



[Service Members File Complaints Over Dangerous Military Rhetoric That Violates the Constitutional Separation of Church and State](#)

The Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) – an entity that seeks to protect the constitutional rights of armed service members against unlawful religious influence in their training and military assignments – has reported receiving more than 200 complaints from across all branches of the armed forces over the use of Christian apocalyptic rhetoric by military commanders in their framing of the Iran war. Military leaders have portrayed the conflict as a biblically sanctioned mission, deploying “end-times” language and suggesting that the war was part of a divine plan for triggering Armageddon. Analysts have highlighted that the use of this type of rhetoric is problematic and represents a clear infringement on the principle of religious freedom. Part of the MRFF’s mission is to defend the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which is widely understood to support the idea of the separation of church and state. The recent complaints submitted to the MRFF come from a diverse array of multi-faith groups of armed service members who have expressed grave concern that the rhetoric undermines religious freedom and the belief that military branches must remain neutral when it comes to theology.

According to MRFF, the complaints involve higher-ups in the military using extremist Christian rhetoric while discussing the war in Iran, framing the conflict in terms of a “divine purpose.” One report even alluded to a commander’s claim that the war was meant to help “induce the biblical end of times” – a period leading up to the second coming of Jesus Christ that some believe will be characterized by wars, natural disasters, famines, and other humanitarian crises. The issue with this type of messaging is that there are many different faith groups within the U.S. military and thus attempting to justify a war because of religion is not only unfair to this collective of multi-faith individuals, but it is also not a valid reason to go to war. When American military leaders invoke a specific religious theme or worldview, they are certain to alienate those who do not hold the same beliefs. Involving religion and theology so heavily in this type of setting risks dividing troops along faith-based lines – which also makes it much more difficult to maintain a strong and unified group.

One of the concerns centers around the fact that it is unconstitutional for a U.S. official to impose their religious views on others. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits the government from “establishing” an official state

religion, favoring one religion over another, using government authority (such as military leaders) to promote religious beliefs, or even preferring religion over non-religion – ensuring government neutrality in religious matters. Given that it is a core government entity, the United States military must adhere to this rule. As such, military members who hold positions of power and present war as a divine plan or frame it in biblical terms elevate one religion over others. Whether intentional or not, this can make non-Christian armed service members feel marginalized and pressured to conform to specific religious ideals.

The rhetoric from military leaders is particularly troubling considering the growth of Christian nationalism in political circles. If ideologies like this filter their way into military rhetoric, it can become increasingly difficult to discern between someone's personal faith and official authority. For example, figures like U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth have elicited alarm for publicly supporting ideas espoused by Christian nationalist Doug Wilson. On social media and news outlets across the United States, Wilson is known for advocating the idea that our government should be governed by Christian principles. He has criticized secularism, Muslim immigration, so-called "liberal Christians," and other "more modern" beliefs and practices. Regrettably, the rhetoric that he and others like him use creates an "us versus them" narrative that portrays one side as morally good and correct, and the other side as unethical. When this spills over into military rhetoric, it can therefore wrongfully frame war on the basis of religious elements – fueling extremism and intolerance.

Overall, the upwards of 200 complaints received by the MRFF demonstrate that many armed service members see the problem with military leaders using religious rhetoric in a war framing capacity. Doing so violates the core American principle of religious freedom and undermines the rights of armed service members. Maintaining a necessary separation between church and state is essential for professionalism within the military and for protecting religious freedom.