



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on November 20, 2011

Forum: Gingrich & Santorum Would Attack Iran, Paul Wouldn't

"Nothing takes life more than the declaration of war," moderator and pollster Frank Luntz [asked](#) the six GOP presidential candidates who participated in the "Thanksgiving Family Forum," sponsored by a division of Focus on the Family. "Can you define the moral justification for war?"

Texas Congressman Ron Paul answered first, [explaining](#): "Early on, the Church struggled with this and St. Augustine came up with the principles of the just war. I believe in them. I think we should follow them from a religious viewpoint. But we have a Constitution that is very clear to guide us to try to prevent these wars. And that is that we don't go to war without a declaration." Traditional Christian just war principles stress that wars must be declared by the lawful authority; under the U.S. Constitution wars require the declaration of war by Congress. But Paul noted that recent U.S. wars have not been declared by Congress. "It was tragic because we did it by failing the rule of law," Paul added.



In addition to requiring that war must be declared by the rightful authority, [Christian just war principles](#) require: 1) that the war must be fought only as a last resort (when all other options have been exhausted); 2) that the damage inflicted by the aggressor nation must be certain, grave, and lasting; 3) that the war must not create greater suffering than it was started to prevent; and 4) that there must be reasonable prospects of winning the war.

Michele Bachmann answered Luntz's question next, [asserting](#): "The moral justification for war is if the United States is attacked, or if we are threatened with attack, then we have a decision that we have to make. Because the number one duty of [the] Commander-in-Chief is to secure the safety of the American people. That is the duty. And in order to do that I have to be convinced as Commander-in-Chief that we have a clearly defined American vital interest in that area. And I need to know also that we have a clear mission to go forward, we have a plan and an exit strategy."

One key phrase in Bachmann's reply was "or if we are threatened with an attack." St. Augustine of Hippo, the origin of Christian just war theory, wrote in the 4th Century that empires always created phony threats to begin wars. "To begin with, there never has been, nor, is there today, any absence of hostile foreign powers to provoke war," Augustine wrote sarcastically of the Roman empire. Moreover, what is a "clearly defined American vital interest"? Bachmann's statement seems to conflict with



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Christian apologist G.K. Chesterton's [quip](#) that "the only defensible war is a war of defense." Perhaps more importantly, Bachmann made no reference to even consulting Congress, the constitutional authority on war powers. To the contrary, she implied it is the President's authority to take the nation to war: "I have to be convinced as Commander-in-Chief that we have a clearly defined American vital interest in that area."

Businessman Herman Cain was a bit more circumspect than Bachmann in favoring war, but still [framed war](#) against just war principles by making it a presidential (rather than congressional) decision: "The defense of freedom and the defense of liberty I believe is the justification for going to war. Secondly, as commander in chief I will not send our young men and women into war unless it is clear why, the mission and the definition of victory. And thirdly, I would not send our men and women into war unless I would send my own son and daughter."

Perry, speaking fourth, made a [vague statement](#) that neither confirmed nor conflicted with Christian just war theory. "Clearly, when America's interests are in jeopardy, there is a time and a place for us to intervene and intervene militarily," Perry said.

Finally, the question fell to the warmongers, former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich. "We're engaged in what many people call the long war," against Islam, Santorum [told](#) the forum. "There is a thousand year conflict between radical Islam and the West that ended only because of the West's great superiority and was able defeat them and to drive them back and eventually colonize the Middle East. But that changed with a three letter word: Oil. Oil allowed the radical elements within the Islamic world to be able to get access to technology."

Santorum [called for](#) outright war against Iran if they fail to abandon their nuclear program. "They are now developing a nuclear weapon. It is apparent that they are doing so.... It must be stopped," Santorum [warned](#). The former Pennsylvania Senator then called for "working with Israel right now to plan a military option that is to strike and destroy these facilities and let the Iranians know that unless they open up their facilities and shut them down that that is an option that will be used. Period."

Newt Gingrich, while giving a nod to Rep. Paul on Christian just war doctrine, agreed fully with Santorum on war with Iran: "As Congressman Paul pointed out, in Christian theology there is a clear development of the concept of the just war I believe we should not go to war if we can avoid it," Gingrich [began](#), before abandoning those principles completely: "I agree entirely with Senator Santorum. I would say to the government of Iran today, you have a very short time to solve this on your own, and if you don't we will solve it for you. And we frankly couldn't care less what the rest of the world thinks. We're going to get it done."

Photo of Ron Paul at the Thanksgiving Family Forum: AP Images



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