

## **The Rise of Jewish Religious Nationalism and Israeli Approach to the Palestinian Conflict**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper analyses the relationship between Jewish religious nationalism and Israeli approach to the conflict with Palestinians. This paper explores the relationship between religious nationalism and Israeli approach to the long standing conflict in the occupied territories. . It seeks to explain why religious nationalism has become closely associated with hawkishness since 1967. While the Jewish religion advocates no single approach to the conflict with the Palestinians, religious nationalism has been significantly more hawkish than the nonreligious approach in Israel.

*Keywords:* Religious nationalism, Israel-Palestine-conflict, hawkish

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many recent studies examining the impact of religious nationalism on conflicts between states and ethnic groups tend to be centred on the role of religious nationalism in the emergence and persistence of conflicts (Krishna, 1996; Calhoun, 2001; Secor, 2001; Woltering, 2002; Agnew, 2008; Mullin, 2010). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most protracted and serious conflicts of the century not only because it is difficult

to find a solution satisfactory to both parties, but also because it is an active conflict which threatens the Middle East and the world because of the involvement of super powers having vested interest in prolonging the conflict. Using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a case study, this paper examines the crucial role of religious nationalism in sustaining the conflict. However, since the 1967 war, religious nationalism and hawkishness have become intertwined in perpetuating the conflict.

The Hebrew Bible attaches special significance to the relationship between national identity and religion (Kaplan, 1994) which underscores the “divinity” element in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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In some situations, even where the root cause of the conflict is religiously motivated, the inclusion of religion into most conflicts only makes matters worse. Thus, for a thorough comprehension of this phenomenon, the authors of this paper set out to underscore in the most general sense, the effect of religious nationalism on the emergence and sustenance of conflicts with special focus on religious nationalism among the Israelis in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Though the focus of this paper is on the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, its findings can be generalised to a large extent to many conflicts around the world, thus, providing further insights and reference materials for the study and debate on religious nationalism. Despite the apparent religious and political divide between the Israelis and the Palestinians, it must be noted that not all Jews support the Zionist agenda of the state of Israel and not all Palestinians are supportive of the aggression of the militant groups.

This paper explores the relationship between the approach adopted by Israel in dealing with the Palestinian issue and the religious nationalism aspect to the conflict. It also examines why religious nationalism has become more hawkishness especially since 1967. Thus, the main aim of this paper is to understand the concept of religious nationalism that is at the heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. As such, the paper contributes to the body of knowledge on this topic. Such a contribution will focus on identifying and examining different points of view regarding the conflict.

Studies conducted thus far have focused on identifying factors that might lead to future resolution of the conflict.

There are some limitations to the study. The first is theoretical and the second is historical. The theoretical one is related to of the kind of religious nationalism that is the focus since there are various religious nationalisms in literature. (Hayes, 1966, Smith, 1996).

The historical limitation refers to the time constraint of the study. This study focused on the development of Zionism in the late 19th century with a view to evaluating the historical, cultural and religious claims of the Jews in the late 20th century. This paper will exclude recent Arab-Israeli conflicts as understanding the recent political rapprochement from both sides is another topic altogether.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND DEFINITIONS**

In an attempt to develop the theoretical framework for the current study on the relationship between religion and nationalism with special focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is vital to have a closer look at both sides of the political divide. Despite the religious and political differences between these two groups, both are faced with similar problems.

In the study on nationalism, Roger Friedland (2002) and Juergensmeyer (1993) describe the concept of distinctive religious form of nationalism. In his discourse, Friedland argued that nationalism is 'a state-centred form of collective subject

formation. . . a program for the co-constitution of the state and the territorial bounded population in whose name it speaks. . . [and] a set of discursive practices by which the territorial identity of a state and the cultural identity of the people whose collective representation it claims are constituted as a singular fact' (Friedland, 2002).

Friedland defines religious nationalism as a special form of nationalism with variable content describing the 'joining of state, territory, and culture' (Friedland, 2002). The form, however, does not explicitly explain how these entities are to be joined together, what content it entails in the state-centred collective subject formation, or the constituents of the discursive practices necessary to amalgamate the geography of a people with their cultural identity. A possible mode of specifying the content of the form is provided in religion. In short, religion provides a means 'of joining state, territory, and culture'. This power of religion, according to Friedland, is due to its unique 'models of authority' feature on the one hand, and its 'imaginings of an ordering power' (2002) on the other. Religion, according to the author, can be regarded as the 'totalizing order capable of regulating every aspect of life' (2002). Friedland however, acknowledged the fact that this injunction is less applicable to Christianity – for Christianity originated as a stateless religion. In an attempt to amalgamate state, territory, and culture, religious nationalism places importance on the family, gender and sexuality. In this way, religion assists in safeguarding the

traditional role of the family as the primary source of continuing human existence through reproduction, and thus, protecting it against the undesirable economic and cultural forces which tend to weaken its prominence. From the point of view of gender, religion seeks to preserve traditional gender roles both within the family and in the wider society, and also to a great extent, restricts sexuality within the family. The relationship between nationalism and religion has also been acknowledged by sociologists, thanks to the increasing detachment of the latter from traditional religious institutions under whose purview they once flourished and 'may be invested with highly diverse meanings and used for a wide variety of purposes . . . both within and outside the framework of religious organizations, and where there exist state religions' (Beckford, 1989). While religion tends to take the back seat in most secular states of the world, religious practices deemed advantageous, especially in the areas of national security, are easily incorporated into the national development agenda (Martin, 1978; Bruce, 1996). As indicated by David Martin (1978), the relationship between religion and nationalism is of vital significance upon which religious values flourish among the countries of Europe. This phenomenon, the author argued, holds even for Christianity despite its apparent conflict with nationalism. The author says:

"Christianity may be a religion that rejects the worship of Caesar or the exaltation of the ethnic group, but in order to retain even the possibility of suggesting more worthy

objects of praise, it must be positively related to the national consciousness, particularly as this is highlighted in a myth of national origin” (Martin, 1978).

Most historical studies highlight the continuing and significant role played by religion and religious belief systems both in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, further indicating that despite the potential risk of decline in people’s appeal for religious belief due to rising nationalism and racism, various philosophies of nationalism act as boosters for religious practices (Hugh McLeod, 2000). A similar argument is put forward by (Turner, 1988) who believes the emergence of the modern day nation states as strength rather than a weakness for Christianity in its drive towards Christianisation of the masses (Turner, 1988).

## **NATIONALISM**

The terms nation and nationalism have proved difficult for historians to define. Adam Smith defines nationalism “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation” (Smith, 2001). Benedict Anderson’s view of the nation relates to the Smith’s potential nation. Anderson views the nation as an imagined political community whose members dream of being free and the symbol of this is the sovereign state (Benedict, 1991). Ernest Gellner ties nations . Zionism created Isreal. Palestine is a potential nation. Palestinian nationalism is an instance of

national consciousness emerging in the absence of a nation state.

The most familiar typology of nationalism has two main categories. In the voluntarist conception, individuals must belong to a nation, but they can choose which nation they wish to belong to. Members are related by citizenship and the population within a certain territory belongs to the same nation regardless of cultural affiliation. In the organic conception, individuals are born into a nation and wherever they migrate, they remain an intrinsic part of birth. (Khalidi, 1997).

The basic tenets, fundamental ideals, and core concepts of nationalism have remained fairly constant through time and across cultures. The basic tenets or propositions to which most nationalists adhere to form the framework of the nationalist vision of the world . Nationalists envision a world divided into a nation. The nation is the sole source of political power and nations require full self-expression and autonomy. Loyalty to the nation overrides all other loyalties, and to be free, every individual must belong to a nation. This core doctrine provides the rationale and impetus for various kinds of nationalist activity. The fundamental ideals of nationalist ideologies are well-defined relating to collective self-rule, territorial unification, and cultural identity. The dream or plane future is as important in the foundation of the nationalist movements as the past (Smith, 2001). National destiny more than simply ideas of the future. Destinies are predetermined by histories and

chart a unique course and fate. Lastly, the homeland constitutes an historic territory or the ancestral land. All of these tenets, ideals and concepts are not involved in every nationalist' ideology or movement, but these overlapping concepts of nationalism can be used to better understand nationalist ideologies (Stendel, 1996).

Historians recognise that nationalism is not just an ideology of reaction. Nevertheless, particular nationalisms arise in opposition to some 'other', and nationalisms are defined by what they oppose. The development and maintenance of every culture requires the existence of a different and competing alter ego. The construction of identity involves the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation of their differences from us (Stendel, 1996). Nationalisms demand the rediscovery and restoration of the nation's unique cultural identity, and they are dependent on leadership that is capable of formulating an ideological content convincing enough for a large population. An important element of a nation's unique cultural identity is ethnic, usually associated with a particular territory and incorporates myths of ancestry and historical memories with elements of common culture (Smith, 2001).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW OF RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM: THE HIGH STAKES INVOLVED**

Palestine-Israel dispute is still one of the major disputes persisting in the world at present symbolising the relationship

between the West and Islam. (Bonney, 2004: p.269).

It is not surprising that much has been written about it by historians and political scientists. The Palestinian-Israeli dispute has played a critical role in shaping the political landscape of the Middle East and has been the focus of considerable social science research.

There have been many theoretical perspectives which offer an understanding of popular attitudes toward issues related to war and peace.. The political cultural approach, for instance, is prevalent among scholars who argue that shared norms and values are the basis of political attitudes (Tessler & Nachtwey, 1998).

Literature contends that religion has played a major role in fuelling most ethnic conflicts in recent decades. (Rummel, 1997; Fox, 1997, 1999, 2000a, b, c, 2004); Laitin, 2000; Ellingsen, 2000; Reynal, 2002; Roeder, 2003; Sammy & Javadi, 2015).

When a state relies on religious doctrines to obtain political legitimacy, it leaves ample room for religious leaders and established religious institutions to bring an overtly theological interpretation to any political question. Religious nationalisms, even those that appear to be ethnic, have an ideological component. This is because religion, the repository of traditions of symbols and beliefs, always stands ready to be tapped by those who wish to develop a new framework of ideas about social order. In the case of Bosnia, for example, the anger of Bosnian Serbs is also fuelled by an imaginative religious myth. The Serb

leaders are Orthodox Christians who see themselves as surrogate Christ-figures in a contemporary political understanding of the “passion” narrative. Dramas and epic poems have been invented to retell the New Testament’s account of Christ’s death in a way that portrays historical Serbian leaders as Christ figures, and the Bosnian Muslims as Judas. This mythologised dehumanisation of the Muslims allows them to be regarded as a sub-human species, one that in the Serbian imagination deserves the genocidal “ethnic cleansing” that killed so many in the darkest hours of the Bosnian civil war (Sells, 1996). As the Bosnian case shows, there is a fine line between ethnic and ideological forms of religious nationalism. It may be just as violent as ideological nationalism. The London terrorist bombings by the Irish Republican Army when the ceasefire broke down in February 1996, and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) in Sri Lanka suicide attacks that demolished downtown Colombo in January 1996 are recent examples. Yet, to some extent, these acts of violence are understandable because they are aimed at a society that the terrorists regard as exerting direct military or political control over them (Juergensmeyer, 1996).

Some religious nationalists see their own secular leaders as part of a wider, virtual global conspiracy, one controlled by vast political and economic networks sponsored by European and American powers. For that reason they may hate not only their own politicians, but also these leaders’ political and economic allies in lands far beyond their own national boundaries. Islamic

militants associated with Egypt’s radical al-Iama’a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group), for example, have attacked not only Egyptian politicians - killing president Anwar Sadat and attempting to kill his successor, Hosni Mubarak - but also foreigners such as the Greek tourists killed near the pyramids on 17 April 1996 (the tourists who were on a bus were allegedly gunned down by Muslim terrorists). The movement literally moved its war abroad against secular powers when its leader, Sheikh Omar ‘Abd ai-Rahman, moved to New Jersey and was involved in a bomb attack on the World Trade Center on 26 February 1993 that killed six and injured thousands. The trial that convicted him in January 1996 of masterminding the attack also implicated him in an elaborate plot to blow up many sites in the New York City area, including the United Nations buildings and the Lincoln Tunnel. Algerian Muslim activists have apparently brought their war against secular Algerian leaders to Paris, where they have been implicated in a series of subway bombings in 1995. Hassan Turabi in Sudan has been accused of orchestrating Islamic rebellions in a variety of countries, linking Islamic activists in common cause against what is seen as the great satanic power of the secular West. In some cases, this conspiratorial vision has taken bizarre twists, shared by both the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo and certain American Christian militia movements that Jews and Freemasons are collaborating to control the world (Safan, 2001).

Israel has a long history of including religious nationalism in its politics and



therefore, it has an effect on the conflict with Palestinians.

Reiter (2010) provides answers to what exactly the role of religion has been in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He puts forth five characteristics of a conflict fuelled by religion;

- i. The enlisting of religious ‘warriors’ unfurls beyond the region in conflict
- ii. Individuals/groups motivated by religious ideology carry out sensationalist terror acts and assassinations in a bid to frustrate political negotiations.
- iii. Religious formations that demonstrate adherence to the prepositions or fundamental truths of religion, and show commitment towards infusing the same among members of the public command massive/decisive political power
- iv. Religious symbols and values are part of asocial fabric that the general public is not predisposed to compromise or negotiate
- v. Religion values and controls holy places that can neither be compromised nor negotiated

Israel and Judaism have 3 parallel and central “elements of religious faith that represent conflicting values, and are therefore used in specific contexts to reinforce the religious aspect of the” Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Reiter, 2010). The first relates to the laws of peace and war and the question of whether or not a nation can settle a conflict by compromising with

people from a different religion. The Torah commands the nation of Israel to fight in the cruelest way possible any nation from taking full control of the Promised Land (Reiter, 2010).

The second element of religious faith representing conflicting values relates to the status of the territory in question, and whether or not control should be exclusive. A theological outlook among Palestinian Muslims and Israeli Jews holds that Palestine is a ‘holy land’ – the Waqf (pious endowment) for the former, and the Promised Land for the latter (Khaid, 2011). Religious faith, therefore, “forbids conceding any control over the land” (Funk & Said, 2009). The Jews believe that it is their religious duty to occupy the entire land and not share it with members of any other religion (Reiter, 2010).

The third element relates to the status of Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and whether or not members of other religions have a right over it. The Temple Mount/Al-Haram site, the old City of Jerusalem and holy sites as Al-Masjid Al-Ibrahimi/the Cave of the Machpela, Joseph’s tomb in Nablém, and Rachel’s tomb “are anchors for the national-religious and historical identity of a vast population which includes people who are not necessarily religious” (Barsiman, 2010). The immensely charged nature of the said sites as religious and historic nationalism symbols is demonstrated perfectly by the decision of the Netanyahu Administration to include the Machpela Cave and Rachel’s tomb among heritage symbols intended for development (Reiter,

2010). The move did not, however, go down well with the Palestinian leaders, and a religious war erupted, with each side claiming ownership and “sovereignty that cannot be relinquished to the other side exclusively” (Barsiman, 2010).

This study contributes to the literature on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by bringing forward different points of view. All the studies on this conflict are based on the possibility of reaching a settlement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict one day. This thesis tries to focus on the conflict from another perspective and strives to reflect that both sides have an interest in the continuation of conflict as their national and religious aspirations over the same territory require.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Any research, regardless of the type is conducted with the overriding aim of gathering intelligence about the marketplace and illuminate trends and behaviours. Qualitative data, though not easily measurable, reveals valuable perspectives and attitudes that are almost undetectable using quantitative means. Its exploratory nature allows for the collection of data on specific areas of interest, often by means of expert reviews and dialogue between researcher and respondent (McLeod, 2008). Therefore, the paper uses the qualitative method because it focuses on a smaller number of cases to provide an in-depth evaluation of valuable perspectives and hidden attitudes.

Library and the internet have been extensively used for this research. Secondary sources such as books and articles dealing with Israel and religious nationalism idea are used to answer the research question.

To answer the research question and the claims of the paper, the study adopts a historical analysis. In order to draw an accurate profile of events, persons or objects (Adams, 1985).

Historical analysis involves investigation and analysis of controversial ideas and facts, and aims at assessing the meanings and reading the messages of the happenings while asking the questions of “what happened” and “why or how it happened” (Leedy, 2012). This study demonstrates how different sides of the conflict interpret the history of the conflict. In this regard, hypothesising the influence of the past is executed in this study to display deeply the effect of different evolvement of the positions of the Palestinian and the Jews in the conflict. Given the fact that modern historical analysis usually draws upon most of the other social sciences, in order to ensure these narratives are thorough, the study has availed of the use of international relations. It will also use the interpretation of the other’s working on the conflict. As a result of library investigation composed of scanning the secondary sources, this study also gets the opportunity of observing and comparing tendentious sources written about the Palestinian -Israeli conflict. Scanning the secondary sources is important in order to see the perspectives of the conflict.



## DISCUSSION

### *Israel and the Zionist Agenda*

In spite of the dispersion of most Jews after the Roman reconquest of the Land of Israel in 135 C.E., Jews continued to consider themselves a nation even though they had no country or state before 1948. They did not lose their religious, cultural and national connection to the Land of Israel and to Jerusalem, the central location of Judaism where their temple once stood. Communities of Jews lived continuously in their homeland and those living elsewhere expressed their hope to return through prayer, folklore, artwork, and song. Modern Zionism began in Europe in the late nineteenth century, when both nationalism and antisemitism were on the rise. The founder of political Zionism was Theodor Herzl, whose ideas were influenced by the anti-Semitic elements in the trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, who was falsely convicted of treason (he was exonerated in 1906). Herzl witnessed French mobs shouting “Death to the Jews” during the trial. The Dreyfus trial, compounded by ongoing anti-Jewish violence in Eastern Europe, led Herzl to conclude that the only solution to the persecution of Jews is to re-establish a Jewish state. He developed modern political Zionism, or Jewish nationalism, which is the belief in the right to self-determination for the Jewish people in their ancient homeland, the Land of Israel. In his renowned book entitled *Der Judenstaat*, which was published in 1896, Herzl highlighted the need for the prospective Jewish state to adopt a system

of state governance along the western liberal type which has a religious element; he dedicating a full section of the book to this theme. In a somewhat vivid rhetoric, Herzl asked “will we end by having a theocracy?” and he answered his own question by saying “No, indeed. Faith unites us, knowledge gives us freedom. We shall therefore prevent any theocratic tendencies from coming to the fore on the part of our priesthood. We shall keep our priests within the confines of their temples in the same way as we shall keep our professional army within the confines of their barracks” (Herzl, 1946).

Despite acknowledging the significant role played by religion in the mobilisation of masses in different parts of the Christian world, the Zionist movement was particularly cautious in preventing the different factions in their midst from dominating the entire movement or in becoming a rigid opposing faction; a mechanism that enabled the integration of the key religious players, and thus putting Zionism on a stronger footing in the international arena. In presenting its demands to the world, the leadership of the World Zionist Organization was never isolated in its ideology of avoiding theocracy. In fact, the religious components of the Zionists also agreed to follow the same line of action in pursuit of a common goal: establishing a Jewish state. If religion bestows on humankind the feeling their fates are interconnected, this primordial feeling is continually reshaped and energised by common experiences and interactions, then by extension, a common religious faith should foster the development of brotherhood (Gutmann, 1979).

The rationale for this compromise and acceptance by religious Zionism can be understood from the Zionist belief that the establishment of the Zionist movement and the eventual setting up of the state of Israel are pivotal components towards the realisation of redemption of their people. This ensured the plans for a theocratic dimension was deferred. The traditional Jewish Party, Agudat Israel, whose ideology includes rejection of the notion that secular Jews may attain redemption, and argued that such elements should be prevented from Yishuv's (Jewish Mandatory Palestine) national institutions, and eventually, the government. Being cognisant of the fact that no man but God predestined the theocratic vision, the Agudah in fact became even more politically dormant on foreign affairs than the National Religious Party (NRP).

David Ben-Gurion's political philosophy introduced the Mamlachtiyut, the idea of statism, which argued that the state should be the focal point of Zionism (Liebman & Don-Yehiya, p. 983). Against the backdrop and believing his Jewish predecessors lacked political realism, Ben-Gurion developed statism in 1936. "We want to build a state, and we shall not build one without political thought, political talent and political prudence," he noted (Yanai, 1987). In two distinct instances, the Zionist movement, after very intensive debates, agreed to the demands by the international community to relinquish territories considered sacred. In both instances (the acceptance of the 1937 partition proposal of the Royal Commission headed by Lord Peel and the UN Partition

Plan of November 29, 1947), the movement was compelled to surrender segments of territories considered by Zionists as part of historic Jewish settlements.

### *Religion and Hawkishness: Understanding the Fundamental Correlation*

#### **The impact of the Six Day War**

One of the most cited reasons for the relationship between religion and hawkishness is the influence of the Six Day War (Rosenak, 1988) which saw the capture of the holiest Jewish site (the Temple Mount) by the Israeli army. Furthermore, the swift nature of the conquest in that the Jews triumphed from the fear of the re-emergence of the Holocaust to a rapid military victory all within six days, in fact led many religious Jews to believe in the divine intervention. Similar beliefs are shared by ultra-Orthodox Jews as well. For the ultra-Orthodox Jews, the Six Day War made it easier for one to readily associate them with their political right agenda, Gush Emunim, in contrast to their predecessors prior to 1967. Thus, the religious Jews generally tend to support the idea of Israel's continuing control of the territories captured during the Six Day War (Rebinstein, 1981).

The most tormented by the success of the Israel military in the 1967 War was the ultra-orthodox Jews. Just before the war, Israel was somewhat intimidated by the strong rhetoric from Arab leaders claiming that Israel would be completely destroyed and the war will be another Holocaust. For this reason, Israel's unprecedented defeat of the Arabs, which led to their control of the

substantial portions of the ancient holy land and Jerusalem, led many Jews to believe the invisible hands of divine intervention. One movement with revivalist tendencies caught the attention of prominent figures among the Orthodox yeshivot (Yehiya, 1996). For the followers of this movement, the phenomenal victory of Israel signalled the imminent redemption of the whole world. To such advocates, victory is indicative of God's decision for the Jews to rescue their entire original homeland and that for the Messianic redemption to be accelerated, the promised land must be controlled and Jewish settlements erected. In short, the 1967 military action was necessary. Among the first flag bearers of the movement that advocated for the settlement of Israelis in the administered territories were the Modern Orthodox (Lustick, 1988; Sprinzak, 1991). Initially, the settlement spree was triggered by security concerns. The Labour Government's focus was on securing the strategic coastal line. However, majority of the settlers perceived this security concern only as secondary with the primary reason being the return to the promised land. For this reason, the religious Zionist movement continued in their drive for expanding settlements to the various holy sites, regardless of the government's approval or disapproval of such moves. With the coming into power in 1977 of the Likud Party, the government supported and further celebrated the settlement agenda, providing funding in order to intensify the process.

By 1967, Israel again imposed a military regime on the Arabs living in the territories

occupied after the war, including West Bank and the Gaza Strip. With this engulfment of portions of Palestine into Israel, the Arab population living in Israel surged and the population distribution of Israel between the Arabs and Jews became a hot political debate. The total population of Israel based on the latest census stands at 7,282,000, comprising 75.5% Jews, 4.4% non-Jews which are mainly immigrants from the former Soviet Union and the rest (20.1%) Arabs (ICBS 2008); it is a balance which is likely to change significantly when the Palestinians in the Territories are counted as a single geographic unit, in which case the two ethnic groups maybe similar in terms of number.

In 1977, the political hegemony enjoyed by the Labour regime was lost due to the disastrous Yom Kippur War in October 1973. Also, as a consequence of that war, the role of religion in Israeli politics changed drastically.

In addition to 1978 declassification of Israeli documents and archives, the backdrop for this shift in popular and academic commentary can be found in events such as the Yom Kippur War which altered the political landscape and created a more hawkish, ethnically diverse, political and religious right conservatives. The 1977 electoral triumph of the Likud coalition over the Ashkenazi-led labour group, the ongoing, high-profile clashes between the Israeli government and Fatah or the military wing of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and the 1982 Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon and controversy over

Israel's indirect role in the massacre of Muslim Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps all helped in changing the attitude of the Jews regarding the Palestinian issue. In this chaotic political context, Israeli scholars began to question the status quo on the ground, drawing parallels to events and policies as early as the 1920s and 1930s, for example, David Ben-Gurion's policy of "transfer"—that is, the Zionist euphemism for what Palestinians call "dispossession" at best, "rape and pillage" at worst (Masalha, 1992). The illegal invasion and occupation of a land far away to create a Jewish homeland, the eviction of a majority rightful occupants and the suppression of the remaining few termed as a bunch of useless "minority" with no rights, made it justifiable for Jews in Israel to emphasise the Jewish race and use it as a rallying call (Kimmerling, 1999; Raz-Krakotzkin, 2005) to unite its people. The post-1967 war made this sense of "bondage" based on Jewishness stronger; with Jewishness not only being referred to as a distinct race but also a national religion.

There has been substantial debate among the commentators of the Israel-Palestinian crisis concerning whether the Six Day War constituted a breakdown or extension. For those in favour of a breakdown, the occupation of parts of the Palestinian territory after Israel's victory, by itself, constituted a new dimension of national religiosity which was never apparent prior to the war. On the other hand, the commentators of continuation are of the view that this new movement is more or less an extension of the old

Labour-masterminded settler scheme. What is evident though is the fact that since 1967, the national dynamism transcended from the Labour movement (characterised by their incipient secularism) to the national religious advocates including the Likud Party, the national religious party, and the Shas Party as well as other nationalistic parties.

In the 1970s, a robust change occurred in the relationship between religion and nationalism. This change is attributed mainly to the policy changes afforded by the religious-national party during this period. Until the 1970s, the central focus of the party was to protect the image of the Jews and safeguard their interests and this party was typically regarded as one of the most dovish players in the political arena at the time. However, the party changed face from being a religious-national party to national religious party, and has since shifted focus on the construction of Jewish settlements across the West Bank enlisting the Yeshiva (Jewish high school students) into the Israeli Army. This new national religious face was represented by the Gush Eminent movement (Block of Faithful) which was established in 1974 (Lustick, 1988) and adopted suitable ideologies from both the Jewish religionism and Zionist nationalism. From the former, the Gush Eminent movement adopted the idea of a community based on the traditional Jewish faith foreseeing a Messianic revival; from the latter, the Gush Eminent also adopted the idea of the territory being the central focus as well as upholding the concept of Messianic revival. Thus, a new

concept of Messianic Zionism was borne based on two strategic areas: community and the territory. Hence, while in the relationship between nationalism and religion in the post-1970 era was primarily implicit, if not completely negative, the relationship became positive thereafter. This positive relationship became even stronger in 1977 when Labour lost power to the Likud Party under the leadership of Menachem Begin. The key supporters of Likud-led government were middle-class Ashkenazi religious nationalists who were mainly represented by the National Religious Party and the low-class traditional and nationalist Mizrahi members. In the 1980s, a number of the low-class Mizrahi elements influenced the traditionalists and the ethnic Mizrahi members to shift their support to the Shas party (Peled, 1998). Another significant turning point in Israeli political history was the reconciliation between the state and the Orthodox Jews. When Likud came to power, the parties protecting the interests of the Orthodox found it suitable to be part of the Likud coalition, a thing they dodged throughout the Labour regime. In the 1990s, the Likud party came under a new leadership headed by Benjamin Netanyahu. During the election season, Netanyahu's campaign slogan was "Netanyahu is Good for Jews". The new Likud coalition represented almost all minority groups except the Arabs. These included the Mizrahi Jews, new Russian migrants, religious nationalists as well as the Orthodox (Haredi) Jews (Shafir & Peled, 2002). In this way, secularism became

synonymous to "Left" while Jewish religion became synonymous with the Right.

The integration of culture and religion had a significant impact on the Israeli political landscape; a view which is also confirmed by data from the current study. As can be shown, the current study indicates that the Mizrachim which are descendants of Arab or Muslim countries exhibit more religiousness compared with those of European descent (the Ashkenazi). Specifically, the result depicts that 50% of the Mizrachim are "traditionalists", compared with Ashkenazim whereby only 19% saw themselves "Traditionalist". Only 9% of Mizrachim are "non-religious", "non-observant", or "anti-religious", compared with the Ashkenazim which account for 34%. Yet, about 78%–86% of Mizrachim believe in God compared with only 49%–52% believers in God among the Ashkenazims.

About 62%–69% of the Mizrachim believe that the Jews are a "chosen people" compared with 35%–36% of the Ashkenazim. The one religious category where the Ashkenazi weight is significantly higher than the Mizrahi is the Orthodox (Levi & Katz, 2000).

While the secular governing parties of the different regimes may have been poised to believe that they have successfully used the settlers to their own political advantage, Labour's strategy in intimidating the Arab states to sign peace accords, and Likud's threats of further occupation of the territories without the possibility of

returning them even when there are peace agreements showed that both parties lost sight of the “religious” injunctions that gave birth to the settlement movement in the first place. Over time, these differences between the politicians and settlers became the source of significant divide between the two. For example, the Labour Party’s acknowledged readiness to surrender the occupied territories in exchange for peace rendered the party at loggerheads with the Religious Zionists. In fact, even the Likud Party, which also preaches and strongly believes in the settlement programme eventually clashed with the Religious Zionists over differences in approach and extent. Security being the primary concern of the Likud, the party identified that parts of the occupied West Bank (previously under the control of Jordan) and the Golan Heights (captured from Syria) are key territories for buffering national security, while the Gaza Strip and Egypt’s Sinai Desert (conquered during the 1967 war) were of secondary importance – for they provided limited or no strategic security benefits. Thus, when Egyptian president Anwar Sadat made pronouncements that he was ready for a peace deal with Israel in the 1970s under the David Agreement, the Likud party accepted the peace offer in a bid to free Israel from the potential danger of one of its key enemies. This however, requires Israel to withdraw from Sinai and evacuate all the Jewish settlements established during the occupation. When the Likud party agreed to this compromise with Egypt, the religious settlers felt utterly dismayed that

despite Likud’s philosophy of safeguarding territorial nationalism, they are succumbing to moves resulting in the expulsion of Jews from their historic homeland. To some of the religious settlers, the Likud Party’s behavior not only tantamounts to a betrayal of their religion but was also a violation of the divine order (Sprinzak, 1991).

Religious Zionism eventually led to much violence. For example, in the West Bank, a Jewish secret terrorist group was initiated, carrying out assassinations of Arab politicians and opinion leaders, and masterminding bombings in public places and transportation. Similarly, a celebrated Jewish physician in the occupied territories, Baruch Goldstein, in a revenge for the killing of his friend by a Palestinian, gunned down over 30 Muslims while observing their prayers. Similar violence was meted out by Religious Zionists on the Palestinians and moderate Jews who tended to advocate for Palestinian sovereignty. While such actions were usually condemned by the National Religious Party as well as the religious elites, the acts also were also justified on religious grounds. In some cases, support for such acts was implicitly indicated. This include, for example, the Chief Rabbi of Israel’s praise singing at Meir Kahane’s funeral, who was the mastermind of the Kach movement, and who repeatedly likened Palestinians to animals and advocated their complete eviction from the state of Israel. In some cases, the religious justification of the violent acts is explicit. For example, when the Israeli government planned to come into terms with the Palestinians concerning the



settlement issue, including Israeli readiness to relinquish parts of the Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestine, a number of rabbis publicly cautioned Jews in the military to desist from being a part of an action which is not in conformity with the will of God. For Israel, where the political neutrality of the military almost became a religious requirement, such a strong rhetoric is indicative of the huge destabilising potential of the land issue.

Moshe Dayan and other secular Zionists also expressed delight at the return of Jews to what they referred to as their historic homeland. In this way, public opinion was generally hawkish in the immediate period just after the Six Day War. However, with the emergence of major events such as the Lebanon War in 1982 and the Palestinian Intifada of 1987–92, Israeli public opinion gradually became more dovish. Nevertheless, the religious community remained consistent in being more hawkish than the non-religious one. The question now is: why has the trend persisted?. This question could be answered by considering the changes in both nonreligious, and the religious segment of the Israeli society (Yishai, 1987). Starting from the mid-1980s, the Israeli political spectrum has witnessed reformation towards greater secularism, liberalism and individualism especially among the younger generation. Before this period, however, the Jewish political spectrum was somewhat divided between republicanism and ethno-nationalism, both of which have experienced significant decline over the years, thanks to rising

liberalism, and the drive towards a more dovish stance. In fact, after the 1987–92 intifada, Israel experienced a drastic decline in ethno-nationalism, with more concerted efforts towards upholding the Israeli territorial integrity (Arian, 2002). Politicians such as the then Prime Ministers Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak argued that given the declining fighting spirit among the populace, it was wise to resort to the dovish stance (Rynhold, 2003). The diminishing republican ideologies is also a directly related to increase in the number of ultra-Orthodox young men exempted from serving in the Israeli army due to religious reasons (Accordance with the Israeli Security Service Law). While this number was only a few hundred in the 1950s, it jumped to over 30,000 in the 1990s (Ilan, 2000).

For the ultra-Orthodox community, the emergency of hawkishness can be attributed to the increased participation in the politics of ultra-Orthodox ideologists (Sheleg, & HeChadashim, 2000). Even though this shift in focus cannot be regarded as explicit republicanism, it is symbolic of their rising self-consciousness. Since 1977 after the Israeli advocacy of the Right to power, ultra- Orthodox practitioners felt their closeness to power for their perception is the ethnocentricity of right and that right is more sympathetic to organized religion ; thus, their participation in national politics surged (Shragai, 2001, & A Dayan, 2002).

The “divinisation” of religiously motivated violence reached its apex on November 4, 1995; the day a sitting

Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, was assassinated by an ultra-nationalist Yigal Amir. Unlike many other assassins who were often societal outcasts, Amir was a product of the Religious Zionist movement, a part timer at an ultra Orthodox yeshivah as well as a student of law at the Orthodox university in Israel (Bar-Ilan). Amir confessed to the killing of the prime minister and accused him of turning into a traitor and endangering the lives of the Jews by sacrificing the sacred territories for a peace deal; and as enshrined in the Jewish law, Amir argued, Rabin's tyranny legalised his assassination (Golinkin, 1996).

There is continuing debate among Israelis whether Amir was a misguided ultra-nationalist or a true product of ultra Orthodoxy. What is clear though is the fact that the pronouncements of Amir were not in any way uniquely associated with ultra-orthodoxy. In fact, they are commonplace among other non-religious Zionist movements as well. Thus, while the majority of the commentators tended to blame Amir for his action, they still found the Likud Party wanton for inciting violent reactions to the peace process initiated by the Labour Party. However, media reports have also pointed out the extreme entanglement of the land issue and religion in Orthodox discourses and argued that, to some extent, Amir being exposed to the extremist views of the Religious Zionists may have influenced in his judgement (Horvitz, 1995).

The emergency of hawkishness can be attributed to the increased participation

in politics by ultra-Orthodox ideologists (Sheleg, & HeChadashim, 2000). In the 1996 election, \ the ultra-Orthodox leadership decided to throw their weight behind Shimon Peres for prime minister candidature, due to his good funding of ultra-Orthodox affiliated institutions. However, pressure from the junior ultra-Orthodox members resulted in them doing the reverse (Shragai, 2001). In addition, during the reconstruction of the settlements, some ultra-Orthodox advocates bought houses in the territories and through which they have some interactions with the people.

In summary, the strong correlation between religion and hawkishness since 1967 can be explained in terms of the role of religious and nonreligious actors which helped in shaping the political culture of the Jewish state. While political liberalism increased, ethno-nationalism and republicanism diminished significantly in the secular community. In the religious community, however, the reverse is true.

## CONCLUSION

Religion always has an advantage over political ideology, because it need not offer a political strategy, and its legitimisation is not dependent on a clear-cut criterion of failure or success. Victory or defeat can quite easily be explained as the will of the Almighty. Religion appears as a universal vision that offers "salvation" to all mankind. It is utopian, undefined in time and unspecific about ends and political means. But Judaism contains some acutely ethnocentric ideas which separate the Jewish people from the

rest of the world.

After the creation of the state of Israel, there remained a profound split between those focused on the religious nature of the first Jewish state, and citizens who viewed the state primarily as a haven for Jews. But all citizens became more mobilised thanks to the continual threat posed by hostile Arab states, and protecting the new nation became infused with religious as well as practical zeal. Although some religious Jews living in Israel do not play an active role in the defence of Israel, for many religious Jews, playing an active role in supporting a militarised state is seen as essential.

It was not until after the 1967 War, however, that support for an expansionist vision of Israel and religious ideology became more galvanised. The unexpected nature of Israel's victory and its seemingly effortless acquisition of lands once part of the Biblical state of Israel fuelled religious nationalism among many religious groups. It created a strong association between hawkishness, support for a relatively hard-line attitude against the Palestinians in the occupied territories, and a belief that Israel is entitled to its original borders.

Although religion remains a constant in politics, its role will thus inevitably change with recent circumstances and will be affected by external pressures. The many changes witnessed by Israel over the course of its short history have changed notions not only of what it means to be Jewish in a political sense, but also in a religious sense: for some citizens, an ideology of nationalism, militarism, and

religious justification for specific actions have become fused. The volatility of the situation in the Middle East has often made it very difficult to find common ground.

Sadly, when the discourse shifts from arguable definitions of national security and state's rights to religious arguments, the potential for dialogue between secular and religious forces within Israel is thwarted, not just between Israelis of different political orientations but also between Israelis and the Palestinians with whom they must negotiate. History has made many dovish Israelis remain suspicious of Arab intentions despite their greater willingness to make concessions. Liberals and moderates often find themselves thwarted by a right-wing religious ideology that sees negotiation as a form of religious heresy as well as militarily dangerous.

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