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### Huckabee Among the Jerusalemites

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A cellphone rang while former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee was eating breakfast in Jerusalem yesterday. "It must be Senator McCain wanting to put me on the ticket as vice-president," joked Huckabee, who a few months back lost to McCain in his bid to become the Republican presidential candidate.

Huckabee didn't rule out the possibility that he might accept the candidacy, but said, with aw-shucks modesty, that he would be "very surprised" if McCain offered it to him. "So far, there's no indication that I'm on the list," the governor claimed bashfully, between mouthfuls of egg. A McCain-Huckabee Republican ticket would have several advantages: the folksy, former Baptist pastor would help McCain woo millions of evangelical voters who are skittish about the twice-married senator.

So why go to Israel, why now? Was Huckabee in Jerusalem burnishing his credentials as an ardent supporter of Israel, as are many of the Christian Right in America, in hopes that McCain might pick him? A trip to Israel does no harm to his standing with American Jews; they are traditionally wary of the Christian right, but might overlook Huckabee's Bible Belt beliefs on education and abortion because of his backing for Israel. A guest of the Jerusalem Reclamation Project, which aims to move thousands of Jewish families deep into the Arab neighborhoods of this divided city, the ex-Arkansas governor told reporters that he supported Israel's control over all Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a beacon to the Judaism, Christianity and Islam, he said, "but you can't have two governments overseeing the same real estate."

The guitar-playing ex-governor went far beyond the White House view on the conflict, which calls for separate Israeli and Palestinian states. "From the security standpoint, the Israeli state should include the West Bank," Huckabee said, referring to the territory that is a cornerstone of an eventual Palestinian nation. Huckabee claimed that his views supporting an Israel that expands beyond its pre-1967 borders, were based on "common sense" rather than his own religious beliefs. "Would I tolerate this in my own neighborhood? No," he said. Many Christian

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**Tim McGirk**, TIME's Jerusalem Bureau Chief, arrived in the Middle East after covering Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. [Read more](#)



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religious beliefs. "Would I tolerate this in my own neighborhood? No," he said. Many Christian evangelicals believe that it is part of Biblical prophecy that Jews should return to occupy all of their ancient homeland.

This was Huckabee's 10th trip to Israel, and he was given a tour of Jerusalem's Muslim quarter by Ateret Cohanim, a Jewish religious group whose aggressive purchases of Arab land have raised an outcry among Israeli civil rights activists and Arab residents of the Old City. For Huckabee, the issue was simple: "Telling Jews they can't live in one part of their city," he said, "is like telling the Boston Red Sox they can't play in Fenway Park." How's that for a folksy metaphor? It could play well in the places that McCain can't reach.

By Tim McGirk/Jerusalem

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					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

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