

Putting a Christian Zionist in Charge

What Canada Can Tell Us

by Philip Giraldi, January 28, 2014 AntiWar.com

(Philip Giraldi is a recognized authority on international security and counterterrorism issues. He is a former CIA counter-terrorism specialist and military intelligence officer who served eighteen years overseas in Turkey, Italy, Germany, and Spain. He was Chief of Base in Barcelona from 1989 to 1992 designated as the Agency's senior officer for Olympic Games support. Since 1992 he consulted for a number of Fortune 500 corporate clients.)

Even though there were few good reasons to vote for Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012, the Republicans provided plenty of better reasons not to vote for their candidates, allowing Obama to benefit from the political vacuum. I was particularly concerned in both election cycles regarding the in-your-face religiosity of several of the GOP candidates. I assessed Sarah Palin as being basically a Christian Zionist, though admittedly a particularly ignorant version thereof who hardly understood what she was promoting, while Romney's Mormonism with its affinities to evangelical Christianity and strong ties to Israel was equally disturbing.

I care little for what one chooses to believe but when the beliefs are such that they will likely be translated into policy that impacts on all the rest of us it is difficult to pretend that a candidate's religion doesn't matter. Be that as it may, the United States has recently benefited from having heads of state that either are believers in a casual way or engaging in a form of piety that is essentially phony, as Bill Clinton did when he paraded around Bible in hand pretending penitence after having had a White House intern perform oral sex on him.

The Canadians have not been so lucky, however. Canada, multicultural to a fault and home to more than a million Muslims, ironically has possibly the world's most pro-Israeli government, its Prime Minister Stephen Harper having described Israel as a light that "...burns bright, upheld by the universal principles of all civilized nations – freedom, democracy justice." He has also said "I will defend Israel whatever the cost" to Canada, an interesting proposition for those who might have believed that his duty was to protect his own country and advance its interests. Harper also supports the currently active Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism's seeking to define the "new anti-Semitism," which will include any criticism of the State of Israel, and hopes to introduce legislation that will make it a hate crime and prosecutable. Critics have noted that it might soon be possible for Canadians to criticize their own government but not that of Israel.

Canada's new ambassador to Israel is Vivian Bercovici, a corporate lawyer and part time journalist who lived in Israel and is a great admirer of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. She believes that no Arab can be trusted, a viewpoint that has been described as "one dimensional," and has written that "... Hamas, the [Palestinian Authority] and just about every government in the Middle East make no secret of their collective ideological commitment to the total destruction of the state of Israel." It is an assertion that is completely false in nearly every detail. Harper's Foreign Minister John Baird defended the appointment by noting that Bercovici's views are identical to those of the Conservative government.

Harper, who has received awards from both Canadian and American Jewish organizations, personally endorsed Israel's bombing of Lebanon in 2006, calling it "measured" even when Canadian peacekeepers were killed in the bombardment. His administration has described the recent election of moderate Iranian President Hassan Rouhani as "meaningless" and has rejected any negotiation with Tehran over its nuclear program. In international fora Canada consistently votes against any measures to advance Palestine's international status, arguing that it favors a two state solution but only through negotiation, leaving it up to the Israelis to dictate how that might come about. It lobbied actively against Palestine's bid to enhance its status in the United Nations and has even voted against declaring Israel's settlements illegal, something that in theory it supports. Foreign Minister Baird has adhered strictly to the Israeli talking points, asserting inter alia that Tehran is the biggest threat to global security. He cited as evidence its hostility toward Israel. Baird has also blamed the Palestinians for the failure of peace talks with Israel and has said "There is no better friend to Israel than Canada. We shall always be there for you, and in front of you."

Harper has recently returned from his first trip to Israel in which he exceeded all expectations, bringing with him an entourage of 208 that mostly consisted of Canadian Jewish supporters and evangelical Christians, many of whom had their travel and hotels paid for by the government. In an address to the Knesset he said Canada is aligned with Israel because of the Holocaust and "it is the right thing to do," noting that describing Israel as an apartheid state was "twisted logic and outright malice" and adding that attempts to boycott Israel are the "face of the new anti-Semitism." His speech was also replete with factually challengeable references to Israeli "freedom, democracy, and the rule of law;" its making the desert "bloom;" its "generosity in peace," and sidebars on how the Palestinians don't want peace and Iran wants a bomb. At a state dinner in his honor, Harper proved to be a real showman, playing on a synthesizer as he sang a song for his host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The song "Hey Jude" by the Beatles might not have been the best choice as "Jude" in German means Jew, something that many in his audience must have been aware of even if Harper was not.

Harper's love of Israel derives from a number of sources. To be sure there is political calculation in it. Canada's powerful Jewish community, which is dominant in the media and in finance, may have aided Harper's election as prime minister back in 2006. Harper's cheerleading for Israel has succeeded in increasing the Conservative's share of the Canadian Jewish vote to just above half, a historic shift at the expense of the country's Liberals. And 42% of Canadian Jews call themselves Zionists, a much higher percentage than among American Jews, with three-quarters of the Jewish communities in Montreal and Toronto having visited Israel. But against that, there is little real evidence to suggest that Canada's 380,000 Jews actually bloc vote based on Ottawa's relationship with Israel, so it should be concluded that Harper is less concerned with actual voting than he is with the Jewish community's political and media support.

But when it comes to votes, Harper, who himself was raised as an evangelical, is almost certainly appealing to his core Conservative Party support group, the 3.5 million evangelicals who comprise roughly ten per cent of the Canadian population. They do vote on the issue of Israel because they mostly entertain views that would define them as Christian Zionists who welcome the gathering in of the world's Jews to Israel as a precondition for the Second Coming of Christ. Harper is himself a member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, an evangelical denomination that believes that the Second Coming of Christ is imminent.

It should be pointed out that many Canadians do not agree with Harper's Middle East policy, but their only option is to vote him out when he runs again in 2015. Fully 57% of Canadians have a negative view of Israel and when Foreign Minister Baird actively worked against enhanced Palestinian status at the UN, the Prime Minister's office received over 1,000 letters with more than 80% opposed to what the government had done, many decrying the loss of Canada's reputation as a "fair broker" in international affairs.

I have written in some detail about Harper and his tilt towards Israel precisely because it is deeply rooted in his own religious beliefs. Obviously Canada will be unlikely to get involved in a war on behalf of Israel because of its limited military capability in spite of its pledge to "defend at any cost," but Harper is a walking illustration of what happens when way too much religion is allowed to shape critical policies. Should anyone expect anything less from America's own Christian Zionists, several of whom are nuttier than fruitcakes, to include Michelle Bachmann, Sarah Palin, Mitt Romney, Louie Gohmert, Rick Perry, Ted Cruz, Jim Inhofe or Mike Huckabee? Gohmert recently told a gathering of the South Carolina Tea Party that Netanyahu is one of the greatest historic leaders of Israel, possibly a latter day King David or Solomon. He called for a national day of prayer and fasting to get God's guidance on how to protect Israel, while warning "And I know you've got secularists, and I called off a couple, that you have to deal with here and tell them this is not for you, it is only for people who believe."

Government by believers as expressed in fractured English might be unique to Gohmert, but Bachmann, Perry, Palin and Romney all made foolish campaign pledges to attack Iran, mostly pandering to the Israel Lobby but presumably also in part due to their unshakable religious beliefs. That the rest of us might pay the price for those beliefs is, at a minimum, unsettling, but the example of Harper demonstrates that there is little to impede reckless behavior in a head of state possessing

the mandate to conduct foreign policy. This means that religion should most definitely be a part of the scrutiny that candidates for high office receive, particularly when that official just might have a strong belief that the end of the world is nigh and that government should do all it can to bring that about. I accept Stephen Harper's desire to immerse himself in his Old Testament, but I would respectfully submit that he should do so at home and that when he deals with foreign countries, Israel included, he should be doing what is best for Canada.