

Who Will Support the State of Israel?

By: HESHEY ZELCER

It is difficult to overstate the importance of United States support for the State of Israel. Since 2011 the United States has provided Israel with over three billion dollars of aid each year,¹ and it allows Israel to use this money to purchase the latest and most sophisticated United States military equipment. The United States also shares intelligence with Israel and is the only superpower that has consistently used its veto power to block anti-Israel resolutions at the United Nations.

Why does the United States shower these gifts upon the State of Israel?² There are various reasons. One is that the American people have been consistently pro-Israel. A second factor is that the Jewish people are the largest non-Christian religious group in the United States and could potentially tip the scale for one political candidate over another. A third is that Jewish organizations successfully lobby the United States Congress for the State of Israel.³

Should one or more of these dynamics change for the worse, United States aid to Israel would likely decline and the very fate of Israel could be in danger. It is always difficult to predict what will happen, but if we examine current demographic and social trends we notice that all three legs of support are weakening: Israel's reputation is under attack at American universities, eroding American public opinion. The number of non-Orthodox Jews, who have been in the forefront of lobbying on behalf of Israel, is on the decline. And finally, while Jews are currently the largest

¹ Sharp, *US Foreign Aid to Israel*. See the second page, *Summary*. See also *Appendix B. Bilateral Aid to Israel*, p. 29.

² Aid to Israel also benefits the United States. Israel is a powerful and dependable ally in a volatile and unstable Middle East. In addition, Israeli battlefield experience with and upgrades to American weapons help the United States improve its military equipment and battlefield tactics.

³ Sharp, *US Foreign Aid to Israel*, states, "For decades, the United States and Israel have maintained strong bilateral relations based on a number of factors, including robust domestic U.S. support for Israel and its security; shared strategic goals in the Middle East; a mutual commitment to democratic values... U.S. officials and many lawmakers have long considered Israel to be a vital partner in the region..."

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non-Christian religious denomination in the country, by 2050 Muslims are projected to be more numerous.⁴

The Changing Jewish Demographic

In 2002 and 2011 the UJA-Federation studied the Jewish population of the “Eight-County New York Area,” which includes the five boroughs of New York City as well as Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester. This area contains the greatest concentration of Jewish people in the United States.⁵

The study showed that since 2002 Jewish population growth has been driven not by immigration, but by high birthrates among the Orthodox, especially the Haredim, whose birth rate is at least three times that associated with non-Orthodox Jewish New Yorkers. In fact, ninety percent of the growth in Jewish population has been among the Orthodox.

The strong growth of the Orthodox Jewish population is true also on a national level. A Pew report in 2013 showed that Orthodox Jews are much younger and tend to have much higher fertility rates than the overall population: 4.1 children among the Orthodox Jews compared with 1.9 children per Jewish adult overall. In the past, high fertility in the US Orthodox community was at least partially offset by attrition, but the retention rate of the Orthodox seems to be improving.⁶

Intermarriage too is not a problem among the Orthodox. By contrast, among Jews in general 44% have a non-Jewish spouse, including nearly six-in-ten of those married in 2000 or later.⁷

Jewish Sociologist Steven M. Cohen sums it up as follows: “Every year, the Orthodox population has been adding 5,000 Jews. The non-Orthodox population has been losing 10,000 Jews.”⁸

Both the UJA regional reports and the Pew national studies paint a rosy picture for American Orthodoxy and a pessimistic one for the non-Orthodox.⁹ This bodes ill for the State of Israel because Orthodox Jews

⁴ Lipka, *Muslims Expected to Surpass Jews*.

⁵ Cohen, Ukeles and Miller, *Jewish Community Study of NY: 2011*, pp. 19–30.

⁶ Cooperman, *Eight Facts about Orthodox Jews*, section 2.

⁷ Cooperman, *Eight Facts about Orthodox Jews*, section 6.

⁸ Nathan-Kazis, *Orthodox Population Grows Faster*.

⁹ The UJA “Eight-County New York Area” study shows the change in the number of Jews from 2002 to 2011: Orthodox increased from 27% to 32%, Conservative declined from 23% to 18%, and Reform declined from 24% to 20%. The Pew reports from 2007 and 2015 show that nationally, Orthodox increased from 10% to 14%, Conservative decreased from 31% to 22%, and Reform increased from 43% to 44%.

have not been doing their share in supporting Israel, and the most dynamic subgroup of Haredi Orthodoxy—as we explain below—is hesitant to openly identify with the State of Israel and has not yet gotten into the habit of advocating for the Jewish state.

Practical Haredim

Pollsters understand that the Haredi community is not monolithic. They have learned to correctly subdivide Haredim into Hasidic and Yeshivish. When it comes to the balance of Orthodox Jews, however, they tend to lump them into a single category called Modern Orthodox. This is unfortunate as it conceals an important trend in the Orthodox world. There is a very large, successful and growing group of Orthodox Jews that we label Practical Haredim, practical in their approach to secular education and to the State of Israel.

The Haredim who are identifiable by their black hats, beards and long dark jackets, those who are truly Hasidic or Yeshivish, tend to have a negative attitude toward secular education and advocate many years of post-high school Talmud study for their male children. Their attitude toward the State of Israel is mostly hostile and at best ambivalent.

Modern Orthodox Jews, on the other hand, those who pray in Young Israel or Orthodox Union-type synagogues, send their children to Zionist schools and summer camps, view secular education as an ideal, and openly and enthusiastically support the State of Israel.

Practical Haredim fit into neither of the above categories. They appreciate that Israel exists, they love to visit it but they do not openly identify with it. They go to college not because secular knowledge is an ideal but because they need to make a living. They send their children to yeshivot whose rabbis are Hasidic or Yeshivish and who ignore the Jewish state. Their yeshivot teach secular education as mandated by the government and the parents want their children to master the secular curriculum. When they graduate high school the sons generally go to a yeshiva in Israel for a year or two to study Talmud full-time. The daughters might attend seminary for a year to strengthen their Jewish education and *hashkafa*, religious outlook. Viewing secular education as a means to a good profession, Practical Haredim often send their children to Touro,¹⁰ a predominantly Jewish university where male and female students are segregated. When they marry they tend to pray in small synagogues, *shtetlich*, whose

¹⁰ In New York City (the Five Boroughs) Practical Haredim often send their children to Touro College. Outside New York City they are more likely to attend a university in their local area.

rabbis are usually Hasidic or Yeshivish. The men can generally be identified by their clean-shaven look and by the black hats they wear on the Sabbath.

Practical Haredim are now the predominant Orthodox group in Flatbush, Queens and Staten Island and are beginning to dominate areas in the Five Towns of Long Island as well.

Practical Haredim are active in their community. They help raise money for their yeshivot and they support social service organizations such as Chai Lifeline, Hatzolah, Bonei Olam, etc.. To date, however, Practical Haredim have not openly identified with the State of Israel.¹¹ They have not been active politically on behalf of Israel and they have not offered up money for its support. Open any issue of the Flatbush Jewish Journal (FJJ) and you will find pages and pages of ads for people being honored by various Jewish organizations. You will not, however, find an ad for anyone being honored by an organization that supports the State of Israel, such as Friends of Israel Defense Forces (FIDF). When Practical Haredim do get involved politically it is usually for the interests of their own community, such as tuition tax credits.

Why Americans are Pro-Israel

To help keep America pro-Israel it is necessary to understand which Americans care about Israel and why.

American support for the State of Israel began at Israel's very founding. Despite warnings from his Secretary of State, President Harry Truman recognized the State of Israel a mere 11 minutes after Israel declared its existence as a state.¹² The recognition was widely popular with the American people: a Gallup poll in June of 1948 showed that almost three times as many Americans sympathized with the Jews in Israel as sympathized with the Arabs.¹³

American Christian Zionism, however, began much earlier. In 1891 the Methodist lay leader William Blackstone presented a petition signed by four hundred predominantly non-Jewish Zionists to President Benjamin Harrison. It called on the United States to use its good offices to convene a congress of European powers to induce the Ottoman Empire

¹¹ While 79% of Modern Orthodox Jews say that caring about Israel is an essential part of being Jewish, only 45% of Haredim say the same. See, Lipka, *Controversy Over New Israeli Law*.

¹² Holbrooke, *Washington's Battle over Israel's Birth*.

¹³ Mead, *The New Israel and the Old*, p. 29.

to turn Palestine over to the Jews. The signatories included the chief justice of the Supreme Court, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the chairs of the House Ways and Means Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the future president William McKinley and mayors of many large American cities. At that time the Jewish community in the United States was neither large nor powerful and there was no Jewish lobby advocating for a Jewish state.¹⁴

Since the founding of the State of Israel there has never been a Gallup poll showing more Americans sympathizing with the Arabs than with the Israelis. Why are Americans sympathetic to Israel? There are a variety of reasons. For one, Israel is a democracy.¹⁵ There is also a residue of guilt among many Christians for the two millennia of Christian persecution of Jews. Since *Nostra Aetate* in the mid-1960s, for example, the Catholic Church has owned up to its past and has taken concrete actions to change its attitude toward the Jews, and by extension the State of Israel.

Christian Zionists can be divided into two groups: A) Prophetic Christian Zionists, who support the Jewish return to their homeland as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. With the ingathering of the Jews to their homeland, Prophetic Christian Zionists wait for the eschatological end and the second coming of their messiah. B) Progressive Christian Zionists, who see the Jewish return to their homeland as the continuation of a divine plan to build a better world through human progress. God, working through history, is restoring and emancipating the Jews who had previously been repressed and degraded.¹⁶

Prophetic Christian Zionists also see the United States as the New Canaan. Just as Israel receives the bounty from God when they observe His commandments, Christian Zionists believe they receive God's bounty in the New Canaan, the United States, when they do what is right and proper in God's eyes. They take very seriously the verse in Genesis concerning the descendants of Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you" (12:2). They believe that for Christians to receive God's bounty they must support the Jews, the descendants of Abraham.¹⁷

The Christians who most exemplify the Prophetic Christian Zionist outlook are the evangelicals and the fundamentalists, who take the bible literally. Evangelicalism is a transdenominational movement within Protestant Christianity whose adherents believe in the centrality of the

¹⁴ Mead, *The New Israel and the Old*, p. 32.

¹⁵ Sharp, *US Foreign Aid to Israel*, p. 1.

¹⁶ Mead, *The New Israel and the Old*, p. 31.

¹⁷ Mead, *The New Israel and the Old*, p. 33.

“born again” experience in receiving salvation. They believe in the authority of the Bible as God’s revelation to humanity, and they share a strong commitment to sharing the Christian message.

In the United States, support for the State of Israel among evangelical Christians is stronger even than among the Jews. A Pew study asked, “Was Israel given to the Jewish people by God?” 40% of Jews answered yes as opposed to 44% of the US general public, 55% of Christians, and 82% of white Evangelicals. Only Orthodox Jews had a higher percentage, 84 (Ultra-Orthodox/Haredim 81%, Modern Orthodox 90%).¹⁸

Roughly 25%¹⁹ of the population in the United States identify themselves as evangelicals. Pat Robertson, a renowned evangelical and a former Southern Baptist minister, writes about Israel, “We are with you in your struggle. We are with you as a wave of anti-Semitism is engulfing the earth. We are with you despite ... the incredible hostile resolutions of the United Nations. We are with you despite the threats and ravings of Wahabi Jihadists, Hezbollah thugs, and Hamas assassins.”²⁰

The Threat from American Universities

There is a serious problem on American universities. Pro-Israel students share depressing tales of being bullied by professors, insulted by roommates and put down by supposed friends for supporting Israel.

This should not be surprising. There are various college campus groups that organize campaigns to delegitimize and paint a negative image of Israel. The most prominent of these groups are the Muslim Student Association (MSA) and Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). One or more anti-Israel groups have a presence on approximately 330 typically high-profile university campuses across the country. The intent of these organizations is to stigmatize the State of Israel as the embodiment of racism, colonialism and imperialism.²¹

To date, the negative effect of these organizations has been partially balanced by Hillel, which has chapters on 363 campuses, and by national pro-Israel organizations, which have representatives at 273 universities.

¹⁸ See, Lipka, *More Evangelicals than Jews Say God Gave Israel to the Jewish People*. This correlates with another Pew question regarding emotional attachment to Israel: 30% of American Jews say they are very attached, as compared to 55% of ultra-Orthodox Jews, and 77% of Modern Orthodox Jews. See, Cooperman, *Eight Facts About Orthodox Jews*, section 7.

¹⁹ See, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” *Pew Research Center*.

²⁰ Robertson, *Why Evangelicals Support Israel*.

²¹ Bard and Dawson, *Israel and the Campus*, p. 8.

Better still, although 330 universities contain anti-Israel groups, the vast majority of the roughly 4,000 universities in the country do not.

Despite anxiety about a growing boycott, divestment, and sanction (BDS) movement, its effect so far is manageable. While a few American universities did adopt BDS resolutions, not a single university has divested from Israel, and many university presidents have made it clear they would oppose such moves.²² Furthermore, in May 2015 the Illinois House joined the state's senate in unanimously passing an anti-BDS bill that would prevent the state's pension fund from investing in companies that boycott Israel. The state's governor, Bruce Rauner, has pledged to sign the bill, and pro-Israel advocates see it as a model for other states as well.²³

There is no question, however, that Israel is less popular among university students than it is among the American population at large. Many students have serious questions about Israel's peaceful intentions and about its human rights record.

To combat anti-Israel hate groups on the campuses, the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (AICE) suggests we provide every Jewish college student with an Israel toolkit to help educate them about Israel, and to teach them to effectively communicate their knowledge. AICE also suggests we teach college students mature Zionism that includes Israel, warts and all, but make sure the students first understand the basic facts about the Middle East.²⁴

The more serious problem on campus is the politically left-leaning professors, found mostly in the humanities and social science departments.²⁵ Unlike students, those professors have both power and presumed knowledge. What they transmit in their classrooms affects not only what their students believe, but also the overall climate on campus.²⁶

College officials are often reluctant to interfere with anti-Israel bias on their campuses even when such bias borders on anti-Semitism. Saudi Arabia and other Arab governments give generously to American universities. Campus Watch reports, "In 1986, Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi donated \$5 million toward a sports center to be named after

²² Medina and Lewin, *Campus Debates on Israel*.

²³ Kontorovich, *Illinois Passes Historic Anti-BDS Bill*. See also, Kontorovich, *South Carolina Passes Historic Anti-Boycott Law*.

²⁴ Bard and Dawson, *Israel and the Campus*, p. 38.

²⁵ The vast majority of professors in humanities and social sciences identify themselves on the left of the political spectrum. See, "A Burning Campus," *The David Project*, pp. 22-23.

²⁶ Bard and Dawson, *Israel and the Campus*, p. 4.

him at American University. Since then, grants for endowed chairs in Islamic studies and Middle Eastern studies centers have popped up at the University of California/Santa Barbara; Columbia University; Rice University; University of Arkansas; University of California in Los Angeles; and the University of California/Berkeley, among many others.”²⁷

Organizations involved in pro-Israel advocacy on campus believe it is less effective to fight anti-Israel voices on campus, and more productive to build pro-Israel support; not to counter the negative but to promote the positive; to make new friends on campus rather than to teach Israel supporters how to debate. They also recommend that we “...demand universities provide the best ‘product’ possible—which includes open classrooms, fair syllabi, thoughtful and thought-provoking professors, a safe campus environment psychologically, not just physically.”²⁸

Another way to counter left-leaning professors is to encourage universities to offer more courses on Modern Israel. Universities should also be encouraged to invite Israeli visiting professors. This has not always worked out, however, as visiting professors are often more interested in advancing in their profession than on focusing on Israel advocacy in their limited time in the United States.²⁹

We should also capitalize on the minority communities that are our natural allies on campus. These include Indian Americans, who see American Jews as a model for minority success in the United States; India, which has a strong entrepreneurial culture and has its own problems with Islamist terrorism; South Korea, which has a large and growing evangelical population; and China, which has an affinity for Jewish culture and Israel.³⁰

It is also important to establish chairs in Israel studies at universities. This, of course, requires donors with deep pockets. Other than at Yeshiva University, there are not many chairs of Israel studies dedicated by Orthodox Jews.

Taglit-Birthright Israel

To counter left-wing hatred of Israel on campus, we should support organizations that have proven to instill love, admiration and advocacy for Israel among college students.

²⁷ Duin, *Saudis Give Big to US Colleges*.

²⁸ “A Burning Campus,” *The David Project*, p. 3.

²⁹ Bard and Dawson, *Israel and the Campus*, p. 40.

³⁰ “A Burning Campus,” *The David Project*, p. 33.

Taglit-Birthright Israel was inaugurated in 1999, and since its inception it has sponsored 10-day educational trips to Israel for more than 400,000 Jewish college students from across the globe (two thirds from the United States). The goal of Birthright Israel is to help participants feel closer to Israel and their Jewish heritage. As a side benefit it has also helped pump \$825 million into Israel's economy.

A study by Brandeis University³¹ concluded that Birthright Israel has been successful in meeting its goals: 77% of participants are married to a Jewish spouse (as opposed to 51% of non-participants), 66% view raising children Jewish as very important (as opposed to 49% of non-participants), and 51% feel very much connected to Israel (as opposed to 35% of non-participants.) Participants were also more likely to celebrate the Sabbath, be a synagogue member, keep kosher, attend Jewish religious services, and make charitable donations to Jewish or Israeli causes.³²

The success of Birthright Israel has led to another pro-Israel experiment on college campuses. Covenant Journey, a new organization announced in May 2015, hopes to provide Christian students what Birthright Israel offers Jewish students. Funded by politically conservative Jews and Christians, Covenant Journey plans to bring 250 Christian students to Israel by the end of the summer, and thousands more in the coming years. According to the organization's founder, the results from a recently concluded pilot project were encouraging. A participant explained, "I grew to love Israel by reading my Old Testament, but after visiting Israel, it gave me a push to act for Israel." While it does not officially take a stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Covenant Journey stresses the security risks faced by Israel, and it highlights the plight of Christians across the Arab world.³³

AIPAC and Pro-Israel PACs

AIPAC was founded a few short years after the birth of Israel but did not achieve prominence until the mid-70s. It now has more than 100,000 members and seventeen regional offices.³⁴

³¹ Saxe, *The Impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel*.

³² Projects that help turn the Birthright Israel enthusiasm into a lifelong commitment include: One Table which sponsors Friday night Shabbat meals for Birthright alumni; and Bring Israel Home in which participants in Israeli and Jewish activities earn points toward a Jewish weekend retreat.

³³ Guttman, *Introducing Birthright for Evangelical Christians*.

³⁴ "How We Work," AIPAC.

AIPAC's purpose is to lobby US Congress on issues and legislation related to Israel and to ensure that bipartisan support remains strong.³⁵ While pro-Israel interest groups rank 31 in dollars spent,³⁶ the annual AIPAC Policy Conference is the largest gathering of the pro-Israel movement; over 16,000 delegates attended the 2015 conference.³⁷ In 1997, Fortune Magazine ranked AIPAC as the second most powerful influence group in Washington DC, second only to the American Association of Retired People (AARP).

AIPAC is not a political action committee and does not donate to any political campaigns. Approximately 50 of about 80 pro-Israel PACs, however, are operated by AIPAC officials. The largest and most prominent of these PACs, which donates money to political candidates in the United States, is NORPAC.

Between 2000 and 2004 the 50 members of AIPAC's board donated an average of \$72,000 each to campaigns and political action committees.³⁸ Contributions from pro-Israel PACs often constitute roughly 10 to 15% of a typical congressional campaign budget.

Unfortunately, until a few years ago, Orthodox Jews of Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island had almost no involvement in AIPAC. Orthodox Jews need to become more active in reaching out to their local politicians to express their concern for the safety and well-being of the State of Israel. Political candidates welcome contributions but they also pay attention to the will of their constituents.

Encouraging Signs

There are some encouraging signs that Practical Haredim are beginning to take some responsibility for the security and well-being of the State of Israel.

Nathan Guttman³⁹ writing in the Forward reports that a new breed of Orthodox Jews whom he labels Modern Ultra-Orthodox are beginning to give money to political candidates who are pro-Israel and who espouse conservative family values. According to the report, Dr. Richard Roberts, an Orthodox Jew from Lakewood, NJ, gave \$750,000 to a pro-Romney super-PAC, and another million dollars to yet another Republican super

³⁵ As we go to press David Horowitz reports that a recent survey by Frank Luntz shows that Israel is losing the Democrats and that it can no longer claim bipartisan US support.

³⁶ "Top Interest Groups," *OpenSecrets*.

³⁷ Frankel, *A Beautiful Friendship*.

³⁸ Frankel, *A Beautiful Friendship*.

³⁹ Guttman, *How Orthodox Money Is Reshaping Republican Politics*.

PAC. Roberts is not the only Orthodox Jew mentioned in the article and the Republican Party is starting to recognize the importance of Orthodox Jewish contributors.


There was another encouraging sign. This one did not include millions of dollars in contributions, but it was a display of Practical Haredim going public with their pro-Israel sentiments. On Israel Independence Day in 2014 about 300 Practical Haredim gathered in Bais Moshe Shmiel, a *shteible* in Flatbush headed by a hasidic rebbe, to express *bakarat batov*, appreciation to God, for the State of Israel. The session was introduced by Shlomo Sprecher, a prominent physician and scholar residing in Flatbush. A representative of AIPAC spoke about Israel advocacy, and the guest speaker at the event was Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.⁴⁰

In yet another step in the right direction, AIPAC events are now all glatt kosher, and policy conferences that had usually begun on Sundays now also include a Shabbaton on the previous day that has expanded to include about 600 people. Yarmulkes of all kinds (and even some hats) are now visible at these conferences and there are *minyanim* for attending delegates. AIPAC under the leadership of a past president, Howard Friedman, an Orthodox Jew, has recognized the importance of recruiting Orthodox Jews to their organization.

Conclusion

Demographic studies show that while the non-Orthodox population is declining, Orthodoxy is on the rise.

As these demographic trends gain momentum it will become ever more important for Orthodox Jews to invest their time and money to help mold public opinion on university campuses, and to lobby the United States Congress on behalf of the State of Israel.

In winning the demographic war, Orthodoxy will no longer have the luxury of focusing on itself. It will need to assume a leading role in support of the Jewish state. 

⁴⁰ Zelcer, *Is This a Turning Point?*

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