

Jul 30 2012

## A Mormon Foreign Policy Would be Good for America and Great for the World, But it won't Happen...

John Collins

By **Inderjeet Parmar**, Professor of Government at the University of Manchester, Chair of the British International Studies Association, and PI of the AHRC Obama Research Network.

As the world prepares to face another US presidential election, thoughts turn to the likely foreign and national security policies of America's first 'Mormon' White House under Mitt Romney. Widely derided as either weird or a cult, a foreign policy true to Mormon beliefs would likely see radical shifts – a massive rollback of American military forces from Afghanistan, reduction of the threatening attitude to Iran, a reversal of blanket support and aid to Israel, and slashed military spending. America would 'come home' and experience a real peace dividend that so patently failed to materialise after the end of the Cold War. But there's a difference between authentic Mormon beliefs and ex-Bishop Willard Mitt Romney, the Church of Latter Day Saints' establishment and, it must be noted, the majority of American Mormons. So 'Americanised' are Romney, the LDS establishment, and lay Mormons that a Romney White House would differ little in practice from previous administrations – including JFK's 'Roman Catholic' and Obama's 'African-American' ones. And that is testimony to the almost overweening assimilating powers of the American Way of Life – the subordination, or hollowing out, of any beliefs that challenge free enterprise, limited government, American exceptionalism, and US proactive global leadership.



A variety of dissenting voices – socialist, conservative, and others – are heard in the Mormon community which, at 14 million strong worldwide, is the fourth largest denomination in the United States. ['Mormons for Ron Paul'](#) – a libertarian Republican contender for the GOP's nomination who [may have as much as 20%](#) of all delegates at the upcoming national convention in Tampa, Florida () – argue that Romney, the LDS hierarchy and fellow Christians have forgotten the fundamentals of Christian beliefs in peace, diplomacy and negotiation. But when Ron Paul, a congressman from Texas, rejected US military intervention as a 'silver bullet' for global problems, he was met with derision from fellow Republicans and Christians. [LDS 'Liberty'](#) members, who also backed Ron Paul, suggested that US foreign policy be run according to the Bible's 'Golden Rule' – the principle that "forbids interference by one with the rights of another. It is equally binding upon nations, associations, and individuals..." "Love your enemies," they suggest, while deriding as "death and destruction" large swathes of American foreign and national security policy.

Meanwhile, the 'Latter Day Conservatives' [website](#) further underlines Mormons' authentic belief in Christian values. They argue that Christians should ever lift "a standard of peace" rather than fight wars or exact "vengeance" even for the terror attacks on 9-11, rejecting "pre-emptive war" on Iraq, or a future war on Iran, as Romney threatens, if elected. Projecting back into American history to trace the rise of an interventionist mindset, LDS Conservatives criticise President Woodrow Wilson's alleged support for a "world safe for democracy" during World War I, suggesting that "There is one and only one legitimate goal of US foreign policy...: the preservation of our national independence. Nothing in the Constitution grants that the President shall have the privilege of offering himself as a world leader.... [nor] to influence the life of other countries, to 'uplift' their cultures, to bolster their economies...."

Yet, so [reputedly integrated](#) into the American Way are Mormons that the FBI and CIA regard mere LDS membership as de facto patriotic loyalty tests. And there is a logical reason: Mormons believe the American Constitution to be a sacred document received direct from God – not the work of mere mortals. They also believe fundamentally in America's exceptional character and mission. And this aligns perfectly with the missionary character of Mormonism itself. Indeed, the teetotal Mitt Romney spent years in France – and in French bars – trying to win converts to the cause.

There are Mormons, however, who lament the uncritical acceptance among their community of the word from the White House in regard to the dangers to the republic from "monsters abroad". To some, the broad mass of Mormons appear to be only faintly familiar with the Book of Mormon, the LDS' earliest and most holy scripture, making them prey to "scheming leaders". They reject the claims of the LDS establishment, which backed the preventive war on Iraq in 2003, on the basis that it was a war, [in the words of](#) LDS President, Gordon B. Hinckley, "not... for... power but... for [Americans'] homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church."

From the Left, The Mormon Worker [website](#) not only rejects Romney's foreign policies on Israel and the Palestinians, among others, but also lambasts President Obama's strategy – before and during the Arab spring – of supplying American arms to some of the most repressive and backward regimes in the region to put down popular revolts.

But these are relatively isolated voices in the Mormon community, while Romney swims with the tide. Romney has drawn his foreign policy advisors from among re-organised and renewed neoconservatives who backed the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) and other militaristic organisations – like Elliott Cohen, William Kristol, Robert Kagan, John Bolton- that called for an American war on Iraq as early as 1997. Not for Romney, a foreign affairs novice, the counsel of old time Republican internationalists like Brent Scowcroft or Richard Armitage, or Reagan-Bush I era former secretaries of state, James Baker III or George P. Shultz – who were aggressive enough in the pursuit of American power. Consequently, Romney has [veered towards](#) bellicose declarations – no negotiations with the Taliban (instead the US should “go anywhere they are and... kill them”), greater military and economic pressure on Iran, more arms to Taiwan, and declared Russia America's main geopolitical enemy.

Romney has dozens of foreign and national security policy advisors but his inner circle are reputed to be similar to Bush's 'vulcans' – neoconservative hardliners who appear to think that the Iraq War was a great American victory and that the military budget should be increased by \$200 billion by 2016 ( the Obama administration had increased military spending by \$200 billion over that of President Bush in 2008; [Romney's plans](#) project spending to increase 38% higher than Obama's current plans), including an increase of 100,000 soldiers in the military, from five to nine navy ships built annually, stationing two aircraft carriers off Iran's coast (Obama has ramped up such pressure on Iran too), and installing a missile defence system in Europe. At the same time, Romney advocates cutting taxes by 20%; in 2010, Obama, it may be recalled, retained President Bush's planned tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans. The Obama administration's militarism has pushed Romney to even greater, politically less credible, extremes.

A truly Mormon White House? If only...

---

This entry was posted in [Foreign Policy](#), [Obama](#), [United States](#), [US elections](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).