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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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16.05.2025

The Times That Try Men's Souls: America in 1776 and 2025



July 2: American Declaration of Independence is signed in Philadelphia, and ratified on July 4 – Public Domain

Two hundred forty nine years ago, at the beginning of the American Revolution, it was the prose of a newly arrived immigrant from England, Thomas Paine, that stirred the revolutionary spirit among everyday Americans. His clarion call for unity, freedom from British rule and vision of America as a safe haven for liberty is etched in the nation's memory:

“These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country, but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.... What we obtain to cheap, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods, and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated ” (The American Crisis. Number 1” 1776-1783).

Our times are also the times that try men's souls. The sanctum of freedom envisioned by Thomas Paine and other American revolutionaries has devolved into a country that detains, forcibly deports and disappears men and women incommunicado to distant prisons in total disregard of their constitutional rights; and one that punishes students for simply standing for what is right: an end to Israel's barbarity against the defenseless people of Gaza.

The troubling question is how did a country that once put its faith in presidents like Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison and Lincoln descend to the likes of Nixon, Reagan, Clinton, Bush, Obama, Biden and Trump. And from the counsels of Paine, why has America's political class deigned to pay heed to the advocacy of the likes of Ben-Gurion, Meir, Begin, Shamir, Sharon and Netanyahu.

When considering America's shift toward authoritarianism and in consequence, the subversion of constitutional rights, two causal factors spring to mind: the destructive U.S.-Israel entente and the growth of the Christian Right.

U.S.-Israel Entente

Decades ago the United States made the unsound decision to align its interests with and to invest heavily in Israel, a country that has, since 1947, been engaged in a genocidal project against the Palestinian people: "intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or part."

The mission of Zionism has always been to expel the Palestinians and erase their ties to the land. Israel's Zionist founders knew that to accomplish their expansionist goals they would need to do two things: garner the support of a powerful enforcer and true believer, namely the United States; and, to tell a biblical story that would appeal to a large majority of the population.

After years of selling Israel to Americans and close systemic collaboration, the political ethos of Washington and Tel Aviv has become much the same, with political and moral corruption and decline the by-products of that alignment.

Israel's ceaseless genocidal war against the Palestinians and the complicity of Presidents Joe Biden and Donald Trump have exposed the falsehoods and the rot.

Biden's indulgence of the Israeli regime laid the groundwork for President Donald Trump's more draconian measures. A fateful precedent was set when, for Israel's sake, he abandoned the "rules-based order" that the United States had essentially created after World War II. Trump appears intent on putting a final nail in the coffin of that order.

The "learning to live with genocide" laissez faire attitude fostered by U.S. politicians, along with the collusion of the corporate media, have moved the United States increasingly to the

Right. The constitutional rights and freedoms, that have been “taken lightly” for so long have begun to disintegrate under Trump’s dictates.

Through threats and coercion, the Trump administration has tried to regulate academic freedom and free speech. Hundreds of students on visas have been threatened with deportation, subjected to university sanctions, or have been illegally detained.

The U.S. State Department, for example, announced in March 2025 that it was rolling out an AI-powered “catch and revoke” initiative in an effort to accelerate the [cancellation of student visas](#). The effort involves government policing of the conduct and speech of scholars and thousands of students from abroad, using AI-assisted reviews of their social media accounts. Cynically, while free speech is being curtailed, Israeli extremists and indicted war criminals have been allowed to speak in the United States. Most recently, Israel’s right-wing national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, addressed supporters in New York. And Netanyahu and former defense minister, [Yoav Gallant](#) have been welcomed.

Many in the United States are now experiencing what Palestinians have endured for decades under Israeli military occupation. Since there are no First Amendment protections in Israel, mass arrests, administrative detention (without charges and trials), kidnapping, ill-treatment, including abuse and torture, are day-to-day realities in Palestinian lives.

Like the Netanyahu regime that has introduced what it calls reforms in an attempt to undermine Israel’s legal establishment, the Trump regime is also using extraordinary, often illegal means, to curb the authority of the U.S. judiciary and carry out arbitrary arrests.

The Christian Right

The Christian Right, a powerful force in the United States, has been a dominant factor in the country’s drift, since the 1970s, toward doctrinaire absolutism. Two influential groups within the broader Christian Right—Christian Nationalists and Christian Zionists— have been effective in that creep.

Their ideologies are compatible and their constituencies overlap. Both view politics through a biblical prophetic prism. Christian Nationalists argue for a ultraconservative, Christian white state in America; while Christian Zionists champion a religious fundamentalist, Jewish-only state in all of historic Palestine.

The American Right, particularly Christian Zionists, have played an important role in assuring that U.S. policies favor Israel and in framing negative perceptions of Palestinians and their regional supporters, like Iran, as the enemy.

That Israel should have sole sovereignty and control over all of Palestine is a core tenet of the faith. They strongly believe that an exclusive Jewish state fulfills the promise of the End

Times as prophesied in the Old Testament and that Israel's survival is essential for the Second Coming—the return of Jesus to Jerusalem.

Consequently, solidarity with Israel is seen not only as a moral obligation but essential to one's own salvation.

Total erasure of the Palestinian nation is fundamental to Christian Zionism's apocalyptic vision. In this context, they have endorsed some of Israel's harshest policies including military occupation, apartheid, annexation of the West Bank and Gaza, and regional supremacy.

Since the Palestinian insurrection of 7 October 2023, they have been among Israel's staunchest defenders, viewing the war as integral to fulfillment of the end-times prophecy.

That Christian Zionism is as much political as it is a religious belief is reflected in their insistence that America must support Israel unconditionally because according to the Book of Genesis: "God will bless those who bless Israel and curse those [individuals and countries] who curse it" (Genesis 12:3).

The Christian Right has had a great deal of influence in Trump's administrations.

During his first term, for instance, he recognized al-Quds (aka Jerusalem) as Israel's capital and moved the U.S. embassy there. At Israel's urging, he also abrogated the Iran nuclear agreement; signed a proclamation stating that the Syrian Golan Heights are part of Israel and slashed crucial financial aid to millions of Palestinian refugees.

The agenda of Christian nationalism has been driving policy during Trump's second term, with many of the faithful [rewarded](#) with high-level positions. For example, the current U.S. ambassador to Israel, Christian Zionist Mike Huckabee, has said that he [supports](#) Israel annexing the West Bank.

Trump has been implementing policies outlined in [Project 2025](#). The project calls for the radical restructuring of the federal government and expansion of presidential power. In line with its goals, his administration has been working to replace the rule of law with a white Christian-centered right-wing social vision.

The way U.S. administrations have engaged with and acted toward Palestine and the Middle East can best be described as arrogant, ignorant and immoral. America as a safe haven for liberty is linked to Gaza. What happens there, the decisions made, will affect the freedom of Palestinians and Americans.

The America that Thomas Paine envisioned has turned into a nightmare. Although the "Common Sense" contours of political life he espoused in 1776 have dimmed, they still

remain. Those ideals that do not come “cheap,” that are there to inspire political transformation, can be resurrected. They must, however, be summoned.

MAY 15, 2025