

Religious Right Rejects Giuliani

By Bill Berkowitz | May 24, 2007

During the second GOP presidential debate, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani experienced what mainstream media pundits have termed the finest moment of his campaign, when he ripped into Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX) for suggesting that the United States was to blame for 9/11. Despite the fact that Paul said nothing of the sort—he talked about a less bellicose foreign policy and an end to preemptive strikes against other countries—Giuliani seized the platform and won the day by lambasting and demanding an apology from Paul.

His tack appears to be a tough-on-defense stance, as shown in his recent remarks to a New Hampshire audience. If a Democrat is elected, Giuliani warned, “We will wave the white flag on Iraq. We will cut back on the Patriot Act, electronic surveillance, interrogation, and we will be back to our pre-September 11 attitude of defense.” The implication, of course, was that a tough Republican like him would be a better, safer choice.

But Giuliani’s Republican primary gamble—that his position on national security issues could override his liberal positions on abortion rights and other social issues—was dealt a severe blow last Thursday, when James Dobson, the Republican Party political kingmaker and founder of Focus on the Family, declared that “the jig is up” for Giuliani, announcing that he wouldn’t vote for him should Giuliani become the Republican Party’s 2008 presidential nominee—under any circumstances.

Thomas B. Edsall, writing in the May 21 *New Republic*, pointed out: “Among Republican voters, the litmus test issues of abortion and gay marriage have been losing traction, subordinated to the Iraq War and terrorism.” Edsall cited the Pew Research Center, which found that 31 % of GOP voters named Iraq as their top-priority issue; 17 % chose terrorism and security. Just 7 % named abortion, and 1 % cited gay marriage.

So while Team Giuliani may not have been counting on his full-bore support, the news from Dobson’s Colorado Springs, Colorado headquarters was not good. In an unequivocal column posted at the conservative website WorldNetDaily (May 17, 2007), Dobson added Giuliani to his growing list of unsupportable candidates, maintaining that he saw “nothing courageous” in Giuliani’s behavior as he tried “to have it both ways in the name of political ambition.”

Dobson pointed out that Giuliani did not support the (anti-same-sex union) Marriage Protection Amendment when Congress was considering it and that there were other issues—three marriages and “his three public appearances in drag”—about Giuliani’s candidacy that troubled him.

Giuliani joined Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) as the second of the three so-called top-tier Republican candidates (former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney is the third) to receive a thumbs down from Dobson. In January, Dobson told KCBI FM talk radio host Jerry Johnson that he “would not vote for John McCain under any circumstances.” According to the *Boston Herald*, “Dobson has given no public indication on how he feels about the other top-tier candidate, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney. The two, however, have met privately” (May 18, 2007).

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Dobson has also questioned how deep former Sen. Fred Thompson's (R-TN) Christianity ran—a statement he first apologized for and later denied making—and he hosted a “repentant” former House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA) on his radio program in early March. During Gingrich's appearance, he managed to both plug his book *Rediscovering God in America* and curry Dobson's favor by confessing to moral failings related to his private life, telling Dobson that he has “gotten on my knees and sought God's forgiveness.”

According to WorldNetDaily, “Dobson told Gingrich he knew him to be a ‘professing Christian’ with whom he has prayed, but said that when they discussed the subject privately in Washington a few weeks ago, ‘you spoke of it with a great deal of pain and anguish, but you didn't mention repentance. Do you understand that word, repentance?’” (March 3, 2007). Gingrich replied, “Absolutely. I believe deeply that people fall short and that people have to recognize that they have to turn to God for forgiveness and to seek mercy.”

These have been heady times for Dobson, a man who Dan Gilgoff, senior editor at *U.S. News & World Report*, calls the Christian Right's “new standard bearer,” who is “more powerful” than either the Rev. Jerry Falwell or the Rev. Pat Robertson ever was (*The Jesus Machine: How James Dobson, Focus on the Family, and Evangelical America are Winning the Culture War*, St. Martin's Press, 2007).

In addition to playing an active role in determining the Christian credibility of GOP candidates, Dobson has recently taken a major interest in national security issues. According to reporter Max Blumenthal, Dobson was one of several religious right leaders who recently met privately with President George W. Bush in Washington to discuss Iraq, Iran, and the “war on terror.” Other meetings with Christian right leaders focused specifically on the threat of Iran.

The following week, Dobson devoted his radio programs, which reach more than 200 million people in 164 countries, to “the threat of radical Islam.”

“I was invited to go to Washington, DC, to meet with President Bush in the White House along with 12 or 13 other leaders of the pro-family movement,” Dobson said on his radio program Monday, May 14. “And the topic of the discussion that day was Iraq, Iran, and international terrorism. And we were together for 90 minutes, and it was very enlightening and in some ways disturbing too.”

Dobson described Bush as “upbeat and determined and convinced,” adding, “I wish the American people could have sat in on that meeting we had.”

According to Blumenthal: “Dobson went on to enumerate a series of meetings convened by Christian right leaders in Washington to discuss the supposedly existential threat to the United States from a nuclear Iran. ‘I heard about this danger not only at the White House but from other pro-family leaders that I met during that week in Washington,’ he said. “Many people in a position to know are talking about the possibility of losing a city to nuclear or biological or chemical attack. And if we can lose one, we can lose 10. If we can lose 10 we can lose a hundred,’ he added, ‘especially if North Korea and Russia and China pile on.’”

While many leaders of the religious right have spoken out about an Iran threat, none has been as unwavering and resolute as Pastor John Hagee, the founder of Christians United for Israel. In early March, Hagee regaled a packed house at the opening dinner plenary of the annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference, warning it that Iran posed “a nuclear threat to the State of Israel that promises nothing less than a nuclear Holocaust.” Hagee claimed that the situation is like 1938, only, “Iran is Germany and [Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad is the new Hitler.”

Hagee added: “We must stop Iran’s nuclear threat and stop it now and stand boldly [with] Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East.”

Others on the Christian Right have sung the same tune. Before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Mike Evans, a best-selling author who heads up the aggressively pro-Israel Jerusalem Prayer Team, argued that war with Iraq could be a “dress rehearsal for Armageddon,” the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. On his Jerusalem Prayer Team website, Evans once asked for petition signatures with this plea: “Mr. President, Protect Israel from a Nuclear Iran!” These days, Evans is fiercely promoting his new book, *The Final Move Beyond Iraq: The Final Solution While the World Sleeps*, in which he argues that Iran is the chief U.S. antagonist in the Middle East and is responsible for the deaths of U.S. forces in Iraq.

Joel Rosenberg recently on his blog said that Monday, May 14 kicked off a week of special Dobson-hosted programming devoted to “the threat of radical Islam.” Rosenberg is the bestselling author of prophetic/apocalyptic/political fictions, whose most recent novel is called *The Ezekiel Option*, “about the threat of a Russian-Iranian alliance to destroy Israel based on the Biblical prophecies found in the Book of Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39.” These prophecies “describe what Bible scholars call the war of Gog and Magog. Russia and Iran form a military alliance with Lebanon, Syria, and a group of other Middle East countries to destroy Israel in what Ezekiel described as the last days,” according to Rosenberg’s site.

Dobson’s website advertises Rosenberg’s most recent nonfiction book, *Epicenter—Why Current Rumbblings in the Middle East Will Change Your Future*, with the following blurb: “Utilizing previously classified government documents, interviews with top political, military, religious, and other leaders, Joel Rosenberg makes predictions regarding the fate of the Middle East regarding issues such as Iran’s

nuclear threats against Israel, the arms race, and ultimately ... Armageddon.”

Rosenberg is also a longtime conservative political consultant, and an interview he did with Dobson earlier this year was geared toward exposing the threat of Iran’s nuclear program and its possibly growing alliance with Russia. According to Rosenberg, among the topics discussed were Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s religious beliefs, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s intentions militarily and nuclearly with Iran, how a Russian-Iranian alliance might relate to biblical prophecy, and what Christians should do about such a supposed threat.

Dobson’s radio shows also featured an interview with Michael Youssef, an Egyptian-born evangelical pastor based in Atlanta, and a conversation with former Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA) “about the radical jihadist threat, what the U.S. government is doing, and what our government should be doing in the months and years ahead to protect all Americans from the possibility of nuclear, chemical, or biological attacks on our soil.” Santorum, who was handily defeated by Democrat Bob Casey in last November’s Senate race, has become the head of a new project called “America’s Enemies,” headquartered at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a Washington-based think tank formerly headed by neoconservative hawk Elliott Abrams.

In mid-May, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that former U.S. United Nations Amb. John Bolton maintained that “a nuclear Iran would be as dangerous as ‘Hitler marching into the Rhineland’ in 1936 and should be prevented by Western military strikes if necessary.” Bolton “told the *Daily Telegraph* that the European Union had to ‘get more serious’ about Iran and recognize that its diplomatic attempts to halt Iran’s enrichment program had failed.” Despite Dobson’s strong support, Bolton, who still has close ties to the Bush administration, was forced to resign his post at the UN when it became apparent that he

didn't have enough votes in the Senate to be confirmed.

Dobson currently heads Focus on the Family Action, described on its website as a "cultural action organization that is completely separate from Focus on the Family legally." Focus on the Family Action "will provide a platform for informing, inspiring, and rallying those who care deeply about the family to greater involvement in the moral, cultural, and political issues that threaten our nation."

While Dobson won't back Giuliani—the candidate whose campaign is centered on national security issues—he nevertheless is looking for someone who can adroitly mix and match traditional values issues with a muscular approach to foreign policy questions. Is there a Gingrich in Dobson's future?

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