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14. ABSTRACT
Appealing to the religious immigrants from Europe and the Middle East, Zionists established Israel as a Jewish state, though only Orthodox Judaism was formally recognized as Judaism. Because of this limited recognition, Jewish religion in Israel has been based upon strict adherence to Orthodox practices, creating the false perception that a significant majority of Israel is currently secular, or non-practicing. To the contrary, recent surveys indicate less than 40 percent of the Jewish population is secular and only half of those are actually atheists. Some analysts have determined that modern changes to the historical status quo indicate the growing secularization of Israel; however, based upon these recent surveys, the secular community has continued to decline. The competing and incompatible religious narratives within these religious communities in Israel have served to create further complexity in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with regards to settlement. Without a history of religious compromise within itself, negotiations with Palestine remain elusive.

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COMPETING RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES IN ISRAEL

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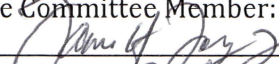
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Executive Summary

Title: Our Way is the Way of HaShem: Competing Religious Narratives in Israel

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Thesis: The religious beliefs among Israeli Jews concerning settlement do not provide sufficient common ground to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Though some religious communities espouse beliefs that would support settlement, they are not large enough to influence Israeli political leadership.

Discussion: Israel was established in 1948 primarily through the work of Zionists who eventually compromised on the incorporation of religion in the government of Israel in order to recruit more immigrants to the nation. In appealing to the religious immigrants from Europe and the Middle East, Zionists established Israel as a Jewish state, though only Orthodox Judaism was formally recognized as Judaism. Because of this limited recognition, Jewish religion in Israel has been based upon strict adherence to orthodox practices, creating the false perception that a significant majority of Israel is currently secular, or non-practicing. To the contrary, recent surveys indicate less than 40 percent of the Jewish population is secular and only half of those are actually atheists. Some analysts have determined that modern changes to the historical status quo indicate the growing secularization of Israel; however, the secular community has continued to decline. Instead, the traditional religious communities have attempted to mediate between the religious and secular Jews in order to bring a conservative or progressive approach to Judaism within Israel, instead of the currently sanctioned orthodoxy that only represents approximately 20 percent of the Jewish population. In identifying this misconception, this study does not seek to place blame on the religious or secular communities, nor the Israelis or Palestinians in the continuance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but rather seeks to examine the least explored aspect in the conflict, the role of religion, in why negotiations have not been fruitful.

Conclusion: Recent studies show Israel's religious communities are increasing while the secular population has declined within the Jewish population. The competing and incompatible religious narratives within these religious communities in Israel have served to create further complexity in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with regards to settlement. Without a history of religious compromise within itself, negotiations with Palestine remain elusive.

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Preface

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has raged on since Israel's establishment in 1948 with no end in sight, despite the best efforts of the international community. As a student of religion, I strongly believe that much of this conflict is attributed to the role of religion in each population, which is rarely understood and often ignored by well-intentioned mediators and scholars, as most countries of eastern and western philosophies customarily separate religion from government. Entering into the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and learning how to empathize with the lives and feelings of people on all sides of this tragedy has been a poignant experience; I only wish I had more space and time to pen the role of religion in Palestine as well. Those seeking to find blame for the continuance of the conflict will be sorely disappointed with my contribution, but I hope they gain perspective into the religious aspects that are not generally taught.

As such, I would like to thank my colleagues and friends who have supported me, in many ways, during the course of this work. I offer a special thank you to Dr. Rebecca Johnson for her willingness to take this project on and see it to fruition. For Dr. Johnson's ability to mentor, constantly encourage, and provide unfailing guidance, I owe her a debt of gratitude. So too, I would like to thank LtCol Kevin Glathar, who kept the candles burning on this project. Most importantly, I would be remiss if I did not thank my best friend, Lindsey Arnold, whose laughter and love of life carry me through the most difficult days of my work. Lastly, thanks to the women of the college's "Army Air Corps," without whom I would have finished sooner and potentially a few pounds lighter, but certainly not happier.

Our Way is the Way of HaShem: Competing Religious Narratives in Israel

For most social observers, the term “Israel” usually conjures images of the nationalist conflict between Jewish and Arab populations; however, the recent Hiddush Association’s Religion and State Index identified that most Israelis identified religion as the most significant tension or dividing issue within Israel – significantly more than national or ethnic strife.¹ This tension between the religious and non-religious has long been a problem² that has led some in the secular community to characterize the religious community as Israel’s “Islamic Jihad,” citing a “senseless and destructive hatred” between the two.³ Likewise, others in the Orthodox populations have referred to the secularists as “heretics” because they believe “they have wounded Judaism more grievously than all its external enemies.”⁴

When secular Zionists primarily formed the state of Israel, the secular population was strong enough to ensure that God was not mentioned in the Declaration of Independence.⁵ However, they became obligated to promote the Jewish religion in order to provide a common source of identity and a compelling immigration recruitment tool for Jews of various places of origin, languages, and values.⁶ The population of Israel quickly transitioned from a secular nature through massive immigrations from Holocaust survivors in Europe and those expelled from Arab countries in the Middle East after the Jewish state was recognized. Both massive groups proved more traditional than the vast majority of the pre-state Jewish population,⁷ ultimately dictating how religion was initially treated, and later, how it would be integrated into the politics of the state.

Evaluating the short history of modern Israel, its complexity makes it clear to see why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is often referred to as the world’s “most intractable conflict.”⁸ The

religious beliefs among Israeli Jews concerning settlement do not provide sufficient common ground to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Though some religious communities espouse beliefs that would support settlement, they are not large enough to influence Israeli political leadership.

This paper focuses on the incompatibility within Israeli communities, illustrating the lack of common ground needed to support a negotiated settlement. It solely focuses on the narratives of Israel, not because those of Palestine are any less important, but simply due to limitations of length. As such, this paper begins by briefly detailing the history of the conflict from Israel's establishment and moves into an exploration of the varying religious narratives influencing the government of Israel as the conflict continues. Following this exploration is a comparison of those narratives, culminating with concluding comments.

History of the Conflict

The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict officially began with the establishment of the nation of Israel on May 14, 1948, though significant intercommunal violence between Jewish *Yishuv*^{*} and Palestinian Arabs occurred in the decades prior. Initially settled by secular-Zionists, five massive waves of Jews making *aliyah*[†] to Palestine between 1890 and 1940 brought the Jewish population to roughly 450,000.⁹ Both frustrated with the British, tensions between the Arab Revolt in Palestine and the Jewish Insurgency in Palestine eventually led to the Civil War of 1947-1948. These frustrations resulted from the United Nations (UN) General Assembly's November 1947 adoption of the resolution for a partition plan for the British Mandate.¹⁰ While the general Jewish public and the Jewish Agency accepted the plan¹¹ despite its

* Refers to a body of Jewish residents in what is now Israel, prior to Israel's existence.

† The immigration of Jews from the diaspora to the land of Israel.

limitations, Palestine refused to accept the partition, stating that it violated the principles of self-determination within the UN charter.¹² Arab states subsequently issued declarations denying the validity of the resolution and announced they would not be bound by the decision,¹³ a move that future leader Mahmoud Abbas would later claim was a mistake that he hoped to rectify.¹⁴

The day after this declaration, a military coalition of Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq invaded the area, with Lebanon also joining the invasion. The Arab League purported its intervention was to restore law and order after the British mandate's termination left no legally constituted authority in place. It also reported it served to prevent further fighting in Palestine from spreading to nearby Arab countries.¹⁵ Additionally, in the cablegram where this was stated, Palestine invoked, "The right to set up a Government in Palestine pertains to its inhabitants under the principles of self-determination recognized by the Covenant of the League of Nations as well as the United Nations Charter."¹⁶ This conflict became known as the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and was heavily debated within Israel as the Orthodox populations were opposed to the Zionist movement and the creation of Israel up until the 1967 war, though they supported immigration into Palestine.¹⁷

The war ended with an Israeli victory and the Israeli occupation of sixty percent of the proposed Arab territory outside of the partition-suggested Israeli borders. The 1949 Armistice Agreements between Israel and the four Arab countries who shared a border ended the conflict and established the "Green Line."¹⁸ Approximately 700,000 Palestinian Arab refugees fled or were expelled from the area, while another 850,000 Jewish refugees were expelled from other parts of the Middle East, with more than 250,000 arriving in Israel within three years of the war's conclusion and another 600,000 arriving by 1972.¹⁹ Arab states, with the exception of Transjordan, refused citizenship to the Palestinian refugees. Israel offered to repatriate 100,000

of the refugees; however, the Arab states rejected the compromise for fear of taking any action that might recognize Israel.²⁰ This event served as a milestone in mass ethnic migrations, and many of the Arab refugees remain in refugee camps today.

From 1950 until the Six Day War of 1967, violence continued between Israel and Palestine, and also between Israel and Egypt, which in turn, provided military training support to Palestinians in Gaza. This was further complicated by the continued anti-Zionists beliefs of the Orthodox community within Israel and their unwillingness to serve in the military.²¹ In 1967, after the Palestinian Liberation Organization's (PLO) establishment in 1964, Israel conducted a preemptive strike against a combination of military forces that involved three battlefronts: Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Each of the three Arab states shared a desire to annihilate Israel and were struck after continued sponsored attacks from Gaza as well as Egypt's expulsion of UN Emergency Forces and the buildup of Egyptian forces on the Sinai Peninsula amongst other nations' actions.²² Now called the Six Day War, Israel took control of the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, as well as the West Bank of the Jordan River to include East Jerusalem from Jordan and the Golan Heights from Syria,²³ an amount three times larger than its pre-war territory.²⁴ This became the turning point for the Orthodox Jews who were anti-Zionists up to this point. Most adopted the belief that Israel's decisive victory was a sign of God's blessing and a fulfillment of prophetic promises, capturing the core of the Biblical Land of Israel (Judea and Samaria), which gave rise to a more religious variation of Zionism.²⁵ After the war, the Arab countries met to discuss their position with regards to Israel. What came of this meeting was a consensus about the "three no's": no recognition, no peace, and no negotiations.²⁶

The following years continued to see bloody battles and a failed attempt to take over the West Bank by the PLO, whose deportation to other countries eventually led to the 1970 Palestin-

ian-Jordanian conflict and the latter Lebanese Civil War.²⁷ The PLO began a terror campaign that consisted of Olympic athletes taken hostage, aircraft hijacked, and massacres committed. Then, in 1973, Egypt and Syria perpetrated a surprise attack on Israel, now called the Yom Kippur War or the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. The Orthodox populations were no longer heavily anti-Zionists, but they still did not serve in the military, creating hostilities within Israel. While the first two days consisted of advancements for the Arab countries, Israel quickly gained the upper hand, penetrating into Egypt and Syria with a strong bargaining position after the war.²⁸ All parties signed the Disengagement of Forces Agreement in 1974, resulting in a ceasefire that held until 1982, when a Palestinian assassination attempt on the Israeli Ambassador in Britain led to Israel's invasion of Lebanon, where the PLO was active, in the 1982 Lebanese War.²⁹

During that ceasefire, Israel had entered a peace treaty with Egypt in 1978, returning the Sinai, 90 percent of the land Israel had obtained during the Six Day War. To put this in perspective, figure one below, the "Land Occupied and Returned," shows the land acquired during the Six-Day War, in return for a promise of peace with Egypt.³⁰ This three-week war cost the Israe-



Figure 1- Land Occupied and Returned

lis devastating casualty rates for such a tiny country (four times the percentage of the U.S. casualty rate in Vietnam).³¹

In 1987, Palestinian uprisings began leading to international interventions in the early 1990s, using the successes with Egypt as a baseline, and leading to the 1993 Oslo Accords that allowed the PLO to recover ground in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where it established the Palestinian National Authority. Radical elements within Palestine rose up and established Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which initiated terror campaigns in opposition to peace processes. During this time, tensions increased within Israel. A Haredi Israeli, opposed to the Israeli government policy regarding settlement, assassinated the Israeli Prime Minister, immediately causing Israel to withdraw from peace brokering efforts.

September 2000 saw the Second Intifada that officially ended the Oslo Accords and led to continued military conflict for several years until Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared an end to the occupation in Gaza through the court system.³² In order to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after political negotiations had failed, Israel relinquished control of the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the West Bank in 2005, which included the eviction and dismantling of residential settlements of Israeli citizens, resulting in protests from religious-Zionists opposed to ceding the land.³³ The Palestinian Authority declined to maintain Palestine-Israel agreements, renounce violence, or recognize Israel's right to exist. Instead, the Palestinian Authority launched rocket attacks and kidnapped an IDF soldier, whom they held for five years, through underground tunnels it created to infiltrate into Israeli territory. Upon Israel's withdrawal, Hamas raised a huge banner that read, "Four years of resistance beat ten years of negotiation" while taking credit for the Israeli withdraw³⁴ and was subsequently elected as the Palestinian Government.

Hamas eventually took complete control of Gaza in 2007, where Israel responded with a naval and land blockade, in coordination with Egypt. In late 2008, Israel launched the three-week Gaza War in response to rocket fire and weapons smuggling in the Gaza Strip, resulting in

multiple international investigations that concluded that both sides had committed war crimes and possible crimes against humanity. In 2009, both parties agreed to a ceasefire, though sporadic periods of violence have continued. The question of whether or not Israel continues to occupy Gaza has been a question long debated in the international community. Israel claims it's withdrawal and lack of political control in Gaza proves it is not occupied; Palestine claims the continued blockades constitute continued occupation.³⁵ At the same time, Palestinian attempts to gain state recognition and membership within the United Nations (UN) have continued to fail, though the UN afforded them non-member observer status in 2012 and their title changed from "Palestine (represented by PLO)" to "State of Palestine."³⁶

As illustrated, the conflict has continued since Israel came into existence in 1948, and it could be argued that it truly dates as far back as the 19th century under the British Mandate. Despite long-term peace process efforts and Israel's current reconciliation with Egypt and Jordan, Israel and Palestine remain in conflict. Many issues surround this conflict including borders, security, water rights, freedom of movement, holy sites, "right of return," and mutual recognition; however, attempts by both the players and secular international organizations to broker negotiations have continuously failed, due in part to the competing and incompatible religious narratives within the nations in question.

Framing the Jewish State

Religion often serves as the ally of nationalism and leaves strong imprints on the evolution of that nationalism.³⁷ As a founding element in nationalism, the religious background of the population is drawn upon to create nationalism, even when the secular population itself rejects the religion personally, often mutating into a "civic religion."³⁸ Israel, as a fairly young nation,

has developed in such a way. With immigration of Jews from all over the world who did not share a language or even culture, the common religion has underpinned the nationalism that has since developed. Eliezar Ben-Rafael best explains this:

These axioms were then integrated into a new secular perspective in which “the People of Israel” became ‘a Jewish nation,’ and the ‘God of Israel and His Teaching’ became this nation’s historical collective culture. Moreover, the notion of “Eretz Israel” (Land of Israel) became the national territory of the State of Israel. In this transformation, however, nationalism awakened confrontations with a variety of Jewish forces sharing different perspectives on the ancestral faith and its contemporary significance—some from outside the national “camp” but others from within.³⁹

As such, this section provides insight on the role of religion in Israel, the religious determinations of Israel’s Jewish population, and the methodology used for later comparison and analysis.

The Role of Religion

Religious narratives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are largely guided by the Abrahamic religions, all of which derived from Judaism, as practiced prior to the Babylonian exile.⁴⁰ This is important because religion plays a large part in both national and individual identity, with regard to the philosophy of Israel and Palestine where the capacity of faith to motivate is unmatched.⁴¹ Since religion is often at the center of one’s identity, it is not uncommon for an insult on traditions or beliefs one has chosen to embody to conjure the same strong emotions as a personal attack.⁴² When one considers the religious breakdown of the population in Israel and Palestine, the influence of religion on the population as a whole becomes clear.

Currently, Israel is a parliamentary democracy with 75 percent of its 8.1 million citizens being Jewish.⁴³ In absence of a constitution, Israel has a mixed legal system that includes English common law and British Mandate regulations, as well as Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious laws.⁴⁴ Freedom of religion is protected within Israeli law; the law also declares Israel as a “Jewish State” and Judaism as the national religion.⁴⁵ Palestine, on the other hand, is not a state.

Hamas currently controls the Gaza Strip with 99 percent of its population being Muslim, predominately Sunni. Fatah currently runs the West Bank with 85 percent of its population being Muslim, the vast majority of which are Sunni as well.⁴⁶ Though they share a border and are both considered Mediterranean or Middle Eastern, Palestine and Israel's religious populations differ considerably.

Israel's Religious Construct

In order to understand the contentious struggles internal to Israel, it is imperative to understand the religious and non-religious breakdown of the population. To facilitate this, this section explores the data revealed in the most recent social and religious surveys conducted throughout Israel. It is difficult to find specific percentages with regards to the numbers of people identified with denominations of Judaism because Israelis do not tend to align themselves with religious movements such as Reform or Conservative Judaism, because they are not state recognized.⁴⁷ Unlike the US who does not have a state-endorsed religion and therefore no standard for comparison, Orthodox Judaism currently serves as the only formally recognized religion in Israel, and therefore, Israelis tend to define themselves on a scale of religiosity dependent upon their degree of adherence to Orthodox practices. The US, on the other hand, only recognizes religion for the sake of ensuring a proportional military chaplaincy for the armed forces.⁴⁸

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics' 2010 religious survey reported that 42 percent of the country's Jewish population identified themselves as secular. This is a large percentage of the population; however, this survey is based on what Orthodox practices the individual upholds. At the same time, 53 percent of this secular population stated they do believe in God.⁴⁹ Additionally, 25 percent were identified as traditionalist, what could be considered as those who are not secular, but do not consider themselves religious; 13 percent as traditional religious, who could

be considered as those who perceive themselves as religious, but not Orthodox; and 12 percent as religious Orthodox; and 8 percent as Haredi, or ultra-Orthodox. Some researchers suggest that the ultra-Orthodox population may be under-represented in surveys as they generally avoid being interviewed, and that each of the other two sections should be adjusted by a half a percentage less.⁵⁰ A second study completed in 2010 at the Israeli Democracy Institute regarding Judaism within Israel reported that the religious and traditional religious communities had increased by 2 and 4 percent respectively while those of the traditional and secular had decreased by 1 and 4 percent since their last study conducted in 1999. Additionally, 80 percent of Jews surveyed stated they believed in God, consistent with the results of atheism in the aforementioned Bureau of Statistics Study.⁵¹

Of note, those who self-identified as traditional-religious or religious in the Bureau of Statistics Study were similar across the age brackets of twenty to twenty-nine year olds and that of sixty-five years and above; however, of the Haredi population, a significant difference between these age groups occurred. While only 2 percent of the sixty-five and above identified as such, 14 percent of the twenty to twenty-nine population self-identified as Haredi.

Along the same lines, researchers of the “Israel 2028 - Vision and Economic-Social Strategy in a Global World” project, who are attempting to integrate the ultra-Orthodox into the economy, expect the Haredi population will represent 15 percent of Israel’s population in 2028, assuming birth rates remain the same.⁵² Another forecast by the Metzilah Center for the Zionists, Jewish, Liberal, and Humanist Thought, found that continued birth rates would put the Haredi population at approximately 37 percent by 2050, assuming non-Haredi Israelis would stay in Israel to support them as they do not currently serve in the Israeli Defense Forces and only 55 percent of Haredi men work.⁵³ This projection will potentially have strong implications in

the future, continuing to cause strife between religious communities identified in the next section.

According to the 2010 Israeli Democracy Institute study examining Israel's Jewish character of Israeli society in terms of religiosity, faith, values, and religious customs and traditions, 73 percent of the *Mizrahim*[‡] Jews defined themselves as traditional, Orthodox, or Haredi. At the same time, most *Ashkenazim*[§] and those whose parents are mixed of Ashkenazim and of other Asian origin are typically secular and anti-religion, at 66 and 56 percent, respectively.⁵⁴ The survey also showed an increase in the number of Israelis who believe a higher power directs the world from the previous 1999 and 1991 studies, currently reporting nearly 80 percent.

The 2014 Religion and State Index revealed that 71 percent of the Jewish population stated they were unhappy with the current policies of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate. Dissected, this population included 89 percent of secular Jews, 80 percent of the immigrant population, and 61 percent of the religious traditional Jewish population.⁵⁵ Specifically, it stated a majority of Jews object to exclusive control by Orthodox Rabbinate with regards to the right to marry and the lack of formal recognition for Reform and Conservative Judaism.⁵⁶ Likewise, the Hiddush Association's Religion and State Index revealed that 51 percent of the population believes religious-secular tension between Haredim and secularists is the largest conflict within Israel's society.⁵⁷ The next closest conflict was identified as the political relations between the right and left at 23 percent of the population. The report also showed the number of Israelis in support of a separation of religion and state had reached 61 percent because of the incompatibility within the differing Israeli communities with regards to religion in the government.⁵⁸ These findings show the

[‡] Mizrahi Jews refer to those descended from local Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa, constituting the largest ethnic group within Israel.

[§] Ashkenazi Jews refer to those descended from Central and Eastern Europe, constituting the second largest ethnic group within Israel.

increased disagreements within the religious and secular communities will only continue with the rapidly growing population of the Haredim.

The role of religious traditions has played a significant role in the influence on individualism and attachment, whether it be family and community or those of bonding to God and the land of Israel.⁵⁹ In Jewish thought, individualism and attachment go hand-in-hand, each serving as a pre-requisite for the other, maintaining a reciprocal approach.⁶⁰ The Hebrew Biblical revolution, namely the profound change in status of the Hebrew Bible in Jewish society within Israel, gained ground after the 1967 Six-Day War and heightened with control over the heart of the “land of the patriarchs” (Judea and Samaria). These events strengthened the historical fundamentalism approach to parts of national religious Zionism, ultimately producing a blend of modernity, nationalism, and messianism, giving a historical reliability to the Bible.⁶¹ For the religious fundamentalist in Israel, the idea of “truth” was adopted with regards to all teaching of the Hebrew Bible.⁶² This revival may also play an important piece in explaining how the population of the secular community has declined over the years.

Until the nineteenth century, the historical reliability of the *Torah*^{**} had been taken for granted and became an important issue on the world-wide Jewish agenda. While secularists disregard the Hebrew Bible as divinely inspired scripture, they regarded it as an authentic and reliable historical document.⁶³ In this way, most Jews perceived any attack on the Hebrew Bible as an attack on the foundation of Judaism and the existence of the Jewish people, as seen in Nazi Germany.⁶⁴ Cultural memory, in the form of religious narrative, is a common trait of the non-religious aspects of the Jewish community within Israel. In this instance, the religious narrative

^{**} Means “teaching,” “instruction,” or “guide.” It has multiple contexts, but in its narrowest sense, refers to the first five books of Moses. In its broadest sense, it encompasses all of traditional Jewish law, teachings, traditions, and scholarship.

is external, pertaining to other people's narratively mediated experiences as relayed through various media and communications.⁶⁵

Because the level of religion in Israel is generally considered a sliding scale of religiosity based upon adherence to Orthodox Judaism, as opposed to multiple sects of a religion often seen elsewhere, it is necessary to establish a heuristic approach for comparative analysis. As such, the next subsection of this paper briefly provides the methodology used for the religious groupings in the remainder of this paper.

Methodology

Many articles break Israel's religious groupings into simply "religious" and "secular," with "religious" being the Orthodox standard and "secular" being everyone else, while others break them into upwards of five religious categories. The two-category approach, while most common, is precisely why this paper is being written, because it inaccurately reports a majority of the population to be secular, which the international community interprets as "non-religious."

For the purposes of analysis, this paper divides the religious groupings into three heuristic categories: *religious*, *traditional*, and *secular*. Religious is defined as those adhering to Orthodox Judaism with observance of the Sabbath and dietary restrictions. It encompasses those of the Haredim (also known as ultra-orthodox^{††}) and Orthodox, totaling 20 percent of the Jewish population. The traditional population are those of the religious and non-religious traditionalists who generally do not observe the Sabbath or adhere to dietary restrictions according to strict Orthodox rules but, by tradition, adhere to the observances of the Passover, totaling 38 percent of the population. Finally, the secular population entails both types of secular thought: the 22 percent

^{††} The term, ultra-Orthodox, is considered pejorative by some and shall be referred to as Haredi.

who believe in God and the 20 percent who do not, totaling the final 42 percent of the Jewish population.

In light of these groups, the following section analyzes their perspectives on the role of religion in both the private and public sphere. Additionally, it addresses the general beliefs and understandings that the respective populations use to guide their perspectives.

Religious Narratives within Israel

Religious narratives in Israeli and Palestinian communities have reinforced partition. In that capacity, this section reviews the religious narratives of the three Jewish groups to demonstrate how their commitment to being God's chosen people, the sacredness of Jerusalem, and beliefs on the creation and defense of Israel combine to erase any political space for reconciliation with the Palestinians.

Prior to providing examples of each narrative, a general understanding of the political system within Israel is necessary in order to better understand why they are important. After delving into this, this section will evaluate individuals in each community who have made significant political statements, either in word or action, in order to shape policy within the Jewish state. Each, within their own narratives, have attempted to do what is "right in their own eyes" of ideology for the sake of their nation and the people of Israel with regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Religious

There are thirteen minimum principles of faith with regards to Orthodox Judaism, on which all sects agree and which are often cited in daily prayers.⁶⁶ Orthodox Jews strongly oppose the theory of evolution, which they consider heresy, and fully believe in the creation theory,

that the world was created less than six thousand years ago by God. The Orthodox also believe the *Torah* was revealed and given directly to the Jews on Mount Sinai, where God set apart the Jewish nation as “God’s chosen people.”⁶⁷ Further, Orthodox Jews believe in works theory and are taught from a young age to prepare for the afterlife of paradise (and hell) in that it is not an end, but a new and better life.

Like all religious, non-messianic Jews, they believe the messiah has yet to come, not recognizing the Christian messiah, Jesus, but instead waiting for the *Mashiach*^{‡‡} to return. Upon return, the *Mashiach* will gather the Jewish exiles, restore the religious courts of justice, put an end to sin and heresy, reward the faithful, and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple service, while restoring the line of David as an heir to the throne and ushering in the Messianic Age. The Temple Mount serves as the holiest site for religious Jews, encased in the Second Temple where the Western Wall is considered holy as it is the area closest to the Temple Mount where Jews can pray under the Status Quo Agreement.

The Haredi and many orthodox have long opposed the Zionist political movement, even before the state of Israel came into existence, though many immigrated to Palestine-Israel when dangers arose for Jews in the Diaspora, namely the holocaust.⁶⁸ Most of the aforementioned group oppose the state of Israel because the Haredi religion teaches that the Jews were not to establish Jewish rule in the “promised land” prior to the return of the Messiah and that it was not to be settled by force and violence.⁶⁹ Because of this belief, Haredi and some orthodox typically do not celebrate Independence Day as they have deemed it as “idolatrous,” as well as other designated state holidays. They also oppose Israel’s expansionist policies in Palestine as well as ethnic cleansing in Israel and have stated they believe Israel’s militaristic nature has transformed the Jewish character of spiritualism to one of a war-like state.⁷⁰ However, the religious Zionists in

‡‡ The Jewish Anointed Messiah.

the group believe secular Zionism was a tool God used to fulfill prophesy, and while they did not participate, they will preserve it.

Most of the Haredi remain a separated community, speaking Yiddish and rabbinical Hebrew; however, the number of those who speak Modern Hebrew is growing as more of the population continues to work outside of the community. The youth population especially tends to speak variations of Modern Hebrew rather than Yiddish.⁷¹ Typically identified externally by black suits, or long skirts and wigs for women, the Haredi view themselves as those who are the true religious followers and as such, maintain segregation from non-Jewish culture although not from non-Jewish society entirely.⁷² The Haredim's religious convictions command them to involve themselves in the lives of secular Jews.⁷³

Because Haredi-Orthodox typically oppose Zionism, the State of Israel, and anything short of segregation from non-Jewish culture, very few participate in politics;⁷⁴ however, several outliers are worth mentioning, as they have made extreme political statements out of frustration with the secular government. For instance, Yigal Amir, raised Haredi, assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 after learning moral absolutism in religious schools and violence during his time in the IDF.⁷⁵ Of note, Amir had discussed the potential action with several rabbis prior to conducting the act, all of whom disagreed with him on the basis of *Halakhic* rulings. He acted alone in accordance with the ancient Jewish doctrine of zealotry, which states under extreme circumstances, a God-loving Jew can kill a gentile without permission.⁷⁶ While not a political figure by way of government position, Amir put a face to the change Zionism had seen since its secular inception, one that was being adopted by the religious after the Six-Day War, willing to use violence even amongst other Israelis.⁷⁷

Likewise, Dr. Baruch Goldstein was an Orthodox Jew who immigrated to Israel from the United States when he was nine years old and was an active member in the Kach party, being third in line on the party list during the 1984 elections. Known for his severe criticism of Israel's democracy, on *Purim*^{§§} in 1994, he opened fire on Muslim worshipers, killing 29 and wounding more than 125 others, jeopardizing attempts at the peace process.⁷⁸ Goldstein's wife insisted he was not a deranged individual, instead stating that he was a fundamentalist, or "national-religious,"⁷⁹ who conducted the massacre in order to end the peace talks on behalf of the people of Israel.⁸⁰ By killing Arabs who he believed wanted to kill Jews, Goldstein was reenacting part of the Purim story from the Book of Esther, not only to save Jews, but also to stop a peace deal that was based on less than Jewish rule over the "completed" land of Israel.⁸¹

Assisting in the furthering of this ideology amongst religious-Zionists were rabbis such as Edo Elba. Elba was imprisoned after publishing essays that gave credence to those Jews who kill gentiles, stating that no authoritative Biblical prohibition existed, essentially giving such acts a rabbinical blessing.⁸² Elba concluded that a preemptive attack on gentiles based on the fear they might attack Jews is an obligatory war to be conducted even on the Sabbath, and he also upheld the belief that Palestinians are Amalekites, members of the Canaanite tribe that Biblical Jews were historically instructed to eliminate.⁸³ Elba maintained that he was not inciting violence, but instead studying the theory of other religious authorities, purportedly Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, the former Israeli chief Sephardic Rabbi.⁸⁴

To a large degree, security is not the motivator of these extremists, but instead, ideology – one that is foreign to a large part of the secular Israeli population.⁸⁵ Both grew up in communities that typically do not involve themselves in politics or recognize Zionism, but both acted in

^{§§} Purim involves the reading of the Book of Esther, the story where Jews were saved from persecution in Persia through a Jewish Queen named Ester and her uncle. The enlightened King reverses Haman's decree to kill the Jews, allowing the Jews to strike down those who sought the original decree.

efforts to stop peace negotiations with Palestine that would relinquish land to Palestine. Amir had convinced himself that assassinating Rabin was the only way to save the land and the nation. Likewise, Goldstein was convinced an act of violence similar to that of *Purim* would save the Jews from preemptive peace negotiations that would cede Biblical land to the enemy.

They were both certain it was God's will and were willing to sacrifice their lives in order to see these religious destinies fulfilled when the government would not. This is a defining difference within the religious grouping: those who oppose the state of Israel being established by force and those who believe God used secular Zionists to establish Israel and now must maintain it as "the promised land." This distinct difference makes it difficult to find common ground for peace efforts, even as the community continues to grow.

Traditional

Traditionalists cover a wide array of beliefs, from religious fundamentalists to the more modern and liberal interpretations of belief and observance. They tend to value traditional Jewish life, but have historically been willing to compromise their Judaic practices in instances believed important enough to do so. The more religious of the traditionalists are often considered traditionalist because, in comparisons to orthodox persons, they elect a non-orthodox approach to religious practices. For instance, they will drive, use electricity, or go to the beach on the Sabbath after attending Shabbat services. Many opt to not wear *tefillin**** or *tzitzit*,††† at least not regularly, but all share a commitment to the religious component of their Jewishness and the Jewishness of the state.⁸⁶ The lesser religious of the traditionalists often serve as a mediator between the secular community and the religious traditionalists.

*** Consists of two small leather boxes attached to leather straps. The two boxes each contain four sections of the Torah inscribed on parchment and are bound to the head and left arm.

††† Four tassels of string with knots that hang from the fringes of the outer garment

Both the traditional religious and non-religious traditionalists are often unrepresented between the Orthodox and secular groupings; the latest Israeli Democracy Institute's religious poll showed between 500,000 and 600,000 traditional secular Jews feel a sense of belonging to the Conservative or Reform streams of Judaism, neither of which are recognized by the Jewish state.⁸⁷ A movement to recognize a conservative sect of Judaism, known as the Masorti movement, exists within Israel with more than fifty congregations throughout the country. According to its mission statement, it is "committed to a pluralistic, egalitarian, and democratic vision of Zionism" and "represents a 'third' way, not secular Judaism, not ultra-Orthodoxy, but a Jewish life that integrates secular beliefs, *Halakhah*^{†††} with inclusion and egalitarianism, and tradition that recognizes the realities of today's world."⁸⁸ It does this in order "to promote and strengthen a religious, communal, and spiritual Jewish approach, combining faithfulness to Judaism, Zionism, and Democracy which will play a leading role in Israeli society."⁸⁹

Like the conservative movement, the reform movement exists as well, but it is more liberal in practice than that of the conservative. The conservative movement seeks to, "integrate Jewish tradition with the realities of modern life, and believe in the right of each individual to shape their own Jewish way of life through a process of study and reflection" and "emphasizes the commandments concerning relations between humans, religious tolerance, and full equality between women and men in the synagogue and in all walks of life."⁹⁰ In addition to the conservative and reform sects, the study showed that Messianic Judaism, also not a recognized form of Judaism or Christianity, had grown to approximately 20,000.⁹¹ These Jews practice the laws of Judaism, but believe the Christian Jesus was the *Mashiach*, adopting the Christian New Testament as authoritative scriptures along with the Hebrew Bible. Additionally, they believe the

††† Translates, "The Way." The totality of laws and ordinances that have evolved since biblical times to regulate religious observances and the daily life and conduct of the Jewish people.

establishment of Israel is a fulfillment of prophesy in the Messianic Age where the third temple will be built in Jerusalem while they await his return.⁹²

The traditional religious of this grouping, typically religious-Zionists, view Jewish nationalism as a holy belief, and therefore, they scrutinize profoundly any national policy issue that is not in line with religious understandings.⁹³ As such, the traditional religious staunchly oppose ceding “ancestral” land that would “betray” the Jewish commitment to the “Promised Land,” instead encouraging “holy settlement” of the “liberated” land.⁹⁴ This interpretation of Zionism has led members to practice fundamental politics that can lead to political violence, often illustrated by hard-liners who encourage the creation of new settlements, taking advantage of the secular government’s reluctance to wage a relentless struggle against its own citizens.⁹⁵

The less religious of the traditionalists believe God exists, but generally do not openly practice their religion. A Hebrew University study concluded there were two types of Israelis: Jewish-Israelis and Israeli-Jews.⁹⁶ Those who identified first as Jewish and then Israeli also tended to self-identify as “religious” and “traditionalist” and felt connected with Judaism that was not dependent upon living in Israel, whereas those who first identified as Israeli and then Jewish, or Israeli-Jewish, tended to self-identify as “secular.” The study suggests that the Israeli-Jews are a product of the Israeli public sphere in that their Jewish pride correlates with a positive attitude toward ritual in public institutions and a negative attitude toward ritual within the private sphere. The study concludes that this speaks to the fact that non-Orthodox Jews are not allowed to develop religious alternatives such as Reform or Conservative Judaism and, in turn, choose to define themselves in the negative (secular), as standing against state-sponsored Orthodoxy, with regard to the 22 percent of seculars who believe in God.⁹⁷ Because of this, there is a lack of religious cohesion within this traditional community.

All of these individuals are categorized as “secular” under the “religious versus non-religious approach” traditionally used within Israel and among many scholars, since that approach is based solely upon strict adherence to Orthodox practices. As demonstrated here, this grossly misrepresents this issue and illustrates the need for the middle category between the two. The internal tension of being labeled as “secular” while having devotion to the religion can be seen among many in this category and many political leaders as well.

David Ben-Gurion, an Ashkenazim from Poland who was known as the father of modern Israel, refused to call himself “secular.” Instead, Ben-Gurion claimed to be a religious “pantheist,” but one who believed in God and the Hebrew Bible.⁹⁸ Ben-Gurion has been characterized as historically conservative since he regarded biblical historiography as reliable history instead of relying solely upon archeology.⁹⁹ Refusing the label of “secular” with notions of pantheism and monotheism, Ben-Gurion would fall somewhere between the lines of the traditionalist and secular groups though not supported fully by either. Ben-Gurion mediated between the religious and secular communities, brokering the four-part “secular-religious status quo” agreement with the Haredi that has remained in effect to date, while remaining committed to building a non-theocratic state.

The late Gershon Cohen, a leading figure in conservative politics as the chancellor emeritus of the Jewish Theological Seminary, established the first Conservative rabbinical program in Jerusalem. He once stated,

Israel can occupy an indispensable place in Jewish life only if it becomes and remains part of an inseverable dimension of greater centrality—the centrality of the Jewish people. To this I hasten to add that even the Jewish people can only perpetuate its centrality if it, in turn, is a consequence of a higher mandate . . . namely the *Torah*. Only a religious, that is, transcendent, mandate can lead to a sense of consanguinity between my children and Jews of Moroccan origin living in Israel. Apart from that religious mandate, apart from the covenant that underlies such a mandate, no demand of loyalty on my part or anyone else’s makes any sense.¹⁰⁰

As a traditionalist, Cohen underscored the necessity to recognize the rabbinical tradition as a key element of Jewish culture.¹⁰¹

Likewise, prominent Rabbis within the traditional grouping have furthered this belief just as Orthodox rabbis have continued to speak on behalf of the religious community to the general public and to politicians. Well-known conservative Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg proclaimed, “In order to continue being an authentic Jew, the secular Israeli Jew must be knowledgeable of the Jewish religious heritage. If he is an ignoramus regarding Jewish sources, unattuned to their substance, he approaches the condition of being a Hebrew-speaking Goy.”¹⁰² Through this, Rabbi Hertzberg purported the belief that ignorance of religious Jewish tradition, and more so, adversity to it, represents a cultural tragedy.¹⁰³ It is important to the traditionalist that the nation is not completely secular, that Israel retains some extent of religious connotations, but not to the extent of Orthodox Jews.

Like that of the religious group, there is little room for agreement between the religious traditionalists who provide no space for peace settlements with Palestine and the non-religious traditionalists who are more compromising politically. The only way for an agreement between them to exist is for the non-religious traditionalists to concede to the staunch stance of the religious, which is not compromise at all.

Secular

As early as the 1920s, especially in the decade following Israel’s establishment, Biblical archeology served as a public cult, a large part of the new Jewish “secular religion.” The secular population’s traditions and practices may be similar to those of more reform-leaning traditionalists; however, they maintain these practices for family and national reasons rather than religious

ones typically. Because Jewish religious practices have such a strong national component, they are a strong element in the national identity, even if Israelis do not believe in the validity of the Jewish religion.¹⁰⁴ As previously mentioned, the secular group is almost evenly split between those who believe in God and those who are atheists.

The 2010 Israeli Democracy Institute study identified that three quarters of the atheist population continue to follow the most traditional of Judaic practices; only 5 percent of the entire Jewish population claims to observe no religious practice in any regard, including Passover.¹⁰⁵ It also indicates that 98 percent of the Jewish population have *mezuzahs*^{§§§} on their doorposts, as understood from the book of Deuteronomy, and 92 percent of Israelis continue to circumcise their children in accordance with Jewish customs,¹⁰⁶ which are both so engrained in the culture that most people do not think of them as religious practices so much as culture.¹⁰⁷

The secular circles do not regard the *Torah* as holy or inspired scripture and do not accept a theo-historical world view, choosing not to observe the commandments, rituals, and practices of such for religious purposes.¹⁰⁸ While the secular population does not share the same religious non-violence belief of the Haredi with regards to military service and national security, most are strongly opposed to violence among Jews.¹⁰⁹

Dr. Nathan Birnbaum, who coined the term “Zionism” in 1890, was unyielding in his belief that the Bible was irrelevant to the rebirth of Israel and that the ancient character of Israel was historic, and thus forever dead, not to be revived.¹¹⁰ Similarly, before Israel’s establishment, Menachem Begin, the Irgun’s commander between 1943 and Israel’s establishment in 1948, was a prominent secular figure in Israeli politics who was adamant that Jews must not fight each other in a civil war in the years leading up to the Jewish state. Historians have credited Begin’s ac-

^{§§§} A piece of parchment inscribed with specified Hebrew verses from the Torah, often contained in a decorated case, and posted on the doorframe of the home in accordance with Deuteronomy 6:9 11:13-21.

tions with helping to prevent extreme violence during the aggression of Gush Emunim settlers against the government in the 1970s and the non-violent reaction to the Yamit settlement evacuation in 1982.¹¹¹

Today, the Likud political party of Israel maintains a secular ideology, focused on national security with a strong military force and a history of reluctance to negotiate with neighboring countries whom they believe seek the destruction of Israel.¹¹² While most seculars lean toward this party, internal disagreements between older moderates and younger hard-liners have continued, and because of this fact, numerous other political parties have come into existence.¹¹³ Members of the Likud party have included the former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Menachem Begin, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In his 2013 speech to the UN, Netanyahu concluded with both a Hebrew and English declaration of the following:

In our time, the Biblical prophecies are being realized. As the prophet Amos said, they shall rebuild ruined cities and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine. They shall till gardens and eat their fruit. And I will plant them upon their soil never to be uprooted again. The people of Israel have come home never to be uprooted again.¹¹⁴

This statement came after he had also announced in the speech that,

It is not the United Nations, nor the United States, nor a slipshod ‘two-state solution’ that will establish the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland, but only the promises of the God of Israel, as spoken in His word to their forefathers.¹¹⁵

Later still, in March 2015, Netanyahu met with Jon Boehner, U.S. House Speaker, just before the Jewish holiday of *Purim* and gave Speaker Boehner a scroll of the Book of Esther. In doing so, he specifically stated, he came to “represent The People of the Book.”¹¹⁶ While this statement was addressing Iran and the nuclear agreement, for years Iran has supplied Hezbollah’s weapons, through Syria to Lebanon (Israel’s bordering states).¹¹⁷ By drawing a parallel between

Purim and the situation of the Jewish people in the nuclear deal, Netanyahu was comparing it to that of the Jewish people of 2,500 years ago as *Purim* celebrates the victory of Esther. The book of Esther tells the story of the plot by the Persian king's advisor to exterminate the Jews and how the faith and courage of the Jewish queen Esther, outwitted him and saved her people. While Netanyahu is typically labeled as secular, he is not an atheist and speaks to seeing Biblical prophecies fulfilled in his time to both the American population and nations within the UN.

Because these three groupings of religious narratives are heuristic, no clear delineating line exists between the three groups. Instead, significant overlap occurs in each of the groups, creating an objective grey line, divided according to questions specifically used in the surveys to illicit defining responses. Religious differences between the ultra-religious and the secular are immense, and the differences in each group are not weighed equally in terms of legislation.

As previously noted, the religious community plays a significantly smaller role in politics, including voting, than both the traditionalist and the secular; however, their religious justifications for violence have considerable political effects. Staunch in their beliefs, the religious often find themselves represented by the beliefs and compromising ways of the traditionalists. In addition to limited political participation, this is due in part to their refusal of conscription and government stipends for employment in the community, causing some non-religious to disregard their interests. At the same time, the secular group has internal disagreements; some vehemently oppose religion in politics, while others (like Netanyahu) reference scripture in international speeches further complexing the role of religion in politics. Below, a brief comparison of religious narratives in politics is addressed to further illustrate this point.

Comparative Analysis

The religious practices are so variant within the Jewish population of Israel that it has created significant tension and a lack of compromise within the country, demonstrating the inability for Israel to enter into peace agreements with Palestine. To illustrate this, all three aforementioned religious groupings are briefly analyzed prior to concluding statements on the research. The first subsection will evaluate Israel with regards to religiosity versus secular status, the second will evaluate some of the internal religious tensions that affect the peace process, and lastly, it will analyze its history of internal compromise with regards to reconciliation with the Palestinians.

Religious versus Secular State

Because Israel has only officially recognized Orthodox Judaism since its inception, Israelis have labeled those Jews who do not subscribe to Orthodox Judaism as “secular.”¹¹⁸ Not fully understanding this underlying factor, the international community has long debated the extent of Israel’s secularism. The general belief that Israel is a secular nation is also due in part to the fact that many of the elites in Israel’s society can be found in the 20 percent of Jewish secularists who do not believe in God, which frames the observations of Israel made by any outside the country.¹¹⁹ Additionally, the vast majority of that 20 percent of atheists are Ashkenazi immigrants from Eastern or Central Europe, or are direct descendants thereof. While 85 percent of the Israeli population speaks English, the Ashkenazi are considerably well-trained compared to the Mizrahi, continue to have relatives in the Diaspora, and are much more likely to be contacted by outside media, all of which enable this perception to transpire and continue.¹²⁰

There has long been a perception that a small percentage of the population, being religious, has been coercing the government in some form or fashion. Part of this perception may be

due to the lack of Israel's recognition of Conservative and Reform Judaism, which makes up over half a million people identifying as traditionalist instead of Orthodox or truly secular. It is clear from the latest surveys and the religious references of current leaders that the secular majority has declined as the religious and even traditional groups have continued to increase in percentage.

Some analysts argue that the religious have lost control of the public sphere as it has taken on a secular culture, proven with the proliferation of non-kosher restaurants, an annual gay pride parade, and the rise of commercial activity on the Sabbath,¹²¹ but a secular nation will not satisfy those who, if pressed, will turn to violence against the imposition of secularism that would threaten their worldview. Similarly, such impositions by the liberal faction would prove to be an intolerance that conquers alternative worldview, and in turn is ironically illiberal.¹²²

When considering the populations of the three groups with regards to peace processes with Palestine, it is not difficult to imagine the complexity of discussions within the country. As identified in the religious narratives, there is much carry over of beliefs between the groups. Within the religious community, there are some who refuse to be involved in politics and do not believe Israel should have been established by force, refusing to serve in the military. Others within the group are religious Zionists who believe God used the secular Zionist to establish the country in which they now have a duty to maintain, by force if necessary.

On the other end of the spectrum is the secular grouping. Being that secularism is marked by an indifference to religion and religious considerations, nationalism takes the priority. There are many in the Likud party whose priority is security of the nation and a history of unwillingness to negotiate with nations who seek their destruction. At the same time, they are ex-

tremely reluctant to use force on the Jewish population, a circumstance often exploited by those in the religious and traditional communities.

Between the religious and the secularists are the traditionalists. While this group is the most flexible and willing to negotiate, the more religious traditionalists are strictly opposed to ceding “ancestral land” that would betray the Jewish commitment to the “promised land” they feel was given by God. At the same time, they encourage settlements on the land and will use violence, if necessary, to further their beliefs. Meanwhile, the non-religious traditionalists are often the more accommodating of the group, willing to negotiate and play a vital mediation role within the country, though they are limited in number.

History of Compromise

Because religious differences have become such a flashpoint for social tensions such as serving in the military, this has led to increased communal segregation within Israel.¹²³ Like the religious absolutes that have stalled negotiations in the peace process, so too have the religious tensions that have led to residential segregation within Israel and continued government infighting, further dividing the population from any possibility of compromise.

Besides incorporating religion into the new Jewish state in order to attract immigrating Jews, few real compromises of consequence have occurred within the government. This situation is due in part to multiple parties within the government based upon the reign of a parliamentary democracy. The other significant reason is the sliding scale of religiosity, in which only the Orthodox truly have a voice as a recognized religious group with regards to establishing marriage rights and other social issues such as “the right of return.” The traditional religious party has rationally served as a mediating group between that of the religious and the secular groupings, and as such, Israel’s views on Palestine often center on the traditionalists’ religious belief

and understanding that the land was God-given to the Jews even after Israel ceased to exist, as demonstrated by public statements made to the UN and US Congress on behalf of Israel by secularist, Prime Minister Netanyahu.

This belief is based on a number of *Torah* references granting the land to certain Jewish tribes or people, but more so to prophecies in the *Tanakh***** about the return of the Jewish people after years of exile. The perceived realizations of Biblical prophecies during their lifetimes, just as they were foretold nearly 3,000 years prior, has reinforced this belief.¹²⁴ For instance, in 2013, for the first time in thousands of years, the Jewish state officially became home to the largest number of Jews in the world, with 6 million recorded. The United States was number two in population, with 5.5 million,¹²⁵ appearing to validate scripture that the Jews would return to Israel out of exile. Because religion is often at the core of both individual and group identity,¹²⁶ or national identity for Israel, it serves as a middle ground between Haredi and atheist Jews, respectively, 28 percent combined.

In these mediation attempts, strong personalities and even violent actions have arisen out of disagreement with said compromising efforts. The most notorious agreement is the Status Quo. In it, Shabbat was officially recognized as a national day of rest, kosher food available in state-sponsored kitchens, a single jurisdiction maintained for marriage and divorce [civil marriage does not exist], and each Jewish religious denomination within Israel had autonomy in education as long as minimum state standards were met. Further, the agreement limited the Jews' access to the Temple Mount.¹²⁷ As previously mentioned, this agreement has not been without dissent by many Jews and has led to much protest.

**** Acronym for the law, prophets, and writings; collection of twenty-four books that make up the Hebrew Bible.

Because the Status Quo only officially recognizes the Orthodox Judaism rabbinate as authority in personal issues, this has caused a lot of opposition by secular Jews as they consider it a monopoly that hinders relations with others in Israel. The Status Quo has created problems, too, amongst converts to Reform and Conservative Judaism, who are not recognized in the state and, therefore, are not allowed to marry or divorce in the country or be buried in Jewish cemeteries.¹²⁸ Additionally, Orthodox views on the definition of “Jew” and “who is a Jew” have created dividing lines regarding the “Law of Return” and who can immigrate to Israel, amongst other national concerns.

This continued reluctance to make concessions are due in part to a lack of internal partnership. Because Israel is a parliamentary democracy, many politicians are aware concessions will cost them seats in the legislature come election time. In the end, this reluctance for concessions leads to a zero-sum game. Ultimately, without a history of successful compromise amongst Israeli citizens, there is little hope of compromise with Palestine.

Conclusion

While religion is not the only salient point in this conflict, it has proven to be a significant influence as the secular community continues to decline and religious tensions rise. Since multiple religious narratives that cannot compromise internally exist, peace negotiations externally remain improbable. Consequently, a “tragic justice” must be accepted because neither party is in a position to negotiate peace processes with the other, based upon the Israeli narratives presented. While the Palestinian narratives are not addressed here, there are a number of competing narratives at play including Hamas, currently designated as a terrorist organization by both Israel and the United States,¹²⁹ and refugees that complicate the negotiation process.

For both Israel and Palestine, the presence of the other is, and will continue to be, their most imperative and unavoidable challenge as the peace process remains unnegotiable. Unfortunately, at this time, the religious beliefs among Israeli Jews do not provide sufficient common ground to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Though some Israelis in each of the three heuristic communities espouse beliefs that would support settlement agreements, they are not large enough, nor do they partner on other significant religious social issues often enough to influence Israeli political leadership. Instead, the social tensions have created further division within the country leading to disintegrated communal ties and residential segregation, neither of which aid in the making of concessions leading to compromise.

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