In this series, we are searching for answers to the question, "Why is the U.S. failing to stop, and in some cases actually promoting, the spread of nuclear weapons worldwide?" (See Rachel's #792 and #793.)

Answers to this question will help us understand President Bush's philosophy of environmental protection -- or perhaps the philosophy of his core supporters in the Republican Party on whom he is depending in the 2004 election.

President Bush has made it clear that he understands the threat posed by nuclear weapons, materials and know-how in the wrong hands. He has said, "We will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes and terrorists to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons."[1]

This was not an isolated statement. In two key White House policy documents published in 2002, the Bush administration concluded that, "The threat of weapons of mass destruction is the highest priority for the United States and should be for other countries."[2,3]

The President has spoken out strongly and repeatedly on the matter and has even said that failure on this issue will be judged "harshly" by history.

When the White House published its National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction in Dec., 2002, the President said, "The gravest danger facing the Nation lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology. Our enemies have openly declared that they are seeking weapons of mass destruction, and evidence indicates that they are doing so with determination. The United States will not allow these efforts to succeed.... History will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act."[3]

Yet the evidence is overwhelming that the U.S. is failing to act on this growing threat. (See Rachel's #792, #793.) Indeed, the Bush administration is actively engaged in spreading nuclear technology and know-how into the hands of potentially-unstable nations.

On June 20, 2004, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace published a 96-page report agreeing with the Bush administration that, "Terrorist acquisition of nuclear weapons poses the greatest single threat to the United States."[4, pg. 25].

However, the Carnegie report points out, "The [Bush] administration has not put money or significant political effort behind [its] proposals."[4, pg. 13]

According to the Carnegie report, the President's proposed budget for 2005 actually reduces the funds available for U.S. efforts to curb the spread of weapons-grade plutonium and uranium world-wide, and reduces the U.S. financial contribution to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) "whose responsibilities have greatly increased while its budget has stayed flat."[4, pg. 13]

Nuclear-armed terrorists are the No. 1 threat to the U.S., and the No. 2 threat is nuclear-armed states like Pakistan and North Korea. As the Carnegie report says, "National instability or a radical change in government could lead to the collapse of state control over weapons and nuclear materials and the migration of nuclear scientists to other nations or to the service of other groups."

However, instead of trying to keep nuclear technology and know-how out of the hands of such states, the Bush administration is actively encouraging U.S. corporations to sell their nuclear hardware and know-how abroad. On a recent trip to China, Vice-President Cheney was peddling Westinghouse nuclear power plants, even though China has announced that it intends to transfer nuclear technology to Pakistan.[5]

These contradictory facts are deeply perplexing. I have been reviewing the available literature on this subject for the past two years, trying to answer the question, "Why is the Bush administration promoting nuclear weapons, materials and know-how world-wide?"

Naturally, all my answers are merely hypotheses because I have no special knowledge of what motivates the President, the Vice-President, their core supporters in the House and Senate, and their advisors in the Pentagon. I only know what's in the public record.

So let us begin. In the remainder of this series, I will examine the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis #1: Simple incompetence and confusion among the nation's defense agencies. Perhaps they actually want to curb the spread of nuclear technologies but just can't manage the task.

Hypothesis #2: Perfectly normal corporate profit goals combined with the ever-pressing need for re-election campaign contributions. Perhaps the administration is promoting nuclear power to reward potential campaign contributors in the nuclear business, such as Westinghouse, General Electric, Framatone (formerly Babcock & Wilcox), Bechtel, Halliburton, Brown & Root, and other large-scale construction firms that build nuclear power plants and the infrastructure they require (roads, power lines, special docks at seaports, fuel processing plants, security apparatus and training, and so forth.)

Hypothesis #3: Nuclear power is needed now to prevent nations and regions from "going solar." Because each nuclear power plant requires an investment measured in billions of dollars, and because nuclear power plants are dangerous, they require (and thus maintain) the highly-centralized, top-down, quasi-military social structure that modern transnational corporations provide. The "military-industrial" complex that President Eisenhower warned us about in 1961 is epitomized by nuclear technologies.
Solar power on the other hand can be small-scale, locally-controlled, definitely not dangerous, much less subject to terrorist disruption, and therefore much more compatible with an open, democratic social structure that might, as time passes, erode corporate control. Therefore, in a sense, solar power is dangerous and even subversive because it could subvert "business as usual."

Hypothesis #4: Just as nuclear power plants require and promote a centralized, quasi-military, corporatized social structure, so also does a world awash in weapons-grade uranium and plutonium.

So long as there is a thriving black market in weapons-grade nuclear materials, then we can more easily justify a $450 billion annual military budget, a network of U.S. espionage agencies active now in 80 countries, and preemptive wars such as the one now in Iraq (and others reportedly being readied now by the Pentagon against Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Iran, Somalia, and Sudan).

Whether your job is military, civilian, or somewhere in between, if you're in the business of fighting the nation's perceived enemies, and you want your business to thrive, then enemies armed with small nuclear weapons may be the best kind of enemies to have. Everyone will support your work against such enemies. They will even follow you into war against such enemies.

Hypothesis #5: Now we enter the realm of realpolitik, the kind of world that Henry Kissinger inhabits, where thinking the unthinkable is routine.

Is it possible that some people within the Bush administration (or among groups whom the Bush administration considers essential to its electoral success in 2004), might imagine benefits from a rogue nation or group detonating a small nuclear weapon in Jerusalem or even New York?

Here are some crackpot speculations perhaps worth considering:

a) Maybe detonation of a small nuclear weapon would serve to remind the current generation how dangerous nuclear technology really is. A rogue nuclear detonation would quickly bring the civilian nuclear power industry to an end. It might also spur the international community to quickly sweep up the tons of weapons-grade plutonium and enriched uranium lying about in 40-or-so nations.

b) A rogue nuclear detonation would almost certainly spell the end of democracy as we know it. Major portions of the bill of rights would probably be canceled within hours.

Recall that the Bush administration saw the mass murders on 9/11 as sufficient reason to scrap the legal doctrine of habeas corpus which was formalized in English law in 1679 and was embodied a century later in the U.S. Constitution.

The U.S. Supreme Court has "recognized the fact that '[t]he writ of habeas corpus is the fundamental instrument for safeguarding individual freedom against arbitrary and lawless state action."[10]

A writ of habeas corpus is a judge's mandate to a prison official ordering that an inmate be brought before the court so the court can determine whether or not that person is imprisoned lawfully and whether or not he or she should be released from custody. Without habeas corpus, people can be imprisoned forever without any recourse whatsoever. Even the fact of their imprisonment can be kept secret. This is what the Bush administration has said it aims to do at Guantanamo Bay and perhaps at other quasi-military prisons the U.S. maintains around the world.

Seeing the right of habeas corpus repealed in response to the mass murders of 9/11, everyone has to be impressed by the fragility of what seemed like the immutable underpinnings of democracy and indeed civilization itself. The enemies of democracy -- inside the U.S. and outside -- can see as well as anyone that a nuclear detonation in New York would almost surely end the American experiment in self-rule.

c) There is a growing movement in the U.S. to erase the barrier that separates church and state, to replace our secular government with a religious government.[11] We can see the beginnings of such thinking in the Texas State Republican Party Platform for 2004, which says, "The Republican Party of Texas affirms that the United States of American is a Christian nation." And: "The Party understands that the Ten Commandments are the basis of our basic freedoms and the cornerstone of Western legal tradition." And: "Our Party pledges to exert its influence to restore the original intent of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and dispel the myth of the separation of Church and State."[12]

By removing the Constitutional wall that separates church and state, some people merely hope to get a free handout from Washington for their religious group (the President's "faith-based initiative" gave $1.1 billion of taxpayer funds to religious organizations during 2003).[13]

Others have much larger goals, hoping to institute a fully theocratic order in which their idea of Christian Biblical law replaces our secular democracy, essentially repealing the enlightenment and returning the world to the 17th century.[11]

d) There is a different, and much larger, group of Christians who say they believe that their personal salvation depends upon the return of Christ to Earth and that this second coming of Christ requires a specific series of events to unfold in the Middle East, including the battle of Armageddon, which many interpret to mean a nuclear World War III.

These believers in Armageddon theology include the Reverend Billy Graham, the Reverend Pat Robertson, the singer Pat Boone, the Reverend Jerry Falwell, Ralph Reed, Jr., Gary Bauer, Republican strategist Ed McAteer, advice columnist Laura Schlessinger, writer Hal Lindsey ("The Late, Great Planet Earth"), the Reverend Tim LaHaye (co-author of the 11-volume "Left Behind" series), House Majority Leader Tom Delay (R-Tex.), U.S. Senator James N. Inhofe (R-Ok., Chairman of the Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works), Attorney General John Ashcroft, and many others in top leadership positions within the Bush administration.

Author Grace Halsell -- herself a born-again Christian from Texas -- toured the Holy Land in the Middle East twice with followers of the Reverend Jerry Falwell. Halsell then wrote a
book about her experiences. In "Prophecy and Politics," which she subtitled, "Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War," Halsell wrote, "I have heard Falwell preach on nuclear Armageddon, and I saw his face turn radiant at the thought." [14, pg. 197] --Peter Montague

[To be continued.]


Rachel's Environment & Health News is a publication of the Environmental Research Foundation (ERF), Peter Montague, editor. Contact ERF at P.O. Box 160, New Brunswick, NJ 08903-0160; Phone: (732) 828-9995; Fax (732) 791-4603; E-mail: erf@rachel.org; http://www.rachel.org. Unless otherwise indicated, Rachel’s is written by Peter Montague. The paper edition of Rachel’s is printed on 50% kenaf, 50% post-consumer wastepaper (processed chlorine free). Rachel’s Environment & Health News is uncopyrighted.