

Reinhold Niebuhr and the Postliberals

The Fate of Liberal Protestant American Zionism

REINHOLD NIEBUHR WAS THE most prominent liberal protestant theologian to support Zionism in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. Only a minority of theologians, clergy, and laity in the mainline churches ever supported Zionism. Some argue that because Niebuhr's Zionism was not grounded in dogmatic theology and biblical exegesis, it was not transmitted to the next generation of mainline Protestants. Furthermore, the structure of his thought left open the possibility of an anti-Zionist approach. This chapter assesses the tensions between theology and ethics in Niebuhr's Zionism, and links it to his conception of both Israel and America as messianic nations with civilizational missions. First, it assesses Niebuhr's support for a Jewish return to Palestine in relation to Protestant and Jewish relocation of the promised land. The second section argues that Niebuhr's Zionism was integral to his Christian realism. The third section probes his shift from viewing Jews as a messianic people to understanding America as a messianic nation, subsuming Israel under America's civilizing mission. The fourth section argues that Niebuhr's natural theology, which was the basis for his understanding of history and divine transcendence, constrained what he could say concerning the "biblical myths" of covenant and election regarding Israel. The fifth section argues that Niebuhr located his Zionism within his reconstruction of natural law and subjected it to his critique of nationalism and religion. As his Zionism was not theologically grounded, his support for Israel could not be persuasive theologically for subsequent generations of mainline Protestants. In the last two sections, I argue that Niebuhr's method had a major influence on

American postliberal theology and on Mark Juergensmeyer's sociological assessment of apocalyptic violence as religious resurgence since the end of the Cold War. As Niebuhr's argument for Zionism was kept outside the bounds of theology, it failed to be registered properly by postliberalism; and his denial of the election of Israel opened the door to denial or ignoring by Christians of the implication of Judaism as politics, and therefore of Zionism, in the challenges of modernity. The result is that postliberalism with its heavy focus on narrative, drama, and nonviolence, is powerless to diagnose the ills of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism that are so prevalent in forms of religious resurgence around the world.

THE PROMISED LAND AS ZION: RELOCATION FROM AMERICA TO PALESTINE

The relocation of the idea of Zion, the promised land, from America to Palestine occurred in the nineteenth century among American Protestants and in the twentieth century among American Jews.¹ Niebuhr's Zionism is located midway between the two. The Congregationalists and Puritans who came to New England in the seventeenth century saw America as Zion.² Many American religious people changed from seeing America as the Holy Land to seeing the Land of Israel as the Holy Land. American Congregationalist missionaries in the nineteenth century believed the second coming was imminent, and set off in 1819 to found missions, despite Catholic and Muslim Turkish opposition.³ Nineteenth-century American Congregationalist missionaries "helped replant the sacred territory of Scripture from America to the Land of Israel, including its eschatological ramifications."⁴ This approach was an important source for American evangelical attitudes to Israel. However, liberal Protestants interpreted the issue differently. Gershom Greenberg compares Reinhold Niebuhr's attitude to that of two other prominent liberal Protestant churchmen of the first half of the twentieth century: Adolf A. Berle Sr. and Harry Emerson Fosdick. The distinctions between them—and between Niebuhr and Fosdick in particular—correspond to the subsequent divide among mainline Protestants over Israel.

1. I am indebted to the account of Gershom Greenberg for the basic tenets of this section. See Greenberg, *Holy Land*.

2. *Ibid.*, 15–45; Handy, *A Christian America*, chs.1 and 2.

3. Greenberg, *Holy Land*, 113–41.

4. *Ibid.*, 132.

Berle was an American Congregationalist pastor from Boston, who penned a volume entitled *The World Significance of a Jewish State* in 1918.⁵ In it he idealizes Jews and Judaism as superior to Christianity, which had failed both to avert the First World War and mitigate its consequences. He looked for the religious rehabilitation and unification of Jews and the formation of a Jewish state on this basis. He envisioned a Hebrew commonwealth in which the Hebrew language and literature would thrive. This would enable the renewal of ancient Israelite law and national structures. The Jewish state would display its national traditions and idealisms, which had made the politics of the Israelite prophets such an integral part of Christianity. As a result, anti-Semitism would be eliminated. Jewish return to Israel would be the occasion for “world instruction in the religion of Israel, which has never been vouchsafed to any other cult in the history of mankind!”⁶ Berle considered Judaism as “the barometer of civilization,” a future moral paradigm. In this, he represented a shift away from seeing America as the world’s exemplary nation. Placing responsibility upon a future Jewish state for “improving the world” due to disenchantment with Christianity was a significant move, as it opened the door to later liberal Protestant disenchantment with Israel for not being morally perfect.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, a prominent New York Baptist minister, toured Palestine in 1920.⁷ Fosdick was disappointed with the land, and disagreed with Theodor Herzl’s slogan that it was “a land without a people,” given that there were more than half a million Arabs living there. Fosdick, like many American liberals, sympathized with the Arabs’ view that they had been betrayed by the British when they were not granted autonomy in return for winning the First World War against the Ottoman Turks. Fosdick sympathized with the Arab fear that Jews would try to rebuild Solomon’s temple, thus provoking conflict with Islam. (This was somewhat disingenuous given that he knew most Jews to be secular.) He wanted to restrict the number of Jewish refugees allowed into Palestine, but like Berle, he also wanted Jews to reside in the land in a way that would somehow “benefit mankind.” Fosdick spoke about Zionism to staff and students at Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1927. Zionism for him was a form of nationalism and as such, an idol. He would only support a Zionism that was a cultural and educational revival such as that espoused by Rabbi Judah Magnes (1877–1948), then chancellor of the Hebrew

5. Berle, *The World Significance of a Jewish State*; Greenberg, *Holy Land*, 281–82.

6. Berle, *World Significance*, as cited in Davis, *America and the Holy Land*, 64, fn. 5.

7. Greenberg, *Holy Land*, 282–84.

University of Jerusalem. This influenced subsequent mainline Protestant attitudes, for Magnes and other intellectuals at Hebrew University were convinced anti-Zionists, favoring the idea of a binational Jewish-Arab state. The most important proponent of this view was Martin Buber, who advanced the concept of the “true Zionism” of the soul.⁸

From the time of his critique of liberalism onwards, Niebuhr differed from both Berle and Fosdick in placing fewer moral expectations upon Jews to redeem the human race. He eschewed moralism, mounting a sharp critique in the early 1930s of the liberal Social Gospel movement and its perceived optimism concerning human perfectibility and the gradual progression of history. Niebuhr saw Palestine as a home for the Jews, not as a project that was supposed to “benefit mankind” (Fosdick) or “improve the world” (Berle). Thus he did not tend to hold Jews and Israel to a higher standard than other nations. He definitely did not want to see ancient Israelite law revived, and was almost paranoid about Israel’s becoming a theocracy. Israel for Niebuhr was neither a displacement of Christian hopes for worldly redemption and progress onto Jews, nor a displacement of Christian hopes for religious resurgence. His secularized Zionism was an alternative to more evangelical forms of Christian support for Zionism.

Niebuhr would grasp the “creational” aspects of Zionism, as opposed to its soteriological and eschatological aspects. In this respect, his thinking was closer structurally and substantially to that of Reform and secular Jews than to that of fellow Protestants. Louis Brandeis’ case for Jewish assimilation in the United States along with the founding of a Jewish state influenced Niebuhr, as both men shared a commitment to the United States as a liberal democracy.⁹ Brandeis’ argument was that nations have right and duties to develop and promote the higher goals of civilization, because they are just as “individual” as persons. Niebuhr also agreed with his friend Justice Felix Frankfurter that Palestine would rescue Jewish national identity.¹⁰ Frankfurter had been recruited to American Jewish Zionism by Brandeis even before Woodrow Wilson led America into the First World War.¹¹ His unofficial diplomacy would prove to be both significant on the Jewish side and supportive of Niebuhr’s efforts.¹²

8. Buber, *A Land of Two Peoples*, 220–24. For strong Zionist criticism of Buber’s role in Israel, see Hazony, *The Jewish State*, 181–93, 267–83.

9. Niebuhr, “Jews after the War: Parts I and II,” 133–34, 138–39.

10. Greenberg, *Holy Land*, 341.

11. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism*, 87–88.

12. Rice, “Felix Frankfurter and Reinhold Niebuhr, 1940–1964,” 325–426.

NIEBUHR'S ZIONISM EXPRESSED AS CHRISTIAN REALISM

Early in his career Niebuhr encountered American Jews. His friendships with them nourished a belief that Judaism's sense of social justice was superior to that of contemporary American Protestantism. Also as a result he became a convinced Zionist, expressing this conviction through his method of "Christian realism." The Israeli political theorist Eyal Naveh has recently argued that Niebuhr's support for Zionism formed part of a "non-utopian liberalism":

As one who always opposed any simple identification between historical events and the divine cosmic structure, Niebuhr refused to give any religious meaning and redemptive significance to the destiny of the Jews. He considered Zionism as a legitimate political movement; a possible, not necessarily inevitable solution; one, not necessarily exclusive remedy, for the Jewish problem in the twentieth century. He admitted, however, that "the ideal of a political homeland for the Jews is so intriguing that I am almost willing to sacrifice my conviction for the sake of it."¹³

Niebuhr's Zionism was central to his Christian realism, which itself was deeply rooted in his favoring what he considered to be the Hebraic moral aspect of the Western Christian tradition over its Hellenic metaphysical aspect. The development of Niebuhr's Zionism reflects the continued coordination of Christian realism's three components: political, moral, and theological.¹⁴ *Political realism* involves taking into account all the different kinds of forces involved in making political decisions. Accordingly, the human condition is too complicated to allow pure moral idealism to affect such decisions, as it risks disempowering political agents through lack of worldly wisdom. Niebuhr's subtlety on this matter has been overlooked, both by critics and supporters. John Howard Yoder accuses Niebuhr of introducing into Christian ethics extraneous concepts that found his political realism upon national self-interest rather than on any Christian moral considerations.¹⁵ The influential International Relations theorist Hans Morgenthau, on the other hand, read Niebuhr in a reductionist fashion, as if he were denying the importance of moral values

13. Naveh, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Non-Utopian Liberalism*, 83, citing Niebuhr, "Judaism and the Zionists," 16.

14. For this categorization, see Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, 3–24.

15. Yoder, "Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism," 101–17.

for politics, and implying that they are reducible to self-interest.¹⁶ This matters because Niebuhr was committed to an underlying *moral realism*, a conviction that moral statements are true or false independent of the individual or community that espouses them. This rules out ethics solely guided by self-interest as well as moral relativism. Niebuhr formulated his version of moral realism by reconstructing Protestant natural law theory along the lines of “ethical naturalism.” This will receive further attention below in section 5. For now it is enough to say that a proper understanding of human nature is necessary to make right action possible. Niebuhr’s *theological realism* is intertwined with the morally realist pursuit of justice. This rests on a belief that God is love, and that this love requires justice of human beings. Deflecting fears of moral authoritarianism whereby all theological realists would be required in advance to know or agree on the content of ethics, Niebuhr implies that, due to God’s transcendence over creatures, no one has complete knowledge of the divine will and purpose on any particular issue. This feeds his critique of religion in relation to nationalism, which will also be considered below in section 5.

Niebuhr’s key writings on Zionism demonstrate his application of this threefold realism. He started speaking and writing publicly in support of American Jewish Zionism in the 1930s, as he realized that the situation of Jews in Europe was worsening. European Jews were attempting to flee Nazi persecution by emigrating to British Mandatory Palestine. In 1938 Niebuhr addressed Hadassah, the women’s Zionist organization, supporting a Jewish home in Palestine. Admitting the real difficulty of this occurring on land claimed by Arabs, he first compared it to other situations across the world affected by heavy migration. He assumed the realist perspective that “nothing in the realm of politics can be done without friction.” He concluded that “Palestine must not be abandoned,” not only due to lack of an alternative location for Zion, but also “because the years of expenditure of energy, life and treasure . . . must not be sacrificed.”¹⁷ Addressing the 44th annual convention of the Zionist Organization of America in Cincinnati in September 1941, he said that when all had been said about the problem of relating Diaspora Jews to the Land of Israel, the justice of Zionism enters because “there is no spirit without a body, and there is no body without geography.”¹⁸ This is the single most important

16. See Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, 10; Rice, “Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau,” 255–91.

17. Niebuhr, “My Sense of Shame,” 59–60.

18. Niebuhr, September 9, 1941, cited in Brown, *Niebuhr and His Age*, 142.

Zionist statement Niebuhr made, because he connected the Land of Israel with creaturely embodiment and statehood, as they were in the Bible. It also articulates in a nutshell his reconstruction of natural law theory to incorporate freedom, here expressed as “spirit.”

Niebuhr’s most important publication on Zionism was his 1942 article “Jews after the War.” It demonstrates a far-sighted approach unmatched by other Christian ethicists. Reintegrating Jews into Europe would be unrealistic due to prospective post-war impoverishment and endemic anti-Semitism. Assimilation alone would be ethically unacceptable as this would bring about the disappearance of Jews as a nationality. Nationality, not religion, represented that which is unique to Jewish life.¹⁹

Jews render no service either to democracy or to their people by seeking to deny this ethnic foundation of their life, or by giving themselves to the illusion that they might dispel all prejudice if only they could prove that they are a purely cultural or religious community.²⁰

In this, Niebuhr reflects Louis Brandeis’ arguments for Zionism. He astutely observes that poorer Jews had not been able to enjoy the benefits of emancipation and assimilation as richer Jews had, because “majority bigotry” always falls much harder on the poorer members of an ethnic group. Poorer Jews thus had a very strong need to return to the Land of Israel.²¹ Zionism was therefore seen as the socialism of poor Jews. Due to Niebuhr’s Christian realist critique of Marxism as a myth or religion capable of corrupting politics, he never carried this argument to the logical conclusion expressed in Marxist strands of early Zionism. Those saw emigration to Palestine as necessary for poor Jews to win the class struggle against their more privileged brethren.²² Christian realism is articulated *in nuce* in his statement that Zionism represents “the wisdom of common experience against the wisdom of the mind, which tends to take premature flights into the absolute or the universal from the tragic conflicts and the stubborn particularities of human history.”²³

19. Niebuhr, “Jews after the War,” 134.

20. *Ibid.*, 135.

21. *Ibid.*, 136.

22. On Niebuhr’s use and subsequent critique of Marxist ideas, see Gilkey, *On Niebuhr*, 33f. On Jewish Marxist Zionists, see Goldberg, *To The Promised Land*, 113–34.

23. Niebuhr, “Jews after the War,” 137.

Niebuhr viewed Israel as an outpost of Western civilization in the Middle East. Indeed, this seems to have become intertwined for him with the idea of a Jewish refuge from persecution as Israel's *raison d'être*. As primary spokesman of the American Christian Palestine Committee, Niebuhr favored free immigration, unlimited settlement by Jews, and the development of a Jewish majority in Palestine empowered to establish a democratic government. He advocated that Palestine should be "set aside for the Jews," and that the Arabs should be "otherwise compensated." It is vital to understand this through the prism of Niebuhr's own German descent, which enabled him to have contact with German Zionists during the Nazi era. This deepens the impact of his painful acknowledgement to American Jews that he was ashamed that "an allegedly Christian civilization" could stoop to the level of systemic anti-Semitism. What surfaces is awareness of the deep cultural link between Western Europe and the United States. Proper appreciation of this very American sentiment is necessary to grasp the importance for Niebuhr of Israel as carrier of Western civilization, specifically one not tainted by the currents that fed Nazi ideology.

In order to defend Christian realism and advance the Zionist cause, he founded the journal *Christianity and Crisis*, soberly telling his American audience that the Nazi regime really intended to annihilate the Jewish people and to destroy Christianity as well. In 1942, forty mainline church leaders and scholars, including Niebuhr, formed the Christian Council for Palestine to support Zionism. On January 10, 1946, Niebuhr appeared before the Joint Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, formed after the War ended, on behalf of the Christian Council for Palestine, making the following statement: "There is in fact no solution to any political problem. The fact, however, that the Arabs have a vast hinterland in the Middle East, and the fact that the Jews have nowhere to go establishes the relative justice of their claims and of their cause."²⁴ He supported transfer of Arabs out of Palestine, including Herbert Hoover's idea that they should be resettled in Iraq.²⁵ Building upon the critical defense of democracy as the only seriously viable form of government that he had developed in his 1944 book *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, Niebuhr then continued:

24. Merkley, *Politics*, 171, citing "Statement to Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry," Reinhold Niebuhr Papers, Library of Congress; also, Central Zionist Archives/box F40/file no. 59; both references in Merkley, *Politics*, 201, fn. 34.

25. Medoff, "Communication: A Further Note on the 'Unconventional Zionism' of Reinhold Niebuhr," 85–88. The British Labour Party also supported transfer.

Nationhood, Providence, and Witness

Christians are committed to democracy as the only safeguard of the sacredness of human personality. . . . The opposition to a Jewish Palestine is partly based on the opposition of Arabs to democracy, Western culture, education and economic freedom. To support Arab opposition is but supporting feudalism and Fascism in the world at the expense of democratic rights and justice.²⁶

While Niebuhr did not explain what he meant by “fascism,” the available historical evidence strongly suggests that he has in mind the active support for Hitler, the *Shoah*, and instigation of Arab attacks on Zionist Jews in Palestine by Haj Muhammad Hamin al-Husseini, appointed the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem in 1921 by Sir Herbert Samuels, the British governor.²⁷ There are no other serious explanations possible for Niebuhr’s use of the term “fascism” here. The fact that Niebuhr would later complain of the Eisenhower Administration’s combined influence with the USSR in the United Nations to keep General Nasser in power in Egypt and carry on with “Nazi measures” (i.e., intention to destroy Israel) corroborates this judgment.²⁸

In 1947 Britain followed Ernest Bevin’s advice and referred the issue of Palestine to the United Nations. In November of that year, the UN passed a resolution calling for the land to be partitioned into Jewish and Arab states—the first instance of a “two-state solution.” Britain was to evacuate the land by May 1948. Niebuhr supported this two-state solution against the idea of a binational state, which was popular with mainline Protestants as well as Jewish anti-Zionist intellectuals such as Martin Buber and Hannah Arendt.

The decision of the United Nations Assembly to partition Palestine and to create a Jewish and an Arab state brings several interesting and perplexing chapters of contemporary history to a conclusion. On the purely political level it represents the first real achievement of the United Nations. . . . The “right” of the Jews to Palestine is established partly by the urgency of the problem of their collective survival and partly by ancient claims and hopes which found their classical expression before

26. Niebuhr, “Statement”; cf. Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, 84–104.

27. See Herf, “Convergence: The Classic Case,” 63–83.

28. Niebuhr, “Seven Great Errors of US Foreign Policy,” 3–5. On Niebuhr and mainline Protestants in relation to post-war US foreign policy, see Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 1945–60.

the Jewish dispersion. . . . The right of the Arabs is quite simply . . . the right of holding what one has and has had for over a thousand years.²⁹

He went on to say that the Arabs lagged behind the Jews in terms of cultural development, such that “this whole Near Eastern world has fallen from the glory where the same lands, which now maintain only a miserable pastoral economy, supported the great empires in which civilization arose.” In response to the argument for a binational state, Niebuhr simply pointed out that the United Nations had already rejected this “primarily because the Arabs were unwilling to grant the Jews any freedom of immigration in such a bi-national state.”³⁰

Niebuhr defended Israel’s wars against its Arab neighbors as defensive wars against intentions to annihilate the Jewish state.³¹ Commenting on Israel’s victory against the attack of its Arab neighbors upon it as soon as it had declared independence, Niebuhr said:

It now seems probable that the new state of Israel will be able to establish itself the hard way, by an armed defense of its existence against Arab attacks. . . . The Arabs were, of course, intent upon preventing this new political force from challenging their sovereignty, and also their pastoral-feudal social organization. . . . One cannot speak of this victory as a morally unambiguous one. No political victory can be so described.³²

He recognized that Christian missionaries to Middle Eastern Arabs had opposed Zionist goals as “unjust invasions of the rights and securities of the Arab world.”³³ At the same time, he wanted America to lift its embargo on supplying Zionists with arms, noting that army strategists opposed it for fear of an Arab embargo on oil. Niebuhr seems to have been willing for America to risk losing oil for the sake of arming the Zionists (cryptically saying that lifting the arms embargo would allow Arab self-defense to be organized). He believed such a policy “would have more meaning in preventing a larger war.”³⁴

29. Niebuhr, “Partition of Palestine,” 3–4.

30. Niebuhr, editorial note, *Christianity and Crisis*, 8, 30.

31. For a lucid defense of Israel’s wars as necessary to defend the country’s very existence, see Lozowicz, *Right to Exist*.

32. Niebuhr, “The Future of Israel,” 12.

33. Niebuhr, “Christians and the State of Israel,” 3.

34. Niebuhr, “Palestine,” 5.

The plight of the Arab refugees who fled or were driven out during 1947–49 concerned Niebuhr, who saw it as a tragic outcome of the foundation of Israel. He was aware of missionary reports of atrocities never reported in American newspapers.³⁵ In 1951, he endorsed a proposal to resettle these refugees in the surrounding countries, in areas that were controlled by the United Nations. The proposal also included the development of waterways and other material resources in those Arab countries. The funding would have come from Israel and other United Nations member states. The Arab countries refused this offer.³⁶ Raphael Medoff provides evidence that the prominent American Zionist leader, Rabbi Stephen Wise, privately thanked Niebuhr for publicly supporting the idea of Arab transfer. Jews could not articulate this view publicly for fear of reprisals. Medoff suggests that Niebuhr's support for transfer was part of what Naveh calls his "anti-utopian liberalism," as well as being part of the post-war ethos by which the superpowers effected the transfer of Germans from Eastern European countries for the sake of peace.³⁷ Critics may argue that Niebuhr's support for the foundation of Israel, even of a two-state solution, constituted a flight into idealism, but it is consistent with his threefold realism. The combination of European anti-Semitic persecution and Arab hostility had pushed Niebuhr to a morally and politically realist support for Zionism alongside liberal Jewish assimilation in the Diaspora.

Responding to the Suez Crisis of the mid-1950's, Niebuhr consolidated his support for Israel's survival as a Jewish-majority state. The central issue was saving Israel from annihilation by its Arab neighbors, especially by Egypt under Nasser. Niebuhr never let go of this central moral goal. He argued that the very existence of Israel was offensive to the Arab world for three reasons. First, Niebuhr argued that "it has claimed by conquest what the Arabs regard as their soil." However, this is simplistic reasoning. The early Zionists legally purchased land from absentee Arab landlords during the time of Turkish and later British rule. Niebuhr may be conflating this with the flight and expulsion of Palestinians in 1947–49.³⁸ He believed that the second reason Israel's existence was offensive to the Arabs was his own discovery that the Arab states refused to resettle these refugees, and that Israel could not reabsorb them without endangering its security as

35. Niebuhr, "Christians and the State of Israel," 3, 4.

36. Anon., "\$800,000,000 Asked for Arab Refugees," *New York Times* (December 19, 1951), 1, 20, cited in Brown, *Niebuhr and His Age*, 142.

37. Medoff, "Communication," 88.

38. See Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*.

the refugees were intrinsically hostile. This problem continues to this day. Niebuhr believed that the third reason for Arab hostility to Israel was the strongest. "The state of Israel is, by its very technical efficiency and democratic justice, a source of danger to the moribund feudal or pastoral economics and monarchical political forms of the Islamic world and a threat to the rich overlords of desperately poor peasants of the Middle East."³⁹

He believed the survival of Israel "may require detailed economic strategies for the whole region and policies for the resettlement of Arab refugees." Recommending economic development as a remedy for Arab grievances against Zionism was ironic given that in his visit to the USSR in 1930, Niebuhr had worried that industrial efficiency was elevated above other values.⁴⁰ His approach to the Arab question betrays lingering traces of his use of certain Marxist concepts originally used to criticize the Social Gospel movement for its progressivist view of history.⁴¹ Stone gives a thorough analysis of Niebuhr's engagement with Marxism. He argues that "some ideas from his Marxist philosophy remain" in his later writings "but they have found independent justification in his thought."⁴² Niebuhr's hope for economic development was also naïve in ignoring the fact that the process of Israel's foundation dealt not only a socio-economic blow to Palestinian Arabs, but constituted Jewish emancipation from centuries of Islamic rule over territory claimed by Islam.⁴³

Finally, Niebuhr compared the Six Day War to the combat between David and Goliath. Like many other observers, Niebuhr understood the war as motivated by a serious intention by Israel's neighbors to annihilate it. He bluntly proclaimed that "a nation that knows it is in danger of strangulation will use its fists."⁴⁴ At the same time, the survival of Israel was "a strategic anchor for a democratic world" and "an asset to America's national interests in the Middle East." This "special relationship" was to be cloaked in the theologically ambiguous notion of national messianism.

39. Niebuhr, "Our Stake in the State of Israel," 9–12.

40. Stone, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, 61.

41. *Ibid.*, 55.

42. *Ibid.*, 91.

43. Maccoby, *Antisemitism and Modernity*, 150. On Palestinian support for Zionism, see Cohen, *Army of Shadows*.

44. Niebuhr, "David and Goliath," 141.