
ISRAEL IS A NATION COMMITTED TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



[religious-freedom](#)

By Curt Smith for the Indianapolis Business Journal, print and online edition.
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Abstract: Americans support Israel because of its commitment to democracy and religious liberty, which stands in stark relief to its Middle Eastern neighbors. Curt Smith recently participated in a trip to Israel sponsored by the American Israel Education Fund that helps educate American state legislators, staff assistants and religious leaders.

JERUSALEM—When traveling in Israel, especially here in the Holy City, it is easy to understand why so many Americans support this nation. The most important reason, however, to support this brash, upstart, startup country might be the easiest to overlook—namely, its commitment to religious freedom.

Millions of Americans, including most Hoosiers, support Israel and urge our national government to stand with her for historical reasons relating to their own faith journey. Judaism, after all, gives the world two great gifts that are central to the self-identified Christian belief system of 83 percent of Hoosiers—monotheism (there is one true God, all powerful and all-knowing) and the Jewish Bible.

Still other Americans recognize Israel is the sole democracy in the Middle East, and as such, its example of free market prosperity and political pluralism is a powerful witness and at times a rebuke to the largely failed states in the region, such as Syria, Jordan and the Hamas-led disaster in Gaza.

Yet another group of our fellow citizens puts all this aside and supports Israel because it is our lone governmental ally and security partner in the world's most troubled and unsettled area. Israel has been battling terrorism far longer and more successfully than any other nation. It has developed technology and techniques second to none that the United States benefits from sharing and emulating.

But on a trip sponsored by the American Israel Education Fund with state legislators, congressional staff, religious leaders and public policy practitioners, it is striking that Israel is the only Middle Eastern nation elevating religious freedom and making that strength a strategic partner for progress on its otherwise intractable problems. This goes beyond maintaining access to the holy sites in Jerusalem for all faith adherents as well as the irreligious.

There is an ethos in this land, something in the very DNA of the nation, that recognizes the strength of saying, "All are welcome as long as you live and let live." Sure, as the self-proclaimed Jewish state, Israel has right-of-return laws like other nations, including Ireland and Germany. And the government

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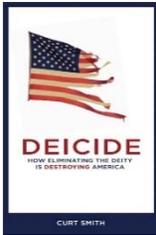
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increasingly recognizes and is addressing the hardship its policies and practices to assure this “live and let live” ethos cause some minority groups.

But in meetings with journalists, scholars, members of the Knesset, peace negotiators on both sides (Palestinian and Israeli), government officials and more, one senses a quiet confidence born of a faith in humankind. This confidence is nurtured by a rooted commitment to peaceful perseverance. But it is not a resignation of failure, a state-sponsored stoicism. The problems are profound, deep and on many levels unresolvable. Yet Israel, as a nation of less than 9 million, including nearly 2 million non-Jewish citizens, is flourishing as a land encircled by 350 million Arab and 1.5 billion Muslim detractors.

One hopes and prays not only for the peace of Jerusalem, but for the well-being of all in this war-scarred land, including Israel’s Arab and Muslim detractors. Those prayers have always been in the hands of a larger, majestic deity whose ways are inscrutable at the mere human level. Those prayers ring across millennia with a sound of hope and at times lament.

We pause to recognize those prayers, in every tongue and dialect and faith, spoken and unspoken, written on paper and carved on hearts, go forward and upward from the Holy City because Israel is committed to religious freedom. Those prayers are the true secret weapon of the Jewish state, a sacred weapon for all who hope for and work toward peace here.



Curt Smith is president of the Indiana Family Institute and author of “Deicide: Why Eliminating The Deity is Destroying America.” Available in paperback only here: <http://amzn.to/2vEQ3xq>. Curt is represented for speaking engagements by PumpJack Speakers Bureau. For more information: <http://www.pumpjack.me/curt-smith.html>, or call toll-free (844) 473-7376, ext 702, or Curt.Smith@PumpJack.me.

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