

TARGET IRAN

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It is not only because of insatiable greed for oil, or because of America's addiction to war or because of Bush's obvious mental instability that America and its allies now seem hell-bent on attacking Iran, although these factors are certainly important. Equally crucially, the current wave of fervent war-mongering in the West directed against Iran owes to the enormous clout wielded by Western Christian fundamentalist organizations who, following the invasion and destruction of Iraq, which they had so fervently abetted, are now calling for a repeat performance, this time in Iran. These blood-thirsty votaries of the cult of unmitigated violence consider Iran to be the major challenge to American and Zionist imperialism, which they regard as enjoying divine blessing. Insisting that America and Israel should invade Iran at once, they regard this as a Christian necessity. They also believe that this would herald a global war of cosmic proportions that would, so they believe, usher in the end of the world and Jesus' Second Coming, some-thing that they passionately await. A key American Christian fundamentalist ideologue is the Texas-based televangelist John Hagee. He is no insignificant crank, although his views are, to put it mildly, wildly outlandish. He is said to be close to top leaders of the American Republican Party as well as Israeli intelligence officers and politicians. He is the pastor of The Cornerstone Church based in San Antonio, and also heads the multi-million dollar Global Evangelism media company that broadcasts his daily programmes on 172 television and 82 radio stations throughout the USA and around the world. His fervent appeals to Christian simplicity obviously are not intended to apply to himself: he is said to be one of the wealthiest men in his city, and the trust that he has named after himself, The John Hagee Rabbi Trust, includes among its various assets a ranch spread over almost 8000 acres.

Hagee is one of the principal ideologues of what is called Christian Zionism, which is said to be the fastest growing religious cult in America today. Hagee is known for his fervent support for Israel, for he considers this a Biblical duty binding on Christians, and has been opposed to any peace deal that might cause Israel to give up back any occupied land to the Palestinians. He works closely with several American and Israeli Jewish groups, and is one of the architects of a Christian evangelical-Zionist alliance. Recently he was in the news for bringing together 400 Christian evangelical leaders, representing as many as 30 million Christians, for a 'Summit on Israel', which resulted in the formation of a new pro-Israeli lobbying group called Christians United for Israel, which intends to establish a 50-state rapid-response network that aims to reach every Senator and Congressman in America. Author of numerous Christian fundamentalist texts, Hagee's latest book, 'Jerusalem Count-down : A Prelude to War' encapsulates the Christian fundamentalists' case for a joint American-Israeli invasion of Iran. In order to build up his argument, he portrays Iran in the most lurid colours. "Iran", he insists, without adducing any evidence (for in Christian fundamentalist circles-and in the West more generally-such evidence is not needed) 'is the

command post for global terror' (p.vii). Under President Ahmadinijad, Hagee argues, Iran is building up a nuclear stockpile, which it intends to share with the rest of the Islamic world. Since Iran, so he claims, is motivated by hatred for Israel and America 'without limitation', it might use these weapons to attack both these countries and their allies and to completely destroy Western civilisation (pp. 4-5). Hence, before this can happen, America and Israel, he insists, must invade Iran and destroy the nuclear bombs that it supposedly possesses. As Hagee and his ilk see it, Iran's opposition to America and Israel has nothing whatsoever to do with American aggression and imperialism or to Zionist occupation and Israeli crimes against humanity. Rather, this opposition is attributed squarely to the fact that most Iranians are Muslims. It is, Hagee claims, Islam as a religion that is the cause of the supposed hatred of Muslims (including Iranians) towards America and Israel. Here, he conveniently ignores the fact that most ruling regimes in Muslim countries, some of which, such as Saudi Arabia, spare no effort to display their supposedly 'Islamic credentials', are decidedly pro-American and are little more than appendages of the West. Obviously, conceding this inconvenient fact would seriously undermine his argument.

Tracing the cause of anti-Western-ism simply to Islam, Hagee claims that Jews and Christians, on the one hand, and Muslims, on the other, are presently engaged in nothing less than the final battle for global domination, and that, in fact, World War III has already begun. Since this is, as he characterises it, a religious war, a war, as George Bush describes it, between 'good' and 'evil', there can be no compromise or settlement between the supposedly contending parties. It is a war to the finish, even if it brings about the destruction of the world and the entire human race through nuclear conflagration. In fact, Hagee seems to clearly suggest (and this is something that he appears to share with numerous other influential Christian fundamentalist ideologues) that this grand, final war must be speeded up by all possible means, for only then, he believes, will Jesus return to the world, destroy all non-Christians and dispatch all 'good' Christians, like Hagee himself, to ever-lasting bliss in heaven. In order to justify what is nothing short than a global anti-Islamic crusade, in which a proposed invasion of Iran is just one step, Hagee repeats many of the worn-out, tired cliches about Islam that were, and still are, part of the stock vocabulary of Christian fundamentalism. Islam and Christianity are poles apart, he insists. He claims that Muslims and Christians do not even worship the same God. While Christianity is said to teach peace and love, Islam, he contends, does precisely the opposite. He claims that Islam was spread by the sword while, ignoring the centuries of Christian aggression, he writes that Christianity was spread through love and charity. Islam, he claims, insists that Muslims must kill all non-Muslims if they do not accept Islam. Muslims, are by definition, 'terrorists', he says, because their religion allegedly teaches them that this is precisely what they should be. Muslims, he goes on, are driven to hate non-Muslims because their religion allegedly tells them to do so. Islam, he writes, has an 'absolute commitment' to 'violence', to 'murder' and to 'terror', (p.70). Muslims' supposed hatred of the West, he claims, is because the West (supposedly) champions democracy, freedom, women's rights, men's respect for women, education, the

love of life, equality and so on, all of which, so Hagee wants his readers to believe, Islam strongly proscribes (p.28).

The ultimate aim of Muslims, Hagee claims, is to destroy the West, kill all Jews and Christians. Muslims, he argues, aim to conquering the whole world and establishing a one-world Islamic government (pp.6-16). He terrorizes his readers into believing that a massive Muslim 'religious army, unlike anything the Western world has seen since the dawn of civilization' is now preparing for war against the West, intending to conquer it and force Christians and Jews into slavery if they do not accept Islam. (P-6)

Iranian/Muslim opposition to America and Israel thus being said to be entirely a result of alleged Islamic teachings, rather than having any political or economic causes, the solution that Hagee offers is also expressed in religious terms: unleashing what is virtually a second crusade against Muslims the world over. The first step that America must do in this regard, he argues, is to admit and announce that it is engaged in a religious war against Islam, which he says, 'is totally dedicated' to America's destruction (p.35). Accordingly, he advises that the American government must firmly tighten control on Muslim immigration to that country. He even goes so far as to suggest that all American Muslims are real or potential 'terrorists' or terrorist-sympathizers, and claims that 'sleeping terrorist cells' have been set up in mosques and Islamic centres across the country, (p.63). 'The Islamic army is not coming, it's here. Quietly living next door, they are waiting for the phone to ring for orders to attack', he says with regard to Muslims living in America. (p.35) This veiled argument for justifying government-backed witch-hunts directed against Muslims in America is accompanied by equally frightening steps that Hagee advocates against Muslims living elsewhere. America must continue, and even step up, its war in Iraq, he insists, and must not bow to any pressure to withdraw from that country for that, he says, would be 'perceived as a victory for radical Islam' which might embolden Muslims to bring the war into America itself, (p.35). Simultaneously, he argues, with unconcealed glee, America must attack Iran and destroy its supposed nuclear warheads. This attack on Iran, Hagee writes, would be a singularly crucial event of cosmic proportions. It would, he claims, be nothing less than a major 'part of a much bigger picture-that of God's plan for the future of Israel and the entire world'. It would, in fact, he says, unleash a chain of bloody and devastating wars, the like of which humankind world has never witnessed before, and which would soon cause the destruction of the entire world, (p.37) The reader is not left without a strong feeling that this is precisely what Hagee and his war-mongering fellow fundamentalists actually desperately crave for.

Hagee sketches out the chain of events that would follow from the American attack on Iran which he claims the Bible predicts in fine detail. No sooner does America invade Iran than a massive Muslim army, hundreds of thousands strong, will attack Israel with Russian assistance in order to destroy it. This army would unleash nuclear weapons against America and Israel, and, in this way, would cause what he calls 'a nuclear Armageddon', (p.53). This, Hagee insists, is not something that can at all be prevented. In fact, he seems to suggest that this global war is something to be wildly celebrated by Christians because, he claims, it has been ordained by none other than God Himself. 'God is making it clear that

He is dragging Russia and its allies into Israel', Hagee writes (p. 145). The purpose: So that God can 'crush them [the Russian-Muslim alliance] so that the Jews of Israel as a whole will confess that He is the Lord!" By all counts, nasty, brutal way for the god of Hagee's imagination to seek to convince the Jews of his existence.

The combined Russian-Muslim force that attacks Israel as soon as America and Israel attack Iran will cause widespread death, Hagee says, but then God will intervene and cause his 'fury [to] explode' against those who have gathered against the Jews, for God, Hagee claims, considers the Jews 'His chosen people'. But no sooner has the Russo-Muslim army been quashed than another major opponent appears: this time in the form of the Anti-Christ, the Son of Satan, who will, through his powers of black magic, conquer the entire world. He will enter into a seven-year peace treaty with the Jews ostensibly in order to protect them from the Muslims and the Russians, but after three and a half years have passed he will break the treaty and will turn on the Jews, seeking to obliterate them. In this task, Hagee writes, he will be assisted by what the Bible calls the 'Man from the East', which he identifies as China.

This represents the culmination of the final battle that heralds the end of the world, so Hagee (like other Biblical literalists and Christian extremists) believes. In this war against the Anti-Christ and China, the West will join forces with the Jews, at a place called Armageddon, a narrow valley outside Jerusalem, which the Bible describes in considerable gory detail.

Just before the battle is about to begin, a miracle will appear, so Hagee ardently believes. Quoting the *Book of Revelations*, the last chapter of the Christian Bible, he writes, Jesus will descend to earth from the skies, clothed in a garment dipped in blood and seated on a white horse. He will be followed by a heavenly cavalry to assist him. His task, Hagee quotes the Book of Revelations as saying, will be to judge and make war. With the sharp sword that he wields in his mouth, Jesus shall 'strike the nations' that have gathered against Israel, killing the Anti-Christ and the 'Man from the East' and sending them-literally hundreds of millions of people-all non-Christians, that is-to eternal torment in hell. The blood of those slain by Jesus, Hagee approvingly refers to the *Book of Revelations* as announcing, would create a virtual 'sea of human blood' that will be 'two hundred miles long'. Jesus would then ascend his throne in Jerusalem, from where he would rule the entire world for a thousand years. A 'Golden Age of Peace' is how Hagee characterizes this era, although how non-Christians could ever consider it so is something that he obviously does not bother about. 'Rejoice and be glad', he excitedly announces, celebrating the gory chain of events that he describes with such passion that he says will unfold in the wake of an American invasion of Iran, 'The best is yet to be!'. That 'best' that Hagee and his fellow Christian extremists so fervently pine for, is nothing less than the destruction of the entire world. □□□