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Israel's Improbable Allies

**Christian Zionism and its Strategic Consequences
for the United States, Israel and the Palestinians**

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Lecture Manuscript – March 2008

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**ISRAEL’S IMPROBABLE ALLIES:
Christian Zionism and its Strategic Consequences for the United States,
Israel and the Palestinians**

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International and Public Affairs, at Columbia University**

Lecture Manuscript

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Abstract:

Strangely enough for a conflict over a territory that is the birthplace of Christianity, the role of Christian Zionism in determining US foreign policy towards Israel has rarely been studied. Christian Zionism is an Evangelical Christian movement, which has been advocating the “Restoration” of the Jews in the Holy Land for more than 300 years. Christian Zionists hold dear the belief that the land of Israel belongs to the Jews based on three doctrines: the anti-replacement theology doctrine, the prosperity doctrine and the prophecy doctrine. With the political awakening of the Christian Right in the United States from the 1980s on, and the embrace of Christian Zionism by parts of the Israeli and American Jewish communities, the religious movement has become a strong political voice, substantially influencing US foreign policy on the matter. Evangelical support comes with political and financial benefits for Israel, but there are also risks to this friendship. Christian Zionists are dedicated to supporting and defending the Jewish state almost entirely regardless of the international consequences of the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As Evangelical Christianity is growing all over the world, especially in Asia, Africa and South America, questions remain on the emergence of a pro-Israel transnational Christian network that would be capable of significantly influencing Israel’s destiny. The religious fervor deployed by these Christians regarding the Holy Land is so fierce that it would be a mistake to fail to take it into account when assessing chances for peace in the Near East.

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This presentation is based on my doctoral research in international relations for which I study religion and foreign policy, and in particular Evangelical pro-Israel interest groups in the United States.

Before getting into the specifics of the topic, I should say a word on how I chose this research topic. I began this PhD journey studying the decision-making process of American foreign policy towards Israel. But I realized that research on the topic had often neglected an important part of the story. For a conflict that takes place in a land with such religious symbolism such as Israel, which is both the birthplace of Christianity, and a holy land for Judaism and Islam, the place of religion, and especially Christian Zionism, in determining US foreign policy towards Israel has rarely been studied¹. More generally, religion has been the ‘parent pauvre’ of political science fields of study, especially in IR theory. Nevertheless, the religious passion that some Jews, Muslims and Christians feel when they think of Israel or Jerusalem is so fierce that it would be a mistake to fail to integrate the existence and consequences of that passion. As far as I am concerned, I wanted to study a particular phenomenon: the Jewish community is not anymore the only American community to be vocal on the issue of Israel. New actors have come into play, namely, Christian Zionists who believe they have a religious duty to support Israel.

I based my research on both primary and secondary sources, looking into academic literature but also internal documents of the community. I attended events and conducted interviews in both Christian Zionist and Jewish communities. This research has led me to develop three arguments:

First, contrary to the impressions given by the media coverage of Christian Zionism, the Evangelical support for Israel is not an epiphenomenon, but is deeply rooted in both history and theology.

Second, Christian Zionists have become important foreign policy actors on the Israel-Palestine issue, thanks to the help of both Jewish American organizations and Israeli political parties. Christian Zionists bring substantial political assets to the pro-Israel community.

Third, I argue that the Christian Zionist approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is contributing to the transformation of a territorial conflict between two people into a transcendental fight between competing religious narratives.

I. Historical and theological roots of Christian Zionism

A. Who are the Christian Zionists?

Christian Zionism is both a theology doctrine and a political set of guidelines according to which its followers are supporting the return of the Jewish people to the Holy Land. The movement is more than 400 years old, somewhat preceding Jewish political Zionism. It comes from a return by dissident and radical Protestant theologians to the texts of the Old Testament and in particular the prophetic books - the Books of Daniel and Isaiah

¹ You can find in the literature a plethora of studies surrounding the activity and influence of Jewish pro-Israel organizations, from famous books such as A.F.K. Organski’s on aid to Israel called the “36 billion dollars bargain” or JJ Goldberg’s “Jewish Power”, to controversial papers such as the recent one by Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer called “the Israel Lobby”. You can also find studies on pro-Palestinian or pro-Arab advocacy. However, and although there is a genuine journalistic interest for the topic, Christian Zionism still remains an understudied aspect of the conflict. Over the years, international relations scholars have approached the question through the lens of classical theories: realists would evaluate the balance of power within the conflict, liberals, and other realists would examine the mechanism of lobbying advocacy in the US, and constructivists would observe the effect of ethnic identities and Diaspora politics.

and also Revelation. They developed a new understanding of the role of the Jewish people in Christianity. The first writings in favor of the “restoration” of the Jews to the Holy Land appeared in England as early as the beginning of the 17th century. The so-called “Restoration movement” has thrived within the conservative and revivalist branch of Christianity called Evangelical Protestantism, first in England and then in American Evangelical circles. By the beginning of the 20th century, Christian Zionist ideas had infused almost all Evangelical denominations.

Today, not all Evangelicals are Christian Zionists, but almost all Christian Zionists are Evangelicals. Therefore, it is important to recall quickly the unifying principles of Evangelicalism as Christian Zionists obey by them too :

1. Authority of the Bible: Evangelicals believe that the Bible is the only inspired, true Word of God, thus that it should be read literally and daily – *Bible-believing Christians*
2. Personal conversion: Evangelicals believe in the importance of experiencing a re-birth into a Christian life – *Born-again Christians*
3. Acceptance of Jesus as personal Savior: they believe in the centrality of Christ in salvation, and they insist on the importance a developing a direct and personal relationship with Jesus – *followers of Jesus Christ*
4. Moral values: Evangelicals obey by a certain set of values and believe strongly in the fight between good and evil – *Value voters*
5. Sharing the Gospel: Evangelicals believe they are mandated by God to share their faith and to get others to become Evangelicals in order to save them – *Evangelicals*

According to the latest 2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, approximately 26.3% of the American adult population are Evangelicals (mainline 18.1%; Black protestant 6.9%); i.e. 80 millions of them live in the United States.²

How many of these are Christian Zionists? Studies differ on the matter. We can estimate that pro-Zionist feelings are widely spread among all Evangelical sects. But Christian Zionism is even more prominent among the fundamentalist branch of the Evangelical movement. So estimates vary: between 1 to 3 million individuals.³ As a comparison, there are 6 million Jews (1.7% of the adult population) in the US and not all are Zionists. Therefore, even if not all pro-Israel Evangelicals are ready to take political action for Israel, the Christian Zionist community could be doubling in numbers the support base for Zionism in the US.

B. Why do Christian Zionists support Israel?

The impetus which urges these Christians to fight for the restoration cause is first and foremost **theological**. It is based on a broad observation of the role of Jews in Christian faith and it stems from one single principle: for them, **the Bible is the True and Inerrant Word of God**.

Three conceptual foundations proceed from this literal reading of the Scriptures:. There is not enough time to detail them extensively here, but I will try to give you the fundamental points.

² The Barna Group has adopted a very restrictive definition of Evangelical faith and has concluded that there are only 8% of Americans who qualify as Evangelicals.

³ According to a 2003 Pew poll, **52% of white evangelicals believe that America should support Israel** over the Palestinians, (64% of “Traditional evangelicals”, and 46% of white Evangelicals say that religious beliefs were the single biggest influence in leading them to sympathize more with Israel).

1. The anti-replacement theology doctrine

The Evangelical faith represents a major theological break from the traditional Christian perception of Jews. In the early years of the Catholic Church, Saint Augustine developed a “replacement theory”, which goes as such: God has rejected the Jews when the Jews did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore, the Christian Church has become the “New Israel”.

On the contrary, following their literal reading of the Bible, Evangelicals believe that the Jews are still God’s Chosen People (Romans 9:11)⁴, and that God’s promises to the Jewish people are intact. From there, Evangelicals interpret literally all biblical mentions related to Abraham, the Jews or Israel – and they are numerous, Jerusalem being mentioned over 800 times in the Bible. **It leads Evangelicals to conclude that God has given the Land of Israel to the Jews and that this promise is eternal.** In Genesis 17:7-8, God made a covenant with Abraham: “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”⁵

2. The prosperity doctrine

For Evangelicals, the restoration of the Jews in Palestine is God’s will – support of Israel is not only a choice, it’s an order⁶– and respecting it will bring prosperity, while disobeying it will convey hardship. This theory is an extension of the “prosperity doctrine”⁷, according to which prosperity is a visible confirmation of God’s blessings. One verse in particular is repeatedly quoted in Evangelical circles as a powerful incentive to support Israel. In Genesis 12:3, God is said to address Abraham in those terms: “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Evangelicals tend to believe this statement literally.⁸ For instance, Evangelicals believe that support for Israel has put the Americans under divine protection, while they believe that Iran’s aggressive attitude towards Israel will eventually result in disasters for the Iranians.

3. The prophecy doctrine

Third, Evangelicals believe that the creation of the state of Israel is part of God’s big plan for humanity. To understand it, you have to understand millennial theology. Millennialism is a Christian concept according to which the time of humans on earth will end with the Millennium, which is a period of a thousand years of peace and prosperity. Post-millennialists believe that Christ will come back after the Millennium for the Last

⁴ Romans 9:11 “Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand:” (All Bible quotations come from the New International Version)

⁵ All biblical quotes are from the New International Version Bible, a version which is especially popular among American Evangelicals.

⁶ As God asks them to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6) or to never be silent for Zion’s sake (Isaiah 62:1).

⁷ Based on Deuteronomy 8:18 “But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.”

⁸ As shown by the remarks of Apostle Zilly Aggrey, an evangelical pastor from Nigeria, during the celebration of Jerusalem’s 40th reunification anniversary, who apologized on behalf of Nigeria for cutting ties with Israel in 1973: “My people did not know the implications of that. [...] Any nation that does not serve you will perish. Our economy went down after we cut ties, and we became one of the poorest nations in the world. Since we have restored relations with Israel, our economy is back up.” Yaakov Lappin, “Followg the Christian money trail”, 02/19/07, Web site: <http://www.ynetnews.com>

Judgment, which implies a pretty optimistic vision of the future. Pre-millennialists believe Christ will come back before the Millennium to install himself his physical reign on earth. It is a much darker vision of the future because the return of Christ will be preceded by the Tribulations, the Rise of Babylon and the Battle of Armageddon. An Anglican priest of the 19th century, John Nelson Darby has developed an elaborate pre-millennial version of apocalyptic events called dispensationalism. According to dispensationalist views, “true” Christians will be “raptured” before the tragic events of the last days.

In both premillennial and dispensationalist theories, a complete restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land is a prerequisite.

Not all Christian Zionists are dispensationalists, but this eschatological doctrine has had an enormous influence, even in the American popular culture, (many continue to see signs of the end times in the unfolding of everyday tragic events). Of the three conceptual motives, this pre-millennial vision tends to be the one most frequently quoted by non-Christian media. However, it is not always the most used by Evangelical leaders to motivate support for Israel.

All this obscure theology is meant to show you that Evangelical pro-Israel positions are not only governed by the politics of the moment, or self-centered interests but rather by profound and dedicated beliefs, touching the core of their faith. As Jim Hutchens, a prominent Christian Zionist, president of the Jerusalem Connection International, told me last year: “you don’t compromise with theology”.

II. How did Christian Zionism emerge as a political force?

Early Christian Zionist beliefs did not transform into significant political action. Christian missionaries traveled to Palestine as early as the 18th century, to help Jews settle and to evangelize local Jews and Muslims alike⁹. In England, some gentlemen clubs¹⁰ promoted the restoration of the Jews to Palestine.¹¹ Traces of Christian Zionism can be found in the Balfour declaration. In the US, in 1891 a Chicago dispensationalist, William Blackstone, petitioned the American government “in favor of the restoration of Palestine to the Jews”¹² in a document endorsed by more than 400 signatories. There were a few Christian Zionists at the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897.

However, all these isolated efforts did not translate into a significant political movement as, among other things, Christian Zionist ideas have long been hidden under a layer of anti-Semitism.

⁹ On this point, see chapter 4 in Michael Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy, America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present*, New York: W. W. Norton & company, 2007, p. 80-97.

¹⁰ Such as the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews.

¹¹ Historian Barbara Tuchman has shown that the story of England’s foreign policy towards Palestine was a story of “Bible and Sword”. During the Victorian era, Ashley Cooper, Seventh Earl of Shaftsbury advocated with relative success the restoration cause to his stepfather-in-law, Lord Palmerston, Foreign Secretary and later Prime Minister.

¹² Because “according to God’s distribution of nations it is their home, an inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force” Quoted from the Blackstone Memorial, petition presented to the President of the United States in favor of the restoration of Palestine to the Jews, 1891.

A. Political developments: from apathy to action

1948 came as a thrilling shock for Evangelicals. They felt they had experienced in their lifetime the fulfillment of a divine prophecy.¹³

Nevertheless, it is not 1948 which launched the modern pro-Israel Evangelical movement, but 1967. In Evangelical imagination, the Biblical land of Israel and the Holy city of Jerusalem were at last returning in the hands of the Jews. And it was a clear sign of the imminence of the Return of Christ. It prompted the return of prophetic and apocalyptic literature, such as the book of Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the best-seller series *Left Behind* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. It contributed to popularize dispensationalist and other pre-millennial views, and it acted as a powerful incentive for Christian Zionists to transform their pro-Zionist inclinations into concrete action. In the US and in Israel, organizations were created, such as the ones listed here: International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, (1983 - Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein), the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (created by a group of Evangelicals, led by the Dutch Jan Willem van der Hoeven, following the 1980 Knesset vote to establish Jerusalem as the “complete and united” capital of Israel¹⁴); Bridges for Peace; Christians Friends of Israel; Unity Coalition for Israel. These organizations have created a network of pro-Israel Bible-believing Christian advocacy groups, which offer assistance to Israel and Jewish immigrants to Israel (in particular in those from the former Soviet Union), biblical promotion and a global constituency of supporters around the world.

The effects of 9-11 cannot be underestimated. The terrorist attacks traumatized many, and it boosted Evangelical prophetic and apocalyptic literature. After the attacks, the American public identified better with Israel and Christian Zionism, and started to talk of a common struggle between Israel and the US against “fundamental Islam”. Conservative Evangelicals who were traditionally preoccupied only with a domestic agenda were converted to Christian Zionism almost overnight, as is the case with presidential hopeful Gary Bauer. Last but not least was the creation in 2006 of the first real Christian Zionist political lobby, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), brainchild of Pastor John Hagee, a long-term advocate of Israel¹⁵. CUFI wants to become the “Christian version of AIPAC”, the powerful Jewish pro-Israel lobby.

Here I must add a strong caveat: As I said before, not all Evangelicals are Christian Zionists or at least not all of them support the kind of right-wing hard-line positions that these organizations have been promoting.

B. Political awakening of Evangelicals

All these developments corresponded with the political awakening of American Evangelicals. Evangelical Christianity really set foot in the US during the two Great Awakenings of the 18 and 19th centuries until becoming the dominant cultural force of America in the 19th century. Challenges to this supremacy at the turn of the 20th century have led Evangelical leaders to preach political separation for decades.

¹³ When they heard David Ben-Gurion read the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, they thought of Verse of Isaiah 66:8 implies that Israel will be born in a day : Isaiah 66:8 “Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children.”

¹⁴ “as an act of comfort and solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people in their claim to Jerusalem” “Word from Jerusalem”, publication of the ICEJ, Jan.-Feb. 2007

¹⁵ Before launching CUFI, Pastor Hagee had been organizing an annual “Night to Honor Israel” in his Charismatic church, at Cornerstone, San Antonio, Texas, for the past 25 years.

But the post-WWII evolutions on social issues and foreign affairs outraged many Evangelicals who denounced America's "secular humanism" and "moral relativism". They began to organize in influential lobbies: Moral Majority, Christian Coalition.

French scholar Denis Lacorne in his new book *De la Religion en Amerique* has shown how from the 1960s the Republican party has adopted a "southern" political strategy for presidential elections that has given Evangelical constituencies disproportionate influence within the Republican party. The Reagan administration was the first synthesis of this New Right: an alliance of economic, foreign policy and social conservatives into a single political platform.¹⁶ Today, elections have proven that the Republican Party needs to get the Christian vote out to win an election. It cannot and will not ignore Evangelicals anymore. This simple fact gives a strong preponderance to Evangelical positions, including Christian Zionism.

C. Israel and American Jewish organizations become pro-Evangelical

The real determinant factor for the rise of Christian Zionism is the decisive political embrace by Israel and the American Jewish organizations of the Evangelical support. At first, the Jewish Diaspora and the state of Israel under-estimated and underutilized Christian Zionist political support, partly because of their mistrust of an anti-Semitic Christian Europe.

Prime Minister Begin was really the first Israeli leader to be receptive to the Christian vision of the role of Jews in the Holy Land. He developed a personal friendship with fundamentalist Jerry Falwell and he welcomed Christian initiatives towards Israel. Following Begin's steps, the Likud party, in particular Netanyahu and Sharon, maintained close links with Americans Evangelicals during the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, the Likud's expansionist policies for an Eretz Israel correspond to the vision of Evangelicals on the dimensions of the land of Israel.¹⁷ The Likud understood the importance of strengthening these ties: Evangelicals proved to be relentless and staunch supporters, less cautious and critical of hard-line positions than the American Jewish Diaspora. In parallel, Evangelicals also cultivated their friendship with the settler movement and religious Jewish groups, finding common positions, not in their beliefs, but in their goals: the expansion of the Jewish state to Judea and Samaria, considered as parts of the rightful biblical homeland of the Jews.

After the failure of Camp David and the Second Intifada, the alliance with Evangelical supporters appeared more attractive, from left to right. In the US, leaders of the Jewish establishment, mainly within AIPAC, the Conference of Presidents and American Jewish Congress, started building bridges with pro-Israel Evangelical groups and setting up Evangelical liaisons. AIPAC and CUFI leaders worked closely together in establishing the new Christian Zionist lobby. In 2003, a Christian Allies Caucus was created in the Knesset¹⁸. It has virtually become the diplomatic link between Evangelical Zionists and Israel.¹⁹

¹⁶ In 1994 and 2004 Evangelicals demonstrated their new political power: Evangelicals provided President George W. Bush with 40% of his total votes in the 2004 presidential election. (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, American Evangelicals and Israel, 2003 poll)

¹⁷ It became common for Israeli leaders to visit Evangelical groups when they come to the US, sometimes at the expense of Jewish groups. In 1999, during his election campaign, Netanyahu outraged Jewish Reform leaders when he didn't find time to see them, whereas he met with fundamentalist Christian leaders.

¹⁸ Objective : "build a direct line of communication, cooperation and coordination between the Knesset and Christian leaders around the world", Mission Statement of the KCAC, available on <http://www.knesset.gov.il>

¹⁹ In March 2007, the KCAC, in conjunction with the Texas-based Christian organization Covenant Alliances, hosted the first ever Jerusalem Assembly when over 250 Evangelicals from around the world came to "celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem, repent for wrongs committed against the

However, not all is perfect in this triangular relationship. Today, the Israeli society and the American Jewish community are split when it comes to deal with Evangelical fervor for Israel.

There are “Enthusiasts”, mainly right-wing hardliners, highly religious Jews and settler movement activists, who are happy to have found allies for their radical platform.²⁰

There are “Pragmatists” who are not big fan of Evangelicals but believe that Israel is at war and that the America Evangelicals are “the enemy of the enemy”. So they think that Israel should welcome and encourage this support.²¹ As an Israeli diplomat told me: Evangelicals are “a growing, highly influential community and they are our friends, why wouldn’t we work with them?”²²

And there are “Critics”²³ who are troubled by the radical agenda of Evangelicals. A lot of Jews consider indeed that Evangelical theology is in fact anti-Semitic as, according to the Evangelical End Times scenario, Jews will have to convert or die. Many American Jews are also worried that the rise of the Religious right might lead to a Christianization of America, with a return to moral austerity and blurred Church-State relations. Moreover, Israelis feel uncomfortable with one of Evangelicals’ main duty, which is “sharing the gospel”. Knesset members have even launched several initiatives to prevent conversion efforts in Israel; one proposal passed the Knesset in 1996. It created a major outcry from Evangelicals around the world, as restrictions on their capacity to “witness” their faith is considered counter to religious liberty. Netanyahu came to their rescue and help to bring down the law; it is considered one of the Christian Zionist first political victories. And in Israel and in America, peace activists continue to be anxious in front of a pro-settler Evangelical support, wondering how future peace negotiations could unfold.

III. Consequences of the peculiar nature of this pro-Israel Lobby

We just saw why Christian Zionists support Israel and how they became a major political actor. It is interesting now to understand the consequences of that support for the US, Israel and the Palestinians.

A. For the United States

Using the literature on ethnic interest groups (Ahrari (dir), 1987 ; R. Hrair Dekmejian/A. Themelis, 1997 ; P. J. Haney / W. Vanderbush, 1999 ; A. Mohammad-Arif,

Jewish people, swear allegiance to support Israel”. First Ever 'Jerusalem Assembly' Launched in Jerusalem”, Press release, Knesset Christian Allies Caucus, March 28, 2007

²⁰ Such as Dmitry Radyshvsky, executive director of the Jerusalem Summit, lieutenant general Moshe Ya’alon, former IDF chief of staff, or late Knesset Member Yuri Shtern, former chairman of the KCAC. In 2007, out of the ten MK who are members of the Christian Allies Caucus, seven come from the right-wing side of the Knesset (three are from the settler-friendly nationalist religious Ichud Leumi-Mafdal party, two from Likud, one from the Pensioners party and one from Yisrael Beitenu – the three remaining seats are occupied by one person of the three major centrist and left-wing parties, Kadima, Meretz, Labour).

²¹ Such as Daniel Ayalon, former Israel ambassador to the U.S., Zev Chafets, author of *A Match Made in Heaven*.

²² Interview by the author with an Israeli diplomat, New York, March 2007

²³ Such as Abraham Foxman, director of the Anti-Defamation League, and Rabbi Eric Yoffie, President of the Union for Reform Judaism, who have also been articulate in their protests against Evangelical Zionists, even if they seem to have toned down their positions recently

2000; A. Aziz Said (dir), 1981; Y. Shain, 1999; T. Smith, 2000), I identified the main efficiency factors for foreign policy interest groups in the following table, as well as the assets that Christian Zionism brings to the table. These assets reinforce the pro-Israel community in the US on several points:

CATEGORIES	EFFICIENCY FACTORS	ASSETS OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM
COMMUNITY	<p>Cohesion</p> <p>Assimilation</p> <p>Economic and Political resources</p>	<p>⇒ Christian Zionism reinforces the resources of Jewish pro-Israel lobbying. White traditional Evangelicals tend to be richer than the overall American population; mobilization is easier and efficient; they are dedicated and active.</p>
INTEREST GROUPS	<p>Business-type structure</p> <p>Grassroots movement</p> <p>Influential Leaders</p> <p>Capacity to reach multiple entry points (Administration, Congress, media)</p>	<p>⇒ From Washington-insiders to constituent-driven movement: Christian Zionists utilize local and regional Evangelical preachers to pass on the message to their constituents, creating the kind of massive support for Israel that U.S. Jewish organizations were never able to achieve</p> <p>⇒ Influential U.S. Christian Zionists, veterans such as late Jerry Falwell or former GOP presidential hopeful candidate Gary Bauer, and “rising stars” like Eagles’ Wings’ founder Robert Stearns</p> <p>⇒ Wide network of alternative Christian media (same kind of alternative, grassroots media that supported Huckabee to the amazement of mainstream media)</p>

CATEGORIES	EFFICIENCY FACTORS	ASSETS OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM
POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT	<p>Echoing American general ideology</p> <p>In harmony with American vital interests</p> <p>Capacity to create bipartisan consensus</p> <p>Capacity to create coalitions with other groups</p> <p>Absence of groups with opposing views</p>	<p>⇒ Evangelicals perceived as “patriots”, not question of dual loyalty being raised.</p> <p>⇒ Convergence between community and Administration interests, especially when the president is himself Evangelical.</p> <p>⇒ Reinforces Republican support of Israel.</p> <p>⇒ Not anymore a simple Jewish lobbying but a Judeo-Christian alliance</p>
HOMELAND	<p>Positive image of the homeland’s regime</p> <p>No conflict of interest with the United States</p> <p>Strong ties with the homeland</p>	<p>⇒ Increase Israel’s positive image even more.</p> <p>⇒ Israel supports Christian Zionists</p>

So we can infer from this rapid overlook that the presence of Christian lobbying in favor of Israel combined with the continuing influence of Evangelicals in politics will ensure that America remain a staunch supporter of Israel for years or decades to come. Of course, the US supports Israel for many different reasons, including political proximity and strategic interests, but I argue that the stronger the pro-Israel constituency, the greater the support. As many Congress insiders say: “Supporting Israel is both good policy and good politics”.

B. Benefits for Israel

➤ Political consequences

We saw just before with the table how Christian Zionists are consolidating political support to Israel in the U.S.

➤ Financial consequences

Evangelicals provide important financial contributions to Israel’s economy, Jewish immigrants, and settlers in the West Bank and Gaza:

- DONATIONS: In total, the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews is said to have raised more than 250 million dollars over the years.²⁴ In 2006 alone, the organization donated 37 million dollars to Israel and the Jewish people²⁵. The International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem has helped more than 100,000 Jewish immigrants settle in Israel since 1989.
- SETTLEMENTS: The director of the Israel office of Christian Friends of Israeli Communities estimated in 2002 that one third of the 145 Israeli settlements receive financial aid from Christians. (“adopt-a-settlement” programs, like the one implemented by Christian Friends of Israeli Communities -CFOIC)
- TOURISM: After the second Intifada, Israel experienced a big drop in the number of tourists visiting each year, only 800,000 in 2002, compared to 3 million today. According to Israel’s Tourism Minister, 400,000 Evangelicals visited Israel in 2003 - almost 40% of total number of tourists (1.06 million) -throwing millions of dollars into the economy.²⁶

➤ **Strategic consequences**

For decades, Israel could only rely on the Jewish Diaspora over the world to lobby on her behalf. In addition, approaching her 60th birthday, Israel is in a difficult situation. In spite of good elements of hard power – strong military, booming economy -, Israel suffers diplomatically from its poor image: it is perceived as a colonial import from Europe, and as a occupying force in a Muslim land.²⁷ According to a recent BBC poll conducted with 28,000 people in 27 countries, a majority of those surveyed (56%) believe that Israel has a mainly negative influence in the world²⁸. It is more people than in the case of Iran (53%). Today, Evangelical Christianity is growing all over the world, especially in Asia, Africa and South America.²⁹ (30 millions in China, 34 in Brazil) To restore Israel’s soft power, Israel and pro-Israel lobbies in the US are working to export the “American model” of Christian

²⁴ <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=40670>

²⁵ Yaakov Lappin, “Followg the Christian money trail”, 02/19/07, Web site: <http://www.ynetnews.com>; and Web site of the ICFJ: <http://www.ifcj.org/>

²⁶ Bill Broadway, “The Evangelical-Israeli Connection, Scripture Inspires Many Christians to Support Zionism Politically, Financially”, *Washington Post*, March 27, 2004; Page B09. In 2006, the director of the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus Josh Reinstein estimated that of the 280,000 tourists that visited Israel in the previous two months, half were Evangelical Christians.

²⁷ As a consequence, for example, UN rulings on Israel are in majority disadvantageous to Israel. Voting records show that in 2005, out of 18 votes by the UN General Assembly regarding Israel, an average of 142,16 countries have voted against Israel’s positions, while an average of 6,16 countries have voted in favor. In 2006, out of 19 votes, these numbers were 150,5 and 5,9. The countries that vote regularly in favor of Israel are: Israel, United States, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau, Nauru, Tuvalu, Grenada and Australia. (based on data from the UN Bibliographic Information System, <http://unbisnet.un.org> and Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/>) Internally, in the aftermath of the Second Lebanon War and political scandals, the Israeli society is facing a serious depression. At the end of 2006, only 5% of Israelis believe that Israel came out the winner in the current round of the conflict opposing Israel to the Palestinians, while 52% believe that neither side won, and 28% believe that the Palestinians won.

²⁸ Nick Childs, “Israel, Iran top 'negative list'”, BBC News, March 6, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6421597.stm

²⁹ As Todd Johnson from the evangelical magazine *Lausanne World Pulse* described it, the evangelical phenomenon is expanding rapidly in all corners of the world, especially in the non-Western World: “Over the past one hundred years global Christianity has experienced a profound southern shift in its geographical center of gravity. Whereas in 1900 over eighty percent of all Christians were from Europe and North America, by 2005 the proportion had fallen to under forty-five percent. It is no surprise then to discover that the center of gravity of the Evangelical Movement, with roots in the United Kingdom and the United States, has also been steadily shifting south for over one hundred years. [...] Thus, though the number of evangelicals worldwide is estimated to range from 250 million to 688 million [depending if one consider “evangelical” with a broad or limited meaning], most are increasingly found outside of the Western world.”

Zionism outside the United States. They do so by holding international prophecy conferences in Jerusalem, by reaching out to them through the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus.³⁰ Without producing any concrete results so far, but it is a development that should be followed as some wonder if we are heading towards the formation of a pro-Israel transnational Christian network that would be capable of significantly transform the world's views on Israel.

C. Risks for Israel and the Palestinians

I argue that there are also serious risks for Israel and for the Palestinians to this friendship:

➤ **Radicalization of political discourse**

Traditionally, the political rhetoric in favor of the existence and security of Israel in the U.S. has mostly been based on moral and strategic considerations. Israel itself is a secular democracy and Zionism a secular ideology. The existence of the Jewish state has been defended as a moral necessity for a people that was victimized and dispersed all over the world. The occupation of West Bank and Gaza was not referred to as a biblically justifiable move but as a necessity for Israel's security. And the main motto of Jewish pro-Israel organizations has been for decades: "Supporting Israel is good for America".

On the contrary, Christian Zionists constantly justify their positions by referring to the Israel's Biblical right to occupy the whole land of Palestine. The message is often oversimplified to make it even easier to adhere to. Arguments that are used to justify their position come from the spiritual and emotional realms therefore are not contradictable. The Christian Zionist message has a universalistic value, encompassing everyone's destiny: "Supporting Israel is good for the humanity, because it is the will of God".

In Christian Zionist discourse, the struggle for Israel is often embedded into the larger idea of Sam Huntington's clash of civilizations, between Judeo-Christian heritage and Islam. It seems that the more Evangelicals love the Jews, the less they like the Muslims. At the Christian United for Israel gala in 2006, I was shocked by the level of inflammatory discourse against the Palestinians, and by the islamophobic tone of the speeches. Israeli and American hardliners have used this religious political rhetoric to transform the narrative from a territorial conflict between two peoples into a Judeo-Christian struggle against islamo-fascism.

➤ **Transformation of the stakes of the conflict**

Because of its highly symbolic value, Evangelicals are dedicated to supporting and defending the Jewish state, almost entirely regardless of Israel's policies and of the

³⁰ Only two months after the war in Lebanon, a Christian leader from Africa addressed fellow Christians and members of the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus in those terms: "We have soldiers in Africa, not just spiritual soldiers but those who even want to come and fight with you." The journalist also mentioned the words of a Kenyan Member of Parliament who promised that, should he win the premiership of his country: "the next morning the Kenyan embassy would be moved to Jerusalem." Yaakov Lappin, "Christians: We'll fight for Israel", 09/27/07, Web site: <http://www.ynetnews.com> NO: Christian Zionist groups outside Europe and the US remain relatively inactive or inefficient in countries. This can be explained by cultural and political contexts, but also by the fact that religious beliefs, even widely held, need certain conditions to translate into political action, such as being organized in active groups, being able to influence their government (which is hard in an authoritarian regime) and not being in contradiction with other vital interests. Time has to prove if Christian Zionism is a valid part of the Evangelical faith or if it is only a case of "theological local subversion" (Paul Freston), that appeared in the West, but wouldn't do so elsewhere.

international consequences of the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On those grounds, and regardless of the realities of the terrain, Evangelicals tend to promote a solution to the conflict that does not involve two States in the end.

Christian Zionists differ from traditional foreign policy interest groups as they don't seek the advancement of their self-interests or the self-interests of Israel or the Palestinians, but they defend transcendental and universalistic interests, whatever the consequences are.³¹ When pushed to the extreme, you find Christian Fundamentalist group with radical providential beliefs who have advocated a destruction of the Al-Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount in order to rebuild of the Jewish Temple.³²

➤ **Different nature of the bond**

The bond that ties together Israel and Christian Zionists is of a different nature than the attachment of Jewish people to Israel. Traditionally, ethnic Diasporas are linked to their homeland by a set of traditions, culture and language inherited from their ancestors: Cuban-Americans with Cuba, Irish-Americans with Ireland for example. Jewish-Americans have a slightly different relationship to Israel but it is still considered by many as a cultural and ancestral homeland rather than religious. This bond creates interdependence between the homeland and the Diaspora. (For example the controversy on determining who is a Jew, or on restricting or not the law of return)

Christian Zionists don't have that bond with the state of Israel. Their love for Israel is real and powerful, but they don't mind upsetting the leaders of the moment, as their vision of the future of Israel is not determined by small human decisions, but by a divine plan, already predicted. Israel has therefore much less leverage or retro influence on those supporters and could find herself constrained by their growing power.

As a conclusion, we may wonder where does that leave the peace process. As if it was not complicated enough to get Israelis and Palestinians to figure out a way to live together on this tiny part of the land, you now have other outside actors who can potentially play a spoiling role. Leaders will have to understand the positions of the Christian Zionists and find a way to utilize their strength in a constructive way.

31 As Allen D. Hertzke has shown, the dedication of religious people to a cause is often stronger than other interest group because the cause transcends their self-interest:

“The religious message, at least in its Christian form, is a supranational, paradoxical call for transcendence over one's narrow selfish interest. Christians are called, as Jesus says to lose their lives to gain the Kingdom. [...] Giving money to a church or to a direct-mail religious group is not just a form of advocacy or self-interest; rather, it is a way, albeit modest, of giving oneself, of losing one's (selfish) life to save it.” Allen D. Hertzke, *Representing God in Washington, The Role of Religious Lobbies in the American Polity*, Knoxville: the University of Tennessee Press, 1988, p.10.

³² cf Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days*