

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY DANIEL WARNER

06.01.2024

The U.S. and Israel: Two Self-Proclaimed Chosen Countries in Need of Demythologizing



Photograph Source: zeevvez – [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

The bro-hug between President Joseph Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on October 18, 2023, at Tel Aviv airport was more than just a friend welcoming his long-time buddy to his `hood. It was also more than just two prominent statesmen hugging as diplomatic allies. For despite whatever tensions have arisen between the two countries over Israel's disregard for civilians in its onslaught into Gaza, the United States and Israel are tied together by similar self-images as exceptional countries. The U.S. and Israel are soul-mates through foundational narratives of being Chosen.

How else to understand the Biden administration's hesitancy to force Israel to agree to a ceasefire? How else to understand the embarrassing votes in the Security Council with the

United States vetoing calls for a cessation of fighting only to finally abstain on a weak resolution calling for “urgent steps” to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza and to “create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities”?

The United States and Israel both began with marginal groups looking for refuge to practice their special religious beliefs. The United States’ narrative of Chosen began with the Pilgrims. Many of the Puritans began their pilgrimage across the Atlantic Ocean searching for a Promised Land. They were looking for a New Israel where they could practice their religion as they saw fit. The Puritans ended their pilgrimage when they found their Promised Land in what became the United States.

When John Winthrop, the future governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, spoke in 1630 of “a city upon a hill” in describing the settlement his followers were going to inhabit, he was referring to something beyond geography that had a special divine sense of purpose and place. In his sermon, Winthrop preached how the colonists were Chosen: “We are entered into covenant with Him for this work,” he declared. He also warned: *“For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.”*

John F. Kennedy, among other politicians and presidents, used Winthrop’s image of this United States as a holy place: “I have been guided by the standard John Winthrop set before his shipmates on the flagship *Arabella* three hundred and thirty-one years ago, as they, too, faced the task of building a new government on a perilous frontier,” he said as president-elect before the general court of Massachusetts. “We must always consider,” he continued, “that we shall be as a *city upon a hill*—the eyes of all people are upon us.”

“A city upon a hill” is no ordinary urban setting. When Woodrow Wilson said in his presidential campaign of 1912 that “America was chosen and prominently chosen, to show the way to the nations of the world how they should walk in the paths to liberty,” he assumed that the U.S. had a special role in world affairs. Other presidents have referred to the U.S. as a “beacon of hope for the world.” That special, exceptional role implies divine guidance, a position that allows the United States to be above international law all too often. After all, how can those not Chosen tell the Chosen what to do?

In the case of Israel, the term Chosen has two meanings. In the first, the term Chosen refers to how Jews see themselves as God’s Chosen people through various covenants beginning with the covenant between God and Abraham. As a result of this

exceptionalism, Israel becomes the chosen place for the Chosen. Chaim Potok, in his novel *The Chosen*, describes the joy of religious Jews upon the creation of the state of Israel by the United Nations on November 29, 1948: “It had happened. After two thousand years, it had finally happened. We were a people again, with our own land. We were a blessed generation. We had been given the opportunity to see the creation of the Jewish state.”

The creation of the state of Israel was more than a geopolitical event; it was a return to a time when territory and religion were inseparable. The Promised Land was the Holy Land. As Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook wrote in the early 20th century; “The spirit of the Lord and the spirit of Israel are one!” Kook’s son later declared; “The State of Israel is divine” after the 1967 war.

While every country has its own national pride, Israel and the United States have self-images of being special that is unique. “Amid an epic history of claims to heavenly-sent entitlement, only two nation-states stand out for the fundamental, continuous, and enduring quality of their conviction and the intense seriousness (and hostility) with which others take their claims: the United States and Israel,” Todd Gitlin and Liel Leibovitz write in *The Chosen Peoples: America, Israel and the Ordeals of Divine Election*. “heavenly-sent entitlement” is the shared value so often promoted between Israel and the United States.

Jewish messianic Zionism can be compared to Americans’ belief in Manifest Destiny “from sea to shining sea.” Both give a sacred politics of place to the land they conquered and occupied; both ignore those who had lived on the land before, Palestinian Arabs or Native Americans.

Count how many times the United States has defended Israel at the United Nations. But it is not enough to quantify the over 40 times the U.S. has vetoed resolutions condemning Israel. The U.S. has used its leverage to change the language of many resolutions, as it did before abstaining in the latest Security Council resolution. There is something here well beyond the incessant, successful political lobbying of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, so aptly described by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt in *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*.

Can Israel and the United States see themselves and act as normal states? Can they recognize themselves as modern countries similar to all other modern countries which are subject to international law and generally accepted international norms? If they can, they must demythologize their foundational messianic myths of being Chosen. For Americans,

reading A.G. Hopkins' magisterial *American Empire* would be a start; it places U.S. history in a traditional international relations context without myths of being exceptional or Chosen.

Israel and the United States have become international pariahs because their Chosen myths have not been demythologized. They remain separate from other countries by continuing to refuse to live in this world as normal states. At this moment, Palestinians are overwhelmed by the horrors of joint actions by the two self-proclaimed Chosen. The need for demythologizing is critical and urgent.

Daniel Warner is the author of *An Ethic of Responsibility in International Relations*. (Lynne Rienner). He lives in Geneva.

CounterPunch 05.01.2024