

America's Crusaders

By Tom Barry | February 23, 2007

Ideology and faith are stirring new calls to arms among influential political factions in the United States. At a time when the U.S. public is questioning the interventionism and unilateralism of the Bush administration, leading social conservatives and neoconservatives insist that the United States needs to militarily confront the purported threats facing the Judeo-Christian world order.

Leading far-right social conservative Rick Santorum, a devout Catholic and former Republican senator from Pennsylvania, is heading up a new initiative, called the "America's Enemies" program at the neoconservative-aligned Ethics and Public Policy Center (EPPC), to awaken the slumbering public to what he sees as a "gathering storm" of adversaries. At the same time, Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT), a devout Jew who co-chairs the Committee on the Present Danger, is calling for a global political and military alliance to defeat the threat of "Islamic extremism."

Ironically, while the ideology and faith-based politics of "America's enemies" routinely come under attack by U.S. social conservatives and neoconservatives as dangerous manifestations of radicalism, the ideology and faith-based politics of America's would-be defenders are presented as redemptive forces in world affairs.

Perhaps nowhere does this merger of ideology and faith come together so clearly than at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, where Santorum is a program director. A strong supporter of the war in Iraq and the Bush administration's war on terror, the EPPC has since the mid-1990s sought to mix religion and politics—or more specifically, to conjoin the Religious Right with a hawkish foreign policy. In its own words, the center aims to "clarify and reinforce the bond between the Judeo-Christian moral tradition" and the public policy debate.

Immediately after his electoral defeat in November 2006, Santorum announced his plans to carry his crusading politics into private life, which resulted in the creation of EPPC's "America's Enemies" program. The program focuses on "identifying, studying, and heightening awareness of the threats posed to America and the West from a growing array of anti-Western forces that are increasingly casting a shadow over our future and violating religious liberty around the world."

Rather than regarding his overwhelming electoral defeat last November as an indicator that his own extreme notions about domestic and foreign policy were misguided, Santorum concluded that Americans are slumbering while at the gates gather barbarians such as "Islamic fascism."

"Iraq is only one front in a larger war waged against the Western world," Santorum says. It is a war of ideas, according to him, waged by Islamic fascists—whose tentacles extend beyond Iraq and Afghanistan and into Iran and Venezuela. "We are under siege by a people with an ideology, a plan, hundreds of millions of dollars, and an ever-increasing presence on virtually every continent" (Santorum, "Knowing Our Enemies," *National Review Online*, December 12, 2006).

Topping the list of priorities is the need "to confront Iran," says Santorum, who was once described by the *New York Times Magazine* as the "country's preeminent faith-based politician," after President George W. Bush. War, said Santorum in a major speech on the Senate floor, "is at our doorstep, and it is fueled, figuratively and literally, by Islamic fascism, nurtured and bred in Iran" (December 6, 2006).

Likening the current array of countries that oppose the United States to what Winston Churchill called the "gathering storm" before World War II, Santorum paints a picture of enemies closing in on the United States. "With the exception of the state of Israel, we are fighting this battle alone, and I suspect we will for quite some time," laments Santorum.

Along with Islamic fascists, Santorum points to supposed threats to U.S. national interests and security coming from Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Russia, and China. To support his alarmist rhetoric, Santorum claims, apparently without evidence, that Hugo Chavez of Venezuela "plans to spend \$30 billion to build 20 military

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bases in neighboring [sic] Bolivia,” where Bolivian soldiers will answer to Venezuelan and Cuban officers. In a speech last December, Santorum warned that the “Sandinista revolution” in Nicaragua and the “Bolivarian revolution” are constructing a 21st-century socialism in the U.S. backyard.

Although Santorum played an important role in the Senate in building support for confrontational resolutions on Iraq and Iran, he was mainly known for his aggressive leadership in legislative efforts against abortion, in favor of intelligent design, against gay rights, and in favor of faith-based government social initiatives—working closely on the latter with Lieberman.

While Santorum concentrates on waking America to the danger of newly emboldened enemies, Lieberman recently took to the world stage to advocate stepping up the ideological campaign against Islamic extremism and to organize a new global alliance to confront that threat. At the Munich Conference on Security Policy in mid-February, Lieberman said: “What we are fighting is an ideology—the totalitarian ideology of radical Islam, as brutal and hostile to personal freedom as the communism we fought and defeated in the last century.”

Lieberman described NATO—the transatlantic military alliance founded in 1949 as part of the Cold War—as “the gold standard for the security of free nations.” To confront the supposed global threat of Islamic extremism, Lieberman called for “a global NATO” that “would profoundly reshape the ideological 21st century” and that would be “capable of acting globally.”

The previous day President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia had warned the conference that the United States “has overstepped its national borders, and in every area.” The

world, said Putin, was dominated by a country whose military actions were “illegitimate” and “unilateral.” It is a world, warned Putin, of “one single center of power. One single center of force. One single center of decision-making. This is the world of one master, one sovereign.”

Lieberman criticized Putin’s address as “confrontational,” saying, “some of the rhetoric takes us back to the Cold War.” Although Lieberman described the United States as “the indispensable nation in the fight for freedom throughout the world,” he disputed Putin’s notion that the United States is the “single center of power in the world.” Rather, he said, “power is freedom,” and he called for a “global war of ideas” because “freedom does not belong to one nation alone” and “totalitarianism cannot defeat it.”

Perhaps the most tragic development in U.S. foreign policy during the Bush presidency has been the reinstatement of a Manichean, Cold-War-like worldview, which has been promoted ably by social conservatives of the Religious Right and the neoconservatives in and outside the administration. Instead of working to reap the long-lost peace dividends that were supposed to emerge after the end of the bipolar confrontation, institutes like the EPPC, the Committee on the Present Danger, and the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, along with their influential spokespersons, are intent on propagating an imperial foreign policy that envisions the United States forever at war.

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