

**ISRAEL, THE ARABS, AND THE MIDDLE EAST
IN PRESIDENTIAL MEMORY**

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Israel, the Arabs, and the Middle East in Presidential Memory: Carter in Comparative Perspective

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“The Jewish people are entitled to one place on this earth where they can have their own state on soil given them by God from time immemorial.”¹

“Let us now reward all the children of Abraham who hunger for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Let us now enjoy the adventure of becoming fully human, fully neighbors, even brothers and sisters. We pray God, we pray God together, that these dreams will come true. I believe they will.”²

---Jimmy Carter

Since the birth of the Jewish State in 1948, every American president has claimed to be pro-Israel. They have all supported Israel, affirmed their commitment to Israel’s national security, and have supported the right of Jews from other countries to migrate there. They have also supported efforts to bring about peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors. For his part, Jimmy Carter had an unmistakable religious vision and a biblically-inspired sense of mission for Israel and her Arab neighbors, particularly Egypt. But did his presidential contemporaries of the late Cold War period share his religious view of Israel, Egypt, and the wider region? When they spoke of peace did they connect it with a sense of religious obligation? The purpose of this paper is to put the views and perceptions of Jimmy Carter in comparative perspective.

The first purpose of this paper is to compare Carter with his own Vice President. It is asked, “Had Walter Mondale been president would he have pursued the goal of Middle East peace with the same vigor and focus as Carter? To answer this, Mondale’s views and political style is compared with Carter.

¹ Jimmy Carter, “Remarks on Middle East Policies in Elizabeth, New Jersey,” June 6, 1976, *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Jimmy Carter* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 220.

In the second part, it is explored whether or not Carter's presidential contemporaries, shared the basic assumptions about Israel and the Middle East that Carter and most white evangelicals hold? Did they have what might be called an evangelical perspective? To answer this, the memoirs of every president from Lyndon Johnson to George H.W. Bush are examined and their respective views on Israel and the Middle East described.

Though certainly not the only means, examination of presidential memoirs is one means of "getting inside the mind" of a president. Certainly, if sincerely held, such a profound influence as religious faith should be readily evident in their presidential memoirs. With no more elections to win, no more voters to court, writing a memoir gives a president the opportunity to tell their fellow citizens what they really thought and why they did what they did. Memoirs should provide us important clues to the Mideast views of the presidents. If President Ronald Reagan was correct when he wrote that a presidential memoir is an opportunity for a president "to tell his story in his own words,"³ the presence or absence of religious motivations and language would be revealing.

Carter's Religious Vision of the Middle East

"I will do everything in power to make our nation an agent of peace in the Middle East; a just and lasting peace that will be in keeping with the teaching of Scripture."⁴

---Jimmy Carter

In terms of understanding President Carter and his views on and priorities for the Middle East, it is useful to compare him to his Vice President. Ever since losing his race for Georgia

² Carter, "Remarks at the Signing Ceremony of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty with President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin," March 26, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 518.

³ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life: The Autobiography of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 7.

governor in 1966, religion became for Carter “the driving force” in his political and personal life.⁵ Carter was a born-again evangelical Christian who pledged as president to pursue policies that he believed were compatible with his understanding of the Christian faith. In fact, in addition to being from the South and being a Washington outsider, Carter argued that his faith made him a different kind of president, providing him with “a different way of governing.”⁶

Of all the faith-based or inspired policies he advocated, Carter’s search for peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors, particularly Egypt, was perhaps the clearest example. Though he clearly recognized that peace in the Middle East would serve U.S. interests in the region, Jimmy Carter believed that working for peace in the Middle East was not only good and practical policy, it was more importantly “sacred work,” a “sacred task,” and a “sacred cause.”⁷ Finding peace between the Israelis and the Arabs, Carter said, was rooted in “a religious commitment.”⁸

In his presidential memoirs, *Keeping Faith*, Carter explained that he came to “realize that I spent more of my time working for possible solutions to the riddle of Middle East peace than on any other international problem.”⁹ Bringing peace to Israel, specifically, was a constant “on my agenda, and on my mind.”¹⁰ Before he mentioned any other reason for supporting Israel and regional peace, such as the shared democratic values between the United States and Israel or his

⁴ Carter, “Remarks on Middle East Policies in Elizabeth, New Jersey,” June 6, 1976, *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Jimmy Carter* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 221.

⁵ Fred I. Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Clinton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 131.

⁶ Quoted in Erwin C. Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President: Leadership and the Politics of the Public Good* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), p. 15.

⁷ Carter, “Remarks at Welcome Ceremony with Egyptian President Sadat in Cairo, Egypt,” March 8, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 406; “Remarks at Welcoming Ceremony with President Yitzhak Navon in Tel Aviv, Israel,” March 10, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 417; “Remarks at Departure Ceremony with Prime Minister Begin in Tel Aviv, Israel,” March 13, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 428.

⁸ Carter, “Interview with George C. Edwards,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38.1 (March 2008): 3.

⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1995; originally published in 1982), p. 438.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

admiration for their military courage and prowess, Carter cited religious justifications for doing so.¹¹

In my affinity for Israel, I shared the sentiment of most other Southern Baptists that the holy places we revered should be preserved and made available for visits by Christians, and that members of other faiths should have the same guaranteed privileges concerning their sacred sites.

The Judeo-Christian ethic and study of the Bible were bonds between Jews and Christians which had always been part of my life.

I also believed very deeply that the Jews who had survived the Holocaust deserved their own nation, and that they had a right to live in peace among their neighbors. I considered this homeland for the Jews to be compatible with the teachings of the Bible, hence ordained by God.

“These moral and religious beliefs,” Carter concluded, “made my commitment to the security of Israel unshakable.”

Duty as a Christian, serving God with boldness—these were key in shaping Carter’s view of the Middle East and compelled him toward action.¹² In late 1979, for example, citing the authority of the Bible in typical evangelical fashion, he said, “The Bible says, ‘Let me hear what God will speak, for he will speak peace to His peace’” and “the Bible also says, ‘Depart from evil, do good, seek peace, pursue it—pursue it actively, search for peace.’”¹³

Carter insisted that promoting peace in the Middle East, “the land of the Bible,” was not a new vision, but an ancient one.¹⁴ It was a fulfillment of “the finest ideals based on the Hebrew Scriptures,” including the pursuit of justice and righteousness.¹⁵ It was a crucial part of “trying

¹¹ Ibid., p. 281.

¹² Tom Princen, “Camp David: Problem-Solving or Power Politics as Usual?” *Journal of Peace Research* 28.1 (1991): 58.

¹³ Carter, “Remarks at a White House Reception for Participants at the World Conference on Religion and Peace,” September 6, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1598.

¹⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 280.

¹⁵ Carter, *Beyond the White House: Waging Peace, Fighting Disease, Building Hope* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), p. 115; Carter, “Remarks at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts,” January 23, 2007.

to find the ideal of Christ: peace on earth.”¹⁶ As the prophet Isaiah foretold, Carter explained in his address to the Knesset (March 12, 1979)—the first ever delivered by an American president before the Israeli parliament—that the Camp David project and peace treaty were good-faith steps towards “pounding Middle East swords into plowshares.”¹⁷ Upon his return to the United States, Carter praised Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat for “following the advice of the Biblical proverb, ‘When a man’s way pleases the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with Him.’”¹⁸ In this, Carter said, “I believe that God has answered our prayers.”¹⁹ It is often argued that Carter failed to articulate a broad political vision for his presidency. It is one of the lasting impressions of his four years. He promised too much and took on many issues that were unrelated to a cohesive and coherent program. However, this argument cannot be said of his views of the Middle East. He had a vision, a vision in no small part inspired and informed by his reading of the Bible. And the success at Camp David proved to Carter that the application of religious principles “can be significant for peacemaking,” especially in the Middle East.²⁰

Carter viewed the Middle East not just in terms of national security or national interest. He viewed it as the “Holy Land,” a region full of religious significance. Many Americans do, too. In a 2003 Gallup survey, respondents were asked if the Middle East had any personal religious significance, either as the place where “biblical events will eventually occur” in the future or if it was religiously significant for other reasons. If not, respondents could choose “it is

¹⁶ Carter, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Religious Broadcasters,” January 21, 1980, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 181.

¹⁷ Carter, “Address Before the Knesset in Jerusalem, Israel,” March 12, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 425.

¹⁸ Carter, “Remarks on Arrival with Vice President Mondale at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland,” March 14, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 431.

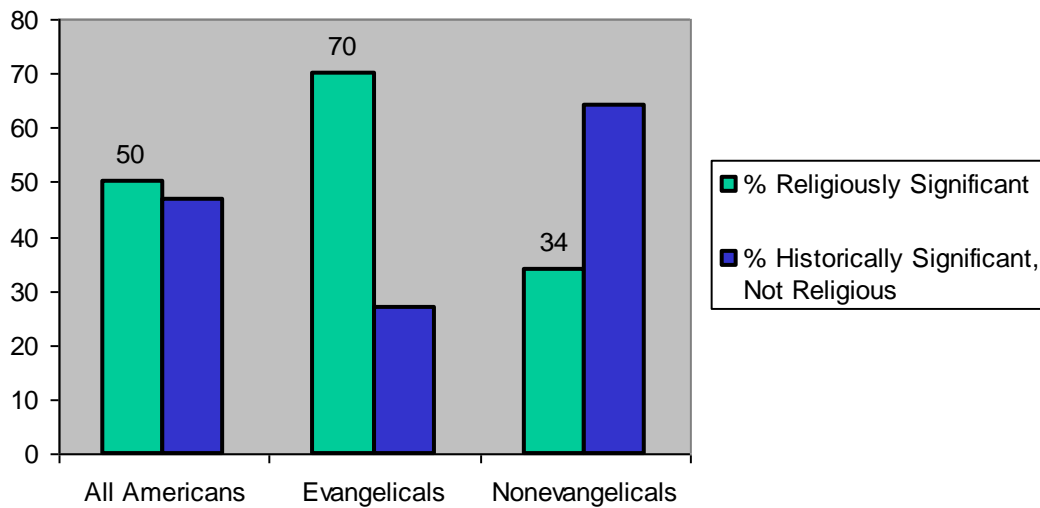
¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

²⁰ Carter, “Foreword,” in *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, eds. Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. vii.

a land that is historically significant but does not have any personal religious significance.” Fifty-percent of Americans claimed that region was religiously significant, 30% choosing the futuristic biblical event option and 20% choosing “religious significance for other reasons.” Forty-seven percent of those surveyed said it was a place of historical significance, but not “any personal religious significance.”

But what is of particular interest is that 70% of those who claimed to be “born-again,” evangelical Christians said the Middle East has personal religious significance, 54% said so based on events to come and 16% for other personal religious reasons (Figure 1). Only 27% said that the region was more historically significant. Of those who said they were not “born-again,” 64% said the region was historically significant rather than religiously, while just 34% said the Middle East was personally important for some religious reason.

Figure 1. Israel and the Middle East: Religiously Significant or Not?

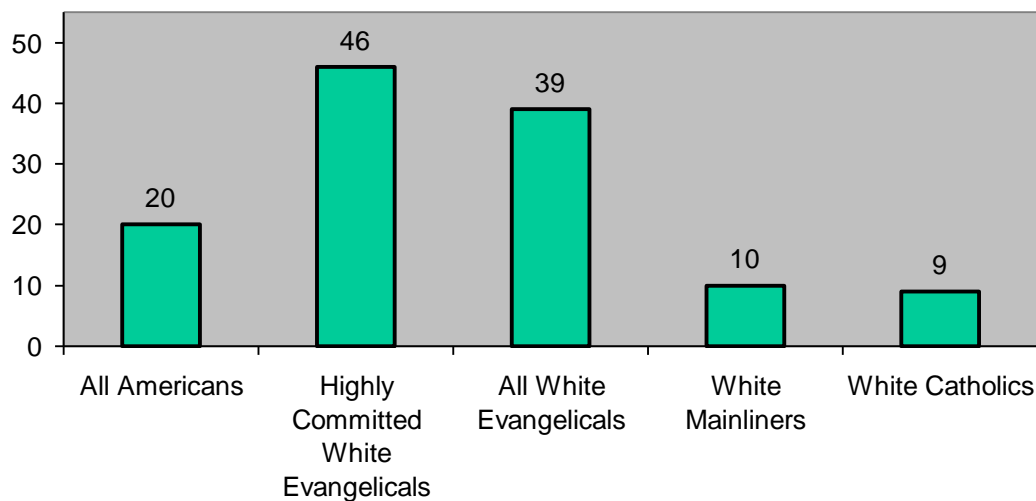


Source: Lydia Saad, “Holy Land, or Just Ancient?” *Gallup Poll News Service*, July 29, 2003.

In 2003, Pew found that for white evangelicals 39% said their religious beliefs were “the biggest influence on their thinking about the Middle East,” compared with 20% for all

Americans (Figure 2). For “highly committed” white evangelicals (those who attend religious services regularly), that number increases to 46%. For white mainline Protestants and white Catholics, only 10% and 9% respectively said their religion had the most influence on their views toward the region. Though Carter did not say that his religion was the only influence on his views toward the region, as noted above, he did list it first in memoirs and as president he frequently employed religious language when speaking of the region.

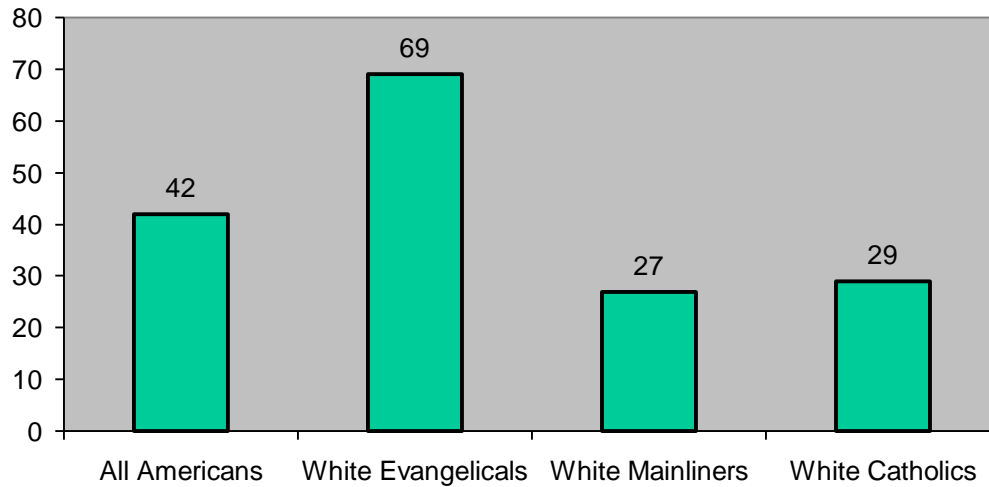
Figure 2. Religious Beliefs as Biggest Influence on Middle East Views (% Yes)



Source: “Religion and Politics: Contention and Consensus,” Pew Research Center Report, July 24, 2003, pp. 16-17. Report available at <http://people-press.org/reports/>.

Among the religious beliefs that shape the Middle East thinking of white evangelicals is the belief that God gave the land of Israel to the Jewish people. In 2006, Pew found 69% of white evangelicals believed this, whereas less than 30% of white mainline Protestants (27%) and white Catholics (29%) did (Figure 3). As mentioned earlier, Carter wrote in *Keeping Faith*, “I considered this homeland for the Jews to be compatible with the teachings of the Bible, hence ordained by God.”²¹

Figure 3. Land of Israel Given By God to the Jewish People (% Yes)



Source: “Many Americans Uneasy with Mix of Religion and Politics,” Pew Research Center Report, August 24, 2006, p. 20.

Though he did not mention it in his memoirs, Jimmy Carter has also said on a number of occasions that the establishment of the modern state of Israel is a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. “The land of Israel,” he confessed, “has always meant a great deal to me. As a boy I read of the prophets and martyrs in the Bible.”²² “The Jewish people are entitled to one place on this earth where they can have their own state on soil given them by God from time immemorial.”²³ “Our nation’s overwhelming support for Israel comes from among Christians like me who have been taught since I was three years old to honor and protect God’s chosen people from among whom came our own Christian savior, Jesus Christ.”²⁴ As both candidate and president, he affirmed, “The establishment of the nation of Israel is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and the very

²¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 281.

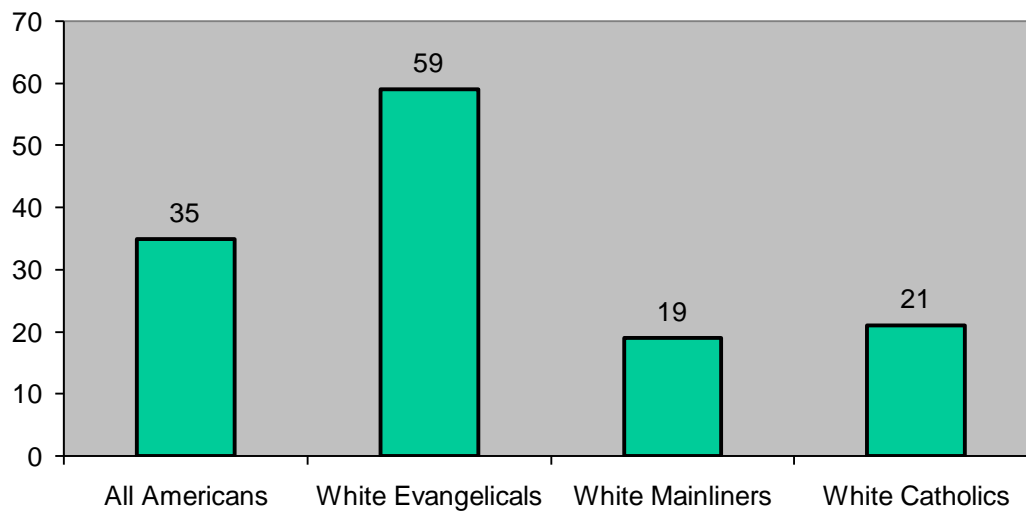
²² Carter, “Remarks on Middle East Policies in Elizabeth, New Jersey,” June 6, 1976, *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Jimmy Carter*, p. 216.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

²⁴ Carter, “Remarks at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts,” January 23, 2007; “Letter to Jewish Community on Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid,” December 15, 2006, www.cartercenter.org; “Interview with David Postman,” *Seattle Times*, December 13, 2006; “Remarks at Mansfield College, Oxford University, United Kingdom,” June 21, 2007.

essence of its fulfillment.”²⁵ Figure 4 shows that this is a common belief among white evangelicals (59%). In contrast, this is not a belief widely held by white mainline Protestants or white Catholics.

Figure 4. Modern State of Israel as a Fulfillment of Bible Prophecy (% Yes)



Source: “Many Americans Uneasy with Mix of Religion and Politics,” Pew Research Center Report, August 24, 2006, p. 20.

As we proceed, these four survey questions can provide a basic framework for examining the views of Carter’s vice president and the memoirs of Carter’s presidential contemporaries of late Cold War period.

- Did Vice President Mondale and Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Bush consider the Middle East as a region with religious significance?
- What clues are there that their religious beliefs were the biggest influence on how they see Israel and the Middle East?
- Did they identify the land of Israel in anyway as being a gift from God to the Jewish people?
- Did they identify the modern State of Israel in anyway as being a fulfillment of Bible prophecy?

²⁵ James Hefley and Marti Hefley, *The Church that Produced a President* (New York: Wyden Books, 1977), p. 229; Carter, “Remarks Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the State of Israel with Prime Minister Begin,” May 1, 1978, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 813.

In fact, following the Gallup and Pew poll findings, it may be hypothesized that self-identified evangelical presidents like Carter would be more likely to see the region in religious terms and identify their faith as being an important reason for justifying their policies toward Israel and the Middle East. Since Presidents Ford, Reagan, and Bush were self-identified evangelicals like Carter, while Mondale, Johnson, and Nixon did not identify themselves as such, one should expect to find that Ford, Reagan, and Bush described the region and their policies toward the region as Carter had done. As mainline Protestants, one should expect to find little “religious” evidence in the writings of Johnson and Nixon and in the secondary sources on Mondale.

Vice President Walter Mondale

Unlike Carter, Walter Mondale was more of a conventional politician. He was a seasoned politician in the politics of the Washington Beltway. To compensate for a comparatively light resume, his Southern origins, and centrist ideological image, Mondale’s congressional experience, liberal voting record, and being a Northerner were key factors in Carter’s decision to select him to join the 1976 Democratic ticket.²⁶

Prior to his selection, Mondale was the successor to the legendary Hubert Humphrey in the U.S. Senate. He served there as Minnesota’s senator for 12 years (1964-1976). When Carter ran for president in 1976, he was an obvious outsider. He possessed little political experience and had little-to-no ties to the national party. Conversely, when Mondale ran for president in 1984, he was “the party’s man on the inside,” “the candidate of the party establishment,” hardly “a new

²⁶ “Why Mondale Won No. 2 Spot,” *U.S. News & World Report*, July 26, 1976, pp. 21-22; Carter, “Interview with *U.S. News & World Report*,” July 15, 1976, published “In His Own Words: How Carter Decided on Mondale,” July 26, 1976, p. 23; Paul Kengor, “A Political Vice President: Walter Mondale (1977-1981),” chap. in *Wreath Layer or Policy Player? The Vice President’s Role in Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), p. 84.

face.”²⁷ Going “from doorbell-punching for Mayor Hubert Humphrey of Minneapolis to a seat of his own in the Senate and to an activist vice presidency,” for the former vice president, running for president was “the logical next step in his career.”²⁸

In the arena of ideas, Carter offered a new, reformist agenda. He came to be seen as the one of the first “new Democrats,” promoting and pushing for a conservative and progressive policy mixture. He was “a Democrat who thought like a Republican.”²⁹ Mondale, however, “was the last New Dealer, the surviving heir to a tradition of thought and politics handed down from Roosevelt to Truman to Johnson to Humphrey and finally to him.”³⁰ Whereas Carter was hard to pin down ideologically, there was no question about Mondale’s life-long commitment to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.

When Carter ran, he hardly concealed his distaste for and disparagement of the so-called “special interest groups.” In contrast, wrote Steve Gillon, “Mondale’s political topography revealed a landscape deeply divided by partisan clusters which represented distinct class and racial groupings.”³¹ For each grouping, he consistently did what he could to curry their favor and give voice to their pet issues. This, according to the Vice President, was the essence of good government—“the careful cultivation of, and service to, Democratic interest groups.”³² Not surprisingly, then, one of Mondale’s key vulnerabilities as he prepared for his presidential run in 1984 was his reputation for catering to special interests. To counter this image, Mondale campaign staffers hoped that “the Mondale agenda for the 1980s” would be “more than the agendas of the NEA, AFL-CIO, UJA, NAACP, Sierra Club, LULAC, NOW, and the Gertrude

²⁷ Peter Goldman and Tony Fuller, *The Quest for the Presidency, 1984* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), pp. 52-53.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45, 51.

²⁹ Steve M. Gillon, *The Democrats’ Dilemma: Walter F. Mondale and the Liberal Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 169.

³⁰ Goldman and Fuller, *The Quest for the Presidency, 1984*, p. 48.

³¹ Gillon, *The Democrats’ Dilemma*, p. 170.

Stein Club stapled together.”³³ However, when he made history by choosing New York congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate, the old Mondale reputation returned. The choice of Ferraro was widely perceived that Mondale once more caved in to the pressure put on him by the National Organization for Women that had “resorted to open threat” against him.³⁴

The Carter-Mondale styles were different, too. *Newsweek*’s Peter Goldman and Tony Fuller described Mondale as “the organization man.”³⁵ “Walter Fritz Mondale,” they wrote, “had always been a meticulous man, the kind who hated being seen in public with a crease unpressed or a stray hair uncombed; he had grown up believing that those were the things people judged you by.” In contrast, here is how National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski remembered his foreign policy briefing with Carter in preparation for the presidential debate in San Francisco with President Ford.³⁶ “I still did not know him well, and I was struck by the fact that he was wearing blue jeans and was barefoot; I said greeting him, ‘Ah, our barefoot candidate.’” During the course of their meeting, Brzezinski added, that he was impressed by Carter’s religiosity. Until then, he said, “I had wondered whether his proclaimed religious convictions” during the campaign season “were real or simply politically expedient.” “The feeling,” he received, was “that I was dealing with a man of genuine conviction.”

As a mainline Protestant, it is not surprising that Mondale lacked Carter’s overtly evangelical, religious style and appeal. Unlike Carter, he was of the older, pre-Carter school of national politicians. He believed that religion was a private matter, “a good and godly man...did not advertise.”³⁷ Following this, it is also not surprising that Carter and Mondale’s respective

³² Ibid.

³³ Goldman and Fuller, *The Quest for the Presidency, 1984*, p. 52.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 212.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983), p. 9.

³⁷ Goldman and Fuller, *The Quest for the Presidency, 1984*, p. 50.

stances on Israel were different. Carter believed in a balanced approach to the question of Middle East peace. For religious and secular reasons, he spoke of security for the Jews, God's chosen people, balanced with justice for the Arabs, the co-heirs in the region of the Abrahamic promise. He had a political vision of peace for the region inspired by the Bible. Throughout his career, Mondale had a strong, unwavering pro-Israel reputation.³⁸ In a 2007 interview, for example, CNN's Wolf Blitzer identified the former vice president, with President Carter seated next to him, as someone who has "always been a very, very strong supporter of Israel."³⁹ Whether the year was 1977 or 2007, "very, very pro-Israel" is not, will not, and cannot be said of Carter—unless, of course, it is conjoined with "very, very pro-Arab, too."

In a 1991 interview with Ken Stein, Carter acutely explained this difference between Mondale and himself.⁴⁰ "Fritz Mondale was much more deeply immersed in the Jewish organization leadership than I was. That was an alien world to me." Carter sensed that the feeling was mutual. In 1976, "I was looked upon as an alien challenger to their own candidate [Washington Senator Henry Jackson]." Consequently, he said, "I didn't feel obligated to them." However, "Fritz...was committed to Israel...It was an act just like breathing to him—it wasn't like breathing to me." "So," when it came to the politics of the Middle East, Carter explained, "I was willing to break the shell more than he was."

For his part, Vice President Mondale, along with other Democratic leaders, often expressed his concern that Carter needed to secure domestic Jewish support.⁴¹ Unlike Carter, Brzezinski observed, Mondale was usually reluctant "to risk his standing with the Jewish community" and typically encouraged the President to be much more cautious and "passive" in

³⁸ Kengor, "A Political Vice President: Walter Mondale (1977-1981)," chap. in *Wreath Layer or Policy Player? The Vice President's Role in Foreign Policy*, p. 100.

³⁹ Carter, "Interview with Wolf Blitzer," CNN's *The Situation Room*, January 19, 2007.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Stein, "My Problem with Jimmy Carter's Book," *Middle East Quarterly* (Spring 2007), p. 3.

his Mideast dealings.⁴² While he supported the President's peace efforts, he had many misgivings along the way. For instance, he became particularly agitated when Secretary of State Cyrus Vance "suggested we initiate contacts with the PLO."⁴³

Mondale's essential argument, as the National Security Advisor understood it, was that Carter's hands-on approach and his desire to pressure Begin "would provoke controversy and be politically counterproductive."⁴⁴ Instead, after the first year and second year, the Vice President wanted Carter to "simply let things go on their own." Anything "thereafter," wrote Brzezinski, Mondale believed would cost the President too much politically if "Israel's many supporters, both Jewish and non-Jewish," were alienated.⁴⁵ William Quandt, who served on Carter's National Security Council, noted this, too.⁴⁶ He wrote that in the summer of 1978 "Mondale argued the case for pulling back and rebuilding confidence with the Jewish community" before the fall congressional mid-term election. Continued direct involvement by the President was simply too risky electorally. To protect the President's prestige, shielding him from any further controversies, he recommended that Carter pull back in favor of a "political negotiator" to handle the personal diplomacy. Mondale provided his input to Carter, but in many instances on this issue he lacked the influence. To paraphrase Paul Light, Mondale had Carter's ear, but he did not have his mind on the Middle East.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 92.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 279; Kengor, "A Political Vice President: Walter Mondale (1977-1981)," chap. in *Wreath Layer or Policy Player? The Vice President's Role in Foreign Policy*, p. 101.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁴⁶ Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1986), pp. 197-198; see also Robert A. Strong, "Shuttle Diplomacy: President Carter in the Middle East," chapter in *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), pp. 192, 207.

⁴⁷ Paul Light, "Vice Presidential Influence Under Rockefeller and Mondale," *Political Science Quarterly* 98.4 (Winter 1983-1984): 619.

This suggests that had Mondale been the President the peace accords likely would never have occurred. Compared to Carter, his approach, while supportive, was generally cautious and much more focused on the potential effects the peace process was having on domestic support.⁴⁸ Mondale evidently feared provoking a key Democratic constituency and the electoral risks involved. The fact that in 1980 Carter received only 45% of the Jewish vote, the lowest level of Jewish support for any Democratic presidential candidate since 1920 proved Mondale right.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, said Mondale, though he did more for bringing peace to Israel than any other president, Carter was “unable to gain the defense of the constituency that should have been the most grateful. That had serious political repercussions in certain states in the union.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, there does not seem to be any evidence that Mondale viewed the Middle East through a religious lens or had a policy vision toward the region influenced by his Christian faith. At best, it seems Mondale considered the region important to the extent that it is important to a key Democratic constituency, Jewish voters. Carter, however, was motivated less by politics than by his faith. As such, he was more willing to pursue policies that he deemed compatible with his faith even if that meant causing controversy and opposition within his party. For Carter, theology trumped party and electoral politics. For Mondale, the reverse was true.

⁴⁸ Gillon, *The Democrats' Dilemma*, p. 171.

⁴⁹ David G. Dalin and Alfred J. Kolatch, *The Presidents of the United States and the Jews* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 2000), pp. 236-243.

⁵⁰ Mondale, “The Perspective of the Vice President,” in *The Carter Presidency: Fourteen Intimate Perspectives of Jimmy Carter*, edited by Kenneth W. Thompson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), p. 245.

Lyndon Johnson

Like Vice President Mondale, over his career, Lyndon Johnson considered Jews “one of his natural constituencies.”⁵¹ In contrast to the more Arabist officials in the federal bureaucracy, particularly the State Department, he had long expressed sympathy for “the Zionist cause” and he “felt a natural antipathy” toward the pan-Arabism of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser.⁵² Still, writes biographer Randall Woods, Johnson was determined to follow the even-handed Middle East strategy of his predecessors Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy, maintaining strong ties with Israel and key Arab states. In the case of the Arabs, Johnson understood the importance of the region’s oil for the country and Soviet desire to expand its influence there.

President Johnson had no plans for any bold involvement in the Middle East. The region may have been important, but throughout his presidency, Vietnam was to be Johnson’s foreign policy preoccupation, burden, and eventual political undoing. He did not give the region any serious attention until the 1967 Six-Day War. In fact, his inattention was blamed in some quarters for the war itself. Woods notes, for instance, that the *Baltimore Sun* ran the headline, “U.S. Ignored Crisis Signs in Mideast” and described the outbreak of war “one of the worst failures of United States foreign policy” since the U.S. began its involvement in Southeast Asia.⁵³

Johnson identified the region as dangerous. With the Six-Day War of June 1967, he came to see that “trouble” in the Middle East was “potentially far more dangerous than the war

⁵¹ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 768. Though by 1966, Woods wrote, Johnson’s “natural sympathy for Jews in general and Israel in particular was partially eclipsed by his anger over growing antiwar sentiment in the American Jewish community.” Exasperated, Johnson even “told Tel Aviv that if they did not get their American friends off his back over Vietnam they could forget about further aid.” *Ibid.*, p. 772. For many “rank and file” Jewish Americans, ever since Johnson became president, the man “from oil-rich Texas” was “an object of suspicion.” *Ibid.*, p. 768.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 769.

in Southeast Asia.”⁵⁴ As his successors would, Johnson feared that Soviet influence in the region might transform more moderate regimes into Soviet clients or pan-Arab radicals.⁵⁵ Moreover, with increased Soviet influence, Johnson worried that every little incident in the region could produce “an ultimate confrontation” between the two superpowers.⁵⁶

In his memoirs, President Johnson did not characterize the region or his efforts in religious terms. For him, U.S. interests were material interests, matters of security. The closest he came to discussing the region and Israel in Carteresque, religious terms came in two passages. In one, likely thinking about the events of the Holocaust and the birthpangs of war surrounding Israel’s independence, he stressed his admiration for the Jewish people. “I have always had a deep feeling of sympathy for Israel and its people, gallantly building and defending a modern nation against great odds and against the tragic background of Jewish experience.”⁵⁷ In the second, he described the region as the place “where our civilization began.”⁵⁸

Though he did not present any compelling regional vision for peace in the 18 pages he dedicated to the Middle East out of 569 pages, he concluded that two things must occur if peace was to happen.⁵⁹ First, he said, “there could be no satisfactory future for the Middle East until the leaders and the peoples of the area turn away from the past, accepted Israel as a reality, and began working together to build modern societies, unhampered by old quarrels, bitterness, and enmity.” Second, and more specifically, he explained, “while I understood the special problems of the people of Israel, living in a harassed and beleaguered fortress,” Israel, with its recent victory, needed to be magnanimous. With the Arab powers humiliated in defeat, “I believed the

⁵³ Ibid., p. 782.

⁵⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 287.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 288.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 297.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 304.

Israelis would have to reach out and help provide a basis of dignity for their neighbors...An Israel overconfident in victory would only weaken” the prospects for “a solid peace.”

Richard Nixon

Though burdened by the American involvement in Southeast Asia he inherited from the previous administration, finding peace in the Middle East was an early and continuing priority for President Richard Nixon. But Nixon’s interest and pursuit of peace in the region, based on his memoirs, evidently had nothing to do with his religious faith. The interest of the Quaker president was predicated on fear of Soviet influence and expansion and fear that another Arab-Israeli war could draw in the two superpowers.

In Nixon’s view, the Soviets were determined to increase and expand their presence in the Middle East, though not for expanding and promoting communism per se. He said the Soviets were seeking access to what they long desired—“land, oil, power and the warm waters of the Mediterranean” rather than ideological conversions.⁶⁰ As he wrote in a memorandum to Secretary of State William Rogers, “The difference between our goal and the Soviet goal in the Middle East is very simple and fundamental. *We* want peace. *They* want the Middle East” (emphases Nixon’s).⁶¹

To counter the designs of the Soviet Union, Nixon sought “a new balance of power” in the region. He said “the United States could not stand idly by and watch Israel being driven into the sea” or continuing to risk “the possibility of a direct U.S.-Soviet confrontation.”⁶² To prevent

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), p. 477.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 483.

these two outcomes, Nixon said U.S. policy needed a good dose of realism.⁶³ That is, to prevent their becoming Soviet satellites, the United States must reach out to the “moderate Arab states, particularly Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.” Such overtures served both U.S. and Israeli security interests. “Israel cannot survive forever,” he explained, “as an island in a sea of hatred.”⁶⁴ So peace was in their interest. Mere preparation for war was not a real policy choice for Israel, especially “over a long period of time with a hundred million Arabs around them.”⁶⁵ And for the United States, a successful mediation of “a peace settlement of Arab-Israeli differences” would constitute “a serious blow to the Soviet presence and prestige in the Middle East.”⁶⁶ Working for peace, Nixon stated, enhanced U.S. credibility with the Arabs. It offered them “a place other than Moscow to turn.”⁶⁷ Simply, as he wrote in his diary in 1973, Nixon believed “we just can’t let the thing ride and have a hundred million Arabs hating us and providing a fishing ground not only for [Arab] radicals, but, of course, for the Soviets.”⁶⁸

Nixon was dismayed that many American Jewish leaders were too “unyielding and shortsighted” to see the larger strategic picture.⁶⁹ They failed to understand that “those who deviate from the hard line of some of Israel’s more extreme supporters” were not necessarily “anti-Israel.”⁷⁰ “Everyone must understand that being a friend of Israel’s neighbors does not make one an enemy of Israel.” Risking an Arab oil embargo and confrontation with the Soviet Union, he argued that he was fully committed to Israel’s security as evinced “in the 1973 war, [when] I ordered the massive airlift of equipment and materiel that enabled Israel to stop the two-

⁶³ Nixon, *1999: Victory Without War* (New York: Pocket Books, 1989), p. 278.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁶⁵ Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, pp. 943, 1008.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 885.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 941.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 787.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 481, 1007.

⁷⁰ Nixon, *1999: Victory Without War*, p. 279.

front advance of Syria and Egypt.”⁷¹ “Our commitment to the survival of Israel runs deep,” he asserted. Though the United States and Israel were not formally aligned, the two countries were “bound together by something much stronger than any piece of paper: a moral commitment.” This is something past and future presidents have and “will faithfully honor” as he did. “America will never allow the sworn enemies of Israel to achieve their goal of destroying it.”

With regard to the occupied territories in the West Bank and Gaza, Nixon said he was concerned that if Israel tried to annex or absorb them, its Western-style democracy would be transformed into “a binational garrison state.”⁷² Citing the views of Israel’s first prime minister, in *1999: Victory Without War*, Nixon said that David Ben-Gurion believed that if Israel’s extremists succeed, given the higher birth rate among Palestinians, “Israel will be neither Jewish nor democratic.” In time, “the Arabs will outnumber us, and undemocratic, repressive measures will be needed to keep them under control.” This, Nixon added, will not only destroy the democratic character of the Jewish state, it will “eventually bring about a united Arab world hostile to Israel” and provide “greater opportunities for Moscow to enter the region than ever before.”

In 1970, in a memorandum to then-National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, the President discussed his feelings and indicated the lurking “danger for Israel of relying on the prominent liberal and dove senators of both parties to come through in the event a crisis arose in which Israel was attacked by the Arabs or was even threatened directly by Soviet power.” He told Kissinger that the pro-Israel community “must recognize that our interests are basically pro-freedom and not just pro-Israel because of the Jewish vote. We are *for* Israel because Israel in our view is the only state in the Mideast which is *pro*-freedom and an effective opponent to

⁷¹ Ibid., 276.

⁷² Ibid., pp.278-279.

Soviet expansion.” In other words, from his perspective, Israel was a valuable ally of the United States not because there was a “pro-Israel attitude prevalent in large and influential segments of the American Jewish community, Congress, the media, and in intellectual and cultural circles,” but because it could be an effective ally in stopping the Soviets. For Nixon, issues of U.S.-Soviet superpower rivalry were of paramount concern, not the more mundane and parochial differences between Arab and Israeli. Therefore, the goal of the Nixon Administration was “to construct a completely new set of power relationships in the Middle East—not only between Israel and the Arabs, but also among the United States, Western Europe, and the Soviet Union.”

Gerald Ford

In his memoir, *A Time to Heal*, Gerald Ford’s view of the Middle East was wholly secular and realist. Though personally religious, Ford long believed that it was improper for presidents to mix religion and politics. In fact, he considered it unseemly for presidents to even publicly discuss their religious views. This is certainly reflected in his descriptions of Israel and the U.S. role in the Middle East. In his writings, there is no religious sense of mission or vision that one finds with Carter. The region’s issues were not communicated in theological or Biblical terms. No Bible verses were invoked to justify involvement or policy positions, and instances of prayer were not cited as evidence that he was emboldened to persist in a particular policy direction when things got tough.

Like Johnson and Nixon, Ford said the Middle East was “one of my chief concerns.”⁷³ He considered it important for the United States to secure the region’s oil supply to the West.⁷⁴ He pledged to check Soviet power and influence. “Their only aim was to promote instability, so

⁷³ Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979), 183.

I wanted to keep them out.”⁷⁵ He reaffirmed the country’s commitment to a “free and secure Israel” and to maintaining its “national integrity.”⁷⁶ Echoing Nixon, Ford said he feared that if the peace process failed, moderate Arabs could be radicalized, creating more enemies for the United States.⁷⁷ This, too, could create conditions for yet another Arab-Israeli war.⁷⁸

But Ford spent much of his Middle East reflections in *A Time to Heal* not by reviewing his vision or policies so much as charging Israel and “the Israeli lobby” in the United States with blocking progress toward peace. Though Carter has been frequently criticized for some of his comments toward Israel and Israeli political leaders, these same critics ignore those offered by Ford. Like Carter, Ford described the Israelis as “tough in their demands,” “less flexible,” “stalling,” “dragging their feet,” and didn’t want to budge.” He wrote that they “didn’t seem to understand that only by giving do you get something in return.” He said that “their tactics frustrated the Egyptians and made me mad as hell.” Unlike the Egyptians who “bent over backward” in negotiations, Ford said, “the Israelis resisted.”⁷⁹ More pointedly, Ford asserted that he believed that “the Israelis had been engaged in a not very subtle campaign to discredit Kissinger.”⁸⁰ “Because Henry was a Jew,” President Ford continued, “the Israeli hard-liners said, he was bending over backward to be ‘fair’ to the Arabs. He was ‘out-Gentiling the Gentiles.’” Ford said, “The fact that I had said I wanted to establish a personal relationship with Sadat seemed to worry the Israelis, and they decided to launch a counterattack” on him.⁸¹ “We

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 183.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 286.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 247.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 286.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 246-247, 287, 291. See Paul Charles Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), pp. 80-86. Though Ford does not claim a religious influence, Merkley nonetheless concludes, “There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Ford’s effort to establish his moral commitment to Israel and to represent this effort as following from his own personal religious commitment.”

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 287.

⁸¹ Ibid.

had been engaged in a war of nerves with Israel.”⁸² The problem with the Israelis, Ford explained, was that they “were always insisting that we supply them more military equipment than our own experts thought they needed and far more than I thought we could afford.”⁸³ “Their shopping list,” he added, “included sophisticated weaponry that even our own forces hadn’t received yet.”

To the pressure of a singularly focused “Israeli lobby,” he said he “was not going to capitulate” and threatened instead to go public with U.S.-Israel differences.⁸⁴ For merely “suggesting the possibility of a reassessment of our policy toward Israel,” he claimed some in the American Jewish community thought “I must be anti-Israel or even anti-Semitic.”⁸⁵

When Secretary of State Kissinger finally succeeded in concluding an agreement with Israel and Egypt in September 1975, known as Sinai II, President Ford had only this to say in his memoirs. After he had congratulated both Sadat and Rabin for their efforts, he called Kissinger. “This is a great achievement. . . . And I know that the American people will be most grateful for the successful efforts that you made.”⁸⁶

Ronald Reagan

In *An American Life*, Reagan made his pro-Israel views clear. “I’ve believed many things in my life, but no conviction I’ve ever held has been stronger than my belief that the United States must ensure the survival of Israel.”⁸⁷ But Reagan’s pro-Israel position and his justification for U.S. involvement in the region were seemingly not based on religious reasons. If his personal faith was a factor, he did not mention it in his memoirs.

⁸² Ibid., 308.

⁸³ Ibid., 308.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 247-248, 288.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.286.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 309.

Not surprisingly, as in Europe, Africa, and Latin America, Reagan was especially concerned about Soviet expansion. Quandt wrote, “Reflecting his general view of foreign policy, Reagan placed primary emphasis on the Soviet threat to the Middle East, not on the Arab-Israeli dispute.”⁸⁸ Reagan came into office “as a determined anti-communist.”⁸⁹ Consistent with this, Reagan listed fear of Soviet expansionism first among his reasons for backing Israel. He wrote, “Under Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet Union was eager to exploit any opportunity to expand its influence and supplant the United States as the dominant superpower in this oil-rich and strategically important part of the world.”⁹⁰

Second, Reagan expressed his “irreversible commitment to the survival and territorial integrity of Israel.”⁹¹ Based on these two points, Reagan viewed Israel “as an important strategic asset in the confrontation with the Soviet Union.”⁹² In this role as a strategic ally, Reagan saw Israel as part of a global strategy in confronting and containing the Soviets.

Reagan further explained that he wanted to resist Soviet expansion in the region and protect the region’s oilfields, “coveted by the Communist world.”⁹³ Reagan believed as well that U.S. involvement would deter “the radical, anti-American Iranian revolution from spreading” and the consequences that would likely bring to “our economy.”⁹⁴ Reagan said he wanted to send a message to “our allies and to Moscow that the United States supported its friends” in the

⁸⁷ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 410.

⁸⁸ Quandt, *Camp David*, p. 18.

⁸⁹ Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001; revised edition), p. 245.

⁹⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 418; see also Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, edited by Douglas Brinkley (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), p. 14.

⁹¹ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 418.

⁹² Steven L. Spiegel, “Israel and Beyond: American Jews and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in *Jews in American Politics*, eds. L. Sandy Maisel and Ira N. Forman (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), p. 263; Stephen E. Ambrose and Douglas G. Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 306.

⁹³ Reagan, *An American Life*, pp. 410-411.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

Middle East.⁹⁵ From this president, he argued, there would not be an abandonment of U.S. allies as the Carter administration had done with Iran. Reagan believed that U.S. involvement would protect Israel, “a small country virtually surrounded by enemies.”⁹⁶ “I repeatedly emphasized that the United States was committed to ensuring Israel’s survival and would do nothing to diminish its position of military superiority” in the region.⁹⁷

Though strongly supported by conservative evangelicals, a constituency that sees Israel and the Middle East region from a Biblical perspective, there is nothing in his memoirs that suggest that Reagan’s views toward Israel and the Middle East were motivated or influenced by his self-proclaimed evangelical faith.⁹⁸ There are no citations from the Bible, no proclamations of Bible prophecy being fulfilled, no lessons learned from Sunday school, and virtually nothing remotely “holy” about the region.⁹⁹ The closest reference of any sort to the Middle East having Biblical significance is a brief comment about the source of the conflict. Reagan described the Middle East as “a region where hate has roots reaching back to the dawn of history. It’s a place where the senseless spilling of blood in the name of religious faith has gone on since biblical times, and where modern events are forever being shaped by momentous events of the past, from the Exodus to the Holocaust.”¹⁰⁰ Unlike Carter, who saw in his religious faith key sources of

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 414.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 415.

⁹⁸ William Martin, “The Christian Right and American Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy* (Spring 1999): 72-73; Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980), pp. 93-98; Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 203-208; Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989), pp. 200-204.

⁹⁹ There is evidence, however, that Reagan did believe in end-time Bible prophecies. In his diary, for instance, after the Israelis bombed the nuclear power plant in Iraq in June 1981, Reagan wrote, “I swear I believe Armageddon is near.” Later in 1983, worried that the fighting in Lebanon could lead to a wider war, Reagan said, “The possibility of an Israeli-Syrian (plus Soviet) confrontation cannot be ruled out. Armageddon in the prophecies begins with the gates of Damascus being assailed.” Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, pp. 19, 24, 150. See also Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, pp. 142-143, 162; Grace Halsell, *Forcing God’s Hand: Why Millions Pray for a Quick Rapture---And Destruction of Planet Earth* (Revised Edition; Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2003), pp. 17, 21, 102.

¹⁰⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, p. 407.

inspiration and solutions for conflict resolution, Reagan seems to have identified religion as not much more than a source of regional violence.

If Reagan had an idealist reason, the closest thing one finds is that he noted a moral reason for his commitment to Israel: the legacy of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust, I believe, left America with a moral responsibility to ensure that what had happened to the Jews under Hitler never happens again. We must not let it happen again. The civilized world owes a debt to the people who were the greatest victims of Hitler's madness.¹⁰¹

Reagan, like other presidents before him, also mentioned the shared values between the two countries. He wrote, "My dedication to the preservation of Israel was as strong when I left the White House as when I arrived there, even though this tiny ally, with whom we share democracy and many other values, was a source of great concern for me while I was president."¹⁰²

George H.W. Bush

Though the Palestinian intifada, which began in 1987, was well underway at the start of his presidency, resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict was not a high priority for George H.W. Bush. President Bush did not give serious attention to the region until August 1990 when Saddam Hussein's Iraq invaded Kuwait. He did not turn his focus to the Arab-Israeli peace process until after the war with Iraq ended.

After the Iraqi invasion, the President described Hussein as "evil" and the Iraqi occupation of its neighbor as a matter of "good versus evil," "right versus wrong."¹⁰³ In a letter to Saudi King Fahd (November 22, 1990), Bush noted how proud he was that the United States

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 410.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ George H.W. Bush, *All the Best, George Bush: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (New York: Scribner, 1999), pp. 503, 506.

and Saudi Arabia were “standing shoulder against Iraq’s evil dictator.”¹⁰⁴ Sometimes, he wrote in a letter to Bernard Cardinal Law (January 22, 1991), “failing to use force” to resist armed aggressions “is an immoral position.” He added, “in certain situations, using force is not immoral, not against God’s will.”¹⁰⁵

From this point through the conclusion of the 1991 Gulf War, the President’s main focus was to rally international opinion against the invasion and forge a Western-Arab coalition to expel Iraqi forces.

In his book, *All The Best, George Bush*, comments about Israel and Middle East were virtually absent. Of Israeli prime ministers, only Labor Party leader Shimon Peres was mentioned in an approving way, and that was from a letter written while Bush was the Vice President (August 3, 1986). In it, Bush said, “I am convinced that Peres wants peace.”¹⁰⁶ His only references to the American Jewish community were some remarks concerning the Jewish Defense League, an organization “led by the outrageous and radical Meir Kahane” that “used disruptive, radical tactics against the Soviet Union” to protest the treatment of Soviet Jews.¹⁰⁷

Regarding Middle East policy, Bush declared in a letter to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad that the United States’ position was, “Territory for peace applied to all fronts, including the Golan Heights. We will not change this fundamental policy position of ours; nor will we change our non-recognition of Israel’s purported ‘Annexation’ of the Golan Heights” (June 1, 1991).¹⁰⁸ It was Bush’s hope that the successful conclusion of the 1991 Gulf War “created new

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 490.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 507.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 350. Reagan, too, was very fond of Prime Minister Peres. In his diary (September 15, 1986), he wrote, “I admire him very much and am sorry the political rotation agreement [between the Labor and Likud parties] will see him replaced with P.M. Shamir...He’s done a great job seeing the way toward peace in the Middle East.” Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, p. 437.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 141n.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 524.

opportunities for progress in the peace process” between Israel and its Arab neighbors; he wanted Syria to take advantage of “these new opportunities” that “may not come again.”

In his book with National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, beyond Iraq, very little was described or discussed about the Arab-Israeli conflict and the peace process. Purposely, they noted up front that their book would contain little on these points, except for the war with Iraq.¹⁰⁹

The few points that were included about Israel centered on administration fears that Israel would jeopardize the fragile Western-Arab war coalition against Iraq if it responded to an attack from Iraq during the war.¹¹⁰ Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir was praised for his restraint; it was “one of his finest moments,” wrote Scowcroft.¹¹¹ “Whatever other problems may have arisen between us and Shamir from time to time, on this occasion, he showed himself a strong, stalwart ally.” Bush asserted, “Because of the Arab-Israeli tensions, throughout the crisis Israel remained very carefully placed outside the coalition.” “I knew,” he said, “we could not build a truly broad coalition, one that included many Arab nations, if Israel were part of it.” When violence broke out at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in October 1990 and Israeli forces “fired into the crowd, killing 21 Palestinians and injuring more than 150,” the Bush Administration supported a UN resolution condemning Israel “for using excessive force and called for a more restricted” investigative mission in “the occupied territories.”¹¹² From the viewpoint of the Bush administration, the U.S.-sponsored measure viewed Israel “as the occupying power under the Geneva Convention” and was responsible for the “protection” of Palestinians under their

¹⁰⁹ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), p. xi.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 452, 455.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 456.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 378-379.

jurisdiction.¹¹³ Not surprisingly, the Israelis were not pleased with this. Bush and Scowcroft wrote, “our relations with Israel hit a new low” and “the Jewish community in the United States was surprised, hurt, and furious.”

After the war with Iraq, President Bush observed that the organization of the Madrid Conference in October 1991 was “a quick and substantial payoff” that came from “our new credibility” in simultaneously working with various Arab states to liberate a fellow Arab country and coming to the defense of Israel.¹¹⁴ It “was one of the direct fruits of the Gulf War.”¹¹⁵ “Without the successful prosecution of that conflict and our coalition-building with our Arab allies,” he said, “such a meeting would have been impossible.” He explained that he “hoped to take advantage of the goodwill we had forged with our Arab allies to advance regional peace and security.” Bush particularly thanked Secretary of State James Baker for his role in making the conference possible. But this was all the 41st President had to say on the matter. His thoughts quickly turned to developments in the near moribund Soviet Union and his relations with Mikhail Gorbachev. Bush ended his brief mention of Madrid with “I looked forward to another opportunity to see Gorbachev in Madrid and talk to him at length.”¹¹⁶

Conclusion

In studying the Arab-Israeli conflict, argued Quandt, an important dimension is “to know how the president...makes sense of the many arguments, the mountain of ‘facts,’ the competing claims he hears.”¹¹⁷ Presidents, he asserted, are not purely rational or strategic in their thinking, nor are they mere prisoners of so-called national interest or bureaucratic politics. While what

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 379.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 490.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 547-548.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 548.

¹¹⁷ Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 9.

constitutes the country's interests may in fact be generally static over time, all presidents have some particular views of the region and the nature of the conflict, and their degree of interest and involvement varies. Therefore, said Quandt, what exactly constitutes a nation's interest "contains a strong subjective element."¹¹⁸ Shibley Telhami, too, noted that "presidential personality and inclinations" can have a tremendous effect on diplomatic situations, the establishment of policy priorities, and the level of presidential involvement.¹¹⁹ To explore and examine this "subjective" dimension of U.S. Mideast policy, this paper investigated the views of President Carter, Vice President Mondale, and the other presidents of the late Cold War period. By examining the memoirs of these presidents and secondary sources regarding Mondale, it was found that Carter's views were sui generis.

Using a basic framework of four questions informed by survey research conducted by the Gallup Poll Organization and the Pew Research Center, Carter was the only president from 1963-1993 that viewed Israel and the wider Middle East from a religious perspective, who derived his basic views of the region from his religious beliefs, who believed that God gave the Jewish people the land of Israel, and who believed that the modern establishment of the state of Israel was compatible with Bible prophecy. In his second post-presidential book, also with an ostensible religious title, *The Blood of Abraham*, Carter summarized his Middle East perspective this way: "For me there is no way to approach or enter Israel without thinking first about the Bible and the history of the land and its people. The names and images have long been an integral part of my life as a Christian."¹²⁰ These basic beliefs, it is argued, motivated Carter to

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

¹¹⁹ Shibley Telhami, "Evaluating Bargaining Performance: The Case of Camp David," *Political Science Quarterly* 107.4 (Winter 1992-1993): 641.

¹²⁰ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1993; Originally Published in 1985), p. 29.

work for peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, specifically Egypt, in spite of the political and electoral risks that ensued.

Carter's Vice President, Walter Mondale, however, evidently either do not share these views or, if he did, he did not publicly express them. Instead, based on the available evidence, Israel and the Middle East mattered to him principally because it mattered to elements within the Democratic coalition, namely Jewish Democratic voters. Consistently, he warned Carter that his peace efforts in the Middle East would endanger Democratic electoral prospects in the 1978 midterm elections and the 1980 Carter-Mondale reelection effort. Mondale's fears proved to be well-founded. In 1980, Carter received the lowest level of support from Jewish voters than any other Democratic presidential candidate since 1920. Therefore, it may be argued that had Mondale been president during the same years (1977-1981), it is highly probable that the success at Camp David and the signing of the subsequent peace treaty likely would not have occurred. Mondale lacked Carter's personalistic approach to diplomacy, his faith-based vision for the region, his sense of religious mission to work for peace, and his determination to press forward in the face of political criticism. In other words, there was nothing inevitable about Camp David or the coming of Israeli-Egyptian peace.

For Carter's presidential contemporaries, from Lyndon Johnson to George H.W. Bush, religion was noticeably absent from their Middle East recollections. Based upon their memoirs, all the other presidents simply did not view the significance of Israel and the Middle East the same way Carter and most evangelicals do; there is simply little or nothing about their faith. While it was expected that the mainline Protestant presidents, Johnson and Nixon, might be more guarded in publicly expressing any religious reasons they may have held, and this held true, what

was surprising was the absence of religion-talk from the other self-proclaimed evangelical presidents.

At least tentatively, this paper suggests that mere claims of being a born-again evangelical are not sufficient for understanding presidential views and behavior. In the case of Israel and the Middle East, neither Ford, Reagan, nor George H.W. Bush claimed any religious justification for their actions in the Middle East in their memoirs or other post-presidential writings. Though they claimed to be evangelicals and received strong electoral support from white evangelicals, they have little to nothing in their works that suggests they possessed an “evangelical” perspective toward Israel and the wider region. In this issue area, these evangelical presidents were actually non-evangelical in their communicative and cognitive styles.

By and large, the two common concerns for most presidents during the late Cold War period were fear of greater Soviet influence in the region and fear that the Arab-Israeli conflict could ultimately escalate to a world war between the two superpowers. As such, Middle East peace was desired not because it would fulfill some biblical obligation to pursue peace, but desired in the interests of national security. Furthermore, the general consensus among the presidents was that peace would stabilize Arab states, provide security for Israel, minimize the appeal of pan-Arabism, and likely secure continued Western access to the region’s oil.

In fairness to each former president, admittedly a broad survey of their other writings, speeches, and comments would need to be examined to make a more definitive judgment. This is a clear limitation here. Nonetheless, use of presidential memoirs is one accepted means of “getting inside the mind” of a president. Certainly, if sincerely held, such a profound influence as religious faith should be readily evident in presidential memoirs.

The fact that President Carter was the lone president in this period to employ the language of faith in his memoirs to explain his Mideast views suggests that there was something quite genuine about his public religiosity. It suggests that his many expressions of faith on the campaign trail in 1976 and during his four years in office was not cynical, instrumental ploys merely to win votes. Even after suffering a crushing defeat in 1980, as the title of his memoirs aptly captured, Carter was still “keeping faith.” And when examined from a comparative perspective as done here, the evidence points to a conclusion that President Jimmy Carter may have indeed had “a different way of governing.”