

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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August 27 , 2021

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington DC 20500

Re: Inappropriate biblical reference in Kabul speech

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to respond to some of your statements on August 26 regarding the horrifying jihadist terrorist attack in Kabul. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 35,000 nonreligious members across the country and in every state, including many veterans and active duty service members. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church and educates about nontheism.

In yesterday's statement, you referred to the American military as answering a call from the deity of the Old Testament:

Those who've served through the ages have drawn inspiration from the Book of Isaiah. When the Lord says, "Who shall I send? Who shall go for us?" America's military has been answering for a long time, "Here I am Lord, send me! Here I am, send me!" Each one of these women and men of our armed forces are the heirs of that tradition of sacrifice and volunteering to go in harm's way, to risk everything, not for glory, not for profit, but to defend what we love and the people we love. And I ask that you join me now in a moment of silence. . . . May God bless you all and may God protect the troops and all those standing watch for America.

Mr. President, the U.S. military is not and should not be answering "the call of the Lord." "God" is not on our side — or anybody's side. Most of the one in four Americans who are religiously unaffiliated do not even believe in a deity. Belief in a deity is entirely a matter of faith, not fact, and indeed god belief can only be predicated on faith, for there is no evidence. The Taliban believes Allah is on its side. ISIS believes Allah is on its side. Almost every side in every war claims a deity is blessing it. Such delusions are reckless. Nothing is more dangerous than a "holy war" or, for that matter, a "holy withdrawal." Individuals may believe as they wish, but our federal government and our military may not take sides on religious matters.

It was particularly tone deaf to choose the verse Isaiah 6:8. In that fever dream of a story, Isaiah's sins were "purged" by a hot coal to his lips, after which he volunteers to be sent to go preach to the people of a certain land, *not* that they should understand, but that they should *not understand!*

Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed. Isa. 6:9–10.

Isaiah then asks how long this pointless religious mission will last, and the answer is:

Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. Isa. 6:11–12.

The U.S. military was not in Afghanistan to spread religion. To the contrary, our entrance was in direct response to a religiously motivated attack on the secular United States. Suggesting that the American presence was ordained by the god of the Old Testament, and should persist until Afghanistan's "cities lie ruined," the "houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged," and the "land is utterly forsaken," paints a picture of American service members as rampaging crusaders. This message, which presupposes the military is entirely made up of believers, is also insulting and insensitive to the quarter of the U.S. population that claims no religious affiliation, including the quarter of armed forces who are religiously unaffiliated.

We understand that yesterday's speech was delivered in the heat of the moment. But invoking a dubious religious story about fighting a crusade until the land is totally destroyed was a lapse of judgment. It was not presidential, nor did it properly convey a respect for the American principle of separation between religion and government. Mr. President, your office represents a diverse population that includes many millions of nonbelievers. You took an oath to uphold our godless and secular Constitution. Please do not use the power and prestige of your office to erroneously suggest that the U.S. military is directed by a deity, or that the United States, a secular republic, intends to pursue a "holy war."

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker  
Co-Presidents  
ALG/DB:rdj