



“A time comes when silence is betrayal  
and that time has come for us.”  
- from Clergy & Laity Concerned, 1967

## Study Guide for use with NUCLEAR TIPPING POINT

**This study guide**, which is based on a similar guide prepared by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops,<sup>1</sup> is intended for use with the film, *Nuclear Tipping Point*. It is designed to assist small groups of adults and mature young people in exploring some issues related to nuclear weapons in the light of their religious faith. This small group study can be completed either in one 90-minute session or more fully in two 60-minute sessions.

**Synopsis:** *Nuclear Tipping Point* is a conversation with four men intimately involved in national security: former Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense William Perry and former Senator Sam Nunn – the first two being Republicans and the latter two Democrats. In the film, the four share personal experiences that led to calling for a world free of nuclear weapons and the way to get there.

**Film length:** 55:24 For a free copy of the DVD: go to [www.nucleartippingpoint.org](http://www.nucleartippingpoint.org)

### Instructions for the Facilitator

**Before the meeting:** At least a week before the meeting, make available to participants the quotes from religious and political leaders on nuclear weapons on pages 3 and 4,<sup>2</sup> and select opening and closing prayers or inspirational statements from your faith tradition. On the day of the session, have copies of the quotes available for all participants. Arrange for a DVD player and TV and set up chairs to face the TV.

**Beginning the session:** Welcome everyone and remind them that the purpose of the gathering is to reflect on the nuclear threat in our world today. We will do this during two one-hour discussions that include watching parts of the film, *Nuclear Tipping Point*, and reviewing our religious principles. Indicate that this session will explore the topic from the perspective of both policy experts and our faith.

**Introductions:** Invite everyone to briefly introduce himself or herself, and to share one word that captures how he or she feels when thinking about the topic of this session.

**Opening Prayer:** Invite everyone to a state of open mindedness and read an opening prayer.

**Watch the Film:** For a single session, watch from the beginning until 26:27, the beginning of the section entitled “Reducing the Threat Step by Step.” Then use the “Next” button to skip to the section entitled “The Mountain Top” and watch through to the closing credits, for a total of 34 min. For two sessions, during Session 1, again watch from the beginning of the film until 26:27; during Session 2, watch the remainder of the film.

**Review the Quotes:** Invite everyone to spend a few minutes reviewing the quotes on the handouts.

**Discussion:** Explain the guidelines; then use the questions on page 3.

**Closing Prayer:** Invite participants to offer intentions based on the discussion. Close with an appropriate prayer or reflective statement from your faith tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/2010-nuclear-tipping-point-study-guide.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Additional statements from various religious traditions and denominations can be found at <http://www.multifaithpeace.org/>.

## Small Group Discussion

### Discussion Guidelines:

- Remember that the purpose of the discussion is to reflect on this issue in the light of our faith.
- Listen carefully to what others are saying. Our goal is to hear what each member of the group thinks and feels, not to debate with one another and reach some kind of a consensus.
- Use “I” statements. (Take responsibility for what you express. Do not speak for “them.”)
- Help all to participate. (The leader should lead by making sure all participants are heard from, and should be careful not to use his or her position to espouse a particular viewpoint.)
- Stay on the topic and stay focused on the film and its relation to achieving peace.
- Be respectful and charitable at all times.

### Questions for Participants<sup>3</sup>

1. What reactions do you have to what you have seen and heard in the film?
2. Why are Shultz, Perry, Kissinger and Nunn and concerned about the growing proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials used to construct them?
3. How does the issue of living with the nuclear risk relate to our religious principles?
4. The doctrine of nuclear deterrence argues that maintaining a credible threat to employ nuclear weapons against innocent populations forestalls the greater evils of war. What is your opinion on this?
5. Since early in the Cold War, the U.S. has adopted a policy of maintaining a secure nuclear arsenal for deterrence, and has justified them by the need to protect our allies with a “nuclear umbrella.” What problems with current nuclear policies does the film highlight?
6. How do you feel about the steps Shultz, Kissinger, Nunn and Perry call for to reduce the nuclear threat?<sup>4</sup>
7. The connections between the arms race, inequality, poverty, injustice, humiliation, and the causes of terrorism and war are complex. Reflect on your questions, concerns, or beliefs about these issues.
8. Peacemaking is a moral requirement of all of the world’s religions. Do you feel called to become involved in addressing the nuclear weapons threat? If so, what steps will you take?

### Take Action:

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<sup>3</sup> If two sessions are used, you might reserve questions 5 through 8 for the second session.

<sup>4</sup> The following steps are listed in the film. Could the U.S. do other things to reduce the incentive for acquiring nuclear weapons?

- \* Secure all nuclear weapons and materials globally to the highest standards
- \* Discard Cold War practices to decrease the danger of accidental, mistaken or unauthorized launch
- \* Reduce substantially nuclear forces in all states that possess them
- \* Eliminate short-range battlefield nuclear weapons
- \* Halt the production of plutonium and highly enriched uranium for nuclear weapons globally
- \* Develop cooperative missile defense and early warning systems
- \* Bring the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty into effect
- \* Develop a new international system to manage the risks of producing fuel for nuclear power
- \* Phase out the use of highly enriched uranium in civil commerce
- \* Strengthen verification and enforcement capabilities
- \* Redouble efforts to resolve conflicts

### Selected Quotations on Nuclear Weapons

**Pope Benedict XVI:** “What can be said, too, about those governments which count on nuclear arms as a means of ensuring the security of their countries? Along with countless persons of good will, one can state that this point of view is not only baneful but also completely fallacious.”

**Former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger:** “The notion that we can abolish nuclear weapons reflects on a combination of American utopianism and American parochialism. ... It’s like the [1929] Kellogg-Briand Pact renouncing war as an instrument of national policy. It’s not based upon an understanding of reality.”

**Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama:** “By far the greatest single danger facing humankind – in fact, all living beings on our planet – is the threat of nuclear destruction. I would like to appeal to all the leaders of the nuclear powers ... to exercise their sanity and begin to work at dismantling and destroying all nuclear weapons.”

**Former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft:** “I think the concept [of a world without nuclear weapons] has several serious flaws. First of all I think it’s unlikely that we could ever achieve it. Even trying to achieve it, I think, may get in the way of doing some more practical things ... In addition, while I don’t think we could ever get to zero, if we somehow did, and nothing else changed in the world, it could be a very perilous, unstable world. We cannot erase the knowledge of how to build nuclear weapons.”

**Susannah Heschel (speaking of her father, Abraham Joshua Heschel):** “He sometimes would ask rabbinical students whether gelatin is kosher, and they would argue based upon this or that citation in the Halachah. And then he would ask, ‘are nuclear weapons kosher?’ and the students would suddenly be silent; they didn’t have the language to describe that.”

**Senator Jon Kyl:** “There are three key factors which make deterrence as important now as it was during the Cold War, albeit for different reasons. First, other states are modernizing their nuclear weapons and the United States is not. ... The second reason why the deterrence still matters is that it deters attacks. ... The third reason for our deterrent is that it would prevent a cascade of proliferation because of the nuclear umbrella that the United States provides for over thirty-one countries, including many with the technology and resources for the development of nuclear deterrence on their own.”

**Mirza Masroor Ahmad:** “These days, every major power possesses an arsenal of nuclear weapons, and even poor countries are joining this race. Mankind stands on the brink of the pit of destruction, whilst the Holy Quran teaches us not to harm the innocent. The fallout from the atom bomb causes physical disabilities, generation after generation; and so, this crime is even worse than murder.”

**Former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and Former CIA Director John Deutch:** “A nation that wishes to acquire nuclear weapons believes these weapons will improve its security. The declaration by the U.S. that it will move to eliminate nuclear weapons in a distant future will have no direct effect on changing this calculus. ... Even in the absence of overwhelming superiority in nuclear weapons, the great predominance of U.S. conventional forces would remain a strong motive for aspiring states to seek nuclear weapons.”

**David P. Gushee, President of Evangelicals for Human Rights:** “Nuclear weapons threaten life’s sanctity. Their very existence marks an absurd and terrifying negation of life. ... America’s evangelicals must learn to see nuclear weapons as perhaps the ultimate sanctity of life issue, and respond accordingly.”

**Evangelical Baptist minister Tyler Wigg-Stevenson:** “Nuclear weapons will never be moralized out of existence, perhaps most fundamentally because there are very few people in any era willing to decide questions about their own security based on a moral abstraction. That said, morality has an vital role to play in the current abolitionism: you just have to know what to ask it to do. Morality complements the security and technological arguments: i.e., we must abolish for our safety, we can abolish verifiably, and we should abolish because it is consonant with our deepest values. Must-can-should: a powerful triad.”

## **Arguments for maintaining the *status quo***

1. Nuclear weapons have prevented World War III for over 60 years.  
Changing policies that have worked for a long time invites instability.  
("If it ain't broke, don't fix it.")
2. Even if we got to zero, the knowledge of how to build the bomb will always be with us.  
Treaties and inspections won't work. If someone secretly rearmed, they could seize enormous power.  
("You can't put the genie back in the bottle.")
3. Small countries have no choice – it is their only defense against more powerful adversaries.
4. The U.S. has provided a "nuclear umbrella" via its various military alliances.  
If the U.S. appeared to be serious about significant nuclear disarmament,  
its allies would be forced to develop their own nuclear weapons.
5. Zero is unachievable. Therefore, even the aspirational goal of zero has no practical value.  
Worse, voicing that goal distracts attention from trying to reach achievable nuclear safeguards.  
("Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.")
6. A president who entertains the concept of "zero" loses credibility.  
That causes our deterrent to lose credibility, making war more likely.

## **Arguments for reducing or eliminating nuclear weapons**

1. Even during the Cold War, it was a myth that nuclear weapons provided national security.  
We have been extremely lucky to get by with only two wartime uses of nuclear weapons.  
The Cuban Missile Crisis was only one of a number of extremely dangerous incidents.  
The risks are much greater than most people think, and are highly unacceptable.
2. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of terrorism, the world has changed.  
If terrorists can get their hands on nukes, they will use them. It will be world changing.
3. Loose nuclear materials must be controlled, and this has to be an international effort.  
Treaties and verification methods may not be foolproof, but the alternatives are worse.  
The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is a good example. It has been working for forty years.  
Part of the deal was that nations without nukes agreed not to seek them.  
The other part of the deal was that nations with nukes promised to get rid of them.
4. The risk to the U.S. is much greater in a world with nuclear weapons than a world without them.  
America's conventional arsenal would provide greater national security and security for our allies  
in a world at zero than our nuclear weapons do today.
5. In the film, Colin Powell says "The one thing that I convinced myself after all these years of exposure to the  
use of nuclear weapons is that they were useless." It is widely acknowledged by the military that if we have  
to resort to using them, then we have lost – and then at an unthinkable cost.  
Their only possible justification is for deterrence – and terrorists will not be deterred.
6. Times have changed. With people like George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn  
calling for a world free of nuclear weapons, it can no longer be dismissed as a hopeless fantasy.  
It is now a broadly accepted, non-partisan goal.