

# Labeled “Dangerous”

GOP presidential candidate Barry Goldwater preceded Ron Paul by many years in being labeled dangerous over his foreign policy views, but it wasn't true then either.

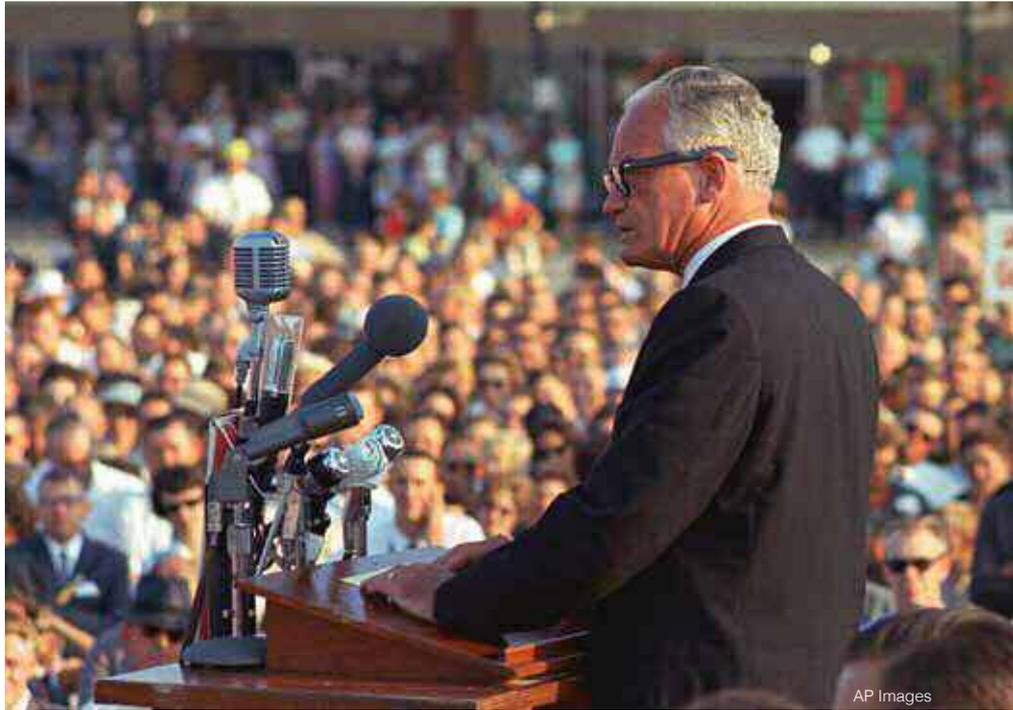
by Jack Kenny

Barely a week before dropping out of the presidential race, Michele Bachmann leveled a charge at a rival candidate that was unusual, even in an age when the airwaves are saturated with highly charged negative campaign ads and the image of an opponent is often transformed to resemble a foreign enemy.

“Ron Paul will not defend (the) United States of America in the event of a nuclear attack,” the Minnesota Congresswoman said in an interview with *CBS News* and the *National Journal*. “He is just fine with Iran having a nuclear weapon and they have already stated they will just use a nuclear weapon against the United States.... Ron Paul would be dangerous for the United States on foreign policy.”

Bachmann, like the rest of the GOP field of presidential candidates (with the exception of Paul), assumed not only that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon, but is on the verge of achieving that goal. In 2007, a National Intelligence Estimate, based on the findings of 16 U.S. intelligence services, stated with “high confidence” that Iran had abandoned its nuclear weapons effort in 2003. Yet the warnings about Iran’s nuclear programs have only intensified in the years since, as the Obama administration has continued the policy of economic sanctions against Iran, accompanied by threats of military action with repeated warnings that “all options are on the table.”

The *Washington Post*'s Jennifer Rubin, in her “Right Turn” column of November 18, 2011 cited “the conclusion of the International Atomic Energy Agency, namely that Iran is going full-steam ahead with its nuclear weapons program.” In fact, the IAEA stated in the “Conclusion” of the agency’s November 11 report to its Board of Governors: “Since 2002, the Agency has become increasingly concerned about the possible existence in Iran of undisclosed nuclear related activities, involv-



**Barry M. Goldwater** addresses a campaign rally in Raleigh, North Carolina, in September 1964. The GOP presidential candidate drew large crowds of enthusiastic supporters, but not large enough on election day.

ing military related organizations, related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile, about which the agency has regularly received new information.” (Emphasis added.)

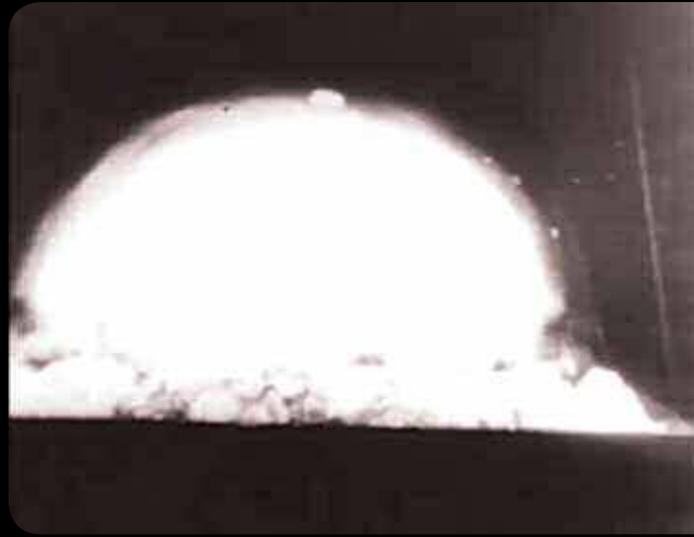
Given the nine-years-long war with Iraq that followed our government’s effort to eliminate “weapons of mass destruction” that were not there, the American public might be less eager than Rubin and many of her colleagues in the neocon press to leap to the conclusion that “Iran is going full-steam ahead with its nuclear weapons program.” If that’s the case, someone apparently forgot to tell the Pentagon. On December 20, Press Secretary George Little, clarifying a statement made the previous day by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, said: “The secretary was clear that we have no indication that the Iranians have made a decision to develop a nuclear weapon.”

Yet of the candidates now running for

President — Barack Obama included — the one who is often described as “dangerous” is the one who is not missile-rattling against Iran. America has not heard this much talk about a “dangerous” candidate and nuclear weapons since Barry Goldwater ran for President in 1964. There is one obvious difference, however: Goldwater was accused of being eager to start a war; Paul is considered “dangerous” because of his reluctance to start one.

## Plan to Burn Barry

Like Paul, Goldwater was widely denounced by members of his own party during the primary campaigns. The blunt-spoken Arizona Senator had made his reputation as a principled foe of welfare-state liberalism and a champion on “brinkmanship,” or going to the brink of war if necessary to deter the Soviet Union or its client states from efforts to advance com-



**A little girl picking daisies** is “vaporized” in a Johnson campaign commercial, implying a Goldwater presidency would lead to nuclear war. The ad was groundbreaking in its dramatic visual effects and in inaugurating a new era of negative advertising in political campaigns.

munism through aggression or subversion. A determined Cold Warrior, Goldwater also had a mischievous sense of humor, and on the subject of nuclear weapons, he once joked that maybe we should “lob one into the men’s room in the Kremlin.” He spoke more seriously of allowing the NATO commander authority to use tactical nuclear weapons in the event of a war in Europe, though that policy had already been quietly adopted during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. While discussing efforts to cut the supply lines to the Viet Cong in the Vietnam War, Goldwater mentioned it was possible to use “low-yield” atomic bombs to defoliate the jungle cover of the supply trails, though he prefaced that observation by

saying, “I don’t think we would do that.”

Not surprisingly, his Republican primary opponents and his many critics in the press were eager to repeat and expand on such statements, suggesting Goldwater was “trigger-happy,” inclined to “shoot from the hip,” and a dangerous man to have in the White House in the nuclear age of “mutually assured destruction.” Add to that Goldwater’s minority vote against the 1963 Nuclear Test Ban treaty, based on his belief that it would give a strategic advantage to the Soviet Union, and the result was a candidate ripe for caricature as one who had, in the words of the movie *Dr. Strangelove*, “learned to love the bomb.”

New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, Goldwater’s main opponent for the Republican nomination, decided to “go nuclear,” in a manner of speaking, in the desperate last days of the California primary campaign, the final battle before the raucous convention at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. Rockefeller and his allies among the GOP “moderates” needed to keep Goldwater from a first ballot victory, and

his California ad firm, Spencer-Roberts and Associates, came up with a pamphlet entitled, “Who Do You Want in the Room with the H Bomb?” It was mailed to all two million registered Republicans in the state and caused a controversy that would follow Goldwater all the way to November. Its immediate impact was lessened, however, by an event in Rockefeller’s personal life. Happy Rockefeller, the Governor’s second wife, gave birth to a baby boy just three days before the primary. However the Governor may have greeted the event personally, it was not a joyous occasion for his presidential campaign. As advertising director Stuart Spencer would later recall: “It reopened the wounds of being a woman-chaser, of adultery, all the G\*\*\*\*\*d questions we had fuzzed over by accusing Goldwater of being a madman.”

### **Democrats Continue Denouncement**

When Goldwater won the June 3 primary, the Democrats began planning a campaign based on fear of what the Republican candidate might do in the White House with nuclear weapons at his disposal. In a letter to Bill Moyers, then special assistant to President Lyndon Johnson and the White House official in charge of the advertising campaign, Americans for Democratic Ac-

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tion president John Roche urged a “savage assault” on Goldwater and offered an idea for a billboard ad: “Goldwater in 64 — Hotwater in 65? With a mushroom cloud in the background.”

Meanwhile, in what resembled a political tag-team match, Pennsylvania Governor William Scranton entered the Republican contest as the last-minute candidate of the “Stop Goldwater” movement. Scranton repeated the charges of Goldwater’s alleged “reckless” and “trigger-happy” ways, but did not sway the Goldwater delegates, who nominated their candidate on the first ballot and booed Rockefeller when he addressed the convention and warned of the dangers of “extremism.”

“I would remind you that extremism in defense of liberty is no vice,” Goldwater declared in his acceptance address, causing, according to legend, a reporter in the press gallery to gasp: “My God! He’s going to run as Goldwater!” But as summer wore on and Goldwater sought to allay fears that his alleged “extremism” would lead to either war or domestic chaos (or both), President Lyndon Johnson and his campaign strategists became concerned that Goldwater might manage to redefine himself to a nervous electorate before the Democrats got around to portraying him as a thoroughly frightening figure, with Johnson as the safe and stable alternative.

“A principal means for attacking Goldwater was through the press,” wrote historian Robert Dallek in *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times*. “The White House knew that Goldwater frightened most of the newspapers and magazines, which wanted to help Johnson defeat him.” And Johnson had no illusions about the supposed objectivity of news reporting. “Reporters are puppets,” he said. “They simply respond to the pull of the most powerful strings.... Every story is always slanted to win the favor of someone who sits somewhere higher up.” The White House called on friendly reporters and columnists for articles favorable to Johnson and critical of his opponent. “Most of them promised to take Goldwater to task for his irresponsible statements,” Dallek wrote. Some reporters covering Goldwater were persuaded to send reports to the White House on off-the-cuff comments by the Senator.

With the polls all showing the incumbent with a commanding lead and with the major news media solidly in their corner, Johnson and the Democratic National Committee were taking no chances. Neither would the ad firm hired to produce their campaign commercials. Five days after Goldwater met with Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, and other GOP leaders at a Republican unity conference

in mid-August, William Bernbach of Doyle Dane Bernbach wrote Moyers, urging an early start to the ad campaign.

“Knowing the short memory of the average person,” Bernbach wrote, “it is entirely possible (Goldwater) might succeed in creating a new character for himself if we are unable to remind people of the truth about this man.” What the ad firm and its White House clients would present as the “truth about this man” would be dramatically displayed on TV screens on the evening of Labor Day, the traditional starting point of the fall campaign. The first ad ran during NBC’s *Monday Night at the Movies*, as viewers watching Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward in *David and Bathsheba* saw the subject change from adultery to apocalypse in an early commercial break. The ad opened on the scene of a pretty child in an open meadow picking petals off a daisy and counting them aloud. Suddenly a Mission Control-type voice was heard counting down toward zero as the camera zoomed to an extreme close-up of one of the little girl’s eyes, with the image of a mushroom-shaped cloud mirrored in it. There followed an explosion and, as a picture of the mushroom cloud filled the screen, the voice of Lyndon Johnson was heard, saying: “These are the stakes: to make a world in which all of God’s children can live — or go into the darkness. We

Goldwater was considered dangerous in allowing for the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe as a defensive measure against an invading Soviet army. Ron Paul is considered dangerous these days for opposing a nuclear first strike against Iran.

must either love each other or die.” The ad ended with a narrator intoning: “Vote for President Johnson on November 3rd. The stakes are too high to stay at home.”

For such a heavy-handed attack, the ad was, nonetheless, remarkably subtle — so subtle, in fact, that a viewer might not have noticed that it never mentioned Goldwater. Yet it was clearly aimed at him, and the implication that a nuclear war was likely if Goldwater won the election was inescapable. And the reaction was predictable. Republican National Committee Chairman Dean Burch complained the ad implied that “Senator Goldwater may somehow cause some kind of atomic conflict because he is a perfectly reckless person,” something Burch denounced not only as a libel, but “the most vile political lie.” His

counterpart, Democratic National Committee Chairman John Bailey, would see no evil in the ad, claiming any frightening image of Goldwater was created by the candidate himself.

The ad ran only one time and on only one network. But the uproar it created ensured that it would be shown for free on the other two networks in news stories about

the controversy. Indeed, the commercial, remembered in later years as the “Daisy Girl ad,” received prominent coverage in print media as well, with the image of the petal-picking “Daisy Girl” reproduced on the cover of *Time* magazine, along with pictures of Goldwater, the mushroom cloud, and other images to go with the magazine’s feature story on the nuclear issue. The Republican outcry served the Democrats’ goal of keeping the controversy linking Goldwater to nuclear war in the news. As Moyers wrote in a memo to Johnson:

Yesterday Burch said, “This ad implies that Senator Goldwater is a reckless man and Lyndon Johnson is a careful man.” Well, that’s exactly

what we wanted to imply. And we also hoped someone around Goldwater would say it, not us. They did.”

In his 1988 memoir, *Goldwater*, the former Arizona Senator recalled the role Moyers played in Johnson’s advertising campaign in light of his later career as a TV journalist. “Over the years, I’ve watched Moyers appear on ‘CBS News’ and the Public Broadcasting Service,” Goldwater wrote. “He has lectured us on truth, the public trust, a fairer and finer America. He portrays himself as an honorable, decent American. Every time I see him, I get sick to my stomach and want to throw up.”

The Johnson campaign ran another ad capitalizing on Goldwater’s vote against the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. A little girl was shown eating an ice cream cone, while a woman’s voice recalled for the viewer that a man named Barry Goldwater had voted against a treaty to prevent radioactive fallout from contaminating children’s milk and ice cream. Sen. Thruston B. Morton rose in the Senate chamber to denounce both ads as “slime.”

“Herr Goebbels in his heyday could not compete with such gruesome, panic-inspiring falsehoods, calculated to instill fear into our citizenry,” Morton protested.

*Time* appeared to make light of the ads

**Children drinking milk and eating ice cream** would be in danger from radioactive fallout if Goldwater were elected, according to another Johnson ad.



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and “their obvious implication: if Barry Goldwater is elected, eating ice cream will be dangerous and daisy-picking will be a thing of the past.” But the magazine’s story on “the nuclear issue” spoke more somberly about what it called “the decisive of issue of the 1964 Presidential campaign — the argument over control of nuclear weapons.”

The “Daisy Girl” ad had an interesting pedigree. In later interviews the principals at Doyle Dane Bernbach expressed uncertainty as to whose idea it was and described it as a collaborative effort. But a history of the ad in the online publication CONELRAD notes that Tony Schwartz, the company’s sound specialist, had done a similar ad two years earlier, which ran as a public service announcement for the United Nations. The promotional piece began with a voice-over saying, “Sometimes numbers can be fun.” A small boy was then heard counting aloud like the girl in the daisy field, followed by a count-down and an explosion, as in the “Daisy Girl” ad. The announcer’s voice repeated, with obvious irony, “Sometimes.” On radio station WNYC in New York, the second “Sometimes” was replaced with: “Young and old. Another world war means death to us all. Support the United Nations.”

### Promulgating Fear, Then and Now

Fear of war in the atomic age had been the rationale for supporting the United Nations from the beginning, and arms control has been a major part of the United Nations’ agenda. Now, because Ron Paul opposes war, he is supposedly risking nuclear holocaust. Ron Paul was one of only six Republican members of the House of Representatives to vote against a resolution authorizing George W. Bush to wage war, at his own discretion, against Iraq to enforce United Nations resolutions concerning that nation’s “weapons of mass destruction.” When President Clinton, claiming authority under the United Nations, waged war in Bosnia without congressional approval, Paul accused his congressional colleagues of allowing “our foreign policy to be commandeered by international bodies like NATO and the United Nations.” He has taken the same stand against those who advocate preventive war against Iran.

Ironically, Paul is even reviled as dangerous for ruling out preventive nuclear



AP Images

**Starting from behind**, the Republican ticket of Goldwater and Congressman William Miller of New York was never able to overcome Johnson’s favorable press and Goldwater’s negative image. Johnson carried 44 states in an historic landslide.

strikes against countries that haven’t attacked the United States. In a debate in New Hampshire in 2007, CNN’s Wolf Blitzer asked several of the candidates then seeking the 2008 GOP presidential nomination the following question: “If it came down to a preemptive U.S. strike against Iran’s nuclear facility if necessary, would you authorize the use of tactical nuclear weapons?”

“I would authorize the use of tactical nuclear weapons if there was no other way to pre-empt those nuclear centrifuges,” replied Rep. Duncan Hunter of California, though he added, “I don’t think it’s going to take tactical nukes.”

“I think it could be done with conventional weapons, but you can’t rule out anything and you shouldn’t take any option off the table,” answered former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Former Governor Gary Gilmore of Virginia insisted that “all options are on the table.”

“You don’t take options off the table,” agreed former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. The question was not asked of Paul, but later in the debate, when asked what the most pressing moral issue facing the country is, he replied:

I think it’s the acceptance just recently that we now promote pre-emptive

war. I do not believe that’s part of the American tradition.... We have rejected the just war theory of Christianity and now, tonight, we hear that we’re not even willing to remove from the table a pre-emptive nuclear strike against a country that has done no harm to us and is no threat to our national security!

Times have indeed changed since 1964, when Goldwater was considered dangerous in allowing for the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe as a defensive measure against an invading Soviet army. Ron Paul is considered dangerous these days for opposing a nuclear first strike against Iran. Perhaps the danger of Presidents, unrestrained by Congress, starting wars on their own authority, or under cover of United Nations resolutions, has become too commonplace to be a cause for concern in today’s White House and Congress, or among the influential voices in the major news media.

“I have to chuckle when they describe you and me as being dangerous,” Paul told a cheering crowd of supporters after his second-place finish in January’s New Hampshire primary, though he added: “We are dangerous to the status quo in the country.” ■