian Zionists has its limits. Their staunch opposition to the two-state solution, rooted in rigid religious and dogmatic beliefs, did not prevent U.S. President Bill Clinton from pursuing the two-state solution at the Camp David Summit, where he mediated peace efforts between Palestine's Yasser Arafat and Israel's Ehud Barak in 2000. Christian Zionists were also unable to block the Wye River Memorandum, which authorized the Israeli military withdrawal from certain parts of the West Bank. This memorandum was accepted by Palestine's Yasser Arafat and Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu and was brokered by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in 1998. Additionally, despite significant support from Christian Zionists, Republican U.S. President George W. Bush dramatically expressed his endorsement for an independent Palestinian state.

Unlike other components of the pro-Israeli lobby in the USA, Christian Zionists' primary concern is not solely the state of Israel and its national security. They also prioritize other social and cultural issues in line with their ultra-conservative agenda. According to the Pew Research Center (2021), approximately 24% of U.S. adults, totaling around 80 million individuals, identify as evangelical Christians, who largely support this dispensationalist theological approach that favors the state of Israel. In contrast, Wheaton College's Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals (2016) estimates that between 90 to 100 million Americans, accounting for about 30-35% of the population, could be classified as

⁴¹ Ilan Ben Zion, "Christian pilgrims fuel Holy Land tourism boom", *Financial Times* (20 April 2019).

⁴² Peter Gries, *The Politics of American Foreign Policy: How Ideology Divides Liberals and Conservatives over Foreign Affairs*, (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2014), 185-200.

evangelical.⁴³ It should also be mentioned that Christian Zionist groups are not as professionally organized as other parts of the pro-Israeli alliance in the USA, such as AIPAC. Moreover, they do not often scrutinize national security or foreign policy issues in-depth to the same extent as other influential members of the pro-Israeli circles who aim to shape Washington's policies in Israel's interests. Academic studies further prove that their political lobbying capabilities are not as strong either.⁴⁴ However, influential figures such as John Hagee highlight that individual leaders within these movements can possess substantial lobbying influence. Nevertheless, Christian Zionists still carry out lobbying activities in Washington in the interests of Israel, albeit to a limited extent compared to other pro-Israeli groups in the USA.⁴⁵ It is important to emphasize that while Christian Zionists strive for the well-being of the state of Israel, this issue represents only one item in their comprehensive conservative Christian agenda. However, following the events of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent incursions, Israel has once again become the most prominent subject on their agenda. Additionally, during President Donald Trump's administration, the evangelical lobby experienced its golden age, further amplifying its influence in advocating pro-Israel policies. In contrast, other influential pro-Israeli groups are operating in the USA that prioritize Washington's aid to Tel Aviv as a key focus of their activities. Pro-Israeli organizations like AIPAC and ADL conduct lobbying operations with that vision. Similarly, the Washington Institute and the Jewish Institute for National Security of America are among the influential research and policy institutes that shape Washington's academic and foreign policy agenda to further cement its support in favor of Israel.

It is important to remember that not all Christians in the USA support the state of Israel and its actions toward Palestinians. While biblical prophecies about Israel do exist, Jewish brutality against Arabs cannot be justified by any legitimate religious teaching. Despite the influence of biblical teachings in Anglo-American culture, many churches in the Western world, including those in the Anglo-American sphere, denounce the oppression of Palestinians by Israel and advocate for a two-state solution to achieve peace in the Middle East, according to their interpretation of Christianity.⁴⁶ Just as many Jewish people in the Western world oppose the actions of the Israeli state, there are also millions of Christians calling for peace.

There are also significant differences between Christian Zionists and other influential pro-Israel organizations regarding economic influence and media visibility. Although it would be a mistake to underestimate the financial strength of Christian Zionists, many other pro-Israel and Jewish organizations wield substantial monetary dominance in the USA. Similarly, regarding regional issues and developments affecting Israel's security and interests, media outlets do not typically seek the opinions of Christian Zionists. While it is true that

⁴³ Aslam Abdullah, "Part 4: Evangelicals in the U.S: Population Statistics and State Rankings," *IslamicCity*, July 7, 2024, <https://www.islamicity.org/102139/evangelicals-in-the-u-s-population-statistics-and-state-rankings/> (Accessed October 29, 2024).

⁴⁴ Steve Brouwer vd., *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 115.

⁴⁵ Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism*, 297-301.

⁴⁶ Paul Peter Jesep, *Crucifying Jesus and Secularizing America: The Republic of Faith Without Wisdom*, (Indiana: Xlibris Publishing, 2008), 151-172.

Christian Zionist pastors have a sizable audience for spiritual guidance, highly circulated and respected newspapers and major TV outlets with broad audience reach tend to consult academics and experts from professional research and higher education institutions. Nonetheless, Christian Zionists have become an increasingly influential component of the pro-Israel coalition in the USA, particularly in recent years. This growing influence is exemplified by their role in significant political decisions, such as President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the relocation of the U.S. embassy. Additionally, influential leaders like Pastor John Hagee have collaborated closely with prominent political figures, participating in events such as the inauguration of the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem and facilitating meetings between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. officials before congressional addresses. These actions highlight the expanding lobbying capacity and political impact of Christian Zionist organizations within the broader pro-Israel advocacy alliance.

Conclusion

Hamas led the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, and the following atrocities and incidents of violence committed by Israel against tens of thousands of Palestinians, predominantly women and children, could be seen as equivalent to ethnic cleansing or genocide. This once again brought the concept of Zionism to the attention of the international community. While the conceptualization of Zionism is mostly focused on debates covering the Palestine/Israel issue, the subject of Christian Zionism and its implications for unconditional American support for Israel remains understudied. This article attempts to fill this gap in the literature.

Christian Zionists can be regarded as an integral part of the broader pro-Israeli lobby in the USA, significantly influencing the Washington administration to align its foreign policy to preserve and safeguard the national security interests of the State of Israel, which they believe was founded on the lands promised to Abraham and his descendants by God himself. Christian Zionists are not only comprised of religious Christian leaders who can significantly influence the conservative segments of American society but also high-level politicians who play pivotal roles in drafting and legislating pro-Israeli laws in the legislative bodies of the USA. Additionally, both prominent religious and political leaders from the USA organize regular visits to Israel to further cement the ties between Washington and Tel Aviv.

While it is believed that dispensationalist biblical prophecy was among the motivations behind British Foreign Secretary Balfour's sympathy for the creation of a Jewish state on the Promised Lands mentioned in the Bible, dispensationalist theology was spread to and popularized in the USA by Christian Zionist clergymen Moody and Blackstone. The creation of the State of Israel on the Promised Lands to Abraham in 1948, and more astonishingly Israel's groundbreaking victory over its neighbors in the Six-Day War of 1967, in which the Arab regimes, allies of the Soviet Union—the USA's archenemy during the Cold War period—were utterly humiliated, whetted the appetite of Christian Zionists in terms of emboldening their support for Israel. Because Israel captured the entirety of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the West Bank as a result of its dramatic victory, Christian Zionists perceived this development as a fulfillment of the biblical prophecy that Jews are indeed in the process of repopulating the Promised Lands, which is a sign of the return of Jesus Christ.

After the 1967 Israeli victory and its reverberations on the comprehension of conservative Christian circles, Christian Zionists began to follow more enthusiastic and aspirational policies to bolster their support for Israel. Their activities took shape under the umbrella of several influential Christian Zionist organizations in an attempt to maximize American support for Israel. Moreover, these organizations engage in comprehensive lobbying initiatives, collaborate with political authorities, and facilitate gatherings that promote pro-Israel agendas within the American political context.

Christians United for Israel (CUFI), International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ), the Christians' Israel Public Action Committee, Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFIC), the Unity Coalition for Israel, and the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel are leading Christian Zionist organizations working in this effort. Through these bodies, radical Christian Zionists prioritizing dispensationalist understanding are making every effort to block any form of a two-state solution between Palestine and Israel because they vehemently oppose the concession of the Promised Lands to non-Jews, which would be against dispensationalist theology. Similarly, they are financing the expansion of illegal Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, which is another significant barrier to Middle East peace. Both Christian Zionist politicians and clergymen regularly visit Israel and directly encourage high-level radical right-wing Israeli politicians to continue their expansionist policies, seriously undermining the fundamental human rights of Palestinians and humiliating them. In a sense, it could be claimed that there is a noteworthy symbiotic relationship between Christian Zionists and the radical right-wing Israeli political movement, which has been governing Israel since the historic 1977 Knesset elections. Israeli expansionist policies in the Promised Lands to Abraham support the legitimacy of the Christian Zionists because they interpret Israeli aggression on Palestinian lands as the fulfillment of God's prophecy mentioned in the Bible. Believing that they are on the right side of this dispensationalist process due to Israeli aggression, Christian Zionists further intensify their socio-cultural and political influence to affect the Washington administration and the American people to further support Israel.

However, it must be remembered that this very close cooperation between the Israeli right and Christian Zionists is actually an unholy alliance. Even though radical Christian Zionists support Jews occupying Palestinian lands, they do not do so out of affection for them. They are merely a pawn in the grand design that would eventually lead to the return of Jesus Christ, in accordance with dispensationalism. When Jesus returns, Jews are expected to convert to Christianity and accept Jesus Christ as their savior. However, this premise is largely false. Although there are many notable exceptions, the majority of Jews have historically shown no inclination to convert to Christianity, and this trend continues today. Furthermore, there is no concrete evidence indicating that they would be willing to convert even if Jesus Christ were to return to the Holy Lands, as believed by Christian Zionist dispensationalist theology. Jews are content that Christian Zionists are among the actors influencing American society and government in favor of their Jewish state and its horrific policies towards Palestinians, but beyond that, they do not share the same biblical dispensationalist interpretation with Christian Zionists. Therefore, even though these two groups heavily support each other, their cooperation is not based on genuine friendship but rather on self-calculated interests that will eventually put them on a collision course in the long term.

Although Christian Zionists are integral members of the broader pro-Israeli alliance in the USA, their influence operates differently compared to organizations like AIPAC and the ADL. Christian Zionists, exemplified by leaders such as Pastor John Hagee, view the protection of Israel as a religious and moral duty. Consequently, while organizations like AIPAC focus primarily on the political and strategic defense of Israel, Christian Zionist groups address a wider array of moral and religious issues alongside their pro-Israel advocacy. Many Christians in the Anglo-American sphere were raised by Bible-reading parents and attended Sunday Bible schools, which imbued the Bible with significant influence over their social and cultural worldview. However, this does not imply that all Christians are Zionists or that they support Israel's policies towards its neighbors simply because they are mentioned in the Bible. Millions of devout Christians oppose the atrocities committed by Israel against civilians.

Additionally, there are limits to the political influence of Christian Zionists even within the USA. Despite their firm opposition to a two-state solution, due to their reluctance to cede any portion of the Holy Lands to non-Jews, the U.S. administration facilitated the Oslo Accords between the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel in 2000. Furthermore, Christian Zionists were unable to prevent the successful conclusion of the Wye River Memorandum, which mandated Israel's military withdrawal from certain areas of the West Bank. Despite their significant influence on his administration, President George W. Bush openly supported the creation of an independent Palestinian state. These political developments concerning the Palestinian-Israeli issue indicate that, while Christian Zionists historically faced limitations in their influence, their role has significantly expanded since President Donald Trump's administration. Notably, Christian Zionists played a crucial role in influencing Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, thereby amplifying their impact on major foreign policy decisions concerning Israel.

Regardless of the debates over their power and limitations, the existence of Christian Zionism and its socio-political activities in support of Israel—despite its significant human rights violations, which were once again highlighted by the recent Al-Aqsa Flood operation led by Hamas—is not a conspiracy theory but a reality. Similar to other lobbying groups in the USA that advocate for specific interest groups, Christian Zionists operate within the framework of a broader pro-Israeli lobby in the country. This study aims to understand Christian Zionists' support for Israel and its underlying causes, which are rooted in dispensationalist biblical interpretation. Further comprehensive and extensive research is necessary to fully understand the other actors and their motivations in supporting Israel. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the influence of the Christian Bible, which significantly impacts Anglo-American culture, will likely remain a major factor behind the support for Israel among millions of Americans, despite its severe human rights violations, in the foreseeable future. In recent years, Christian Zionists have substantially increased their influence and impact within the United States, particularly within the pro-Israel coalition. Although they previously encountered setbacks in influencing American political leadership, their strategic advocacy and collaboration with key political figures have positioned them more favorably today. Notably, Christian Zionists played a pivotal role in President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and relocate the U.S. embassy there, underscoring their significant sway in major foreign policy decisions concerning Israel. As such, Christian Zionists have emerged as a more powerful force within

the American political spectrum, making them a central entity to reckon with in the ongoing support and advocacy for Israel.

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