



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on August 12, 2011

Ames, Iowa, GOP Debate: Paul Schools Santorum, Bachmann on Iran, War

Asked by Fox News channel anchor Chris Wallace why Paul was "soft" on Iran in his opposition to economic sanctions against the country, Paul [told the debate audience](#) that the threat from Iran was small when looked at through the lens of history: "Just think of what we went through in the Cold War when I was in the Air Force, after I was drafted into the Air Force, all through the Sixties. We were standing up against the Soviets. They had like 30,000 nuclear weapons with intercontinental missiles. Just think of the agitation and the worry about a country that might get a nuclear weapon some day."



Paul [concluded](#) of sanctions: "That makes it much worse. Why would that be so strange if the Soviets and the Chinese had nuclear weapons, we tolerated the Soviets. We didn't attack them. And they were a much greater danger. They were the greatest danger to us in our whole history. But you don't go to war with them."

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Paul also [asked](#) the audience to consider the nuclear issue from the perspective of the Iranian people:

Just think of how many nuclear weapons surround Iran. The Chinese are there. The Indians are there. The Pakistanis are there. The Israelis are there. The United States is there. All these countries ... why wouldn't it be natural if they might want a weapon? Internationally, they might be given more respect. Why should we write people off? In the Fifties, we at least talked to them. At least our leaders and Reagan talked to the Soviets. What's so terribly bad about this? And countries you put sanctions on you are more likely to fight them. I say a policy of peace is free trade, stay out of their internal business, don't get involved in these wars and just bring our troops home.

Paul's statements did not sit well with neo-conservatives at the debate podium. Rick Santorum, who had authored a sanctions bill against Iran as a Senator, [took particular umbrage](#) at Paul's analysis:

Iran is not Iceland, Ron. Iran is a country that has been at war with us since 1979. Iran is a country that has killed more American men and women in uniform in Iraq and Afghanistan than the Iraqis and the Afghans have. The Iranians are the existential threat to the state of Israel.

While Santorum's claim about more Americans being killed by Iranians in Iraq and Afghanistan than by the natives of those countries is patently false, Paul responded with a deeper historical analysis, [noting](#):

The senator is wrong on his history. We've been at war in Iran for a lot longer than '79. We started it in 1953 when we sent in a coup, installed the Shah, and the reaction — the blowback — came in 1979. It's been going on and on because we just don't mind our own business. That's our



problem.

Santorum [defended](#) the U.S. government's use of the CIA in the 1950s to install the brutal dictatorship of the Shah in Iran, which ended in an anti-American revolution in 1979. Santorum even called the Shah's reign freedom for the Iranian people:

He sees it exactly as Barack Obama sees it. That we have to go around and apologize for the fact that we've gone out and exerted our influence to create freedom around the world. I don't apologize for that. I don't apologize for the Iranian people being free for a long time, and now they're under a malocracy [sic] that tramples the rights of women, tramples the rights of gays, tramples the rights of people all throughout their society and is the greatest supporter of terrorism in the Middle East and around the world — and — is setting up training camps and is working with Venezuela and other countries south of our border to threaten us.

Representative Michele Bachmann agreed with Santorum, [stating](#),

Regarding Iran, Iran is the central issue in the Middle East and their capacity to become a nuclear power. They are one of the four state sponsors of terror in the world. I sit on the House Select Committee on Intelligence. I can't reveal classified information, but I can say this: As President of the United States, I will do everything to make sure that Iran does not become a nuclear power.

Paul [concluded](#),

You've heard the war propaganda that is liable to lead us into the sixth war and I worry about that position. Iran is a threat because they have some militants there, but believe me, they're all around the world and they're not a whole lot different than others. Iran does not have an air force that can come here. They can't even make enough gasoline for themselves.

Paul [said](#) that the propaganda about Iran matched the propaganda drumming up support for war against Iraq in 2002 — all of the claims of which ended up being exaggerated or patently false. "They're building up this case just like we did with Iraq. Build up the war propaganda. There was no al Qaeda in Iraq." He noted that war propagandists claimed "they had nuclear weapons and we had to go in," and then, referring to Santorum, added: "I'm sure you supported that war as well." (Santorum nodded that he did support the Iraq war from the beginning.) Paul concluded: "It's time we quit this. It's trillions of dollars we are spending on these wars."

Paul campaign staffer Jack Hunter blogged on the Paul presidential campaign website,

Paul is the only candidate tonight that hasn't unilaterally declared war on Iran, (or if you're Rick Santorum, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Syria) for the same vague and likely unfounded reasons as the last war. Most importantly — and this is key — Paul is the only candidate who has mentioned that we can no longer afford trillions of dollars to fight wars that don't make sense.

Photo of Ron Paul: AP Images

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