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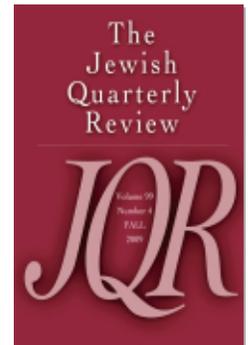
## U.S.—Israel Relations

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Jewish Quarterly Review, Volume 99, Number 4, Fall 2009, pp. 603-608 (Review)

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jqr.0.0061>



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## U.S.—Israel Relations

SHALOM GOLDMAN

ZEV CHAFETS. *A Match Made in Heaven: American Jews, Christian Zionists, and One Man's Exploration of the Weird and Wonderful Judeo-Evangelical Alliance*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007. Pp. viii + 231.

ZVI GANIN. *An Uneasy Relationship: American Jewish Leadership and Israel, 1948–1957*. Modern Jewish History. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2005. Pp. xxi + 255.

MICHAEL B. OREN. *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present*. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007. Pp. xxii + 778.

WILLIAM PENCAK. *Jews and Gentiles in Early America, 1654–1800*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005. Pp. xiv + 321.

ELIZABETH STEPHENS. *U.S. Policy towards Israel: The Role of Political Culture in Defining the "Special Relationship."* Brighton, England: Sussex Academic Press, 2006. Pp. xi + 338.

JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER and STEPHEN M. WALT. *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. Pp. xxii + 484.

In 1918 members of the U.S. House and Senate expressed support for the British Government's Balfour Declaration of November of the previous year. Numerous pro-Declaration statements by individual congressmen alluded to the recent British victory over the Turks in Palestine, seeing it as confirmation and fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Representative William E. Cox of Indiana stated that "just as Moses had led the

Israelites out of bondage, so the Allies are now redeeming Judea." Judea, in the senator's mind, merited redemption: for "Rome taught mankind a government of law . . . but it remained for Judea and her people to give mankind the true Christian religion" (Stephens, pp. 12–13). In Cox's formulation, and in the understanding of many Americans of the period, Christians were in debt to Jews, for it was from Judaism that Christianity sprang. That debt could be fulfilled by supporting the establishment of a "Jewish National Home" in Palestine. It is instructive to recall that these congressional statements were made long before there was a State of Israel or an "Israel Lobby."

Though the stated objective of the Balfour Declaration was the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people, the centrality and sanctity of Palestine was understood by American Protestant elites as a *Christian* issue. If Jews as a nation were to be accepted into the postwar family of nations, American Protestants had a role to play in this acceptance—for they could explain to the world that Christianity was in debt to Judaism and that Jews were entitled to a land of their own. As Representative Cox noted in his 1918 statement, "These ideals and teachings of the true Christian religion given to searching mankind, makes Judea and her people the greatest on earth" (Stephens, p. 13).

Thus, thirty years before the establishment of the State of Israel, "Judea" had replaced "Palestine" as an American way of referring to Palestine. The preconception that "Judea" belonged to the Jews was so powerful it erased consideration of the majority Arab population in the "Land without a people" that awaited "a people without a land." This American perception of "Judea" as Jewish territory explains some of current American support for Israel. But a biblical understanding of the Palestine issue is an important factor not emphasized sufficiently in the six books discussed in this essay.

Explaining U.S. support of and fascination with Israel requires a varied tool kit and highly skilled analysis. No one explanation including a biblical one, is sufficient. Elizabeth Stephens's book focuses on the "political culture" aspects of the question, which she contrasts with the "rational choice" theory of many political scientists. These theorists, according to Stephens, "would deny altogether the importance of culture predispositions." Stephens notes that a political culture approach "does not provide the researcher with a systematic theory of political action that can be subjected to the scrutiny of scientific rigour" (p. 44). Rather it focuses on the power of narratives and symbols; "symbols and myths are among the most common forms of cultural representation" (p. 47). In the history of American political culture Stephens identifies three themes: exception-

alism, redemptionism, and exemplarism (pp. 59–66). She identifies the same themes in Zionist thought. Within the limits imposed by her methodology Stephens does a fine job of linking American self-understanding and the foundational ideas of modern Israel. Anticipating the argument made by Mearshimer and Walt, Stephens is skeptical about the claim that the pro-Israel lobby plays a major role in shaping U.S. foreign policy. She dubs that claim “impossible to quantify” (p. 35).

In *Power, Faith and Fantasy*, Michael Oren takes on an even larger and more ambitious task than Stephens does. He attempts to narrate and explain the American obsession with the Middle East and place its fascination with Israel within the longer U.S.–Middle East relationship. Oren’s sprawling tome presents itself as “covering 230 years of history . . . an indispensable work” (blurb on book jacket). The book’s ideological program is not explicitly highlighted, and it can be best understood by what is left out of his account. For Oren, the Gulf War of 1991 and the current U.S. war in Iraq are *not* departures from U.S. foreign policy but rather continuations of long-standing U.S. engagement with the Middle East. Therefore these wars are not seen as an aberration but are contextualized and accepted. In his discussion of Israeli–U.S. relations there is little mention of the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories (pp. 575 and 684), which the United States—up to the second George W. Bush administration—declared “illegal” and an impediment to peace.

The Likud-oriented ideology of Oren’s book is further indicated by the lack of context provided for Oren’s description of Rabin’s assassination by “a lone Jewish gunman” (p. 576). Oren makes no mention of the Israel right’s campaign against Rabin’s policies, including the 1995 rally in which Benjamin Netanyahu spoke while Likud supporters waved posters of Rabin dressed as a Gestapo agent. Too, there is no mention of Baruch Goldstein’s terrorist attack in Hebron in 1994, an attack that had profound consequences for Israeli–Palestinians relations.

Oren’s chapter 24, “An Insoluble Conflict Evolves,” set up the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as *insoluble* from the beginning, thus Israeli actions don’t matter. Strikingly, Oren seems to endorse the view popularized in Joan Peter’s 1984 book *From Time Immemorial* that a large part of the Palestinian Arab population emigrated to Palestine because of the economic prosperity brought about by the industriousness of the Yishuv. Oren claims that 300,000 Arabs came to Palestine (p. 421) to benefit from the presence of the Yishuv. This claim was refuted in the 1980s by the Israeli historian Yehoshua Porath (*New York Review of Books*, January 16, 1986). Of the six books under discussion here, Oren’s scope is the widest—and the one in which the analysis is the thinnest.

In contrast with Oren's book, Zvi Ganin's *An Uneasy Relationship* unpacks a pivotal period in the U.S.–Israel relationship, 1948–57. Ganin has unearthed gems from archives, correspondence, and diplomatic papers in Israel and the United States. Unlike the political scientists under discussion here, Ganin sees the “birth” of the State of Israel as a “miracle” in which there were three collaborators, the Yishuv, the Zionist Movement, and American Jewry (p. xv). Ganin demonstrates that the founders and early leaders of Israel were convinced of the importance of establishing and maintaining strong cultural and strategic ties to the government and people of the United States. Along with Golda Meir, who was brought up in the U.S., Ben Gurion, who spent three years in the United States and who was married to an American woman (1917–20), is the most obvious case in point. The focus in Ganin's book is on “official” American Jewish leadership and its encounters with Israeli leaders. Much space is devoted to the leaders of the American Jewish Committee, particularly to Jacob Blaustein. Unfortunately the book's bibliography is out of date; the most recent items cited are from the early 1990s.

One might think that *Jews and Gentiles in Early America*, William Pencak's fine book on American Jewish communities in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, would have little to do with the Christian ideas about the Holy Land. But it does. Though political Zionism is a late nineteenth-century phenomenon, its Jewish and Christian roots are centuries deep. Pencak's book surveys and contextualizes in U.S. history the stories of the Jewish communities of five cities: New York, Newport, Charleston, Savannah, and Philadelphia. Pencak has a fine ear for the delightful detail. In his narrative of the building of the Touro Synagogue of Newport, Rhode Island, in 1759, he notes this charming anomaly. “The synagogue also had a trap door, as did the Amsterdam synagogue and many others in Europe as a possible escape from an attack. But the trap door led nowhere, except to a small room in the cellar. The Jews, it seems, were expressing their confidence that they would never need to use this emergency exit” (p. 94).

That the Early American Republic was thought of as an “American Zion” is well known. In Pencak's understanding “American Jews of the revolutionary era shared in the belief that God has ensured that the chosen people of Israel were to be protected by, and flourish under, the aegis of the chosen people of the United States” (p. 262). Less well known is the fear expressed by some American pundits of the late eighteenth century that Jews, if fully admitted to the body politic and able to hold any elected office, would be subject to conflicting loyalties. One columnist in the *New York Daily Advertiser* (January 14, 1788) opined that Jews should

be excluded from full participation in the American political process. “Given the command of the whole militia to the President—should he hereafter be a Jew our dear posterity may be ordered to rebuild Jerusalem” (p. 264).

Unlike the five other books under consideration here, Zev Chafets’s *A Match Made in Heaven* is not a scholarly study, nor does it purport to be. Rather, it is an enthusiastic celebration of contemporary Evangelical Christian Zionism and it calls on American Jews to embrace Evangelicals in their support of Israel. This book is an account of Chafets’s year of travel and research among American Evangelicals. He attended trade shows (including the International Christian Retail Show), churches, and Evangelical colleges, in search of expressions of Evangelical Christian Zionism. Early in the book Chafets declares that “no community in the United States is more philo-Semitic than conservative Christians” (p. 18). But the author doesn’t go on to define this philo-Semitism or address its limitations. What he does define is the group that he sees as the current enemy: “It may be that American Jews will decide they would rather face jihad alone than rely on Conservative Christians . . . Christian Zionism, in a time of jihad, deserves a closer look” (p. 19). Islam as the enemy is a common theme in current Evangelical discourse, and as Thomas Kidd has pointed out in *Islam, Christians, and America* (2009), this anti-Muslim prejudice has deep American roots.

Chafets’s contempt for political liberals is clearly and openly displayed: “The dislike and contempt for Evangelical Christians that is so integral to American Jewish political thinking is almost wholly absent in Israel” (p. 17). This assertion would surprise readers of *Haaretz*, where many Israeli writers have expressed reservations about Evangelical support. Chafets doesn’t completely dismiss Jewish critiques of Evangelical Zionism’s expectation that Jews will convert in the End of Time. He concedes that “there is a certain amount of truth to it. Evangelicals want to evangelize” (p. 48), and “Christian” Zionists tend to downplay the degree to which converting Jews is important to them” (p. 54). But he finds these considerations negligible in comparison to the benefits to be gained by encouraging Christian support for Israel. An odd note in this account is the display of Chafets’s own assertive secularism, which is in sharp contrast to the religiosity of his Christian interlocutors. In Israel, where he lived for many years, Chafets is well known as an assertive secularist and opponent of rabbinical authority.

Though political Zionism is a late nineteenth-century phenomenon, its Jewish and Christian roots are centuries deep. One wonders if Chafets is aware of the long history of Evangelical Christian hostility to Jewish

secularism—a designation whose legitimacy they would deny (just as these Evangelicals would deny the legitimacy of “Christian secularism”). As Chafetz is no doubt aware, Jewish secularism is an integral aspect of Zionism both past and present.

Of the books under review here, Mearsheimer’s and Walt’s *The Israel Lobby* is the book that has been most discussed and reviewed in the American and international media. And its publication occasioned a counter book, Abraham Foxman’s 2007 *The Deadliest Lies: The Israel Lobby and the Myth of Jewish Control*. Weighing in at almost five hundred pages, *The Israel Lobby* is a scrupulously and one might say meticulously documented book. The 106 pages of footnotes could fill a slim volume. Mearsheimer and Walt lay out their argument in the book’s introduction. “We have to convince readers that the United States provides Israel with extraordinary material aid and diplomatic support, the lobby is the principal reason for that support and this uncritical and unconditional relationship is not in the American interest” (p. 14).

Perhaps the most trenchant review of *The Israel Lobby* was by Daniel Levy in *Haaretz* (October 9, 2007). Levy notes some of the “Pavlovian responses” to the book including the assertion that book is anti-Semitic. Most perceptive is Levy’s observation that Walt and Mearshimer understate the “significant element of emotion, sentiment, and identification in the way Americans relate to Israel; manufactured or not, it exists.” These elements are featured to greater or lesser degree in the other books under review here. The cultural and religious elements analyzed by Elizabeth Stephens and others are summarily dismissed by Mearsheimer and Walt, who write that “it makes little sense to try to explain current U.S. policy—and especially the lavish support that is now given to Israel by referring to the religious beliefs of a bygone era or the radically different forms of past American engagement” (p. 7).

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