

**AMERICAN EVANGELICALS AND US FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST:  
EXPOSING AND OVERCOMING MISSIONAL BLIND SPOTS**

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# **1 Introduction**

## 1.1 Background

I was only fourteen years-old at the time, but I remember a feeling of excitement and anticipation while I watched live footage of American bombs falling on Baghdad in 2003. The nationalistic, evangelical worldview of my childhood led me to believe that something wonderful was happening when God used America's military power to annihilate terrorists. Despite being a devout Christian, I had grown to believe that America was the savior that the world needed, and that the American military was the hand of God to enforce his righteousness among the nations. My love for America was one of the reasons that I chose to become an officer in the US Army. However, as my faith in Jesus Christ deepened, I began to question my blind faith in America's righteousness. I also began to notice glaring contradictions between my worldview and the life and teachings of Jesus.

As I learned from the Bible about God's love for all nations and his promise to bless the nations through Jesus,<sup>1</sup> I was eager to make friends from other parts of the world, especially the parts that I had despised as a youth. Among them were Muslims and Christians from every corner of the Arab World, Iranians covering a broad range of religious and spiritual beliefs, and many others from Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. Although I was initially driven only by an evangelistic desire to see the blessing of Jesus take root among all nations, I found myself spending much time with my new friends because I genuinely enjoyed them, and I could see the fingerprints of God in their lives.

For the past eight years, I had the unique perspective of serving as an officer in the US Army while simultaneously learning about the impact of US foreign policy from many Middle

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 12:1-3, fulfilled in Christ according to Galatians 3:14, 16, 29.

Eastern friends. What I learned challenged the worldview of my childhood and led me on a journey of discovering the history of American involvement in the Middle East. Most importantly, I learned to do something in recent years that my former self would have thought unpatriotic – I used biblical principles to evaluate and critique American policies.

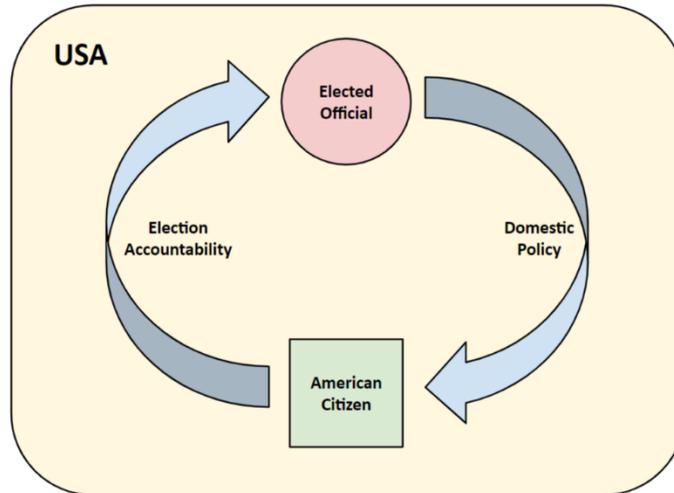
American Evangelical Christians often express a desire for Muslims in the Middle East to hear and believe the gospel of Jesus. Many will financially support missionaries who travel to the region to share the gospel with Muslims, while simultaneously giving their support to violent military actions and destabilizing political policies in that very same region. Perhaps it does not occur to them that the political policies they support are often counterproductive to the mission of God in the region.

I eagerly desire that all my Middle Eastern friends would experience real, spiritual peace and transformation. My own encounter with Jesus has led me to understand that blessing in a holistic way. I cannot with a clear conscience tell a friend that God loves him, while also supporting or turning a blind eye to policies that might harm him and his children. Seeking God's blessing for them means doing everything I can to see that they flourish as the people and the community that God intends them to be.

## 1.2 Significance and Urgency of the Research

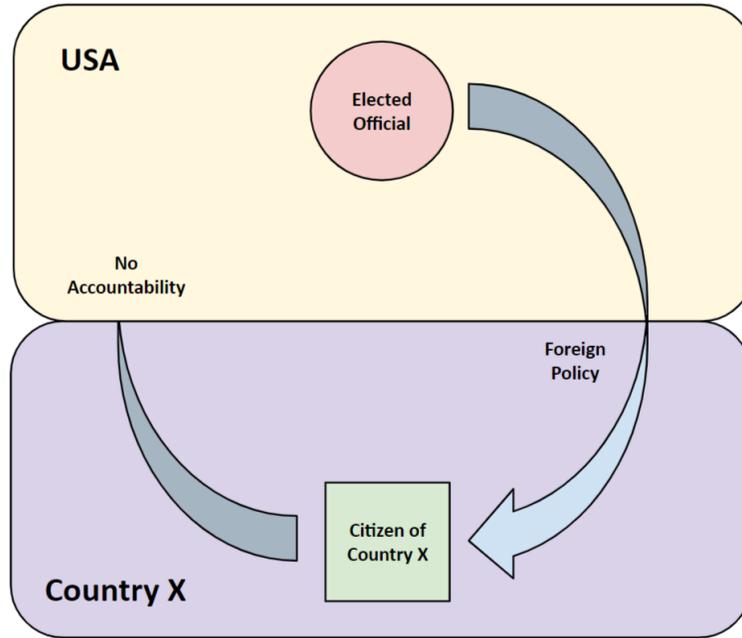
Democratic systems are built on the simple principle that elected officials work for their constituents, not vice-versa. This is accomplished by an accountability loop (see Figure 1), whereby citizens choose whether an elected official can stay in office. Ideally, elected officials will pay close attention to how their policies affect their constituents because their career

depends on it. When such an accountability loop functions as it should, it leads to policies that benefit the people rather than the few individuals in power.



*Figure 1: Domestic Accountability Loop*

The same cannot be said about policies that affect non-Americans who are outside of the accountability loop, such as foreign policies. In such cases, those who are impacted by our policies have no means of voicing their grievance and holding officials accountable (see Figure 2). This is more of a problem with the United States' foreign policy than most other countries because the US exerts disproportionate power globally, and there is no country in the world that can effectively pressure the United States into choosing just policies. Even the UN has limited ability to check American power. The US has historically used this unrestrained power to accomplish its purposes and protect its interests, oftentimes without regard for other nations. Unfortunately, the weak and vulnerable in other countries often become the primary losers in this arrangement.



*Figure 2: Foreign Policy = No Accountability Loop*

When American Evangelicals are asked why the Middle East is such a mess, many will point the finger at such things as Islamic beliefs, a medieval worldview, dictatorial regimes, Islamist jihadists, and state-controlled economies. To be fair, there are many factors that contribute to the problems in the Middle East today, and I do not claim that US foreign policy is the cause of all problems or even the primary cause. However, my approach in this project is to be self-critical as an American Evangelical. Jesus' teaching is particularly relevant here: "first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the size of the log or the speck, the point is that we should point the finger at ourselves first, owning up to our own contribution to the chaos before we blame others.

While American presidents and diplomats have claimed to use American power to promote democracy and human rights, to eliminate terrorists, and to remove despotic regimes,

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:5

we should not take their word for it. We must examine the evidence to discover how the United States' policies have affected democracy and human rights, terrorism and violence, and economic growth and development. How have they affected Middle Eastern Churches? Do they in any way hinder the work of Evangelism and Church Planting in the region? Those who are committed to the holistic mission of God in the world must ask these questions as they observe global events.

### 1.3 Central Research Problem

This final project explores the impact of US Foreign Policy in the Middle East, particularly regarding the role of American Evangelicals, in order to identify how they have contributed to the problems in the region and to propose political and theological applications that promote both peace and more effective missional engagement in the Middle East.

### 1.4 Overview of the Project and Methodology

Chapter 2 of this thesis will review existing literature related to the history of US foreign policy in the Middle East and the Evangelical contributions to those policies. In Chapter 3, I will describe in broad strokes the history of the United States' involvement in the Middle East, which became a central issue after the Second World War, continued to increase throughout the Cold War, reached its climax in the "War on Terror" following the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, and continues to affect the region significantly today. Because I have limited space to cover such a vast topic, I will not be able to summarize all of that history evenly. Rather, I have chosen to give special emphasis to certain events and threads that have had the greatest impact,

such as the Cold War rivalry, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 along with its various consequences.

In Chapter 4, I used qualitative questionnaires to explore the perceptions of US foreign policy in the Middle East from three different groups: (1) American Evangelical Christians, (2) Middle Easterners, and (3) American Evangelicals who have served in some form of Christian ministry in the Middle East. Although my sample sizes were small and do not represent an accurate cross-section of the demographics they represent, they nevertheless shed interesting light on the differences between American and Middle Eastern perceptions of US foreign policy in the Middle East. The third group represents those who are likely to understand both American and Middle Eastern perspectives. Because they have crossed cultures, they have likely gained new insights and perspectives which can help us bridge the gap between the different perspectives of the other two demographics. I will describe in this section the results of these questionnaires and summarize the key lessons learned.

Building upon my literature review and research findings, I then interpret and analyze the mindset or worldview of American Evangelical Christians in Chapter 5. I have identified some of the presuppositions, beliefs, and values that have guided the political views and advocacy of American Evangelicals. I will offer an explanation about how some components of the American Evangelical mindset developed and how it contributed to US foreign policy in the Middle East. In this chapter, I will consider such relevant topics as Proselytism<sup>3</sup>, Patronage of Christian Minorities<sup>4</sup>, Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism, Racism and Islamophobia, and Christian

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<sup>3</sup> As an evangelical, I am strongly in favor of evangelism. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I will use the label of “Proselytism” to describe efforts to evangelize non-Christians that goes to an extreme, even to the point of utilizing inappropriate means to achieve evangelistic goals.

<sup>4</sup> The criticism here is not their concern for persecuted Christians per se, which I consider to be a good thing, but (1) their failure to understand the causes of persecution and, consequently, their inadvertent contribution to it, and (2) their imbalanced emphasis on patronizing persecuted Christians, to the point of neglecting justice and turning a blind eye to persecution and injustice against non-Christians.

Nationalism and Militarism. Looking at these topics together will help us to understand the “why” behind American Evangelicals’ support for certain policies. In this chapter, I will offer a brief critique on each of these Evangelical blind spots.

### 1.5 Delimitations

1. This thesis does not have the space to be exhaustive or comprehensive on such a vast topic. Inevitably, there will be various perspectives and arguments left out. However, my intention is that this research will adequately summarize and synthesize the most important issues and encourage further research and reflection.
2. I will focus on the actions and policies of the US government in the Middle East and will only mention the contribution of individual Americans in passing. There is no doubt that many American Evangelicals have attempted to do good in the Middle East, and some have succeeded in benefiting the region, but they are not the focus of this thesis.
3. Foreign Policy includes a vast range of economic activities that I will barely mention in this thesis. The influence of the corporatocracy on developing nations, the role of loans and foreign aid to poor and developing nations, with all their strings attached, and the impact of economic sanctions, are all significant components of foreign policy, but I lack the space to include these economic activities in this thesis.
4. Even though politics is the focus of this thesis, I will not promote a certain political party or politician. However, I will make claims about particular policies and the ideologies behind them. I will naturally focus on policies in which American Evangelicals played the most significant role – such as the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Due to the close association between Evangelicals and the Republican Party, this

means that I will be critiquing the policies of Republican administrations more than Democratic administrations. In doing so, I do not claim that the Democratic Party is innocent regarding the Middle East. In fact, the Obama Administration did enormous damage to the region. However, because Democrats have little Evangelical support, I will not focus on those issues.

5. Finally, I will not attempt to put forward a list of all the policies that should be implemented or eliminated, although I will mention some that should be obvious. Rather, I have chosen to focus on the ideologies and blind spots behind the policies because I believe that the worst and most destructive policies promoted by Evangelicals are often conceived in bad theology and a failure to grasp the gospel's impact on politics. My assumption is that correcting our theology and beliefs will naturally lead to more just, compassionate, and humble political engagement from American Evangelicals.

## 1.6 Definitions

1. "Evangelical" is difficult to define. Some would give it a narrow theological definition, based on what an Evangelical believes or practices. Historically, the Evangelical movement was created in the 1950's as a rejection of the excesses of the Fundamentalist movement. Through a series of events, Fundamentalist leaders like Jerry Falwell and many others hijacked the Evangelical movement and politicized it. The political manifestation of Evangelicalism that dominates headlines today, often labeled "The Christian Right," is almost indistinct from Trumpism and is a distortion of the movement's origins and theological foundations. While most self-described Evangelicals align themselves with the Fundamentalists of the Christian Right, it is important to note

that much of the Evangelical core, holding to the movement's foundations, reject this politicization as unnecessary and sometimes antithetical to biblical faith and identity. In fact, although American Evangelicalism as a whole is strongly conservative in the political arena, Whiteman and Perry<sup>5</sup> have shown that the most devout American Christians tend to be more balanced in their political views. Their research shows that radical conservatism is more common among American Christians who pray less, read the Bible less, and attend church less often. For this reason, political conservatism should not be considered identical to or inherent to Evangelicalism. Despite these nuances, for the purpose of this project I will use a broad definition of "Evangelical" to include all who are self-described Evangelicals. Using this definition, a large majority of Evangelicals are politically conservative and most strongly supported the policies of presidents Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, and Donald J. Trump.

2. "Missions" and other related words (the mission of God, missional, missionary) are often used to narrowly describe activities such as personal evangelism, apologetics, church planting, and reaching the "unreached." While these definitions are appropriate in certain contexts, for the sake of this project, I will use Christopher JH Wright's broad definition of mission: "all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation and all that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose."<sup>6</sup> Also, Wright says that, "We need a holistic gospel because the world is in a holistic mess."<sup>7</sup> Without wanting to devalue the importance of activities such as evangelism and church planting, we must also acknowledge that it is not part of God's design for children to starve as a result of

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 84.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher JH Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (IVP Academic, 2018), 25.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

unwarranted military aggression or economic sanctions, for innocent civilians to be struck by indiscriminate air strikes, or for millions of displaced people to languish in refugee camps without basic services. In Jesus' own ministry, proclamation of the Kingdom of God was accompanied with tangible expressions of healing from disease, liberation from demonic oppression, and compassion for the poor and the outcast, as well as harsh criticism of and confrontation with the rich, the powerful, and the oppressors. Following Jesus' example, mission should include these activities as well.

3. The "Middle East" could be defined in several different ways. I have chosen a broad definition to include all Arabic speaking countries, including the regions of North Africa, the Levant, and the Arabian Peninsula, as well as the non-Arabic speaking countries of Iran and Turkey. This region includes some large non-Arabic speaking minorities, such as Kurds and Berbers, as well as many others. Although Afghanistan is typically not considered part of the Middle East, I will mention it occasionally because of the important role it has played in Middle Eastern affairs and US foreign policy since the 1970's.

### 1.7 Assumptions

1. The problems in the Middle East are caused by a complex variety of factors and cannot be explained by US foreign policy alone, but some US policies have certainly contributed to the chaos and worsened the situation for many vulnerable people throughout the region.
2. American Evangelicals have many inaccurate understandings and false assumptions about the nature of the Middle East and the effects of US foreign policy in the region.

## 1.8 Conclusion

Because of the biblical command to extend God's blessing to all the families of the earth, and the significant influence of the United States on Middle Eastern affairs, American Evangelicals should watch carefully how their political engagement affects the peoples of the Middle East. This will require a willingness to critique our own positions and a deliberate choice to learn about the history and current events of the Middle East, to which we will turn in the next two chapters.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 History & Politics

Works about the history of the modern Middle East are abundant, as well as works about the role of the United States' or Western nations generally in the Middle East. Tamim Ansary's book *Destiny Disrupted*<sup>8</sup> paints the broad strokes of Islamic history, from the days of Muhammad to the present. He deliberately presents the Muslim understanding of history, which gives context to modern Middle Eastern issues. Eugene Rogan's *The Arabs: A History*<sup>9</sup> is an overview of the history of the Arab World starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, once again supplying much needed historical context to our topic. The events of the First World War and the fall of the Ottoman Empire forms another critically important time period for our study, even though it technically precedes the United States' heavy involvement in the region. David Fromkin's *A Peace to End All Peace*<sup>10</sup> and Elizabeth F. Thompson's *How the West Stole Democracy from the Arabs*<sup>11</sup> have been very helpful on this topic.

The topic of Zionism and the Jewish colonization of Palestine also became a central concern during this period. *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*<sup>12</sup> by Rashid Khalidi describes the colonization process, beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and continuing into the present day. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*<sup>13</sup> by Ilan Pappé describes in incredible detail, and using Israel's own internal historical sources, the events, massacres, and military campaigns

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<sup>8</sup> Tamim Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World through Islamic Eyes* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, Third edition (London: Penguin, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Holt, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth F. Thompson, *How the West Stole Democracy from the Arabs: The Syrian Arab Congress of 1920 and the Destruction of Its Historic Liberal-Islamic Alliance* (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Paperback ed (London: Oneworld, 2007).

throughout Palestine at the time of Israel's independence in 1948. *The Iron Wall*<sup>14</sup> by Avi Shlaim is a very lengthy and detailed description of the Arab-Israeli conflict, starting in the 1940's and ending in 2006. Rashid Khalidi's *Brokers of Deceit*<sup>15</sup> unpacks the problems of the United States playing the role of mediator between Israel and the Palestinians due to its inability to be impartial, and especially highlights three "moments" when the United States failed to mediate peace despite the opportunity to do so. This insightful work makes the claim that the United States has served as "Israel's lawyer," not as an honest broker. Lastly, *The Israel Lobby*<sup>16</sup> by Mearsheimer and Walt, although criticized by many for making their point too strongly, nonetheless provides a detailed analysis of the damaging effects of pro-Israel lobbies and interest groups in the US, to the detriment of the United States, Israel, and the Middle East region.

American involvement in the Middle East skyrocketed in the 1940's because of the Second World War, and then remained because of the post-war Soviet threat. *Sowing Crisis*<sup>17</sup> by Rashid Khalidi was necessary background for Middle Eastern history during this period, until the fall of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War of 1991, which marked a significant turning point in Middle Eastern history. Khalidi's historical analysis reveals that the United States and the USSR are both guilty of trampling over the Middle East region as they sought an advantage over each other, by stoking conflicts, hindering peace processes, empowering authoritarian regimes, and overlooking grave injustices. *Lords of the Desert*<sup>18</sup> by James Barr describes the rivalry between the United States and Great Britain, following the Second World War. The United States sought

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<sup>14</sup> Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London: Penguin Books, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit: How the US Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East* (Beacon, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> James Barr, *Lords of the Desert: The Battle between the United States and Great Britain for Supremacy in the Modern Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

to challenge Britain's imperial control over the region and gain access to oil resources, and in the process perpetuated the imperialist agenda. Ussama Makdisi's *Faith Misplaced*<sup>19</sup> is a unique work that describes the trust that the United States had won among Middle Eastern peoples, largely because of the presence of benevolent American missionaries, which was then dashed to pieces because of American policies.

Ignorance about Iran and the history of US-Iranian relations clouds the thinking of American citizens and policymakers. *All the Shah's Men*<sup>20</sup> by Stephen Kinzer powerfully tells the story of the 1953 CIA-backed coup that removed Iran's democratically elected leader and empowered the Shah of Iran to establish authoritarian rule. US-Iranian relations, as well as the growth of anti-American sentiment across the entire region, cannot be understood apart from this seismic event. Also, *Iran and the United States*<sup>21</sup> by Seyed Hossein Mousavian tells the history of US-Iranian hostility from the Iranian perspective and sheds important light on the negative consequences of American policies toward Iran.

During the Cold War era, the Islamist movement gained traction and would eventually lead to the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Few Americans know that the United States intentionally cultivated this movement as a counter to the USSR. Several books describe how this process unfolded, including *Unholy War*<sup>22</sup> by John Esposito, *The*

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<sup>19</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations: 1820-2001* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Seyed Hossein Mousavian and Shahir ShahidSaless, *Iran and the United States: An Insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

*Anatomy of Terror*<sup>23</sup> by Ali Soufan, *Black Wave*<sup>24</sup> by Kim Ghattas, and *The Looming Tower*<sup>25</sup> by Lawrence Wright, among many others.

After the 9/11 attacks, the United States' role in the region increased dramatically because of President George W. Bush's "War on Terror." As a result, the United States took on an increasingly imperialistic role. The most telling book on this era is *Resurrecting Empire*<sup>26</sup> by Rashid Khalidi. The incredibly flawed process that led the United States to invade Iraq in 2003 is described in detail in *To Start a War*<sup>27</sup> by Robert Draper. *Fiasco*<sup>28</sup> by Thomas E. Ricks details the failures of the United States' military in the beginning of the war and military occupation, which ultimately doomed the entire campaign. Emma Sky, a British peace activist who worked for US General Odierno in Iraq, described many of the mistakes made by the United States in her book *The Unraveling*.<sup>29</sup> The unfortunate policies regarding torture, which violated international law and significantly undermined the United States' War on Terror, is painfully described in *Getting Away with Torture*<sup>30</sup> by Christopher H. Pyle. Lawrence Freedman's *A Choice of Enemies*<sup>31</sup> describes the Middle Eastern foreign policies of each US president, from Jimmy Carter through George W. Bush. *Understanding Arabs*<sup>32</sup> by Margaret Nydell explains how anti-

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<sup>23</sup> Ali Soufan, *Anatomy of Terror: From the Death of Bin Laden to the Rise of the Islamic State* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Kim Ghattas, *Black Wave: The Saudi-Iran Wars on Religion and Culture That Destroyed the Middle East* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Co, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, National Bestseller (New York, NY: Vintage, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Robert Draper, *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2020).

<sup>28</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Emma Sky, *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Christopher H. Pyle, *Getting Away with Torture: Secret Government, War Crimes, and the Rule of Law* (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East*. (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Margaret K. Nydell, *Understanding Arabs: A Contemporary Guide to Arab Society*, 6th ed (Boston: Intercultural Press, an imprint of Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2018).

American sentiment in the Middle East is the result of the United States' policies in the region. *America's War for the Greater Middle East*<sup>33</sup> by Andrew Bacevich, a former US Army officer, is a critique of America's military actions in the Middle East since the late 1970s. Bacevich explains the damaging consequences of the United States' excessive reliance on military solutions to the regions problems. *ISIS: A History*<sup>34</sup> by Fawaz Gerges describes how the rise of ISIS is a consequence of the previous policies of the United States and especially the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Lastly, *Arab Voices*<sup>35</sup> of James Zogby is a detailed analysis of Arab perceptions, based on actual polls, which tells the story of Arab resentment for American policies in the region. Zogby urges the US government, and Americans generally, to listen to Arab voices instead of acting unilaterally.

While the Trump era is still very recent, I will briefly touch on my preliminary analysis of his presidency. *Trump and His Generals*<sup>36</sup> by Peter Bergen analyzes Trump's foreign policy agenda based on the first two years of his presidency. *A New Foreign Policy*<sup>37</sup> by Jeffrey Sachs is a critique of the isolationism and nationalism of Trump's foreign policy and a call for America to be involved globally, not as unilateral interventionists, but in cooperation with the United Nations to make progress toward the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). A recent work, *The Management of Savagery*<sup>38</sup>, by Max Blumenthal, describes the failures of the National Security apparatus in the Middle East, how it created so much chaos, and how it ultimately led to the election of Donald Trump to the presidency. Blumenthal demonstrates convincingly that

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<sup>33</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York, NY: Random House, 2016).

<sup>34</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> James J. Zogby, *Arab Voices: What They Are Saying to Us, and Why It Matters* (New York: Griffin, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Peter Bergen, *Trump and His Generals: The Cost of Chaos* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2019).

<sup>37</sup> Jeffrey Sachs, *A New Foreign Policy: Beyond American Exceptionalism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Max Blumenthal, *The Management of Savagery: How America's National Security State Fueled the Rise of Al Qaeda, ISIS, and Donald Trump* (New York, NY: Verso, 2019).

many problems in foreign policy do not lie with a particular political party, but with the national security apparatus that influences foreign policy for both parties. For example, he demonstrates how the national security apparatus led the Obama Administration to make poor decisions in the Middle East, especially regarding Libya and Syria, and how American policies in the Middle East today are essentially no different than the policies that created Al-Qaeda.

## 2.2 American Evangelicalism and Foreign Policy

Thomas Kidd's *American Christians and Islam*<sup>39</sup>, is one of the most important histories of American Christian perceptions of the Muslim World, covering all of US history. This work effectively describes how an inherent Islamophobic bias existed among the first American settlers, carried over from Europe, and how that bias has been continually fed and inflamed to the present day. The impact of this bias on all interactions with the Muslim World, certainly including foreign policy, has been substantial.

*Evangelicals and American Foreign Policy*<sup>40</sup> by Mark R. Amstutz is a survey of American Evangelical contributions to US foreign policy. The author writes as an insider, with a bias that presents American Evangelicals in a positive light, but even his attempt to write objectively reveals the presuppositions and blind spots regarding the Middle East, especially concerning Israel and Palestine. He seems to justify the use of torture in the War on Terror, claiming that it safeguards American lives. However, he fails to cite any evidence that torture has made anyone safer, which has been thoroughly proven to have the opposite effect by Ali

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas S Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ Press, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Mark R. Amstutz, *Evangelicals and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Soufan's new book, *The Black Banners (declassified)*.<sup>41</sup> Amstutz also fails to even mention the Evangelical role in the War on Terror or the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Concerning Israel-Palestine, Amstutz presents various Evangelical views but seems to defend America's unconditional support for Israel without presenting a compelling case. He challenges the notion that American Evangelicals are pro-Israeli primarily because of dispensational theology. Rather, he claims that the reasons have more to do with an affinity for Jews and because of shared democratic values between the United States and Israel. Of course, he fails to explain how Israel can be considered democratic considering its undemocratic military occupation of Palestinian territories. In contrast to Amstutz, Timothy P. Weber's *On the Road to Armageddon*<sup>42</sup> argues that dispensational theology significantly influences Evangelical support for Israel. *For God's Sake: The Christian Right and US Foreign Policy*<sup>43</sup> by Lee Marsden attempts to look at the contribution of American Evangelicals to US foreign policy, but with an obvious bias against Evangelicals. Marsden effectively describes the ugly side of "The Christian Right" and its global and political activities.

*Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*<sup>44</sup> by Whitehead and Perry is an objective exploration of the phenomenon of Christian Nationalism in America today. Such Christian Nationalism certainly affects how Evangelicals perceive and engage with the rest of the world. Andrew Bacevich describes the American obsession with military power in *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War*.<sup>45</sup> Such

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<sup>41</sup> Ali H. Soufan and Daniel Freedman, *The Black Banners (Declassified): How Torture Derailed the War on Terror after 9/11*, Declassified ed (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020).

<sup>42</sup> Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Lee Marsden, *For God's Sake: The Christian Right and US Foreign Policy* (New York: Zed Books, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back for God*.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Militarism was a strong factor behind widespread American support for the War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as a means of getting revenge for 9/11. Although this book is not written about Evangelicals specifically, my personal experience and observation leads me to believe that this militarism is perhaps stronger among Evangelicals than non-Evangelicals.

*Islamophobia, Race, and Global Politics*<sup>46</sup> by Nazia Kazi explains how America's Islamophobia and racism intersect and affect US foreign policy in the Middle East. Although the book is written from a thoroughly Muslim perspective, and its bias is evident, it is nevertheless a perspective that American Evangelicals need to hear.

### 2.3 Christian Missions in the Middle East

Within the realm of Christian missions, I have often heard exhortations to avoid politics. The idea is that missions and politics are quite different and should not be mixed, or that a Christian should be apolitical, preaching the gospel instead of taking a stand on political issues. Below I will explore reasons why this approach is problematic for Christian mission in the Middle East.

Several works have convinced me that politics is a critical component of the mission of the church in the Middle East. Many books that focus on evangelizing among Muslims mention the obstacles associated with US or Western foreign policy, imperialism, colonialism, Christian Zionism, etc. Among them are Nabeel Jabbour's *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross*.<sup>47</sup> Although Nabeel is a Christian, he writes one section from the perspective of a fictional Muslim character, named Ahmad, whose political views are typical of many Muslims in the Arab World. Ahmad felt that American Christians discredit their gospel message because of the hypocrisy of

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<sup>46</sup> Nazia Kazi, *Islamophobia, Race, and Global Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

<sup>47</sup> Nabeel Jabbour, *The Crescent through the Eyes of the Cross: Insights from an Arab Christian* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2008).

their political views. This was my first exposure to the topic and opened my eyes to the Muslim or Middle Eastern perspective. I also attended a course that Nabeel Jabbour teaches, called “Islam and the Geopolitics of the Middle East,” which influenced my thinking significantly on this topic and showed me how it fits within the broader subject of Christian Missions.

Colin Chapman’s book, *Cross and Crescent*<sup>48</sup>, also touches on political issues and their impact on Christian mission in the Middle East. Perhaps the most helpful in this category is Mike Kuhn’s *Fresh Vision for the Muslim World*<sup>49</sup>, which describes the historical consequences of Western injustices against the Muslim World and invites Christians to respond by “living the kingdom” and “extracting the empire.”

#### 2.4 The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, some excellent books have been written to challenge the conventional pro-Israeli narrative held by most Evangelicals and to foster a deeper understanding of the injustices experienced by Palestinians. *The Other Side of the Wall*<sup>50</sup> by Munther Isaac, a Palestinian Christian leader in Bethlehem, is a theological critique of Zionism and an appeal to American Evangelicals to learn about the suffering of Palestinian Christians under Israeli occupation. *Whose Land? Whose Promise?: What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians*<sup>51</sup> by Gary Burge, an American evangelical, is a balance of history, theology, and the current realities of Palestinian struggles for justice, including a lengthy chapter on Palestinian Christian contributions to peace and justice. *Whose Promised Land: The*

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<sup>48</sup> Colin Gilbert Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam*, 2nd ed (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> Mike Kuhn, *Fresh Vision for the Muslim World* (Colorado Springs, CO: IVP Books, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Munther Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> Gary M Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise?: What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2013).

*Continuing Conflict Over Israel and Palestine*<sup>52</sup> by Colin Chapman, who lived and taught for many years in the Arab World, is another historical and theological analysis of the topic with the goal of promoting peace and justice in the region.

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<sup>52</sup> Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land: The Continuing Conflict over Israel and Palestine* (Oxford: Lion Books, 2015).

### **3 History of the United States in the Middle East**

#### 3.1 Early Perceptions & The Missionary Age (Before 1919)

While there were many interactions between the Muslim World and European Civilization in the Middle Ages,<sup>53</sup> and many of them were positive, the Crusades ultimately influenced European perceptions of Islam to be mostly negative. For many Europeans who wanted to display their honor and their love for God, joining the Crusades was a logical choice. Even after the Crusades ultimately failed, and most Crusaders were driven out of the region, there remained ongoing conflict between European powers and the Ottoman Empire for centuries. In 1453, The Ottomans captured Constantinople, previously thought to be impenetrable, and made gradual progress into Europe. These Ottoman advances came to their climax and threatened all of Europe with the siege of Vienna in 1683, where the Ottoman were finally defeated. To 17<sup>th</sup> Century Europeans, the Ottoman Empire was virtually interchangeable with Islam, and the labels “Muslim” and “Turk” were commonly substituted for each other.

In such a context, European Christians, including many founders of the new Protestant movement, were filled with fear of Turks/Muslims and perceived them as ruthless savages and enemies of God. When European settlers colonized North America, they carried these perceptions with them, and the new society was built on a European tradition of negative perceptions of Muslims and the Muslim World. In many ways, the intense fear of Muslims experienced in many parts of the United States today is the fruit of this European seed that was planted in the very beginning of our nation’s history.

When the United States declared its independence in 1776, there was virtually no interaction between the Middle East and the New World. That would quickly change in the early

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<sup>53</sup> Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Chicago, IL: New Amsterdam Books, 2000), chapters 4-5.

years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when North African Barbary pirates captured American ships and took passengers and sailors as prisoners.<sup>54</sup> These early encounters with North African Muslim pirates fed into the already strong anti-Muslim sentiments felt across the United States. Americans caricatured Arabs and Muslims as barbaric savages because of their practice of taking Americans as slaves. Benjamin Franklin was quick to point out the hypocrisy in this position because Americans captured many times more African slaves in an excessively brutal manner.<sup>55</sup> Regardless, Islam was off to a bad start in the New World. According to Thomas Kidd, “Many in America’s early national period perceived Muslims as both a military threat to their fledgling mercantile democracy, and one of Christianity’s great eschatological enemies.”<sup>56</sup>

In 1819, following a renewed fervor of missionary activity, the first American missionaries to the Muslim World – Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons – set sail across the Atlantic.<sup>57</sup> Although the American missionary enterprise had a slow and tumultuous start in the Middle East, it eventually came to be a powerful force for good, largely through the establishment of schools, hospitals, and Bible societies. Some of the leading academic institutions in the region, like the American University of Beirut and the American University of Cairo, were founded by American missionaries.

For nearly one hundred years, these missionaries were the primary link between America and the Middle East. Ussama Makdisi makes the point that “it was of great significance that the Arab perception of America would initially and most comprehensively be created by ardent missionaries and their descendants, not by sailors, merchants, or soldiers.”<sup>58</sup> This set America

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<sup>54</sup> Kidd, *American Christians and Islam*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>57</sup> Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 19.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

apart from European powers, and Arab perceptions of America during this era were mostly positive because of the reputation of American missionary work. Makdisi makes a strong case that this positive perception of American values led the Arab world to turn to American President Woodrow Wilson for assistance in achieving independence from European colonial powers after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.2 The Aftermath of the First World War (1919-1945)

Among the victors of the First World War, Colonial powers Britain and France looked to use the victory to divide the spoils of war, especially from the former Ottoman lands. However, US President Woodrow Wilson despised imperialism and idealized the notion of self-determination. He established the Fourteen Points – principles that would allow for the many peoples of the world to develop their own nation-states, free from the interference or control of imperial powers. Makdisi claims that “more than any single act of American charity, it was President Wilson’s dramatic vision of a new world order that confirmed America’s ascendance on the world stage.”<sup>60</sup> Also, according to Makdisi,

“Arabs had a highly embellished sense of the American president. Muslim and Christian, they followed his speeches. Like so many other people around the world, they saw in Wilson’s words an unprecedented commitment of a major power to their freedom.”<sup>61</sup>

If there was ever a moment when American ideals shone brightly for the world to see, this was it. However, the moment passed quickly and without its intended effect as Woodrow Wilson ultimately failed to achieve self-determination for the Arab peoples.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 123-125.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 126.

“The United States did not directly partake in the colonial feast... American diplomats and policymakers, however, quickly acquiesced to the British and the French in their imperial remaking of the Arab world. They recognized the mandates. In return, they asked not for self-determination or any such grand scruple attributed to Wilson, but for a grant of equal access for American companies, especially oil companies, to potentially lucrative commodities and markets.”<sup>62</sup>

Amid dividing up the spoils of war, Zionists were able to win support from the British for their plans to colonize Palestine with Jewish settlers. At this early stage, the United States’ government had a small role in the Zionist enterprise, but Woodrow Wilson did little to stop it despite its obvious violation of Wilson’s ideals of self-determination. Contrary to the popular notion that some factions in the Arab Muslim world hate America because of her freedoms and values, the truth is that much of the Middle East loved America precisely because of these values. To summarize Makdisi, it was not because of its values, but rather the United States’ failure to live up to its values following the First World War that caused its reputation and moral standing in the Middle East to decline.

### 3.3 Following the Second World War: The Cold War, Israel, and Oil (1945-1990)

#### 3.3.1 The Cold War

On March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1947, President Truman gave an address to a joint session of Congress about developments with the Soviet Union, particularly in Turkey and Iran, claiming that, “confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East.”<sup>63</sup> According to Khalidi, this was significant because it was “the first time an American president had designated the Middle East as an area that was crucial to the national security interests of the United States.”<sup>64</sup> Truman

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>63</sup> Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, loc 673.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., loc 673.

offered military and financial aid to these countries and others in confronting domestic communist forces and the Soviet Union, which came to be known as the Truman Doctrine.<sup>65</sup> So, from the very beginning of the Cold War, the Middle East was at the heart of the superpower rivalry.

Developments in the Middle East from 1947 until the Gulf War of 1991 cannot be understood apart from this Cold War context. During these Cold War years, gaining a strategic advantage over the USSR dominated all other US foreign policy considerations. Two factors that play a dominant role in American policy today, Israel and oil, were merely pawns in the Cold War contest, as will be discussed later.

Khalidi names three specific Middle Eastern conflicts that were greatly exacerbated by the Cold War rivalry: the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Lebanese Civil War, and the Iran-Iraq War, which will be discussed below. Additionally, I will describe the importance of the Global Jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and Middle Eastern oil.

### 3.3.2 The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1948, Israel declared its independence. Within minutes, US President Truman became the first leader in the world to officially recognize the new nation. When diplomats warned him that a pro-Zionist policy would harm US interests in the Arab World, he responded, “I am sorry, gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism. I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents.”<sup>66</sup> So, from the very beginning, American involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not born

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., loc 670.

<sup>66</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 79.

out of a pursuit for peace, justice, democracy, or any other high ideals, but out of political expediency. It would help President Truman's political standing in America if he took the side of Israel. This is especially egregious when we consider Ussama Makdisi's claim that "more than any single factor, the presence of Israel has altered the course of U.S.-Arab relations."<sup>67</sup>

In early 1948, before Israel was declared a state, Zionist forces had already begun to implement Plan Dalet (a.k.a. "Plan D"), which "involved the conquest and depopulation...of the two largest Arab urban centers, Jaffa and Haifa, and of the Arab neighborhoods of West Jerusalem, as well as scores of Arab cities, towns, and villages."<sup>68</sup> According to Ilan Pappé, "Israel's 1948 Plan D...contains a repertoire of cleansing methods that one by one fit the means the UN describes in its definition of ethnic cleansing, and sets the background for the massacres that accompanied the massive expulsion."<sup>69</sup> To the present day, Palestinians commemorate 1948 as the Nakba, meaning the disaster or catastrophe. All future negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians would be hindered by different narratives of 1948. To the Palestinians, a grave injustice occurred that needs to be at least acknowledged by the Israelis and reparations should be made. To the Israelis, 1948 was a fight for national survival and independence, no injustice occurred, and therefore the scattered Palestinian refugees and destroyed Palestinian villages are not Israel's problem.

The Palestinians who remained under Israeli sovereignty became second-class citizens. Rashid Khalidi describes several massacres of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers that were "part of a pattern of behavior by the Israeli military. News of the massacres was suppressed in Israel and veiled by a complaisant American media."<sup>70</sup> All subsequent Palestinian resistance and guerilla

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<sup>67</sup> Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 72.

<sup>69</sup> Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 23.

<sup>70</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 94.

warfare must be seen in light of the historical backdrop of the Nakba and the injustices of Israeli military occupation. The trust that Arabs had placed in the United States before the Nakba deteriorated rapidly as America became Israel's primary patron.

“The broken promise of U.S.-Arab relations is the result of a chain of actions and reactions that stretches back to at least the First World War and to the betrayal of the principles of Wilsonian self-determination with which many Arabs had become familiar and to which they were deeply devoted. Anti-Americanism as a distinctly Arab phenomenon began with the U.S. support for the creation of Israel.”<sup>71</sup>

Interestingly, when Israel declared its independence in 1948, both the United States and the Soviet Union rushed to recognize Israel as a state and to provide it with weapons, hoping to become the patron to the new state. Only after realizing that it had lost this race, and not wanting to be outdone, the USSR changed sides and supported several Arab regimes. However, in a strange turn of events, both the US and the USSR supported Egypt in opposition to Israel in the 1956 Suez War. Seen as the last adventure of the old colonial empires, Britain and France collaborated with Israel in a coordinated attack against Egypt. Both superpowers, the USA and the USSR, claimed to despise colonialism and used the Suez War as an opportunity to prove themselves as anti-colonialists to the watching world. Additionally, President Eisenhower viewed the Suez War as an opportunity to woo Egypt onto the American side of the rivalry. American war planners hoped to gain the favor of Egypt because of the strategic importance of air bases within Egypt, from which American bombers could reach the Soviet Union. After bombers were developed with a longer range, America's relationship with Egypt lost much of its strategic value.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 355.

<sup>72</sup> Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, loc 321.

US support for Israel strengthened further during the Six Day War in 1967. Egyptian President Nasser foolishly moved some of his forces into the Sinai Peninsula. “[US President] Johnson and [Secretary of Defense] McNamara had already heard from their military and intelligence advisors that the Arabs were not going to attack, and that in any case Israel was likely to win an overwhelming victory.”<sup>73</sup> Despite this, Johnson gave Israel permission to launch a preemptive strike and Israel went to work annihilating the grounded aircraft of Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian Air Forces. Having achieved dominance in the skies, Israel’s superior army was able to easily defeat the armies of all three Arab countries and conquer large swaths of territory. According to Khalidi, Arab ambassadors were told that “the United States was mediating with Israel to defuse the crisis and would restrain it from attacking, while [urging the Arabs] to counsel restraint to their governments.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, the United States was duplicitously counseling Arab countries to lay down their weapons while counseling Israel to destroy the Arabs.

Until 1967, the US was cautious in its support for Israel to not strain its relationship with Arab allies such as Saudi Arabia. Cold War considerations required that the US remain pro-Israel and pro-Arab at the same time, maintaining a difficult and delicate tension. However, after 1967, “The United States was now more squarely on the side of Israel than it had been previously, which meant the abandonment of the semblance of balance shown at times by the Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy administrations.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, 103.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 105

### 3.3.3 The Lebanese Civil War

Concerning the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), Rashid Khalidi acknowledges that this war was incredibly complex, and even for the historian it can be difficult to dissect. However, Khalidi describes a convoluted sequence of events through which the United States maneuvered the various factions of this war in a way that would weaken the Soviet grasp on its allies, like Syria, and strengthen America's allies, like Israel. When Ronald Reagan took office, the relationship between the United States and the USSR grew more adversarial. Reagan's first secretary of state, Alexander Haig, strongly supported Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, and gave him the green light to invade Lebanon in 1982 in order to interject Israel into the Lebanese Civil War. This enabled Israel to expel the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and to establish an Israel-friendly regime under Bashir Gemayel. This arrangement failed to materialize as Israel had hoped. To make matters worse for Israel, it faced intense international outcry, even from its own citizens, after reports emerged of a massacre at Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon called Sabra and Shatila. Khalidi remarks, "These camps [Sabra and Shatila] were under Israeli military control, in a city occupied by the Israeli army, and were lit overnight by Israeli army flares as the butchers went about their work."<sup>76</sup>

Khalidi summarizes this section about the Lebanese Civil War by claiming that "one searches in vain for any signs that either of the superpowers (or any regional power), tried seriously to halt the carnage at this early stage. Instead, both worked assiduously to gain advantage at the expense of the other, with the Americans in the end making out far better than the Soviets."<sup>77</sup> He then concludes,

"An American policy driven by Cold War imperatives and based on ignorance of the real forces on the ground had proven utterly bankrupt. It was undermined not

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<sup>76</sup> Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, loc 2201.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, loc 2172.

by the increasingly enfeebled Soviets, but rather by the savage realities of a Lebanon that had been turned into a battlefield in large measure by the callous machinations of the superpowers and their clients, ruthlessly seeking advantage over one another at the expense of the hapless Lebanese people and Palestinian refugees on their soil.”<sup>78</sup>

### 3.3.4 The De-Democratization of Iran and the Iran-Iraq War

The United States became heavily involved in Iran in 1953, under President Eisenhower, when CIA agents collaborated with British MI6 and successfully staged a coup to remove the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh so that Mohammad Reza Shah could consolidate power and establish an authoritarian regime that resembled Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq. Despite America’s claim to promote democracy in the region, this was a clear example of the opposite – the removal of a popular democratically elected leader to strengthen a pro-American dictator. Mohammad Mossadegh posed an economic threat to Western powers, and especially Britain, because of his attempt to nationalize Iranian oil production. However, the greatest fear to the American president was the growing strength of a communist party within Iran that could threaten to take over the government and bring Iran into the Soviet camp.<sup>79</sup> An authoritarian Shah with American weapons would be able to crush the communists and repel the Soviet threat. Such authoritarian leaders, like Mohammad Reza Shah in Iran and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, were strategic assets because they were easier to control than the masses. CIA officer Kim Roosevelt, the mastermind behind the coup d’état in Iran, summarized the US’ new affection for regime change,

“Our principle should be to encourage the emergence of competent leaders, relatively well-disposed to the West, through programs designed for this purpose,

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., loc 2230.

<sup>79</sup> Barr, *Lords of the Desert*, 195-196.

including, where possible, a conscious, though perhaps covert, effort to cultivate and aid such potential leaders, even when they are not in power.”<sup>80</sup>

Historian James Barr comments, “This represents a sea change. Where once the Americans had invested all their hopes in democracy to transform the region, they would not actively hunt for competence.”<sup>81</sup> And according to Andrew Bacevich, “At no time did the promotion of democracy and human rights figure in Washington’s Iranian agenda.”<sup>82</sup>

In 1979, the Iranian people revolted against the ruthless regime of Mohammad Reza Shah and empowered Ayatollah Khomeini to establish the Islamic regime that exists today. The Revolution was perceived by many Americans as merely another incident of radical Middle Eastern Muslims showing the true, ugly face of Islam. However, such a perception lacks historical context. Iranians lived under a violent regime for twenty-six years that was established and strengthened by the United States, and the Revolution finally gave voice to their anger. According to Seyed Hossein Mousavian,

“The coup d’etat [of 1953] was the single most pivotal event in shaping Iran-US relations for decades to come...the coup changed the psyche of Iranian society and destroyed Iranians’ positive image of the United States. The humiliation and frustration felt by Iranians laid the foundation of the anti-Americanism that ultimately produced the 1979 Islamic Revolution.”<sup>83</sup>

Deeply troubled by the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and wanting to quickly crush it, American policy makers and their allies encouraged Saddam Hussein to invade Iran in 1980.<sup>84</sup> The United States paved the way for Iraq to purchase the materials needed to build chemical weapons and then protected Iraq from international sanctions when these illegal weapons were

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>82</sup> Bacevich, *America’s War for the Greater Middle East*, 13.

<sup>83</sup> Mousavian and ShahidSaless, *Iran and the United States*, 24.

<sup>84</sup> Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, loc 2325.

used against Iran forces and Kurdish civilians.<sup>85</sup> The CIA also provided military intelligence to the Iraqi regime for use against Iran.

The new regime in Iran was staunchly anti-Western and anti-Communist at the same time. For this reason, the Soviet Union also offered support to Iraq in its invasion of Iran. Khalidi claims that this collusion between the superpowers prevented the United Nations from acting to halt Iraq's deployment of chemical weapons in warfare.<sup>86</sup> Complicating matters further, both superpowers also recognized that a sweeping Iraqi victory over Iran would create many new problems in the region, and so they both aided Iran so that Iraq's victory would not be absolute. Additionally, the United States thought that Iran could still be swayed into the American camp against the Soviet Union. Because the Iranian military was dependent on American weapons systems left over from the Shah's regime, the United States had an opportunity to entice Iran onto the American side of the Cold War by providing military equipment and spare parts that would be used in battle against Iraq. This set the stage for the infamous Iran-Contra scandal, when the Reagan Administration illegally delivered weapons to Iran.<sup>87</sup>

To summarize the insanity of the Iran-Iraq War, both the United States and the Soviet Union were assisting both Iraq and Iran in their war against each other to achieve objectives dictated entirely by Cold War strategic priorities. Khalidi summarizes,

“the contradictory policies that led both to extend some support to Iran were also driven by their obsessive rivalry with each other, and by the fear of each that the other might secure a decisive advantage with either of the two combatant powers. In fact, a reported remark of Henry Kissinger's, that the ideal outcome for the United States would have been for both powers to lose, may best have reflected the true basis of the tortuous policies of Washington and Moscow...Most of the estimated 1 million casualties suffered by both sides in the Iran-Iraq War were

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., loc 2325.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., loc 2340.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., loc 2336.

inflicted by weapons delivered by the two superpowers, in sales from which both profited handsomely.”<sup>88</sup>

Significantly, Khalidi claims that this conflict significantly stunted the political development of the countries of the region by sabotaging democracy and curtailing human rights.<sup>89</sup>

### 3.3.6 Afghanistan and the rise of Global Islamist Jihadism

The Middle East of the early Cold War era was dominated by Arab Nationalist revolutionaries, whom the US viewed with great suspicion. Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser was the most beloved and influential of these Arab Nationalists. If there was one thing that energized Arab Nationalism, it was anti-Colonialism. For this reason, Arab Nationalists generally wanted to stay away from the Cold War in order to avoid taking on a new Colonial master. However, most Arab nationalist regimes found themselves dependent on superpower patronage and tended to align with the Soviet Union. In many cases, the United States mistakenly perceived an ideological alignment, that countries like Egypt and Syria were fully embracing Communism, when they were actually choosing Soviet alignment for practical reasons. In this context,

“Saudi Arabia’s value to the United States was soon to emerge in another sphere: the ideological arena...The radical [nationalist] wave in the Middle East seemed to place the United States and its allies in a highly unfavorable position. To this apparently unbalanced situation, Saudi Arabia brought the powerful weapon of Islam.”<sup>90</sup>

In other words, the Islamist wave that swept the Middle East in the late 1960’s and 1970’s became especially useful to the United States in combating Soviet influence. Ironically,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., loc 2355.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., loc 2639.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., loc 359-370.

the US threw its weight behind supporting this movement to achieve short-term Cold War objectives.

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the United States saw an opportunity to hand Moscow its own Vietnam. Through its allies, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the US supported and armed anti-Soviet resistance fighters, the precursor to the Taliban. Islamist fighters from all over the Muslim World answered the call to Jihad and descended on Afghanistan to defend the Muslim nation from non-Muslim invaders. The contribution of foreigner mujahideen to the war effort was negligible, but it represented a significant new shift in Middle Eastern politics – international Jihadist cooperation. Little did the US understand the historical consequences of supporting such mujahideen as the “Arab Afghans,” led by Osama bin Laden.

### 3.3.6 Oil

Oil became a strategic factor in the Second World War, to the degree that both the United States and the USSR viewed oil as a strategic chess piece in the Cold War rivalry. In the words of Rashid Khalidi,

“By the end of [the Second World War], American bombing of German oil facilities had been so devastating that on both the eastern and western fronts, German panzers could not move and the Luftwaffe could not fly for lack of fuel...If both American and Soviet leaders and strategists came to understand the vital importance of denying oil to their enemies in order to achieve victory, their own frightening wartime experiences gave both of these allies reason to be concerned about their own oil supplies in the future.”<sup>91</sup>

Any war against the Soviet Union would require unabated access to oil and would prioritize cutting off the Soviet Union’s access to oil. For this reason, “even before the outset of the Cold

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., loc 741.

War, an uncannily symmetrical simultaneous interest in Middle Eastern oil was shown by American and Soviet leaders at the highest level.”<sup>92</sup>

A couple additional points need to be made about the role of oil in the United States’ Middle East strategy.

“American strategic and economic interests in the oil-producing Arab states of the Gulf have determined Washington’s continued support for their ruling families... The United States thus helped to protect [Gulf] rulers not only against external enemies, but also against the significant range of discontented elements among their own peoples.”<sup>93</sup>

In other words, the United States was willing to support despotic and undemocratic regimes, even against the process of democratization, in order to support its “strategic and economic interests.” Rather than being a champion for democracy, the United States championed the fight against democracy for the sake of its own national interests.

Concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, these Arab Gulf rulers have been willing to overlook injustices against the Palestinian people for the sake of their ongoing strategic and economic relationship with the United States. While most citizens of these Gulf countries demand justice for Palestinians, their authoritarian rulers are not obliged to listen. In this respect, it benefits the United States to keep these Gulf States undemocratic. “When – and if – fundamental and lasting democratization takes place in the key Arab states, there will necessarily ensue a day of reckoning for US policy on Israel and Palestine.”<sup>94</sup>

### 3.3.7 Conclusion

Khalidi’s words make an appropriate conclusion to this section on the Cold War:

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., loc 709.

<sup>93</sup> Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, xxvi.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., xxvii.

“There is little if any evidence that at any stage during the Cold War either superpower made the promotion of democracy a central tenet of its third world policies. They certainly did not do so in the Middle East, where superpower meddling in the internal affairs of the countries of the region often served exactly the opposite purpose...How much harm to the internal political development of this region, and in particular to its peoples’ aspirations for democracy, was done by the two superpowers’ obsessive focus on each other, sometimes to the exclusion of all else, and their constant, insidious jockeying for Cold War advantage?”<sup>95</sup>

### 3.4 The New World Order & the War on Terror (1990-2017)

#### 3.4.1 The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the New World Order

The Gulf War of 1991 was a significant turning point in world history. Following immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States remained the only superpower in a new post-Cold War world. Before 1991, all American actions and interests in the region were part of a global chess match with the Soviet Union. The rules of the game completely changed, however, in response to Saddam Hussein’s invasion and capture of Kuwait. For the first time in modern history, there was a global superpower who had no competitor and could act unilaterally. President George H.W. Bush and the neoconservatives in his administration wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to demonstrate American power and hegemony and to send a clear message to the rest of the world that the United States was not to be challenged.

#### 3.4.2 The War on Terror

The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 set in motion a chain of historic events that will have long-lasting consequences. In response to the attacks, President George W. Bush declared a

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<sup>95</sup> Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, loc 2487 and 2965.

global war against “terrorism.” Most significantly for the Middle East, the War on Terror signaled a major increase in US military presence in the region.

President Bush committed the United States’ military to a full invasion of Afghanistan to remove the Taliban from power and to destroy Al Qaeda’s leadership and training bases. Much of the region was sympathetic to America’s war in Afghanistan because of the direct links to the 9/11 attacks. This sympathy would disintegrate quickly in what followed.

### 3.4.3 Iraq

Riding the wave of American anger and unity after the 9/11 attacks, George W. Bush managed to include a full-scale invasion and regime change in Iraq as part of the War on Terror. In hindsight, it seems ludicrous to somehow connect Saddam Hussein to the 9/11 attacks, but that is exactly what Bush did. In fact, the US administration used two primary arguments for justifying the war on Iraq. First, Bush claimed that Saddam’s Iraq had ties to Al Qaeda and had trained and supported Al Qaeda terrorist activity. Second, Iraq allegedly possessed massive stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), that would be supplied to terrorists in the future. It is difficult to determine if the Bush Administration genuinely believed their claims were true, or if they were driven by ulterior motives. What is clear, however, is that the intelligence behind the claims was misleading, exaggerated, unreliable, and occasionally fabricated. Robert Draper’s book *To Start a War* tells a story that goes something like this: (1) The Bush Administration (particularly Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney) claimed without evidence that Saddam was connected to 9/11 and that he was a dangerous threat. (2) Having already decided that war against Iraq was imminent, the Bush Administration demanded evidence from the intelligence community to support its claims against Saddam, not to discover

if they were true, but primarily to convince the American people and the world that war was necessary. (3) The intelligence community struggled to find any quality and reliable evidence and so the Bush Administration pushed harder, rewarding those intelligence officials who were able to find or fabricate anything. A culture developed within the intelligence community that rewarded evidence against Saddam regardless of whether it was accurate or reliable. (4) The Bush Administration used that weak intelligence to claim “slam dunk” evidence against Saddam.<sup>96</sup>

Regardless of what brought the United States into Iraq, the consequences have devastated the country and the broader Middle East region since 2003. President Bush prematurely declared “Mission Accomplished” aboard an aircraft carrier on May 1, 2003, failing to understand that an insurgency was forming against the US-led coalition. Fueling this insurgency were two decisions by Paul Bremer in 2003, chief executive of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), whom Bush appointed to administrate the country of Iraq until a new government was formed. The first decision was de-Baathification - to forbid all former Baath party members from serving in government positions, affecting as many as eighty-five thousand people.<sup>97</sup> This was especially egregious because anyone who worked for the government under Saddam had to be a Baath party member, all the way down to schoolteachers. Treating all of them as if they had embraced Baath party ideology – and so dismissing all of them from government service – was excessively harsh and counterproductive to redevelopment. According to Emma Sky, de-Baathification meant that “hospitals would be without doctors and schools without teachers.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Draper, *To Start a War*.

<sup>97</sup> Ricks, *Fiasco*, 174.

<sup>98</sup> Sky, *The Unraveling*, 57.

The second mistake was disbanding the entire Iraqi Army, essentially disgracing hundreds of thousands of young men, making them unemployed, and sending them home with their weapons. “Abruptly terminating the livelihoods of these men created a vast pool of humiliated, antagonized, and politicized men.”<sup>99</sup> According to Colonel Elias Nimmer of the US Army, “When an officer is sent home without a salary and can no longer feed his family, his wife will tell him to get out of the house. What do you think he will do then? How do you think he will feel?”<sup>100</sup> These Iraqi soldiers could have been used to restore security to the country after the war. Additionally, because they needed an income, were angry at the American invaders for terminating their employment, and already had weapons and military training, they made easy and highly effective recruits for militias and terrorist organizations.

Following the 1991 Gulf War and twelve years of crippling US-led sanctions, Iraq was already in a bad state at the beginning of the war. In fact, in 1999 a UNICEF report found that about 5,000 Iraqi children died every month because of the US-backed sanctions.<sup>101</sup> After the invasion, an insurgency against the US occupation soon emerged and the country further spiraled out of control into violence and chaos. Colin Powell, reflecting on the war more than a decade later, described Iraq as a pressure cooker full of boiling stew, and removing Saddam was like ripping the lid off the pressure cooker.<sup>102</sup> Terrorist organizations were eager to take advantage of Iraq’s chaos. Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian jihadist and founder of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), took advantage of sectarian tensions to the benefit of his organization. Fawaz Gerges claims that “by destroying state institutions and establishing a sectarian-based political system, the 2003 US-

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<sup>99</sup> Ricks, *Fiasco*, 176.

<sup>100</sup> Draper, *To Start a War*, 380.

<sup>101</sup> Anthony Arnove, ed., *Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*, Updated ed (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002).

<sup>102</sup> Jason Breslow, “Colin Powell: U.N. Speech ‘Was a Great Intelligence Failure,’” *Frontline*, May 17, 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/colin-powell-u-n-speech-was-a-great-intelligence-failure/>.

led invasion polarized the country along Sunni-Shia lines and set the stage for a fierce, prolonged struggle driven by identity politics.”<sup>103</sup> As a result of this increase in sectarian violence, Iraq experienced as many as one thousand civilian deaths per month during its peak in the winter of ’06-’07.<sup>104</sup> By the time US troops withdrew in 2011, about 120,000 Iraqis had been killed in the war.<sup>105</sup> The sectarian violence following the invasion crippled what was left of an already devastated economy and created a massive refugee crisis.

#### 3.4.4 Torture

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld sent an article to General Tommy Franks, the conclusion of which he endorsed: “In the end, if we are going to lead...we must be considered the madmen of the world, capable of any action...If we are to achieve noble purposes we must be prepared to act in the most ignoble manner.”<sup>106</sup> Acting in an “ignoble manner” is precisely what the United States proceeded to do as it disregarded the Geneva Conventions and international law and utilized torture throughout the Middle East and around the world. According to Christopher H Pyle, the widespread support that Americans gave their government to torture suspected terrorists was the result of two impulses – fear and revenge.<sup>107</sup> Americans became so paranoid after 9/11 that they easily tossed their moral values to the side, the very same values that they claim to promote around the world.

There were at least two major consequences of torture. First, it “destroyed the moral standing of the United States throughout the Middle East and around the world.”<sup>108</sup> No longer

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<sup>103</sup> Gerges, *ISIS*, 68.

<sup>104</sup> “Iraq Body Count,” Iraq Body Count, accessed April 30, 2020, <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/>.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Pyle, *Getting Away with Torture*, 6.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

could the United States claim to support human rights and the rule of law. Second, closely related to the first, is that torture became a highly effective recruiting tool for terrorist organizations. Before the Abu Ghraib photos leaked, 63% of Iraqis supported the US military occupation. After the photos leaked, that number dropped to an abysmal 9%.<sup>109</sup> According to Pyle, “As accounts of the torture spread throughout the Middle East, al Qaeda acquired thousands of imitators, and world opinion, which had been massively sympathetic to the victims of 9/11, came to see the United States as arrogant, brutal, and breathtakingly hypocritical.”<sup>110</sup> Pyle remarks that the Bush Administration failed to understand that defeating terrorism required winning public opinion in the Middle East. Counterproductive to this goal, Bush focused on winning the public opinion of his conservative voter base in the United States and lost the war on terror as a result. Most concerning to me is that these torture practices received widespread and public support from American Evangelicals (62% in 2009), more than any other religious or secular group in American society.<sup>111</sup>

### 3.4.5 The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

In 2014, more than two years after the U.S. military withdrawal, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, a.k.a. ISIS) emerged as a radically violent jihadist group. It quickly seized territory in both Iraq and Syria, claiming to revive the Islamic caliphate. The emergence of ISIL is a direct consequence of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. According to Fawaz Gerges, “The destruction of the Iraqi state in 2003 was the most important variable in the emergence of Al Qaeda in Iraq and its subsequent rebirth as ISIS.”<sup>112</sup> Gerges points out that Zarqawi only had about thirty

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>111</sup> Amstutz, *Evangelicals and American Foreign Policy*, 184.

<sup>112</sup> Gerges, *ISIS*, 63.

fighters before the invasion in 2003, and his organization was near the brink of extinction, but after “the US-led invasion of Iraq, he quickly amassed at least five thousand full-time fighters, bolstered by twenty thousand homegrown supporters.”<sup>113</sup> It was Zarqawi’s Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) that eventually morphed into ISIL. As for Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the leader of ISIL and self-proclaimed Caliph, “there is a consensus among people who knew Baghdadi that the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a turning point in his radicalization.”<sup>114</sup> He was captured by US forces in February of 2004 and was detained in Camp Bucca, which is called “Al Qaeda school” by former detainees, and was later released because he was considered a low-level threat. “According to the Iraqi government, seventeen of the twenty-five most important ISIS leaders running the war in Iraq and Syria spent time in US-run detention facilities between 2004 and 2011.”<sup>115</sup> Baghdadi’s experience at Camp Bucca completed his radicalization, to the degree that he “realised that life would be meaningless without killing.”<sup>116</sup>

As a result of ISIL’s emergence, Iraq experienced another surge of violence in 2014-2017, totaling about 67,000 civilian deaths,<sup>117</sup> creating another wave of refugees, and further destabilizing the region.

### 3.4.6 The Ongoing Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the Second Intifada

Much of the world perceives Israel as an extension of the United States because of the excessive and unconditional support it receives from the US. For this reason, an examination of US foreign

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>117</sup> “Iraq Body Count”

policy in the Middle East must also include an examination of Israel's policies toward its neighbors. In what follows, I owe much to Avi Shlaim's *The Iron Wall*.

The primary question that dominates Israel's internal political discourse regards how Israel should resolve its "demographic problem." Essentially, what should Israel do with its Palestinian population? Since Israel's founding, it has sought to uphold three political ideals simultaneously, which are often in conflict with each other: (1) a Jewish national identity, (2) a claim to the entire land of Greater Israel, which at least includes the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights, if not more, and (3) a democratic government founded on the rule of law and human rights. These three objectives cannot be sustained simultaneously because of the presence of a large demographic of Palestinians. If Israel annexes the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights, and gives all of its Palestinian inhabitants the rights of citizenship, as modern democracy requires, it will no longer have a Jewish majority and would lose its Jewish identity. Israeli political positions have formed around different solutions to this "demographic problem."

The first solution, taken by the right wing of Israeli politics, who have largely controlled the Israeli government in recent decades, is to uphold Israel's Jewish identity and to slowly acquire the land of Greater Israel, while compromising the state's democratic nature. This closely describes the situation today, where Israel is slowly capturing new territory through new settlements in the occupied territories, with the goal of eventually taking all of Greater Israel. However, much of the Palestinian community lives under military occupation with few rights, effectively making Israel an apartheid state. Israeli politicians who push for this policy will do everything they can to prevent a Palestinian state from forming in the occupied territories, because then they would no longer be able to claim the land of Greater Israel as their own. This

camp has resisted peace with neighboring countries, such as Syria, knowing that land can only be captured through ongoing adversarial relationships. For example, Avi Shlaim described the historical process of several Israeli governments refusing to make peace with Syria despite Syria's interest in peace, all because of Israel's insistence on holding the Golan Heights.<sup>118</sup>

The second solution, embraced by the left wing of Israeli politics, is to uphold Israel's Jewish identity and to uphold democracy, while compromising its pursuit of the land of Greater Israel. Those on the left would say that peace and security with Israel's neighbors is more important than an ideological pursuit of Greater Israel. Despite intense pressure from the Right, this political camp has occasionally made progress toward a Two-State solution, has acknowledged the legitimacy of the Palestinian national movement, and has been willing to build diplomatic relations with Palestinian leaders. However, the Left has been too weak within the Israeli government to see this vision come to fruition. While the Two-State may have been the most straight-forward and practical solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the past, decades of new settlement construction have suffocated hopes for a Palestinian state, which is exactly what they were intended to do.

The third solution, which neither side of the Israeli political spectrum is willing to seriously consider, upholds democracy and integrates all the land, but compromises on its Jewish identity. This is often called the "One State Solution," and would seek to make Israel more like other Western nations, which uphold equal rights to all ethnicities and religions. Palestinian Muslims and Christians would be equal citizens alongside Jews. This solution is much more idealistic, and it is difficult to imagine this happening in the near future because there are few Israeli politicians who are willing to compromise on the nation's Jewish identity.

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<sup>118</sup> Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, chapter 16.

The failure of the Israeli government and its American patrons to find a solution to this problem will likely mean an ongoing pursuit of the first option, which is the most illegal and inhumane of the three options. Israel will continue to confiscate Palestinian land and build illegal settlements, harass Palestinians with the goal of compelling them to emigrate, and utilize an oppressive military occupation over Palestinian territories to accomplish these purposes.

US President Bill Clinton spent his entire presidency trying to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During his final year in office, he made a last-ditch effort to bring about peace by bringing together both sides at Camp David, including Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority chairman Yasser Arafat.<sup>119</sup> The two sides failed to make any lasting agreement after two weeks of grinding negotiations.

“On the Palestinian side there was mounting frustration and deepening doubt that Israel would ever voluntarily accept a settlement that involved even a modicum of justice...On the Israeli side, there was growing disenchantment with the Palestinians and disillusion with the results of the Oslo accord. Ehud Barak succeeded in persuading his compatriots of virtually all political stripes that there was no Palestinian partner for peace. The Israeli propaganda machine churned out a torrent of fabrications, accusing the Palestinian leadership of deliberately sabotaging the peace process and of a premeditated plan to return to violence.”<sup>120</sup>

Within this context of growing distrust and disillusionment, Ariel Sharon staged a provocative visit to the Temple Mount on September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2000. “He in effect put a match to the barrel of gunpowder.”<sup>121</sup> The following day, after Friday prayers, riots broke out around the Old City. Palestinians threw rocks and Israeli policemen responded with rubber-coated steel bullets. “During the first five days, 47 Palestinians were killed and 1,885 were wounded. Within a very short time, the riots had become a full-scale uprising—the al-Aqsa intifada”<sup>122</sup>, or the Second

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., chapter 17.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 689.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 690.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 690.

Intifada. The Oslo peace process was completely reversed because of the breakdown of the Camp David negotiations and the outbreak of the Second Intifada. Ariel Sharon used the uprising as a political platform to win support from the Israeli public for his tough stance against Palestinian “terrorists.” According to Avi Shlaim, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was one of the greatest instigators of conflict in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “Sharon’s instinctive response to every crisis was to escalate, to use military force on an ever-greater scale in order to terrorize the Arabs into submission. Civilians were not spared in his ruthless drive to establish Israeli mastery in the region.”<sup>123</sup> Also,

“Sharon spurned diplomatic compromise and pushed for the confiscation of more and more Arab land, for the building of more and more Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, and for the expansion of existing settlements... [and] deliberately scattered civilian settlements across the length and breadth of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in order to render territorial compromise impossible when the [left leaning] Labor Party returned to power.”<sup>124</sup>

The popular narrative of the Camp David Summit in Israel and in the United States is that Yasser Arafat was not willing to pursue peace, and even intended to destroy the peace process in order to ignite the Second Intifada. However, Israeli intelligence claimed that no proof existed that Arafat initiated the riots or that Arafat did not want to reach a settlement with Israel.<sup>125</sup> The violence of the Second Intifada played directly into Ariel Sharon’s hand and gave him a wide-open door to commit the Israel Defense Forces to crush Palestinian resistance and to restore a harsh military occupation over the Palestinian territories. On the Palestinian side, the failure of moderates to bring any real results caused them to lose the confidence of the Palestinian leadership, and militants like Hamas gained popularity. The direct result was greater violence

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 711.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 712.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 722.

against Israelis, which was met by greater violence by the Israeli defense forces against Palestinians, and the cycle of violence accelerated at an alarming pace.

When George W. Bush became the president of the United States, he initially stayed away from the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. However, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, he started to view Israel's struggle against Palestinians as the same existential struggle his own nation now faced against Islamist terrorists like Osama bin Laden. Ariel Sharon told President Bush, "Everyone has his own Bin Laden, his own 9/11. We have Arafat."<sup>126</sup> The United States swung even further to the Israeli side and approved of violent and repressive tactics against Palestinian civilian populations. Then, in 2002, all 22 Arab states adopted the Arab Peace Initiative, which was an offer of comprehensive peace to Israel on the basis of international legality with the whole Arab World. Israel was completely indifferent and Bush did nothing to pressure Israel into accepting the initiative.

The significance of these events for our purposes is two-fold. First, the United States has been an obstacle to peace, rather than serving as a peacemaker or disinterested mediator.

"Whatever process the United States was championing, it was not in fact actually directed at achieving a just and lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis."<sup>127</sup> Secondly, the United States did nothing to bring an end to the violence against the Palestinian people in the midst of the Second Intifada, despite the fact that it had the means to do so.

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 727.

<sup>127</sup> Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, pg xvii.

### 3.5 Donald Trump (2017-2021)

American foreign policy failures during the Bush and Obama administrations left the Middle East in shambles. By 2016, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Syria were failed states. Radical terrorist groups like ISIL and Al-Qaeda were strong and active despite the United States' 15 years of continual warfare. Additionally, Americans feared Iran's growing influence in the region because of these interventions. These failures contributed to the popular support for an "America First" isolationism and the rise of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016.<sup>128</sup> Trump had a few priorities regarding the Middle East: (1) to withdraw American forces and disengage from American interventions in the region, (2) to reward his Evangelical voters with a strong pro-Israel agenda, (3) to cancel Obama's nuclear agreement with Iran and to generally take a tough stance toward Iran, and (4) to support key economic allies in the region, especially Saudi Arabia.

Region-wide sectarian warfare between Sunni and Shi'ite states, with Saudi Arabia and Iran leading the way respectively, are a major factor in the chaos of today's Middle East. Countering Obama's attempt to improve relations with Iran and restrain Saudi Arabia, President Trump took a strong stance in support of Saudi Arabia and against Iran, even giving Saudi Arabia the green light to commit violent crimes. Trump brokered large weapons sales to Saudi Arabia,<sup>129</sup> who then used those weapons to kill civilians indiscriminately in Yemen. Substantial proof exists that Saudi airstrikes are hitting civilian targets and killing thousands of innocent people. One such airstrike hit a school bus and instantly killed twenty-six children.<sup>130</sup> Despite

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<sup>128</sup> Blumenthal, *The Management of Savagery*, loc 82.

<sup>129</sup> Michael LaForgia and Walt Bodanich, "Why Bombs Made in America Have Been Killing Civilians in Yemen - The New York Times," *The New York Times*, May 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/16/us/arms-deals-raytheon-yemen.html>.

<sup>130</sup> "World Report 2019: Rights Trends in Yemen," Human Rights Watch, January 17, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/yemen>.

public knowledge of these egregious crimes, President Trump continues brokering arms deals to Saudi Arabia, and he has boasted of the number of American jobs created through these weapons sales.<sup>131</sup> The message sent to the rest of the world was that the US government was willing to sacrifice Yemeni children on the altar of the American economy.

Concerning Israel and Palestine, Trump has given Israel support that far exceeds any previous president. This support included moving the American embassy to Jerusalem, recognizing Israel's control of the Golan Heights, declaring Israeli settlements on Palestinian land to be legal, cutting off funds for Palestinian refugees,<sup>132</sup> and brokering a peace deal between Israel and the UAE that is regarded by many as a stab in the back to Palestinians.<sup>133</sup> Palestinian Christian Munther Isaac, who is the academic dean of Bethlehem Bible College and the pastor of Evangelical Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, recently lamented, "Let us be clear: implementing the [Trump peace plan] would bring catastrophic consequences for the prospects of a political solution between Israelis and Palestinians, and particularly for the fulfillment of the rights of the Palestinian people, including Palestinian Christians."<sup>134</sup> On top of this, President Trump sought to block the International Criminal Court from investigating Israel for war crimes

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<sup>131</sup> Mike Stone, "Defense Firms Say Trump's Saudi Arms Deal Will Create 500 American Jobs, While Trump Claimed as Many as 500,000," *Business Insider*, October 30, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-saudi-arms-deal-job-creation-2018-10>.

<sup>132</sup> "US Ends Aid to Palestinian Refugee Agency UNRWA," *BBC News*, September 1, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45377336>.

<sup>133</sup> Jonathan Cook, "How the Israel-UAE Deal Puts the Bogus Peace Industry Back in Business," Jonathan Cook: The View from Nazareth, August 15, 2020, <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/2020-08-15/israel-uae-deal-peace-industry/>.

<sup>134</sup> Munther Isaac and Jamal Khader, "Donald Trump Is Complicit in a Catastrophe for Christians - Middle East News - Haaretz.Com," *Haaretz*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/.premium-donald-trump-is-complicit-in-a-catastrophe-for-christians-1.8825832>.

committed in the Gaza Strip in 2014.<sup>135</sup> President Trump admits that many of these policies in favor of Israel are intended to appease his Christian constituents.<sup>136</sup>

While Trump's disdain for interventions in the region can be a relief in comparison to previous presidents, his excessive pro-Saudi, pro-Israel, and anti-Iran bias further damages the already fragile region. While he is reluctant to send American troops to the region, he is happy to empower allies to commit crimes with impunity. As was true for President George W. Bush, Trump's foreign policy objectives have been largely influenced by Evangelical Christians.

I do not have the space to dive into Trump's "Muslim Ban," his nearly total dismantling of the refugee resettlement program, which served many Middle Eastern refugees, and the many Islamophobic statements he made while campaigning and while in office. Although these could be considered domestic issues, their blatantly racist character, their impact on the most vulnerable and victimized people of the Middle East (including refugees and Middle Eastern Christians fleeing from persecution), as well as Trump's strong Christian support base, all send a terribly negative message to the world about what is important to Christians.

### 3.6 Summarizing Historical Lessons

While there is a lot of history to cover in a short space, we can draw at least two key lessons from this historical survey. American Evangelicals have played a significant role in the shaping of US foreign policy in the Middle East, especially since the rise of the Christian Right

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<sup>135</sup> "Trump Authorises Sanctions against ICC Officials," June 11, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/11/trump-authorises-sanctions-against-icc-officials>.

<sup>136</sup> Allison Kaplan Sommer, "Trump Says Moved Israel Embassy to Jerusalem 'for the Evangelicals,'" August 19, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-trump-israel-moved-embassy-jerusalem-for-evangelicals-more-excited-than-jews-1.9081183>.

in the 1980's, and partially due to their unprecedented access to the White House during the presidencies of Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump.

First, unconditional support for Israel has been the most significant contribution of American Evangelicals to US foreign policy in the Middle East. Jerry Falwell, one of the key leaders of the Christian Right during its formative years, listed “support for Israel” as one of the four organizing principles of his organization, The Moral Majority.<sup>137</sup> American Evangelicals pushed the US government to reject “land for peace” strategies for mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and encouraged illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land.<sup>138</sup> “Through their sermons, lobbying, media campaigns, publications and broadcasting Christian Zionists provide support for an aggressive US militarism and unequivocal support for Israel.”<sup>139</sup> Evangelicals also provide more than \$25 million per year (as of 2004) in direct financial contributions to Israel, including support for illegal Israeli settlements.<sup>140</sup> This is significant because so much of the conflict in the Middle East, as well as many of the reasons for anti-American terrorism, find their roots in the injustices experienced by Palestinians. Rather than sacrificially serving the oppressed, American Evangelicals continue to empower and encourage the oppressor.

Second, and related to the first point, American Evangelicals have pushed for aggressive and interventionist policies that have done incalculable damage to the region. Marsden wrote about this concerning the US invasion of Iraq in 2003:

“As the commitment to regime change in Iraq became more public, key figures within the Christian Right were eager to provide theological justification for such action. Richard Land

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<sup>137</sup> Marsden, *For God's Sake*, 184.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

organized a letter stating that a pre-emptive military strike on Iraq would be legitimate under Just War Theory. The letter was co-signed by Chuck Colson,... Bill Bright, [and others].”<sup>141</sup>

Also, “John MacArthur...was one of four clergymen discussing ‘What would Jesus do about war with Iraq?’ MacArthur’s position was the default position for the Christian Right. War with Iraq was justified and would be approved of by Jesus.”<sup>142</sup> Marsden concludes,

“Throughout the build-up to war with Iraq and in the following years it has been the Christian Right’s leadership and conservative evangelicals sitting in church or in front of Christian television that have been the most vociferous and enthusiastic supporters of the war.”<sup>143</sup>

### 3.7 Conclusion

American Evangelical Missionaries have done much good in the Middle East and US government policies have sometimes served the interests of the region. However, American political policies since the start of the Cold War shifted significantly, and the United States started to act like a global power with imperial interests. Perceptions of the United States turned negative during this period, not because of American values, but because of a failure to stay true to its values. Evangelicals have not been behind all destructive policies, as President Obama’s mistakes in Libya and Syria demonstrate, but the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the United States’ participation in Palestinian suffering are two clear examples of American Evangelicals negatively affecting the Middle East through its support for certain policies.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 229.

In what follows, I will examine the theological and ideological blind spots that have contributed to the American Evangelical support for damaging policies in the Middle East, and I will consider some positive steps forward.

## **4 Questionnaires**

### 4.1 Questionnaire Introduction

Perceptions of US foreign policy in the Middle East can vary significantly between American Evangelicals and Middle Easterners. American Evangelicals tend to view the United States' role in the world more positively, and sometimes with great pride and patriotism. For example, a relative recently told me, "America is the greatest force for good in the world." Many of my Middle Eastern friends describe US foreign policy very differently, having experienced it as a lived reality, regardless of the ideals proclaimed by Americans. Subjective perceptions and experiences should not be confused with objective historical facts, but they still have value in understanding the effects of US foreign policy and the type of response needed by the Church.

For the sake of this research, I have used questionnaires to capture the degree and nature of perceptions regarding US foreign policy in the Middle East. As mentioned in the Introduction, I have created questionnaires for three demographics: (1) American Evangelicals, (2) Middle Easterners, and (3) American Evangelicals who have served in Christian ministry in the Middle East.

Sample sizes were relatively small: 30 responses from American Evangelicals, 15 from Middle Easterners, and 16 from American Evangelicals who served in the Middle East. Due to the small sample sizes, we should not assume that the responses reflect an accurate cross section of the three demographics. Additionally, responses lean heavily toward those who are within one or two degrees of separation from me in my personal relational network. For this reason, the responses naturally lean toward my personal bias, with some obvious exceptions. Many of the American responses were from people like me: young, white, Evangelicals who are religiously active and uncomfortable with the Christian Nationalism of their parents – this has an obvious

effect on the overall bias of the responses. One major weakness of the Middle Eastern responses is that 100% were from men. I also received more Christian responses (8) than Muslim responses (5), which does not reflect an accurate cross-section of the region. Two additional responses were from men who were born into a Muslim family and describe themselves now simply as “Followers of Jesus.” The third questionnaire, from American Evangelicals who served in the Middle East, is probably closer to being an accurate reflection of the entire demographic because that demographic is quite small relative to the other two. Despite these sample sizes, the data nevertheless reveals important insights.

In my historical analysis, I found that the most important issues revolving around US foreign policy in the Middle East are the following, in no particular order: (1) the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, (2) the US-Israeli relationship and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, (3) the US-Saudi relationship, and (4) US-Iranian hostility. The three questionnaires are built around these four themes. Each theme included two open-ended questions followed by an optional space for additional comments. For the sake of analyzing questionnaire data, I chose to focus on the one question per section that gave us the best data. Those questions are as follows:

1. Iraq War: “In your opinion, what have been the most significant results of the Iraq War? (results could be positive or negative)”
2. Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: “In your opinion, how has the United States affected the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?”
3. Saudi Arabia: “In your opinion, how has the US-Saudi relationship affected the Middle East region?”
4. Iran: “In your opinion, why has there been hostility between the United States and Iran?”

In addition to these four themes, one final section of the questionnaires included the three following questions:

1. “In your opinion, how have the United States’ policies affected its reputation in the Middle East?”
2. “In your opinion, what has been the contribution of American Evangelical Christians to US foreign policy in the Middle East?”
3. “In your opinion, what priorities should guide the United States’ policies in the Middle East? Why?”

In what follows, I will describe the results of the questionnaires one theme at a time, including the final three questions. By concentrating on one theme at a time, I will compare and contrast the perspectives of each demographic on that theme, before moving on to the next theme. Each participant will be given a number followed by the letter A, B, or C. Responses to the first questionnaire, for American Evangelicals, are given the letter A, Middle Easterners the letter B, and American Evangelicals who served in the region, C.

#### 4.2 The Iraq War

American Evangelicals were surprisingly critical of the decision to invade Iraq in 2003. When asked about the consequences of the war, only 13% (4) gave primarily positive answers; 70% (21) gave negative answers, and 17% (5) gave neutral answers or did not know. Many of the participants who tended to be more positive in their assessment of US foreign policy expressed regret that they had supported the war. Typical negative answers included: destabilization of the region, increase in terrorism and rise of ISIS, destruction of Iraq, loss of human life, and participant 11A wrote, “Significant damage to America’s standing in the Middle East.” A

handful mentioned the cost of the war in terms of American soldiers killed and wounded, or suicides among American soldiers. Three participants (5A, 9A, and 17A) noted a rise in anti-Muslim or anti-Middle Eastern sentiment within the United States because of the war. Participant 28A was the only response that mentioned the negative impact on Iraqi Christians. Participant 12A wrote that he supported the war in 2003, but he now realizes that “removing dictators from the Middle East has led to more instability and suffering.” Participant 9A claims that she supported the war and continues to stand behind her decision. Participant 29A’s response was a little difficult to decipher, but he seems to believe that the United States is more secure now. However, he added the caveat that the war was “too drawn out and lengthy. The US should have [gone] in quickly and taken care of the problems and brought troops back home.” Participant 18A mentioned that “Another event like 9/11 hasn’t happened in the US since then,” as if Iraq had something to do with 9/11.

Middle Eastern responses were almost entirely negative. 73% (11) gave entirely negative answers and the other 27% (4) listed one or two positives along with many negatives. None gave an overall positive response. This is especially significant considering that most of the participants were Christians. One of the positives came from participant 3B, an Iraqi Muslim, who mentioned only “freedom of speech” as a positive. Participant 5B is an Iraqi Shi’ite (a group that was persecuted under Saddam Hussein’s regime, and therefore stood to benefit from the war) who only listed one positive: “The economy became better.” However, he also listed 4 negatives: (1) increase in terror, (2) region-wide chaos, (3) increase in Iranian influence, and (4) hatred between Muslims and Christians as never seen before. Participant 13B, a Jordanian, listed Kurdish independence as a positive and Participant 15B, an Egyptian Christian, wrote that overthrowing Saddam Hussein was a positive. Negative responses were abundant, and

sometimes lengthy. Participant 1A, a Christian, wrote, “greater resistance to America and to the Gospel.” Participant 2B’s only answer was: “Iraq destroyed.” Contradicting the response from the Iraqi above who claimed that the economy became better, several specifically mentioned the destruction of the Iraqi economy and widespread poverty. Participant 7B, a Lebanese Christian, mentioned the torture of Iraqi people. Participant 8B, a Yemeni Muslim, and Participant 11B, a Lebanese-Palestinian Christian, both mentioned Iraqi deaths in the millions. Participant 12B, an Arab Christian, wrote, “The Christian community of Iraq is wiped out!”

Concerning American Evangelicals who served in the Middle East, 69% (11) gave primarily negative responses, 6% (1) gave a positive response, and the remaining 25% (4) gave balanced or neutral responses, including one who did not answer. The only positive response, Participant 2C, mentioned “less persecution and abuse, a better infrastructure, a stable government representing each group, a safe country with tourism, and genuine freedom of religion.” Some of the participants who gave overall neutral answers mentioned as positives the downfall of Saddam Hussein, some improvement in freedom, and security for Kurds. However, the negatives far outweigh the positives. Half of the participants (8) used words like “destabilize,” “instability,” “chaos,” or “power vacuum.” Two specifically mentioned the advantage gained by Iran, resulting in greater rivalry with regional Sunni powers and exacerbating the sectarian conflict in the entire region. Five mentioned the advantages gained by terrorist groups and/or the formation of ISIS. Participant 5C wrote, “The most significant results were the deaths of 150,000-1.2 million (depends on who is counting) people. Any other result pales in comparison to this horrific loss.” Participant 9C, who I labeled as neutral, wrote concerning negatives, “Destabilized the county and caused untold suffering. Unleashed some of the ethnic divisions that had always been held in check by a dictator. Exposed sectarian tensions

that are part of the people of Iraq.” Participant 14C wrote, “I think it was a terrible decision that gave little thought to long-term feasibility without broad and strong international coalition. It became a lightning rod for extremists and a full-fledged disaster for long term American interests around the world.” Participant 1C, a church planter who served in Lebanon wrote, “I remember being embarrassed and ashamed to answer to all the collateral deaths of innocent bystanders shown on the news in ‘precision attacks’ on behalf of the US.” Participant 4C wrote, “Sadly because of what US has done here, it is very difficult for American citizens to live and serve here.” Participant 10C wrote, “What most Americans do not realize is how the Iraq war actually impacted the people of Iraq and transformed the nation and the people.” Surprisingly, none of the American Evangelical Workers mentioned the suffering of Iraqi Christians.

In summary, all the groups gave an overall negative evaluation of the consequences of the Iraq War, but Middle Eastern responses were the most negative. While American Evangelical responses were generally negative, the brevity, shallowness, and ambiguity of many responses revealed a general lack of understanding of how the war affected Iraqis and the entire region. Of the sixty-one total responses, only two mentioned the impact on Iraqi Christians, which is especially concerning considering 92% (56) of the responses from all questionnaires combined were from Christians or self-described “followers of Jesus” from a Muslim background.

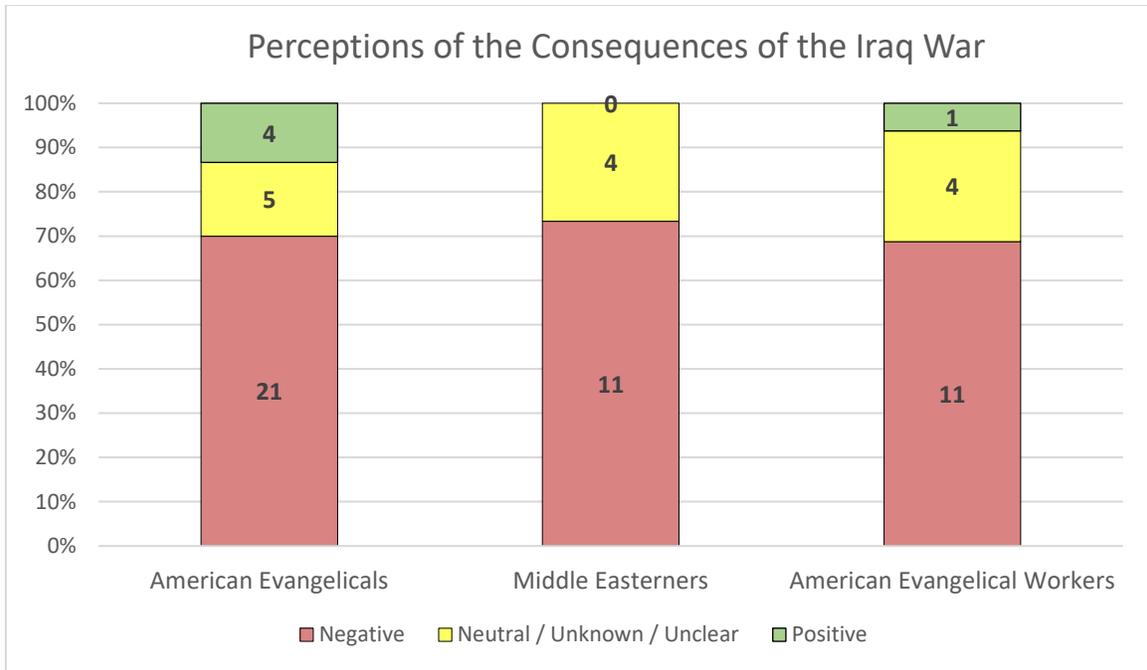


Figure 3: Perceptions of the Consequences of the Iraq War

### 4.3 The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The question concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict revealed the largest difference in perception among the three groups and American Evangelicals gave a wide variety of responses. The question I analyze here asked specifically about how the United States has affected the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, so it does not necessarily tell us whether someone leans toward the Israeli or Palestinian perspective. It will, however, tell us whether people think that the United States has been fair and balanced in their approach to the conflict. Zionists and those strongly sympathetic with Israel are more likely to evaluate the role of the United States positively because there is no mystery that the US has favored Israeli interests. Those who are sympathetic with the Palestinian cause are likely to be disappointed with the contribution of the United States.

I expected American Evangelical responses to be more positive about the role of the United States in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but 40% (12) gave generally negative responses.

Participant 1A wrote, “There’s been a disregard for the displacement and mistreatment of Palestinians.” Participant 21A wrote that the United States “may have increased tensions by other non-Western countries toward Israel and the United States.” Participant 28A’s response was, “Provided arms to Israel and helped in oppression of Palestinians.” Most other negative responses revealed uncertainty and a lack of familiarity with the conflict, but a general understanding that the role of the United States has not been positive. For example, Participant 16A wrote, “I don’t think [the US] has been helpful,” and Participant 17A wrote, “I have heard that we took a role that maybe was not ours to take in this conflict.” Another 43% (13) of American Evangelical responses were generally neutral, unclear, or were not sure how to answer the question. The final 17% (5) gave an overall positive evaluation of the US role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some responses simply claimed that the United States has been an effective mediator, such as Participant 9A, who wrote, “Many US presidents have pursued peace negotiations to help improve relations or accomplish peace between Israel and the Palestinians.” Participant 30A wrote that the US has affected the Israeli-Palestinian conflict “hugely, we’ve really supported Israel, been a sort of big brother to them.” While this answer was a little ambiguous, it conjures up images of a little brother facing bullies on the playground, who needs a big brother to stand up for him. If I understand his answer correctly, the US is the hero of the story.

I expected Middle Eastern responses to give the United States a negative evaluation, but I did not expect it to be so completely negative. 100% of the 15 Middle Eastern responses were overall negative about the role of the US in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with one possible exception. Participant 7B came close to being neutral because he admitted that the US has positively affected the conflict at certain points in its history, but he said that “the relationship

has been biased toward Israel specifically after 2001.” Typical negative responses are: “America is not an honest broker but is biased toward Israel” (1B), “Prioritizing security and prosperity of Israel, at any cost to Palestinians...The US unashamedly supports the illegal occupation of Palestine and Israeli settlements. This empowered Israelis and antagonized Palestinians. Successive US administrations submit to pressure from Israel lobby in ways that hurt America's national interest” (11B), “absolutely negative” (12B), and “the US has been turning a blind eye to Palestinian reality in favor of the Israeli one” (15B). All the quotes given here are from Christian participants. Many American Evangelicals would claim that anti-Semitism is inherent to Islam, and therefore Islamic teaching is the reason behind such a negative evaluation of America's support for Israel. However, the Middle Eastern Christians seemed to give the most negative and critical responses. We can conclude from this that Islamic anti-Semitism, if there is such a thing, is not the primary reason behind such widespread frustration with the US' role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

American Evangelicals who served in the Middle East also gave almost entirely negative responses to this question, revealing a difference between Americans who have served in the region (Workers) and those who have not. Another significant difference between Americans who served in the region and those who have not is the depth of their answers. Workers' answers were specific and revealed an understanding of the history and current struggles of the region. Participant 2C, who served more than 20 years in the Middle East wrote, “They have struggled to be balanced as Israel has pressed for a one-sided support. They have not been successful in stopping killing by either side, or getting Israel to consider the rights and needs of the Palestinians.” Participant 7C wrote, “It has negatively affected and propagated the conflict by their backing and involvement.” Participant 10C wrote, “The U.S. has enabled and empowered

Israel to do anything and everything to protect their own interests and claims of sovereignty, providing cover and support for Israel. The U.S. has prevented other parties (the U.N.) from advocating for the Palestinian side. The U.S. has at times exacerbated the conflict through clear one-sidedness in the conflict. The U.S. has also contributed to anti-Palestinian racism and discrimination.” Participant 11C wrote simply, “Made life worse for Palestinians.” Participant 9C, another with 20+ years of service in the Middle East, wrote, “Very seldom has the US had a balanced view of the reality and impact of US policy in this particular conflict.” Participant 14C, a younger church planter serving in Lebanon, gave the only positive response, “I think the US has probably helped in keeping some hope alive of a future solution. Without the US supporting Israel and also keeping Israel from routing Palestine, I feel unsure what the region would look like.” Even within this one positive response, there was an admission that the United States is protecting Palestinians from further Israeli aggression, not exactly shedding a positive light on Israel.

To summarize this part of the questionnaire, American Evangelicals who have not served in the Middle East have a more positive perception of how the United States has affected the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Middle Eastern responses, as well as American Workers, gave almost entirely negative responses. The responses of the second and third groups, who are more familiar with the region, show that the United States has not been an honest broker, and that its policies toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have negatively affected its reputation in the Middle East. We can be certain that this is not the result of Islamic anti-Semitism because 84% (26/31) of the responses from those two groups combined were Christians.

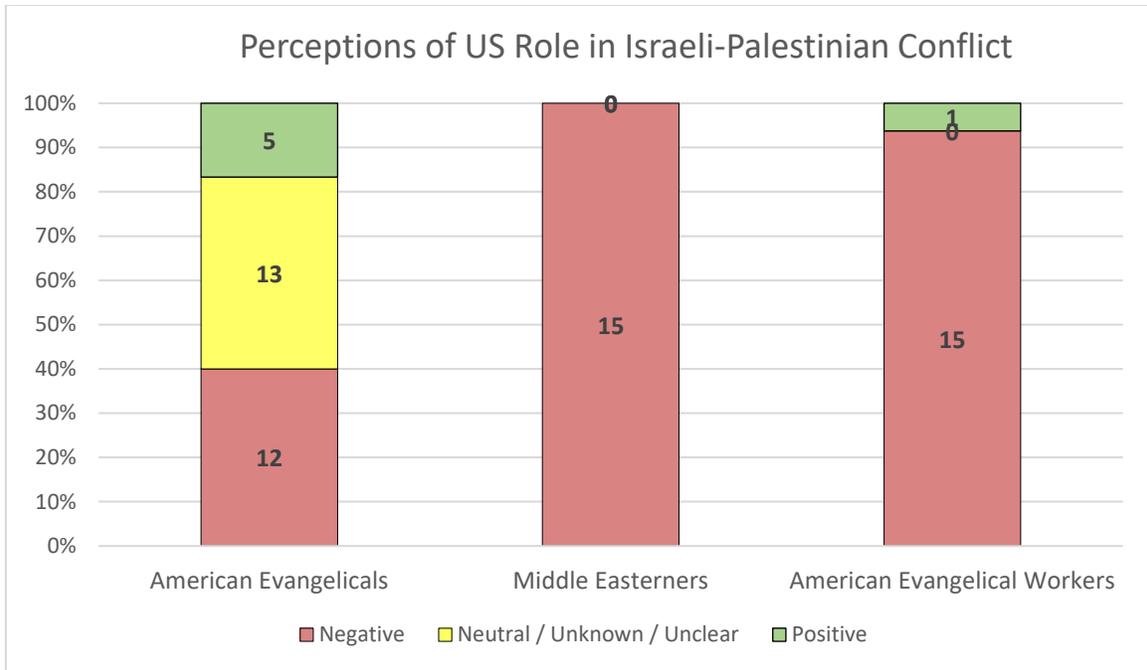


Figure 4: Perceptions of US Role in Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

#### 4.4 US-Saudi Relationship

Participants were asked how the US-Saudi relationship has affected the Middle East region. In the next section, I will analyze the US-Iranian relationship. I expected that responses to these questions would largely correspond with each other. Those who view the US-Saudi relationship positively will blame Iran for US-Iranian hostility, and those who evaluate the US-Saudi relationship negatively would blame the US for US-Iranian hostility. In other words, positive perceptions of Saudi Arabia should have an inverse relationship to positive perceptions of Iran. However, participants' responses were far more complex and nuanced than I expected, and it is difficult to identify any clear correlation between responses to the two questions.

Concerning the effects of the US-Saudi relationship, American Evangelicals were mostly unsure how to answer the question or could only give vague answers. 57% (17) gave answers that I consider to be neutral. Ten of them plainly stated that they did not know how to answer the

question. Other Neutral answers mentioned the economic relationship founded on oil, without making a positive or negative evaluation. 17% (5) gave positive evaluations of the US-Saudi relationship. Three of them used the word “stability” to describe a positive effect of the relationship. Three also mentioned that this relationship keeps Iran in check. Participant 24A wrote that “it has brought about an opening of UAE with Israel which is good for everyone (except Iran).” I found it interesting that this participant looked at the Israel-UAE agreement in light of its impact on Iran, rather than its impact on Palestinians. It is very typical for American Evangelicals to focus too narrowly on Iran and to fail to understand that this agreement is intended to hinder Palestinians aspirations for statehood. 27% (8) of participants evaluated the effects of the US-Saudi relationship negatively. Participant 14A wrote, “The US has continued to ignore controversial actions of Saudi Arabia in order to keep them as an ally for ourselves.” Participant 15A wrote, “The Saudi government is overbearing and tyrannical. It seems random that we have chosen to overlook it both in politics and the media.” Participant 19A wrote, “It has neglected human rights issues and other issues in favor for maintaining a peaceful and economical reciprocal relationship.”

Middle Easterners were more negative in their evaluation of the US-Saudi relationship, with 87% (13) giving overall negative answers. Concerning the Israeli-UAE agreement mentioned above, one Arab Christian (1B) also saw the connection to the US-Saudi relationship, but instead of mentioning its impact on Iran, he wrote, “Palestinians see the normalization of relationship of Israel with UAE as treason.” Participant 4B wrote, “KSA is one of the worst countries in human rights violations, yet the US does nothing to influence them to stop.” Participant 5B wrote, “it affected the region in a very bad way, the US sold weapons to KSA in billions of dollars since the 70s until now and by supporting Saudi strict terrorism doctrine that

ended up with many terrorist acts and violation to human rights in the world such as 9/11.”

Participant 12B also mentioned the spread of Wahhabism and anti-Christian sentiment by Saudi Arabia. Participant 10B wrote, “The US has disregarded Saudi support of Islamist extremism for the benefits of its own foreign policy interests. Israel and the control of oil fields are at the center of all US foreign policy.” Participant 13B made the keen observation that “the US has used [Saudi Arabia’s] money and influence to pressure other nations to act in a way against their wills or their citizens.” In other words, the US is pressuring countries to act undemocratically. No Middle Eastern participants gave positive answers, and 13% (2) gave neutral answers, with one of them admitting that he did not know how to answer the question. Participant 15B, the other neutral response, mentioned that the effect has been “ambiguous.” On the positive side, he claims that there is some evidence that Saudi is turning away from traditional Wahhabism, but on the negative side, it is happening by way of “despotism and dictatorship.”

American Evangelical Workers’ responses were similar to Middle Eastern responses. 69% (11) gave overall negative evaluations of the effects of the US-Saudi relationship. Five responses mentioned the spread of Wahhabism, Islamic fundamentalism, or terrorism because the US has been unwilling to confront Saudi Arabia. Four mentioned that the US has helped Saudi Arabia to deepen sectarian conflict in the region. Four mentioned Saudi Arabia’s poor record on human rights and other moral issues, which the United States has largely overlooked. Concerning the spread of Wahhabism/fundamentalism/terrorism, Participant 5C wrote, “It has fundamentally furthered the reach and ‘legitimacy’ of Wahhabi Islam...extending its reach far further and more effectively than it could have done on its own.” Participant 8C responded that “Saudi Arabia has continued to send out fundamentalist Islamic teachers throughout the world.” Participant 13C wrote that the US-Saudi relationship “provides a safe place for Wahhabi

extremism to grow.” Concerning sectarian conflict, Participant 4C said that “it worsens the tension between Sunni and Shia and sectarian conflicts. Yemen is one example.” Participant 9C also mentioned Yemen, “Too often the US has turned a blind eye to Saudi actions (like the Yemen War) in order to placate the leadership.” Participant 10C mentioned the differences between the Obama and Trump presidencies regarding the Saudi-Iran proxy war, and said that Trump’s move toward Saudi Arabia “has really created this very clear divide/cold war between U.S./Saudi/Israel and Iran/Iran-backed groups.” Concerning human rights, Participant 2C wrote, “Political and economic decisions have dominated, affecting our taking a strong stand on issues like freedom of religion and women's rights.” Participant 3C wrote, “Our government’s support of the Saudis seems to undercut any opportunity to be a moral example in the world. It's hypocrisy and our Muslim friends can see it.” No Workers gave an overall positive assessment of the US-Saudi relationship and the remaining 32% (5) gave neutral answers. Participant 14C wrote that the relationship has been a stabilizing influence, although it has had a negative impact on democracy-promotion. The other four gave mostly ambiguous answers or did not answer at all.

In summary, American Evangelicals are largely ignorant of the consequences of the US-Saudi relationship on the Middle East region. Middle Eastern and Worker responses demonstrated a strongly negative perception of the United States’ tacit support for Saudi Arabia’s actions in the region, particularly regarding Wahhabism, terrorism, sectarian conflict, and human rights.

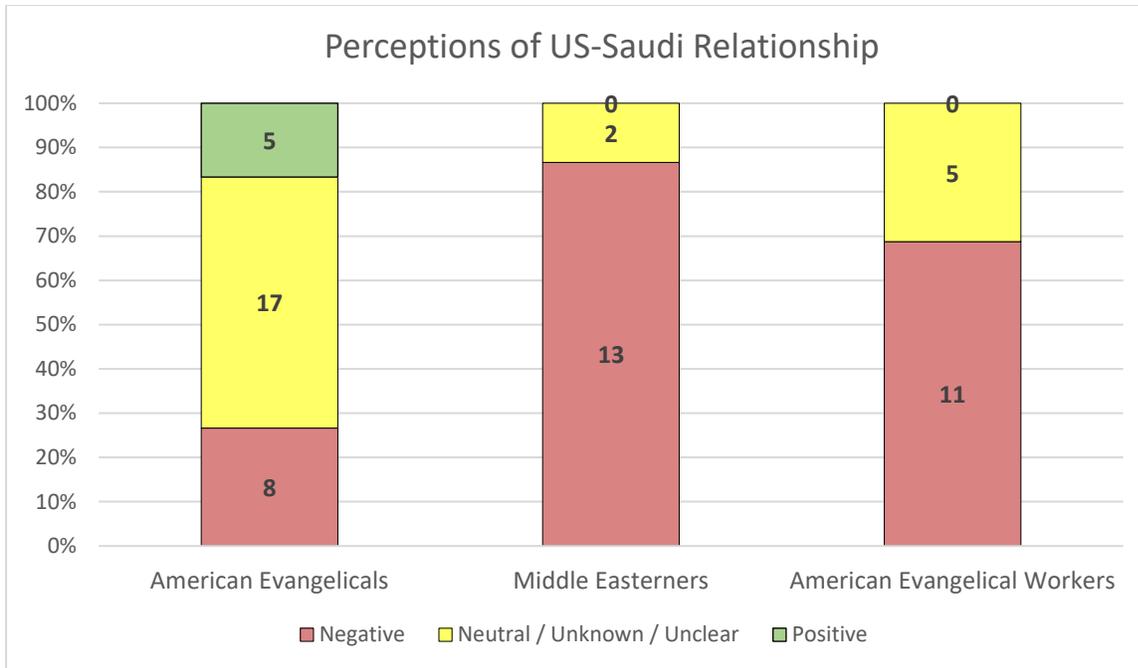


Figure 5: Perceptions of US-Saudi Relationship

#### 4.5 US-Iranian Relationship

The questionnaires asked participants to identify the reason(s) behind US-Iranian hostility in order to identify whether the participant was more sympathetic with the position of the United States or with Iran. In this analysis, I have chosen to categorize responses into three groups: those who view the hostility as Iran’s fault, those who viewed it as the United States’ fault, and those who gave an uncertain or neutral response. To help me place participants in these categories, I utilized the following guideline: when participants identified the hostility beginning in 1953, with the CIA-backed coup to remove a democratically elected leader in Iran, I assumed that they were more sympathetic with the Iranian position and I categorized them as such. However, if they identified the beginning as 1979, with the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis, I assumed that they were more sympathetic with the American position and placed them in that group. Those who mentioned both were placed in the neutral group.

American Evangelicals tended to place blame on Iran as expected, with 47% (14) blaming Iran and only 20% (6) blaming the United States. The remaining 33% (10) were neutral. Six participants specifically mentioned the hostage crisis in 1979. Six also mentioned Iran's connections with terrorism. For example, Participant 12A wrote that Iran is a "sponsor of terrorism" and Participant 18A was uncertain but thought that it had something to do with "radical Islam." Four responses mentioned that cultural values and/or religion are completely incompatible between Iran and the United States. Participant 6A wrote, "Honestly, because their culture seems directly opposite our values," and Participant 7A wrote, "I assume a clash of culture and religion." Interestingly, the same American Evangelicals who mentioned terrorism and/or opposite cultural and religious values as a primary reason behind US-Iranian hostility did not mention these same issues with Saudi Arabia. They seem to believe that Iran and the US are incompatible because of Islam, but they fail to see that the US-Saudi Arabia relationship proves otherwise. Also, Participant 24A mentioned that Iran is "stirring up trouble all over the Middle East," but the only thing he said about Saudi Arabia is that they opened the door for peace between Israel and the UAE. Apparently, he does not believe that Saudi Arabia is also stirring up trouble all over the Middle East. 20% (6) of American Evangelicals believed that fault was more on the side of the United States. Four of those negative responses in addition to two overall neutral responses mentioned the US meddling in Iranian affairs as a reason behind the hostility, including the CIA-backed coup of 1953. Participant 4A wrote, "US meddling in the Middle East for decades including Iran's own government and heads of state." Among the 33% (10) of neutral responses, seven admitting that they did not know how to answer, revealing a high degree of ignorance among American Evangelicals. The other three neutral responses covered a broad range of themes.

Middle Eastern responses to this question were not uniform or consistent, but only two (13%) expressed strong criticism toward Iran without also strongly criticizing the United States. On the opposite end, four (27%) expressed strong criticism toward the United States without also criticizing Iran. The remaining 60% (9) provided overall neutral responses, and some were critical to both the US and Iran. Participant 3B, an Iraqi Muslim, was the most critical of Iran: “The Iranian regime is the fuel of every hostility in the region.” Participant 1B, an Arab Christian wrote about the role of Israel, “Because Israel does not want Iran to have a place at the table in the Middle East.” Participant 15B gave a typical neutral response that was critical of both sides: “Both are trying to control the ME. Israel is at the heart of their interest.”

Among Workers, there was not a strong trend, although overall they placed more blame on Iran. 19% (3) placed more blame on the US. Participant 1C wrote, “Historical interference/meddling by the US in Iranian government and politics,” and Participant 6C wrote, “US tried to control Iranian politics and messed up.” 44% (7) of Workers placed more blame on Iran. Participant 3C wrote, “Mostly because the Iranian regime is bent on evil.” Participant 4C wrote, “I think Iran itself plays a main role on this. This theocracy is justified by anti-America ideology.” The remaining 38% (6) gave neutral responses.

This section on perceptions of US-Iranian hostility was the most difficult section to analyze. My assumption was that Americans would perceive that US hostility against Iran is justified and is largely due to Iran’s violent actions and ambitions. I also assumed that Middle Easterners and Workers would view Iran more favorably and would think that US policies against Iran have been mostly to blame for the hostilities. While this assumption proved slightly true for American Evangelicals and Middle Easterners, Workers leaned more heavily toward blaming Iran. Middle Eastern responses placed twice as much blame on the US, while American

Evangelical and Worker responses placed twice as much blame on Iran. This was the only section of the questionnaire where American Evangelicals did not seem to change their views after serving in the Middle East, even though Middle Eastern views differ.

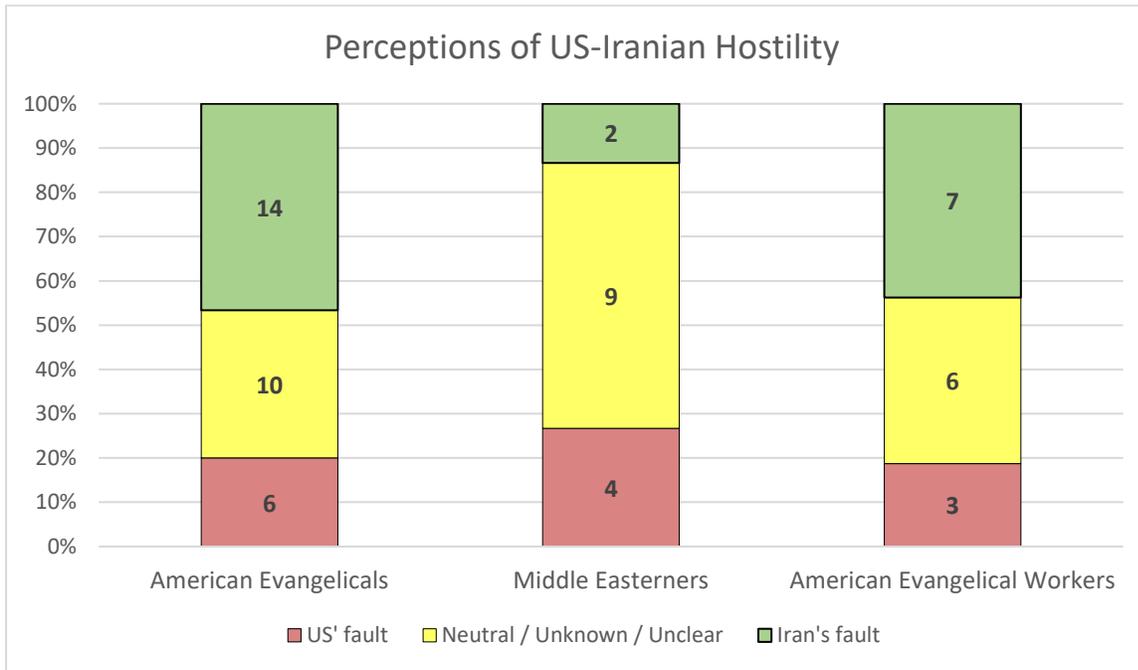


Figure 6: Perceptions of US-Iranian Hostility

#### 4.6 US Reputation in the Middle East

When asked, “How have the United States’ policies affected its reputation in the Middle East,” all three groups gave about the same proportion of responses, with about two-thirds answering negatively and the remaining third giving neutral answers. None of the responses were positive overall. One American Evangelical response (6A) seems to admit that US policies have damaged its reputation, but attempts to exonerate the US by claiming that, “they would hate us no matter what.” In personal conversations with American Evangelicals, I have encountered this perspective many times, that “they will hate us no matter what we do.” The problem with this view is that history does not agree. As mentioned in Chapter 3 above, there was a time when

Middle Eastern people loved the United States of America until certain policies throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century damaged America's reputation. A Lebanese Christian (7B) said, "Foreign policy is quite negative, while education and aid is positive." Participant 13C wrote "I very rarely meet someone who has a positive view of the US government. On the whole, I think it has not universally affected the reputation of American individuals, but certainly has caused anti-American opinions among a section of the population. The US is seen as almost completely driven by nationalistic economic interests." Many responses specifically mentioned the centrality of Israel. Participant 2C, a Worker who spent more than 20 years in the Middle East, wrote, "By overly supporting one small country in the region which affects their relationships with all the others, the US is seen as biased." Participant 10C, who served in Iraq, wrote, "The U.S.'s support of Israel and its invasion of Iraq have made the U.S. have an extremely low reputation of the majority of Arabs in the Middle East." Participant 4B, a Lebanese Christian, wrote, "In general it has been negative, mainly because they have not been an honest broker with the Israeli and Palestinian conflict."

It seems clear that all three groups acknowledge that the United States has a reputation problem in the Middle East. It has pursued policies that have done much damage to its own reputation. I was surprised by the degree to which American Evangelicals were aware of this problem and I am curious to what degree they believe that American policies should change.

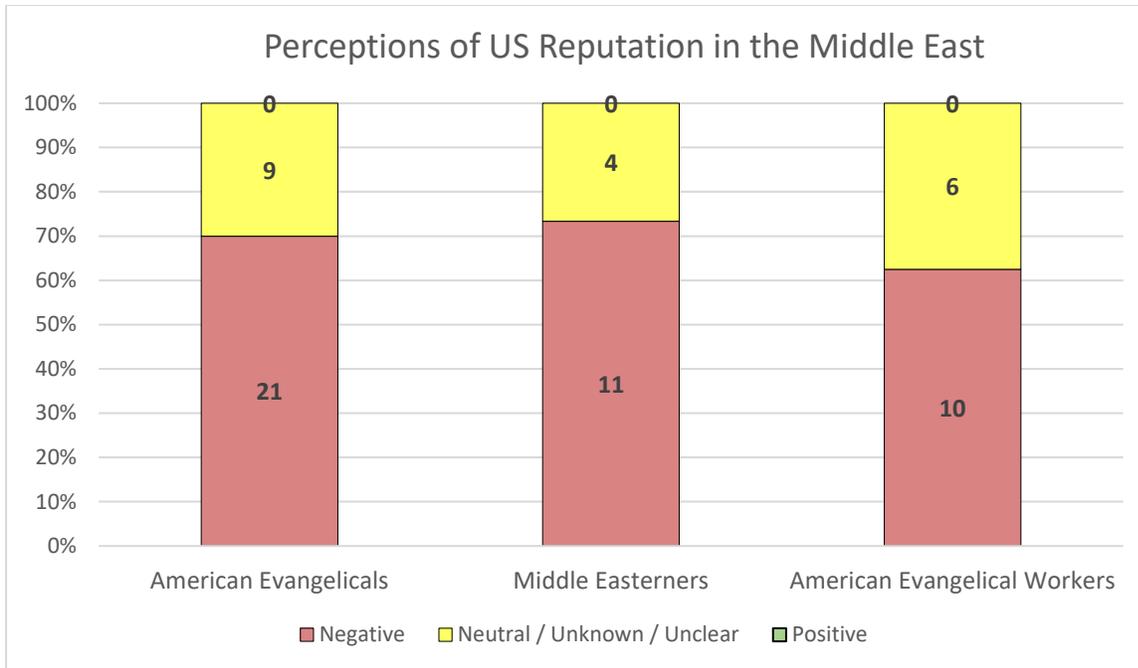


Figure 7: Perceptions of US Reputation in the Middle East

#### 4.7 Contribution of American Evangelical Christians

Participants were asked to describe the contribution of American Evangelicals to US foreign policy. Responses were diverse enough that it will not be possible to graph them. 40% of American Evangelicals, 40% of Middle Easterners, and 75% of Workers specifically mentioned support for Israel as one of the biggest contributions of American Evangelicals to US foreign policy in the Middle East. This was by far the most common answer and seems to align with what we see historically. Concerning Israel, Participant 20A wrote, “Seems to love Israel and does everything for Israel’s benefit without listening to how it affects others.” Participant 1B wrote, “Greater resistance to the Gospel because in the minds of most Muslims Christ is wrapped with a bias towards Israel.” Participant 14C wrote, “I think it has historically given blind allegiance to Israel and assumed Israel’s God given right to their land and led the government to be too one-sided in the conflict for the sake of political expediency.”

Participant 14A wrote about nationalism, “American Evangelicals have repeatedly ignored injustices done by the US as long as we get what we need/want in our lives. Evangelicals, in my experience, fall quickly into nationalism and consistently vote for candidates who “care” so much for the US that they ignore and perpetuate injustices in other countries.” I found the Middle Eastern responses to be very insightful. Participant 7B, a Lebanese Christian, gave a more positive answer: “It is mostly positive with education (AUB), medicine and faith sectors.” Some of the more negative Middle Eastern responses include: “Negative influence. They supported the government in destroying the Middle East” (2B), “They have blindly supported right-wing policies and believed the lies of US administrations with total disregard for biblical values and the teaching of Jesus” (10B), “It hurts the Gospel as it doesn’t speak justice to issues in the MENA region” (12B), and Participant 14B, a Palestinian Christian, wrote simply, “horrendous.”

While there were some responses that describe the role of American Evangelicals in a positive light, including the work of education, medicine, and church planting, most viewed the political actions of American Evangelicals negatively. The primary exception was the American Evangelical participants who believe that supporting Israel should be a priority for US Foreign Policy. For these, American Evangelical support and advocacy for Israel was seen in a positive light. This brings us to our last section of the questionnaire.

#### 4.8 Priorities that should guide US policies in the Middle East

Participants were asked, “In your opinion, what priorities should guide the United States' policies in the Middle East? Why?” Answers covered a broad range of priorities. Among American Evangelical responses, three (10%) said that support for Israel should be a priority. Participant

26A gave a typical Christian Zionist response, “we should always support Israel, since they are God’s chosen country.” Other answers involve economic development, stability, nuclear non-proliferation, and peacemaking. Participant 17A wrote, “there should be a priority to reconcile and break down any divisions that have been created up until this point.” Participant 20A wrote, “Compassion for civilians who have been affected by war. Care for the most vulnerable.” Participant 19A suggested that the US can bring “stability through economic development.” Participant 29A emphasized the importance of foreign trade: “Foreign Trade should be the biggest priority, we should have good relations and trade policies, we shouldn't worry about fighting political or religious wars with a country that far away.”

Middle Eastern responses were not significantly different and also covered a broad range of themes. Two words that came up many times were “peace” and “justice.” Participant 1B wrote, “Justice + America should be an unbiased referee who is a peace maker.” Participant 13B wrote, “Seeking peace and justice, balanced relationships with the region’s states. Form alliance that helps the stability of the region.” Participant 10B gave perhaps the most insightful response, “US policies in the Middle East should be driven by real principles of justice. It should look beyond (without necessarily ignoring completely) its primary economic interests and its support for the wellbeing of Israel. US economic interests are legitimate and understandable, and its desire to protect Israel against aggression is acceptable, but this cannot be at the expense of justice and equal measure for other Arab and ME nations. What is required of the US is fairness and a balanced approach to all ME players.” Participant 6B wrote, “I think they just need to care about economic relations.” Middle Eastern responses to this question, when considered alongside their responses regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, make it clear that pursuing “peace” and

“justice” in the Middle East would certainly involve changing the US’ approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and taking Palestinian grievances seriously.

American Workers also emphasized “peace” and “justice.” None of their responses mentioned supporting Israel while two mentioned the importance of resolving the Palestinian struggle for statehood. Participant 1C gave a detailed and lengthy response, “Economic development, job creation, education, refugee relief - all in a framework on level partnership, done in a way that preserves and builds honor and respectful/trusted relationship. The US has tinkered in such a way that all the benefits flow to America, while neglecting the well-being of the inhabitants of the area. Yes, the US should work for the benefit of a better lifestyle for Americans, but not at the expense of others. Respond thoughtfully in a way that creates win/win situations that are cooperative. So far, the sense of the situation is more akin to rape.” Participant 13C specifically rejected a fixation on end times prophecy: “Peace, protection of vulnerable peoples, promotion of self-determination...Current foreign policy makes my job harder. *God doesn't need our help ushering in the end times regardless of what we believe about them*” (emphasis mine). Participant 6C expressed pessimism, “There’s no easy way for the policeman to put his gun down and back out of a building of enemies. I don’t know where we go from here.” Participant 8C also feels rather pessimistic, “I have no idea because I see problems with all the options.” Participant 16C, who spent more than 20 years in the Middle East, gave a more relational response, “Listen deeply to the peoples’ vision for their future.”

#### 4.9 Conclusion

In this fourth chapter we explored questionnaire results from American Evangelicals, Middle Easterners, and other American Evangelicals who served in Christian ministry in the Middle

East. We noticed among American Evangelicals who did not serve in the region a difference in perception from the other groups, especially concerning US support for Israel, but also regarding the US relationship with Saudi Arabia. In the next chapter, we will explore some of the reasons why these perceptions exist, which are deeply rooted at the levels of values, beliefs, and worldviews.

## 5 Common American Evangelical Blind Spots

### 5.1 Premillennial Dispensationalism & Christian Zionism

The most significant contribution of American Evangelicals to US Foreign Policy regards its support of Israel and opposition to Palestinian rights. I have already made the case that the United States' role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been ineffective and even counterproductive in resolving the crisis, with the United States acting as "Israel's lawyer,"<sup>144</sup> rather than acting as an unbiased mediator. Christian Zionists are not the only reason that the US supports Israel so strongly and unconditionally, but according to Lee Marsden "Although Christian Zionist support is not a necessary condition for US support for Israel, it helps create the conditions that preclude a peaceful resolution of conflict and even incites such conflict in a way that is detrimental to the interests of both the United States and Israel."<sup>145</sup>

Some historians trace the beginnings of Christian Zionism to John Nelson Darby (1800-81) and the Plymouth Brethren. According to Colin Chapman, however, Darby was merely building on the foundations of Restorationism. Going back at least to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, as more and more Christians in Europe started reading the Bible for themselves, "they began to believe that prophecies of the restoration of Israel and a return to the land would one day be fulfilled literally."<sup>146</sup> Darby took it a step further by developing a theological system called dispensationalism, which influenced American revivalist preachers such as D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and Cyrus Schofield. Schofield's Reference Bible then became "the main vehicle

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<sup>144</sup> Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, xxxvi.

<sup>145</sup> Marsden, *For God's Sake*, 167.

<sup>146</sup> Collin Chapman, *Christian Zionism and the Restoration of Israel: How Should We Interpret the Scriptures?* (Eugene: Cascade, 2021).

for disseminating Darby's interpretation of the Bible and contributed to the ascendancy of Christian Zionism within the movement."<sup>147</sup>

Premillennial Dispensationalist interpretations of the Bible were also widely disseminated through Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), which has sold over 47 million copies,<sup>148</sup> and the *Left Behind* series, by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, which tells the story of the end times in a series of novels, according to the premillennialist perspective, and sold over 70 million copies.<sup>149</sup> Also, Timothy Weber pointed out that Christian Zionists have not just supported the Israeli government generally, but they have specifically aligned with the most radical and anti-peace elements within Israeli politics, including those who want to destroy the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount in order to make way for the third temple.<sup>150</sup> Christian Zionists also provide substantial support to Israeli politicians who are the least likely to pursue a peaceful settlement to the conflict and the most likely to use violence against Palestinian civilians, like Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu. In other words, Christian Zionists are working against peace and are pushing for continual injustice and violence for the foreseeable future.

There are many theological problems with Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism, but I lack the space needed to make a thorough biblical critique. Fortunately, many have already done so, including Gary Burge,<sup>151</sup> Colin Chapman,<sup>152</sup> Munther Isaac,<sup>153</sup> and many others. However, I would like to make one point briefly.

Timothy Weber wrote,

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<sup>147</sup> Marsden, *For God's Sake*, 179.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>150</sup> Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 249-250.

<sup>151</sup> Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise?*

<sup>152</sup> Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?*

<sup>153</sup> Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall*.

“Dispensationalism has effectively conditioned millions of Americans to be somewhat passive about the future and provided them with lenses through which to understand the course of world events... Striving for peace in the Middle East in other words, is a hopeless pursuit with no chance of success.”<sup>154</sup>

While making peace and promoting justice should be considered high priorities for Christians, many American Evangelicals toss those values aside regarding the Middle East because of their eschatology, even if they do so subconsciously. To the degree that they have hindered peace in the Middle East, their expectation of continual conflict is a self-fulfilling prophecy. We should be alarmed by the ease with which Biblical ethics could be completely disregarded. Even if dispensational interpretations regarding the end times and the Middle East were true, and everything comes to pass exactly as they expect, that does not give Christians a free pass to throw away the teachings of Jesus regarding loving neighbors,<sup>155</sup> loving enemies,<sup>156</sup> treating others as you want to be treated,<sup>157</sup> making peace,<sup>158</sup> caring for those in need,<sup>159</sup> and making disciples of all nations,<sup>160</sup> just to name a few. In fact, it is difficult to find any clear commands from Jesus or the apostles regarding prophetic end times scenarios, except for the general commands to “stay awake”<sup>161</sup> or to “endure to the end.”<sup>162</sup> The only time that followers of Christ are commanded to do anything to speed up the second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:14) has nothing to do with Israel and everything to do proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom among the nations.

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<sup>154</sup> Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 266.

<sup>155</sup> Luke 10:25-37

<sup>156</sup> Matthew 5:43-47

<sup>157</sup> Luke 6:31

<sup>158</sup> Matthew 5:9

<sup>159</sup> Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>160</sup> Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>161</sup> Matthew 24:42

<sup>162</sup> Matthew 24:13

In conclusion, the New Testament consistently emphasizes: (1) a high standard of ethics – including loving enemies, making peace, and caring for those in need – with no exceptions, and (2) the urgency of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom among the nations. It does not give any clear commands regarding the Christian’s responsibility to restore Israel or to force end times scenarios to happen. Even if God intends for such end times scenarios to take place, the Christian’s only task is to proclaim the gospel and to display the character of God through practicing biblical ethics.

Mark Amstutz claims that Dispensationalism has had a negligible impact on US support for Israel because Dispensationalists are few in number,<sup>163</sup> but he fails to appreciate the far-reaching influence of such Premillennial Dispensationalists and their writings, which extend far beyond the boundaries of Dispensationalism. For example, I grew up reading the children’s version of the *Left Behind* series, and other members of my family read the adult version, even though we did not consider ourselves Dispensationalists. I assumed that *Left Behind* was the only biblical interpretation of the end times, and I was not even aware that other interpretations existed. However, despite the problems with Amstutz’s claim, it does have an element of truth to it, and for that reason critiquing the theological flaws of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism is not adequate. From my personal experience, it seems that many Evangelicals, even those who reject the theology of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism, still tend to support controversial Israeli policies for other non-theological reasons.

Perhaps the greatest non-theological reason behind American Evangelical support for Israel is the widely accepted narrative that Israel is a weak and victimized nation amidst a region swarming with anti-Semitic terrorists who are eager to drive all Jews into the sea, and therefore

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<sup>163</sup> Amstutz, *Evangelicals and American Foreign Policy*, 6.

the US needs to be a big brother and defend them. While there are certainly many who want to destroy Israel, historical context is completely missing from this narrative. First, Israel is not weak, but has the strongest military in the region. Even without its hundreds of nuclear warheads, the Israeli Defense Forces could easily defeat almost any combination of Middle Eastern nations. Even in 1948, in Israel's so-called War of Independence, "the IDF significantly outnumbered all the Arab forces arrayed against it, and by the final stage of the war its superiority ratio was nearly two to one."<sup>164</sup> For this reason, Israel has never really needed help from the United States for its self-defense, and especially since the Six Day War. Second, while Jews have been persecuted frequently throughout their history, and episodes of anti-Semitic violence like the Holocaust were horrific crimes against the Jewish people, it does not follow that Jews are also victimized in the same way and for the same reasons by Palestinians, nor does it give Israelis the right to persecute Palestinians. In the current arrangement, Palestinians are the victims of an intentional process that seeks to rob them of their heritage and deprive them of national aspirations. Despite this, many American Evangelicals continue to use the narrative of Jewish victimization to justify Israeli policies against Palestinians. Third, anti-Israeli sentiment in the region, and even anti-Semitism, is largely a result of the victimization of Palestinians just described. Therefore, the best way to reduce the demand for violence against Israel is for Israel to treat Palestinians humanely, to end illegal confiscation of Palestinian land and the building of illegal settlements, to end random acts of violence against Palestinians, and to create viable solutions that would resolve Palestinian statelessness and depravity.

A second widespread belief is that Israel and the United States have a lot in common as Western neoliberal democracies. While there certainly are many similarities between the US and

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<sup>164</sup> Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 37.

Israel culturally and politically, it is hard to see how someone can claim that Israel is a democracy when it discriminates against non-Jews and places many Palestinians under military occupation to solve its “demographic problem.” Not only is this undemocratic, but it is also clearly racist. A country that intentionally engineers its demographics so that a certain religious and ethnic community maintains political dominance is not a democracy.

A third widespread belief is that Israel is a strategic ally of the United States. This perspective has been thoroughly debunked by Mearsheimer and Walt,<sup>165</sup> who demonstrate that Israel is more often a liability to the United States than a strategic asset. Even in key moments when the United States could use a strong ally in the region, such as the Gulf War of 1991, the US had no choice but to ask Israel to stay out of the conflict because Israel’s involvement would have greatly hindered the US’ ability to build a coalition with Arab nations. So, it appears that theological and non-theological reasons for unconditionally supporting Israel have converged to create a situation wherein Evangelicals have lost their prophetic voice on behalf of beleaguered Palestinians and stand with the oppressor instead of the oppressed.

One more point needs to be made in conclusion. Weber wrote, “Probably the greatest irony concerning dispensationalists’ involvement in the religious life of Israel is their lack of interest in the largest group of believers in Israel and the West Bank, the Palestinian Christians.”<sup>166</sup> Unfortunately, many American Evangelicals travel to Israel and tour historic sites, but they fail to realize that the most beautiful and miraculous thing that God has done in Israel-Palestine is not Israel but the Church, through whom “the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:10). Brother Andrew, famous for smuggling Bibles into the Soviet Union, later spent time in the Middle East

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<sup>165</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, ch 2.

<sup>166</sup> Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 246.

and wrote about his experience: “It bothers me that millions of Christian tourists come every year from Western Europe and from America to see dead stones. I want to see the living stones.”<sup>167</sup> Palestinian Christians “wonder why evangelical tours treat Palestinian Christian communities...like museums of ancient Christianity rather than living religious communities with their own important stories to tell. Why would evangelical tour groups prefer to hear from Israeli generals than fellow Christians who are suffering?”<sup>168</sup> American Evangelicals’ fascination with Israel and with a certain interpretation of prophecy has blinded them to the beauty of the Church (the living stones) and the suffering of their own brothers and sisters in Christ. Munther Isaac, a leading Palestinian Evangelical, wrote,

“When it comes to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the international community, and to a large extent, the global church, are part of the conflict. They are not innocent, neutral bystanders. In fact, I wish they were. From the point of view of Palestinian Christians, the global church has been part of the problem and have over the years made things worse for Palestinian Christians.”<sup>169</sup>

In other words, American Evangelicals are directly assisting in the destruction of Christianity in the very place where it was born.

## 5.2 Racism & Islamophobia

I once believed that racism was largely dead in America. However, the racial tensions in the United States in recent years have helped many Americans like me to realize that racism is alive and well. Despite the persistence of racism in the United States, we can be grateful that racial prejudice against African Americans, as well as other groups, is considered wrong by most of

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<sup>167</sup> Brother Andrew and Al Janssen, *Light Force: A Stirring Account of the Church Caught in the Middle East Crossfire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2005), 109.

<sup>168</sup> Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 247.

<sup>169</sup> Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall*, 221.

American society, even by many who inadvertently perpetuate racist views. In contrast, prejudice against Islamic identity or Middle Eastern ethnicity is still widespread and largely acceptable in much of the United States, and is still preached from many pulpits across the country. This was on full display following the 9/11 attacks, when Muslims, and others who were misidentified as Muslims,<sup>170</sup> experienced anti-Islamic hate crimes as never before seen in America.<sup>171</sup> In more recent years, political figures like President Donald Trump capitalized on the widespread fear of Muslims and Arabs, even spreading false rumors about them celebrating in New Jersey as the Twin Towers fell,<sup>172</sup> and promising to ban all Muslims from the entering the country.<sup>173</sup> As a result, anti-Muslim hate crimes during Trump's presidential campaign in 2016 surpassed those of 2001.<sup>174</sup> Even Muslims who are born and raised in the United States sometimes experience unnecessary and discriminatory treatment at American airports.<sup>175</sup> The Pew Research Center found that 76% of White Evangelicals in 2017 supported Trump's travel ban, a higher percentage than any other religious group surveyed.<sup>176</sup> Therefore, before pointing the finger at anyone else, we must acknowledge that America's problems with Islamophobia and racism against Middle Eastern ethnicities is a problem within the Evangelical community.

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<sup>170</sup> Haya El Nasser, "Sikh Americans Are Not Muslims, but They Still Suffer from Islamophobia," Al Jazeera America, December 29, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/12/29/sikh-americans-not-muslims-but-suffer-islamophobia.html>.

<sup>171</sup> Katayoun Kishi, "Assaults against Muslims in U.S. Surpass 2001 Level," Pew Research Center, November 15, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/15/assaults-against-muslims-in-u-s-surpass-2001-level/>.

<sup>172</sup> "Donald Trump Again Says He Saw Cheering in New Jersey on 9/11," ABC News, November 22, 2015, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/donald-trump-cheering-jersey-911/story?id=35355447>.

<sup>173</sup> Andrew Rafferty, "Trump Calls for 'Complete Shutdown' of Muslims Entering the U.S.," NBC News, December 7, 2015, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/trump-calls-complete-shutdown-muslims-entering-u-s-n475821>.

<sup>174</sup> Kishi, "Assaults Against Muslims in US Surpass 2001."

<sup>175</sup> "Muhammad Ali's Son Detained at Airport and Asked 'Are You Muslim?'," NBC10 Philadelphia, February 25, 2017, <https://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/national-international/muhammad-alis-son-detained-at-airport-and-asked-are-you-muslim/39106/>.

<sup>176</sup> Gregory A. Smith, "Most White Evangelicals Approve of Trump Refugee Policy, Express Concerns about Extremism," Pew Research Center, February 27, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/27/most-white-evangelicals-approve-of-trump-travel-prohibition-and-express-concerns-about-extremism/>.

Concerning foreign policy, Christian leaders have frequently described American military campaigns in the Middle East as wars of good vs. evil, or of God vs. Satan, as Tim LaHaye and Jerry Falwell did concerning the Iraq War in 2003.<sup>177</sup> The implication is that White Christians, who are predominant in the US military, are on God's side, while brown-skinned Muslim Arabs are on Satan's side. I have personally encountered disturbing racist comments and attitudes from American soldiers toward Iraqi Muslims, even toward those who were pro-American. According to Muami Abu-Jamal, "One need not look far to find a general likening the Iraq war to 'holy war' against 'unbelievers'; or to hear US military members referring to Arabs/Muslims as 'ragheads,' 'hajjis,' or the Reagan-era colloquialism 'sand niggers.'"<sup>178</sup> Also, according to Michael Prysner, an Iraq War veteran, "I began to hear new words like 'towel head,' 'camel jockey' and—the most disturbing—'sand nigger.'...All the way up the chain of command, viciously racist terms were suddenly acceptable."<sup>179</sup> This is concerning for our topic because Evangelicals make up 40% of the US military.<sup>180</sup>

Nazia Kazi points out that the only thing Iraq had to do with 9/11 is that Iraqis and Al Qaeda's hijackers were both Arabs.<sup>181</sup> In other words, it was easy for Americans to be duped into believing that Iraq was somehow behind 9/11 because of their Arab identity and the common perception that Arabs are terrorists, and therefore, there was a racist dimension to the United States' unwarranted invasion of Iraq in 2003. The same could be said for others in the Middle East, like Palestinians and Iranians – subconscious racist and Islamophobic views condition

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<sup>177</sup> Kidd, *American Christians and Islam*, 156.

<sup>178</sup> Stephen Sheehi, *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign against Muslims* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, 2011).

<sup>179</sup> Joseph Kay, "'The Enemy Is the System That Sends Us to War' - Speech by Iraq War Veteran," libcom.org, August 18, 2010, <http://libcom.org/library/enemy-system-sends-us-war-speech-iraq-war-veteran>.

<sup>180</sup> Jeff Brady, "Evangelical Chaplains Test Bounds of Faith in Military," NPR.org, July 27, 2005, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4772331>.

<sup>181</sup> Kazi, *Islamophobia*, loc 1762.

American Evangelicals to view them with suspicion and to be more likely to support violent policies against them.

### 5.3 Christian Nationalism & Militarism

The ideology of Christian Nationalism has been present in the United States of America for a long time, but the presidency of Donald Trump brought it to the front and center of American consciousness. According to Whitehead and Perry,

Christian Nationalism is “a cultural framework— a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems— that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life...the ‘Christianity’ of Christian nationalism represents something more than religion...it includes assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism. It is as ethnic and political as it is religious.”<sup>182</sup>

Also, Whitehead and Perry found in their research that roughly half of American Christians embrace Christian Nationalism to some degree. For this reason, any serious critique on American Evangelical political engagement must consider the effects of Christian Nationalism.

Christian Nationalism is relevant for our topic because it causes Christians to promote warfare and violence as a sacred act of God’s will. Whitehead and Perry point out that many Christian nationalist pastors teach about the sacred nature of giving one’s life to defend the United States, and they draw direct comparisons between the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the sacrifice of military women and men for the nation. “[Christian nationalists] elevate the military and military service to sacred status. There is a powerful link between Christian nationalist beliefs and believing that God’s people must fight wars for good or that truly moral

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<sup>182</sup> Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back for God*, 10.

people must serve in the military.”<sup>183</sup> But what about American soldiers who commit war crimes? What about soldiers who kill innocent people by accident? What about soldiers who participate in unjust and unnecessary wars of choice? What if soldiers fight in a war that contributes to the destruction of a nation’s Christian community, as the 2003 invasion of Iraq did? Is their sacrifice sacred? Is it really sanctioned and blessed by God?

Nationalism is intricately connected with Militarism, which manifests itself in “a romanticized view of soldiers, a tendency to see military power as the truest measure of national greatness, and outsized expectations regarding the efficacy of force.”<sup>184</sup> According to Andrew Bacevich,

“Conservative Christians have conferred a presumptive moral palatability on any occasion on which the United States resorts to force. They have fostered among the legions of believing Americans a predisposition to see U.S. military power as inherently good...In doing so, they have nurtured the preconditions that have enabled the American infatuation with military power to flourish...Put another way, were it not for the support offered by several tens of millions of evangelicals, militarism in this deeply and genuinely religious country becomes inconceivable.”<sup>185</sup>

As previously mentioned, American Evangelicals played a key role in President George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq in 2003, including claims that the war met the qualifications of a “just war” by key Christian leaders. Jack Graham, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention at the time, expressed the typical Christian Nationalist and Militarist view, “This is a war between Christians and the forces of evil.”<sup>186</sup> Had American Evangelicals fulfilled their prophetic role in speaking out against Bush’s desire to use unnecessary violence to wage an unjust war, the war may have never happened, countless millions of lives would have been

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>184</sup> Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, 2.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 145.

saved, and we can only imagine all the second and third-tier consequences that would have never occurred. American Evangelicals' obsession with violence is on display for the world to see and deeply damages the reputation of the Church globally. Their love for guns, their fascination with military power, and their eagerness to utilize the most violent methods to kill their enemies betrays their supposed belief in a savior who chose to submit himself to a gruesome execution to save his enemies.

As a former Christian Nationalist who was obsessed with military power, and as a former officer in the US Army, I personally struggled over these deeply rooted ideologies. As I sought to follow Jesus, he opened my eyes to see how they had deceived me into hating my enemies. For the first time, I was able to truly examine American history, politics, and foreign policy according to biblical values. Only then was I able to embrace an Iraqi pastor and pray for him as he wept and recounted all that he had lost because of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Previously, I would have been too defensive to enter his pain with him. Unfortunately, a sizable portion of American Evangelicalism still embraces Nationalism and Militarism today, which continues to negatively impact how American Evangelicals engage in politics and view the rest of the world.

#### 5.4 Proselytism & Polemics

As an Evangelical, I am strongly in favor of evangelism. However, in this section I will use the word "Proselytism" to criticize an extreme and unhealthy approach to Evangelism, even to the point of utilizing unbiblical and destructive means to achieve evangelistic goals. The World Evangelical Alliance condemned proselytism in this way:

"Proselytism takes place (1) whenever our motives are unworthy (when our concern is for our glory rather than God's), (2) whenever our methods are unworthy (when we resort to any kind of 'physical coercion, moral constraint, or

psychological pressure’), and (3) whenever our message is unworthy (whenever we deliberately misrepresent other people’s beliefs).”<sup>187</sup>

Additionally, the word “polemics” can be used to describe evangelism or apologetics in a way that is aggressive, argumentative, or even hostile.

Unfortunately, many American Evangelicals view the Muslim World primarily as targets for proselytizing activities. They become fixated on numbers of converts and churches planted. While such activities do occasionally lead to legitimate salvations, it often leads to resentment within the Muslim community. They see that missionaries only see them as targets, not as real people to be known. I encountered this recently when I conducted research with Muslim-background believers (MBB). I asked a Saudi Arabian MBB the following question: “If an American Evangelical wanted to go to Saudi Arabia and reach your family, what would you advise them to do?” To my surprise, he answered, “Don’t go to reach them. Go to get to know them.” In my interviews of MBB’s from the Arabian Peninsula, almost all of them mentioned the importance of building relationships founded on love and trust, and how they rarely see these traits among American Evangelicals who are serving among Arab Muslims.

When missionaries take a proselytizing posture, Muslims will often respond with anger and resentment, and the missionary’s worst perceptions of Muslims are only reinforced. The missionary then returns home to the United States and shares with churches and financial supporters negative things about their interactions with Muslims, and the cycle of Islamophobia continues. Fortunately, we are seeing a new trend of Americans who share about Jesus in the Muslim World in a way that is more relational and inviting, with some staggering results.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Warrick Farah, “The Difference Between Proselytism and Evangelism,” *Circumpolar* (blog), December 15, 2010, <https://muslimministry.blogspot.com/2010/12/difference-between-proselytism-and.html>.

<sup>188</sup> Exemplified by individuals like Carl Medearis, Joseph Cumming, and the late Rick Love

I also see a tendency among American Evangelicals to oversimplify or over-spiritualize social, political, and economic problems in the Middle East. In their thinking, the Middle East's problems will go away if they would finally repent and become Christians. While believing in Christ does produce some positive fruit in every sphere of society, the various problems in the Middle East are complex, and external factors play a significant role. Until Evangelicals grasp this complexity and seek deeper understanding, they will not be able to contribute effectively to progress in the region.

### 5.5 Patronage of Christian Minorities

Mark Amstutz pointed out that American Evangelicals first became directly involved in international politics to influence the US government to protect weaker and vulnerable Christian communities in the Middle East during the First World War.<sup>189</sup> I acknowledge the intense persecution Christians face in some countries, and I agree that we should do what we can to assist brothers and sisters who are suffering. However, this patronage can be problematic in some ways, and needs to be balanced with an understanding of how such patronage is perceived by non-Christians. We should also consider the various problems associated with American Evangelicals pushing the US government to champion the causes of the global church.

First, US foreign policy contributes significantly to the suffering of Christians in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Palestine. Therefore, any effort to reduce persecution of Middle Eastern churches cannot be aimed exclusively at Muslim actions against Christians but must also include a critique of US policies. Second, American support for Middle Eastern churches puts those churches in danger. This is part of a historical trend that can be traced back

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<sup>189</sup> Amstutz, *Evangelicals and American Foreign Policy*, 59-60.

to the early centuries of the church when Christians in Persia experienced persecution after Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Rome Empire. Rome then claimed to be a patron and protector to the Christians in Persia and suddenly every Christian in Persia was considered a possible agent of the Roman Empire, which only increased persecution.<sup>190</sup> In the same way, when the United States claims to be the protector of Christian minorities in a country like Iraq, Iraqis that distrust the United States will start viewing Iraqi Christians as agents of the United States.

I offer a few suggestions, in no particular order. First, American Evangelicals should recognize their contribution to persecution, and push for better foreign policy objectives. Second, American Evangelicals should encourage the US government to support all persecuted minorities, not just Christians, but such support should be approached cautiously, to not put those minorities in greater danger. Third, American Evangelicals should also repent of their tendency to persecute religious minorities, especially Muslims, in the United States. Fourth, American Evangelicals should not see the US government as the primary tool to support persecuted Christians but should seek non-political ways to support them as much as possible. Fifth, “rescuing” persecuted Christians is not necessarily the most biblical thing American Evangelicals can do. We tend to think that every Christian should be like us when we often need to be more like them. We also love to solve problems and downplay the importance of relationships. So, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we should do what we can to come alongside them, join them in their struggle, and sit with them and listen, before trying to offer any solutions. Sixth, rather than demonizing their persecutors, we should follow the example of Jesus, who viewed his executioners with compassion and taught us to love our enemies.

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<sup>190</sup> Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (London: Routledge, 2011), 10-11.

## 5.6 Conclusion

American Evangelicals have made significant mistakes in our foreign policy advocacy, but these mistakes were not simply the result of choosing the wrong policies among a list of equally valid options. Rather, many of our worst contributions flow out of theological deficiencies and a failure to grasp the full meaning of the biblical message, as taught by Jesus and demonstrated through his ministry.

## 6 Conclusion

Where do we go from here? While I do not pretend to have the silver bullet to creating real peace and stability in the Middle East, I offer a few concluding recommendations regarding how American Evangelicals can faithfully carry out the mission of God within the political realm of foreign policy. I consider political justice just one dimension of the multi-faceted work of God in the world, but I will only mention other dimensions very briefly. This is not because I view other dimensions as unimportant, but because they are not the focus of this thesis. Correcting mistakes in the political realm should make these other dimensions of mission more fruitful. However, we should not reduce political justice to being merely a means to more fruitful ministry. Justice is important in and of itself because it is on the very heart of God and reflects His just character.

### 6.1 Overcome Ignorance by Learning and Befriending

One of the greatest challenges American Evangelicals face in overcoming our ineffective political approach to the Middle East is that we are largely ignorant of the region and we lack the ability to think critically. According to one survey, 65% of Americans incorrectly identify Iran as an Arab country.<sup>191</sup> This is the equivalent of identifying Germany as an English-speaking country or identifying Canada as a European country. Our questionnaire results in Chapter 4 revealed a sufficiently high degree of ignorance among American Evangelicals regarding the Middle East that it is easy to understand why misperceptions and false theories about the region are so widespread, and why politicians can so easily convince us to buy into their ideologies. How can we possibly inform our political leaders to choose just and appropriate policies if we lack the most basic knowledge of the region? Certainly, this ignorance contributed to Americans

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<sup>191</sup> Zogby, *Arab Voices*, loc 430.

so easily supporting the invasion of Iraq as a response to 9/11. Steven Salaita wrote that one of the greatest skills critical thinking provides “is the ability to recognize bullshit.”<sup>192</sup> Nazia Kazi responds to this statement by writing, “I wonder how a critically thinking America would have responded to all the bullshit they were fed after 9/11.”<sup>193</sup> Despite the crassness of their language, we stand convicted as a demographic that bought into the war hook, line, and sinker.

There are two dimensions to this problem. First, we do not know Middle Eastern people. We do not hear their stories. We do not see their struggle. I believe that most American Evangelicals are genuinely kind and responsive to those they meet, but most of them do not personally know a person from the Middle East. I have met many American Evangelicals who were consumed with fear, or even hatred, until someone from the Middle East became a close friend. To overcome this problem, I suggest either traveling to the Middle East and interacting with locals or finding ways to befriend Middle Eastern people in the United States. Second, our factual knowledge of the region is very weak. We do not know their history, their culture, their languages, or their geography. We do not know the political aspirations of the people and how American policies affect them. While befriendng Middle Eastern people will go a long way in overcoming our ignorance, it would also help to supplement with quality books, articles, documentaries, etc. Refer to my Literature Review above for some ideas.

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<sup>192</sup>Steven Salaita, *Uncivil Rites: Palestine and the Limits of Academic Freedom* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2015), 159.

<sup>193</sup> Kazi, *Islamophobia*, loc 2350

## 6.2 Repent and Reconcile

After we have heard the stories of Middle Eastern friends and learned their history, we will inevitably find ourselves in a position to repent of past mistakes and ideologies. I think we need to be careful not to jump too quickly into solving problems; there is an important intermediate step that should not be skipped or rushed. While many of us may find individual thoughts or actions that require personal repentance, all of us have a role in repenting corporately for the policies promoted and executed by American Evangelicals in the Middle East. According to Soong-Chan Rah, “Spiritual renewal emerges as God’s people engage in a corporate confession of sin, and sincere repentance moves the community toward a changed and renewed life.”<sup>194</sup>

John Dawson, founder of International Reconciliation Coalition wrote, “Even though each person stands alone before God and is in no way guilty for the sins of their ancestors or any other group, God is looking for volunteers who will open themselves to experience godly sorrow and confess the sins of the land. This is where reconciliation begins.”<sup>195</sup> True repentance involves deep remorse over sin, and it would be natural and biblical for such remorse to be accompanied with fasting. According to Scot McKnight, “Fasting is a choice not to eat for a designated period because some moment is so sacred that partaking in food would deface or profane the seriousness of the moment...fasting identifies with how God views a given event; fasting empowers us to empathize with God”<sup>196</sup> Because of the suffering of the weak and vulnerable, and especially children, we can be certain that God looks at the Middle East with grief. Let us join Him in His grief. Repentance also involves a genuine attempt to make things right. Much

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<sup>194</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times*, Resonate Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 130.

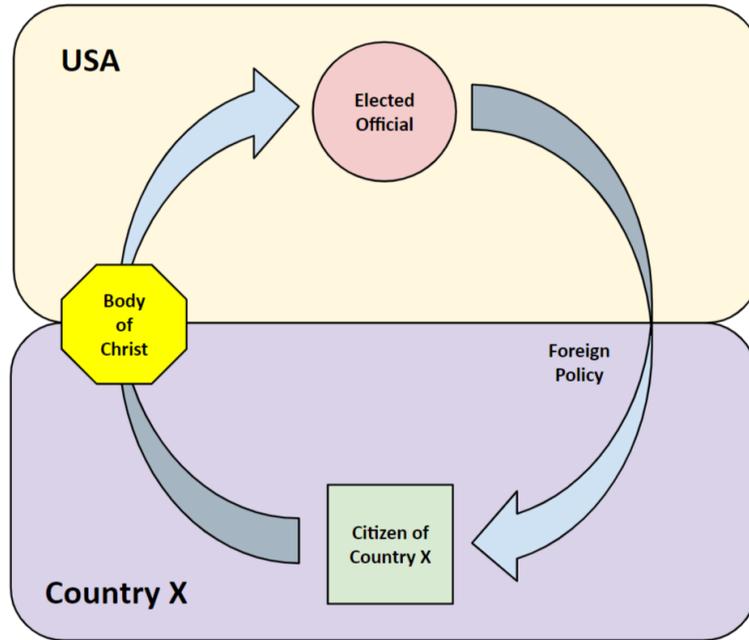
<sup>195</sup> John Dawson, “Healing the Wounds of the World,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009).

<sup>196</sup> Scot McKnight, *Fasting* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 19

that has been done cannot be undone but we must reach out to Middle Eastern communities, seek to reconcile, and do what we can to make restitution for past wrongs. I have personally apologized to many Middle Eastern friends for the pain they experienced because of American policies, and it is usually a very touching and meaningful experience that builds greater trust with them.

### 6.3 Advocate for Just Policies

When we consider those who suffer from US policies, we should remember passages like Psalm 10:17-18 (NIV): “You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.” While it is clear that God cares about those who suffer, what should Christians do about it? The lack of an accountability loop in foreign policy, as described in the Introduction, creates a system where the vulnerable cry out for justice and no one hears them. Proverbs 31:8-9 (NIV) exhorts us to “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” Those who suffer under American policies might have no official voice in the US government, but American Evangelicals can step in and voice their grievances on their behalf. I call this “The Kingdom Accountability Loop” (see Figure 3), because it is a tangible outflow of citizens of God’s Kingdom using their privileges for the sake of others.



*Figure 8: The Kingdom Accountability Loop*

#### 6.4 Work Toward Holistic Transformation

In addition to the important work of political advocacy, there are many opportunities to serve Middle Eastern communities directly to bring real transformation, which can reverse some of the negative effects of US foreign policy. However, I must give a couple caveats. First, as an Evangelical, I believe that true, lasting transformation must include spiritual transformation. However, whatever social good we can do, even when people do not turn to Christ, still pleases God, reflects His character, and proclaims His Kingdom. For this reason, we should always engage in the mission of God holistically, prioritizing temporal transformation (social, economic, political, etc.) and eternal transformation simultaneously. Second, we must be careful to

approach the work of transformation by coming alongside people rather than trying to do all the work ourselves, which could create dependency or deprive them of dignity.<sup>197</sup>

There are many ways to get involved in the work of transformation in the United States by welcoming refugees and other types of Middle Eastern immigrants. Some people help them learn English, others help them start businesses or acquire academic credentials so they can earn a living and take care of their families. Some will mentor or tutor their children. Regardless, the most important thing is for Americans to come alongside them and love them through their difficult transition to life in the United States. There are also many opportunities to work toward transformation in the Middle East by working with humanitarian organizations and development organizations, or through academic work, medical work, or business.

## 6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, American Evangelical Christians, by means of their foreign policy advocacy in Washington D.C. and other forms of international involvement, have contributed to the chaos in today's Middle East. I am not suggesting that this is the only factor contributing to the chaos, or even that it is the primary factor. However, if we are serious about promoting the missional purposes of God among the nations, we need to take seriously our own contribution. We will never see a Utopian Middle East this side of eternity, but our pursuit of justice and righteousness will create signposts that point the nations to the beauty of God's already-but-not-yet Kingdom.

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<sup>197</sup> To learn more, see Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012).

We must take a hard look at our political and theological assumptions about Muslims, prophecy, and the Middle East, acknowledging where our biases have deceived us into contributing to injustice. We should repent of past sins, seek reconciliation, advocate for justice on behalf of Middle Eastern communities, and work towards holistic transformation. We must resolve to embrace the full mission of God, proclaiming Jesus as the Prince of Peace while extending peace to the nations.

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