

The Battle Over Israel Within the Republican Party

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Israel has recently emerged as a major flash point within the Republican coalition, which has otherwise been relatively unified behind President Trump. Increasingly, voices within the party are questioning whether continued support for Israel is compatible with an “America First” foreign policy. In some prominent cases, the argument over United States policy toward Israel has intersected with old-school antisemitic tropes and religious trends in the Christian right, increasing concerns among American Jews. President Trump’s dominance in GOP policy circles and among party supporters has meant that these less amicable views of Israel have had limited impact on US policy decisions. Nevertheless, the proliferation of such views on the right suggests that in the future, the Republican Party will not necessarily maintain unified support for Israel. In conjunction with trends in the Democratic Party and among younger Americans across the board, Israel must prepare for a reality in which support for it is neither bipartisan nor even a consensus position within either party. In this reality, Israel may find no reliable home for a pro-Israel US foreign policy in either of the major political constellations. At the same time, American Jewry is likely to feel increasingly alienated across the political spectrum, whether because of its Judaism or its support for Israel.

The Republican coalition that has been largely united since President Trump’s reelection in November 2024 has recently begun to show signs of fracturing. One of the key fault lines to emerge in this internal fight has been Israel, its place within the web of American interests, and perhaps most concerning, the place of Judaism within American society. Much of the debate around these issues has centered on the platforming of anti-Israel and antisemitic figures and messages by major right-wing media outlets. The implications, however, reverberate more deeply, touching upon the nature of the MAGA movement and the future of the Republican Party.

Background

Although discussions about Israel on the American right have become noticeably heated in recent weeks, the first signs of strain appeared several months ago during the war with Iran. In the lead-up to the US strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities, prominent voices in the American [political](#) and [media](#) right questioned whether being drawn into a war in the Middle East served US interests or signaled improper intervention by Israel in American politics. At the time, Trump responded directly to criticism that by joining Israel in the war he was not being faithful to the America First ideology, [asserting](#) that it was his creation and that he alone decides what it means.

This statement, however, did not end internal discussion over the place of Israel in right-wing politics. At a recent public event, Vice President JD Vance [was asked](#) whether the United States should consider Israel a close ally. The person posing the question framed his doubts as a

“Christian... confused why there is this notion that we might owe Israel something.” Vance, an outspoken Catholic, did not reject the premise of the question. He acknowledged the religious disagreements between Jews and Christians and emphasized that while the United States supported Israel, it did so only insofar as Israel’s interests aligned with Washington’s. In this, he echoed the realist approach [he has expressed in the past](#) regarding the relationship between the two nations.

More concerning than this exchange has been a recent wave of anti-Israel and antisemitic statements from prominent figures on the right. Tucker Carlson, who hosts the leading news and politics podcast in the United States, has openly attacked Israel and US support for Israel and has gone as far to [describe](#) Prime Minister Netanyahu as an enemy of Western civilization, likening him to the Nazis.

“Netanyahu says he defends Western civilization. No. He’s its enemy—literally its main enemy . . . Why are the Nazis bad? Because they said we’re fighting these people based on who they are . . . and Netanyahu believes the same thing.”

This came after Carlson hosted [Nick Fuentes](#), a popular and outspoken racist, antisemite, and Hitler sympathizer, on his show. Another leading media personality, [Candace Owens](#), has repeatedly spread antisemitic conspiracy theories, including that AIPAC was behind the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and that Judaism is a “pedophile-centric religion that believes in demons . . . [and] child sacrifice.” Whereas in the past, such expressions would have led to the ostracization of those voicing them, they increasingly appear to be commonplace among politically engaged young conservatives. A recent [exposé](#) by Politico uncovered a group chat among leaders of Young Republican groups—adults in their 20s and 30s—that was rife with antisemitic and racist posts. Confronted with the story, senior Republican leaders, including the vice president, [chose](#) to minimize its significance.

Similarly, after some conservative figures criticized Carlson for hosting Fuentes, the president of the Heritage Foundation, Kevin Roberts, [rushed](#) to the celebrity podcaster’s defense. Declaring that his “loyalty as a Christian and as an American is to Christ first and to America,” Roberts rejected calls to marginalize Carlson. The Heritage Foundation is arguably the conservative movement’s leading think tank, and it is responsible for many of the Trump administration’s policies, including on combatting antisemitism. Pushback over Robert’s statement has [led to an internal argument](#) within the organization, much of it focused on whether support for the US–Israel special relationship comports with America First principles and Christian values.

Analysis

The concerning developments regarding Israel and antisemitism on the American right have been driven by ideological, religious, and technological developments.

- **Ideologically**, the anti-Israel faction on the right claims that it is merely taking President Trump’s America First approach to its logical conclusion. If the argument goes, all alliances should be examined through the prism of narrow American interest, why should Israel be treated differently? And if, as some on the right argue, Israeli interests are misaligned with American interests, the United States should be less willing to support Israel to the extent that it currently does. This would leave shared

values as the remaining basis for the partnership, yet many in this camp regard shared values as a poor foundation for foreign policy. At the same time, others question whether the values of both nations are indeed as close as is often argued.

- **Religiously**, the hostility within the Republican Party toward the US–Israel alliance has been strengthened by the underlying Christian nationalism animating parts of the right. While some in the movement have sought to situate Judaism within a broader “Judeo-Christian civilization,” others have placed Judaism outside the boundaries of the strong Christian cultural identity they wish to cultivate. Shifts within American Christianity have also contributed to the rise in open antisemitism and anti-Israel views. Until recently, the dominant religious group within the American right was White Evangelicals, many of whom describe themselves as Christian Zionists. Today, conservative Catholics and [Orthodox Christians](#), who do not share the Evangelicals’ theological commitment to the State of Israel, have [growing influence](#) on the right.
- **Technologically** the media landscape, including, most recently, changes to the X (formerly Twitter) algorithm, are increasingly rewarding controversy and removing the gatekeepers. As a result, such changes have allowed extreme voices that in the past would have struggled to gain an audience to now be easily normalized.

All three trends have been turbocharged by Israel’s multi-front war. The far right, no less than the left, has been influenced by the torrent of images of suffering that saturated the Western media during the two-year conflict in Gaza. Surveys suggest that negative sentiment toward Israel has [surged among younger Americans](#) across party lines. In a recent [Pew survey](#), half of Republicans under age 50 expressed an unfavorable view of Israel.

For now, President Trump’s control of the party, along with his own pro-Israel stances, is acting as an upper limit on the policy effects of these trends. Nevertheless, the debate over what “America First” means for the US–Israel alliance—and the emergence of antisemitic discourse on the American right—are unlikely to be quickly contained. Already, the overt antisemitism accompanying the shift away from Israel is alarming the American Jewish community, which has not faced this degree of open animosity in nearly a century. Moreover, Trump’s own assessment of the US national interest could change at any time, and when he eventually leaves his current leadership role, several leading candidates to succeed him come from the more Israel-skeptic wing of the party.

When juxtaposed with plummeting support for Israel in the Democratic Party, which at times [veers](#) into [antisemitism](#) in its own way, the implications for Israel, and for a Jewish community that is still [mostly supportive](#) of the state (even if not its government), are dire. Israel has not only ceased to be a bipartisan issue, but support for Israel is increasingly becoming an issue without a natural political home in either party. This is not to say that opposition to Israel has become the default position in the United States. American politicians are still more likely than not to vote in favor of support for Israel. Yet as interparty cooperation becomes increasingly rare, and support for Israel erodes on the ideological flanks of both parties, it will become more difficult to achieve the level of backing Israel had taken for granted over the last few decades.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Work with President Trump to contain the spread of antisemitic and anti-Israel sentiment within MAGA.** President Trump continues to enjoy an unusual degree of influence on Republicans both in elite circles and on the ground. Israel and its leadership have demonstrated over the last year that they have the ear of President Trump and his advisors. This access could be used to discuss measures aimed at containing and delegitimizing the worst expressions of antisemitism and anti-Israel conspiracy mongering.
2. **Shift the “special relationship” away from US sponsorship toward a strategic partnership.** The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that governs US military aid to Israel is set to expire in 2028. Israel should work toward a future MOU that gradually reduces the US financial contribution while strengthening the security partnership in ways that better reflect the reciprocal nature of the alliance.
3. **Make intensive effort to restore bipartisanship support.** The recent developments on the right show that Israel can no longer take its support for granted. In light of this (and because the pendulum tends to swing between Republican and Democratic administrations), Israel must work to reaffirm support for its core interests among as broad a range of legislators and opinion makers across the American political spectrum. This will most likely require policy changes, rhetorical and value-based signals from Israel’s leadership, and a scaling back of Israeli reliance on US funding of military assistance. Be it as it may, the alternative to making these adjustments is a dangerous loss of support.
4. **Show support for, and listen to, American Jewry.** Despite Israel’s centrality to the identity of many American Jews and the role Israel plays in current attacks on Judaism in the American political arena, Israel on its own cannot solve the problem of antisemitism. What Israeli officials can do, however, is listen to the concerns of American Jewry through both its institutional representatives and the many direct conversations they have with communities around the United States. Having listened, it is possible that some promising avenues for action will emerge.

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