

# **United States: Relationship Between U.S. Jews and Israel Grows More Strained While Israel Cuddles Up to U.S. White Evangelicals**

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While the May 14 massacre by Israel sharpshooters was occurring in Gaza, Trump was symbolically opening the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was there, heaping praise on Trump. In addition, there were two pastors present, one making the opening prayer, the other the closing one.

These two ministers come from the extreme rightist white Christian evangelicals. Both are well known for their outspoken anti-Semitism as well as their support to Israel. It could have been assumed that Trump brought them there to shore up his base among white evangelicals, and that Netanyahu accepted their presence but silently didn't approve of these two for their anti-Semitism.

But this assumption is wrong. These pastors not only represent one sector of Trump's base, but also of Netanyahu's base in the U.S. The support of these rightist white evangelicals has increasingly become more important to the Israeli establishment than the support of U.S. Jews, according to a recent article in the *New York Times*.

An article by Moshe Machover, an anti-Zionist Israeli Jew presently living in Britain, published in the *Weekly Worker* of that country, argues that the relationship between U.S. Jews and Israel is becoming increasingly strained.

This tension has been increasing under the rightist Netanyahu government. For many decades the majority opinion among U.S. Jews had been largely uncritical support to Israel's policies.

Of course, there has always been a range of views among U.S. Jews regarding Israel. Left wing Jews, especially socialists, have been long opposed to Israel's oppression of the Palestinians. New organizations defending the rights of Palestinians, such as Jewish Voice for Peace, have rapidly grown in the past decade and become more vocal. After the massacre in Gaza, JVP organized, together with Arab organizations and others, some 75 demonstrations in cities across the country.

On the other end of the spectrum has been the hard line supporters of Israel. But, Machover notes, there has been "a growing rift - more like a schism - that has been developing within that portion of the Jewish community that up to now has been pro-Zionist and very ardent in its support of Israel, but is now drifting away very quickly...."

"Here is a quote that is not one of the most extreme, published on April 18. It is very telling, because it comes from Jane Eisner, the editor of the most important Jewish American newspaper, *Forward* .... Because of her position, she writes very discreetly and diplomatically. The title of her article is: 'It's time for Israel to recognize that diaspora Jews are already home' - something that the Zionists do not want to hear.

"The article starts: 'The state of Israel is 70 years old - well past its growing pains; it is strong,

confident and distinctive. North American Jewry is still here – strong, confident and distinctive in its own fashion. But the relationship between the world’s two largest Jewish communities is growing more and more strained, and on this milestone anniversary of independence, it is the subject of much hand-wringing over whether and how it can ever be repaired.’

“This is language as strong as she dares use.”

Another article by a member of the editorial board of *Forward* Machover quotes is titled “My Zionism is fading – one expulsion at a time.” She is referring to the expulsion of human rights activists from Israel. The article begins: “I feel like I’m standing on a melting ice floe. For decades, I have loved Israel. I want it to thrive as a shining, rights-abiding country. And yet, increasingly, I find I can envision a day when I (or maybe my children) will not want to go there any more.”

Machover adds, “Another article I have read recently is headed ‘Ashamed to be Jewish’. I do not think they mean it, but Israel’s actions are certainly having their effect on American Jews.”

Another factor is that most Jews in the U.S. do not like Trump and his racism, and the anti-Semitism of his Alt-Right supporters. Remember the white nationalist march in Charlottesville, Virginia, where demonstrators chanted “Jews will not replace us.” Trump said there were “good people” among them. The anti-Semitism of the pro-Trump evangelicals also is rightly feared by U.S. Jews. Another article by Jane Eisner bluntly states, “Israel may love Trump’s policies. But they are a challenge to American – and Jewish – values.”

Machover adds, “I would like to point out the religious dimension of the split. A recent editorial (May 18) in the [Israeli newspaper] *Haaretz* said that Netanyahu was making a huge mistake by siding with evangelicals against most American Jews.... But this is not the only religious dimension of the split.... The overwhelming majority of practicing U.S. Jews are aligned with the reform, liberal or conservative forms of Judaism.

“By contrast, in Israel, the strictly orthodox rabbinate has a monopoly on all Jewish religious issues. They often insult American Jews who visit Israel and who want to pray at the western wall of Temple Mount. While U.S. Jews ... pray together, both men and women, the orthodox rabbinate does not allow this. So when women want to pray at the sacred wall, they are shooed away. This is religious persecution of Jews by Israel! ....

“To cap it all, the Israeli government is now proposing a bill that will give Israel’s rabbinical courts power over non-Israeli Jews. This will not go down too well among U.S. Jews.”

With these ties weakening, the Israeli establishment increasingly looks to the evangelicals as an enthusiastic base of support in the U.S. population, and this is reflected in Netanyahu’s embrace of their representatives at the opening of the U.S. Embassy. The number of U.S. evangelicals is many times larger than the number of U.S. Jews.

U.S. policy has been for decades military, financial and political support to Israel as an outpost of imperialism in the Middle East. While the Zionism of the evangelicals finds support in their belief that the return of Jews to Palestine and the creation of Israel is fulfilling a biblical prophecy necessary to the advent of Armageddon, it also dovetails with U.S. policy.

The evangelical’s anti-Semitism in no way conflicts with their Zionism, since they want all Jews to leave their countries (including the U.S.) and go to Israel. After Armageddon, all Jews gathered in Israel who haven’t converted to the evangelical version of Christianity will burn in hell.

This evangelical anti-Semitism, and the anti-Semitism in office under Trump’s presidency, is

“something that Jews detest”, says Machover. “However, Netanyahu does not care about such anti-Semitism in America – or anywhere. That is all the better for Israel, since it encourages more Jews to ‘return’ to Israel. So that is not exactly an attitude that goes down well with American Jews.”

**Barry Sheppard**

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