

Christian Right and `Islamofacism`

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Global Research, August 14, 2006

[Council for the National Interest](#) 14 August
2006

Region: [USA](#)
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"Islamofacism," a term that Americans heard George Bush use at an August 7 press conference, is the new term being thrown around among factions of the Christian right, from which he no doubt picked it up. It was much in use last month when the new lobby group, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), held their first "Washington-Israel Summit" at a Washington D.C. hotel. Amidst plenty of the celebratory song and dance usually associated with evangelical meetings and a three-course meal was served to over 2,000 attendees, a series of prominent religious and political speakers got up to promise unquestioning support for the state of Israel.

Although CUFI is a religious organization founded by minister John Hagee of Texas, it was a political speaker, Senator Rick Santorum, whose comments seemed to have a profound impact on the nights events. Santorum was the first to use the term "Islamic-fascists" during the presentation. According to Santorum the constant use of "The War on Terror" rhetoric is erroneous because it is akin to "declaring war on a tactic." Santorum went on to say that "The War on Terror" rhetoric was the product of a disinformation campaign and exclaimed that "terror is not the enemy; the enemy are Islamic fascists."

The term "Islamic fascists" appeared to have mass appeal and was used regularly by the rest of the speakers throughout the evening. Before Santorum's speech the Ambassador of Israel to the United States, Daniel Ayalon, using the same rhetoric, saying, "Radical Islam is on the march."

Santorum felt it incumbent upon himself to explain to the audience exactly what they were up against in their support of Israel. He said, "They [the American public] don't understand the enemy because we don't explain it to them." According to Santorum, "Islamic fascism is a mosaic. But the biggest piece of the mosaic, the one that reaches out and touches all the others, is Iran."

The vilification of Iran was the major thrust of the summit and the speakers pulled no punches. On Iran Santorum said, "This is the enemy we face. This is the enemy attacking us." While Ayalon echoed his prime minister's declaration that "Iran must be stopped," Santorum took the matter even further and severely criticized efforts to negotiate a solution with Iran. "While we negotiate with Iran, they fund Hamas and Hezbollah to attack Israel. While we negotiate, they continue in their pursuit of nuclear weapons technology." Of course, Santorum used this opportunity to encourage support for his bill that calls for increased sanctions against Iran. The bill was defeated last month.

There was more than a fair amount of saber rattling at the CUFI summit. Again, Santorum

stood out among the speakers on this point when he admonished the U.S. to "...go at the heart of the problem-Iran." The CUFI speakers made it well known at the summit that they want to see less diplomacy and more action.

Also on display was outspoken and undying support for Israel. The speakers depicted Israel as a victim in the current crisis taking place in the Palestinian Territories and Southern Lebanon. Gary Bauer mentioned the sadness of seeing Israelis who are so used to terrorist bombings that they seem virtually unaffected by their occurrence. Neither he nor any of the other speakers referenced the daily deaths occurring in Gaza and the West Bank. CUFI founder and National Chairman John Hagee demanded that the U.S. let Israel defend itself, declaring that if rockets were falling on United States territory, Congress would be voting to go to war.

Whether or not CUFI's Washington D.C. summit is a success for the organization remains to be seen. It is CUFI's intention to bring their interpretation of the Bible and their mandate to support Israel at all costs to the Hill in a massive lobbying effort. CUFI's followers know their message well and, if they are anything like they were during the last evening of their summit, they possess tremendous enthusiasm for their cause. However, it may take more than enthusiasm to convince the nation's policymakers that adopting CUFI's mission as their own would be in the nation's or the world's best interest.

Dan Jennejohn writes for Council for the National Interest Foundation

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