

## Will Evangelicals Spur the US to War?

Alastair Crooke, 24 April 2019

On March 14, Russia's National Security Council, headed by President Putin, officially raised its perception of American intentions toward Russia from "military dangers" (*opasnosti*) to direct "military threats" (*ugrozy*). In short, the Kremlin is [preparing for war](#), however defensive its intention.

Why? Why would Putin do that? 'Trump doesn't want more wars... He has consistently called for good relations with Moscow. And now that Mueller has come up with zero...'

This is the familiar refrain that suggests that a confrontation with Russia simply cannot happen: "It wouldn't make any sense: it would not be rational". Well, maybe Russia is reading the 'tea-leaves' differently, and maybe they simply understand that when it comes to wars, it is often the non-rational that trumps the rational.

As Russia might view things, the precursors for a conflict in the Middle East are fast falling into place. On the one hand, we have a very hawkish Israel, 'pie-eyed' from large draughts of team Trump's 'Greater Israel' cool-aid; then we have Bolton prosecuting his ancient hatred for Iran – trying to corner the Republic, and to implode it.

These represent major clashes of tectonic plates, especially as the northern tier of the region (including Turkey) is now with Iran (to one, or other extent). Moscow will be aware that colliding tectonic plates release hot plasma, which all too easily can spread to scald Russia.

And then, we have other shifts in the tectonic plates: Turkey is inching toward Russia and China, and so – it seems –[might be Egypt](#) (after Sisi's recent altercation in Washington). Translated – this all says that the US is fast losing its hold over the Middle East. And Russia, whether intentionally, or not (more 'not', than actively 'sought'), is increasing its' reach.

Usually, such occurrences are met with Washington decreeing a hard slap over the head for Moscow's Promethean 'impudence'. But... actually, America is almost out of substantive allies in the Middle East – except 'the one'.

Yes, indeed – up to this point, we are dealing with the rational chessboard. So, what about the 'non-rational'?

Let us go first, to basics: 80% of white evangelicals voted for Trump in 2016, and his popularity amongst them remains high – in the 70s percent. Whilst other white voters may have become disheartened by Trump's foreign policy (the Saudi embrace), white evangelicals have become his last, solid bastion. They are not insignificant either: they form some 25% of all Americans.

Professor of Religious Studies, Andrew Chesnut [tells us](#) that Christian Zionism has become the "majority theology" among white US Evangelicals. In a 2015 poll, 73% of evangelical Christians said events in Israel are prophesied in the Book of Revelation. For Christian Zionists, achieving a 'Greater Israel' is one of the key preconditions for 'Rapture'. It is a belief, known as pre-millennial dispensationalism or Christian Zionism, Chesnut says.

*“Trump himself embodies the very opposite of a pious Christian ideal. Trump is not a churchgoer. He is profane, twice divorced, who has boasted of sexually assaulting women. But white evangelicals have embraced him, writes Julian Borger.*

*“Some leading evangelicals see Trump as a latter-day King Cyrus, the sixth-century BC Persian emperor who liberated the Jews from Babylonian captivity. The comparison is made explicitly in *The Trump Prophecy*, a religious film screened in 1,200 cinemas [last year], depicting a retired firefighter who claims to have heard God’s voice, saying: “I’ve chosen this man, Donald Trump, for such a time as this ...*

*“Cyrus is the model for a nonbeliever, being appointed by God as a vessel for the purposes of the faithful,” said Katherine Stewart, who writes extensively about the Christian right. She added that they welcome [Trump’s] readiness to break democratic norms, to combat perceived threats to their values and way of life.*

Mike Pompeo and Vice-President Pence are strongly of this Evangelical orientation. It is something that has real import for foreign policy: During his tenure as CIA director, and before that as a member of the House of Representatives, Pompeo has consistently used language that casts the war on terrorism as a cosmic, divine battle of good and evil. He has [referred to](#) Islamic terrorists as [destined to](#) “continue to press against us until we make sure that we pray, and stand and fight, and make sure that we know that Jesus Christ is our savior, and is truly the only solution for our world”.

The proscription of Iran’s IRGC, by Pompeo was couched in exactly this language of terrorism, with the clear connotation that Iran is the cosmic ‘evil’. This style of Apocalyptic or Rapture language has been adopted wholesale by Trump, and his Administration. “To worship our Lord and celebrate our nation at the same place, is not only our right,” Pompeo told attendees at a Kansas rally in 2015: “It is our duty.” He added, “We will continue to fight these battles,” the then Congressman said at a church in Wichita. “It is a never-ending struggle ... until the Rapture. Be part of it. Be in the fight!”

Pompeo’s reference to Rapture is important: The Rapture, Tara Burton [notes](#), “is a distinctively American theology that says Christians will be taken up, or “raptured,” into heaven, at the onset of the End Times ... and a number of GOP politicians allow their belief in Rapture theology to influence their political worldview. Because the Rapture is ultimately desirable — it marks the return of Jesus Christ — anything that hastens it, is desirable too. For many evangelicals, apocalyptic “good versus evil” battles, particularly centred over the “Holy Land” of the Middle East, are signs that the longed-for end may be at hand”.

So, how does all this balance out? Well, the pivot is the Las Vegas Casino billionaire, Sheldon Adelson. He donated \$82 million to Trump and other Republican candidates during the 2016 election. Trump has consciously courted the moneyed Jewish diaspora Right, but Adelson’s significance lies more with his passionate commitment to Netanyahu’s [“Greater Israel”](#) political agenda, and to strengthening ties between the Republicans’ evangelical base and Israel.

And just to be clear, the ‘Greater Israel’ mission is similarly rooted in ‘End of Time’ biblical theology. David Ben-Gurion, the “father of the nation”, was a firm believer in the ‘mission’, declaring: “I believe in our moral and intellectual superiority; and in our capacity to serve as a model for the redemption of the human race”. At the 2003 ‘Jerusalem Summit’, whose participants comprised three acting Israeli ministers (and included Netanyahu, and Richard

Perle from the USG), the group [solemnly professed](#): “We believe that one of the objectives of Israel’s divinely-inspired rebirth, is to make it the center of the new unity of the nations, which will lead to an era of peace and prosperity, as foretold by the Prophets”.

As Larent Guyénot [observes](#), Zionism, in fact, has always been about a New World Order, under the mask of ‘nationalism’. It is with the Adelson lynchpin too, that John Bolton fits in. Bolton is no evangelical. He says that to call him a neoconservative “is clearly not accurate”, by which he explicitly means that [he never shared](#) the desire to ‘spread democracy’ as other mainstream neoconservatives did. He does however, hold to the belief that America (and Israel) are ‘chosen’ to lead and shape the global order. This may not be strictly a ‘religious’ expression, but it is a prime example of a millenarian ‘project’ that emphatically denies religion, yet is in fact a vehicle for religious myth – Judeo-Christian myth.

Bolton says it [explicitly](#): “I would describe myself as pro-American. The greatest hope for freedom for mankind in history is the United States, and therefore protecting American national interest is the single best strategy for the world.”

The American millenarian ‘myth’, then and now, was (and is), similarly rooted in a messianic belief in the Manifest Destiny of the United States: ‘the New Jerusalem’ that would represent humanity’s best hope for a utopian future. This belief in a special destiny (being ‘chosen’) is reflected in a conviction that the United States must lead – or more properly, has the duty to coerce – mankind towards its universalist destiny.

Adelson’s role then – using his own money – has been to resurface neoconservative policies: Policies that had been discredited after the US invasion of Iraq, and to reconnect these policies to the Israeli Right (as they were, before the war on Iraq). This whole is underpinned through the extensive Evangelical base that forms Trump’s key constituency. Both Pompeo and Bolton are reportedly Adelson’s protégés, whom Adelson pushed into their key positions in the White House, as a part of his political architecture.

And with the resurfacing of neoconservative policies, comes, inevitably, their ancient attitude towards Russia as an existential struggle that can have only one outcome – Russia’s collapse, leading to regime change – either via war or means short of war. All elements of western policy are [geared to](#) that one inalterable objective.

Former US diplomat, James Jatras, [remarks](#) [that these American millenarians] “hate Russia not for what it does, but for what it is: an obstacle to absolute global domination by a US-led [New World Order]. Russia’s deployment of the most powerful weapons imaginable – perhaps can limit the military aspect of that agenda, but it cannot reverse it. Quite to the contrary, such actions, like Moscow’s defensive moves after the 2014 regime change in Ukraine; or Russia’s 2015 deployment in Syria; or current presence in Venezuela, are held up as further “proof” of Russians’ “typically, almost genetically driven” aggressiveness, in the words of former CIA Director James Clapper.”

“With Robert Mueller’s pointless investigation concluded, nothing has improved, nor can there be much expectation that it will”. Jatras [quotes](#) [Gilbert] Doctorow:

*“... the step by step dismantling of the channels of communication, of the symbolic projects for cooperation across a wide array of domains, and now dismantling of all the arms limitation agreements that took decades to negotiate and ratify, plus the incoming new weapons systems*

*that leave both sides with under 10 minutes to decide how to respond to alarms of incoming missiles – all of this prepares the way for the Accident to end all Accidents. Such false alarms occurred in the Cold War; but some slight measure of mutual trust prompted restraint. That is all gone now, and if something goes awry, we are all dead ducks”.*

One might perceive that this broad ‘dismantling’ of channels, agreements and commitments came about as some unexplained, extraneous ‘happenstance’. If so, it would be wrong: No, it represents [signature Bolton thinking](#). He says:

“America has slowly constrained its range of action, through foolhardy entanglements with international institutions such as the United Nations, and naive bilateral agreements that promised too much to America’s enemies, in exchange for too little. [Bolton] saw bad deals all around: The INF Treaty ... was one. The Iran nuclear agreement, which Bolton has laboured tirelessly to scrap, was another.”

So, why should Trump acquiesce in this road to calamity?

Trump was raised as a Presbyterian, but leaned increasingly towards Evangelical preachers as he began contemplating a run for the presidency, Katherine Stewart [observes](#). Trump’s choice of Pence as a running mate was a gesture of his commitment.

But, having lost control of the House of Representatives in November, and under ever closer scrutiny for his campaign’s links to the Kremlin, Trump’s instinct has been to cleave ever closer to his most loyal supporters. Almost alone among major demographic groups, white evangelicals are overwhelmingly in favour of Trump’s border wall, which some preachers equate with fortifications in the Bible, Stewart suggests.

In brief, this is what Trump has – this is what ‘has his back’ politically. Bolton gives him some cover from the US Deep State; the Evangelicals and the deplorables represent a base which sustains the President from the plots to remove him from office. A core base, which simply ignores the denigrations thrown out at President Trump, daily.

But here is the point: There lurks a major danger in to this ideologically ‘non-rational’ set-up. One that threatens us all – and may explain the Russian raising of their ‘threat status’. Trump’s instincts still remain that a channel with Mr Putin is essential. But the demonization of Russia will not be stilled with the publication of the Mueller investigation. It will just swap to a new narrative.

The pressures on Trump from his Bolton-Evangelical team, to hasten End Time with an Apocalyptic good-v-evil struggle, possibly linked the Christian Zionists’ Greater Israel ambition, inexorably will mount (precisely in response to US weakness and crisis). Will Trump hold the line? Might he offer up Iran, towards advancing Rapture, (and pleasing his base)?

The major danger is that Trump is not fearful of nuclear war – at least not in the way earlier generations of US leaders were. For Trump has manifested (admittedly before assuming the Presidency) a strange and worrying fatalism about nuclear conflict. Will Bolton manoeuvre to exploit this quirk?

We know that Trump regards himself as ‘an expert’ on nuclear conflict: In a [1984 interview](#) with the Washington Post, Trump said that he hoped one day to become the United

States' chief negotiator with the Soviet Union for nuclear weapons. Trump claimed that he could negotiate a great nuclear arms deal with Moscow. Comparing crafting an arms accord with cooking up a real estate deal, Trump insisted he had innate talent for this mission.

In a 1990 interview with [Playboy](#), Trump said, "I think of the future, but I refuse to paint it. Anything can happen. But I often think of nuclear war." He explained: "I've always thought about the issue of nuclear war; it's a very important element in my thought process. It's the ultimate, the ultimate catastrophe, the biggest problem this world has, and nobody's focusing on the nuts and bolts of it."

Five years on, Trump [was asked](#) where he would be in five years. "Who knows?" he replied. "Maybe the bombs drop from heaven, who knows? This is a sick world. We're dealing here with lots of sickos. And you have the nuclear and you have the this, and you have the that." Trump continued expressing the notion that nuclear annihilation could be on the horizon: "Oh absolutely. I mean, I think it's sick human nature. If Hitler had the bomb, you don't think he would have used it? He would have put it in the middle of Fifth Avenue. He would have used Trump Tower, 57th and Fifth... Boom".

In another [Playboy interview](#)—this one in 2004—Trump once more conveyed his nuclear despondency. He was asked, "Do you think Trump Tower and your other buildings will bear your name a hundred years from now?" Trump responded, "I don't think any building will be here—and unless we have some very smart people ruling it, the world will not be the same place in a hundred years. The weapons are too powerful, too strong."

During the Presidential election debate, Candidate Trump [said in December](#): "The biggest problem this world has today is not President Obama with global warming ... The biggest problem we have is nuclear – nuclear proliferation – and having some maniac, having some madman go out and get a nuclear weapon. That's in my opinion, that is the single biggest problem that our country faces right now... I think – I think, for me, nuclear is just the power, the devastation, is very important to me."

"So for decades, it seems" David Corn has written in [Mother Jones](#), "Trump has been haunted by the feeling that nuclear war may be inescapable. Now he is in a position to do something about the matter". And, as former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper [remarked](#), "[If] in a fit of pique he [Trump] decides to do something about Kim Jong Un, there's actually very little to stop him". "The whole [nuclear weapons] system is built to ensure rapid response if necessary. So there's very little in the way of controls over exercising a nuclear option, which is pretty damn scary."

In short, should a fatalistically inclined US President, order a nuclear tactical weapons strike (and America currently is taking delivery of tactical weapons, and exercising with allies, the air delivery of them) – possibly believing recourse to tactical nuclear weapons is somehow inevitable, and egged on by his messianic team – there is almost nothing to stop him.

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Source: [Strategic Culture Foundation](#)