

# War and Religion: Don't Tell Me 'The Bible Made Me Do It'

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*Traditional conservative friends of mine now rarely refer to Republicans without using the preceding descriptor "batshit ignorant." They are onto something. Former representative Michelle Bachmann, who was quite recently a viable GOP candidate for President of the United States, appeared on [radio last week](#) to discuss President Barack Obama's policies. She said that his nuclear deal with Iran and his "declaring war" on Israel would bring about Armageddon and the so-called "End Time." Bachmann, who claims to be something of an Islamic scholar, observed that the "Koran and Hadith...the works of Islamic jurisprudence, they say one complete consistent truth and that's that they want to have a nuclear weapon."*

Bachmann's discovery that Iran's nuclear weapons program actually began in the seventh century will surprise many but it is reassuring to also learn from her that

"The world is embracing degeneracy [and]...we have very little time...left before the second return of Christ. That's good news!"

Fortunately for Bachmann someone is actually doing something about it. Daniel Larison makes a [compelling case](#) that Republicans in Congress and possibly also in control of the White House after 2016 will actually do what they are threatening to do, which is reject any agreement made by the Obama White House so they can increase pressure on Iran. That would constitute a war policy. Such a war would by both definition and geography be Armageddon, which means it might be coming a whole lot sooner than most people think, suggesting that Bachmann might just be right. Larison argues that hostility to Iran is so widespread in the Republican Party at all levels that it has become dogma, a pledge that any GOP candidate, if elected, would actually be compelled to keep if only to maintain control of his own party relating to the issue.

It is being [argued in other circles](#), including among Iranian leaders, that it really doesn't matter what Congress and a new president do because the P5+1 agreement with Tehran will be made, if final negotiations are successful, with multiple parties who can make irrelevant the possible continuation of sanctions by Washington. U.S. Sanctions and other punitive action would presumably be sidestepped by the international community, just as Russia has already [agreed to sell](#) a defensive missile system to Tehran and Turkey is already working out arrangements to buy oil and gas.

But that thinking ignores two things. First, Washington has enormous leverage over what other banks, particularly central banks, do if it chooses to punish them, so it might very well

be able to sustain considerable pressure on Iran in financial markets. And second, unrelenting hostility towards Iran is a slippery slope that could lead to much worse if there is an incident either by accident or design that invites a military response. Even if most Republicans in Congress do not actually want war with Iran they might just wind up getting it by miscalculation or as the result of an Israeli covert action.

And unfortunately for the rest of us it is not just Congress and the gaggle of hawkish candidates who are “batshit.” Among Republican rank and file there are a lot of Michelle Bachmanns running around. There has been some serious chatter in the alternative media (inevitably) about a recent [Bloomberg opinion poll that includes questions](#) about American attitudes towards Israel. Glenn Greenwald [headlines the article on the subject](#) “Religious fanaticism is a huge factor in Americans’ support for Israel.”

In overview, the poll suggests that two out of three Republicans are willing to support Israel “even if its interests diverge” from those of the United States. For the Democrats it is a flip, with two-thirds saying “no.” Combining the two results, however, reveals that only 47% of Americans believe that U.S. interests trump those of Israel.

Greenwald sees the astonishing level of support for Israel as related to religion, and more particularly to the views of the 37% of Christians who regard themselves as born again or evangelical. The more fundamentalist one is the stronger is the connection. He notes how the inclination to blindly support Israel is often linked directly to the Bible. Pastor John Hagee of Christians United for Israel put it this way, “We support Israel because all other nations were created by an act of men, but Israel was created by an act of God.”

It’s tough to argue with that one. And the same formulation also holds for American Jews. Greenwald notes that the support for Israel among American Jews, normally liberal and Democratic, is similarly along fundamentalist lines. Four out of ten Jews believe that Israel was given to them by God, but among the Orthodox the percentage who believe that to be true doubles.

The Bloomberg poll includes some ratings of leading politicians and [breaks down the data](#) by voter preferences. Interestingly, the only declared presidential candidate whose “very favorable” and “mostly favorable” ratings exceed those of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is Hillary Clinton. Sixty-seven per cent of Republicans find Netanyahu “sympathetic” versus only 16% who would say the same about President Barack Obama. So perhaps those jokes about the GOP disbanding and declaring Netanyahu as their leader are not so funny after all. It also makes one wonder about the extent to which the American public actually followed Bibi’s antics back in March. For what it’s worth, Bill Clinton topped the poll of political figures in terms of his favorability.

Admittedly, much of the response reflects the questions themselves and how they were phrased. Regarding Israel they were, “Israel is an important ally, the only democracy in the region, and we should support it even if our interests diverge” versus “Israel is an ally but we should pursue America’s interests when we disagree with them.” The question, is of course, both loaded and flawed in that Israel is not now and has never been an ally of the United States and many would question that it is even a democracy if one considers the second class treatment of its own Arab citizens and its military occupation of East Jerusalem and much of the West Bank.

If the question were “Would you support Israel even if it means going to war with Iran?” the

response might have been somewhat different. Or “Israel and the United States have different national interests. Whose interests should be more important for American politicians and policymakers?”

Nevertheless the issue of a large portion of the electorate and a majority of the Republican Party regarding Israel as an untouchable in Washington’s fractious politics should be troubling to any American who considers himself to be even vaguely patriotic. Ironically, the evangelicals who bleed for Israel also back the war against terror and the [use of torture](#) by a two to one margin, suggesting that it ain’t the New Testament that they have been reading. In my opinion, Bachmann and her millions of clones let their Bibles do their thinking for them, which is perfectly fine as long as they do not demand that a-historical Biblical allegories become the basis for defining United States Foreign Policy. And it might be observed that she and her associates represent a real danger for all the rest of us as the issue of Israel and Iran could easily come down to real American blood and real American deaths if it goes the wrong way.

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