

Christian Nukes: The Effects of Christian Ethics on Support for Nuclear Strikes



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Overview

- Literature
- Research question and Importance
- Research Design
 - Data
 - Methodology
- Expected results and Conclusions

Literature

- First Wave
 - Theoretical
 - Constructivist ‘nuclear taboo’ (Tannenwald 1999) vs. Realist ‘tradition of non-use’ (Sagan 2004)
 - Logic of Appropriateness vs. Logic of Consequences
- Second Wave
 - Quantitative
 - US studies (Press, Sagan and Valentino 2013; Carpenter and Montgomery 2020)
 - Cross-national studies (Dill, Sagan and Valentino 2022)
- Towards a Third Wave?
 - Cross-national studies
 - Public/Elite gaps
 - Micro-level gaps

Question and Salience

- How do individual ethics and ethical notions rooted in Christianity contribute to the formation/continuation of a nuclear taboo?
 - Second wave skepticism about durability of non-use norm
 - Implications for secularization of the West on non-use norm?
 - Implications on efficacy of arguments of elites (strengthen norm)
 - Implications for foreign posturing and policy (strengthen norm)

Data

- Survey Experiment
 - Consistent with the nuclear taboo public opinion literature
 - Hypothetical scenario
 - Rationalize choice
 - Measure control variables
- Carried out on POSC 104 students
- n~ 300

Terrorists Planning Chemical Weapons Attack on Washington, D.C.. Joint Chiefs Say Nuclear Airstrike Doubles Chances of Destroying Terrorist Chemical Weapons Lab in Libya

If Successful, the Terrorist Attack Would Kill an Estimated 3,000 Americans

Officials from intelligence organizations in Sweden and the United States have determined that an imminent chemical weapons attack against Washington, D.C. city buses is being planned by a previously unknown Islamist terrorist group based in Daraya, a small, Muslim city in northern Libya. If successfully carried out, experts estimate that the terrorist attack on Washington would kill approximately 3,000 people.

High-ranking administration officials speaking on the condition of anonymity confirm that the president and senior officials have received a report from the Joint Chiefs of Staff describing two U.S. military options for destroying the terrorist chemical weapons facility where the weapons are being produced. The facility is located in a deeply buried bunker once used by the Libyan military. Because the precise location of the bunker is not known, destroying it will require either a large conventional strike or the use of a nuclear weapon.

The emergence of the new terrorist organization in Daraya has evenly divided the population of the remote city. While half of the citizens openly cheered for the group, carrying its flags in public protests against the West, the other half strongly oppose the terrorists.

There is no evidence, however, that support for the group extends beyond political sympathy. Citizens of Daraya have not provided any material aid or recruits to the terrorists.

The first military option described in the report would target the facility using 50 conventionally-armed cruise missiles launched from navy ships currently deployed in the Mediterranean Sea. The second option would utilize a single nuclear-armed missile fired from a submarine. The Joint Chiefs' report does not recommend which option the president should choose.

"Nuclear weapons would be dramatically more effective against this deeply buried target."

The report concludes that the nuclear strike would be "dramatically more effective against this deeply buried target" than the conventional attack. According to the report, the conventional strike has a 45 percent chance of successfully destroying the chemical weapons lab while nuclear weapons increase the chances of success to 90 percent.

The report comes days after Swedish intelligence agents intercepted specialized chemicals and equipment used to produce sarin gas, a potent nerve toxin, on their way to Libya.

Two smugglers, employees of a Swedish chemical plant, confirmed that previous shipments had already arrived in Daraya, where the weapons were assembled and ready for use.

Although investigators are confident the terrorists have not yet produced functional chemical weapons, the weapons will be operational within days unless action is taken to destroy them. The report states that no other nation has forces in the area capable of acting in time and that the U.S. "only has one shot at destroying the facility," since the terrorists are likely to relocate the lab if it is not destroyed in the first strike.

The report emphasizes that the United States will attempt to minimize civilian loss of life in Daraya in both strikes and that the remote location of the terrorist facility should contain civilian fatalities to within the city - the nearest population center is over 150 miles away.

"2,700 Libyan civilians in the remote city would be unavoidably killed in either the nuclear or conventional strikes."

Because many conventional weapons would be required to destroy the weapons lab, the Joint Chiefs expect that the conventional and nuclear options would result in approximately the same number of Libyan fatalities: an estimated 2,700 Libyan civilians would be killed as a "regrettable side-effect" of either strike, including immediate deaths and deaths resulting from long term consequences of the conventional or nuclear strikes.

As both options will rely on missiles launched from naval vessels, the report concludes that "no U.S. military personnel are at risk in either operation."

Target: Terrorist Chemical Weapons Facility in Libya

	CONVENTIONAL STRIKE	NUCLEAR STRIKE
Probability of destroying target	45%	90%
Estimated Libyan civilian deaths	2,700	2,700

If no action is taken, the terrorists will carry out attack, killing 3,000 American civilians.

Source: Dill, Sagan and Valentino (2022)

Research Design

- 3 groups
 - Control, treatment 1 (ethical framing), treatment 2 (christian ethical framing)
- Treatment 1
 - Many say the use of nuclear weapons is wrong in and of itself. They argue that using nuclear weapons can never be justified.
- Treatment 2
 - Jesus says: “*But I tell you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven*” (Matthew 5:44-45). As a result, many say the use of nuclear weapons is wrong in and of itself. They argue that using nuclear weapons can never be justified

Methodology

- Logit Regression
 - Willingness to use nuclear strike
 - P- use ; F- framing ; C- Christian framing ;
 - control variables (eg: compatriot partiality, death penalty)

$$P = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\beta_0 + \beta_1 F + \beta_2 C + \dots)}}$$

- Logit Regression

- Effects on nuclear taboo

- T_1 - nuclear taboo ; F- framing ; C- Christian framing ; T_2 - tradition of non-use

$$T_1 = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\beta_0 + \beta_1 F + \beta_2 C + \dots)}}$$

$$T_2 = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\beta_0 + \beta_1 F + \beta_2 C + \dots)}}$$

- Coding T_1 & T_2
 - Semi-structured survey response rationalizing decision of nuclear use
 - Nuclear taboo coded = T_1 activated
 - Radiation, nuclear precedent, and civilian consequences coded = T_2 activated
 - Civilian immunity, international law, or other coded = no activation
 - Avoid bias

CATEGORY	EXPLANATION
nuclear taboo	<p>Subject indicates that the nuclear strike is wrong because using nuclear weapons is always wrong regardless of consequences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanations should not focus on the consequences of the nuclear or conventional strike, but on the awfulness, wrongness or uncivilised nature of nuclear weapons. • Statements should express the absoluteness of the prohibition on using nuclear weapons, without exceptions, regardless of the consequences. • Exclude from this code-group responses that suggest that it is wrong to use nuclear weapons "first." • Exclude from this category statements that suggest that it was wrong to use nuclear weapons because it was "unnecessary" or because there was a better alternative.
civilian immunity	<p>Subject indicates that the attack is wrong because intentional attacks against civilians/innocent people are always wrong.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanations should not focus on the consequences of the nuclear or conventional strike, but on the wrongness of <i>intentionally</i> targeting civilians under any circumstances. • Statements in this group do not imply that all violence/killing is wrong, only violence/killing that is both intentional and directed against innocent persons. • We are hence looking for statements that contain two types of beliefs about a strike: 1) the attacker ("we") intended the casualties and 2) the casualties are innocent. • Both beliefs might be explicit ("it is wrong to intentionally kill innocent people") or they might be implicit. For instance, the words "target", "attack", "aim at", "use to send a message" imply intentionality. The word "civilians" implies innocence.
radiation	<p>Subject indicates that the nuclear strike will have negative/undesirable effects on human life associated with radiation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of the consequences in this code-group amount to the argument that there would be "more civilian casualties." But statements only belong in this category if it is stated/clearly implied that these casualties are not effects of the bomb blast, but of the specific feature of nuclear weapons that is its radiation. • You should exclude from this code-group statements about civilian casualties/loss of human life that are neither designated as "long-term" nor explicitly associated with radiation.
international law	<p>Subject indicates that the strike would violate formal or customary international law.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanations should state or clearly imply that launching the attack would violate some kind of international law or rule or code of combat and that doing so is a reason to prefer not to launch that strike. • This category could overlap with taboo and immunity responses if subjects also clearly indicate that because it is against the law we should never use nuclear weapons or target civilians. If so, code the response in both categories.
nuclear precedent	<p>Subject indicates a preference against the nuclear strike because they believe using nuclear weapons will increase the likelihood that other countries/groups will use nuclear weapons in the future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In its simplest form, subjects express opposition to the nuclear strike because of a concern that "other countries" or "terrorists" will be more likely to use nuclear weapons because we used them first. • Statements in this category might reference nuclear escalation, a Pandora's Box, a slippery slope or the annihilation of the planet. As long as they imply that the future use of nuclear weapons is more likely due to the use of a nuclear strike in this situation they belong in this code-group. • A concern for "setting a precedent" could include the belief that there is a (legal/moral/conventional) rule against using nuclear weapons and that breaking it would weaken this rule, but the response must reference the 2nd order consequences of rule breaking. Simply saying "it would break the rules/laws we have promised to follow" is not sufficient. Look for "if we do this, it will prompt others to do bad things" logic. • Statements fall in this code-group even if they do not specify the identity of the likely targets of future nuclear attacks. "It will make future nuclear use more likely" is sufficient. • This category applies to nuclear precedent setting only. Statements that express a belief that using nuclear weapons makes a conventional or unspecified retaliatory attack more likely, or that make it more likely that others will deliberately target "our civilians" with conventional weapons, should be coded 0.
civilian consequences	<p>Subject indicates a preference against the nuclear strike (or both strikes) because it will cause a higher number of civilian casualties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements in this group should assume or explicitly state that higher civilian casualties are a negative effect of a strike. If higher civilian casualties are welcomed and a higher number of expected civilian casualties is treated as a reason to prefer a strike, code 0. • Statements that focus on radiation can be included in this category as long as they clearly reference higher expected civilian deaths and suggest that it is those deaths, not just the radiation, per-se, that motivates the subject's opposition to the nuclear strike. • These statements should be distinguished from statements that indicate opposition based on the categorical belief that intentionally targeting any civilians is always wrong (see above).

Results?

- Expect Christian framing to have strongest impact on both nuclear use (negatively correlated) and nuclear taboo (positively correlated)
 - Framing similar results but not as strong
- Interesting to see impact of framing and Christian framing on tradition of non-use
 - Do ethical frames make people start to consider other ethical consequences that are more important to them?
 - Do these frames 'convert' logic of consequence thinkers to logic of appropriateness reasoners?

Conclusions

- Literature
 - First and Second Waves
 - Towards a Third Wave?
 - Micro-level gaps
- Ethical and Christian ethical effects on norm?
 - Implications for: 1) religious trends and norm durability, 2) efficacy of elite arguments, and 3) foreign posturing and policy
- Research Design
 - Survey experiment with 3 groups
 - Logit regression methodology
- Next step in preventing existential nuclear crises