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**İSRAİL İLE FİLİSTİNLİ ARAPLAR ARASINDA YAPILABİLECEK HERHANGİ BİR BARIŞTA
DİKKATE ALINMASI GEREKEN İKİ TOPLUMSAL GRUP: ULUSALCI HAREDİM VE
EVANJELİKLER**

**TWO COMMUNITY GROUPS THAT SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IF ANY KIND OF
PEACE IS TO BE ACHIEVED BETWEEN ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN ARABS: THE
NATIONALIST HAREDIM IN ISRAEL AND EVANGELICALS**

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Öz

Sivil toplum kuruluşları veya diğer toplumsal gruplar, diğer aktörlerin yanısıra uluslar arasındaki ilişkileri etkileyen önemli unsurlardır. Bu kapsamda, Haredim veya diğer bir ifadeyle ultra-Ortodoks Yahudiler ve Evanjelik Hristiyanlar, İsrail-Filistin ilişkilerinde ve barış sürecinde dikkate alınması gereken önemli aktörlerdir. Haredim, gerek İsrail iç politikasında ve gerekse de barış sürecinde, sahip olduğu nüfus oranının ötesinde bir etkiye sahiptir. Öte yandan Evanjelik Hristiyanlar, diğer İsrail yanlı kuruluşlardan bağımsız olarak ABD’de İsrail’i destekleyen en önemli organizasyonlardan birisidir. Her iki toplumsal grup yapılabilecek bir barış anlaşması kapsamında İsrail’in toprak tavizinde bulunmasına karşı çıkmaktadır ve bu konuda katı bir tutuma sahiptir. Bu makale, söz konusu her iki grubun İsrail’in Filistinli Araçlarla olan ilişkilerini ve barış sürecini nasıl etkilediğini araştırmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, İsrail’in kalıcı bir barışa ulaşması için her iki grubun dikkate alınması ve etkilerinin dengelenmesi gerekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İsrail, İlişki, Ortodoks, Evanjelizm, Haredim, Dış Politika.

Abstract

Apart from other actors, Nongovernmental organizations or community groups are two important actors with influence and responsibility in international relations and in peace-making in particular. In this context, the Haredim or ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel and the Evangelicals are two of the most important religious groups which affect the Israeli-Palestinian Arabs relations and the peace process. Haredim carry weight in Israeli politics far in excess of their numbers, and can affect decision-making process in government circles and provide a support base for religious militants. On the other hand, since the 1970s, Evangelical Christians have become a dominating pro-Israel force independent of the other Jewish interest groups in the United States. Both groups are hawkish on the question of territorial compromise with the Palestinian Arabs, and strengthen the struggle against territorial withdrawals. This paper examines how these two community groups affect Israel’s relations with Palestinian Arabs, and how they affect the peace process. The argument is that for Israel, it is necessary to balance the effects of these two groups of people if it wants to reach a permanent peace.

Keywords: Israel, Relations, Orthodox, Evangelicals, Haredim, Foreign Policy.

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Introduction

Governments or international organizations are not the only actors with influence and responsibility in international relations and in peace-making in particular. Nongovernmental organizations or community groups also seek to influence or control government policies by various ways. In this context, the Haredim or ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel and the Evangelicals are two of the most important religious groups which affect the Israeli-Palestinian Arabs relations and the peace process. These are two of the most dynamic forces which yield considerable power in Israel's relations with Palestinian Arabs.

Even though the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is primarily a dispute between the two nations of Jews and Arabs, it has religious aspects that need to be addressed. If a peace is to be achieved, the above mentioned social groups need to be addressed in their own symbolic language. Because, religion and these religious groups have been quite influential in Israel's policy towards the territories occupied since 1967. They give a religious meaning to the conquest of West Bank and East Jerusalem, and think that Jewish possession and settlement in those areas would accelerate arrival of the messianic age. The Haredim opposition to the land for peace formula has been motivated by a normative mindset which centered around a messianic theology. Besides framing the territorial issue in religious terms, they have been also influential as a political actor. They spearheaded the settlement of the occupied territories, were the first to set up communities in the West Bank, and protested fervently against any territorial concessions. Moreover, they utilised the mechanisms and power constellations of Israel's political system, which led to their regular involvement in the governing coalitions.

On the other hand, Support for Israel is the dogma of many Christian groups and is a theme that runs through the belief system of the Evangelical Christian society. The Evangelicals believe that Israeli support must continue to fulfill certain prophetic claims made in the Bible. As one of the prominent evangelicals, Pastor John Hagee told that "we believe in the promise of Genesis 12:3 regarding the Jewish people and the nation of Israel. We believe that this is an eternal covenant between God and the seed of Abraham to which God is faithful" (Hagee, 2014). Pat Robertson, one other evangelical leader, pointed similar statements when he was in Israel as "the Jews are God's chosen people. Israel is a special nation that has a special place in God's heart. He will defend this nation. So Evangelical Christians stand with Israel. That is one of the reasons I am here" (Lazaroff, 2006). Although there are some differences between evangelical denominations, the majority of evangelicals agree that Israel's presence is a prelude to the second coming of Christ. They believe that the return of the Jews to Israel is in line with Biblical prophecies, and this is a necessary condition for Jesus to return to earth as its king (Krusch, 2014).

In this regard, this paper tries to discuss the role that both Haredim and the Evangelicals have played in shaping the foreign policy of Israel towards Palestinian Arabs. It tries to elaborate the Haredim as a political force from the late 1960s on and its influence on government. Moreover, the Evangelical support for Israel on religious grounds shall be scrutinized.

1. Who Are the Haredim?

Haredim is a general term used to describe the ultra-Orthodox Jews. Haredim is the plural of the word Haredi. Haredi literally means "someone in fear of the power of the divine," or "God fearing." It refers to describe the traditional Orthodox Jews (Reich and Goldberg, 2008: 207; Rubin, 2012: 332). Haredim as a distinct cultural and political force arose within Jewish communities in Europe in reaction to the westernization and secularization, and the term "Orthodox" came into use to describe the Jews who continued Judaism's traditional tenets and practices (Rubinstein et al., 2002: 45-47). When modernization's first effects were felt in Europe, Jews had new opportunities which would potentially help them contribute to European economic and social revitalization. This new situation was called the "Jewish Enlightenment," or the Haskalah (Heilman and Friedman, 1991: 200). However, the Enlightenment and emancipation confronted the Jews with problems as to their religious identity. Social changes compelled many of them to alter their religious practices. These Jews tried to balance the strict religious needs with modern life. They have become known as the "modern Orthodox." Besides, there were those who believed no such balance could exist, and this latter group insisted that the appropriate response to the Enlightenment was to maintain strict adherence to traditional Jewish law. They have resisted modernity, and became known as the "ultra-Orthodox."

Until the end of the 19th century, when political Zionism entered the stage of history, the idea of living in the Land of Israel was a spiritual rather than a practical, realistic hope. The modern notion of Zionism was brought about in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but was mainly denounced by the religious community. Orthodox Jews believed that the Jewish people's return to the Land of Israel (Eretz Israel or Eretz Yisrael in Hebrew) would occur only with the coming of Messiah (Tessler, 1990: 254). The phrase of the Land of Israel has been used to refer to Palestine and is found in the Bible. It refers to the land of ancient Israel which covers all of Palestine, including West Bank and Jerusalem (Reich and Goldberg, 2008: 156).

Religious Jews held the traditional belief that the Land of Israel was given to the ancient Israelites by God, and the right of the Jews to that land was permanent and inalienable. Therefore the Messiah must have appeared before the land could return to Jewish control. For this reason, religious Jews adopted a rejectionist position towards Zionism, and held the idea that establishing a Jewish state would be a heresy (Tessler, 1990: 265). However, some modern and religious Jews have accepted an adaptive strategy, supporting Zionism and its modern lifestyle, and required that the Messiah should not be waited for the Jewish state to be established, and this state should run according to both secular and Jewish religious norms and principles. Thus, Orthodoxy in Judaism has been divided between religious non-Zionist and religious Zionist groups (Hazan, 2000: 113), non-Zionist groups opposing the creation of the state while religious Zionist (also known as religious nationalist or nationalist ultra-Orthodox) groups supporting it.

Even though the new State of Israel was governed by secular Zionists, Israel was marked by its creation on the basis of religious identity, and “there is no secular definition of Jewishness” (Orr, 1994: 50). The first chief rabbi in the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish community in mandatory Palestine), Avraham Yitzhak Kook, was the theological source for religious Zionism. Contrary to most religious Jews at the time who regarded secular Zionism as a heretical movement that defied the will of God by trying to end Jewish exile before the arrival of the Messiah, Kook supported the secular Zionists in the belief that the return of Jews to their homeland represented the beginning of the process of divine redemption. He argued that secular Zionists, the pioneers who had begun emigrating from Europe to Palestine were carrying out God’s will. Kook justified the participation of religious Jews in the Zionist national project, and rationalised the relationship between secular Zionism and religion: “The spirit of Israel is so closely linked to the spirit of God that a Jewish nationalist, no matter how secularist his intention may be, is, despite himself, imbued with the divine spirit even against his own will” (Quoted in Goldberg, 1996: 155). Thus, Kook assigned an inherent holiness to Jewish people and the Land of Israel as a whole. He applied this argument to the reality of Zionist settlement in Palestine, and secular Zionist ideology was accepted by some religious Jews as a divine instrument in achieving the redemption of the Jewish people. This use of theological thought was an example of how religion affected the politics.

1.1. The Nationalist Haredim in Israeli Politics

Until the rise of religious nationalism in the 1970s, religious parties concentrated on their material interests (state patronage and funding for their own educational institutions and subsidised housing, exemption of Haredi males from compulsory military service) rather than broader issues, including foreign affairs. The handling of foreign and security policy was overseen only by secular Zionist leadership of Mapai/Labor (Maoz, 2006: 488). The Haredim was generally non-Zionist in political orientation (“believing that the full national renewal of the Jewish people must await the arrival of the Messiah”), however, after the 1967 Six Day War, most of them have realized Zionism and become integrated in Israeli political life with their own parties (Reich and Goldberg, 2008: 207; Rubin, 2012: 332). Whereas some Haredi groups have maintained a hard lined rejectionist position, and abstained from taking part in the political process, some of them adopted a pragmatic position, and involved themselves in the political process.

Traditionally, there have been three main Haredim parties (National Religious Party [NRP], United Torah Judaism [UTJ], and Shas Party) in Israel representing their religious communities (Rubin, 2012: 223-224). After 1967, NRP was the main religious nationalist party. It worked hard to balance the demands of rival groups of which one who put settlements first and the other who prioritised the use of religious practices in daily life. It was always a member of all coalitions from 1948 to 1992 (Rubin, 2012: 166). After 1973, the party took a more nationalistic character and its followers believed that settlements in West Bank and Jerusalem were closely associated with divine redemption. The competition from Shas and its rejection of the peace process all helped NRP shrink in the Knesset. On the other hand, internal disputes over the fate of Gaza and being a one-issue party destroyed NRP and it split ahead of the 2009 elections into National Union, a far-right, pro-settler group; and Jewish Home. The Jewish Home is a religious and nationalistic right-wing party, which mainly supports construction in the settlements (Jewish Virtual Library, 2015). Although it is a religious Zionist party, and it is the successor to the NRP, the Jewish Home primarily represents the modern Orthodox Jews. On the other hand, party’s members adhere to the same beliefs of the Haredim that Jews are divinely commanded to retain control over the Land of Israel. Moreover, the leader of the party, Naftali Bennett has pro-settlement views (The Associated Press, 2013), and he has distinguished himself with a series of extremist, hardline statements. He has been a supporter of settlements and an opponent of the two-state solution: “There is not going to be a Palestinian state within the tiny land of Israel” he said (Sherwood, 2013).

UTJ was formed in 1992 as an alliance between two ultra-Orthodox political parties, Agudat Israel and Degel HaTorah (Reich and Goldberg, 2008: 522). Agudat Israel was especially known in the late 1980s for its active support for West Bank and Gaza settlers and its opposition to territorial concessions in peacemaking

(Reich and Goldberg, 2008: 26). The party encouraged settlement building and discouraged territorial negotiations with the Palestinians, espousing the view that the entire Land of Israel is the divine right of the Jewish people. When Ehud Barak negotiated with Arafat in Camp David in 2000, UTJ quit the coalition government out of fear that Barak might give parts of Jerusalem to Palestinians (Rubin, 2012: 225). The politics in Israel illustrates not only a deeper involvement of religious issues in domestic and foreign policy, but also deep struggles between parties, which is true also for the religious parties. This division has shown itself when the religious-political landscape was more and more fragmented by splits and mergers. The diversification caused by the rise of new competitors in the religious bloc is most impressively illustrated by the emergence of Shas in 1984. Officially Shas is a right-wing, ultra-Orthodox party. It was founded in 1984 as the answer to decades of discrimination by the Ashkenazi-dominated religious establishment. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef formed the party in protest after Agudat Israel refused to place Mizrahi candidates on its election list (Rubin, 2012: 225).

Haredim parties in Israel have usually got their electoral support almost from religious groups (Hazan, 2000: 114), and beginning from the 1970s, they became more interested in foreign and security policies of the state. They did not confine themselves only to domestic issues; instead, gradually adopted a hawkish position on the territorial question. Given the fragmented political system, religious parties exerted considerable power and attained a powerful position within the government disproportionate to their electoral gains. In pressing their demands, they made or broke ruling coalitions or hastened early elections. As the electoral system forced parties to form coalition governments, the competition for power between Labor and Likud Parties (the major two parties in Israeli political system until 2000s) benefited the small religious parties. Both parties tried to induce religious parties to form a government, and their inclusion in the governing coalitions became a necessity. Because they are in an advantageous position during coalition formation, the small religious parties have the opportunity to blackmail the big parties. For instance, in many governments, the NRP controlled the Ministry of Housing and Construction, and increased the funding for new settlements in the occupied territories, and contributed to the ongoing conflict with Palestinians. However, the inclusion of religious parties in coalition governments was also closely linked to the foreign policy choices of the big parties in the government. In this respect, Yitzhak Rabin was the first prime minister who abstained from inviting religious parties into the government "in order to diminish the role of religion in foreign policy" (Frisch and Sandler, 2004: 84). In contrast, his successor Benjamin Netanyahu put together a religious nationalist coalition that supported his hawkish policies towards the Palestinian Arabs. In fact, Netanyahu's victory in the 1996 elections was largely brought about by the broad support of the religious public, and by the late 1990s, the peace process was buried under renewed hostility and mistrust.

1.2. The Capture of Biblical Landscapes, Settlements, and the Haredim

The year 1967 had profound impacts for Israeli society and Israeli politics. Israeli army captured the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem during the war. This was a "momentous turning point in the history of the Jewish state" (Sandler, 1993: 141). The 1967 war added to Israel those territories that constituted the core of the biblically promised land: Judea and Samaria (West Bank), and East Jerusalem with the Temple Mount, the holiest place in Judaism. This gave rise to religious zionism as an important factor which has been taken into account in Israeli politics since then. Many religious Jews saw the conquest of East Jerusalem and the West Bank of the Jordan river as the providentially redemptive hand of the God and those people thought that they were living in messianic times (Shlaim, 2001: 549). They interpreted the military campaign as a divine act which would restore the Jewish people to the promised land, and because the biblical lands were under the control of the Jewish state, religious zionists began to deal with the future of these territories. From then on, political discourse in Israel has had a religious factor which was absent in political spectrum while discussing foreign policy and security. This perspective has interpreted history, such as military victories, as being accomplished through divine intervention and indirectly assigned religious significance to the planning and various outcomes of the affairs of state.

After the war, religious nationalists had the opportunity of combining nationalism and religion with the idea of Eretz Israel. They became more closely associated with the hawkish position on territorial concessions. For the spiritual leader of the NRP, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, there were no occupied territories, only redeemed land. After the war he demanded their complete annexation and Jewish settlement (Masalha, 2000: 113; Dowty, 1998: 228). His followers responded by establishing Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) in 1974 and began settlement activity in 1975 (Shahak and Mezvinsky, 1999: 55-56). Land began to be seen as an important factor in the worldview of these religious and political Jews:

"For many, territory has become the very core element of their ideology, having replaced other religious precepts as the foundation stone around which their religious and national affiliation is

based. Their inherent 'right' to settle the West Bank is seen as part of a Divine process, of which pre-1967 Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 were stages through which abstract and metaphysical notions of space have been transformed into concrete notions of statehood following two thousand years of exile and territorial dislocation, and through which the 'homeland' territory has returned to its 'rightful owner', and been 'liberated' from foreign control" (Newman, 2001: 241).

Changes in the ideological landscape of the political spectrum coincided with the transformation of the Israeli governing party system. The Likud Party won the elections in 1977, ending 30 years of political dominance of Labor. With the Likud in power, the Eretz Israel ideology was transformed into a nationalist agenda and became the core of right-wing foreign politics. Religious groups welcomed this result and "power sharing between a nationalist ruling party and the religious parties proved both more natural and politically potent" (Frisch and Sandler, 2004: 83). While the political system in Israel moved rightward and Israeli society became more ideologically radicalized, the religious nationalist position of NRP towards the settlements became more acceptable for the new political mainstream. And, the support of the new cabinet for the establishment of new settlements in the Westbank, announced by the Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the new Minister of Agriculture Ariel Sharon immediately after the elections, was highly appreciated by the settlers of Gush Emunim (Peleg, 1987: 45-47). What brought together Likud with the Jewish settlers and the NRP was the emphasis on the Eretz Israel over the State of Israel (Ram, 2003: 28).

Religious parties' attachment to Eretz Israel ideology has framed their attitude to Israel as a state. Following the Six-Day War, this paradigm, together with the fact that their followers tended to be more hawkish, inclined them towards pursuing a harder line in foreign policy (Dowty, 1998: 181). However, the attitudes of the different religious parties towards the occupied territories has not been uniform (Reiser, 1991: 79-83). Shas in particular has seemed to be inclined to pursue a pragmatic line over territorial compromise. It traded its votes in the Ehud Barak government of 1999-2000 on agreements with the Palestine National Authority and the dismantling of unofficial settlements for funding concessions (Weissbrod, 2003: 86). Together with its electoral strength, this helped Shas replace the NRP as the central religious player in government.

After the end of Cold War and during 1990s, Israel engaged in a peace process that seemed to pave the road to a negotiated solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The land for peace approach summarized the political vision of the governing Labor Party under Yitzhak Rabin. "Rabin, in short, consistently framed the settlements as holding hostage Israel's future peace and prosperity and as depriving Israel of its Zionist and liberal identity" (Barnett, 2002: 74). The prospect of peace infused hope and even enthusiasm in many parts of the Israeli society; however, for the religious Zionists, who had placed the territory at the center of their religious ideology and identity, the plan to give land for peace was perceived as an existential threat. "The settlers and the religious community were up in arms, frantic and angered by his (Rabin's) assault on their positions and core values" (Barnett, 2002: 79). This embittered opposition found its most tragic expression in the assassination of Rabin in 1995. The assassin, Yigal Amir, was a law student at the religious-conservative Bar Ilan-University and came from the religious Zionist background.

After Ariel Sharon replaced Netanyahu in Likud and became Prime Minister in 2003, he introduced his plan for the settlements and for the peace with Palestinian Arabs. He offered to pull the 7,500 settlers out of the Gaza, and wanted to retain the six major Jewish settlement blocks, holding 92,000 people, on the West Bank (Shlaim, 2004). Ahead of the Gaza withdrawal, religious nationalist parliamentarians tried to bring down the government in the Knesset. At the same time, mass rallies and countless acts of civil disobedience were staged. However, it would be wrong to assume that the Gaza withdrawal necessarily would repeat itself in the West Bank. Gaza's settler population was less than 3 percent of the West Bank's and its religious heritage far less significant. Although Sharon withdrew Israeli forces and settlements from Gaza, it is highly likely that he would not have been able to make more concessions, and he would not compromise on Jerusalem (Aronoff, 2010: 165).

2. Evangelicals and Their Support for Israel

Evangelicals are one of the three branches in American Protestantism which consist of fundamentalist, liberal, and evangelical. Liberal Protestantism does not focus its attention on classic biblical doctrine because liberal protestants do not view all of the Bibles teachings as literal facts. They do not believe "that Jesus was a supernatural being, but see him as a sublime moral teacher whose example they seek to follow through a lifetime of service-often directed primarily at the poor" (Mead, 2006: 30). On the other hand, fundamentalists and evangelicals believe that the Bible is the inspired teachings of God and that all of the teachings within are seen as absolute truth. They believe the high authority of the Bible, and even though interpretations of the Bible can vary, evangelicals accept it as the actual word of God (Spector, 2009: 43).

During the course of time, whereas fundamentalists began to withdraw from society, evangelicals, however, became more involved in mainstream American culture with a heavy involvement in politics.

Evangelicals are also called "Christian Zionists" (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007: 132-140), and this term is relatively new. It did not come into widespread use until the 1990s, and there is no generally accepted definition for it (Spector, 2009: 2). In a broad manner a Christian Zionist could be defined as any Christian who supports the Zionist aim of building the state of Israel, its army, government, and other institutions. The term could apply even more generally to any Christian who supports Israel for any reason (Riggans, 1988: 19). If Christian Zionism is to be defined more narrowly, it is "a movement within Protestant fundamentalism that understands the modern state of Israel as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and thus deserving of political, financial, and religious support" (Wagner, 2003).

2.1. Evangelical Reasoning

In the evangelical view, there have been phenomenal events that have taken place that gave reason to the rise in evangelicals. These particular events involve the relationship between fulfilled Biblical prophecy and the state of Israel and the Jewish people. According to evangelicals, there are prophetic themes recorded in the Old Testament portion of the Bible. When these prophecies were written 2,000 years ago, the Jewish people or Israelites were living on the land of Israel. One of the particular prophecies which are of great significance to the evangelical belief system is that God will use gentile (people other than Jews) nations to bless Israel (Spector, 2009: 23). In this case, evangelicals see the US as a "gentile nation" which is, according to biblical scriptures, obligated to support Israel. One of the prominent leaders of the evangelicals, Jerry Falwell pointed this obligation when he remarked that "God has blessed America because America has blessed the Jew," and invoked this verse in another instance again: "If this nation wants her fields to remain white with grain, her scientific achievements to remain notable, and her freedom to remain intact, America must continue to stand with Israel" (Falwell, 1980: 98).

Evangelicals believe that the American people must do everything in its power to support Israel. The scriptures in the Bible are taken seriously by evangelicals because they believe the US is a great country only because of her continuous support to Israel. Evangelicals believe that if the US stops supporting Israel, God will curse her like the nations that have gone against Israel. According to this view, God's blessing and prospering of the United States has been a direct result of her welcoming Israel more than any other nation (Gammons, 2002: 42). As Richard Land from the Southern Baptist Convention told in 2005 that "I want God to bless America, not curse America", and "I firmly believe that God blesses those who bless the Jews and curses those who curse them" (Spector, 2009: 24).

The second prophecy involves the covenantal promise God made to the Jewish people regarding Jewish decedents and the land of Israel. This covenant was made from God to Abraham while he and his people were residing in Israel. As Pat Robertson told "Evangelical Christians support Israel because we believe that words of Moses and the ancient prophets of Israel were inspired by God. We believe that the emergence of a Jewish state in the land promised by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was ordained by God" (Robertson, 2014). According to the evangelicals God gave the Holy Land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the ancestors of the Jewish people (Spector, 2009: 26). They believe that "the Jewish people have a right to live in their ancient land of Israel, and that the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of this historic right" (Christians United for Israel, 2014).

Evangelicals assert that the covenant is significant, because it shows why the land of Israel belongs to no people other than the Jews. Because of this, according to Hagee, the evangelical belief system does not encourage any form of settlement between Palestine and Israel (Gross, 2006). Christian Zionists have repeatedly remarked that the Land of Israel belongs to God, and that He will punish anyone who tries to divide it. Pat Robertson affirmed in 2004 in Jerusalem that Israel is part of God's providential plan. Islam, on the other hand, wants "to destroy Israel and take the land from the Jews and give East Jerusalem to Yasser Arafat. I see that as Satan's plan to prevent the return of Jesus Christ, the Lord" Robertson said, adding, "God says, 'I'm going to judge those who carve up the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It's my land and keep your hands off it'" (Haaretz, 2004). In fact, on every occurrence that Israel's land has been threatened, Evangelical Christians have protested the president and many congressional officials to discourage any form of settlement. They oppose the idea of a Palestinian state located on territory which should be in Israel's possession according to the Bible. That's the main reason why they have opposed Israeli withdrawal from Gaza on the same grounds. As a prime example, Hagee declared:

"The Roadmap for Peace is an ill-conceived document, one that has Israel giving up Gaza, then the West Bank, and then Jerusalem. It clearly violates the Word of God. How so? Joel 3:2 says...My heritage Israel...They divided up my land. When America forced Israel to give up Gaza, it was clearly violating Joel 3:2" (Hagee, 2007a: 61).

The third prophetic theme is about God's promise to bring the Jewish people to their land (Christian Friends of Israeli Communities, 2014). The regathering of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel is supposed to be prophesied in Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos in the Bible and they are the conditions to the full flowering of the Messianic age. The evangelical belief system argues that these scriptures were fulfilled after World War II and the events of the Holocaust. "A miracle took place and God did raise them up, literally out of their graves, and made them into a nation once again. On May 14, 1948, the modern state of Israel was born in a day" (Wagner, 2002: 13). In regards to the Isaiah scripture, this prophecy was fulfilled in that the Jewish people have immigrated to Israel from over 100 countries (Wagner, 2002: 14).

2.2. Evangelical Support

Evangelicals' influence on politics and the US' Middle East policy is not a new phenomenon. Their involvement in politics can date back to the 19th century during the protestant revivalist movement, when in 1881, William Blackstone, a well-known figure in American Zionism, gathered 43 signatures of key political figures to petition an effort to form a Jewish state in Palestine (Bennis and Mansour, 1998: 16). However, until the late 1970s and early 1980s, evangelicals were not a dominating political figure. During this time period, Likud administration in Israel started to recognize the political clout evangelical leaders were obtaining in the US government. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin instructed one of his aids to meet with prominent evangelical leaders in America to "explore the depth of their pro-Israel sentiment" (Kiracofe, 2009: 17). Israeli government officials and leaders such as Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu began to participate the gatherings of evangelicals, started to address and encourage their political efforts on Israel's behalf (Diner, 2004: 327).

In the 1980s, there was approximately 61 million US citizens that followed the evangelical belief system (Tivnan, 1987: 181). The Evangelical Christians started to become exceptionally influential in politics through their recognized evangelical leaders. One of the primary leaders that helped the rise of evangelicals in the 1980s was Dr. Jerry Falwell. He was a religious leader, political activist and television evangelist (Biography.com, 2014). Falwell was the founder of the Moral Majority which contributed greatly to the election of president Ronald Reagan who practiced evangelical beliefs. "The Moral Majority was a political organization of the United States which had an agenda of evangelical Christian-oriented political lobbying. It was founded in 1979 and dissolved in the late 1980s" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014). Falwell's intent was to not only increase evangelical involvement in politics but unite a new wave of support for Israel. That's why he restarted The Moral Majority Coalition in 2004 (Biography.com, 2014). Because of Falwell and the Moral Majorities' influences, the Reagan administration became one of the most pro-Israel administrations in the US history. Falwell also tried to strengthen pro-Israel sentiment in the US by the expansion of tourism to Israel by Christian groups (Kiracofe, 2009: 149), and developed close ties with Begin and other conservative politicians in Israel. As result of these close ties, Falwell, who became one of Israel's most passionate Christian friends, was awarded by Begin with the Jabotinsky Centennial Medal for his achievements (Spector, 2009: 147-148).

Another influential leader of the evangelical movement has been Pastor John Hagee. Hagee witnessed how Falwell united the evangelical front in the 1980s and used that motivation to continue the movement throughout the 1990s and into the present day:

"Pastor John C. Hagee is the founder and Senior Pastor of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas. He founded, and is the National Chairman of Christians United For Israel (CUFI), a grass roots national association through which every pro-Israel Christian ministry, para-church organization, or individual in America can speak and act with one voice in support of Israel in matters related to biblical issues. Christians United for Israel has grown to become the largest pro-Israel organization in the United States" (John Hagee Ministries, 2014).

He aimed CUFI to be a Christian version of the influential part of Israel lobby, American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) (Spector, 2009: 168). It comprised a dozen regional directors and a network of evangelical political activists who can be reached within twenty-four hours to lobby senators and congressmen. CUFI has a powerful and sophisticated machinery with which to mobilize the evangelical political base:

"To educate and mobilize Christian support for Israel, CUFI issues a weekly e-mail update and glossy quarterly magazine (The Torch; circulation 200,000) and maintains a regularly updated Web site. It arranges for quarterly teleconferences in Washington, DC, between select CUFI members and Israeli and US officials. Its public policy and lobbying work, beyond the annual conference in Washington, DC, includes electronic rapid response alerts that generate 'millions of phone calls and e-mails' from CUFI members to the executive and legislative branches of federal and state government" (Wood, 2007: 80).

CUFI has a close relationship with AIPAC. This was indicated by Hagee's participation as a speaker at the annual 2007 AIPAC conference. His presence at the AIPAC meeting was designed to reinforce AIPAC's demands for the US foreign policy in the Middle East. Moreover, Hagee used that event to declare the affirmation of the solidarity of Christian Zionists to Israel:

"There are millions of evangelical Christians across America who consider the Jewish people the apple of God's eye, who see you as the chosen people, a cherished people and a covenant people with an eternal covenant that will stand forever. Ladies and gentlemen of AIPAC it's a new day in America. The sleeping giant of Christian Zionism has awakened; there are 50 million Christians standing up and applauding the State of Israel. If a line has to be drawn, draw the line around both Christians and Jews; we are united; we are indivisible; we are bound together by the Torah-the roots of Christianity are Jewish. We are spiritual brothers and what we have in common is far greater than the things we've allowed to separate us over the years." (Hagee, 2007b).

One other influential evangelist leader is Pat Robertson. He is a "television evangelist best known for founding the Christian Coalition, an influential conservative political organization" (Pat Robertson Biography, 2014). Like other Christian Zionist organizations, Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to help poor Jews across the world move to Israel. When Israel's tourism industry was at a low point between 2000 and 2003 due to the Second Intifada, Pat Robertson visited Israel during this period and used his broadcasts to tell his millions of viewers it was safe to visit Israel (Krusch, 2014). Israeli and Jewish American leaders showed their appreciation of Robertson's commitment. In 2001, the Prime Minister Ariel Sharon gave him the Jabotinsky award in recognition of his service to Israel (Lind, 2002). In 2002, the Zionist Organization of America honored him with its State of Israel Friendship Award (The Official Site of Pat Robertson, 2014).

For many Evangelical Christians, the Israeli conquest of the old city of Jerusalem in 1967 was a crucial and prophetic event. This was also true for Pat Robertson. He was straightforward about the role that this prophecy played in his support for the Jewish state. In June 1967, as soon as he heard that war had broken out in the Middle East, he said that:

"Something just responded within me. I knew this had enormous significance, that we at CBN (the Christian Broadcasting Network) were linked with Israel. It had to do with the last times, and it had to do with the fulfillment of the prophecy that Jesus made when he said Jerusalem will be trodden under foot until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (White, 2014).

During the war with Lebanon, Robertson visited northern Israel in August 2006, and told that he saw that war as part of this worldwide conflict. He said that the Jewish state is "fighting for the United States, they are fighting for Western Europe, they are fighting for freedom-loving people everywhere" (Hiel, 2006). Robertson explained his thoughts about the Palestinians in a fiery speech at the Herzliya Conference in Israel in December 2003. Robertson appealed to his audience not to surrender territory in the hope of achieving peace. "Please don't commit national suicide" he implored them. "It is very hard for your friends to support you, if you make a conscious decision to destroy yourselves...Be strong! Be strong!" (Robertson, 2014). During the same conference, he summed up his thoughts against Palestinians:

"I hardly find it necessary to remind this audience of the stated objectives of Yasser Arafat, the PLO, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad. Their goal is not peace, but the final destruction of the State of Israel. At no time do they, or their allies in the Muslim world, acknowledge the sovereignty of Israel over even one square inch of territory in the Middle East. If a Palestinian State is created in the heart of Israel...the ability of the State of Israel to defend itself will be fatally compromised. The slogan 'land for peace' is a cruel chimera. The Sinai was given up. Did that bring lasting peace? No. Southern Lebanon was given up. Did that bring lasting peace? No. Instead Hezbollah rode tanks to the border of Israel shouting, 'On to Jerusalem!' ...Arafat was brought up at the knees of the man who yearned to finish the work of Adolf Hitler. How can any realist truly believe that this killer and his associates can become trusted partners for peace?" (Robertson, 2014).

With the effect of these prominent leaders, the number of evangelicals rose throughout the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium, their presence in the politics has remained strong. "At the beginning of the Gulf War, 14 percent of the people in the US believed that they were witnessing the beginning of Armageddon" (Saturen, 2006). The word "Armageddon" has become synonymous with the future battle in which God will intervene and destroy the armies of the Antichrist as predicted in Biblical prophecy (Herzog, 2014). After the attacks of 11 September 2001, the number of evangelicals and their support for Israel increased even more with the war on terror. Prior to this incident, 41 percent of Protestants identified themselves as evangelical; however, in 2003, the number rose to 54 percent (Mead, 2006: 36). In addition, the Southern Baptist Convention, which shares the evangelical belief system, gained approximately 7 million additional members in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 (Mead, 2006: 36). There has been also a quite

significant support for Israel. According to the Pew forum on Religion and Public Life, “44 percent of Americans believe that God gave the land that is now Israel to the Jewish people while a substantial minority (36 percent) thinks that the state of Israel is a fulfillment of the Biblical prophecy about the second coming of Jesus” (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2003). Moreover, in 2004, 40 percent of the total vote that elected President Bush for a second term came from Evangelical Christians (Mead, 2006: 36).

During most of the 20th century, evangelicals in the US has been reticent about politics. However, this situation has seemed to change in the 1970s when evangelicals visibly entered the national spotlight with the rise of Democratic presidential candidate Jimmy Carter, who claimed to be “born again” (Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, 2014). Ever since Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980, evangelicals have been a powerful political force. Moral Majority was credited in part with Reagan’s election, having registered millions of evangelicals to vote, and evangelicals’ influence would grow over the next 25 years to affect the Republican Revolution of 1994, and both of George W. Bush’s victories (Merritt, 2012). However, during the last two elections, their support was not enough to make their candidate be elected. As for the last elections held on 6 November 2012, “79 percent of white evangelicals voted for Romney” and it was “the same percentage that Bush received in 2004, and more than Senator John McCain received in 2008.” The evangelical vote was 27 percent of the overall electorate, and even though it was the highest percentage ever been for an election, the evangelicals were not successful (Merritt, 2012).

Conclusions

When Israel is the subject matter, assessing the influence of the social groups on foreign policy is not easy. The overlapping agendas of secular and religious Zionists, especially in relation to the issues of the Jewish settlements in Jerusalem and West Bank, complicates analysis. The convergence of national security concerns and religious interests of both groups can be clearly seen in the handling of the Jewish settlements in Jerusalem and West Bank. Religion has been an important factor in Israel’s foreign policy towards Palestinians in Jerusalem and West Bank. The sanctity of the land lies at the core of the religious perspective on foreign policy in Israel. It is both a cause of the conflict and the choice of conflict behavior. In particular, the religious Zionists promoted the settlement process and deepened hostility towards the Palestinians.

On the territorial question, religious nationalists tend to sit on one end of the Israeli political spectrum. They constitute the bulk of the religiously and ideologically driven settlers in the West Bank. They and their supporters inside Israel are among the most vocal opponents to Israeli territorial concessions and the most likely to violently resist any attempt to evacuate settlements. Haredim are hawkish on the question of territorial compromise with the Palestinian Arabs, citing God’s covenant with Abraham granting Jews the land of Israel. Their vote is usually fragmented between more than one party. However, beginning with Begin’s coalitions governments, the ultra-Orthodox parties consistently were in Likud-led governments, and their combined strength grew. Besides the state built ultra-Orthodox settlements as part of the wider effort to encourage Jews to settle in the West Bank, and the alliance between Likud and the ultra-Orthodox parties has forced Israeli politics toward permanent rule of the West Bank and away from peace negotiations (Gorenberg, 2012). On the other hand, Haredim does not anymore represent a tiny minority of Israel’s population. They have high birth rates, and if the demographic trends hold, with the growth of Haredim population, it seems that in the long run, Israeli society will include more ultra-Orthodox, and will be more right wing (Ephron, 2012). As a result, there will be a significant challenge from the religious Zionists and from settlers who view the attempts for relinquishment of the territories as a blasphemy. And, the settlements will constitute an important obstacle to achieving a durable peace between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs.

As Haredi Jews tend to be more hawkish on settlements, their growth may constitute an obstacle to reaching a peace deal with the Palestinian Arabs. However, according to the results of the last elections for the Knesset which was held on 17 March 2015, Shas got 7 seats, and the other ultra-Orthodox party, UTJ got 6 seats, while the Jewish Home got 8 seats (Central Elections Committee of Israel, 2015). When compared with the previous elections, the results meant a 4-seat decrease for Shas, 4-seat decrease for the Jewish Home, and a 1-seat decrease for UTJ. Even though these parties lost a total of 9 seats in the Knesset, they are now in the current Netanyahu-led coalition government, unlike the previous one (The Times of Israel, 2015). Small parties that represent the Haredim could wield significant political power in Israel’s coalition-based government system. A close look at the current coalition government of Israel shows that there is hardly any reason for optimism for peace process. The new coalition government’s composition shows that it would be one of the most right-wing administrations in Israel’s history. It will control 61 parliamentary seats, and will be a narrow, right-wing and ultra-Orthodox government with the narrowest of Knesset majorities. It seems that the new government is more right-wing and religious than the previous one, and Netanyahu will need every Knesset member of the ultra-Orthodox parties. This increases the leverage these parties could exert on Netanyahu. On the other hand, Netanyahu’s positions about peace process are well known. He refuses to

evacuate settlements on the West Bank, and rejects any settlement of the conflict on the basis of the 1967 borders, including land exchanges. Given that the current Netanyahu government is based on a coalition made up of only right-wing and ultra-Orthodox parties, it would not be wrong to assume that the new government of Israel is to be hawkish on foreign policy, and Orthodox in composition.

On the other hand, Evangelicals are another important community group that should be considered while dealing with the peace process. Since the 1970s, Evangelical Christians have become a dominating pro-Israel force independent of AIPAC and other Jewish interest groups in the United States. Given its millions of devotees and its political influence, it has tried to influence the United States' Middle East policy and the peace process. As Reverend Stephen Sizer identified the political and foreign policy implications of Christian Zionist doctrine with reference to the Middle East, he singled out six key areas which are "the blessing Israel, facilitation the Jewish emigration, support for the settlements, lobbying for international recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, funding the rebuilding of the temple, and opposing the peace process, exacerbating relations in the Arab world and hastening Armageddon" (Sizer, 2004: 206).

Evangelicals have had many small scale political successes regarding Israel. Because evangelical leaders, such as Falwell and Hagee, have been exceptionally influential in their ability to unite pro-Israel movements. They have tried to affect the conduct of the United States' foreign policy towards the Middle East. As a major component of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States, they have been lobbying the White House and Congress on foreign policy based upon its idiosyncratic interpretation of the Bible. Moreover, they have been even more conservative on some issues about Israel than many Jews. They assert that Israel never cede any parts of the land in Palestine to Arabs, because they believe that these areas were given to Jewish people by God. When Israel's former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon implemented the unilateral disengagement plan, Pat Robertson claimed that Sharon's illness was divine retribution for giving up the Land of Israel. When he was asked about former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's plan to evacuate settlements in the West Bank, he replied, "It is an absolute disaster...I don't think the holy God is going to be happy about someone giving up his land" (Krusch, 2014).

In conclusion, settlements and the governments which include the ultra-Orthodox parties, and also the modern-Orthodox the Jewish Home, imperil the chances for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Israeli authorities hardly feel any pressure to pursue a different policy. The argument is that for Israel, it is imperative to balance the effects of religious nationalism if it wants to reach a permanent peace and ensure its security. In addition to Haredim, the Evangelicals are an important social group which tries to influence Israel's approach to peace process, and the Evangelical support/relationship to Israel is unique. They give unconditional support to Israel no matter what the circumstances are. Their reasoning stems from a theological belief that Israel's presence is a prelude to the second coming of Christ. Thus, even though they have not been successful to get their candidate be elected in the last two elections, they remain as a powerful social movement, and they shall try to influence governmental decision making in the United States to support Israel, and shall try to affect the peace process as long as they and Israel exist.

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