

Biblical, Historical Reasons America Supports Israel

While an array of recent controversies have developed from members of Congress around U.S. support of Israel, the fact is America is and was always pro-Israel. This is built on the foundation of early American leaders who understood the significance of Israel based on common Judeo-Christian values and solid biblical imperative.

Of course, when the American Founding Fathers supported Israel, it was not based on the existence of a modern state. They understood that Israel, that is, Jewish people, and the land of Israel were inseparably linked. Long before there was ever an Israel-Arab conflict, and when Moslem Ottomans controlled the land of Israel, the U.S. Founding Fathers aspired to bless Israel and to restore Jewish sovereignty there.

It is legendary that minutes after Israel declared independence in 1948, U.S. President Harry Truman was the first to recognize the Jewish state. Since then, America has been solidly pro-Israel. However, according to Ilka Kreimendahl in *Peacemaker USA: The Role of the United States in the Arab-Israeli Conflict in the 1990s*, long before Truman, America's support of Israel was unambiguous. In fact, he notes, the "first pro-Zionist declaration that was ever made by an American president" came from U.S. President John Adams.

Two hundred years ago this month, Adams wrote to a leader of the American Jewish community, Mordecai Noah. "I could find it in my heart to wish that you had been at the head of a hundred thousand Israelites indeed as well disciplined as a French army—marching with them into Judea & making a conquest of that country & restoring your nation to the dominion of it. For I really wish the Jews again in Judea an independent nation."

Adams was born in 1735, in a Puritan home. The Puritans saw parallels between themselves breaking away from England and the Jews' exodus from Egypt, wandering into the vast and unknown wilderness and reaching the promised land. The Bible was their guide and their playbook. The adopted biblical customs and even gave their children Hebrew names.

As a fledgling democracy, Adams and other early American leaders saw parallels between the civil values they held and which they set as the standard for the United States, and values codified in the Bible.

Adams' admiration of the Jews and what they gave to the world was deep-seated. In 1808, he wrote. "They are the most glorious nation that ever inhabited this Earth. The Romans and their Empire were but a Bauble in comparison of the Jews. They have given religion to three quarters of the Globe and have influenced the affairs of Mankind more, and more happily, than any other Nation ancient or modern."

Early American support for Israel was not limited to Adams. Abraham Lincoln, who personally dreamt of visiting Israel, wrote that he hoped the oppression of Jews could be relieved by "restoring the [Jews] to their national home in Palestine ... a noble dream and one shared by many Americans."

In subsequent generations before Israel's establishment as a state, similar bipartisan support was echoed by presidents as diverse as Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Hoover.

By the end of the 19th century, evangelist William Blackstone submitted a petition to President Benjamin Harrison to establish a Jewish state. This was signed by some of the most prominent Americans, including the chief justice of the Supreme Court, future president William McKinley and John D. Rockefeller.

Long before the establishment of the modern state of Israel, Israel was firmly part of U.S. foreign policy. Despite recent

anti-Semitic aberrations to this wide support over two centuries, support for Israel remains strong both among political and religious leaders as well as Americans overall. A recent Gallup demonstrated this with 69 percent of Americans having a favorable opinion of Israel.

This remains constant over decades. By the time World War II ended, both houses of Congress called for a Jewish state, and both the Democratic and Republican parties had pro-Zionist platforms. Polls then showed Americans supporting a Jewish state 2 to 1.

Today, support for Israel remains wide, largely bipartisan and dynamic. This week, nearly 20,000 will gather in Washington as part of AIPAC's annual policy conference. AIPAC is one of the largest and most consistently pro-Israel organizations in the US. It is sometimes referred, mistakenly and pejoratively, as the "Jewish lobby." Yet American support for Israel is not limited to Jewish Americans. Indeed, far outnumbering American Jews are millions of American Christians and others for whom support of Israel is a biblical obligation based on the imperative of Genesis 12:3 where God promises he will "Bless them who bless you."

Underscoring this, at the same time as AIPAC is taking place in Washington, another no less significant gathering will take place on the opposite coast with thousands of pro-Israel Christians gathering for the National Religious Broadcasters convention. This is not a pro-Israel group the same way that AIPAC is, by definition. However, the NRB attendees are no less so. {eo}

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