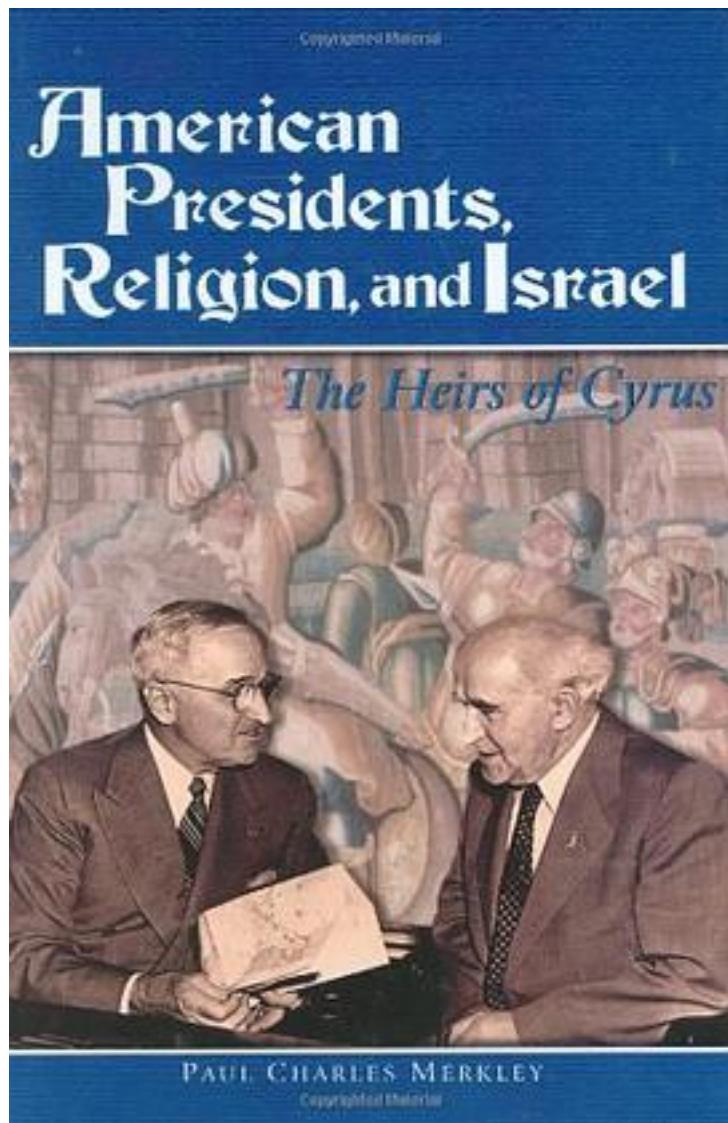


American Presidents, Religion, and Israel



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Shortly after the end of the World War II, President Harry S. Truman declared his support for the creation and maintenance of the modern state of Israel, basing his support on religious and theological grounds. When he declared "I am Cyrus," referring to the Persian king who allowed the Jews to return to Israel, he revealed his religious commitments and supported his policies on Biblical grounds. From Truman to Ford, US Presidents relied in part on their religious and moral commitments to support their policies and views toward Israel. Beginning with Carter, however, American presidents have abandoned the role of champions of Israel to become champions of the Peace Process, stressing peace and a secular approach that rises above the religious and theological fray. And yet, even in the context of this attempted fair-mindedness, they consistently reveal the character and commitments of their personal religious and moral beliefs in their responses to the issue of Israel. Now, George W. Bush, one of the USA's most vocally religious presidents, seems poised to reclaim the mantle of Cyrus, and take up the tradition once again of relying on his religious convictions to justify his positions toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. Bringing to the fore neglected evidence of the role of religious belief in policies toward Israel, Merkley explores an overlooked aspect of presidential decision-making, suggesting that religion, while not the only factor, is at least among the influences that determine a president's view of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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