

Reading

Before our next class on February 14, read this handout and Bruce Blair's columns "Keeping Presidents in the Nuclear Dark" [Episode 1](#) and [Episode 2](#). Blair is a former Minuteman launch control officer who now heads the [World Security Institute](#). Also, make sure you're caught up with reading the previous handouts. I have been integrating different resources into this set of handouts and there will be some repetition as a result, for which I beg your indulgence.

How likely is a full-scale nuclear war?

This section focuses primarily on an all-out nuclear exchange because it is the least respected, yet potentially most destructive, nuclear risk. Because this nuclear risk is the hardest one for many people to envision, it helps to keep in mind that the initial steps to counter this risk and nuclear terrorism appear to be largely the same:

1. Reduce the number of weapons: That reduces the risk of theft by terrorists. It also increases international trust and understanding, an important element in preventing misunderstandings that can lead to crises that, in turn, can lead to war.
2. Raise nuclear awareness: That is a prerequisite to achieving item #1 above.
3. Perform an objective, in-depth analysis of the risk posed by nuclear weapons through terrorism, proliferation and war. Such a study would also investigate coupling between these risks. For example, could a nuclear terrorist attack trigger a nuclear war?

The earlier handout on risk analysis partly answered this question, but had three limitations. First, it only considered trigger mechanisms involving a Cuban crisis, and therefore purposely underestimated the risk. In engineering, this is called a lower bound on the risk. Second, because it was quantitative, people who prefer a qualitative approach may come away wanting more explanation. Third, estimating the final probabilities (crossing the nuclear threshold, and escalation from that to full-scale nuclear war) involved some subjectivity, again leading some people to prefer the qualitative approach taken in this section.

As noted earlier, one of the reasons full-scale nuclear war is discounted by most people is illustrated in the righthand half of Figure 4.1 below (repeated from earlier handouts). Most of the time, the world is in one of the middle states of the *The World As We Know It* super-state, and there is no direct path to the catastrophic *WW3* state. This leads many people to assume that World War III can never happen. That would be true if we never moved to a state closer to the nuclear threshold, but history shows such excursions occur frequently enough to create an unacceptable risk.

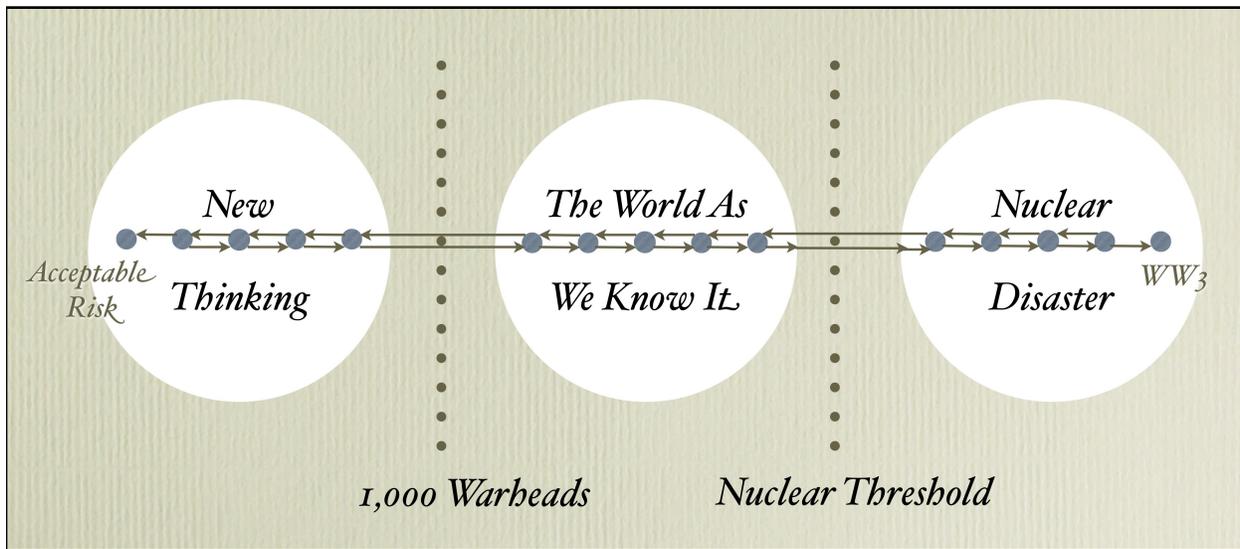


Figure 4.1. A state diagram illuminates the negative and positive possibilities.

The following list adds some new examples of dangerous moves, as well as reminding us of those we have already seen:

- In 1908 a small asteroid struck a remote area of Siberia with the power of a 10 megaton nuclear blast. Today, a similar event in a more populated area could be mistaken for an attack and trigger a nuclear war.
- During the 1961 Berlin crisis American and Soviet tanks faced off at Checkpoint Charlie, in a confrontation that the [U.S. Army web site](#) says “nearly escalated to the point of war.” [Declassified documents](#) show that President Kennedy and his military advisors considered executing a nuclear first strike against the Soviet Union during that crisis.
- President Kennedy estimated the odds of war¹ resulting from the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis as “somewhere between one out of three and even.” While Kennedy’s estimate may have been inflated by his subjective experience and interests, it also had an underestimation bias because he was unaware of two significant risk factors that did not become known until decades later: A Soviet submarine that we forced to surface had a [nuclear torpedo](#) and considered using it against the American naval force; and the Soviet troops on Cuba had [battlefield nuclear weapons](#) to deter an American invasion – an option frequently advocated throughout the crisis.
- The 1967 Arab-Israeli war led Soviet Party Chairman Alexei Kosygin to awaken President Johnson with the proverbial 3 AM call² warning that war with the United States

¹ Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, Harper & Row, New York, 1965, page 705.

² This “3 AM” call was actually at 7 AM, but President Johnson was still groggy when awakened.

was imminent. Johnson's Defense Secretary Robert McNamara [attributed Kosygin's call to a misunderstanding](#).

- In 1973, when Israel encircled the Egyptian Third Army, the Soviets threatened to intervene, leading to implied nuclear threats.³
- In 1979, a test tape that simulated a massive Russian attack was mistakenly fed into a NORAD computer connected to the operational missile alert system, resulting in a serious [false alarm](#). As noted in that link, Senator Charles Percy happened to be at NORAD during that time and described a situation of absolute panic.
- On September 26, 1983, a Soviet early warning satellite [signaled that the U.S. had launched a missile attack](#). This occurred during one of the tensest periods of the Cold War, but fortunately Colonel Stanislav Petrov deviated from standard procedures (presumably at some risk to his career) and declared it a false alarm. The erroneous signal eventually was traced to the sun reflecting off the tops of clouds.
- The 1983 Able Archer incident has been described by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates⁴ as “one of the potentially most dangerous episodes of the Cold War.” President Reagan's statements about fighting and winning a nuclear war had created fear in the Soviet leadership that the U.S. thought it could execute a successful first strike. Able Archer was a NATO military exercise that raised the Soviet fear level to unprecedented levels. If nuclear war seems inevitable, military doctrine would dictate that they strike first – and mistakenly in this case. Both of Bruce Blair's columns in this week's assigned reading provide evidence of that bias.
- Certain events during the 1993 Russian coup attempt that were not recognized by the general public led a number of American intelligence officers at NORAD headquarters to call their families and tell them to leave Washington out of fear that the Russians might launch a nuclear attack.⁵
- In 1995, the Russian air defense system mistook a meteorological rocket launched from Norway for an American submarine launched ballistic missile, causing the Russian “nuclear football” – which contains the codes for authorizing a nuclear attack – to be opened in front of Boris Yeltsin. This was the first time such an event had occurred, and fortunately Yeltsin was sober enough to make the right decision.⁶

³ William L. Ury, *Beyond the Hotline: How We Can Prevent the Crisis that Might Bring on a Nuclear War*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1985, pp. 19-20.

⁴ Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows*, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, New York, 2006, pp. 270-273.

⁵ Peter Vincent Pry, *War Scare*, Praeger, Westport, CT, 1999, page x, pp. 129-169.

⁶ Pry, *ibid*, pp. 183-238.

- [Confusion and panic](#) during the 9/11 attacks led an airborne F-16 pilot to mistakenly believe we were under attack by the Russians, instead of terrorists. In a dangerous coincidence, the Russian Air Force had scheduled an exercise that day, in which strategic bombers were to be flown toward the United States. Fortunately, the Russians learned of the terrorist attack in time to ground their bombers.
- The August 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia would have produced a major crisis if President George W. Bush had followed through on his [earlier promises to Georgia](#): “The path of freedom you have chosen is not easy but you will not travel it alone. Americans respect your courageous choice for liberty. And as you build a free and democratic Georgia, the American people will stand with you.” The danger is compounded because most Americans are unaware that Georgia fired the first shots and Russia is [not solely to blame](#). Ongoing tensions could well produce a rematch, and Sarah Palin, reflecting the mood of many Americans, has said that the United States should be [ready to go to war](#) with Russia should that occur.

The risks associated with the nuclear near misses listed above would have been amplified if they had occurred during an international crisis, when there would have had a much greater chance of their being mistaken for the real thing. While more recent data would clearly be of interest, during 1977-84, “moderately serious false alarms,” known as Missile Display Conferences to Evaluate Possible Threats, occurred almost [three times a week](#), indicating that the risk of such a coincidence is higher than might first be assumed.

Underestimation of the Risk

Society tends to underestimate the risk of a nuclear catastrophe, and especially the danger of a full-scale nuclear war, for several reasons. The most dangerous states of Figure 4.1 are visited infrequently and for very short periods of time. Most people understandably base their perceptions on the typical environment that they face, but here the unusual, atypical environments dominate the risk. The thirteen days of the Cuban Missile Crisis spanned less than 0.1% of the nuclear deterrence era, yet probably encompassed between 10% and 30% of the total risk. The fact that most people are unaware of the majority of the risks listed above – as well as others that were not included – exacerbates the human tendency to overlook atypical environments. Unrecognized risks are overlooked by definition.

“Nuclear optimism” also causes society to underestimate the risk of a full-scale nuclear war. Some proponents maintain that, because deterrence has worked for over fifty years, it can be relied on to work into the indefinite future, without fail. As noted in an earlier handout, soon after President Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his commitment to “seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons,” [TIME Magazine’s on line edition](#) ran a story entitled “Want Peace? Give a Nuke the Nobel.” It said in part:

As long as a nukeless world remains wishful thinking and pastoral rhetoric, we’ll be all right. But if the Nobel Committee truly cares about peace, its members will think a little harder about trying to make it a reality. ... A world with nuclear weapons in it is a scary,

scary place to think about. ... If the Nobel Committee ever wants to honor the force that has done the most over the past 60 years to end industrial-scale war, its members will award a Peace Prize to the bomb.

While TIME has a point that eliminating nuclear weapons in the current world environment might entail major risks, that is irrelevant. If nuclear weapons ever are eliminated, it will first require major changes in the world environment. (Coincidentally, a [recent Russian article](#) also makes that point.) The new START Treaty had great difficulty obtaining Senate ratification even though it only reduced our nuclear arsenal from 2,200 to 1,550 warheads. Does TIME think there is any real risk of a president eliminating our nuclear weapons in the current atmosphere? And, even if a president tried to commit such a politically suicidal act, would Congress and the nation allow it? Obama's [Prague speech](#) included an important caveat that TIME overlooked:

So today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. I'm not naive. This goal will not be reached quickly – perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence. But now we, too, must ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change. We have to insist, “Yes, we can.” Make no mistake: As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies -- including the Czech Republic.

Overlooking such caveats, as the TIME article does, creates the false impression that our only two choices are between business as usual and immediate nuclear disarmament. The latter straw man is easily demolished, mistakenly leading to the conclusion that nuclear weapons must be – and therefore, implicitly, can be – relied on to keep peace *ad infinitum*.

No one in his right mind would start a nuclear war

Underestimation of the risk is often buttressed by another fallacious belief: Because no one in his right mind would start a nuclear war, there is nothing to worry about. Unfortunately, world leaders are not always in their right minds:

- Nuclear deterrence depends on appearing irrational enough to use your nuclear weapons. This is particularly true when deterrence is examined beyond the simplistic Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), which is often used (incorrectly) as a synonym for nuclear deterrence. The simple version of MAD – “I only have these weapons so I can retaliate if you hit me first” – allows some level of rationality. But, as many Russian-American confrontations show (e.g., Berlin 1961, Cuba 1962, Georgia 2008), we use nuclear threats much more freely and over issues that are minor compared to national survival. Only by pretending to be irrational enough to use our nuclear weapons and invite our own destruction can we preserve the primary value that they possess – deterring behavior we believe to be inimical to our interests. This paradox was spelled out explicitly in a 1995 US Strategic Command report, [Essentials of Post-Cold War Deterrence](#), obtained under the Freedom of Information Act:

... it hurts to portray ourselves as too fully rational and cool-headed. The fact that some elements [in the U.S. nuclear command structure] may appear to be potentially “out of control” can be beneficial to creating and reinforcing fears and doubts within the minds of an adversary’s decision makers. This essential sense of fear is the working force of deterrence. That the US may become irrational and vindictive if its vital interests are attacked should be part of the national persona we project to all adversaries.

Along those very lines, in 1969, Richard Nixon tried to convince the Soviets and North Vietnamese that he was a [madman](#) with an itchy finger on the nuclear trigger. He hoped that this would end the Viet Nam War on terms more favorable to the United States. The article linked to describes some unforeseen risks that developed in this questionable, and unsuccessful ploy.

- National leaders often fail to see the consequences of their actions, which is how some of the most dangerous moves in the state diagram of Figure 4.1 have occurred. Examples include:

1. Describing an exchange during the 1961 Berlin crisis, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara relates:

I asked a senior NATO commander what further moves we should expect and how we should respond. He said the Soviets would probably do *a* and we *b*; they *c* and we *d*; they *e* and we *f*; and then we would be forced to do *g*. And when I said, “What do we do then?” he replied, “We should use nuclear weapons.” When I asked how he expected the Soviets to respond, he said, “With nuclear weapons.” In the event, of course, we did no such thing.⁷

While, in this account, McNamara thought through the sequence of moves, it is disconcerting that a senior NATO commander appears not to have done so. We saw repeated, similar lapses of judgment during 1962’s Cuban Missile Crisis (e.g., pressure to invade without adequately considering the possibility of Soviet battlefield nuclear weapons).

2. The 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco created [strong pressure](#) within the U.S. to invade Cuba in force. In the month prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis, that pressure led the Soviets to warn “that any U.S. military action against Cuba would unleash nuclear war.”⁸ Two days later (a month before the missiles were detected) Kennedy warned the Soviets that “if Cuba should ever ... become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its

⁷ Robert McNamara: *Blundering Into Disaster: Surviving the First Century of the Nuclear Age*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1986, page 8.

⁸ Sorensen, *ibid*, page 680.

own security and that of its allies.”⁹ Once the missiles were discovered, both Kennedy and Khrushchev were boxed in by their earlier statements. The overt Soviet nuclear threat and the implied American one had been intended to deter certain actions, but deterrence failed at that level. Khrushchev did place missiles on Cuba that America viewed as offensive. (Khrushchev regarded them as defensive in nature, intended to deter a second American invasion attempt.) And, America seriously contemplated military action against Cuba, in spite of Khrushchev’s warning. Fortunately, deterrence did not fail catastrophically, only partially, and nuclear war was averted.

3. In a [2005 speech](#) in Tbilisi, President Bush proclaimed to the Georgian people: “The path of freedom you have chosen is not easy but you will not travel it alone. Americans respect your courageous choice for liberty. And as you build a free and democratic Georgia, the American people will stand with you.” **Emboldened** by such promises and Bush’s efforts to fast track Georgia’s membership in NATO, in August 2008, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili attacked South Ossetia, which had seceded from Georgia after Georgia seceded from the Soviet Union. Fortunately, President Bush did not follow through on his promises, even though that meant losing face. Bush failed to think through the [likely consequences](#) of his actions, Saakashvili failed to do the same (he lost the war, and with it, any remaining hope of regaining the secessionist region). And, if Bush had kept his promises to Georgia, Russia would have suffered that same failure.

- During crises, rationality is often one of the first victims. [The Myth of Rationality in Situations of Crisis](#) examines how Kennedy and his advisers reached the irrational conclusion that the Bay of Pigs invasion could succeed against a Cuban adversary over 100 times stronger. [To Err is Human: Nuclear War by Mistake](#) has a section entitled *Performance during Crisis* which enumerates other impediments to rational behavior when it is most needed.
- Alcohol and drugs can cause irrational behavior in otherwise rational people and, even without having researched this thoroughly, I am aware of four instances where world leaders either suffered from drug or alcohol impairment, or were at risk of that occurring:

President Kennedy was given amphetamines by Dr. Max Jacobson. Known as “Dr. Feelgood” and “Miracle Max” because of the massive amphetamine doses administered to his clients. Jacobson’s medical license was [revoked in 1975](#), six years after one of his patients died from amphetamine poisoning.

Some [reports](#) attributed Boris Yeltsin’s bizarre behavior to alcoholism. Whatever the cause, his behavior often seemed incompatible with the responsibilities of a world leader who held the fate of the earth in his hands.

George W. Bush and his wife have stated that his use of alcohol impaired their relationship prior to his becoming president and [allegations](#) of more serious problems

⁹ Sorensen, *ibid*, page 671.

exist.[Note: That link is to Wikipedia, which is not an authoritative source. However, its quote from David Owen's book is unlikely to be faked, and Owen was Foreign Secretary. Again, that is not to say Owen is accurate, but it adds credibility.]

Former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's recent memoirs [state that](#) he often had a "stiff whisky or G and T before dinner, couple of glasses of wine or even half a bottle with it." This means that he might have had to make a decision involving the use of nuclear weapons when his judgment was impaired to the point that he could not legally drive a car.

If it is illegal to drive under the influence (DUI), should it also be illegal to have one's finger on the button under the influence (FOBUI)? If so, should a president have to abstain from alcohol since it is never known when he/she will have to make a fateful decision? I am not proposing that will ever happen, just pointing out that the world is at risk from this factor.

- Mental illness can strike anyone, often with little or no warning. President Calvin Coolidge [suffered from depression](#) after his sixteen-year-old son died of blood poisoning. There were [reports](#) that, prior to President Nixon's resignation as a result of the growing Watergate scandal, he "broached the possibility of suicide ... [seriously enough that White House Chief of Staff] Gen. Haig ordered doctors to take away Nixon's tranquilizers and deny his requests for pills." Soon after being ousted as Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal was hospitalized with a nervous breakdown and died in what appears to be a suicide.
- Some religious groups welcome chaos, including nuclear war, as ushering in an apocalyptic end to a sinful world, and there is evidence that Presidents Reagan¹⁰ and [George W. Bush](#),¹¹ as well as a number of highly placed officials were affected by End Times beliefs. Of particular relevance to American nuclear policy is the belief by some Christians that Biblical prophecies connected with the Battle of Armageddon are necessary precursors to the Second Coming of Christ. [Prof. Paul Boyer](#), Merle Curti Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin has kindly allowed me to post [one of his lectures](#) that provides evidence of such thinking in a number of prominent

¹⁰ Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1992, page 142.

¹¹ Although this article reports Bush's alleged phone call to Chirac as fact, the lack of a direct chain from Chirac to Prof. Römer (see the article for his role) indicates that more evidence would be needed to conclusively establish this. A 2009 French book, *Si vous le répétez, je démentirai... : Chirac, Sarkozy, Villepin*, makes the same assertion and the author claims to have heard this directly from Chirac.

American figures, as well as in the population as a whole. The following list uses italics to denote excerpts from Prof. Boyer's lecture.¹²

In a 1996 poll, 42 percent [of Americans] agreed with the statement: "The world will end in a battle in Armageddon between Jesus and the Antichrist." A [2010 Pew Poll](#) found similar numbers, with 41 percent believing that "Jesus Christ will return to earth by 2050." That same poll found that, "58 percent see another world war as definite or probable [by 2050]." In correspondence with the coordinator of the poll, I learned that there was a correlation between those two questions: 75 percent of those who believe Jesus will return to earth by 2050 also believe there will be another world war, compared with 48 percent of those who do not believe Jesus will return to earth in that time frame.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, and the administration's subsequent focus on Iraq raised this prophetic theme [End Times prophecies identifying Saddam Hussein as the Antichrist] to a fever pitch. Hal Lindsey's¹³ Website featured a cartoon of a plane emblazoned with a U.S. flag and a Star of David and carrying a missile targeting "Saddam".

In a November 2002 sermon beamed nationwide via the Trinity Broadcasting Network, televangelist John Hagee called the looming US invasion of Iraq "the beginning of the end," and a sign of Christ's Second Coming. As the sermon ended, House majority leader Tom DeLay rose to proclaim: "[W]hat has been spoken here tonight is the truth from God."

The prophecy popularizers readily acknowledge that Israel's territorial expansion and claims to Temple Mount [part of the required prophecies] could lead to horrendous conflict. Indeed, their scenario assumes just such an apocalyptic showdown. They quote God's curse on Abraham's illegitimate son Ishmael and

¹² I focus on Christian apocalyptic beliefs solely because they play a larger part in American politics and foreign policy, and therefore increase the risk of a nuclear disaster. Jewish and Islamic apocalyptic beliefs also increase the nuclear risk, but probably by much smaller amounts. Senator Joseph Lieberman, an orthodox Jew, appears in the Christians United for Israel YouTube video mentioned later. He compares Reverend Hagee (the founder of CUFI) to Moses. It is not clear whether Senator Lieberman's position is based on Jewish apocalyptic beliefs, but even if they are not, the effect on nuclear risk is much the same. Similarly, there are reports that Iran's President Ahmadinejad holds apocalyptic beliefs involving Islam's "twelfth imam." I have not researched those reports adequately to confirm them, but confirmation would not be surprising.

¹³ Hal Lindsey co-authored *The Late Great Planet Earth*, a 1970 book on End Times themes. As of 1990, 28 million copies were in circulation, and it appears to have held the status of almost a second Bible to true believers of End Times prophecies. Many of the current generation of Evangelical political leaders, including President George W. Bush, came of age religiously while that book held great sway. The current *Left Behind* series has largely taken the place of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, albeit in a clearly fictional setting. Later, this handout has some excerpts from *The Late Great Planet Earth* that give an idea of what Lindsey and his followers espouse.

God's blessing on Abraham's legitimate son Isaac as proof of eternal conflict between Arabs and Jews. Like all apocalyptic struggles, this can end only in total victory for one side, annihilation of the other. The Temple Mount is the location of one of Islam's holiest sites, the al Aqsa Mosque. While it is the holiest site in Judaism, any attempt to destroy the mosque and rebuild the Jewish Temple, as advocated by many End Times believers, would create chaos on an immense scale.

In his 1998 book Final Dawn over Jerusalem, televangelist John Hagee attacked any peace plan involving even partial withdrawal from the West Bank and shared governance of Jerusalem: "The man or nation that lifts a voice or hand against Israel invites the wrath of God. . .," he wrote; "There can be no compromise regarding . . . Jerusalem, not now, not ever. . . . Israel is the only nation created by a sovereign act of God, and He has sworn . . . to defend His Holy City."

Hagee formed a lobby, Christians United for Israel (acronym CUFI). The inaugural [2007] event in Washington, drew 3,500 supporters. Featured speakers included [soon-to-be Majority Leader of the House] Tom DeLay, Republican senators Rick Santorum and Sam Brownback, and GOP national chairman Ken Mehlman. President Bush sent greetings. . . . Tom DeLay, asked by a reporter about his prophecy beliefs and how they relate to his support for Israel, responded: "[The Rapture] is what I live for And obviously we have to be connected to Israel . . . to enjoy the Second Coming of Christ." A [YouTube video](#) that starts with DeLay saying that is well worth watching.

*After Bush's 1986 religious conversion, the conviction that his policies mirror God's will seemed to grip him. . . . Journalist Bob Woodward, interviewing Bush before the Iraq War, became convinced that he was "casting his mission and that of the country in the grand vision of God's master plan." There are reports that President Bush's decision to invade Iraq may have been influenced by his religious beliefs. When he was Palestinian Foreign Minister, Nabil Shaath [claims that Bush told him](#) that God either commanded or inspired (depending on the translation) him to attack Iraq. Of course, this is hearsay, and therefore questionable. The link to *George W. Bush* at the bottom of page 8 has additional evidence, but as noted in the associated footnote, that too has some gaps. Taken together, and especially when combined with [other reports](#), the evidence becomes stronger.*

General William Boykin, deputy undersecretary of defense . . . in sermons in evangelical churches in 2002-03, Boykin, in full-dress uniform, voiced his basic message: terrorists hate America "because we're a Christian nation . . . and the enemy is a guy named Satan." Referring to a captured Muslim warlord in Somalia, he said: "I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol." . . .

President Bush distanced himself from Boykin's remarks after Muslim protests, but the general remains in his post..

- Such End Times beliefs also portray Russia as one of the forces of evil arrayed against God's chosen people, Israel, accounting for some of the residual Cold War mentality. The following excerpts from *The Late Great Planet Earth* also evidence irrational beliefs that increase nuclear risk, especially if held by national leaders.

Pages 55-56: There remains but one more event to completely set the stage for Israel's part in the last great act of her historical drama. This is to rebuild the ancient Temple of worship upon its old site.... There is one major problem barring the construction of a third Temple. That obstacle is the second holiest place of the Moslem faith, the Dome of the Rock. This is believed to be built squarely in the middle of the old temple site. Obstacle or no obstacle, it is certain that the temple will be rebuilt. Prophecy demands it.

Pages 59-60: I once heard a radio program with a minister saying that the Bible indicated that the last war of the world would be fought between nations symbolized by an eagle and a bear. ... Little did I realize at that time how definite the Bible is about who the nations will be that play the major roles in the last drama. There is certainly more revealed than the vague symbols of an eagle and a bear. [This refers, of course, to the American eagle and the Russian bear.]

Page 62: Study Ezekiel 38 and 39. The most significant part of this chain of events is established here. These chapters indicate with certainty that after the physical restoration of the nation, but before the spiritual rebirth, a great northern enemy will invade Israel (Ezekiel 38:8, 16). Then God will supernaturally judge the northern invaders, and this is the very act which will impel the Israeli people to know and believe in their true Messiah, Jesus Christ (Ezekiel 39:6-8). [This becomes dangerous when paired with the next excerpt that identifies the northern invaders with Russia.]

Page 63: Who Is the Northern Commander? For centuries, long before the current events could have influenced the interpreter's ideas, men have recognized that Ezekiel's prophecy about the Northern commander referred to Russia. Dr. John Cumming, writing in 1864, said, "This king of the North I conceive to be the autocrat of Russia ... that Russia occupies a place, and a very momentous place, in the prophetic word has been admitted by almost all expositors." [Lindsey then spends several pages creating evidence that Ezekiel 38-39 refers to Russia as the enemy.]

Page 66: The final evidence for identifying this northern commander lies in its geographical location from Israel. Ezekiel puts great stress on this by saying three times that this great enemy of Israel would come from their "uttermost north." ...

You need only to take a globe to verify this exact geographical fix. There is only one nation to the “uttermost North” of Israel – the USSR.

Page 82: [Chapter 7 is entitled “The Yellow Peril” and explains that “the kings of the east” of Revelation 16:12 is an Oriental army.] Another important detail involving this Oriental army is unlocked by the clue involving the Euphrates. The apostle John speaks of the release of four vicious, depraved angelic beings which have been kept bound by God at the Euphrates River (Revelation 9:14-16). Immediately after their release an incredible army emerges from the Euphrates... it numbers “200 million” (Revelation 9:16). The demonic spirit-beings somehow incite this great army to invade the Middle East ... A terrifying prophecy is made about the destiny of this Asian horde. They will wipe out a third of the earth’s population (Revelation 9:18). The phenomena by which this destruction of life will take place is given: it will be by fire, smoke (or air pollution), and brimstone (or melted earth). The thought may have occurred to you that this is strikingly similar to the phenomena associated with thermonuclear warfare. In fact, many Bible expositors believe that this is an accurate first-century description of a twentieth-century thermonuclear war.

The above excerpts from Hal Lindsey’s book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, represent more than just a fringe element of American society. The [YouTube video](#) mentioned earlier provides evidence that former Majority Leader of the House Tom DeLay believes these prophecies, and that that they influenced his voting on important foreign policy matters. Some excerpts from University of Wisconsin Professor Paul Boyer’s book, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1992, pages 140-142) also provide evidence of their influence at the highest levels of government:

Thus far, our analysis has been textual, focusing on the pronouncements of preachers and prophecy writers. Is it possible to contextualize this evidence and assess its influence, if any, on U.S. nuclear policy? The question is difficult, the evidence sketchy. Hal Lindsey insisted that the impact was direct and dramatic. He described earnest prophecy discussions with newspaper publishers, government officials, and military strategists. When he spoke at the American Air War College, [Lindsey maintains] “virtually the entire school turned out, including many officers accompanied by their wives.” At the Pentagon, “hundreds ... jam[med] the room” with more crowding outside. If we move beyond such self-serving anecdotal evidence, two lines of analysis suggest themselves ...

The direct influence of prophecy belief on nuclear decision-making surfaced as an issue in the 1980s as the eschatological interests of several Reagan administration officials became known. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, asked about the subject in 1982, replied, “I read the Book of Revelation and yes, I believe the world is going to end – by an act of God, I hope – but every day I think that time is running out.” Interior Secretary designate James Watt, questioned at his confirmation hearing about preserving the environment for future generations, forthrightly replied, “I do not know how many

future generations we can count on before the Lord returns.” Reagan’s Surgeon General, C. Everett Coop, attended a 1971 prophecy conference in Jerusalem and reported on it for a leading pre-millennial journal. ...

Ronald Reagan’s abiding interest in prophecy, dating from his youthful immersion in the theology of the Christian (“Campbellite”) Church, deepened in the 1960s and 70s through contacts with Billy Graham, Hollywood minister Donn Moomaw, born-again entertainer Pat Boone, and other prophecy believers. “Apparently never in history,” then Governor Reagan told *Christian Life* magazine in 1968, “have so many of the prophecies come true in such a relatively short time.” *The Late Great Planet Earth* strengthened Reagan’s prophecy belief, and at a 1971 political dinner in Sacramento shortly after a leftist coup in Libya (a nation mentioned in Ezekiel as one of Israel’s invaders [during the prophesied battle of Armageddon]), Reagan observed somberly: “That’s a sign that the day of Armageddon isn’t far off ... Everything is falling into place. It can’t be long now. Ezekiel says that fire and brimstone will be rained upon the enemies of God’s people. That must mean they’ll be destroyed by nuclear weapons.”

During the White House years Reagan’s prophecy interest continued. In 1983 he told a lobbyist for Israel: “You know, I turn back to your ancient prophets in the Old Testament and the signs foretelling Armageddon, and I find myself wondering if we’re the generation that’s going to see that come about. I don’t know if you’ve noted any of these prophecies lately but believe me, they certainly describe the times we’re going through.” ...

In a 1984 Yankelovich poll, for example, 39 percent of the respondents said that biblical prophecy of Earth’s destruction by fire referred to nuclear war, with 25% convinced that God would spare them personally from the coming Holocaust. [As noted earlier in this handout, a [2010 Pew Poll](#) showed similar numbers, with 41 percent of Americans believing Jesus Christ would return to Earth by 2050, and 75 percent of those believing that another World War would occur within that same time period.]

There is also evidence that George W. Bush may have been influenced by End Times beliefs. The most disturbing allegation, briefly mentioned earlier in this handout, is that the president’s decision to invade Iraq in 2003 was directly [influenced by his religious beliefs](#)¹⁴ concerning the prophesy of Ezekiel – a prophesy that figures prominently in End Times beliefs. In 2005, a [Washington Post article](#) noted that “The BBC will broadcast a documentary this week in which a senior Palestinian official alleges that Bush privately suggested that he invaded Afghanistan and

¹⁴ The link is to an English language report about a [French language article](#) in the magazine of the University of Lausanne. I translated the French article and found that the English language report accurately reflects what was said. However, both articles report Bush’s alleged phone call to Chirac as fact, while I believe more evidence is needed to conclusively establish that. Even though a 2009 French book by Jean Claude Maurice, *Si vous le répétez, je démentirai... : Chirac, Sarkozy, Villepin*, makes the same assertion and the author claims to have heard this directly from Chirac, questions still remain. For example, could Chirac have misunderstood Bush?

Iraq on the orders of God,” but goes on to note “An Arabic speaker at *The Washington Post*, however, translated the words differently after receiving the original Arabic from *Haaretz*. Instead of ‘God told me,’ The Post’s translation had Bush saying he was inspired by God.”

In June 2009, [GQ Magazine revealed](#) that daily top-secret briefings from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to President Bush often had Biblical quotes with “Crusades-like messaging” on the covers, even though some of the people privy to the practice “worried that if these covers were leaked during a war conducted in an Islamic nation, the fallout – as one Pentagon staffer would later say – ‘would be as bad as Abu Ghraib.’” (GQ has [a slideshow](#) of the covers.) At a minimum, such practices would seem to be dangerous fodder for those in the Islamic world seeking to portray America’s invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as a latter day Crusade of Christianity against Islam. Unfortunately, such an association was facilitated by the president’s use of the word *crusade* in [his remarks about 9/11](#):

But we need to be alert to the fact that these evil-doers still exist. ... This is a new kind of – a new kind of evil. And we understand. And the American people are beginning to understand. This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while. And the American people must be patient. I’m going to be patient.

President Bush’s emphasis on *evil* was also problematic, because that word is often associated with Christian End Times beliefs. [An article](#) in the *Christian Science Monitor* that appeared three days later noted the danger of using those terms:

President Bush’s reference to a “crusade” against terrorism, which passed almost unnoticed by Americans, rang alarm bells in Europe. It raised fears that the terrorist attacks could spark a ‘clash of civilizations’ between Christians and Muslims, sowing fresh winds of hatred and mistrust.

“We have to avoid a clash of civilizations at all costs,” French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine said on Sunday. “One has to avoid falling into this huge trap, this monstrous trap” which he said had been “conceived by the instigators of the assault.”

On Sunday, Bush warned Americans that “this crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take awhile.” He and other US officials have said that renegade Islamic fundamentalist Osama bin Laden is the most likely suspect in the attacks.

His use of the word “crusade,” said Soheib Bensheikh, Grand Mufti of the mosque in Marseille, France, “was most unfortunate”, “It recalled the barbarous and unjust military operations against the Muslim world,” by Christian knights, who launched repeated attempts to capture Jerusalem over the course of several hundred years.

Bush sought to calm American Muslims’ fears of a backlash against them on Monday by appearing at an Islamic center in Washington. There he assured Americans that “the face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That’s not what Islam is all about.”

But his earlier comments, declaring a war between good and evil, shocked Europeans. “If this ‘war’ takes a form that affronts moderate Arab opinion, if it has the air of a clash of civilizations, there is a strong risk that it will contribute to Osama bin Laden’s goal: a conflict between the Arab-Muslim world and the West,” warned the Paris daily *Le Monde* on Tuesday in an editorial.¹⁵

More could be said, but I will stop here, particularly since talking about religion is fraught with hazards, even when it is relevant to an issue as important as nuclear risk. I will appreciate any feedback that you might have on this section. Was it helpful? insulting? too long? Thanks in advance, and my apologies if I offended anyone. That certainly was not my intent.

¹⁵ In spite of such warnings, President Bush again referred to the war on terror as “a crusade” in a [February 2002 speech](#): “I want to thank the members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are here. I want to tell you something, we’ve got no better friends than Canada. They stand with us in this incredibly important crusade to defend freedom, this campaign to do what is right for our children and our grandchildren.”