

Meet the American Hedge Fund Billionaire Who Could Start a ‘Holy War’ in the Middle East

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Henry Swieca is a money man. The New York-based billionaire made his fortune by co-founding Highbridge Capital Corp., a hedge fund that boasted clients like the American International Group.

In 2009, the banking giant JP Morgan Chase, another client of Highbridge, fully took over the flagship hedge fund. Swieca went on to play a role at two more hedge funds: Talpion Fund Management, which he launched, and Clearline Capital, which Swieca joined as a startup investor in February 2013.

Swieca, [whose net worth is \\$1.2 billion as of September 2013](#), is well-known as a financial guru. His every move is covered by the financial press. But he’s less known for what his foundation pours money into: right-wing, pro-Israel causes. Along with a host of charitable groups and domestic Jewish centers, the Swieca Family Foundation, which he runs with his Israeli-American wife Estee, has poured tons of cash into pro-Israel groups—including to religious extremist groups that operate in the most sensitive of holy places. Swieca did not return requests for comment on his donations.

According to tax records reviewed by AlterNet, Swieca, an Orthodox Jew, has given hundreds of thousands of dollars to the American Israel Education Foundation, the non-profit offshoot of the powerful lobbying group called the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. He’s also handed over cash to groups like the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces; the right-wing, anti-Muslim David Horowitz Freedom Center; and the Hebron Fund, a Brooklyn-based organization that funnels American money into illegal Israeli settlements in Hebron, a big city in the West Bank that has the most intense regime of settler violence and enforced segregation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

But perhaps most alarmingly is Swieca’s funding of the Temple Institute, an organization that promotes the building of the Third Temple on the third most holy site for Muslims. In early December, the [Washington Post disclosed that Swieca and his wife funded](#) the Jerusalem-based Temple Institute’s move to “to a large, renovated space in the Old City’s Jewish Quarter, overlooking the Western Wall.” The move put the institute just a short walk away from the place where they hope the Third Temple arises.

The religious extremists who run the Temple Institute have their sights set on the Haram al-Sharif, or the Noble Sanctuary in English, which is also the Temple Mount for Jews. “Our short-term goal is to rekindle the flame of the Holy Temple in the hearts of mankind through education,” the [Temple Institute says on their website](#). “Our long-term goal is to do all in our

limited power to bring about the building of the Holy Temple in our time.”

In the middle of the Noble Sanctuary sits the Dome of the Rock, a shrine whose gold dome is a fixture on the Jerusalem skyline. The Noble Sanctuary is home to the Al Aqsa Mosque, thought to be the place where the Prophet Muhammad was transported to from Mecca and is the third holiest site to Muslims around the world. At the same time, it is a site deeply revered by Jews, since it is the place thought to be where the First and Second Temples stood. The Second Temple was famously destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans, who then sent Jews into exile. The [Temple Institute says](#) that “the Temple Mount has to be cleared of the Dome of the Rock and the mosques which are presently located upon it before the physical rebuilding of the Holy Temple can begin.”

Both Judaism and Islam have competing claims to the site, making it the most contested piece of real estate on earth. In 2000, a provocative visit by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to the Noble Sanctuary set off clashes that many say sparked the Second Intifada. It continues to be a frequent site of clashes between Palestinians and Israeli authorities.

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