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Guest Essay

What Tucker Carlson Means When He Talks About Israel

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Tucker Carlson can read the room. In November 2016, just days after President Trump's first election victory, he launched a prime-time show on Fox News [largely devoted](#) to the proposition that liberal elites were replacing white Americans and Europeans with Black and brown immigrants.

Now, as many Americans sour on Israel, he's in the vanguard once again. [Over the last year or so](#), he's become a leading champion on the right for abandoning America's long-held support for the Jewish state. "Hopefully the first thing we do when and if this war is resolved is detach from Israel," he [told](#) his audience in early April.

Mr. Carlson's worldview hasn't fundamentally changed. Like other prominent figures on the anti-Israel right, he still sees the West as menaced by alien civilizations bent on its destruction. He has just turned his attention to what he sees as the alien civilization that populates the Jewish state. And he's done so with the same penchant for conspiracy theories that has long marked his public commentary. Now he is using a destructive, ill-defined and unpopular war to give those theories even greater reach.

Consider a [monologue](#) Mr. Carlson delivered in March, in which he offered a bizarre theory as to why Israel attacked Iran: The strike was, he said, part of a stealth plan to demolish the Al Aqsa Mosque and rebuild the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, which would then incite a global religious war. The real victims of that religious war, Mr. Carlson claimed, would be "Christian, Western, white countries." Israel's "real target," he suggested, "is not the mullahs in Iran. It's us, as it always has been."

Mr. Carlson's theory is preposterous, but it reflects a perspective growing on the American right. He is at the forefront of a cohort of right-wing commentators who don't merely condemn Israel's manifold crimes against the Palestinians and others in the Middle East. They also suggest something far more troubling: that Israel's crimes stem from its Jewishness, which they claim threatens the Christian West.

Commentators of all ideological stripes can conflate Israel with Jews, progressives included. Still, when progressives seek explanations for Israel's misdeeds, they often talk about systems — settler-colonialism, imperialism, ethnonationalism. These structural explanations implicate many countries, including the United States. By contrast, conservative critics like Mr. Carlson tend to shun such explanations because they threaten American and Christian moral superiority. Instead, they frequently root the problem in Israel's Jewishness.

In its focus on identity, the right's discourse about the Jewish state increasingly resembles its discourse about Islamist terrorist groups. Just look at America's post-9/11 arguments about Al Qaeda and ISIS. The left tended to see these terrorist groups as a product of American imperialism in the Muslim world. The right saw them as the product of Islam. A 2021 Pew Research [poll](#) found that Republicans were more than twice as likely as Democrats to say "Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its believers."

Now Americans across the ideological spectrum are growing [more critical](#) of Israel. But young conservatives are more likely than their lefty counterparts to link Israel's transgressions to its religious identity. Last fall, a Yale [survey](#) asked Americans ages 18-34 how they felt about claims that American Jews enjoy too much power, are more loyal to Israel than America and should have their businesses boycotted to protest the war in Gaza. Almost two-thirds of respondents ages 18 to 34 who defined themselves as "extremely conservative" agreed with at least one of those statements. Among people in that same age group who defined themselves as "extremely liberal," less than one-third did.

That's not surprising given the rhetoric of some of America's most influential far-right commentators. Candace Owens, one of America's [most popular](#) podcasters, has [endorsed](#) Mr. Carlson's [claim](#) that the ultra-Orthodox Jewish group Chabad is using the Iran war to try to rebuild the Temple. She has also [claimed](#) that the Talmud tells Jews "that we're animals, that they have a right to own us, that they have a right to make us worship them." In 2024 she [accused](#) Israel of giving refuge to pedophiles and linked that behavior to the ritual murder of Christians in Europe during Passover. Nick Fuentes, an avowed racist and misogynist who Mr. Carlson recently [hosted](#) for a friendly interview, has [insisted](#) that "If you read anything about the Israeli government, anything even about Talmudic Judaism, what they say is, we don't love our enemies. They say that the non-Jews, we don't even consider them human."

Mr. Carlson is more subtle. But he, too, often attributes Israel's behavior to what he sees as its anti-Western religion. Last October, he [claimed](#) that "the Israeli position is 'everyone who lives in Gaza is a terrorist because of how they were born, including the women and the children.' That's not a Western view. That's an Eastern view. That's a non-Christian — that's totally incompatible with Christianity and Western civilization." Earlier this year Mr. Carlson [said](#) that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel had tried to punish members of Mr. Carlson's family because Mr. Netanyahu "believes in blood guilt, Amalek. You know, when someone commits a crime against you, you punish not just him but his family, his bloodline. There's no idea that's less Western than that, more anti-Christian than that. Christians reject that."

Mr. Carlson is implying that Israel's punishment of the Palestinian people stems from something particularly Jewish — or "non-Christian" — about its misdeeds. Such civilizational generalizations are false; many Christian and Western leaders practice collective punishment. The United States was founded on the same kind of land theft that Israel is committing against Palestinians.

Combating the anti-Israel right's conflation of Israel and Jewishness is made harder by pro-Israel American Jewish organizations that have conflated those two things as well.

But progressives must not blur the distinction between viewing Israel as a state, which practices forms of oppression and aggression that can occur in states of every ethnic and religious type, and viewing Israel as the product of a peculiarly Jewish pathology. It is understandable that some progressives, who are rightly eager to end America's support for Israel's human rights abuses, might be tempted to see figures like Mr. Carlson as allies. But the struggle for Palestinian freedom should not indulge bigotry of any kind. That includes the bigotry of figures like Tucker Carlson, who blame Israel's crimes on its Jewishness so they can pretend that America and Christianity are morally pure.

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