

Presidential candidate links Israel policy to religious faith

by [Bob Allen](#)

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NEW YORK (ABP) – An already contentious debate about the role of faith in presidential politics took a new twist Sept. 20 when Texas Gov. Rick Perry told a New York City press conference he believes America's continued support for Israel is a theological priority.

"As a Christian, I have a clear directive to support Israel," said Perry, considered a front-runner for the Republican nomination. "So from my perspective, it's pretty easy. Both as an American, and as a Christian, I am going to stand with Israel."

Perry's view is similar to those of John Hagee, a leading advocate of a theology called Christian Zionism, which views the Promised Land described in the Old Testament favors modern Israel in discussions of Palestinian statehood.

Hagee, head of Christians United for Israel, was a participant in Perry's recent prayer rally called "The Response," which sparked questions about Perry's association with people holding extreme religious views. Some viewed that sort of criticism out of bounds in a political campaign, along with whether Michele Bachman's church is anti-Catholic or whether it should matter to voters that front-runner Mitt Romney is a Mormon.

Perry made his comment about Israel surrounded by a group of Jewish leaders in response to a question following prepared remarks that criticized President Obama's Middle Eastern policies as "naïve, arrogant, misguided and dangerous."

Intended to lure Jewish voters away from Democrats and win favor with evangelical Christians, Perry's faith statement drew sharp reaction from the left. Think Progress labeled it "theocratic foreign policy" and Slate called it "a gift to Islamic extremists."

On the same day

Perry made his remarks, two Baptist ethicists issued a sharp rebuke of Christian Zionism and its role of the oppression of Palestinians. David Gushee and Glen Stassen of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good appealed to biblical authority in asking fellow evangelicals to "reconsider your interpretation for the sake of God, humanity, the United States and, yes, Israel itself."