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# National Insecurity: Why Do So Many in the World's Most Security Conscious Nation Live in Fear?

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# National Insecurity: Why Do So Many in the World's Most Security Conscious Nation Live in Fear?

Jerry Cheston Rice, PhD

University of Connecticut, 2017

In 2017, the President proposed a budget that allocated sixty percent of US discretionary resources toward military spending, putting US military spending higher than that of the next eight nations combined. Despite this enormous allocation of resources, millions of Americans feel so insecure that they have decided to take steps to insure their own security. With stockpiles of food and weapons, in personal bunkers, these preppers are viewed by some as extreme in their approach. The purpose of this piece is to explore the causes and fears that drive prepping behavior, and what view these individuals have of the US federal government; the entity that is supposed to insure the security of the American public. Ultimately, this study concludes that cultural factors, such as religion and the way one is raised, are most likely the causes of one's decision to prep. However, other factors such as personal history, identity, and personality, when taken in conjunction with culture, can intensify prepping behavior. Furthermore, with natural disasters and the threat of a global financial meltdown at the top of the list of fears for most preppers, there is little that a single nation-state can do to address these concerns. Rather, a more wide-spread multilateral approach is required of the key actors within the international community. Ultimately, most within the prepping community possess a somewhat negative view of the US federal government, but there is no evidence that such views have the traction that would ultimately lead to conflict between preppers and the American government.

National Insecurity: Why Do So Many in the World's Most Security Conscious Nation  
Live in Fear?

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University of Connecticut

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APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

National Insecurity: Why Do So Many in the World's Most Security Conscious Nation  
Live in Fear?

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This dissertation is dedicated to:

My loving wife, Gina M. Rice

Thanks for all of your hard work, loyalty, patience, and many sacrifices over the years. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

and to:

A great mentor and committee member of this project, Dr. Garry Clifford

Thanks for always having an open door, the memories my kids have of our trips to the Dairy Bar, and for your advice: “Just focus on writing one page a day”. Although I was not able to write that fast, your words did serve as a reminder to keep pushing forward.

# **National Insecurity: Why do so Many in the World's Most Security Conscious Nation Live in Fear?**

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# Chapter 1

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## The Insecurity in Today's Security Paradigm

*"If the people cannot trust their government to do the job for which it exists - to protect them and to promote their common welfare - all else is lost."*

Barack Obama, *An Honest Government, A Hopeful Future*, 2006

It is uncomfortable to imagine a world devastated by events such as a nuclear detonation, a global pandemic, or a widespread economic collapse; where the very fabric of society is strained and individuals are forced to rely on themselves and their community for survival. However unlikely these events may be, the increasingly connected nature of the global community makes their occurrence far more probable than once was the case<sup>1</sup>. As Newman points out, the very political and economic changes that allow for increased communication and cooperation are the changes that also pose serious threats to the global community (2001, p. 245). For example, improvements in travel also make it easier to smuggle drugs, and traffic humans. Similarly, as was hinted by the 2014 Ebola outbreak, these same advancements may serve as the catalyst for the spread of a global pandemic. Likewise, the increasingly interdependent nature of the global economy that on the one hand facilitates international cooperation, could just as easily trigger an equally high level of human insecurity through a

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<sup>1</sup> President Obama warned that a nuclear terrorist attack is the single greatest threat that the United States currently faces, in both the short and long-terms. He went on to explain that a nuclear detonation in a city such as New York or London would change the security landscape as we know it (Jackson, 2010, April 11).



global financial meltdown. This was illustrated in 2008 with the burst of the housing bubble in the United States. The resulting economic ripples were felt globally as an unknown number lost their career and life savings over night.

For many Americans, the eminent threat posed by events such as those mentioned above are very real, and these individuals are skeptical of the US government's ability to adequately provide for their individual security<sup>2</sup>. As a result, the United States and other economically developed countries around the world have witnessed a growing prepper trend. Some have even gone so far as to refer to 2012 as "The Year of the Prepper" (2012Prepared.com, 2012), since prepping behavior dramatically increased; undoubtedly due to fears associated with the Mayan apocalypse. In a National Geographic poll, of over a thousand Americans, taken in January of 2012, forty percent said that they were opting not to put money in a 401k plan. Instead, they planned to put that money toward catastrophic preparations. Almost half of those polled stated that, if they were to purchase a new home, they would rather have a safe-room or bomb shelter, instead of new high-end appliances (TP Newswire, 2012)<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, more than half expect that the United States would be the victim of terrorism (55%)<sup>4</sup> or a financial collapse (51%)<sup>5</sup> within the next twenty-five years, while a third expect to experience a significant power blackout

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<sup>2</sup> Many point to the events that followed Hurricane Katrina as evidence of the US Government's inability to provide for their security needs (Burns, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> This poll claimed to have a 3.1% margin of error, but it should be noted that this poll was conducted online. As such, it is not readily apparent how the pollsters controlled for issues such as those related to biased sampling and repetitive responses.

<sup>4</sup> In a poll taken shortly after the bombing at the Boston Marathon, seventy-five percent of those surveyed now believe that an occasional act of terrorism, will be a part of American life in the future, and while sixty percent of the country feels that the steps taken by the government have made the country safer since the 9/11 attacks, forty-nine percent of Americans believe that there is more that the government could do to prevent acts of terrorism in this country (Pew Research Center, 2013 April 23).

<sup>5</sup> A majority of Americans (63%) feel that the economy was no stronger in 2013 than it was prior to the 2008 market crash, and forty-nine percent of Americans feel that the government has not done enough to protect the market from another collapse (Pew Research Center, 2013 September 12).

(37%) or a pandemic (29%) within the same period. A few of those polled (14%) even stated that they expect to experience nuclear fallout within the next twenty-five years.

These beliefs have led many Americans to begin prepping. A prepper is an individual that prepares for a catastrophic emergency or event by stockpiling resources, such as food, survival equipment, and weapons. Whereas a survivalist merely lives off of what their environment provides them, a prepper seeks to thrive in times of catastrophe with as little change in their present living conditions as possible. Furthermore, a prepper is one who acts with the goal of indefinite self-reliance in mind. While it is true that the federal government urges all Americans to be prepared for the unexpected emergency, by having a 72-hour kit on hand (Build a Kit, 2016; Kempner, 2016), a prepper is one who looks far beyond these minimum expectations. These individuals think in terms of indefinite self-reliance by stockpiling garden seeds, tobacco, alcoholic beverages, and precious metals<sup>6</sup>.

The term first rose to prominence in the years preceding the Year 2000 (Y2K) scare (Google Books, 2013), but television shows, like *Doomsday Preppers* (Madison, Cromley, & Sharp, 2012), have helped to cement the term into widespread use. Some estimates suggest that as many as one to three percent of Americans classify themselves as a prepper (Strochlic, 2014; Brady, 2012, February 11). However, it is difficult to determine the accuracy of these estimates, since most within this subculture are reluctant to discuss their fears and the provisions that they have made, out of the belief that, should a doomsday scenario arise, they will make themselves a target for others who have not made the necessary preparations.

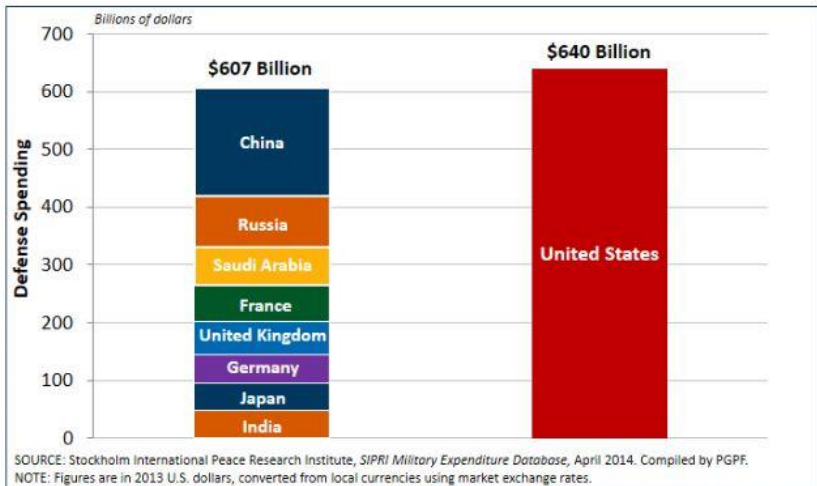
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<sup>6</sup> Most preppers expect that in a state of emergency, currency would no longer serve as the basis of the economy. Survivors want materials that can be immediately used. All of the items listed above could serve as the basis of a barter economy.

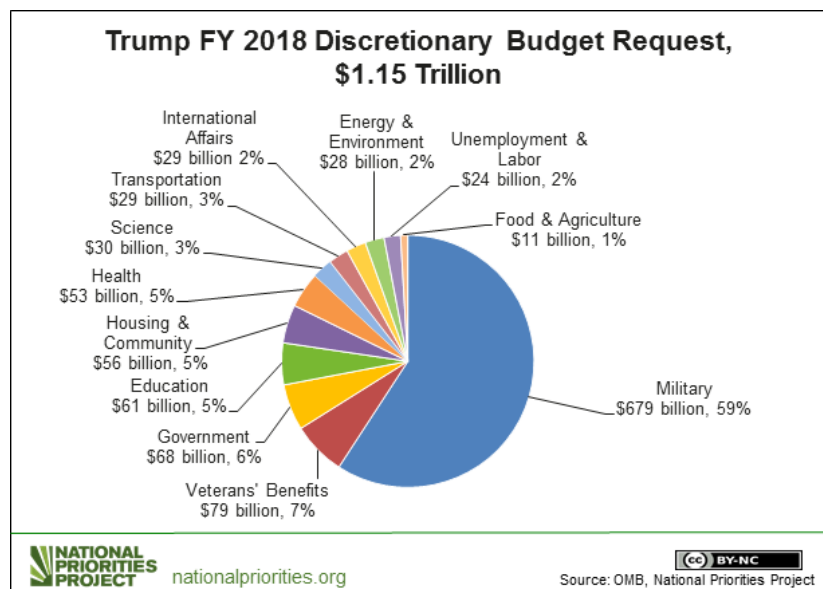
As noted above, at least some of the motivation for prepping seems to derive from a loss of faith in the government's ability to adequately address such threats. Ironically, the United States spends more than any other country on issues of

defense and national security<sup>7</sup>, while many within its borders fear for their own long-term personal security; so much so that they have taken drastic measures that include the stockpiling weapons and food. In May of 2017, President Trump submitted to Congress a budget proposal for fiscal year 2018 that

earmarked almost sixty percent of the US discretionary budget for military purposes<sup>8</sup>. This figure is most telling, since it is this portion of the overall budget where lawmakers are most-able to spend according to their perceived priorities.



**Figure 1.1: Defense spending by the United States, as compared to that of the world's other top defense spenders (National Priorities Project, 2015).**



**Figure 1.2: The 2018 proposed discretionary spending budget (National Priorities Project, 2017).**

<sup>7</sup> At over a trillion dollars annually, the US national security budget is the highest in the world (Department of Defense Budget Overview, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> A poll from April of 2012 found that roughly 58 percent of Americans, who were polled, supported substantial reductions in military spending (Tucker, 2014).

However, the sixty percent allocated for defense purposes represents only a portion of the total picture. This amount does not include the additional seven percent that has been allocated toward Veteran's Benefits, nor does it account for the costs of nuclear weapon activities that fall under the budget of the Department of Energy. These figures represent an increase in military spending that are "already higher than at any point during the hyper-militaristic Reagan years (National Priorities Project, 2017).

Yet with all of these resources, millions of US citizens feel the need to make provisions to insure their own security<sup>9</sup>. If the United States spends so much on national security, why do so many in this country feel insecure<sup>10</sup>? This would suggest that there is not a direct relationship between military spending and one's sense of security<sup>11</sup>.

The intent of this study is to examine the gap between the attempts of the United States to provide its citizens with security, from a traditional national security perspective, and the sense of security that these citizens actually feel. In other words, this piece seeks to explore the root causes of one's decision to become a prepper instead of relying on the national government as the primary source of their security. In so doing, this piece will address the following questions:

1. Why do some Americans feel the need to take measures to provide for their own security, as opposed to relying on the national government, as has traditionally been the case? What are the chief factors that serve as catalysts for triggering one's decision to begin prepping? Can these be attributed to one's personality, their identity, historical events, or are cultural factors such as religion at play? Is a perfect storm of both personality and culture necessary to flip the prepper switch?
2. To what extent are preppers losing faith in their government's ability to carry out its primary function; that of providing security? While some preppers point to poor government planning and mistakes as a justification for their lifestyle, others just as

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<sup>9</sup> Some estimates put the number of preppers in the United States at about three percent of the population (Strochlic, 2014; Brady, 2012, February 11). With more than 323 million living in the country, that would mean that there are more than 9 million preppers.

<sup>10</sup> President Obama acknowledged in his 2016 State of the Union Address that the United States spends more on defense than the next eight nations combined (Obama, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> As Newman explains, "a reorientation of security toward human needs can be more effective, more cost efficient, and more stable in systemic terms...than a conception of security that rests solely upon military defense of territory" (2001, P. 249).

quickly explain that prepping is a practice that government organizations such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have encouraged (Burns, 2015). As such, this study will examine whether feelings of negativity or patriotism and devotion, toward one's country, are more prevalent among preppers.

3. In the eyes of most preppers, what are the major threats that the United States currently faces, and are these threats among those that a single sovereign state would be able to address? For example, to truly diminish the threat posed by nuclear weapons or a global pandemic, widespread cooperation within the international community is a necessity and speaks to the need for change within the international political arena. On the other hand, if individual security concerns, such as that of personal economic security triggered by the loss of one's job, are more common concerns within the prepper community, then such threats are certainly within the realm of the sovereign state and speak to the need for a restructuring of the social safety net within the United States.

As these questions suggest, this piece is a break from more traditional studies of security within the field of International Relations, which tend to focus on issues of national security or threats to human security. Preppers are an enigma in that they do not carry the weight or prominence of a nation-state, nor are they victims seeking sanctuary from a harsh oppressor. Rather, they are individuals who choose not to rely on a nation-state for all aspects of personal security, and who are taking steps to insure that they do not one day become victims.

Unfortunately, the need for such measures is growing as the gulf between state-based security efforts and the security concerns of the American population seems to be widening. Nation-states are selfish in that their traditional security focus has been that of self-preservation. In other words, a state-based approach to security is one that focuses on territorial integrity, and perhaps a long-term supply of natural resources. Not since the 1940's has the sovereign territory of the United States truly faced such a threat<sup>12</sup>, and with the fall of the Soviet Union, so too went the arms race and a need for a large nuclear arsenal. Unfortunately, the US defense strategy has not kept pace with the changing nature of the world's security concerns. This was most evident

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<sup>12</sup> While the attacks of September 11, 2001 were an attack on the United States, at no point was the country in danger of losing a portion of its sovereign territory to a foreign power. In this way, even these attacks represent a threat to individual security, not a national security.

after the attacks of September 11, 2001, when as McDonald (2002, p. 290) points out President George W. Bush responded first with an invasion of Afghanistan followed by another in Iraq. In essence, Bush attempted to restore the American public's sense of security with a traditional state-on-state posture, instead of accepting that terrorism is an attack perpetrated by individuals, against individuals. This distinction is significant when one considers that the very existence of the state is tied to its ability to provide its citizens with security (McDonald, 2002; Hobbes, 1904 [1651]). Ultimately, McDonald asserts that in the world's present condition, for a country to continue to prioritize traditional national security concerns, over those of the individual, "the need to point to the insecurity of security is clearly pressing" (2002, p. 292).

### **Preppers: An American Subculture**

As Chapter 3 will explain, the origins of the prepper's movement go back to the Cold War, when America was preparing for a possible nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union. In this era, the federal government actually encouraged Americans to take steps to insure their own security. Personal measures, such as building a family bomb shelter, were cheaper than proposals that urged for federally funded shelters that could accommodate the population as a whole. In other words, the federal government was certainly capable of seeing to the needs of the population at large, but for economic, political, and social reasons (see chapter 3 for an explanation of these) federal officials chose not to pursue this route.

As the consequences of nuclear war became more widely known by the 1960's, many Americans chose not to prepare for surviving such an event, because trying to survive the aftermath of nuclear war, in the minds of many, would be worse than death. Emergency management officials no longer encouraged long-term preparedness, but instead shifted their attention to smaller, more likely, events; like natural disasters. As chapter 4 explains, current

federal emergency policy urges Americans to be able to sustain themselves for seventy-two hours; at which point the expectation is that federal emergency management officials will be on site to lend assistance. In this light, the practicality of long-term prepping may seem odd or unorthodox for many.

Unfortunately, as recent events have shown, the federal government's response is not always quick. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana and Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico illustrated for many that the federal government is not always able to provide immediate relief. Furthermore, while surviving the aftermath of a nuclear war might seem impractical, other threats, capable of crippling a modern society, would certainly leave the planet inhabitable. Examples include a solar flare, a global pandemic, or an electromagnetic pulse. One would merely have to survive the initial blow to society, and resulting widespread panic, and then if adequately prepared be able to live a relatively normal life. With this in mind, prepping may seem more rational.

The terms "prepper" and "survivalist" are frequently used interchangeably. However, it is important to note the differences between the two groups. While a prepper may also be a survivalist and vice versa, the two groups have very different philosophies. Survivalists have been around for centuries. These are those who learn to live off the land, or on what can be found in their environment, and are able to do so if the need were to arise. As noted above, the basis of a survivalist mindset is merely survival. In contrast, a prepper seeks not only to survive, but to thrive. The goal of a prepper is the continuation of their present living conditions, which is why modern bunkers are equipped with amenities such as television and showers.

While there is no single definition of what it means to be a prepper, generally speaking, a prepper is one who prepares for a catastrophic event that he/she feels is likely to occur given

their understanding of their surroundings and the state of the world. The stockpiling of food, ammunition, and other supplies are typically integral components of these preparation efforts. Some go so far as to prepare underground bunkers for their families, capable of withstanding any number of threats, which range from inclement weather to a nuclear detonation. Recent increases in the bunker building phenomenon have even led some to plan and develop bunker communities, complete with underground connecting tunnels, which would serve as a “bugout” location for like-minded individuals, if the need were to arise (Atlas Survival Shelters, 2012).

Preppers themselves argue that to prep merely means that one is showing a high level of personal responsibility and self-reliance, rather than relying on the charity of others, or any type of societal safety net. Preppers, perhaps in an effort to rationalize behavior that for most seems irrational, down-play their focus on doomsday scenarios that have come to characterize the subculture in recent years. Instead, preppers assert that they are prepared for a variety of doomsday or emergency scenarios, including those that affect only the individual, such as when a breadwinner loses their job, or that of a home fire, or natural disaster (American Preppers Network, 2014).

For the purposes of this piece, a prepper is defined as one who prepares for the long-term survival (a month or more) of a number of potential threats, while trying to achieve a lifestyle as near to that of their current lifestyle as possible. In other words, while many Americans may have 72-hour kits, as prescribed by the federal government, these individuals would not be considered preppers. Also, while whole house generators are increasingly common as individuals seek to cope with the fallout from increasingly severe weather, these individuals would also not be preppers. A prepper thinks long-term, and for a variety of possibilities. Furthermore, preppers tend to think past the constructs of America’s current society; such as the



economy, pharmaceuticals, or power grid. A prepper thinks in terms of a future barter economy, herbal medicine, or the use of solar and wind power.

As they prepare, preppers do so out of fear of “the end of the world as we know it” (TEOTWAWKI) type of event, which for them is measured at the individual level, and is based on one’s own point of view (American Preppers Network, 2014). In other words, an event that would end the world as one person knows it, such as the loss of employment or a sudden diagnosis with a serious illness, would not necessarily affect society as a whole. By prepping for such events, an individual seeks to insure the continuation of their present living conditions without assistance from family, friends, or the government. An example of this would include the stockpiling of food and personal hygiene products in the event of long-term unemployment. By planning ahead, preppers are able to continue living by their own means without relying on others. In such a light, prepping may then be viewed as a responsible, or even civic minded behavior that is completely normal until one considers the extent that many preppers go to as they pursue this goal of self-reliance. While many Americans set money aside for a rainy day, very few go to the lengths of some preppers, who practice tactical exercises meant to simulate those of the military.

It is these types of preparations, on the part of the prepper movement, that is perhaps the best argument for a scholarly study of the subculture. As Buzan (2007) points out, there is a reciprocal relationship between individuals and the state. He argues that the state can threaten the security of individuals through a variety of actions, which include its external security policies. On the other hand, individuals can also threaten the security of the state. This is evident when one considers that many preppers stockpile weapons and ammunition, and in many instances, have extensive tactical and military training. As a growing number of Americans

perceive that their government is no longer capable or willing to serve their best interests, there is a potential that these individuals could choose a path that is perpendicular to that of the US government.

While the intent of this piece is to focus on American preppers, it is worth noting that the prepping phenomenon is in no way limited to the United States<sup>13</sup>. Feelings of paranoia, over the potential collapse of society as we know it, are becoming increasingly common throughout the industrialized world. As of May 2012, fifteen percent of all people world-wide believed that the world was going to end during their lifetime (Michaud, 2012; Cafferty, 2012). However, there was great disparity from country to country on this belief. In a poll of over 16,000 people, in twenty different countries, researchers found that feelings of doom were widespread, but varied dramatically depending on where one lived. Less than eight percent of French and British citizens fear the apocalypse in their lifetime, as opposed to twenty-two percent in Turkey and the United States (Michaud, 2012; Cafferty, 2012). With these numbers in mind, one is forced to question why so many live in fear of an apocalyptic shift away from their present lifestyle, and why there is such variation in this level of fear, from country to country. Is there something about the American experience that makes it unique? After all, not only does America have the greatest number of preppers and doomsayers, it also leads the world in gun ownership, and as mentioned earlier national defense spending. What is it about America that makes its population so afraid?

One possible explanation for the catalyst of these fears are media outlets. Some use their voice to stoke and exploit fears of impending doom. The twenty-four-hour news networks are

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<sup>13</sup> International Preppers Network, an online prepping forum, has a tracker that traces the number of people from various countries that view its site. It currently boasts over 14,000 views from more than 120 different countries (International Preppers Network, 2014).

the best example of this, with the sensationalist approach that they take as they cover the world's events; and during slow news cycles, they turn to potential threats, such as the end of the Mayan Calendar, to carry their ratings. Unfortunately, doom and gloom seems to sell. During its stint, *Doomsday Preppers* (Madison, Cromley, & Sharp, 2012) enjoyed the highest ratings of any show in the history of the *National Geographic Channel* (North, 2012, May 28). Its success led to a number of spinoff shows, which included *Doomsday Bunkers* (Gallagher, Greensfelder, & Smith, 2012) and *Doomsday Castle* (Madison, Cromley, & Sharp, 2013). The success of these programs have in turn spawned a growing industry of prepper conventions, where one can view anything from weapons and long-term food storage, to the latest in luxury bunkers (Morris, 2013, November 11). Finally, there has been a growing industry around doomsday novels such as *One Second After* (Forstchen, 2009), which was a New York Times best seller and earned great praise from various military and political leaders such as former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich; who wrote the Forward for the novel.

While access to media and print coverage may serve as an Occam's Razor for explaining the growing prepper trend, such an explanation is too simplistic. As noted above, citizens in countries such as The United Kingdom and France, who have widespread media access, also live with a relatively low level of fear, when compared to of the United States. Similarly, if media reporting was the culprit, one would expect the reach of this activity to be far greater. In other words, the feelings of doom over a potential apocalypse would be present in a greater amount of the population. While fifteen percent of Americans may feel that the world will end in their lifetime, such a number does not reflect the significant reach of the American media machine.

Another potential force behind the widespread American fears of apocalypse, and one that is more unique to this country, is the large number of Hollywood movies and television

dramas that depict a catastrophic shift in the way Americans currently live. Examples of this include the feature film *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004) and Fox's series *Revolution* (Burk et al, 2012). In both instances, the world has been plunged into a state where individuals are forced to rely on their own wit and what little he/she possesses for their mere survival. More recently, reality shows such as TLC's *Risking it All* (Goolnik, 2014), and National Geographic's *The Pioneers* (Evangelista et al, 2014), which make no reference to a doomsday scenario, test the ability of the show's participants to live without even the basic conveniences of the modern American lifestyle, such as access to the power grid.

Perhaps the most reaching genre of apocalyptic movies and television programs has been those related to zombies. While zombies have always been a favorite of those who follow the occult, at no previous period have these undead creatures enjoyed the popularity that they currently possess. The movie *World War Z* (Pitt et al, 2013) depicts the onset of a global pandemic that is turning the world's population into zombies. Grossing more than 540 million dollars, the movie is the biggest zombie movie in history (Box Office Mojo, 2015). Similarly, AMC's *The Walking Dead* (Darabont et al, 2010) takes place in a post-apocalyptic setting, after a pandemic has turned most of the world's population into "walkers". The show has been such a success, that it has become the most watched program in cable history (St. John, 2014). In both cases, the planet's few remaining uninfected inhabitants, now finding themselves in a true state of nature, are forced to rely on their wit and good luck in order to survive, and to ensure the safety of their family. Ironically, in their efforts to stay alive, these individuals are frequently forced to make moral choices, at the expense of their own humanity. Such a scenario resonates with those who fear TEOTWAWKI, and serves as just one more example of a justification for prepping.

While Hollywood has frequently been criticized for the amount of violence it has introduced into America's society, and for the effects this may be having on the public, such an argument does little to explain the current prepper trend within the United States. One must remember that during the Cold War, the movie *On the Beach* (Kramer, 1959) shook society to its core, forcing Eisenhower himself to publicly state that such events could never really happen. In fact, Rose argues that during this period, the "many descriptions of the end of our civilization, in both their vividness and quantity, cannot be found in any other era of American history" (2001, p. 70). Nearly thirty years later, it was rumored that President Reagan wept after viewing *The Day After* (Papazian & Meyer, 1983), and the debates that were a result of the movie spawned new terms, such as nuclear winter, to the American dialect. Despite the widespread impact that these movies had on society, no prepping movement, to the extent of today's ever developed.

If one eliminates news media and Hollywood as the force behind the prepper movement, and if one assumes that the national government seeks to provide a sense of security for its citizens, the only logical factor that could serve as a source to motivate prepping behavior are individual traits such as one's individual personality, identity, cultural norms, or life experiences. Before such a leap can be made, however, it is worth mentioning that some scholars have argued that a strong sense of security within the general public is at times contrary to the goals of the national government. In other words, it is possible that government officials like for the American population to feel a certain level of insecurity. In their discussion of President George W. Bush, Rothe and Muzzatti (2004) argue that the administration used the attacks of September 11, 2001 to maintain a high level of fear within the American public; in an effort to implement its right wing political agenda. They explain that for Bush, the attacks were a "great gift" that "enabled him to strengthen his faltering credibility...[and] to vastly enhance State power" (2004,

p. 347). Rothe and Muzzatti explain that in the aftermath of 9/11, an “intended heightened concern” was spread through society that created an “us or them” mentality and maintained a state of moral panic. Regardless of the merits to such an argument, such a psychological response on the part of the American public only serves to support the supposition that one’s decision to prep can be attributed to either to individual identity or personality traits, cultural norms, or in response to a life experience.

### **Research Questions**

With the individual as the focus of analysis, three main questions and accompanying hypotheses arise: First, what about these individuals cause them to reconstruct what it means to be secure, or more simply what chain of events lead to becoming a prepper? In other words, are factors related to individual personality, identity, culture, or history the best predictor of one’s decision to embark on a prepping lifestyle, or are all four factors necessary for such an extreme response to a perceived threat? After all, nuclear attacks, global pandemics, financial meltdowns, and even terrorist attacks are relatively rare. Given the odds for the occurrence of these types of events, the steps taken by some to prepare for them can certainly seem irrational for most. The working hypothesis for this question was that individuals who classify themselves as a prepper, or something similar to a prepper<sup>14</sup>, do so because of an event that reshapes their security norm; in conjunction with unique personality, identity, or cultural factors that support such behavior. In other words, a prepper is born out of what Constructivists refer to as a norm tipping event, which changes the way (s)he defines their sense of security. Examples of such an event could include experience with job loss, a physical assault, a natural disaster, or a terrorist attack; aimed at either themselves or a loved one. However, traumatic events could not work

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<sup>14</sup> Some within this group do not like the term “prepper” because they feel that society has attached a negative connotation to the term. Instead, they refer to themselves as one interested in “sustainable living” (Morris, 2013).

alone since there would certainly be many more preppers if such were the case. In addition to a triggering event that reshapes one's security norm, personality, identity, or cultural factors must also be present. An example of how culture might serve as a catalyst for prepping behavior would be one's religion. As this piece will explore in chapter 3, Christianity teaches of an impending apocalypse that will precede the return of Jesus Christ. As such, certain branches of Christianity, most notably The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, teaches its members to be prepared; leading some within its membership to stockpile a year's worth of food for their families. Ultimately then, the goal of this piece is to not only trace what event triggered the change, but also what other factors are at play that would result in one's decision to prep.

The second question derives from the notion that there is a social contract between a country's citizens and its government. In the contract, the government agrees to protect its citizens, and in return the citizens agree to give the government enough authority and power to fulfill this function. To what extent do preppers feel as though the United States has not upheld its side of the social contract, in that it is unable or unwilling to provide its population with a sense of security? If so, do preppers tend to be distrustful, or even anti-government? The working hypothesis for this question is that most preppers are distrustful of the government's ability and/or willingness to protect them, should the need arise. The logic behind this assumption is that when faced with a previous norm tipping event, those who became preppers did so because they were unhappy with the response that they got from their local governing authority. As such preppers are those who have taken measures into their own hands.

The third question addressed by this study seeks to understand the specific threats concerning most American preppers. Quite simply, in the eyes of preppers, what are the most pressing threats that the United States currently faces, and are these threats among those that a

single sovereign state would be able to address, or is a multilateral approach within the international community more appropriate? While most polls indicate that terrorist attacks, nuclear attacks, financial meltdowns, environmental degradation, and global pandemics are all issues of concern, it is unfeasible to think that a single sovereign state, even one with the resources of the United States, could solve these problems. On the other hand, personal economic fears, such as those associated with that of losing one's job and not having the ability to provide for one's family, are problems that the United States could address. The working hypothesis for this question is that the concerns of most preppers are so grand in nature that any effort to effectively address these issues would require widespread multilateral cooperation within the international community. This includes examples such as extreme weather, a threat that many climatologists have warned about since the international communities' numerous failures to act in any meaningful way, during its discussions of environmental policy.

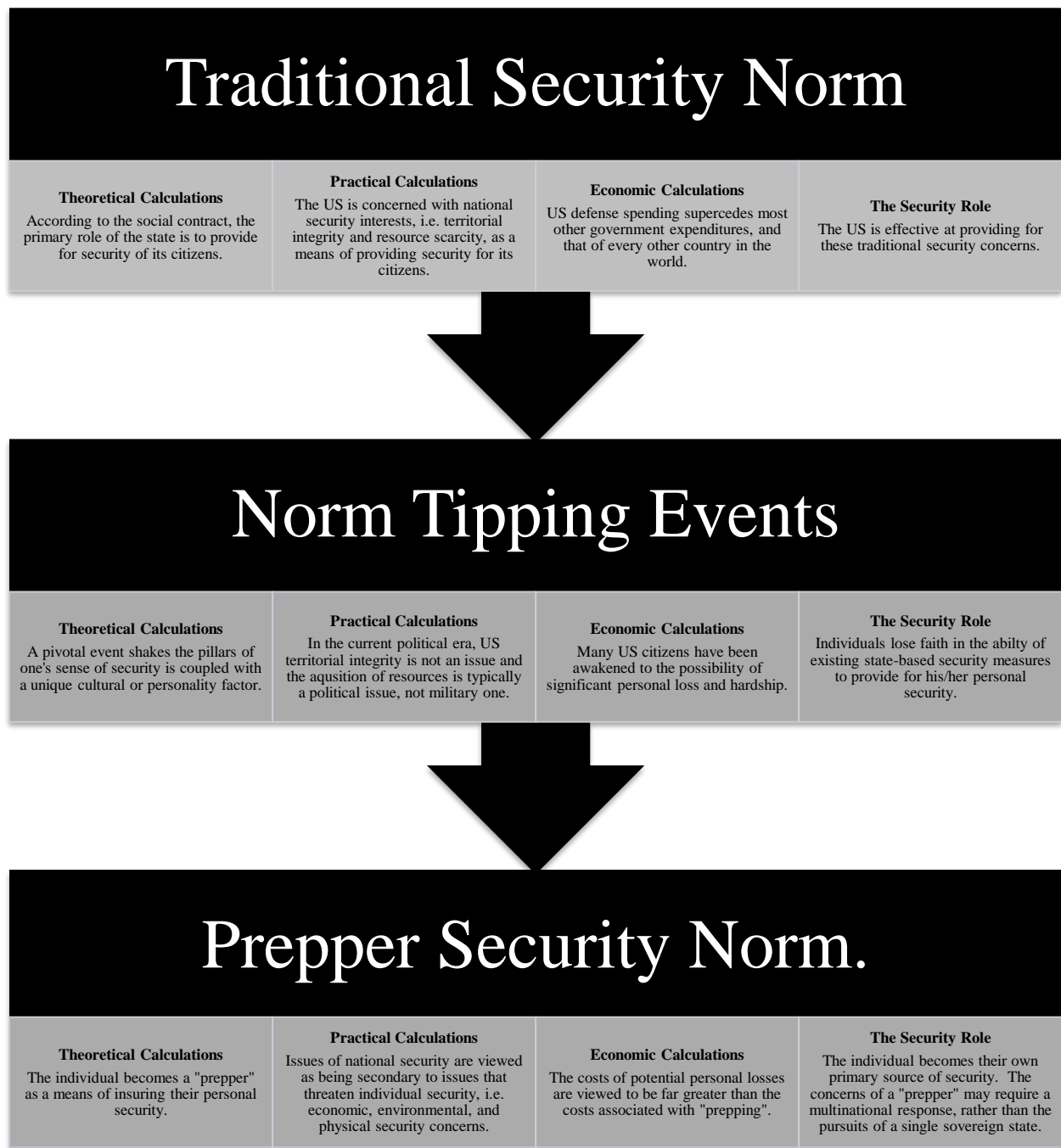
Figure 1.3 is an attempt to summarize these hypotheses. Ultimately, a major norm tipping event serves to shake the pillars of one's security norm. When coupled with unique cultural or personality factors, and the possibility for significant loss in their present living conditions, individuals will react in an extreme manner. Their identity will shift from that of a security consumer (supplied by the United States), to that of a security insurer (a prepper). As this shift occurs, these individuals lose faith in the government's ability to protect them, and as such they become less trusting and unwilling to rely on the government.

### **Theoretical and Substantive Significance**

Like other studies within the field of Political Science, this is a study of power, and the extraordinary measures that some are willing to take to ensure a level of power that would allow them maintain their present lifestyles. As was mentioned above, prepping is not about mere



**Figure 1.3- The Transition from the Traditional Security Norm to the Preppers Security Norm**



survival, it is an attempt to thrive when the world around you has fallen apart. From a substantive standpoint, this piece will offer a glance into an American subculture that has in some cases gone to extraordinary lengths, in an effort to insure its personal security.

Furthermore, this study will offer insight into the various threats that these individuals perceive

to be of greatest concern, and how intensely these feelings of apprehension are held. For example, while many Americans may share fears over the state of the economy, presumably only certain issues motivate individuals to take action. By pinpointing those threats that facilitate action, one is then able to determine those areas worthy of increased policy attention and government resources. In doing so, it may offer guidance for those in a position of authority, whose legitimacy may be in decline with the American public, and who must decide how to move forward. At the end of the day, policymakers want specific problems with specific solutions and this usually means paring down what is up for discussion at any one time.

It is the issue of legitimacy that serves as both a substantive and theoretical point. As was noted earlier, the theoretical purpose of the state is to provide security for its citizens (McDonald, 2002; Hobbes, 1904, [1651]). If it is failing to do this, as the emergence of preppers would suggest, then the state itself is losing legitimacy. With that loss of legitimacy comes substantive issues, such as civil unrest. Examples of this include the Vietnam War protests of the 60's and 70's, and the Occupy Wall Street movement just a few years ago. In both cases, although in varying degrees, the legitimacy of the government was eroded as Americans feared for their security. More recently, in places like Ferguson Missouri and Baltimore Maryland, Americans who actually felt threatened by those meant to protect them have taken to the streets to protest for measures that would in essence increase their sense of security.

From a purely theoretical perspective, this piece sets at the crossroads of a number of different theories, which include Constructivism, Prospect Theory, Historical Analogies, Groupthink, and theories on the influence of an individual's personality. Chapter 2 will include an in-depth discussion of each of these theories and their literature. In no way are these theories meant to be competing. Rather, they serve as a lens through which the same story may be

viewed. The goal of this study is inductive in nature in that it seeks to gather evidence that would support the various nuances of these theories.

At its core, the basis of one's decision to prep is fear. As such, chapter 2 also includes a theoretical discussion of fear as it relates to security. Ultimately, the American public fears unusual and even unlikely security threats at the expense of those that do far more harm. Much of this is due to how media outlets and government policymakers frame security issues to achieve their own agendas. Furthermore, since the United States directs so much of its resources toward national security, the American public expects perfection in the product that is provided by the government. When even minor failures do occur, the result is even greater levels of public fear.

### **The Nature of This Study**

In a subculture of mistrust and secrecy, exhaustive research into the many nuances of the prepper community may be very difficult. However, there are countless online prepper blogs and forums, where preppers converse and exchange information. In an effort to gather evidence that would support the hypotheses discussed above, a portion of this study consisted of quantitative research focused on one such blog. In July of 2011, *The Survivalists Blog* (Creekmore, 2011) asked its readers, "What was it that originally inspired you to start prepping?" In August of 2013, the blog followed up with a similar question, "Why did you start prepping, what was the trigger?" (Creekmore, 2013). With over 180 responses to these two posts, the blog offers a rich harvest, in the words of preppers themselves, explaining why they prep. While some posts are as simple as a few words, such as the one that states, "I prep for my family", others are more than a page in length, with vivid details of life experiences and political beliefs.

The methodology for this portion of the study was a content analysis of the *The Survivalist Blog* posts. Each observation was analyzed and coded using Figure A.1 in the Appendix. As the table indicates, the study consisted of three areas of focus, which coincide with the study's three hypotheses. First, each observation was coded into one of four categories based on the motivation behind the prepper's decision to make security preparations. These categories included personality, culture, identity, and history. Personality is "characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving" (American Psychological Association, 2017). Examples of personality were references to fear or distrust, which might be indicative of paranoia. Similarly, words such as loss, or safety would be indicative of an individual who is risk averse, and as a result preps due to personality traits. Finally, references to self-reliance and the need for independence also fell within this category. In the end, personality is meant to be a measure of how one thinks about the world around them, or the way others view them. On the other hand, references to culture were those related to religion, the way someone was raised, or even social factors such as membership in the Boy Scouts. Culture is a measure of one's customary beliefs that they share with those from within their community. On the other hand, identity is the way one views their role within that community. Examples where identity would be at play included that of one's identity as a father, or protector. One who preps due to personal history would be an individual that references an event that has happened previously, either to themselves or others, and that they perceive to be a short-term eminent threat. Examples of this were those who lost everything in a natural disaster, and who now prep to prevent the vulnerability that they endured during the experience. Similarly, one who preps due to an awareness of a major catastrophic event that is due to repeat itself, were also included in this category.

The second major area of focus is that of the nature of the threat, from the perspective of preppers. In other words, what type of threat do these individuals fear most? This category was broken down into seven ratings: natural disasters, global economic threats, individual economic threats, global physical threats, individual physical threats, global pandemics, and domestic unrest. Perhaps the broadest of the categories, “natural disasters” included anything from floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes, to the not so ordinary example...solar flares. “Global economic threats” were references to the faltering global economy, oil and other types of resource scarcity, or blackouts of the power grid. “Individual economic threats” were references to the loss of a job, corporate downsizing, etc. “Global physical threats” was any reference to potential violence at the international level. This included conventional war, nuclear war, or any reference to foreign terrorism. On the other hand, a reference to domestic terrorism fell in the category of domestic unrest. Similarly, references to protest movements, like the one in Ferguson Missouri or Occupy Wall Street, also fell within this category. “Individual physical threats” although domestic in nature, were a separate category, since the target is not the country as a whole, but rather the individual. Examples of this was instances where one was the victim of a violent crime, such as robbery, rape, or gun violence, and as a result made the decision to become a prepper. Finally, concerns related to disease, such as the Ebola virus, was coded in the “global pandemics” category. In some cases, one observation could have been coded in two separate categories. For example, fears associated with a biological terrorism would be coded as both “global pandemic” and “global physical threat”.

The third major area of study was that of the prepper’s view of the government, which is divided into three categories: positive, negative, or not expressed. References to the government’s inability to function, or to provide security was coded negatively. Similarly,

negative references to President Obama or Congress also fell within this same category. On the other hand, references of praise for the President, Congress, or various government programs was coded positively. Finally, if no mention of the government or government policies were referenced, then the observation will be coded as “not expressed”.

Unfortunately, a purely quantitative approach fails to tease out the many nuances, which serve as driving forces behind the prepper movement. Of particular concern are their views of the US government, and levels of trust that they choose to place in that government. While some of the blog’s posts are very vocal, about the author’s view of the government, others say nothing. This could suggest that distrust or disfavor of the government is not a driving force behind that individual’s choice to prep. However, it is just as likely that in a culture where distrust of the government is perceived to be widespread, these individuals may hesitate to post anti-government comments on a public forum, which could lead to increased scrutiny toward themselves. Furthermore, it is not discernible that when government is a factor, whether these beliefs can be attributed merely to partisan beliefs? In other words, it is unclear whether the prepper would hold a negative view of the government, with equal intensity, if the other party were in office.

The need to clarify how motivating factors, such as culture and one’s personal history work in tandem to motive prepper activity, is another reason that an interview of individual preppers is necessary. As mentioned above, while some of the blog responses are very detailed, others are very short, only a few words in length. While these short answers undoubtedly offer a single reason, which serves as the greatest motivator behind the author’s prepping activity, none of these short responses specifically claim that the reason given is the only reason.

Ultimately, an interview of a small cross-section of the prepper community was necessary to truly tease-out what factors serve as catalyst behind one's decision to begin prepping. Fortunately, there are numerous prepper groups that can be accessed and even joined online, that participants use to exchange knowledge, ideas, and even meet for training seminars. In an effort to interview these individuals, contact was made with the organizers of some of these groups, in the hope that (s)he would help to facilitate further participation from more of the group's members. Such an approach allowed for an increased level of security for the researcher and participants alike. It also lent the researcher a bit of the group organizer's credibility, as (s)he acts as a go-between for the researcher and the participants. Using this method, the goal of this study was to interview 10-15 preppers. To control for regional differences in belief and political influence, efforts were made to ensure some diversity in the social, political, and economic backgrounds of the interview participants.

Once participants agreed to be interviewed, the interviews themselves were conducted in person, via e-mail, or through a format such as Skype. When acceptable for the subject, the conversation was recorded and later transcribed. The interview questions themselves were in a standardized, open-ended format, where the same open-ended questions are asked to all interviewees<sup>15</sup>. This resulted in faster interviews, but also data that was more easily analyzed and compared (Valenzuela and Shrivastava, 2002). Ultimately, the interview consisted of questions meant to address factors such as the participant's view and level of trust in the government. Furthermore, the interview probed how the individual got into prepping, what steps they have taken as a prepper, and what in their eyes is the greatest threat that they currently face.

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<sup>15</sup> A copy of the interview questions is in the Appendix, and is labeled Figure A.2.

## **Chapter Outline**

Chapter two of this study examines the various theoretical approaches through which preppers may be viewed. Chief among these are the theories of Constructivism and Prospect Theory. The literature within the realm of political psychology is also explored, such as that of historical analogies, Groupthink, and individual personality; and how these characteristics affect decision-making. These theories offer insight into not only the reasons why some see security threats where others do not, but also why some take such extreme measures to address these threats. Finally, the literature relating to fear as a motivator for personal behavior is examined.

Chapter three examines prepping as a historical practice, and focuses on the evolution of prepping from the Cold War, and into the present. In so doing, emphasis will be placed on the government's evolving role and standing within the prepping community. For instance, during the Cold War, the US government urged Americans to build bomb shelters in their backyard, and such preparations were made to thwart the advancements of communism and to provide protection from a state-based security threat. Today, security concerns are far less state-based and the US government has a significantly diminished role in urging American prepping habits.

Chapter four focuses on prepping from the government's perspective. To gather information on what steps the government recommends for being prepared in various situations, efforts were made to contact and interview security experts and government officials from agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). With no response from these agencies, the study's data on the government's recommendations relies on Homeland Security websites. As a point of comparison, interviews were conducted with individuals from various security consulting firms who specialize in prepping, in an effort to determine which steps they recommend be taken for these same types of risks. The goal of these interviews was



to ascertain the level of threat posed by each of these security concerns, in the eyes of the US government, as compared to that of preppers. Finally, this chapter discusses prepping conventions and the role they serve in helping preppers prepared for various threats.

In chapters five and six, the findings of the study are presented and discussed. Chapter five focuses on the data from the quantitative portion of the research, that of *The Survivalist Blog*, while chapter six consists of the qualitative portion; that of the prepper interviews. The goal of chapter 5, the content analysis, was to reach a general conclusion about the study's hypotheses, while chapter 6 served to support these conclusions, and to tease out any nuances that might serve to better understand the results of the content analysis, and develop questions for future research.

Finally, chapter seven summarizes the findings of the study and addresses whether or not these findings support the project's hypotheses. Furthermore, this chapter offers insight into possible political approaches for addressing human security concerns. For example, if the findings indicate that a vast number of the study's participants were focused on a small number of security threats, then these are surely areas where the US government could shift its attention by increasing the allocation of resources meant to address these concerns. Finally, this chapter discusses issues or strands that require further study.

## **Summative Remarks**

The United States spends more than any other country in the world on issues of security. Unfortunately, in a world that has grown ever connected, the insecurity of America's security paradigm has left many of its citizens feeling increasingly vulnerable to newly emerging security threats. Unfortunately, as it attempts to address new threats, like terrorism, the United States has relied on a traditional state-on-state approach. As such, the United States is failing to hold up its

end of the social contract. Millions of Americans now live in a state of insecurity and feel the need to take measures into their own hands.

Based on the tenants of Constructivism, Prospect Theory, and political psychology, this study will examine the shift some have made from a traditional national security norm to a prepper security norm. Starting with the assumption that individuals go to extraordinary measures to preserve their current lifestyle once a potential for loss is perceived, as Prospect Theory predicts, this piece is deductive in that it will gather evidence of the factors that lead Americans to begin a prepping lifestyle. Presumably, these will include a norm tipping event, which is required in order for an individual to register their state of vulnerability, along with the necessary cultural, identity, and personality factors that cause individuals to become preppers. For these Americans, prepping becomes not only a rational response, but a personal responsibility.

Given this perceived need to provide for one's own security, it stands to reason that most preppers have little faith in the American government's ability to provide for their best interests and security needs. As such, generally speaking, preppers should be distrustful or even anti-government in their political views. This would be a substantively significant finding, since these individuals, with the stockpiles of weapons and ammo, represent a considerable threat to the legitimacy of the US government.

Finally, the presumed inability of the US government to naturally address the security concerns of preppers suggest that such threats are outside the realm of the individual sovereign state's ability to provide for security. Once again, this would be a significant finding for the field of International Relation, where for too long the sovereign state has dominated the conversation.

Perhaps an era is coming where the desire for security, as it has in the past<sup>16</sup>, will serve as a catalyst for shifting the focus of global politics.

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<sup>16</sup> It is worth mentioning that security has long influenced the nature of sovereignty within the international arena. For example, as some scholars argue (Spruyt, 1994; Barkey, 2008), sovereignty is placed on the entity best able to mobilize and allocate resources. At one point, feudalism was the best means for allocating resources and for the provision of security. It was later replaced by the sovereign state. Unfortunately, some like Stein feel that the state has lost its ability to provide for security, and therefore its role within the international community is in decline (Ferguson et al., 2000). However, as Sterling-Folker (2005) points out, a state's decision to join an international body in no way erodes its sovereignty. Rather, the state is merely redefining its role within the international community, in an effort to enhance its own security.

# Chapter 2

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## Theories of Insecurity and Prepping

*“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.”*

Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Chance for Peace*, 1953

Given at the White House just days after the death of Josef Stalin; President Eisenhower’s comments represent an early effort to end the Cold War military build-up that was already beginning to take shape. Unfortunately, his words fell on deaf ears in both the United States and the Soviet Union, and despite this warning, more than sixty years later Americans are still infatuated with guns and other types of weaponry; often to their own detriment. This was best illustrated on December 14, 2012, when the country was shaken to its core as a lone gunman entered Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut and opened fire. As a result of these actions, twenty young children and six adults lost their lives. Despite the nation-wide outrage and the promptings of the Obama administration, little has been done in the wake of this tragedy to prevent the reoccurrence of such catastrophes. In fact, by October of 2015, 294 mass shootings had been committed in only 274 days (Ingraham, 2015); and 45 of these were in schools (Richinick, 2015).

As alarming as these statistics may be, the majority of Americans remain steadfast in their commitment to gun rights. In a 2015 CNN poll, more than half of all Americans still opposed more-strict gun control laws (Hicap, 2015). Perhaps more shocking is the fact that for

the first time, Americans placed a higher value on protecting the individual's right to own a firearm than they did on controlling which citizens had the privilege of exercising this right (Kohut, 2015). The driving force behind this trend seems to be public perceptions on crime. Despite the fact that overall crime rates are holding at twenty-year lows, the majority of Americans feel that crime rates are on the rise, and as such "spending on residential security has more than doubled since 2001, from \$7 billion to a projected \$16 billion in 2016" (Koppel, 2015, p. 155). Many more Americans now also believe that gun possession best guarantees one's ability to protect themselves and their family. In a 2014 Gallup poll, 63% of those surveyed said that they would feel more safe having a gun in their home<sup>17</sup>. This is significant since this number has more than doubled since the survey was given in 2000 (McCarthy, 2014).

As these statistics illustrate, the likelihood of one's involvement in a mass shooting is increasing every day<sup>18</sup>. Ironically, in the minds of many Americans, the remedy for this problem seems to be more firearms. States such as Arizona, Texas, and Georgia have gone so far as to make it easier for one to open-carry in public establishments, and even school campuses (Sayers and McLaughlin, 2014); arguing that victims are those unable to protect themselves. In the end, the firearm debate has become a chicken and the egg type of argument, in that some assert that guns provide safety, while others see them as a source of danger. For the majority that insist on having the right to own a firearm, it is clear that these individuals, like preppers, have little faith in the security measures taken by their local government officials to provide for their

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<sup>17</sup> Despite this statistic, only 42% of these individuals actually own and keep a gun in their home. This number has remained fairly constant since 2004. In 1993, this number reached a high of 51%, while the low was in 1999 at 34% (McCarthy, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> On six days in September of 2015, there were three different mass shootings in the United States (Ingraham, 2015).

community's general welfare. Instead these individuals resort to gun ownership as a personal insurance policy.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore theories related to individual decision-making under threatening conditions. In other words, this chapter will investigate various explanations for why some Americans go to extreme, and perhaps irrational lengths to insure a personal sense of security<sup>19</sup>. As the focus of this research is on preppers, and the motivations behind their behavior, this piece falls within the realm of human security studies. As such, this chapter will begin with an examination of the literature on human security, and then follow-up with an exploration of the literature related to Constructivism, Prospect Theory, and various other theories of political psychology; as these theories relate to decision-making under stress. Finally, the chapter will conclude with the literature on fear as a motivating factor for personal behavior.

### **Theories of Human Security**

Many scholars, particularly those within the study of human security (Waisova, 2003; McDonald, 2002; Paris, 2001), have argued the insecure nature of the world's current security paradigm; or that based on the nation-state. Paris for example calls for a "broadening and deepening" of security as a concept. Broadening in that our understanding of security should entail more than just traditional military concerns, and deepening in that it should consider the security of individuals and groups, rather than just a narrow focus on state security (2001, p. 97). These works merely serve to echo those originally heard from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in their 1994 *Human Development Report*, which for many is regarded as the "first major statement concerning human security (Paris, 2001, p. 89). In its strong

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<sup>19</sup> Ironically in an extreme effort to insure security, some Texas lawmakers, after the terrorist attacks in Paris, argued that Texas should no longer take-in Syrian refugees. These politicians claimed that it was too dangerous to allow these refugees into Texas since doing so would give these individuals easy access to firearms (Kaufman, 2015). It seems that even in the most pro-gun portions of the country, there are limits to who should have access to firearms.

condemnation of state-based politics, the UNDP argues that issues of security have too long been equated with matters of territorial integrity, when in fact most people feel greater trepidation over concerns pertaining to their job, income, health, the environment, and security from crime<sup>20</sup> (1994, p. 3). The report goes on to explain that there are seven main categories of human security. These include: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (1994, pp. 24-25).

Elaborating on these points, Newman explains that “In its broadest sense, ‘human security’ seeks to place the individual-or people collectively-as the referent of security, rather than, although not necessarily in opposition to, institutions such as territory and state sovereignty” (2001, p. 239). Like the UNDP, Newman asserts that for most individuals, issues of hunger, disease, crime, and domestic violence are of much greater concern than those of the military’s defense of sovereign territory<sup>21</sup>. Such threats are the very concerns that plague most preppers. While the UNDP seeks to assure the seven types of security to those that do not currently enjoy them, preppers fear that while they have them today, this will not always be the case. In essence, they are reacting, perhaps in an extreme manner, to the perception of a future security threat.

It is this extreme reaction to the unknown that make preppers unique. Ultimately the decision to prep is an individual one. As such, the basis of any attempt to investigate the factors that lead to prepping behavior must begin at the individual level of analysis and should include

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<sup>20</sup> Waisova reminds us, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, security was seen as a condition of both the individual and the state. It was not until the Cold War era, a time of bipolar politics, that the focus of security was shifted solely to the nation-state (2003, p. 59).

<sup>21</sup> Keohane and Nye (2000) explain that military security does not always dominate a state’s agenda. Rather, due to the growing rate of economic interdependence other issues can rise to the forefront of a state’s security concerns. As Waisova explains, “A state that may be able to protect its borders militarily may not at the same time be able to protect its national or international markets, just as it may not be able to protect supplies or essential resources” (2003, p. 60).

literature from Constructivism, Prospect Theory, and various aspects of political psychology; particularly the literature that addresses individual decision-making under stress. While for preppers the stress may be more perceived than real, stress associated with loss and with the unknown has long been shown (Houghton, 2008; Levy, 2003; Levy, 1997; Khong, 1992) to affect decision-making. The goal for the next section of this chapter is to lay out the various aspects of this theoretical literature, as it applies to preppers. While much of this work has typically focused on key decision-makers in political power, it too may shed light into the decisions that lead to a prepper lifestyle.

### **Theories of Decision-Making Under Stress**

First coined by Wendt (1992), Constructivism has three main strands of research, which include: that focused on identity construction (Houghton, 2007; Wendt, 1992), that focused on norm construction (Hoffman, 2006; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998), and that focused on speech and rhetoric construction (Jackson, 2006; Onuf, 1989). It is the literature on identity and norm construction that bear the greatest relevance to this study, in that preppers have essentially reconstructed their security norm. Generally speaking, Constructivists argue that, “behavior, interests, and relationships, are socially constructed, and can therefore change” (Newman, 2001), or as Wendt (1992) put it, “anarchy is what states make of it”. In this way, Constructivists (Checkel, 1993; Wendt, 1992) are able to use a norm-based argument to explain an individual or state’s decision to change. A norm is a “standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 891). Perhaps the most cited example of a Constructivist argument is the decision of the Soviet Union to cede the Cold War to the United States, when older theories like Neo-Realism and Neo-Liberalism failed to do so. In essence, the



Soviet Union redefined its relationship with the United States by redefining its identity from enemy to ally.

Similarly, identity shapes the way individuals look at the world. As Houghton (2007) points out, if comparing two identical nuclear weapons, with the same potential for destruction and the same technological components, there would be no difference. However, if one of those weapons is in Tehran and the other in Paris, there is a significant difference in our perception of the two weapons. One is in the hands of an ally, while the other is in the hands of an enemy. The identities of the two states play a crucial role in how individuals view the same nuclear weapon. Likewise, a recent Gallup poll found that 57% of white Americans place a high level of confidence in the police meant to protect them, as compared to only 30% of black Americans (Jones, 2015). Gallup attributes these findings to incidents like those in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland; where race relations are tense and have made national news. Ultimately, the same law enforcement official may have a very different identity in the eyes of white and black Americans.

While the focus of this piece is on individual security, it is worth noting that a state's identity and sense of security can vary greatly from that of its citizens. As Wendt points out, there is the possibility of divergence between a state's reality and those of its citizens, and ultimately, he argues that "states are people too" (1999, p. 215). In other words, the security needs of the state can be detrimental to those of its citizens. An example of this was the build-up of the US nuclear arsenal during the Cold War. As chapter 3 will explain, top-level government officials in 1950's and 60's understood that most of the American public would not survive a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union. Despite this knowledge, policy-makers lied to the public, even releasing propaganda videos to prepare Americans for an attack, so that the nuclear-

policy of the United States could be pursued without too much public resistance<sup>22</sup>. This example is just one instance of how a focus on national security neglects the day-to-day concerns of an individual's security. As such, preppers are forced to reshape their identity from that of a consumer of state provided security, to that of a provider of personal security.

While some may question the level of danger that preppers actually face, Newman argues that ultimately all security threats “are constructed, rather than being natural or inevitable: identity and interest formation derive from the social processes of interaction leading to expectations of costs and benefits attached to different types of behavior” (2001, p. 248). In other words, a threat is not identified as a threat until one perceives it as such. Furthermore, threat perceptions are learned, based on the outcome of one's past experiences. Similarly, one's threat experiences either reinforce or alter the way that individual reacts to the likelihood of future threats, depending on the costs or benefits associated with their previous threat experience outcomes. This would suggest that prepping behavior is learned from the outcome of past security threats; and that preppers do not adhere to traditional security norms because these individuals found the costs of such behavior to be too great.

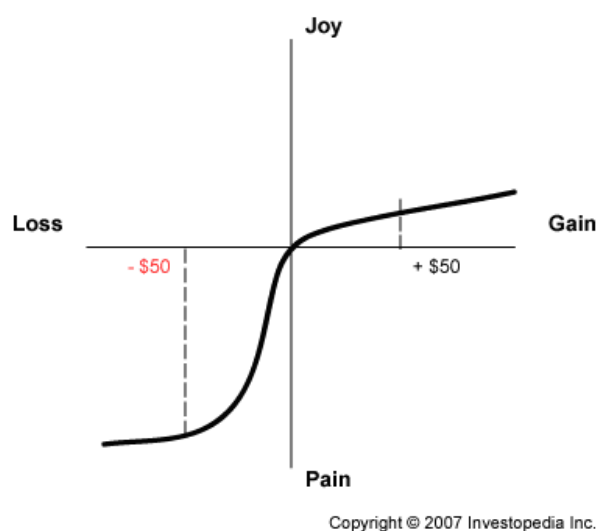
One example of this would be the experiences of those in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Most of the storm's victims, who live on the Gulf of Mexico, had undoubtedly experienced hurricanes before. By the time the magnitude of the storm was realized, and Katrina was labeled the most destructive storm, in terms of cost, in US history, most of the residents of New Orleans found comfort in the knowledge that federal aid would arrive quickly. When it did not, many began to view the national government as incompetent,

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<sup>22</sup> In the aftermath of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, many Americans began to question the wisdom of possessing nuclear weapons; devices capable of wiping out man-kind. The anti-nuclear movement gained further traction after US nuclear tests on and around Bikini Island. Many of the world's foremost nuclear authorities, including Oppenheimer spoke out against nuclear weapons.

incapable, or simply unwilling to help the survivors that consisted largely of minorities. The security norm for these individuals undoubtedly began to change. The consequences of being unprepared were great, as many went without food, water, clothing, and adequate shelter for an extended period of time. On top of the suffering related to basic needs described above, some of the storm's survivors found themselves the victim of rape, looting, and various other crimes. As these events escalated, orders were circulating through the New Orleans police force to take the city back by shooting looters on sight (Shankman et. al., 2012). The deafening silence of the national government's absence would certainly serve as a reference for those who feel that under similar circumstances they would be on their own as they attempted to insure safety and security for themselves, their family, and their property. In the light of such chaos, it is no wonder some have chosen to take steps aimed at limiting their vulnerability and insuring a basic quality of life. These preppers have chosen a prepper's security norm (not relying on assistance from others) in an effort to reduce the potential costs of future security threats.

It is these costs, associated with future security threats that lead to the second line of work that serves as the theoretical foundation for this piece: Prospect Theory. First postulated by



**Figure 2.1: A graphic depiction of Prospect Theory (Phung, 2007).**

Kahneman and Tversky (1979) and grounded in the field of Economics, and more specifically the methodology of Rational Choice, Prospect Theory posits that individuals will tend toward continuing the status quo. This is because decision-makers place a higher emphasis on losses than prospective gains, and will in fact take excessive risks to maintain their current

positions, reputations, and lifestyles to retrieve even minimal losses. Because people undervalue gains, they are often risk-adverse towards such gains. Levy (1997, 2003) points out, risks have to become essentially nonexistent before an individual will pursue perspective gains. As Figure 2.1 illustrates, a gain of \$50 brings significantly little joy, compared to the pain associated with a loss of the same amount.

It is this significant pain tied to loss that leads to the extraordinary measures taken by some to regain that loss. This is best illustrated by the habitual gambler who after losing a large sum of money will continue to wager even greater amounts. In what is known as the “Sunk Cost Fallacy” a gambler who has invested a large amount of money into a slot machine will continue to gamble, with the expectation that the machine has to payout soon (Guide to Gambling Addiction, 2015). In this mindset, walking away before the payout would mean that all of the previous money that had been dropped into the machine was a waste that will very quickly be enjoyed by the next player; even if the payout is only a fraction of what has been lost. In this example, one can see not only the logic (or rationality) behind one’s choice to continue to play, but also how an individual’s losses can be felt far greater than their perspective gains.

An example of Prospect Theory within the field of international Relations is that of Carter’s decision to attempt a hostage rescue mission during the Iranian Hostage Crisis. As McDermott explains, Iran’s decision to take American hostages “was a severe blow to American power, prestige, and credibility on the international scene” (1992, p. 261). When coupled with the United Nation’s unwillingness to support sanctions, and an upcoming Presidential election, Carter not only took action, he chose the most extreme of all available choices. The rescue mission was the riskiest of all available options, in terms of its likely success, as-well-as personnel and material costs (1992, p. 261). However, Carter understood that the large risks

brought with them a large payoff. If successful, the rescue mission would not only bring home the hostages, it would restore American prestige, which had declined in the wake of the Vietnam conflict, and all but insure Carter's re-election. In hindsight, Carter would have been better off had he heeded the advice of his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, to do nothing<sup>23</sup>. But as Prospect Theory predicts, he chose to take extreme risk in an effort to maintain his presidential status, and regain previous levels of American prestige.

Like Carter, preppers fear the loss of the status quo, in terms of their present living conditions. As such, these individuals react to this threat perception by prepping. As in Carter's case, the difference between preppers and other Americans is that they have chosen the most extreme option available to them. Instead of saving money in a checking



**Figure 2.2: A look at a modern-day bunker, complete with flat screen television, a refrigerator, and galley-style eating arrangements. This particular model sleeps four, including a private master bedroom. (Rice 1, 2014)**

account<sup>24</sup> for a rainy day, or in a retirement plan for their future, preppers stockpile food and ammo for an apocalyptic event. As Prospect Theory suggests, preppers place a greater value on the potential loss of their current living conditions, than they place on the measures taken to

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<sup>23</sup> Vance argued that once the Iranian Revolution solidified its foothold within Iran, the American hostages would no longer be necessary, and that at the time the hostage-takers would simply let the hostages go (McDermott, 1992, p. 261). This was proven to be an accurate assessment the day Ronald Reagan was sworn into office.

<sup>24</sup> Some preppers fear that paper money will one day lose its value. As such, these individuals will invest in materials made of gold, or silver coins.

preserve that lifestyle<sup>25</sup>. As such, it then becomes rational to go to extreme measures as one makes preparations for the impending collapse of society; since for many such a catastrophe is not a matter of if, but when.

When lacking adequate information, such as what the future will bring or who will be there to provide help if needed, a decision-



**Figure 2.3: Modern bunkers come equipped with luxuries that include leather sofas and even private shower and toilet facilities. (Rice 2, 2014)**

maker is forced to rely on cognitive shortcuts, such as historical analogies, to help him/her reach a decision. Similar to the work of Constructivists (Newman, 2001) political psychology scholars who study historical analogies (Houghton, 2008; Khong, 1992) have long known that some decision-makers have a tendency to look to the past as they decide how to move forward into the future. For example, as Khong explained, President Johnson used a historical analogy of the Korean War to guide his decisions for Vietnam in 1965. The Korean conflict helped Johnson to see North Vietnam as an aggressor, as had been the case with North Korea, thus justifying military intervention in Vietnam. However, it also led him to believe that if he pushed too hard in Vietnam, Chinese intervention would be a certainty. As such, while investing an ever-growing amount of resources into the conflict in the 1960's, the United States never fully committed itself to winning the war. Certain measures and resources, such as a full invasion of North Vietnam and its allies, or the use of nuclear devices were never potentially on the table.

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<sup>25</sup> Many preppers spend more than a hundred thousand dollars on their preps. In one case, a family in Melbourne, Australia has spent more than \$350,000 on prepping materials; a feat accomplished by taking out a second mortgage (Ellis, 2012).

Like the Korea/Vietnam example above, events such as those of the 9-11 attacks, and the Ebola scare of 2014 could certainly serve as a historical marker for guiding the decisions of preppers. For many, the attacks of 9-11 led to a feeling of vulnerability that had been unknown in their lifetime. For the first time, Americans learned that the continental United States could be hit, and that they were no longer buffered from the affairs and tragedies of the rest of the world. Americans have been reminded of this vulnerability on numerous occasions, like the one in Orlando Florida where a supporter of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) opened fire and fifty Americans<sup>26</sup>, including the shooter, died as a result (Ellis et. al., 2016). Similarly, the recent Ebola scare in the United States reinforced both feelings of vulnerability and incompetence as Americans watched trained medical professionals, who had been supplied with faulty or inappropriate medical equipment, fall prey to the very disease they were trying to treat. While America's doctors and nurses proved capable of handling the limited number of cases that reached the United States, it is certainly understandable for one to wonder whether a more serious and contagious disease, similar to that of the Spanish Flu in 1918, could be contained. Such fears would only multiply as one stops to consider that in a pandemic scenario, with an unknown pathogen and a high rate of mortality, some healthcare providers may choose not to treat patients<sup>27</sup>.

Another factor that influences decision-making is an individual's personality. Scholars such as Birt (1993) and Dyson (2006) have argued that personality is key in the outcome of any decision. For example, Birt argues that the choices made by Josef Stalin, during his rise to

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<sup>26</sup> The Orlando shooting was the deadliest mass shooting in US history until the 2017 Las Vegas mass shooting.

<sup>27</sup> The 1995 Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo did result in the breakdown of professional medical treatment as a number of healthcare workers abandoned their post. Ultimately, 245 of the 317 infected patients died, with 25% of these being healthcare professionals. Those who stayed were stigmatized after the outbreak, as many feared that these individuals could be carriers of the disease. "In some cases, neighbors threw stones at them, while others were chased from their houses" (Kinsman, 2012).

power and then once in control of the Soviet Union, were the result of a paranoid personality that resulted from a childhood of cruelty and abuse. However, it was this paranoid personality that helped him to reach his position of prominence and eventually lead the Soviet Union through one of the most trying periods in the country's history. Similarly, Dyson argues that as Prime Minister, Tony Blair's personality was responsible for the way the British justified their involvement in the Iraq war. Blair's low level of cognitive complexity, or the way he organized his understanding of the world, led to a black or white view of the conflict. As such, Britain's reaction to the threat posed by Saddam Hussein was an all or nothing response that justified military invasion, but ruled out the possibility of a more diplomatic response.

As has been previously stated, personality refers to one's patterns of thinking, feeling, or behaving (American Psychological Association, 2017). Like the examples above, personality may too be a factor that would lead one to begin a prepping lifestyle. As was the case with Stalin a traumatic event early in one's life, where (s)he is left materially lacking and vulnerable, could result in a paranoid personality that would explain one's need to be overly prepared. In other words, Stalin's pattern of thinking led him to believe that others were out to get him. Similarly, a low level of cognitive complexity, resulting in a black or white (all or nothing) view of the world would certainly explain one's decision to take dramatic steps as one prepares for the unknown, such as stockpiling food, weapons and ammo. Finally, as Koppel points out, Americans simply distrust "big brother". He explains that rural Americans especially possess a spirit of independence, "and an inclination to keep the government at arm's length...people will try to solve their own problems before turning to any government agency" (2015, p. 130).

Like personality, cultural factors, such as one's religion, shape their view of the world in a way that could also result in a prepping lifestyle. Christians in particular have long held



patterns of focusing on various apocalyptic scenarios that would lead to the end of the world. Many modern-day televangelists, such as John Hagee, have used the Bible and other references to point out to their followers that the end of the world is almost upon us (Guyatt, 2007). Many Christians believe that in the period prior to Jesus' return, an Antichrist will reign on Earth, and Christians will be persecuted for their beliefs. As such, some are making preparations now for the period of hardship that is soon to come.

One faith that is perhaps best known for prepping behavior, or what it refers to as self-reliance, is that of *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Mormons, LDS). Mormons are urged by the leaders of their church to keep a minimum of at least three months' worth of food stored in their homes at all times (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 2014). Some keep enough food in their homes to sustain themselves and their families for a year or more (Food Storage for One Year, 2006). In the case of Mormons, preparations such as these are culturally based in that they are divinely inspired. As noted above, the leaders of the Church, who according to the faith receive inspiration from God, have instructed members to make such preparations. Failure to act upon such guidance is essentially the same as disregarding instructions from God. Furthermore, the church itself has warehouses stocked with food, milk, generators, tires, fuel, and various types of other supplies. Even more remarkable is the fact that the LDS church has no outside suppliers. It produces all of these goods itself on church-owned property. It is estimated that the church gives away more than \$145 million worth of food and supplies each year for various purposes (Koppel, 2015).

As the Mormon case illustrates, cultural factors such as religion, can have an effect similar to that of Groupthink. This is a psychological phenomenon where decision-makers reach a decision with "extreme concurrence...within a cohesive policy-making group" ('t Hart et al.,

1997, p. 10; Janis, 1972). Individuals who defy the group consensus risk banishment from the group. Similarly, cultural institution such as religions have long been known to “excommunicate” those who act in a way that is contrary to the teachings of the faith. This threat of exclusion serves as a corrective driving force behind the behavior of those within the group who would otherwise deviate. On the other hand, membership within a group that shares a common core consciousness serves as a source of reaffirmation for those who believe.

The effects of Groupthink have been very strongly linked to the 2002 war in Iraq. As Badie (2010) explains, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Groupthink resulted in the escalation of Saddam Hussein from that of a “troubling dictator”, to that of a threat to US national security. While there were those in the administration, such as Colin Powell and George Tenet, who were skeptical of Hussein’s role in the 9/11 attacks, these individuals ultimately conformed to the view of the majority in order to maintain their access to the inner circle of the Bush administration. Tenet in particular had the unique role of gathering reliable intelligence, while staying in lock-step with the views and policies of the President. While decisions made under the effects of Groupthink may not always be the wrong ones, by narrowing one’s view of what is possible, Groupthink frequently results in a poor gathering of information and a bias in the way that information is processed (Badie, 2010, p. 293).

The effects of Groupthink are certainly present within the prepper community as well. As was discussed above, cultural factors such as religion, can drive groupthink. However, with an abundance of web pages, Facebook groups, community clubs, and prepping expos, all preppers are surrounded by people and information that reaffirm their views of the world and the

threats that it faces. While those that do not share these views may not be completely shut out by those who prep, these nonbelievers are easily dismissed as short-sighted or naive<sup>28</sup>.

### **Theories of Fear as a Motivation**

Ultimately, any quest for security is motivated by fear. Certain fears, such as that of heights or snakes, is easily managed by separating one's self from the source of the fear. However, fear of the unknown, like that felt by preppers, is a far greater motivator in that there is no way one can be separated from the source of their fear. The result is a constant state of insecurity. As the section that follows will illustrate, the personal dispositions of Americans today are certainly a considerable source of their fear. Americans are not only unreasonable in their expectations, but irrational in what they view as the greatest dangers. However, government officials and media outlets exacerbate the situation by using fear as a tool to drive their own agendas.

A recent study (Chapman University Survey of American Fears, 2016) found that for the second year in a row, America's greatest fear is government corruption. As Americans geared up for the 2016 presidential election, nearly sixty-one percent of those surveyed said that they were afraid or very afraid of corrupt government officials. This response was twenty percentage points higher than the next closest fear, that of a terrorist attack. Ironically, in its annual survey of corruption, Transparency International (2017, January 25) ranked the United States as the 18<sup>th</sup> least corrupt country in the world out of 176 rankings<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Mutz (2006) argues that Americans have in effect built gated communities around themselves, in that most select only friends and news sources that share their political views. As such, it becomes rare to encounter political views that are contrary to one's own. When such an encounter does occur, the views of those outside the group norm are easily dismissed as an outlier. In essence then, most Americans are essentially trapped in what could be referred to as Groupthink bubbles.

<sup>29</sup> With a score of 90 out of 100, Denmark and New Zealand were at the top of the list for being the least corrupt countries in the world. Somalia was the most corrupt country in the world with a score of 10. The United States was ranked at 18<sup>th</sup> with a score of 74.

As the example above illustrates, many of America's fears simply are not grounded in fact, and individuals are simply unable to accurately evaluate the risks associated with various types of threats. As Harvey points out, Americans are terrified of the possibility of a terrorist attack<sup>30</sup>, but "20 percent of adults still smoke, another 20 percent drive without seatbelts, and 66 percent are overweight", despite the fact that far more die each year from these threats (2008, p. 54). Humans are more afraid of novel risks than they are of those that are well-established. Furthermore, uncontrollable threats are far more scary than those with which there is a perception of control (Harvey, 2008, p. 54-55). Most Americans know that smoking can kill them, but many are less afraid of smoking than of the possibility of a terrorist attack. Similarly, air travel for many, is a far greater fear, due to a lack of control, than automobile travel; despite the fact that flying is statistically safer than driving. In the end then, not all deaths are the same. The 3,000 deaths on 9/11, which were outside the control of the victims from that day's tragic events, were far more traumatic than the tens of thousands of deaths on American highways each year (Harvey, 2008, p. 62).

In an effort to provide a greater sense of security and control for its population, from threats such as terrorism, the solution for the United States has been to throw more money at the problem. Unfortunately, as the amount invested toward providing security increases, so too do public expectations and the subsequent outrage when failures do occur (Harvey, 2008, p. 1-2). Since 2001, the level of spending on security matters has increased, in an effort to prevent the occurrence of terrorist attacks in the future. This spending has undoubtedly closed the security gaps that allowed the attacks of 9/11 to occur. But as Harvey explains, the probability that a

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<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, Americans focus on the probability of an attack on the country, and not on themselves. On 9/11, there was about a one hundred percent chance that the United States would become the victim of a terrorist attack. However, the probability that an individual American would be a victim in that attack was only 0.0000085 percent (Harvey, 2008, p. 63).

terrorist will again attempt to use these gaps in the future is low anyway; as terrorist prefer instead previously unused vulnerabilities.

While there has been only a small number of terrorist attacks aimed at the United States since 9/11, the public's level of trust in the US government's ability to provide security for its citizens has actually declined (Harvey, 2008). "Our sense of security is rarely (if ever) based on how many lives were saved [or the number of terrorist attacks prevented] but rather on how many were lost" (Harvey, 2008, p. 26). Glassner elaborates on this point by stating, "Give us a happy ending and we write a disaster story" (1999, p. xix). In other words, rather than celebrating the fact that thirty thousand lives were saved on 9/11<sup>31</sup>, the American public focused on the three thousand that were lost. Similarly, rather than celebrating the fact that an attack of the magnitude of 9/11 has not been repeated, Americans fixate on smaller incidents like that of the married couple who opened fire at an office party in December of 2015; killing 14 people (CNN Library, 2017, September 10). Because of this tendency to focus on the negative and due to unreasonable expectations set by the American public, because of their ever increasing financial investment in security, the US government is forced to attempt the impossible; absolutely perfect security.

As the discussion above illustrates, Americans tend to focus on and fear certain hot-topic issues like terrorism that may not even be that common. All-the-while, missing the deeper, more significant, problems. One reason for this is that fears are oftentimes shaped. Media outlets, are important in framing the news, so that they can influence not only what Americans think, but how the public thinks about a given topic (Altheide, 2006, p. 420). For example, media outlets

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<sup>31</sup> It is hard to know exactly how many lives were saved that day. If one considers that each tower served as workspace for 20-25 thousand people, and that not all had yet arrived to work, 30,000 occupants is a reasonable estimate.

choose to focus on the threat of the next terrorist attack, rather than the causes of terrorism.

Glassner further illustrates this point by stating, “We still shake our heads over the latest mass shooting while failing to limit access to guns for people who shouldn’t have them” (1999, p. xi).

Similarly, Americans are outraged when a child is kidnapped, but few lift a finger to help the millions who live in poverty or attend crumbling schools.

In the end, “Atypical tragedies grab our attention while widespread problems go unaddressed” (Glassner, 1999, p. xii). As a result, media outlets choose to direct our focus toward these atypical events with two outcomes in mind. First, they drive ratings; and for media, ratings are everything. For this reason, a “media-savvy” advocate can prolong a public scare long after its “rightful expiration date” (Glassner, 1999, p. 177). This hints at the second effect. In an effort to push ratings, media outlets actually encourage a continued state of fear within the minds of the American public. As such, fear becomes a part of “our everyday discourse, even though we enjoy unprecedented levels of health, safety, and life expectancy” (Altheide, 2006, p. 421).

While various forms of media use fear as a tool, so too do government policymakers. As Pain explains, “Fear is the emotion through which public life is administered” (2009, p. 468). Ultimately, the US government uses fear as a political tool to help it achieve political goals (Altheide, 2006, p. 417). As was the case with media, Huysmans (2006) explains that governments too work to frame issues. He elaborates on this point by explaining that the study of security is the study of knowledge and discourse. It is the study of knowledge in that those who have access to information are able to tell the American public of what they should fear. Huysmans elaborates on this point by explaining that in the Hobbesian world, the real threat is not that another man might kill you. Rather, the real threat is not knowing which man is your

friend, and which might be the killer (Huysmans, 2006, p. 54). In this way, not knowing from which direction a threat might come is detrimental, and as such, knowledge is power.

The study of security is the study of discourse in that once new dangers are identified the potential threat must go through a two-step tempering process that will harden it into a legitimate security issue. First, the new threat must be solidified as a legitimate fear in the minds of the American public. As Huysmans explains, “insecurity is not a fact of nature but always requires that it is written and talked into existence” (2006, p. 7). Second a new security threat must get its fair share of resources. Due to finite resources, nation-states are forced to prioritize individual goals according to which outcomes are in need of the greatest attention. To classify an issue as a security threat, one necessarily places that issue at odds with other policy objectives; including other security threats (Huysmans, 2006, p. 3). In this way, security dialogue becomes a conversation of priority. In essence, the conversation becomes one about which security threat is most threatening; therefore, requiring the greatest resources.

With both media outlets and government policymakers using fear as a tool to frame how the American public understands security threats, it is no wonder that so many Americans live in fear<sup>32</sup>. When this is coupled with the fact that many Americans set unreasonable expectations that they expect security providers to meet, and then have a tendency to dwell on government failures to meet these expectation, it is perhaps understandable why some would decide to rely on themselves for personal security by making the decision to prep, and why preppers may hold a negative opinion of their government. As was stated above, government policymakers are faced with a number of security threats, all requiring access to finite resources, in any given

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<sup>32</sup> “Anxiety disorders are the most common psychiatric illnesses affecting children and adults” (Medco, 2011, p. 6).

moment. Any divide between preppers and there government would surely stem from differing views on how these resources should best be deployed.

### **Summative Remarks**

At its core, this study is about norms. Is it normal to build a bunker in one's backyard, to stockpile food and weapons in one's basement, or to go hundreds of thousands in debt doing so? At a minimum, most Americans would say that prepping behavior is extreme, while others are much more critical of the lifestyle. For example, some pointed a finger at Adam Lanza's (the Newtown, CT. shooter) mother who was characterized as a "gun-stockpiling prepper" (I will survive, 2014). There were those that attributed the behavior of her son to her prepping lifestyle. Regardless of the validity of such criticisms, as Constructivists argue, the world is what we make of it, based on the information available to us under stressful conditions. This information is derived from previous historical moments serves as a reference point in similar situations. In addition to this information, the value individuals place on potential losses, identity roles, and on personal cultural factors, such as religion, also serve to influence decision-making.

As the data in chapters five and six will illustrate, a prepper's identity is that of a security provider; for themselves and those they love. This norm is derived from historical and cultural factors that affect the way the prepper sees and interacts with the world, along with the fears and expectations that the individual has for their government. As such, the prospect of loss, leads to one's decision to prep despite the significant costs of such behavior. Once the decision is made to embark on such a course, a Groupthink effect takes hold and one's peers begin to reinforce their behavior; while those outside the new norm are dismissed for their naivety.



# Chapter 3

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## Preparing for Seven Years of Famine, the History of Prepping

*“When I get my shelter finished, I’m going to mount a machine gun at the hatch to keep the neighbors out if the bomb falls...I’m not going to run the risk of not being able to use the shelter I’ve taken the trouble to provide to save my own family”.*

A Chicago Suburbanite, *Time*, 1961

Printed in the midst of the Cold War, the *Time* article “Religion: Gun Thy Neighbor”, which included the quote above, greatly troubled many Americans. Since the conclusion of World War II, the country stood firm in its commitment of fighting communism; even accepting that in doing so, the United States faced the possibility of all out nuclear war. Whereas the prospect of nuclear war made the Soviet Union an enemy to the American public, it was the chance of surviving the war that turned one’s friends and neighbors into a new potential threat. If the need arose, would those who had taken necessary precautions be forced to make the decision of locking-out their friends and neighbors, who were seeking last minute shelter?

Addressing this question of “gunning” one’s neighbor in an effort to protect one’s shelter was not clear-cut. Some theologians argued that the Christian thing to do was to leave one’s shelter so that it may be used by others, while other theologians argued that it was wrong to help one’s neighbor if doing so meant harming those under one’s protection, such as one’s children. Finally, there were the theologians who bluntly stated that the error was in assuming that one could survive a nuclear war (Religion: Gun Thy Neighbor?; 1961).

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the historical developments of the prepper movement from its origins in the Cold War to the present, and will focus primarily on the debates of the American civil defense program, which have always very heavily placed the onus of civilian survival in the hands of private individuals. In other words, the origins of the modern-day prepper movement rest in the Cold War American civil defense policy itself, which heavily encouraged prepper behavior as a means of countering the Soviet threat. As this chapter will explain, as early as the Eisenhower administration, government insiders knew that most Americans would not survive an all-out nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union. The intent of the American civil defense program was not to protect American lives, but to insure the continued legitimacy of American foreign policy; that of mutually assured destruction (MADD). Most within the government elite feared that if the true outcome of a nuclear exchange were known, there would be immediate calls for the destruction of all nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, the constraints of domestic and foreign policy did not allow for the possibility of such steps. Instead the government enacted a policy meant to lead the American public to believe that if proper steps were taken, then one could certainly ride out the effects of a nuclear war; with their family and lifestyle largely intact.

### **The Birth of Prepping: Cold War Political Policy**

Perhaps one of the oldest recorded references to what can be described as prepping is that of the Pharaoh of Egypt, in the Book of Genesis (King James, 1979, p. 63). As the story goes, the Pharaoh had two dreams where seven fat cows and seven healthy ears of corn were devoured by seven lean cows and seven thin ears of corn. Concerned and unable to understand the meaning of these dreams, the Pharaoh turned to a Hebrew servant named Joseph, who was known for his ability to interpret dreams. Joseph warned the Pharaoh that Egypt would

experience seven years of prosperity, followed by seven years of famine. He went on to explain that in order for Egypt to make it through the famine, it must use the time of prosperity to store and save food. Inspired by Joseph's guidance, the Pharaoh placed Joseph in charge of stockpiling food for the approaching famine. Ultimately, the Book of Genesis states that by the seventh year of the famine, many from the surrounding countries came to Egypt to get food. Even some Egyptians themselves were forced to trade their land and livestock for bread. Because of Joseph's efforts to prepare for the coming famine, Egypt survived it and was significantly more powerful, relative to its neighbors, than had been the case prior to the famine.

While it is true that there are numerous instances throughout history when humans have stockpiled materials during periods of prosperity to prepare for times of hardship, prepping as a practice really took hold during the early stages of the Cold War as a response to the nuclear threat posed by the Soviet Union. What makes the Cold War period unique is that although nuclear war is a security issue of national significance, and would have been the result of poor diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and United States, private American citizens were left to fend for themselves when it came to insuring for their personal safety. In other words, during the Cold War the focus of United States security policy was on the state level, at the expense of individuals.

Ultimately, there were three factors that pushed the security policy of the United States away from individual concerns. These were political, economic, and ideological. First, from a political perspective containment was key to the security of the United States. While the policy of containment is typically thought of in terms of limiting the physical boundaries of the Soviet Union itself, a second goal of containment was to prevent the proliferation of nuclear technology. When it became clear in August of 1949 that the United States would no longer enjoy a nuclear

monopoly, and would have to settle for merely limiting the physical and political influence of the Soviet Union, an alliance system began that created a bipolar world divided between NATO and Warsaw Pact countries. As such the US security policy was heavily preoccupied with matters of national and international significance, and not those of the individual.

Economics served as a second factor that resulted in the privatization of individual security during the Cold War. After World War II, all Americans were concerned with issues of economic prosperity<sup>33</sup>, job security, the security of their homes and marriages, and the security of the country<sup>34</sup> (May, 2008). Concerns over war debt, the high rate of inflation, and fear that the country might fall back into a depression, led President Truman and his economic advisors to conclude that the United States could not afford hefty defense spending. Truman quickly realized that the only way for the United States to counter the growing Soviet threat, while maintaining a balanced budget, was through increased reliance on nuclear weapons to back US diplomacy (Oakes, 1994). In other words, the security strategy of the United States was based on nuclear weapons because they were the cheapest option.

With the economic constraints of the United States in mind, there were a number of proposals that originated from the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA), meant to protect the American public from a nuclear attack from the Soviet Union. Perhaps the most basic of these was evacuation, a plan championed by the Civil Defense Director, Val Peterson. The basic premise of this plan was that if given enough warning, the major American targets could be evacuated before the bombs reached their destination. This plan was a favorite during

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<sup>33</sup> Many were worried that the conclusion of World War II would bring with it another depression (May, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> During the initial postwar period, it was unclear whether nuclear technology would serve or destroy humanity (May, 2008).

the Eisenhower administration<sup>35</sup>, in both the executive and legislative branches because it was easy on the purse<sup>36</sup>. However, almost as soon as it was proposed, the plan fell victim to numerous attacks. By 1955, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), in response to its tests on Bikini Island, was forced to admit that nuclear weapons of the era were capable of dispersing radiation over a seven thousand square mile area, thus making any form of evacuation impossible (Rose, 2001; McEnaney, 2000). Unfortunately, other proposals meant to minimize civilian casualties were far too expensive to be taken seriously by Congress. Estimates for a national shelter program, for example, ranged anywhere from \$20-\$150 billion; but those advocating for the program argued that the creation of such shelters were worth the investment. The 1958 Rockefeller Report on international security, for example, argued that a national shelter program that allowed society to withstand an attack, was the best deterrent to a nuclear attack (Rose, 2001).

Ideology was the third factor that resulted in a hands-off approach by the US government with regard to matters of individual security. After the Soviet Union successfully detonated its first atomic weapon, an ongoing struggle erupted between the American public and its government officials over who was responsible for civil defense preparedness. By-in-large, the average American believed that civil defense preparation was the responsibility of the national government who after all, would ultimately decide whether to use nuclear war as a tool of US diplomacy. On the other hand, the country's military leadership and top political figures, such as

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<sup>35</sup> One of the most widely held myths is that Eisenhower supported the development of the federal interstate system as a means of mass evacuation in the case of an impending nuclear attack. While he understood their value as a military asset, the chief purpose of the interstate system was civilian in nature. Contrary to popular belief, there is no law or regulation that requires that one in every five miles of interstate be straight to accommodate landing aircraft (Federal Highway Administration, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> During the 1950's, Congress was never a fan of the FCDA in that it never fully funded the organization. It would eventually take the 1961 Berlin Crisis for the legislative body to allocate meaningful economic resources toward the agency. However, even with such crises, the FCDA only ever received about twenty percent of the funding that had been recommended during the creation of the organization (Rose, 2001).

Robert McNamara (Rose, 2001), pointed their finger back toward the American public, arguing that a state sponsored civil defense program was too communistic. As McEnaney explains, in an effort to avoid looking soft on communism, political decisions were made that actually prevented funds from going toward civil defense programs that were meant to resist communism (2000, p. 7). As such, the American public was left to fend for itself.

In perhaps the best example of disregard for the American public, General Curtis LeMay argued for the hardening of nuclear silo sites, while simultaneously downplaying the need for a civilian shelter program. In a hearing before Congress, the General argued that a hardened silo could withstand attacks from thirty missiles, whereas a traditional silo could be destroyed by only two<sup>37</sup>. In the same hearing, however, LeMay was forced to admit that no preparation had been made to provide shelter for the dependents of those who were serving on military bases around the silos. The expectation was that these individuals would simply evacuate, if time permitted (Rose, 2001).

### **Life During the Nuclear Age**

By 1959, two-thirds of Americans viewed the “possibility of nuclear war as the nation’s most urgent problem” (May, 2008, p. 26; Gallup, 1972). Despite this, over eighty percent of the country was more than willing to wage such a war if the alternative meant living under communism (Rose, 2001). The American public did however demand information on what it needed to do to prepare for such an event<sup>38</sup>. In response to criticism from various local

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<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, the missiles themselves were heavily sheltered. Today, visitors can tour an old silo site, in Tucson, Arizona, which serves as the home of the Titan Missile Museum. At 146 feet deep and with 750-ton blast doors, this underground silo housed a Titan II missile, the largest nuclear warhead ever deployed in the US arsenal. At any given time, these silos were occupied by two men who worked twenty-four-hour shifts. Both men were required to simultaneously turn keys that would launch the weapon, and were drilled frequently to insure that their response would be almost mechanical (Wiener, 1993).

<sup>38</sup> After World War II, postwar “America was the era of the expert” (May, 2008, p. 29). *Look* magazine assured its readers that there was no reason to live in fear of radioactivity. It stated that if the American public was ever faced with such a threat, experts would be there to provide assistance.

government officials that there was little information available on how to plan for civilian defense, the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) had been created by the passage of the Federal Civil Defense Act in 1950 (Rose, 2001). Among its numerous functions the FCDA sought to lay out guidelines to help homemakers<sup>39</sup> be more prepared for the threats of nuclear warfare. Gender roles of the 1950's led planners "to conclude that if welfare was the problem, then women were the solution" (McEnaney, 2000, p. 98). Furthermore, the home, where much of the civil defense planning would occur, was largely considered the realm of women. As such, much of the civil defense training was aimed at women, thus placing much of the burden on women. One of the leading figures in the movement to educate women in their civil defense responsibilities was Jean Wood Fuller who argued that atomic warfare could be waged and survived by simply being prepared. She urged women to develop a set of domestic expertise that included home nursing, teaching children about nuclear survival<sup>40</sup>, knowledge of how to supply a bomb shelter, and the ability to prepare large amounts of food with makeshift utensils<sup>41</sup> (May, 2008).



**Figure 3.1: A Grandma's Pantry propaganda poster. (May, 2008, p. 102; Fuller, 1956)**

<sup>39</sup> Generally speaking, programs to attempt a widespread evacuation of the American public was viewed as impractical and quickly abandoned. As such, the plan for insuring personal security was based on private efforts (May, 2008). It is worth noting that there were some exceptions to the rule. Glendo Wyoming, whose residents voted to purchase a potato cellar that would accommodate the entire town's population of 294, became the first community to offer a shelter for all of its citizens (Rose, 2001).

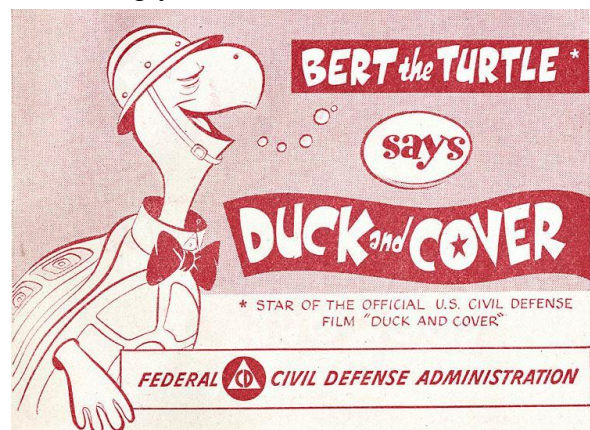
<sup>40</sup> Fuller encouraged mothers to make a game of reacting to a surprise attack, so that children would be well practiced should the need actually arise. She even went so far as to compare civil defense training to religious training (May, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Feeding drills were held so that women could practice these skills. During these drills, cooking was done with bricks, rubble, and other items that might be found lying around after a nuclear attack (May, 2008).

With help from organizations like the National Grocer's Association, Fuller began the "Grandma's Pantry" campaign, which consisted of a list of guidelines and supplies that every household needed to withstand a nuclear attack. The logic behind this campaign rested on the notion that everyone's grandma was always ready for the unexpected. The slogan on the government brochure was: "Grandma's pantry was always ready. She was ready when the preacher came on Sunday or she was ready when the relatives arrived from Nebraska. Grandma's Pantry was ready--Is Your 'Pantry' Ready in Event of Emergency?" (May, 2008; Fuller, 1956). Among the recommended list of supplies were soap, a first aid kit with medical supplies, canned foods, candles, buckets, a flashlight, and a portable radio.

As a result of campaigns like "Grandma's Pantry", the goal of preparedness spread through all walks of society. Farmers were reminded that their assets were among the country's most valuable, and were urged to make preparations accordingly. In some cases, individuals went so far as to build bomb shelters that could house over two hundred cows (Rose, 2001).

School children were taught to "Duck and Cover" in the event of a nuclear attack and drills were held in schools that consisted of each student getting under their desk, so that they would be safe from falling debris. The official video,



**Figure 3.2: Bert the Turtle warns school children that at the first of a bomb that they should "Duck and Cover" (Calonius, 1951).**

produced by the FCDA, even went so far as to claim that a newspaper wrapped around the back of one's neck would offer protection from the effects of a nuclear attack (Mauer and Rizzo, 1951). Finally, private militia groups were even formed to protect the American public. The Minutemen, for example, were a group dedicated to repelling the Soviet invasion that would



inevitably come after a nuclear attack. In 1961, the group claimed a membership of twelve thousand, and went so far as to stockpile medicine, supplies, and ammunition at various spots around the country (Rose, 2001).

### Cold War Bomb Shelters

In 1959, *Life* magazine featured a Florida couple that spent their two-week honeymoon in a bomb shelter. Made of steel and concrete, the 8'x14' shelter was twelve feet underground. With a picture of the couple's supplies laid out in front of them, the article stated that "fallout can be fun" (May, 2008, p. 1; "Their sheltered...", 1959). Similarly, in 1960 a New Jersey family (husband, wife, and three kids) spent two weeks in a fallout shelter to test the effects of such living on the family. While the participants of both studies were able to complete the full two-week period, both complained that the physical environment was very hard to endure<sup>42</sup>. Heat, humidity, and odor were all factors that made the experience less than ideal. Research discovered in later experiments that under such conditions, some participants tended to sleep up to sixteen hours a day. Issues with depression and spatial disorientation<sup>43</sup> were also present (Rose, 2001).



**Figure 3.3: A couple prepares for their honeymoon in a bunker. (May, 2008, p. 1; "Their sheltered...", 1959)**

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<sup>42</sup> The scientist that conducted the New Jersey experiment, with the family of five, placed a microphone in the shelter with the participants. On more than one instance, the researchers were sure that the experiment would have to be prematurely concluded, because the husband and his wife were so intensely fighting (Rose, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Within weeks of the conclusion of one study, one participant was involved in two automobile accidents (Rose, 2001).

Since US economic policy had no room for the construction of public bomb shelters, for most Americans the home shelter represented the peak of personal readiness. During the 1950's, Americans were counseled that in the event of a nuclear exchange, they would need to remain in their bunkers for at least a two-week period. After that amount of time, it



**Figure 3.4: A basement family fallout shelter. (The National Archives, 1957)**

was expected that harmful radioactive particles would have fallen back to the ground and the atmosphere would once again be safe to breathe (May, 2008; Rose, 2001).

In an effort to encourage Americans to build shelters, the FCDA and popular magazines celebrated their multipurpose value, by arguing that a shelter offered extra storage space, as-well-as an ideal spot for children to play. After all, allowing children to play in and around the family bomb shelter served to reinforce in their minds the seriousness and availability of this safety precaution (Cook, 2011; May, 2008). Some, with greater financial means, built bunkers that were entire homes, with a pool and tennis courts. These bunkers were surrounded by decoratively painted concrete that was meant to imitate the outside world. One individual is reported to have liked his bunker so much that he lived in it for four years (Cook, 2011).

In addition to its population, there was concern over America's industrial might. Some argued that vital industries, such as that of steel, should be dispersed throughout the country, so that an attack on a city like Pittsburg would not cripple the country's war-making ability. For obvious reasons, this was an unpopular plan within most industries that feared greater

competition and the loss of a comparative advantage. Rumors did circulate that some companies took steps on their own to construct bomb shelters that would not only serve to house their employees, but that would also allow for the continuation of production; in a time when America's production capabilities would most be needed<sup>44</sup> (Rose, 2001).

In an effort to save money and protect their communities, some local civic leaders turned to schools as a potential point for community shelters, especially since schools tend to mirror population densities. While a number of commercial contractors argued that retrofitting schools to include a public shelter was economically feasible, educators were more than put off by the loss of features that would result from these plans, such as classroom windows, which provided natural light a factor thought to improve classroom learning. One New Mexico town even went so far as to construct its school entirely underground (Rose, 2001).

While the US budget could not support public shelters, it is worth noting that government officials did not mind spending money to insure their own security. Among the most famous bomb shelters was that of the *Greenbrier Hotel* in West Virginia. Built as a retreat for Congress, the shelter was capable of housing the 535 members of the governing body, as-well-as a staff of 565. With a twenty-five-ton blast door, an operating room, an incinerator that was capable of cremating bodies, and a press room for addressing the American public, the facility was meant to insure the continuity of the American political system. Similar facilities were also constructed for the President, and the Pentagon. Furthermore, the Department of Treasury stockpiled a supply of currency, and many banks stored microfiche copies of their records at underground sites; with the goal of ensuring the future of the country's economic system (Rose, 2001).

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<sup>44</sup> By 1958, Sweden had constructed an elaborate network of shelter facilities. One such shelter, was seven stories and capable of housing twenty thousand occupants. Cave factories were also constructed that included windows with painted landscapes on the other side to prevent claustrophobia (Rose, 2001).

By the 1960's, the issue of deterrence, as it relates to bomb shelters, became a hot topic debate. Some argued that a well-protected society, where the majority of citizens would go unscathed from a nuclear attack, served as the best tool of deterrence against such an attack. As such, those with this point of view were strong proponents of public bomb and fallout shelters<sup>45</sup>. On the other hand, some Americans argued that the construction of these shelters would increase the likelihood of nuclear weapons becoming a widely accepted tool of foreign policy, thus increasing the chances of a thermonuclear war. To make matters worse, others argued that shelters would empower Americans with a false sense of security. In what was known as the Maginot Line argument, critics of bomb shelters asserted that as was the case in France in the 1930s, the inhabitants of these structures would overestimate their degree of security. Finally, some proponents feared that the construction of bomb shelters was the beginning of a "garrison state", where society would be dominated by the military (Rose, 2001; McEnaney, 2000).

During the Berlin crisis of 1961, President Kennedy asked and received from Congress an additional \$207 million to fund a civil defense program that would identify and mark space in existing buildings that could be used for shelter during a nuclear attack (Rose, 2001). Ultimately, more than 13,000 apartment buildings and public structures in New York City alone took part in a government stockpiling program, meant to prepare the city for a nuclear attack. Supplies included medical kits (in addition to the basics, these included penicillin and the

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<sup>45</sup> In major cities where there were some public shelters, especially in the South, the issue of race reared its ugly head. Would blacks be allowed to use the same shelters as whites, or would separate facilities need to be constructed? This debate was especially troubling for the black population, who typically found that separate but equal did not usually translate into equal facilities (McEnaney, 2000).

sedative phenobarbital), emergency water drums, crackers, candy, and radiation detectors<sup>46</sup> (McEnaney, 2000; Onishi, 1995).

### Bomb Shelters: A Moral Dilemma

“By 1960, nearly 70 percent of American adults thought that nuclear war was imminent. By 1965, an estimated 200,000 shelters were built--but that’s just an estimate. It’s hard to know exactly, because a permit wasn’t required to build one” (Cook, 2011). As the numbers indicate, only a small percentage of the country’s population actually went to the trouble of constructing a shelter; despite the looming threat of nuclear war. There were three reasons that led most to decide against the construction of such a structure. First, as Rose (2001) points out, shelters were expensive. While it is true that building contractors offered to build in a variety of styles and sizes, which ranged from a simple foxhole all the way to a shelter that included a telephone, toilet and Geiger counter (May, 2008), such projects weighed heavy on the purse<sup>47</sup>; especially when one considers that the final product may never actually get used. It is also worth mentioning that with an increased interest in bomb and fallout shelters, fraudulent contractors began taking advantage of those who sought to purchase these structures. Many, with little experience in the construction of bomb shelters, were suddenly mass producing an inferior product at cut-rate prices. In one instance, a Detroit contractor constructed eighteen shelters, and all of them leaked when it rained (Rose, 2001).

The second reason that many Americans opted not to build a bomb shelter during the Cold War period was their limited utility. As was noted above, while the FCDA and others

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<sup>46</sup> In 1995 the superintendent of a New York City apartment building found more than a hundred nuclear survival kits in his building’s basement. Typically, these kits were collected by the federal government as the threat of nuclear war lessened, and later distributed to developing countries. Somehow, those in this building were forgotten by not only the government, but also the building’s tenants (McEnaney, 2000; Onishi, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> The bomb shelters that included all the amenities, such as a phone and toilet cost about \$5000. When converted to 2017 dollars, such an amount would equate to over \$50,000.

promoted their functionality, family shelters offered only a limited amount of security. For example, as some critics pointed out, bunkers offer little protection from the threat of a firestorm. In the 1943 bombings of Hamburg Germany, a firestorm was initiated when the bomb blasts created a low-pressure area that was then flooded with oxygen; resulting in wind speeds in excess of 150 miles per hour, and temperatures of 1400 degrees Fahrenheit. Under such conditions, those able to reach their shelters died of “heat stroke, dehydration, and carbon monoxide poisoning as the storm sucked all oxygen out of the air” (Rose, 2001). Physicists have determined that the fifteen kiloton bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima created a firestorm that was over a mile in diameter. However, larger bombs, like those in the twenty to fifty megaton range could potentially create a firestorm with a diameter of one hundred miles or more (Rose, 2001). Furthermore, the protection that was provided by the structure is based on the assumption that one either has some warning of an impending attack, or that he/she is near enough to their shelter that they can rapidly seal themselves in it when an attack occurs.

Finally, when confronted with the notion of what life would be like after a nuclear attack and the accompanying decisions that would have to be made, most people were uncomfortable with these types of choices (Rose, 2001). In other words, one must consider whether they would allow their neighbors, who had not bothered to prepare, admittance into their shelter. Such questions were important, since it would be necessary to keep out radioactive fallout, and also to prevent the maximum capacity of a shelter from being exceeded. Some went so far as to devise a special knock for family members, so a determination could be made about when it was appropriate to open the shelter door. Similarly, would it be okay to steal from a friend or neighbor in an effort to ensure the safety of one’s own family?

Furthermore, after that two-week period, most would have to move above ground because their food and water supply would be depleted. What awaited those who survived was perhaps far worse than the initial attack. All domesticated animals and plant life would be dead. The seeds from the plants would likely be sterile, and erosion would be a significant problem since most of the trees would have been leveled by the nuclear blast. Furthermore, it was argued that if the Soviets were really motivated, the discipline to hold in reserve a small arsenal of nuclear weapons, which would be deployed about two weeks after the initial attack, would essential annihilate the remaining civilian population (Rose, 2001). When confronted with these types of dilemma, many decided that such circumstances were no way to live and opted to proceed without a family bomb shelter.

### **The Reagan Years**

Throughout the late sixties and seventies, perhaps due to the near catastrophic consequences of the Berlin and Cuban Missile Crises, the United States and the Soviet Union seemed less poised for nuclear war. The two superpowers even agreed to a series of treaties (SALT I and II) meant to limit the nuclear arsenals of the two powers. However, with the election of Ronald Reagan in the 1980's, there was a dramatic shift in the foreign policy of the United States. Once again, nuclear war became a real possibility, as scholars such as Huntington (1982) declared that the United States would go to war in the 1980's; and the conversations from the 1960's about a national civil defense program renewed its relevance in the American political landscape.

However, as had been the case in the 1960's talk was cheap, but action was a different story. Congress proved more than willing to fund Reagan's arms race, but resisted efforts to increase civil defense funding. By the end of the Cold War, the two nations would possess at

least 40,000 warheads (Rose, 2001, p. 217), while government agencies such as the federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the modern-day replacement of the FCDA, downplayed the effects of a nuclear conflict. This tide shifted somewhat with the 1983 movie, *The Day After* (Papazian & Meyer, 1983), and with the development of the theory of nuclear winter; the idea that the sun's rays could actually be blocked out by the dust cloud from a nuclear war. Suddenly, the prospect of surviving a nuclear conflict did not seem so realistic.

The 1980's also saw a growth in reactionary trends that resulted from the increased threat intensity of the decade. In contrast to the general attitude of the American public during the Cold War, some Americans adopted a survivalist mentality. There was a small renewal in the private shelter industry, and publications like *Survive* magazine were also born in this era. On the other hand, the 1980's also saw the birth of the *Nuclear Freeze* movement. These individuals sought an immediate halt of the testing, production, and



Figure 3.5: A 1982 Nuclear Freeze rally in New York (Meisel, 2015).

proliferation of nuclear weapons. While gaining a great deal of initial support, the group ultimately “collapse[d] under the weight of Reagan’s overwhelming victory in the 1984 elections” (Rose, 2001, p. 222).

By 1985, FEMA had given up on its efforts to provide a viable civil defense plan for the American public. At this point, Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), or *Star Wars* program was well under way. The goal of this massive defense project was to destroy inbound Soviet missiles before they ever reach American soil. By 1989, with the end of the Cold War,



the inoperative SDI program was cancelled, in favor of the 1991 START I treaty. As had been the case in the 1970's, the diplomats would once again get their chance to keep the world from the brink of destruction (Rose, 2001).

## Contemporary Times

With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the American public was far less concerned about the possibility of a nuclear war than once was the case. However, it was already becoming clear that the next great threat would be that posed by international terrorism. In 1999, as FEMA continued to lessen its interest in traditional civil defense planning and focus primarily on natural disaster planning, \$158 million was given to twenty-seven local municipalities around the country for the purpose of stockpiling civil defense gear. San Francisco used its portion of the money to buy decontamination suits, vaccines and antidotes to nerve agents, and a thousand body bags. These preparations were made in response to attacks such as that of Aum Shinri Kyo cult in Japan, who released Sarin in the Tokyo subway (Sabin, 1999, February 26).

The next great event that really stirred the American public was the Y2K (year two thousand) scare, where millions of Americans stocked up on food, ammo, and other supplies out of fear of what effect the year 2000 might have on the world's computer systems. After all, it was not known how computers would interpret the change from ninety-nine to double-zero. Would they read this as 1900



**Figure 3.6:** The January 18, 1999 cover of “Time”, as Americans prepared for Y2K (Rothman, 2014).

instead of 2000? Would power plants and banking systems continue to operate as normal? Fears over these issues resuscitated the survival movements of the 1980's, as many Americans grew weary at the realization of how vulnerable the country had gotten due to its computer dependence. Since the government had little to do in addressing this issue, and for many appeared to be just as vulnerable as the civilian population, many Americans once again relied on their own means to insure their safety. The greatest concerns seemed to be over access to food, power, and fuel. Large numbers of Americans purchased a year's supply of food, a stockpile of fuel, and home generators. In the prepping community, Y2K was an extremely significant event in that it served for many as the catalyst that initiated an interest in prepping as a lifestyle. Fortunately, it was a date that came and went, and as such, many who stockpiled food and other supplies later threw them away (Amerian Preppers Network, 2014). In other words, Y2K introduced many to the prepping community, but this occasion alone was not significant enough to serve as a norm tipping event that would change the lifestyles of those who experienced it.

By the year 2001, attention shifted away from computers and back toward the fear of terrorism. In the wake of the 9-11 attacks, when President George W. Bush declared war on terror, he did not ask Americans to sacrifice as Roosevelt had during World War II. Rather, Bush, like Nixon, celebrated the American way of life and urged Americans to resume their normal lifestyle (May, 2008). In an effort to achieve a bit of normality, many Americans turned to personal and family relationships for comfort<sup>48</sup>. Even Putnam, who in *Bowling Alone* (2000), noted the decline in the number of Americans who participate in civic and community events

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<sup>48</sup> After the terrorist attacks, newspapers reported unusually high numbers of “quickly-kindled romances and post-disaster intimacy”. In Denver, for example, the number of requests for marriage licenses went up almost fifteen percent (May, 2008, p. 227).

outside of their home, found that after September 11, 2001, “Almost instantly, we rediscovered our friends, our neighbors, our public institutions, and our shared fate” (May, 2008, p. 227; Putnam, 2002, p. 20).

As had been the case during the Cold War, efforts were made by the government to deliver a false sense of security to the American public. Whereas families during the Cold War were urged to build and stock a personal fallout shelter, and children were taught to “duck and cover” to protect themselves from nuclear war, after the attacks of September 11, steps were also taken that offered an illusion of safety “but no real protection”. The most obvious example of this were the increased security measures in the nation’s airports that have led to longer lines and random security checks, but still offered no guarantee of flight safety (May, 2008). Ultimately, the minds of most Americans were not put at ease as a result of the government’s increased safety measures. In the post 9-11 world, thousands of Americans immediately took steps to secure themselves, as they purchased personal weapons. In the six months after the attacks, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) “conducted 455,000 more background checks for gun purchases than in the same period of the previous year. The FBI also handled 130,000 more applications to carry concealed weapons” (May, 2008, p. 228).

The attacks of 9-11, coupled with those in London and Madrid, rekindled many online discussions of self-reliance and emergency preparedness. As disasters like Hurricane Katrina and the earthquakes and tsunamis in Indonesia, Haiti, Chile, and Japan all illustrated the inability of national governments to truly insure the safety of their populations, interest in prepping continued to build in momentum. Whereas Y2K was a single event that sparked an interest in prepping, those now interested and engaged in prepping were doing so without a specific date or event in mind.

As was discussed in chapter one, 2012 has been referred to by some as the “year of the prepper”, when estimates suggested that millions of Americans were actively engaged in a prepping lifestyle. Much of this was fueled by the large number of shows on the topic, such as *Doomsday Preppers* (Madison, Cromley, & Sharp, 2012), but also by the hype surrounding the Mayan Apocalypse. It was during this period that attendance levels for preppers conventions skyrocketed. It is worth noting that most who attended these preppers conventions were not the marginalized survivalists that preceded them. While there were certainly extremists, as is the case with any group, the average audience of a prepping convention was that of the 40-75 years-old group, most of which possessed college degrees<sup>49</sup>; and while there were booths with firearms and various weapon accessories, many among this group were dismissive toward guns and the culture that surrounded them. Furthermore, many did not even like the label of “prepper” and the stigma that went with it, but instead preferred the title of someone who seeks to live a lifestyle of “sustainable living”, and these individuals seek the knowledge to be able to do that. At its core, modern prepping is not just about stockpiling weapons and bullets, and waiting for the end of the world. Instead, it is also about acquiring skills that allow for a higher level of self-sufficiency (Morris, 2013).

In the prepping world, 2012 was also significant in that the national government once again made a significant policy decision that in the eyes of many boosted the security of the national government, at the expense of the individual. President Obama outraged many when he signed Executive Order 13603 on “National Defense Resources Preparedness”. This act essentially gives the executive the authority to take a very wide range of steps to procure any resources deemed necessary for the national security of the country, including all forms of

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<sup>49</sup> Eighty percent of those who typically attend a “prepping convention” have a college degree, while twenty percent of attendees have advanced degrees (Morris, 2013).

energy, forms of civil transportation, commodities and products that can be ingested either by humans or animals, all usable water and its sources, health resources, and forced labor (Powell, 2012; The White House, 2012). While there were the usual outcries over “big brother’s” extensive reach, preppers felt especially threatened by this act. In their eyes, no amount of preparedness would ever be enough if the national government could simply seize their stockpiles as it sees fit. News of this executive order immediately became, and remains, a major topic of discussion for all of the online prepper forums, with the general consensus being that the best way to move forward is with even greater secrecy. In other words, preppers were advising one another to take steps to insure that no one, including friends and neighbors, but especially the government, knew where their stockpile was located or of what it consisted (Last Minute Survival, 2015).

Since 2012, the level of attention on preppers as a subculture has waned a bit. However, current world events, such as the 2014 Ebola outbreak, continue to provide fuel for the movement. With 38 percent claiming that they believed that a member of their family would be affected by the disease, many Americans took precautions by purchasing basic prepping kits; with some even spending thousands on gas masks for their family (Strochlic, 2014). On the other hand, as discussed in chapter two, 2015 was the year of mass shootings. In some ways reminiscent of the old West, this trend resulted in large numbers of Americans choosing to purchase and carry concealed firearms of their own; especially in certain regions of the country like the South. Most recently, the presidency of Donald Trump has served as a catalyst for prepping activity. A growing number of Americans, including the more affluent, are interested in being prepared for the possibility of nuclear war with North Korea or Russia (Williams, 2017,

September 23). As such, bunker sales have increased four hundred percent since the beginning of the Trump administration (Fleck, 2017).

### **Summative Remarks**

By 1961, at the height of Cold War tensions, America's society felt that nuclear war was eminent, and most were considering what preparations might be necessary for the impending war. These personal calculations were out of necessity given that for political, economic, and ideological reasons, US government officials had deemed public bomb shelters too expensive to be practical. These determinations were made as national government officials were spending huge sums of money to first fortify and insure the safety of the bombs themselves, and second in constructing heavily fortified bunkers for top government officials and their families.

Ultimately, the American public became the victims of an elaborate lie, as it was led to believe that survival of a nuclear war was possible if one is properly prepared. All of this was done to prevent a public backlash against nuclear weapons, and to insure the continued public support of the MAD security strategy.

Ironically, in such conditions, only a very small percentage of the country's citizens actually took measures, such as constructing a bomb shelter that would offer protection from a Soviet attack. In a period when there was widespread government urging for the construction of shelters, and in a period when events such as the Berlin Crisis and Cuban Missile Crisis made the threat of nuclear war very real, most Americans chose to take their chances. For moral, economic, and practical reasons, only about one half of a percent of the US population constructed these structures (Rose, 2001, p. 187). As one Boston minister put it, "To some extent we are all part of this retreat from reality, and a degree of it is essential to our ability to

rise up in the morning and go about our normal duties” (Rose, 2001, p. 212; Brelis, 1962, p. 182).

Today, the government “is no longer taking a lead role in encouraging preparedness. For some, this leaves a vacuum of reassurance, and plenty to worry about” (Williams, 2008). With the conclusion of the Cold War, FEMA no longer encourages the construction of shelters for nuclear purposes. The organization’s discussion of these structures is more geared toward weather hazards such as tornados and hurricanes (Rose, 2001). Similarly, the Department of Homeland Security merely encourages Americans to “stock up on plastic sheeting and duct tape to seal windows in case of biological or chemical attacks” (Williams, 2008), and government officials now recommend having seventy-two hour kits for each family member in a home for emergency purposes. The assumption is that after seventy-two hours outside assistance should be available.

Despite the very low threat of nuclear war, and the random nature of terrorist attacks, many Americans today seem as fearful as ever, and are making the decision to act upon this fear; even more so than in the Cold War period<sup>50</sup>. Attendance at prepper conventions, those now purchasing and carrying firearms, and the number who are purchasing or learning to can one-year supplies of food are higher than ever. Millions of Americans are also now building underground bunkers, with a level of luxury previously unknown. For example, an unnamed individual in Colorado spent more than eight million on his bunker. With more than fifteen thousand square feet, this bunker was equipped with access elevators, a basketball court and

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<sup>50</sup> As was previously discussed, very few Americans during the Cold War period actually went to the trouble of constructing bomb shelters. However, the bomb shelter industry has thrived since the election of Donald Trump. Apparently, there has been a growing fear of a nuclear exchange with Russia or North Korea. As a result, bunker sales are up 400% since his election to the presidency. One company, whose bunkers cost an average of \$200,000, confirmed that it is now building around twelve bunkers a year (Fleck, 2017).

gym, an airplane hangar capable of accommodating two Cessna planes (there are camouflaged doors on the side of a mountain for take-off and landing purposes), and twenty-two other rooms (Nye, 2013). Similarly, private firms, such as Vivos, are now purchasing old Cold War underground government complexes and converting them into prepper communities. Renamed *Europa One*, their 76-acre bunker in the heart of Europe, for “high net worth individuals, their families, and most precious assets”, offers protection for up to several years (The Vivos Group, 2015).

In the Bible, the Pharaoh had the advantage of a dream to inform him not only on how long he had to prepare for an impending crisis, but also on how long that crisis would be when it arrived. Preppers today do not have that advantage. While millions of Americans are prepping, none of them know what the next catastrophe might will be, or when it will occur. With the possibility of the next great scare just around the corner, many Americans today are taking steps to be more prepared than in any previous generation.



# Chapter 4

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## A Word from the Experts

*A woodsman was once asked, "What would you do if you had just five minutes to chop down a tree?" He answered, "I would spend the first two and a half minutes sharpening my axe."<sup>51</sup>*

C.R. Jaccard, *Farm Foundation*, 1956

As the quote above suggest, preparation is at least half the battle as one sets out to meet any challenge. Similarly, in his fable of the grasshopper and the ant, Aesop reminds his audience that a wise ant will spend half the year preparing for winter so it will not experience hunger like the foolish grasshopper. However, the advantage enjoyed by both the woodsman and the grasshopper was that they knew in advance for what to prepare. As such, the preparations made by each were appropriate for the challenges that they faced. Had the woodsman stockpiled food, he certainly would not have been prepared for cutting down a tree. Likewise had the grasshopper spent the summer sharpening an axe it would certainly not have been prepared for the hunger that winter brought.

The challenge that preppers face is that they are forced to prepare without any actual knowledge of what hurdles might be placed in their path. In other words, preppers are forced to rely on a combination of personal instinct, past experiences, and personal perception as they attempt to prepare for what they foresee as potential threats to their current lifestyle. Those who

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<sup>51</sup> Although this quote is frequently cited to President Abraham Lincoln, there is little evidence that suggest that he ever actually said it.

find themselves a victim of a TEOTWAWKI type event usually are not warned in advance that they are going to lose their job and source of income, or that their house will be destroyed by natural disaster tomorrow. Similarly, most preppers are not able to predict when the next global financial collapse might occur, or when the next pandemic might decimate the world's population.

It is fear of the unknown that can leave many paralyzed, unsure how to move forward. Fortunately, for individuals seeking guidance as they begin to prepare for the unexpected, there are those willing to help. One potential resource is the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), a department within Homeland Security that has been charged with the task of insuring that the country is ready for the potential emergencies that it may face. As it carries out this responsibility, FEMA offers first responders, state and local officials, and the American public a wide range of resources and training experiences meant to facilitate greater preparedness for various emergency scenarios. On the other hand, for those seeking more personalized advice, or who perhaps distrust government agencies like FEMA, there are a growing number of security consultants who specialize in emergency preparedness, and who make a living advising others on how to prepare for the threats that they may face.

The aim of this chapter is to serve as a touchstone for those seeking to be prepared for the threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As chapter three explained, American Civil Defense experts once urged Americans to build bomb shelters with at least a two-week supply of food, in the event of nuclear war. However, today's threats are not the same as those of the Cold War era. While it is true that all crises offer unique challenges, the goal of a prepper is to be ready for any obstacle (s)he may face. In this spirit, this chapter will begin with a discussion of the federal government's general recommendations for emergency preparedness. It will then explore the

prepping industry itself, and present advice that has been offered by private security experts from within the industry for general emergency preparedness. Ultimately, the goal of combining the recommendations of the federal government with those of private security professionals is to draw well-rounded conclusions about what the ideal prepper should be doing as (s)he prepares for the unknown.

### **The Federal Government: Don't Call Us, We'll Call You**

Government bureaucracy, at all levels, has long been the recipient of criticism for its inefficiency and inability to adequately meet the needs of those whom it is supposed to serve. Most Americans have undoubtedly complained at some point about the countless hours spent in long lines at their local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office. However, the government agency that has perhaps received the most criticism, especially in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, has been FEMA<sup>52</sup>. As chapter three explained, since their creation in the 1950's, civil defense organizations like FEMA have always been underfunded. This is apparent when one considers that for a mere seven hundred billion dollars, the United States government could feed the entire American population for one year (Koppel, 2015). In other words, for a relatively insignificant amount of money, Congress could insure that the most basic needs of its population, access to food and potable water, are met for an entire year should the need arise. However, Congress has taken no such steps. Instead, it seems more interested in spending on hefty defense technologies that are more in line with traditional notions of security. In the aftermath of Katrina, Americans witnessed firsthand the effects of a meagerly funded and poorly managed FEMA, as conditions in the city of New Orleans deteriorated without any apparent aid from the government agency or the Bush administration. Shockingly, when policemen, firefighters, and

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<sup>52</sup> Within some prepping circles, FEMA has also come to stand for "Foolishly Expecting Meaningful Aid" (Osnos, 2017).

EMS crews from outside the area did try to help, they were first sent to Atlanta for a two-day training session on issues such as sexual harassment and the history of FEMA (Bluestein, 2005).

With more than a decade having passed since FEMA's absolute failure in addressing the needs of the citizens of New Orleans, one would expect that the agency took steps to streamline overall efficiency, as to better meet the needs of the American public. However, as Ted Koppel pointed out in his 2015 book *Lights Out*, when efforts were made to reach FEMA as he was conducting research for the book on the declining infrastructure of America's power grid, his research assistant was repeatedly passed around the agency's switchboard, before finally getting to a recorded message prompting her to leave contact information (Koppel, 2015, pp. 134-135). Ultimately, while Koppel did speak to various representatives from Homeland Security, he apparently never was able to speak with anyone from FEMA.

Similarly, as the research for this piece was being conducted, numerous efforts were made to speak with representatives from FEMA, in an effort to discuss the federal government's recommendation for private Americans seeking to live in a state of preparedness. In every attempt the experience of this researcher mirrored those of Koppel. The switchboard operator connected the researcher to various departments including the Individual Community Preparedness Division (ICPD), and also FEMA's Department of External Affairs. After several transfers, the researcher eventually reached a voice mailbox, where information was left for a return call. On no occasion was the researcher ever routed to the same person, or to the same voice mailbox. Unfortunately, FEMA never responded to any of these messages.

The Department of Homeland Security attempts to make up for its subsidiary's (FEMA) shortcomings in public relations with the resources that it provides on its website<sup>53</sup>. Included on

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<sup>53</sup> Efforts to speak with someone with Homeland Security about emergency preparedness resulted in the researcher getting transferred to back to FEMA.

the Homeland Security website, one can find information on how to best prepare for a broad range of specific events, including a biological or chemical attack, natural disasters, a nuclear attack, or a pandemic. For general preparedness, Homeland Security and also the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that every American have a 72-hour kit available that can sustain them until help from emergency personnel can arrive (Build a Kit, 2016; Kempner, 2016). Homeland Security even provides a checklist of items that one should include in such a kit. These include food, water, first aid supplies, a flashlight with batteries, a whistle, and various other supplies. The list does remind those interested to remember to include baby and pet foods as needed, as-well-as any medicines that one regularly uses.

Perhaps more important than the 72-hour kit, the Department of Homeland Security urges American families to plan in advance what steps will be taken should families be separated when emergencies occur. It encourages families to plan for emergencies by considering the following questions: Where will family members go for safety? How will they get in contact with one another? And ultimately, how will family members get back together?

Finally, the Department of Homeland security offers a wide range of training and resources to help local civic leaders and first responders better prepare for unexpected emergencies. The agency also professes to conduct various exercises meant to measure its preparedness effectiveness, but does not openly offer the findings of these exercises on its website, as doing so would certainly be a threat to national security.

The government's role and policies for civilian preparedness have evolved greatly since the Cold War. Where agencies such as the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) were once in place for the sole purpose of educating Americans on what they needed to do to prepare, today's counterparts (agencies such as FEMA) are far less available for the American civilian

population. Similarly, while the FCDA once encouraged Americans to build bomb shelters as preparation for nuclear war, government recommendations today are rather meager by comparison. Apparently, one is sufficiently prepared if (s)he can survive for 72 hours on their own, without government assistance. Despite historical evidence to the contrary, like that of Hurricane Katrina, the federal government expects the American population to trust that within 72 hours it will be there to help. Ultimately, the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA, and the CDC have a very different view of preparedness than that of the average prepper, who tend to look far beyond a 72-hour window.

### **Private Security Professionals: “Skills Trump Stuff”**

Whereas the Department of Homeland security offers detailed information on how to prepare for specific emergency scenarios on its website, prepping experts argue that it is a mistake to “focus too narrowly on just one...concern” (Hunt, 2014, Loc 30). Rather, as they explain, a general understanding of the requirements for survival are as equally applicable in any emergency scenario. Ultimately, a well-rounded approach to prepping is the best course of action. “If one is reasonably well prepared for, say, a pandemic then they are likely pretty well set for most potential long-term scenarios, let alone the more minor, every day sorts of events like a temporary power outage” (Prepping Expert, 2016)<sup>54</sup>. One of the most commonly cited pieces of advice is the “Rule of Three”, which in essence states that a person can live about three minutes without oxygen, three hours without some form of warmth or shelter, three days without

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<sup>54</sup> For the purposes of this piece, the identity of the prepping security expert that agreed to participate in an interview with the researcher will remain confidential, and will be referred to as “Prepping Expert” when referenced. While attempts were made to reach several prepping experts, others declined out of fear that their participation in this study could adversely affect their business. Apparently, preppers are uncomfortable with those who have detailed knowledge of their preparations sitting for interviews with outsiders. Fortunately, many of the more well-known prepping experts have written books where they freely voice their opinions and thoughts.

water, and three weeks without food (Hunt, 2014, Loc 913). If one understands these needs, and their priority, then one can effectively prepare for any scenario.

Unfortunately, from the perspective of some prepping experts, the greatest threat that the United States faces today is the “dumbing down of society” (Prepping Expert, 2016). Many Americans are unaware of their most basic survival needs. To remedy this crisis, an entire industry centered around prepping has emerged that includes prepping convention and seminars, blogs, instructional videos, and even web-based computer applications; such as the one by *Ready Nutrition* that helps preppers calculate how much food one should stockpile based on the size and characteristics of their family (Ready Nutrition, 2017). As one observer noted, education is “the lifeblood of the industry” (Stec, 2017).

As one seeks such knowledge, there are many eager to assist. In an effort to capitalize on what some see as the latest fad, many are claiming to be experts, and are using prepping television shows, conventions, and blogs, to disseminate information for a fee. Unfortunately, the material being taught is not always good information, and “bad information in the prepping world could lead to significant injury, or even death” (Prepping Expert, 2016).

Ultimately, effective prepping is about educating one’s self. This means learning the skills required for preserving foods, to purify water, or to build a shelter. This also means doing one’s homework as (s)he turns to a prepping “expert” for advice. How long has the individual been an instructor? What is their background, or the source of their expertise? What is their reputation within the prepping community? These are questions that can be answered fairly quickly with a Google search (Prepping Expert, 2016).

Prepping is a multibillion dollar industry (Ogg, 2013), and dedicated preppers seek far more than mere educational materials. These individuals spend thousands of dollars stockpiling

food (a six-month supply of food, for a single person, from a prepping supply shop cost in excess of \$3,000), with the expectation that it will last for decades. However, this price does not include a water filtration system that one would also need, especially since most of the food will need to be rehydrated, which is at least another \$350 (Kempner, 2016). Furthermore, as Hunt (2014) points out, if one is not careful food such as that in a typical prepacked prepping kit can lead to problems such as palate fatigue<sup>55</sup>, decreased morale, or even vitamin deficiency. Instead, he argues that one should learn to preserve and stockpile the foods that they already eat, and know that they enjoy.

In addition to food and water, clothing can also be a significant expense. Military grade clothing and boots are easily obtained, but can also be costly. At over \$2,000, a hazardous materials (hazmat) suit, and gas mask, “can cost as much as an Armani suit...[and] are considered essential by many preppers” (Ogg, 2013). Furthermore, once a prepper has begun to assemble their stockpile, and gear, it is important that (s)he is able to protect it. Thousands will be spent on weapons, and ammunition. “Some [prepping] families have in excess of 10,000 rounds of ammunition” (Ogg, 2013). Others will have web-monitored surveillance applications, so that they can monitor their stockpile at any time and from anywhere.

The quality of one’s gear is also a vital component of their survival. As is the case with the number of prepping “experts”, there has been a dramatic upswing in the number of companies that are producing products geared toward preppers. Unfortunately, an increasing number of these items are low-quality, and are being marketed toward unknowing preppers at extraordinary prices (Prepping Expert, 2016). It is always a good idea to seek reviews on prepping gear and supplies, not only from sources like Amazon, but from those who have

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<sup>55</sup> Palate Fatigue is when “the same food is offered repeatedly to an individual...[and (s)he] develops revulsion to the food, preferring not to eat” (Hunt, 2014, Loc 538).



professed to use them. Preppers should always test new items, before they are actually needed during a crisis situation, to insure that these items function properly. As such, more and more You Tube videos are appearing, where preppers are offering reviews of their equipment. This is a great way to educate one's self on the pros and cons of a product (Prepping Expert, 2016).

While the cost of food, water, clothing, and personal defense items are significant, they pale in comparison to the costs associated with shelters. At about \$5,000, large shipping containers have become a favorite for many preppers. However, this does not include the delivery costs, or any fees that might be associated with putting these structures in the ground. A professionally built and installed bunker cost significantly more. Two of the more prominent distributors are *Atlas Survival Shelters* (Atlas Survival Shelters, 2012) and *Rising S Company* (Rising S Company, 2017). Known for their use of corrugated pipes, and a regular on the prepper convention scene, *Atlas*' typical 50'x10' model starts at about \$78,000. On the other hand, Rising S constructs their bunkers out of welded steel, and their 50'x10' base model starts at \$123,000<sup>56</sup>. While these prices include the costs of construction and burial, complete with furnishings and an air filtration system, they



**Figure 4.1: A corrugated Atlas Survival Shelter on display at a prepper's convention. (Rice 3, 2014).**

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<sup>56</sup> There is much debate within the prepping community about the construction of bunkers. The Army Corp of Engineers used corrugated pipes for some of their early bunkers, and due to their round shape, these structures were able to withstand nuclear blasts. This was not the case with early rectangular built bunkers (Atlas, 2012). For this reason, there are those who claim that the only safe bunkers are those constructed for corrugated pipe. Others (Rising S Company, 2017) argue that such assertions are myths, and that with new construction techniques, rectangular built bunkers are actually better than the traditional corrugated pipe.



**Figure 4.2: The US Army Corp of Engineers testing an underground bunker, constructed from corrugated pipe, during a nuclear detonation (Atlas Bomb Shelters, 2012).**

do not cover the cost of a power source. Tens of thousands of dollars will also be required for solar panels or wind turbines (Ogg, 2013).

While for some, the cost of the bunkers above may seem significant, even to the point of absurdity, there are a growing number of people who are “high net worth individuals” (HNWI) that are getting into prepping (Osnos, 2017).

Many of these individuals are the nation’s top hedge-fund managers<sup>57</sup>, or the Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of the most prominent tech firms in Silicon Valley<sup>58</sup>. There is an unspoken consensus among many within this group that the United States will eventually face an event like the French or Russian Revolutions, where the nation’s lower classes will rise up against those of the economic elite due to the ever-growing gap in income equality. As such, many are purchasing hideaways, complete with airstrips, in distant places like New Zealand.

Other HNWI’s are buying into exclusive bunker communities like the Survival Condo in the heart of Kansas. Purchased by Larry Hall in 2008 for \$300,000, this fifteen-story complex was constructed from a Cold War Era Atlas missile silo<sup>59</sup>. The refurbishment of the silo cost twenty million dollars, and the eleven apartments brought in and estimated thirty-three million dollars<sup>60</sup>. In addition to a luxury apartment, complete with power and air scrubbers, amenities

<sup>57</sup> The top “Twenty-five hedge-fund managers make more money than all of the kindergarten teachers in America combined” (Osnos, 2017).

<sup>58</sup> Steve Huffman, the co-founder and CEO of *Reddit*, had laser surgery performed on his eyes in November of 2015 to correct his nearsightedness. “He underwent the procedure not for the sake of convenience or appearance but, rather, for a reason he doesn’t usually talk much about: he hopes that it will improve his odds of surviving a disaster, whether natural or man-made” (Osnos, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> All of the apartments in the first silo have been sold. Hall is now working on the construction of a second silo, and expects those apartments to sell rapidly (Survival Condo, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> Hall kept the 12<sup>th</sup> apartment for himself (Osnos, 2017).

for these dwellings include: an indoor gun range, a private security force, a hydroponic garden, an indoor pool and exercise facility, a rock climbing wall, an arcade, a library, a classroom, and a movie theatre (Survival Condo, 2017). The complex has “enough food and fuel for five years off the grid; by raising tilapia in fish tanks, and hydroponic vegetables under grow lamps, with renewable power, it could function indefinitely” (Osnos, 2017). It is also equipped with a medical wing, and two of its residents are doctors, with a third being a dentist (Osnos, 2017; Survival Condo, 2017).

Another important aspect of the industry is that of the prepper expo. These annual travelling conventions offer preppers a chance to gather and interact with vendors, presenters, and other like-minded individuals. With around one hundred exhibitors, the average convention now draws anywhere from four to eight thousand people in a two-day period; depending on the convention location. And although the number of conventions held each year are not as great as they once were, the number of participants at each convention has doubled since 2010 (Stec, 2017; McFadden, 2014). As mentioned above, these gatherings are ideal for the dissemination of prepping information.

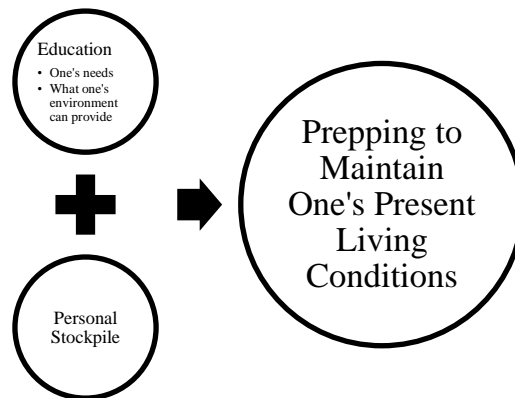
Most conventions consist of a convention hall, a large open space, where vendors display their items for attendees to walk through and view. As one explores each booth, products range from food storage and fire-starters to bunkers (that can be toured) and body armor. All-the-while, smaller classrooms, outside of the convention hall, serve as gathering points for prepping gurus to share information from



**Figure 4.3:** When attending a prepper’s convention, a vehicle in the parking lot that looks like this is usually a good indication that one is in the right place (Rice 4, 2016).

their area of expertise. Common courses include those on first aide, natural herbs and oils, self-defense, gardening, the use of solar power, primitive survival techniques, and fire-starting.

Ultimately, to be a truly prepared prepper, one must remember that “skills



**Figure 4.4: A prepper’s level of knowledge is at least as important as their personal stockpile.**

trump stuff...knowing how to do things is much more valuable than just having a bunch of gear socked away” (Prepping Expert, 2016). In this way, the most prepared preppers are not necessarily those that have the largest stockpiles, as the Hollywood stereotype usually implies. Rather, as Figure 4.4 illustrates, the most prepared preppers are those that have taken the time to educate themselves on how they can best insure the continuation of their present living conditions based on personal needs and wants, and also on what their environment can provide. Any stockpiling that occurs should then be in response to the gap between one’s needs and what their environment can provide.

Finally, while prepping experts prepare for a variety of scenarios, it is also worth noting that at the top of their personal security lists are concerns related to issues such as the failure of the country’s declining power grid (Hunt, 2014, Loc 39) and the increasing rate and intensity of natural disasters (Prepping Expert, 2016). In both instances, these concerns are in no way in line with traditional security concerns like those related to a terrorist or a conventional military attack. This would suggest that a shift in the allocation of the country’s current budgetary resources might be warranted, and that addressing the declining state of America’s infrastructure might provide as great a sense of security as a new fighter plane or battleship. Similarly, steps

toward multilateral cooperation aimed at lessening the human impact on the planet and thus its weather patterns, would serve as a cheap means of insuring a personal sense of security for many.

### **Summative Remarks**

The federal government encourages all Americans to have on hand a three-day supply of provisions for an emergency situation. The expectation is that by the end of a 72-hour period, first responders from federal agencies, such as FEMA, will be able to prepare and provide assistance; despite past instances where such was not the case. While it can be challenging to contact a federal official directly, there is a wealth of knowledge meant to help those who seek to be ready on the website for the Department of Homeland Security. This would suggest that federal agencies do not intend to play a pivotal role in personal preparedness for private citizens. Instead, information has been made available, and the general public can do with it what it will. Agencies such as FEMA seem to be focusing more of their attention toward the training and readiness of first responders, who will react once a crisis is eminent.

While in recent decades FEMA has devoted much of its attention toward natural disasters, rather than threats posed by the Soviet Union or other military threats as has historically been the case, the agency was left looking incompetent after Hurricane Katrina. Agencies like the FCDA were once a trusted source of information for those seeking to protect their families from the threat of a nuclear attack from the Soviet Union. However, Americans have steadily lost trust in the federal government since the mid 1960's<sup>61</sup>. Today fewer than twenty percent of Americans trust their government (Pew Research Center, 2015). With lack of

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<sup>61</sup> In 1964, almost eighty percent of Americans trusted the federal government “just about always” or “most of the time”.

trust being so prevalent, it is no wonder that so many are now taking measures to insure their own security.

Since the Y2K scare, the United States has experienced an explosion in the number of Americans who have chosen to adopt at least some degree of a prepper's lifestyle. With this growth, a thriving industry of prepping products and security consultants has developed, with all involved seeking to cash-in. With all preppers in need of the basics: food, water, clothing, protection, and shelter, prepping has become a multibillion dollar industry. This number is sure to climb as HNWI's begin prepping in greater numbers. Unfortunately, many uninformed preppers have now fallen victim to those seeking to capitalize on their fears. Inferior products and poor information is being sold to these individuals that could result in injury or death in a crisis scenario.

The best course of action that a prepper can take is to educate themselves. However, this education must originate from a source that is reliable. As such, due diligence is important as one turns to the numerous blogs or You Tube channels that profess to be security experts. Likewise, a prepper must also be knowledgeable of their surroundings and the tools and supplies that they possess. In the end, a well-rounded prepper has the education to know what their environment can provide, and a stockpile to supplement any shortcomings. The result should be a lifestyle that at least resembles that of what (s)he is accustomed.

# Chapter 5

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## A Word from the Wise

*“I was driving to work one morning and a voice told me to put up food...From there I have bought beans, bullets, and band-aids.”*

Crazy Stevo, The Survivalist Blog, 2013

As many as fifteen percent of Americans, aged 19-65, experience some form of auditory hallucinations that in certain instances can manifest in the form of voices giving instructions (Valmaggia et al., 2007). While there are many medical causes for such disorders, including mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and various types of paranoia (Counts, 2014), some interpret their symptoms in a metaphysical sense. For these individuals, such occurrences are directions from God; instructing his followers. An earnest attempt to discern the source of such voices is beyond the scope of this piece. However, as the quote above suggests, experiences such as a voice in one's head are important in any study that seeks to determine causation of one's actions, because they can have a tremendous impact on how that person behaves.

As the next chapter will explain, among the greatest concerns for most preppers, is the stigma attached to the term “prepper”. Many hesitate to even use the word for fear that they may be labeled as crazy or unstable<sup>62</sup>. As such, the intent of this study is in no way meant to imply

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<sup>62</sup> One must concede that using screen names like “Crazy Stevo” does not help in any endeavor meant to remove stigmas attached to the term “prepper”.

that prepping is an outcome of a mental disorder. Likewise, no judgment or conclusion should be drawn from this piece about the merits of arguments insisting that prepping is wisdom dispatched from God. Rather, this study is purely concerned with exploring the causation behind prepping, as described by preppers themselves.

The goal of this chapter is to explore not only the specific fears for which preppers prepare, but also the motivations behind their behaviors, as-well-as their view of the American government and its role as a provider of security. Ultimately, the findings of this chapter indicate that the fears of preppers are very much in line with those of the general public, in that the threat of natural disasters rank at the top of prepper security concerns. Similarly, like most Americans, preppers have a very negative view of government and the country's elected officials (Pew Research Center, 2015; Newport, 2015). However, as this piece will illustrate, the motivation behind one's decision to prep are not as clear cut. While no one particular motivation seems to be the primary cause of prepping lifestyle, a majority of preppers are influenced by two or more motivations. This would suggest that motivating factors work in conjunction with one another to trigger prepping behavior.

### **The Nature of This Study**

In July of 2011, *The Survivalists Blog* (Creekmore, 2011) asked its readers, "What was it that originally inspired you to start prepping?" In August of 2013, the blog followed up with a similar question, "Why did you start prepping, what was the trigger?" (Creekmore, 2013). Ultimately, the two posts produced 182 responses, in the words of preppers themselves, explaining why they prep. While some posts were as simple as a few words, such as the one that states, "I prep for my family", others were more than a page in length, with vivid details of life experiences and political beliefs.



A content analysis of the *The Survivalist Blog* posts was performed. Each observation was analyzed and coded. The analysis consisted of three areas of focus, which coincide with the study's three hypotheses. The first of these three categories was motivation, or the driving force behind a prepper's lifestyle. As stated in chapter 1, one of the hypotheses for this study is that prepping behavior is triggered by a norm tipping event, in conjunction with other factors such as one's culture or personal identity. In an effort to test this hypothesis, each observation in this study was coded into one of four categories for prepping

Category 1: Motivation	
Personality	Identity
Culture	History

motivation. As Table 5.1 illustrates, these included personality, culture, identity, and history. Examples of personality included references to fear or distrust, which might be indicative of paranoia. Similarly, words such as loss, or safety were indicative of an individual who was risk averse, and as a result preps due to personality traits. Finally, references to self-reliance and the need for independence was also categorized as personality. On the other hand, references to culture were those related to religion, the way someone was raised, or even social factors such as membership in the Boy Scouts. Examples where identity was at play included those that mentioned one's identity as a father, or protector. One who preps due to personal history was an individual that referenced an event that had happened previously, either to themselves or others, and that they perceive to be a short-term eminent threat. Examples of this were those who had lost everything in a natural disaster, such as a forest fire or flood, and who now prep to prevent a repeat of the hardship that they endured during the experience. It is the history motivator that was used to measure the presence of a norm tipping event. In other words, if the blog post stated, "I started prepping after surviving Hurricane Katrina", such a statement would represent a historical trigger that served as a norm tipping

event. Hurricane Katrina reshaped the individual’s reality of security and the source of that security.

Category 2: Security Threats	
Global-Level Threats	Domestic-Level Threats
Natural Disasters	Individual Physical Threats
Global Economic Threats	Individual Economic Threats
Global Pandemic	Domestic Unrest
Global Physical Threats	Not Expressed

Table 5.2: Prepping Security Threats

The second major category of focus was that of the most significant threats for which a prepper prepares. In other words, what type of threat do these individuals fear most? The hypothesis for this portion of the study was that the concerns of most preppers are so grand in nature that addressing these issues would require widespread multilateral cooperation between members of the international community. As Table 5.2 illustrates, this category was broken down into seven areas of threat. Those items listed on the left are more global in nature, requiring multilateral cooperation within the international community. Those items on the right are more domestic in nature, and could reasonably be addressed by the US government. Perhaps the broadest of the categories, “natural disasters” included anything from floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes, to solar flares. This category was listed under global threats since most scientists now agree that the increasing intensity of the world’s weather patterns are due to climate change (Van Aalst, 2006), and that man is the cause of climate change (Solomon et. al., 2009). As such, any meaningful effort to address the intensity of the world’s natural disasters would require widespread multilateral cooperation within the international community. “Global economic threats” included references to the faltering global economy, oil and other types of resource scarcity, or blackouts of the power grid. “Individual economic threats” were those that referenced the loss of a job, corporate downsizing, etc. “Global physical threats” was any reference to potential violence at the international level. This included conventional war, nuclear war, or any reference to foreign terrorism. On the other hand, a reference to widespread looting, vandalism, or political rioting fell in the category of domestic unrest. Protest movements, like

the one in Ferguson Missouri or Occupy Wall Street, would fall within this category.

“Individual physical threats” although domestic in nature, are a separate category, since the target is not the country as a whole, but rather the individual. Examples of this would include instances where one is the victim of a violent crime, such as robbery, rape, or gun violence, and as a result made the decision to become a prepper. Finally, concerns related to disease, such as the Ebola or Zika viruses, were coded in the “global pandemics” category. In some cases, observations were coded in two separate categories. For example, fears associated with biological terrorism were coded as both “global pandemic” and “global physical threat”.

Finally, this content analysis measured the prepper’s view of

Category 3: View of Government	
Positive View of Government	Negative View of Government
View of Government was not Expressed	

**Table 5.3: Prepper's Views of the US Government**

government and its role in providing security for the US population. The hypothesis for this portion of the study was that preppers are very distrustful of the government and its ability, or even willingness, to help them; should the need arise. As Table 5.3 indicates, responses in this category were divided into three outcomes: those possessing a positive view of the government, those possessing a negative view of the government, and finally those in which a view of the government was not expressed. References to the government’s inability to function, or to provide security was coded negatively. Similarly, negative references to President Obama or Congress also fell within this same category. On the other hand, references of praise for the President, Congress, or various government programs was coded positively. Finally, if no mention of the government or government policies were referenced, then the observation was coded as “not expressed”.

In an effort to insure the reliability of the study’s findings, all of the blog responses were coded by two independent analysts. Using *Stata*, software for statistical analysis, a Kappa score

for each of the study's three measurements was determined. Kappa scores range from zero (no agreement between analysts) to one (perfect agreement between analysts). Stata suggests the guidelines proposed by Landis & Koch (1977) as

Inter-Coder Reliability Guidelines	
Kappa Score	Strength of Reliability
0.0-.20	Slight
.21-.40	Fair
.41-.60	Moderate
.61-.80	Substantial
.81-1.0	Almost Perfect

**Table 5.4: Inter-Coder Reliability Guidelines**

a means for interpreting the level of agreement between analysts. As Table 5.4 illustrates, a Kappa score above .4 is in the moderate range, and acceptable for most studies outside of the medical field, whereas a score above .6 represents substantial agreement, and anything above .8 is almost perfect agreement.

Tables 5.5-5.7 illustrate the Kappa scores for each of the three research questions. Beginning with Table 5.5, three of the four areas of motivation resulted in a substantial

Inter-Coder Reliability: Motivations		
Motivation	Kappa Score	Agreement %
Personality	.45	71.98%
Culture	.65	82.42%
Identity	.75	87.91%
History	.63	82.97%

**Table 5.5: Inter-Coder Reliability for Motivation**

level of agreement between the two coders. The exception was in the personality rating. While this rating fell within the moderate range, the two raters agreed on almost 72% of the observations. Similarly, Table 5.6 illustrates substantial, and in some cases, almost perfect

Inter-Coder Reliability: Security Threats		
Fear	Kappa Score	Agreement %
Natural Disaster	.90	95.60%
Global Economic Security	.81	92.31%
Individual Economic Security	.70	87.91%
Global Physical Security	.74	93.41%
Individual Physical Security	.45	93.96%
Global Pandemics	.80	99.45%
Domestic Unrest	.73	95.05%
Source of Fear Not Expressed	.80	91.76%

**Table 5.6: Inter-Coder Reliability for Security Threats**

agreement between the two coders in all but one of the coding outcomes for security threats, which fell into the moderate level of agreement. Even in that instance, there was agreement in almost 94% of the observations.

Finally, for the category on Views of Government, as Table 5.7 illustrates, the two coders had almost perfect agreement on two of the three outcomes. For the outcome that was not almost perfect, “Positive View of Government”, there was no agreement between the coders. Whereas coder **A** found only one positive view or comment of the government, coder **B** found none. While there was a 99.45% agreement rate, the Kappa score for coder reliability was zero. Ultimately, these findings suggest a high level of agreement between the two coders, and thus a reasonable level of reliability in the study’s findings.

<b>Inter-Coder Reliability: Views of Government</b>		
<b>View</b>	<b>Kappa Score</b>	<b>Agreement %</b>
Positive View of Government	.00	99.45%
Negative View of Government	.85	93.41%
View of Government Not Expressed	.86	93.96%

**Table 5.7: Inter-Coder Reliability for Views of Government**

## Results

As they pertain to motivation, the results of this study were somewhat unexpected. The study’s motivational hypothesis was based on Constructivism, and the idea that a norm tipping event, like that of surviving a major natural disaster, serves as the foundation for prepping

<b>Motivations for Prepping</b>	
Personality	46% (84/182)
Culture	53% (97/182)
Identity	41% (74/182)
History	40% (73/182)

**Table 5.8: Motivations for Prepping**

behavior. Furthermore, while it is true that many people experience major events that shake them to their core, a prepper is born when a major historical event is taken in conjunction with other personal or cultural characteristics; like reaching the rank of Eagle Scout or learning to hunt with your grandfather as a kid. However, as Table 5.8 illustrates,

the findings of this content analysis do not support this hypothesis. Ultimately, only 40% (73 out of 182) of the observations indicate that a major historical event was a part of one's decision to begin prepping. Of the four categories, history turned out

Those with Multiple Motivations	
Two or More	57% (104/182)
Three or More	20% (36/182)
All Four	3% (5/182)

**Table 5.9: Prepper's with Multiple Motivations**

to be the least likely factor to affect prepping, with one's personal identity following close behind at 41% (74 out of 182). Ultimately, the best catalyst for prepping behavior, according to the findings of this analysis, is one's culture. However, reaching a mark of only 53%, even this characteristic failed to fully explain the motivation behind prepping.

While any single personal characteristic failed to adequately measure the likelihood of one's decision to prep, almost three-fifths (57%) of the observations possessed two or more of the motivational characteristics, with one-fifth (20%) possessing three or more. Ultimately, no two characteristics seem to be more strongly related to one another than the others<sup>63</sup>. This finding suggests that when any combination of the four characteristics are taken together, prepping behavior is more likely to occur.

As noted earlier, the findings for the fears behind prepping were very much in line with the findings of a recent poll of mainstream America's greatest fears (*Healthcare Ready*, 2016). The hypothesis for this portion of the study was that preppers were more concerned with issues beyond the power and authority of the individual nation-state. In other words, preppers fear those things that either cannot be controlled, or that require widespread multilateral cooperation within the international community to adequately be addressed. Natural disasters are certainly an

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<sup>63</sup> All four characteristics were measured against one another, using STATA, for levels of correlation. In most cases, none of the individual factors of motivation reached more than a single digit percentile for correlation; and the relationship for the levels of correlation that did exist were inverse in nature.

example of such a threat. As was mentioned above, mankind has never been able to control natural disasters, but most scientists now agree that climate change has certainly increased the magnitude of the world’s most recent natural disasters (Van Aalst, 2006), and that man is the cause of climate change (Solomon et. al., 2009). Any effort to reverse the effects of climate change<sup>64</sup>, or even to merely diminish the amount of greenhouse gases going into the world’s atmosphere, would require widespread cooperation within the international community. For the purposes of this piece, regardless of whether one believes in climate change and its effects, natural disasters are certainly beyond the capabilities of an individual sovereign state.

Fears Behind Prepping		
Natural Disaster	34% (62/182)	48% (62/129)
Global Economic Security	27% (49/182)	38% (49/129)
Personal Economic Security	29% (52/182)	40% (52/129)
Global Security	14% (26/182)	20% (26/129)
Individual Security	3% (6/182)	5% (6/129)
Global Pandemic	1% (2/182)	2% (2/129)
Domestic Unrest	8% (14/182)	11% (14/129)
Not Expressed	29% (53/182)	NA

**Table 5.10: Fears Behind Prepping**

Ultimately, as Table 5.10 illustrates, natural disasters were the greatest fear for those in this analysis. With more than one-third of all observations (62 out of 182, or 34%) mentioning the threat of a natural disasters, it certainly looms large on the minds of preppers. However, when one considers that almost of third (29%) of the observations did not include evidence of their greatest fear, and then adjusts the sample size accordingly, almost half (62 out of 129, or 48%) of the observations that mention fears include those related to natural disasters.

Also at the forefront of concerns for preppers are the fears related to individual and global economic security. With 40% of the blog posts referencing individual economic concerns, such as fears related to personal unemployment, and 38% referencing global economic

<sup>64</sup> Solomon et. al. (2009) argue that the world has reached a point where some of the effects of climate change are already irreversible.

concerns, such as that of the next great depression, the difference in the number of responses (and therefore which is the greater threat) is negligible. What is clear, is that many preppers are concerned about their long-term economic well-being. Individually, these concerns did not rate as significant as natural disasters. However, when one considers that there was almost no correlation between the two variables, and that when put together, two-thirds (67%, or 87 out of 129) of those that responded with fears, mentioned some form of economic fear, then the state of the national and global economies are much more significant than they at first glance appear.

There are levers that can be pulled by agencies such as the Federal Reserve to protect the US economy. Similarly, social safety nets such as unemployment insurance, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) protect individuals should they face an unexpected economic catastrophe. However, should a scenario like that of the Lehman Brothers Bankruptcy (or Deutsche Bank) repeat itself, such an event would certainly send ripples through the world economy, as was the case in 2008, and there would be very little that the government of the United States could do unilaterally to limit its effects. Rather, regulators from the United States, Europe, and perhaps Asia, would all be required to step in to keep the world economy afloat. In other words, while the US government is capable of addressing threats related to the individual economic security concerns of its citizens at home, those on a global scale would require multilateral cooperation.

The final fear that reached any level of significance (20%) was that of global security. These are the threats related to issues such as international terrorism, or conventional and nuclear war. With only one in five voicing concerns over these threats, preppers are far less concerned with these issues than once was the case. However, any effort to prevent terrorist attacks, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, or to prevent war requires widespread multilateral cooperation.



Countries have to work together as they embargo countries developing nuclear technology, or to investigate international chatter that would suggest an impending terrorist attack. As was the case with natural disaster, and global economic security, these issues are beyond the singular reach of the US government.

Ultimately, with the exception of individual economic security<sup>65</sup>, all of the most significant security threats were those that would require widespread multilateral cooperation. On the other hand, those threats related to individual security or domestic unrest, which could easily enough be handled by the US government, were of little concern for those preppers who were analyzed in this study. The only global threat that received little attention in this analysis was that of a global pandemic. While there is the occasional scare, from threats such as the Ebola virus, the world has not faced a significant pandemic threat since the Spanish Flu outbreak of 1919. As such the threat of a global pandemic may fail to register among even preppers; some of the world’s most paranoid.

Those with Multiple Fears	
Two or More	45% (58/129)
Three or More	20% (14/129)
Four or More	4% (5/129)
Five or More	2% (2/129)

**Table 5.11: Prepper's with Multiple Fears**

Finally, while preppers are more concerned about some threats than others, many prep for a wide range of scenarios. As Table 5.11 illustrates, almost half (45%) of all posts mentioned more than one security threat, and a fifth (20%) mentioned three or more. This would suggest that one plausible criteria for prepping would be the ability to see a wide range of security threats. Whereas many Americans may fear the next natural disaster, most may choose to play the odds when it comes to preparing for such a disaster. On the other hand, when one is concerned about

<sup>65</sup> It is worth noting that the blog posts used for this analysis were written in 2011 and 2013. Many were still recovering from the global collapse of 2008. As such, the individual economic concerns from this study were likely a result of the global economic events that occurred only a few years before.

a natural disaster, a global economic collapse, and a terrorist attack, all at the same time, then perhaps it makes more sense to begin preparing for such events.

<b>View of Government</b>			
	<b>Positive View</b>	<b>Negative View</b>	<b>Not Expressed</b>
<b>Total Observations</b>	Less than 1% (1/182)	30% (55/182)	69% (126/182)
<b>Expressed Observations</b>	2% (1/56)	98% (55/56)	NA

**Table 5.12: Prepper's View of the Government**

The one characteristic that preppers seem to universally share, when they are willing to voice their opinion, is their distrust of the government, its willingness to do right, and its inability to protect them. As Table 5.12 illustrates, of the 182 observations, only 56 expressed their view of the government. While the blog questions did not specifically ask about one's view of the government, it is worth noting that with only 31% of the observations referencing the government many preppers may have no opinion. On the other hand, many may not feel safe posting negative views about "big brother" in an online conversation. However, of the 56 observations who did share their views on the government, at least 55 (98%) were negative<sup>66</sup>. This finding is in line with the study's third hypothesis that preppers do not trust the government to adequately protect them, and therefore fill the need to take security measures of their own.

### **Summative Remarks**

The goal of this chapter was to determine whether a content analysis of various prepper blogs, responding to the question, "Why do you prep?" would support the study's three basic hypotheses. In an effort to understand why preppers prep, the first hypothesis of this study was that prepping is triggered by a norm tipping event in one's personal history that works in conjunction with a cultural, personality, or identity characteristic to trigger prepping. The

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<sup>66</sup> As noted above, coder A found one positive view, while coder B found none.

findings of this content analysis do not support the study's first hypothesis in its entirety. In other words, there was little evidence that a major historical event in one's personal history is required for prepping to begin. Furthermore, not one of the four measured motivations, in a unilateral condition, adequately explained why a person would begin to prep. However, the findings of the analysis do support the assumption of the hypothesis that when at least two these characteristics come together prepping is more likely to occur. Three-fifths of the observations in this analysis did display evidence of at least two of the motivations working in tandem, with one-fifth presenting evidence of three or more.

The study's second hypothesis was that the fears that drive prepping are so large in their nature that no single sovereign state could address them alone. The findings of this content analysis do support this assumption. The single greatest fear was those related to natural disasters and their increasing frequency and intensity. If one accepts the assertion that the increasing intensity of the world's weather patterns is due to climate change, then this is a threat that requires multilateral cooperation. This cooperation could come in the form of treaties, which seek to limit the world's carbon emissions, or in the form of humanitarian aid after a disaster occurs. Other threats ranking high in the analysis were those related to the health of the global economy, international terrorism, and war. On the other hand, with the exception of fears related to individual economic security, threats related to individual security and domestic unrest, those easily addressed by the individual state, received little mention from preppers.

Finally, the third hypothesis of the study is that preppers do not trust the government to adequately protect them and their families, and as such feel the need to take security precautions of their own. With more than 98% of the responses indicating a negative view of the government, the findings of this content analysis were very much in line with this conclusion.

Such a finding is significant if one assumes that the whole purpose of the nation-state is to insure the security of its citizens.

While the findings of this analysis were fairly conclusive, there are some points that lack clarity. For example, do the vast majority of preppers really dislike the government as much as the analysis would indicate, or do only those who are negative of the government choose to voice their opinion? If it is true that a majority of preppers dislike the government, are there measures that can, or should, be taken to improve the government's image? Similarly, are the fears of 2017 the same as those from 2011 and 2013? For example, with the recent Ebola and Zika outbreaks, are more preppers concerned about the threat of a global pandemic? On the other hand, now that the economy seems to be on the rebound, are preppers as concerned with the state of the economy, and their personal financial well-being as once was the case? Do most preppers simultaneously fear a wide range of possible events, as opposed to the average American who may merely fear the next natural disaster or the loss of their job? Is it this ability to see multiple threats that serves as a better predictor for prepping activity? And finally, is it safe to conclude that personal historical events are not a significant trigger for prepping behavior? The goal of the next chapter will be to gain greater clarity on these questions by personally interviewing preppers.

# Chapter 6

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## The Proud Few

*“The vast majority of Americans today do not feel safe...they fear for their children; they fear for themselves”.*

Rudy Giuliani, *Republican National Convention*, 2016

The words of Mayor Giuliani seemed to serve as the theme of Donald Trump’s 2016 bid for President. In countless speeches like that given at the Republican National Convention, Trump repeatedly stated, “The attacks on our police, and the terrorism in our cities, threaten our very way of life...Any politician who does not grasp this danger is not fit to lead our country” (Ball, 2016). While Trump was criticized for “ratcheting up” fear, the tactic worked. Many of Trump’s most devoted supporters were convinced of the ever-increasing dangers of our world today. Ultimately, Trump drove those fears all the way to the White House by keeping the threats of terrorism, a weakening middle class<sup>67</sup>, and foreign immigration on the minds of the American public. This message of fear resonated with Jonnianne Ridzelski, a Trump supporter from Alabama, who stated that she was terrified. When pressed on her beliefs and why she felt afraid, Ridzelski conceded that she did not know what the future of the United States would look

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<sup>67</sup> The Census Bureau recently announced that the real median income of middle-class America rose by 5.2% in 2015, the largest recorded increase since the bureau started tracking the median income in the 1960s. Furthermore, the poverty rate fell by 1.2%, the sharpest decrease since 1968 (Tankersley, 2016). While Democrats thundered praises for the Obama administration in his final days as President, the response of Congressional Republicans was to point out that the growth was not nearly enough, and that the state of the American economy was not as strong as it should be.

like, or even of what she was afraid, but stated only that she had “been making preparations for disaster, including stocking up on canned goods” (Ball, 2016).

While it is true that many Americans live in fear, not only for themselves, but for the future of their children, the basis of that fear is not necessarily what Trump would have America believe. Whereas Trump tried to keep the focus of the American public on terrorism and immigration, a June 2016 poll, conducted by the international polling firm YouGov, revealed that Americans were far more concerned about natural disasters than they were about terrorist attacks, cyber-attacks, or a global pandemic<sup>68</sup> (Healthcare Ready, 2016). These findings are significant given that the poll was conducted precisely at the point when fears surrounding the Zika virus were most prominent in media sources around the country. This suggests that the Trump administration, in its attempts to focus the fear of the American public, may not truly understand these fears.

While fear led to Trump’s election, it also drives the lifestyle choices of many preppers. This chapter offers an in-depth analysis of those choices, from the mouths of preppers themselves, who volunteered to sit for an interview to explain why they have chosen to live the way they do. As with the previous chapter, the focus of these discussions were three-fold, with the goal of determining motivations and fears behind prepping behavior, as-well-as the participant’s view of the US government and its role as a provider of security. The remainder of the chapter will first offer an explanation of how the interviews were conducted, along with challenges that were faced as the research was performed. Finally, this chapter will offer a summary of the interview findings, and conclusions that should be drawn from them.

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<sup>68</sup> The poll consisted of 1,122 respondents. Thirty-two percent of those survey rated natural disasters as their top concern among catastrophic events. In comparison, only fourteen percent rated terrorism as their chief concern, while only six percent ranked a global pandemic as their top concern.

## **Interview Methodology**

As was explained in the introduction, the goal of this portion of the study was to locate and interview 10-15 preppers who would serve as a cross-section of the larger group. As such, this sample would need to be both culturally and geographically diverse. Unfortunately, finding preppers who were willing to discuss their lifestyle proved to be a significant challenge. By their nature, preppers are very guarded when questioned about their prepping behavior. Most fear that doing so will paint a target on themselves, should an instance arise when these preparations are needed. In a crisis scenario, a friend or neighbor in need could become a threat to those who have prepared for such a situation in advance. Furthermore, as was discussed in chapter 3, with President Obama's executive order (13606) on National Defense Resource Preparedness, many preppers are more guarded about their efforts in order to keep big brother from knowing of their existence. Finally, as will be discussed below, there is a stigma attached to the term "prepper" that makes many within this community uncomfortable. Most simply do not like the label, and do not want to be judged or ostracized for their personal choices.

Ultimately, to interview a prepper, you have to personally know the prepper. In other words, linkages and connections, based on trust, have to be constructed; and even this goes only so far. In an everyday social setting, most preppers are unidentifiable. The only way to know a prepper is for (s)he to identify themselves. For the purposes of this piece, the author had to attend several prepper's conventions and join numerous online forums to make contact with individuals who would identify themselves as a prepper. Once past the introduction, only repeated and prolonged interactions ever resulted in a participant being willing to sit for an interview. The only way to speed up the process was by having someone willing to make an introduction, thus vouching for the interviewer's character. Any person willing to make such an

introduction was usually themselves not a prepper. There seems to be an unspoken cardinal rule within the prepping community. “Preppers don’t identify or discuss other preppers with those who are outside the community”. On only one occasion did an interview with a prepper lead to that individual introducing the interviewer to another prepper. When asked, most simply claimed that they did not know any other preppers that would be willing to sit for an interview.

While a large number of contacts were made, with many willing to share ideas and information, most declined to participate in a formal interview. In the year-long period, in which the interview phase of this study was conducted, only six participants agreed to sit for an interview. Fortunately, the characteristics of this group were tremendously varied. Interviews were conducted with both men and women, of various ages and races, and with a wide range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. While one participant had earned a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) in Economics, others were living happy and content lives with only a high school diploma. Geographically, the participants are a cross-section of the entire country. Some grew up in states as far east as Connecticut, or as far west as Alaska, while others had backgrounds in southern states like Georgia. A couple were members of a military family, and had even experienced time living in places outside the United States. Ideologically speaking, the group was also a good mix. Two of the participants were liberal leaning and two were conservative. The final two declined to share their political perspective. In the end, while the research for this portion of the study was challenging to conduct, the proud few who were willing to express their views in a formal interview were highly diverse.

In most cases, the interviews were done in-person, but a couple were completed via e-mail or Skype. As the one-on-one and Skype interviews were conducted, the researcher sought permission to record the conversation for transcription purposes. In all instances, permission



was granted. Once the transcription was complete, all participants reviewed them and affirmed that the transcripts were an accurate representation of the conversation.

The interviews were standardized in that all who chose to participate in the study were asked the same open-ended questions<sup>69</sup>. With this backbone of comparison in place, the content of the participant's responses then dictated the direction of the interview and how long they took. Once started, most were very comfortable talking. Some even seemed to possess a sense of urgency or need to share their message.

## **Findings**

The most obvious finding from the interviews that were conducted was that the participants did not like the term “prepper”, because of the stigma attached to the title. To label one a “prepper” seems to equate him/her with extremism, or even as crazy. Overwhelmingly, the participants stated that they were not comfortable with the term, preferring rather the label of one who seeks to live a self-sufficient lifestyle. In the minds of those who are a part of the community, prepping is a social responsibility for two main reasons. First, as a parent or breadwinner, one is responsible for insuring that the needs of those under their watch are always met. This is in-line with the notion that prepping is as a result of one's identity. Second, as an American, one has the responsibility to do all that he/she can to insure they are not a burden on their extended family or the public. Almost all of the participants stated a desire to responsibly meet their own individual needs, and to not ever find themselves in a situation where they would be a burden on the government, through social safety programs, or upon those around them. In this way, prepping seems very much to be a lifestyle of self-sufficiency.

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<sup>69</sup> The Appendix includes a list of these questions.

Ultimately, all of the survey's participants expressed concern over the perceived marginalization of those with a prepper mentality, and all voiced a strong desire that those outside of their community know that "most preppers aren't crazy" (Interview 4, 2016). One person explained that he believed media, and television shows like *Doomsday Preppers* (Madison et.al., 2012), paint those like himself in a very negative light, and that such programs are the only exposure that some outside of the prepper community get; from which they must draw their opinion of preppers. Similarly, he went on to explain that, "As with any group, you are going to have those with varying personalities within it...unfortunately, those on the fringe of societal norms seem to also be the most vocal" (Interview 5, 2016). He explained that these are the individuals that tend to get the media's attention. While uncomfortable with the term, one participant stated, "I would love to see some de-marginalizing of the word "prepper". We need to stop stigmatizing personal planning. In our society today, we are very misguided on what wealth is. A guy that drives a \$75,000 car and lives in a penthouse is just as irrational as a prepper that stockpiles guns and bullets, and builds a bunker in their back-yard" (Interview 6, 2016).

Among the chief concerns of this study were the motivations behind prepping. All participants were asked the question "What made you start prepping...why do you do it?" Responses were rated into four categories: personality, culture, identity, and history. With five of the six participants giving responses that relate to their personal culture, and as was discovered from the content analysis in chapter 5, one's culture is the individual factor most likely to serve as a catalyst for prepping behavior. Responses related to culture were those that referenced religion, one's upbringing...how he/she was raised, or membership in groups like the Boy Scouts. An example of this type of response was as follows:

“I grew up in Anchorage Alaska. You had to be prepared. You couldn’t just turn the heat up, or go to the grocery store. If that was your plan, you were going to be in trouble. Even the cities felt like wilderness outposts. Relying on the lower 48 to bring food up didn’t always happen. It was common to lose electricity for a week at a time. Shipments got held up because the ocean was frozen. We kept water and blankets in our car in the winter. If you didn’t, and broke down, you were in real trouble. Everybody planned. Alaska plays for keeps. You can make a lot of mistakes in other locations and you have that nerf-padded life, but Alaska isn’t like that. We played for keeps. If you made a mistake, you could die. I remember going into the store as a kid, and there was no bread because it did not get there. In a case like that, your money was no good, because there was nothing to buy” (Interview 6, 2016).

As this example clearly illustrates, this individual was raised in a culture where not being prepared had serious consequences. Such an environment would certainly shape the way (s)he approaches preparedness throughout their life.

One’s personal history was the other factor that was frequently cited as a reason for prepping behavior. Two-thirds of the interviewees referenced some event for their history when responding to this question. One example was the following: “...in 1991 when I was stationed at Clark Airforce Base the volcano Mt. Pinatubo erupted and the base was destroyed. I went without food and water for three days. I thought it was the end of the world” (Interview 3, 2016). As this example illustrates, personal experiences, such as that of surviving a national disaster, can certainly lead to a prepping lifestyle. This finding supports the study’s hypothesis that a historical event frequently serves as a tipping point that triggers and justifies a prepping lifestyle. However, this finding is a diversion from the findings of chapter 5, where personal history was found to be the cause least likely of the four to lead to prepping behavior.

Whereas culture seems to be the only single clear-cut catalyst for prepping behavior, the findings of the personal interviews do also seem to support those of the content analysis from chapter 5 in that the individual causes of prepping seem to reinforce one another. Four of the six participants expressed evidence of multiple motivations behind their desire to prep. As

mentioned above, culture and history were the most likely predictors of prepping behavior as explained by the interview respondents, and at times, these factors work hand-in-hand to reinforce prepping behavior. An example to help clarify this point was that of the participant who admitted that their initial cause for prepping was cultural<sup>70</sup>, but this individual's prepping behavior was half-hearted at best. However, once life threw periods of unemployment and other hardships at this interviewee, she was able to use her food stockpile to make it through these challenging periods. As such, her personal history (periods of unemployment) reinforced a cultural factor (religion), and both work jointly to intensify prepping behavior.

Another primary goal of the study was to determine the types of fears that are driving prepping behavior. As was the case with the content analysis in chapter 5, the responses of the interviewees were broken down into seven different categories. These were Natural Disasters, Global Economic concerns, Individual Economic concerns, Global Physical concerns, Individual Physical concerns, a Global Pandemic, and Domestic Unrest. The content analysis found that the primary concern of most preppers was the prospect of future natural disasters, with personal economic and global economic concerns at a close second and third. Similarly, those participating in an interview voiced the threat of future natural disasters, such as devastating hurricanes, tornados, floods, and wildfires caused by drought, as their greatest fear. While most involved in the study did not offer an explanation for the cause<sup>71</sup>



**Figure 6.1: As a means of insuring access to drinking water, one of the study's participants had this hand pump attached to the well in their front yard (Rice 5, 2016).**

<sup>70</sup> As a Mormon, church leaders encouraged this individual to stockpile a year's supply of food and water for their family.

<sup>71</sup> Scott Pruitt, the head of the EPA, caused an uproar in early 2017 when he rejected the notion widely held by scientists that humans are the primary catalyst behind global warming (Mooney and Dennis, 2017 March 9).

of the increasingly extreme weather patterns faced by the world, all six interview participants expressed concern over threats of future natural disasters, of an increasingly greater magnitude that could potentially affect the world's food supply. Of particular concern was access to clean potable drinking water. As Figures 6.1 and 6.2 illustrate, preppers are resorting to a number of tactics in order to insure access to water. While some prepare to stay in a fixed-fortified position with a personal well, others seek to be ready to move at a moment's notice with a water filtration system that at less than twenty-five pounds can go anywhere. Such systems allow anything from a swimming pool to a mud puddle to become a potential water source.



**Figure 6.2: A portable water filter that is capable of purifying one gallon of water per minute (Rice 6, 2016).**

Like the findings from the content analysis in chapter 5, global and individual economic concerns were close second and third behind natural disasters as the chief source of fear for the preppers that chose to be interviewed, with the other four categories getting very little mention. Although not receiving the same level of attention as natural disasters, most of the survey's participants were extremely concerned about the state of the global economy, and how that would affect them personally. As one participant stated:

“We save for retirement by saving money that we have seen historically be manipulated by governments and NGOs. We put a lot of faith in something that hasn't been around very long. I've studied money for a long time. Our experiment with the fiat currency started in the 70's. We don't know what the end-game is, so to put your faith in something like that seems foolish, when I know I'm going to need a supply of food and water. We're putting our future in money. That to me seems foolish. Historically, we

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Ironically, that same week Gallup released its annual poll on climate change in which the organization found that more than sixty-six percent of Americans are now not only worried about the effects of climate change, but also believe that humans are the primary cause of its occurrence (Global Warming..., 2017, March 14).

have seen periods of hyper-inflation when one's savings wouldn't even buy a loaf of bread" (Interview 6, 2016).

While it is true that the economy has grown significantly since 2008, the pace of its growth (especially since the election of President Trump) has been at an almost alarming rate. Many preppers seem to be weary of what they perceive as an unstable American economy, and are preparing for a repeat of an economic collapse that is as great, or even worse, than that of the Great Recession.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the interviews were those fears that came to light that were unexpected. Half of the study's participants expressed concerns over the influence and power of large multinational corporations. Chief among these were companies such as Monsanto, known for its production of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) that can affect the world's food supply, and pharmaceutical companies with their iron grip on medicine. As an example of this, one only has to Google the term "Contraceptive Corn" to get hundreds of stories of Epicyte's (a company that was later purchased by Biolex Therapeutics) supposed ability to potentially use genetically modified corn as a form of birth control. The company has isolated a natural antibody that kills sperm in some females, which prevents the possibility of pregnancy. When modified into corn, such a gene could potentially serve as a contraceptive (McKie, 2001). Early lab trials suggest that the corn not only prevents conception in females, but that it also kills sperm in males. Some, however, see the corn's potential use as a weapon, capable of sterilizing entire populations of men and women.

Of those voicing concern, the source of their anxiety stems from the extraordinary amount of power that these corporations possess, and the fear that the need for corporate profits will supersede what is best for humanity. In other words, the preppers who participated in this study are of the opinion that pharmaceutical companies are so concerned with profit that they no

longer care about the safety of the medicines that they are producing. As such, several of the study's participants voiced interest in various forms of alternative medicine. Examples of this ranged from Chinese acupuncture and various forms of medicinal plants to Colloidal Silver, which has shown promise in its ability to kill even strains of bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics.

It is as result of fears such as these that preppers are taking their extraordinary precautions. Ultimately, two-thirds of the study's participants discussed multiple fears for which they were most concerned. These findings are in-line with those of chapter 5 in that many preppers are apparently concerned with a wide range of fears. As stated in chapter 5, it is perhaps this trait that best serves to explain prepping behavior.

All who participated in this study were asked to share some of the measures being taken in an effort to be prepared. Obviously the most common response was that of stockpiling food and water. However, all of the participants conceded that such practices were only a short-term solution. With a year's supply of food, one would certainly be able to weather the vast majority of threats. On the other hand, such a response would be inadequate for a more long-term event, such as that of an electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) that potentially could result in the collapse of the US power grid, thus throwing society back into a preindustrial age for a prolonged period of time. As such, many of those interviewed are looking for more long-term approaches to insuring access to food and water. As discussed above, a residential well can be one solution for assuring one's access to water. Likewise, in an effort to be more self-reliant, some preppers are moving toward producing more of their own food. While some may consider hunting as a viable option, in most parts of the country,



**Figure 6.3: A prepper's goats.** (Rice 7, 2016).



**Figure 6.4: Vertical farming of potatoes in a hay bale (Rice 8, 2016).**

animal populations simply cannot sustain any long-term mass human predation. To put it simply, deer and other forms of wildlife would very quickly be hunted to extinction.

As was true a millennium ago, the only solution to the long-term assurance of food is the domestication of plants and animals.

As such, many of the study's preppers have already shifted toward producing more of their dietary needs. Steps being taken include raising chickens (for both meat and eggs), goats, and rabbits<sup>72</sup>.

Likewise, preppers are turning to various forms of gardening as a source of fruits and vegetables. As such, there is a growing demand

within the prepper community for heirloom seeds, or those that will bear fruit for generations to come<sup>73</sup>. Since many preppers do not own large tracks of land, which are typically required for farming at a scale that would sustain a family, these individuals have had to research alternative forms of agriculture, such as vertical farming, that allow for large-scale crop production in a limited space. As Figure 6.4 illustrates, although still in the experimental stage, this prepper has had success with vertically growing potatoes in hay bales. This individual, who chose not to sit for an interview is a graphic designer by trade, with little to no previous experience in crop production. This is perhaps one of the greatest aspects of the prepper movement. Individuals, such as the one just described, are expanding their knowledge and capabilities far outside that of their traditional norm. Many are learning agriculture, basic first-aid and healthcare, and various

<sup>72</sup> With a gestation period of only thirty days, and litters of four to twelve, some breeds of rabbits can produce as many as 120 offspring a year from a single female. In turn, these new rabbits can begin their own breeding as early as four months (McClure, 2016). Furthermore, rabbit meat has less fat and more protein than beef, pork, or poultry (AZ Prepper, 2011). For these reasons, raising rabbits have become a vital part of some prepper's food plans.

<sup>73</sup> Most GMO seeds will only germinate for two to three generations after which, the seeds become useless. An heirloom seed is one that has not been genetically modified or cross-pollinated, and as such, will bear fruit indefinitely.



means of personal self-defense. In this way, these individuals have become a sort of “Renaissance Man” for their era.

Also high on the necessities list for most of the study's preppers was the gear one would need to survive in various emergency situations. Chief on this list was a means of personal defense. Access to guns and a supply of ammo is very common in the stockpiles of most preppers. During her interview, one of the prepper even referred to her ".50 caliber hand cannon named Tiny" (Interview 2, 2016). As in any group, there are those who are uncomfortable with firearms. Even these individuals have a plan for personal security. As one prepper explained, hornet/wasp spray is an ideal self-defense tool. In most instances, these sprays have a range of at least twenty feet. When faced by a would-be attacker, one merely has to aim for their eyes with the spray. The attacker then has 30 minutes to receive medical assistance, or be permanently blinded.

Information like that of using wasp spray for self-defense is the kind of knowledge that preppers readily share at prepper conventions. As was previously discussed, many who attend these gatherings argue that it is less about what you have on hand, than what you know. Despite this assertion, prepper conventions offer a wide assortment of resources that one may choose to have at their disposal. As Figure 6.5 illustrates, various grades of body armor are available for purchase as one seeks to insure their own personal safety. Despite the implications of such an image, very few of the exhibits at prepper conventions are firearm related. Such



**Figure 6.5: Body armor being sold at a prepper convention (Rice 9, 2016).**

resources can be readily acquired at a gun or pawn shop. Rather, most of the exhibits at prepper conventions are related to new tools for communication or food preservation. Likewise, there are booths for solar panels, various forms of illumination, and many other tools that one would need for long-term survival.

Another item that almost all preppers possess, and to which all of the interviewees referenced is a bug-out-bag. These are bags that one can grab and be ready to go at a moment's notice. Ideally, if necessary, a bug-out-bag should include the supplies one would need for about seventy-two hours. Such a bag is closely in-line with what the US government refers to as a seventy-two-hour kit in its recommendations. A few of those who were interviewed (Interviews 4 and 6, 2016) mentioned that they had multiple bug-out-bags and supplies ready to go at any given time, and one prepper even referenced the Navy Seal philosophy of redundancy that "two is one, and one is none" as a justification for having multiple bug-out-bags. Usually, these bags are kept in separate locations, such as one's home or the trunk of their car. Within these bags, one would find food, rope, hand tools, flints, matches, winter clothing, a flashlight, batteries, candles, and perhaps most importantly, some form of first-aid equipment.

The final necessity that was mentioned by those who were interviewed was the need for a network upon which one could rely in a long-term survival scenario. One participant (Interview 4, 2016) mentioned that in the case of a long-term crisis she, and those in her network, had a plan to resettle on a single piece of property. Not only is such an arrangement advantageous for defensive purposes, but practically speaking, communal living would result in a division of labor, and an accumulation of survival knowledge.

Furthermore, a network is important as one tries to acquire the resources that they do not possess. In other words, most preppers concede that it is impossible to stockpile everything that

one would require for indefinite survival. As such, preppers have to develop a network with those who live around them that could insure access to needed goods. For example, one participant (Interview 6, 2016) discussed the fact that he had multiple beehives in his back yard. His plan is to use the honey produced by the hives as the basis of a barter relationship. He could potentially trade half a cow for a specified quantity of honey. Such an arrangement insures the long-term survival of all participants.

The final goal of this analysis was to examine prepper's views of the federal government. As was discussed in chapter 5, ninety-eight percent of those who expressed views of the government in the content analysis did so in a negative way. As Figure 6.6 illustrates, there does seem to be a general will of discontent towards the federal government within the prepping community. Taken at a prepper's convention, the words "We the People" are clearly a reference to the US Constitution, and the image suggest that negative views of the government are consistent throughout the American subculture. The



Figure 6.6: A t-shirt that was for sale at a prepper's convention (Rice 10, 2014).

findings of this qualitative study also support that notion. All six participants, at some point during their interview, expressed negative views of the federal government. One example of this was the following comment: "I think the government in the United States of America as a whole pretty much sucks. I really don't think there is much concern for people like me at all. I'm not a threat to them...but I'm also not a priority" (Interview 1, 2016).

While most preppers hold an overall negative view of the current state of the US national government, these individuals are in no way anarchists. Most, including the individual who made the comment above, very much love their ideal of the American political system. In fact,

two-thirds of the study's participants served in the military, or are currently federal employees, and are very proud of the service they have provided their country. However, these individuals see the current state of affairs in Washington, with the political bickering and wasteful spending, as less than ideal<sup>74</sup>. These sentiments are in no way directed at a particular political party. Rather, the study's respondents seem to have enough criticism to go around.

It should be pointed out that not all of the participant's comments were negative. In other words, while all of the participants made negative comments, a couple of respondents had positive points to make as well. The following comments were an example of these:

The government has the duty to provide for infrastructure, safety, national defense, and education. Most of what they do, they do well, but from time-to-time they do fail. I don't think that the government is full of evil people. Obama was a really good President. It (the federal government) is at times short-sighted. This short-sightedness can lead to uncertainty. Governments worry about the next news cycle or election. Such a mentality makes it hard to be effective...Being afraid of the federal government is ridiculous. [In a crisis scenario] People will try to take what you have. There will be gangs or marauders. In a true crisis "Road Warrior" scenario, you will be glad to see the government. That is better than the alternative. You are going to be praying that the government is around to provide law and order. (Interview 6, 2016)

As the comments illustrate, this prepper does not dislike the government or the services it provides. In fact, the comments suggest that the federal government may even be a part of his crisis scenario plans. However, they do suggest that the American political system may need a bit of tweaking to make it more effective.

### **Summative Remarks**

Preppers are very friendly, and eager to help those who seek to be more prepared. However, these individuals are a bit distrustful of those who inquire too much into their own prepping habits, and if asked, most decline to be formally interviewed about their lifestyle. With

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<sup>74</sup> As discussed above, the study's participants were ideologically well divided. Two were liberal lean, two were conservative, and two chose not to share their political views.

only six preppers agreeing to be interviewed, any conclusions drawn from their responses should in no way be taken as law. This limited degree of participation is no doubt the Achille's Heel of this study. However, the interviews do serve as a foundation, upon which, some of the findings of the content analysis from chapter 5 are corroborated. Furthermore, as was discussed above, the interviews brought to light new and telling information about prepper's fears that had not been included in the study's design; large multinational corporations that control the nation's food and medical supplies.

When interviews are given, those who participated were very uncomfortable with the label "prepper", due to the stigma that society has attached to it; preferring instead the label of one who is self-sufficient. In an effort to prevent having to rely on others in an emergency scenario, the participants of this study stockpile food, water (or have assured their ability to access clean water), guns, ammo, and various other forms of self-defense. Likewise, these individuals possess multiple bug-out bags, and have built networks of like-minded individuals who will support one another, should the need arise.

Ultimately, the findings of this analysis, on the causes of prepping behavior are mixed in their support of those from the content analysis. As was the case with the content analysis, one's personal culture was the best predictor of a prepping lifestyle. However, the content analysis found that one's identity was the next best predictor, whereas those interviewed were more likely to discuss factors from their personal history, such as surviving natural disasters. In the end, both studies concluded that when one of the causes of prepping works in conjunction with another the likelihood of prepping increases.

The findings of the interviews on the top fears for which preppers are preparing are also in line with those of the content analysis. By far, preppers are more concerned with natural

disasters than with any other potential threat. Furthermore, while the order of their significance was reversed in the two studies, global and individual economic concerns are also at the top of concerns on the list of prepper's fears. While all of the interviews were conducted prior to President Trump taking office, and the unprecedented market climbs that occurred shortly thereafter, most of the study's participants voiced concern over the long-term stability of the US economy, and what that would mean for them.

Finally, as was the case in chapter 5's content analysis, the interviewees in this study voiced very negative comments about the federal government. However, most of the study's participants have, or are currently working for the federal government. These individuals are not anti-government. They simply seek a more collaborative and cost-effective environment in Washington D.C. Furthermore, there is evidence that some preppers may include the continued presence of a federal government, as a part of their preparedness calculations. As such, it is important to point out that while both studies concluded that negative attitudes toward the federal government were held by the vast majority of preppers, this study offers little evidence that the prepping subculture is a potential fifth column that might try to topple the US government from within.

In the end, the preppers in this study just want to feel secure like everyone else. They seek security from the unexpected trials of life, like a natural disaster or unexpected financial hardships. Whereas some Americans invest in a 401K, others buy beans and bullets. Engaging in what they view as a civic-minded endeavor, these self-sufficient preppers simply want to take care of themselves, and be accepted within mainstream society.

# Chapter 7

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## Is it the End of the World as we Know it?

*“How do you think people responded to the prospect of eminent doom? They gobbled it up like a chocolate éclair. They didn’t fear their demise, they repackaged it. It can be enjoyed as video games, as TV shows, books, movies...the entire world whole-heartedly embraced the apocalypse and sprinted toward it with gleeful abandon. Meanwhile your Earth was crumbling around you. You’ve got simultaneous epidemics of obesity and starvation...bees and butterflies start to disappear, the glaciers melt, algae blooms...and you won’t take the hint. In every moment there’s the possibility of a better future, but you people won’t believe it, and because you won’t believe it, you won’t do what is necessary to make it a reality. So, you dwell on this all terrible future, you resign yourselves to it for one reason, because that future doesn’t ask anything of you today.”*

*Tomorrowland* [Motion Picture], 2016

One hundred years ago, the American Expeditionary force, led by General John J. Pershing, arrived in Europe to find a war that had ground to a halt in stalemate. With millions having already lost their lives, the Great War seemed to have no immediate end in sight. New weapons, such as airplanes, poison gas, and machine guns made combat especially deadly. However, the effects of such weapons were multiplied by the fact that many of the war’s officers continued to operate on tactics and strategies of a previous era. This is evident when one considers the number of men who were killed after having been ordered to advance on foot into a machine gun’s field of fire. This failure to adapt to the changing conditions of the day certainly made World War I far more-costly than it had to be.

As the example above illustrates, humans are slow to change; even if it is in their best interest to do so. Likewise, the national security strategy of the United States has been slow to

evolve with the changing needs of this current age of increasingly diverse security threats. This piece has illustrated that since the birth of the Cold War, the primary focus of the US government's security strategy has been at the national level. Such an approach worked as the world's two great superpowers faced off through a system of coalition building (NATO Nations v. Warsaw Pact) and proxy wars. Today, the Cold War is over, and the threats faced by the United States are very different. Unfortunately, the US's strategy for providing its citizens with a sense of security has failed to keep pace. This is evident when one considers that during the Cold War an arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union was the product of the period's global political climate. Unfortunately, the foreign policy of the United States has evolved little since that period. President Trump is currently seeking to spend more than sixty percent of the country's discretionary budget on issues of national security, with the primary recipient being the US military. As has been previously discussed all countries have finite resources and therefore must prioritize security threats; both national and human. As President Trump allocates greater resources to national security priorities, the zero-sum nature of economic policy necessitates that he cut spending elsewhere.

While significant resources are being dedicated to insuring America's place in the world, oftentimes the security of America's own citizens, even apart from the concerns of preppers, is being traded away. This focus on national security instead of human security is best illustrated by the fact that while President Trump is increasing military spending, he is doing so by cutting programs for the poor (Davis, 2017). Today the United States spends more than the next eight countries combined on issues of national security, while spending a lower percentage of its economy on its poor than at least twenty-six other industrialized countries (Weissmann, 2015). Similarly, in October of 2017, Congress allowed the Children's Health Insurance Program



(CHIP) to expire, a program that supplemented Medicaid in providing healthcare coverage to more than nine million of the nation's children and pregnant women. At the writing of this piece, efforts to restore medical access for these individuals has been stalled in the House of Representatives (Pear, 2017). With these examples in mind, it is no wonder that millions of Americans feel unsafe, and that some have taken steps to insure their own security by becoming preppers.

The comments and examples above are not meant to be a complete indictment of national security spending. However, they do illustrate, contrary to the assertions of scholars like Harvey (2008), that throwing more money at our fears is not always the best tactic; especially when doing so leaves us more vulnerable to other threats. The hyper-focused approach of President Trump and other US policymakers on traditional security concerns has not seemed to have provided a greater sense of security. As was previously discussed, prepping is up by four hundred percent since Trump took office (Fleck, 2017), and in November, after his election, the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* set the Doomsday Clock to 2.5 minutes till midnight because of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the unaddressed issues of climate change, and Trump's rhetoric on the possibility of using nuclear weapons during the 2016 presidential campaign. This is the closest that the clock has been to midnight since 1953, when it was at two minutes, due to the detonation of the hydrogen bomb by the United States (Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, 2017). While national security concerns are significant, Trump's disproportionate budgetary approach does not allow for meaningful efforts at addressing human security concerns.

This deficient allocation of resources, where the needs of the nation-state are placed so far above those of the individual, is significant given that the primary role of a country is to provide security for its population. A failure to perform in this function is a potential cause for

erosion to the foundation of the social contract between a state and its citizens. After all, as John Locke (2006, [1689]) explains, the whole basis of the social contract is to protect natural rights.<sup>75</sup> In the United States we interpret this to mean life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, it is pretty hard to pursue happiness if you are sick and cannot afford healthcare, while the government is dismantling affordable healthcare plans and spending more on traditional wars. Locke argued that if a sovereign state fails in protecting these natural rights, then it has abolished the social contract, and its citizens have a moral obligation to form a new governing system that will protect their rights

The intent of this piece was to examine this puzzle of why so many Americans feel so insecure in a country where so much is dedicated to security. As illustrated by the arguments above, the US security paradigm has failed to keep pace with the ever-changing nature of national and global security concerns. As a result, millions of Americans are shifting from the role of a security consumer, to that of a security producer. In other words, these preppers are no longer willing to rely on “big brother” to meet their needs, should the unexpected occur. This chapter will review the key assumptions of this study, its methodologies, along with the findings of the research that was conducted. In turn, potential policy prescriptions based on these findings will be discussed, and the chapter will conclude with areas of potential research in the future.

## **The Study and its Findings**

Ultimately, the study was broken down into two parts. First, chapter 5 consisted of a content analysis of more than 180 blog posts that responded to an inquiry into why the respondents began prepping. Based on responses, each post was coded for the individual’s

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<sup>75</sup> Locke argued that the basic natural rights were life, liberty, and property.

motive behind prepping, their view of government, and the greatest fears for which they are preparing. Likewise, chapter 6, the second part of this research analysis, consisted of personal interviews with individuals who are preppers. The six individuals were asked open-ended questions about the same topics: motivations behind prepping, their view of the federal government, and the greatest fears for which they are preparing. As was the case with the content analysis, all six interviews were transcribed and coded.

In an effort to better understand preppers, this study began with three basic questions in mind. First, what are the factors that serve to motivate an individual to become a prepper? As the analysis was conducted, responses to this question were broken down into

Key Questions of this Study	
1.	What are the factors that serve to motivate an individual to become a prepper?
2.	To what extent do preppers feel that the US has upheld its side of the social contract, in that it has provided its population with a sense of security?
3.	What are the most significant threats for which preppers are preparing?

**Figure 7.1: The three overarching questions of this research study.**

four categories. These were those related to one’s personality, personal history, identity, or their culture. As illustrated in Figure 7.2, the working hypothesis for this question, based on the theory of Constructivism, was that individuals who classify themselves as a prepper, do so because of a norm tipping event that reshaped their security norm; in conjunction with unique personality or cultural factors that supported such behavior. If the evidence were to support this hypothesis, one would expect to see, at a minimum, a high number of references to events in one’s personal history that served to trigger prepping.

Unfortunately, the evidence gathered from the study does not support this hypothesis. Of the four categories measured, personal history was the factor least mentioned in the content analysis for triggering prepper behavior. Similarly, the prepper interviews also failed to produce

personal history as the primary catalyst for prepping. Therefore, the findings of this study do not support the notion that prepping is triggered by a historical moment that serves as a norm tipping event. In light of these findings, one must accept the null hypothesis that personal history is not the best predictor of a person's decision to become a prepper. Thus, the theory of Constructivism may not offer the best explanation for prepping behavior. Furthermore, these findings also fail to lend credence to the psychological theory of historical analogies, which also links one's decision-making to previous historical events; and since this theory also relies on a high level of significance being given to one's personal history.

Of the four factors that were analyzed as a potential for triggering prepping, the best predictor was one's culture. A high level of confidence may be placed in this finding, as the results were consistent in both chapters 5 and 6. Most commonly cited examples of this included religion and the way participants were raised. However, culture alone is not enough to thoroughly explain the widespread prepping phenomenon. Rather, the findings of this study suggest that one's culture works in conjunction with other factors, such as personal history or identity, to initiate prepping behavior. In both studies, a significant number of respondents made statements that resulted in these individuals being coded in more than one category. In other words, while Constructivism may not be the best explanation for prepping behavior, the initial argument that prepping is the result of multiple factors at play does seem likely. However, one's culture seems far more instrumental in driving prepping behavior than does their personal history, personality, or identity.

Ultimately, Prospect Theory, or the notion that one's losses (or in this case, perceived losses) is felt more intensely than one's potential gains, is likely a better theoretical explanation than Constructivism for the initiation of prepping behavior. As mentioned in chapter 1, the goal

of a prepper is to insure the continuation of their present living conditions, even if the costs of such an assurance is significant. Whereas most react to the emotion associated with loss, preppers may have the same reaction to the perception of loss.

Furthermore, theories associated with fear offer significant insight into the mindset of preppers. After all, the drive for absolute security is unreasonable and likely unobtainable. As nations like the United States fall short of this expectation, ever increasing numbers of their citizens may turn to prepping.

Once an individual has made the decision to become a prepper, Group Think may then be at play. It is quite common for (s)he to join online forums, or to attend prepper conventions. Similarly, as discussed in chapter 6 preppers oftentimes form networks. These may take the form of a trading cooperative, or that of a communal agreement where all involved would relocate to a single piece of property to accumulate knowledge and for the division of labor, should an emergency crisis present itself. Never-the-less, such arrangements likely serve as a source of Group Think, where the thoughts and views of preppers become reinforcing.

Hypothesis		Supported by Evidence
Hypothesis 1	A historical factor, in conjunction with a cultural or psychological trait, will lead to a norm tipping event that triggers prepping behavior.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hypothesis 2	Most preppers are distrustful of the government's ability and/or willingness to protect them should the need arise.	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Hypothesis 3	The fears for which preppers feel the greatest concern are those that would require a multilateral approach to address, thus putting the solution to these issues outside the control of the nation-state.	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

**Figure 7.2: A list of the study's hypotheses and whether or not these were supported by evidence from the data acquired in the study.**

The second major question that drove this study was to what extent do preppers feel as though the United States has upheld its side of the social contract, in that it has provided its population with a sense of security? In other words, how do preppers feel about the US

government? Does it provide them with a sense of security? Would they like to get rid of it?

The working hypothesis for this question was that most preppers are distrustful of the government's ability and/or willingness to protect them, should the need arise. Evidence that supports this hypothesis would indicate that preppers are distrustful of the government, or even that they hold anti-government views.

The findings related to this question was clear-cut. Ninety-eight percent of the responses in the content analysis were negative, and one hundred percent of the interview participants made negative comments about the US government. This data is certainly significant enough to lend credence to Hypothesis 2 that preppers distrust the government and its ability/willingness to provide security for them. However, while negative views of the government seemed widespread within the prepping community, there was no evidence that such views are to the level that would lead to a potential civil uprising. Rather, many of the study's participants are or have been employees of the federal government, and wish to see it operate more effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, most preppers seem eager to remain under the government's radar, rather than against it; so as to go unnoticed. Many certainly seek to insure that their personal stockpiles go unnoticed, thus preventing the government from repurposing them should an actual emergency scenario arise.

It is worth mentioning that the federal government does recommend at least some degree of preparation for all Americans. It encourages every person to have a 72-hour kit that can be used to sustain themselves until help from the government officials arrives. Basic necessities such as food, water, first aid supplies, and personal medications should be included in such kits. Furthermore, one should also pack essential survival tools, such as a knife, a method of starting a fire, and a change of clothes.

The final question proposed by this study was on which fears preppers were most concerned. As Figure 7.2 illustrates, the hypothesis for this portion of the study was that the chief concerns for preppers were those that would require wide-spread multilateral cooperation between members of the international community, and that are therefore out of the control of a single nation-state. The evidence from this study also conclusively supported this hypothesis. The perceived greatest threats, as found in both the content analysis and the interviews, was that of natural disasters, followed by global and individual economic concerns. While providing security from the threat posed by individual economic concerns are within the realm of a single state, concerns related to natural disasters and the global economy are not. Any meaningful reaction to either threat would require cooperation from participants around the world.

To be clear on this point, multilateral cooperation will not prevent hurricanes or other forms of natural disaster. Through international cooperation, nation-states can address climate change and thus curb the intensity of these natural disasters. Furthermore, international agreements could be set in place that promise humanitarian aid to nations devastated by natural disaster. This in turn would likely decrease the response time of emergency management officials on the ground; lessening the fears of victims.

It is worth noting that almost all participants, in both portions of the study (chapters 5 and 6), mentioned multiple fears as they discussed their greatest concerns. In many instances, preppers mentioned three or more threats. Perhaps one of the most likely predictors of one's decision to become a prepper is their ability to perceive a wide range of threats, where others see only a few or none. It could be that preppers are simply more risk adverse than the average American.

Finally, the prepper interviews were especially telling in this part of the analysis in that those who participated brought to light one unexpected set of fears. These were those related to the power and influence of multinational corporations. A few of the preppers were concerned with companies like Monsanto who produce GMOs that can seriously affect the world's food supply. Similarly, many preppers have trepidation about pharmaceutical companies, and the effect that prescription drugs are having on the American public. One frequently mentioned example of this is the danger that some perceive in vaccines. While no conclusive evidence links these drugs to significant medical risks, many Americans are convinced that there is a link between vaccines and Autism. Ultimately, many preppers are interested in more traditional or homeopathic approaches to medicine, and most preppers possess heirloom seeds from other parts of the world.

### **Policy Prescriptions**

The findings of this study conclusively support the notion that America's current security paradigm is no longer adequate for the tasks ahead of it. While the US government continues to pump money into a strong standing military, so that it may efficiently face traditional security threats, the vast majority of Americans are left vulnerable. With 13.5 percent of Americans living in poverty (Proctor et. al., 2016) and the current administration attacking these individuals through budgetary cuts, many Americans today are literally not financially secure. As this study has illustrated personal and global economic security are very high on the list of concerns for most preppers. To truly provide human security, the United States needs to reduce its traditional security spending, and solidify the foundation of its economy. While preppers seek self-reliance, and not help from the government, they do worry the US economic system itself will collapse,



thus toppling the whole house of cards. This is evident when one considers the number of HNWI's who now prep because they fear an economic revolution scenario.

Similarly, the US government has to do its part to insure that the global economy remains stable. In a period when the world is so interconnected, the collapse of one nation's economy (like that of the US in 2008, or of Greece in 2015) can bring down the whole house of cards. Global US partnerships that will help to prop up and stabilize fledgling economies are in the best interests of the whole world. Unfortunately, such a policy prescription is a complete 180-degree turn from that of the current direction of the Trump administration, which recently withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (Baker, 2017).

Furthermore, as competition for the world's limited amount of fossil fuels grows increasingly tense over the coming decades, resource scarcity will serve to weaken the US and global economies. The United States needs to take steps now to initiate a moon-type (or perhaps Mars-type) quest, in an effort to seek out the best technologies and energy sources of the future. While such an endeavor will be expensive, it will lead to new industries, and sustain the world's economy for generations to come.

A quest for new forms of energy and technologies will not only serve to stabilize the global economy, but also help address the greatest fear for preppers: natural disasters. These unexpected events are becoming more frequent in their rate of occurrence, and more extreme in the amount of damage that they produce. Many scientists attribute these changing weather patterns to global warming, and the vast majority of Americans are now convinced that global warming is a result of the interaction that humans are having with their environment (Global Warming..., 2017, March 14). The carbon emissions that are being dumped into the atmosphere are pushing the world to the point of no return, where that damage that is being done might not

be reversed. As such the US and its global partners need to intensify their efforts to reduce the effects of climate change. In this way, a decision on the part of the Trump administration to withdraw from the Paris Climate Change Accord would be a disaster. Some models suggest that if every country, except the US, meets their carbon reduction goals, that the global temperature would still increase by half a degree; likely pushing the world over the three-degree threshold that has been set as the point of no return (Associated Press, 2017).

While it is unclear, what the future may hold for the world, with regard to climate change, there are steps that the US should be taking in the short-term to insure the security of Americans who fear natural disasters. Chief among these would be to adequately fund the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the agency tasked with responding to such threats. If natural disasters are truly the chief concern for preppers and in some cases other Americans also, then the federal response to these threats, and one that is focused on human security, should be the top priority of the American security complex.

As the beginning quote from the movie *Tomorrowland* states, "...in every moment there is the possibility of a better future, but you people won't believe it, and because you won't believe it, you won't do what is necessary to make it a reality. So, you dwell on this all terrible future, you resign yourselves to it". Such a quote describes the mindset of many preppers who accept the inevitability of a bleak future. While it is perhaps unfair to judge these individuals for allowing the status quo to persist, while they prepare for catastrophe, it should be reiterated that no outcome is a certainty. Imagine if instead of three million preppers, the United States had three million political activists, all seeking to make change for the better; all seeking to shift the long-standing security paradigm from that of the nation-state to that of human security. What might the world be like then?

## **Further Research**

No previous academic study has ever been performed on the American prepping subculture. Upon hearing of this study, many preppers were interested in its methodologies and findings, but very few were comfortable with formal participation. The greatest weakness of this study is certainly the low number of preppers willing to sit for a formal interview. With only six participants, it is hard to have any kind of certainty about the conclusions drawn from these interviews. At a maximum, these interviews serve only to support the conclusions drawn from the content analysis, which they largely do. Future studies on preppers should continue to seek out those willing to participate in formal interviews, so that their voices may be heard. Furthermore, more inclusive studies should be conducted that examine preppers in other parts of the world to determine whether the findings of this study also apply to those outside of this country.

As has previously been stated, the findings of this study suggest that the theory of Constructivism is lacking in its ability to explain prepping behavior. As such future studies on preppers should continue to explore various other theoretical lenses through which preppers may be viewed. Top contenders among these should be Prospect Theory and Group Think. Furthermore, future studies should include an analysis on a prepper's ability to perceive threats, as compared to those of non-preppers. Is it possible that these individuals are simply more risk averse than other Americans? Extensive interviewing is certainly required to tease out such points.

One final point that became apparent through the interview process was that the vast majority of those who participated had once, or is currently working for the federal government. It is possible that one's employment with the government leaves a jaded view of that agency in

the eyes of the prepper. In future research, this factor needs to be isolated as to insure that the conclusions that have been drawn are legitimate. In other words, future studies need to insure that the views of government being shared are not as a result of employment with such agencies.

### **Closing Remarks**

In the five years that it has taken to complete this study, much has changed in the world. A President, a Pope, and various other world leaders have come and gone. America has experienced riots, terrorist attacks, mass shootings, and the threat of a global pandemic. All the while, preppers remained constant, and ready for whatever life had to throw at them. The year 2012 was certainly a highpoint for the prepping community, as many Americans considered the possibilities of a Mayan and zombie apocalypse. For a period, television shows, such as *Doomsday Preppers*, made prepping mainstream. Unfortunately, as is usually the case, the most extreme members of the prepping community got the spotlight, and colored what it meant to be a prepper for all outside of the community who were seeking to better understand.

In closing this study, one final point should be reiterated. Preppers desperately seek to not be viewed as crazy or extremist. As such many do not even like or use the term “prepper”, preferring instead to be thought of as self-sufficient. As a subculture, these individuals are kind, and generous with their knowledge. Most genuinely love their country and long for it to see better days. In the end, preppers are very much like any other American. They have similar beliefs and fears, and simply seek their brand of security like any other American who might contribute to a retirement or savings plan. Ultimately, for most preppers, their lifestyle is one of personal responsibility.

## Appendix

Figure A.1: The table used for content analysis.

Observation	Prepping Motivation				Source of Fears								View of the Government		
	Personality	Culture	Identity	History	Natural Disaster	Economic- Global	Economic- Individual	Physical- Global	Physical- Individual	Global Pandemic	Domestic Unrest	Not Expressed	Positive	Negative	Not Expressed
1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
4	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
6	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
7	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
9	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
10	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
11	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
12	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
13	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
14	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
15	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
16	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
17	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
18	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
19	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
20	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
21	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
22	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
23	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
24	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
25	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
26	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

27	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
28	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
29	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
30	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
31	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
32	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
33	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
34	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
35	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
36	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
37	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
38	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
39	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
40	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
41	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
42	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
43	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
44	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
45	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
46	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
47	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
48	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
49	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
50	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
51	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
52	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
53	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
54	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
55	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
56	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
57	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
58	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
59	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
60	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
61	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
62	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
63	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
64	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
65	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0

66	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
67	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
68	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
69	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
70	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
71	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
72	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
73	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
74	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
75	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
76	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
77	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
78	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
79	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
80	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
81	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
82	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
83	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
84	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
85	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
86	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
87	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
88	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
89	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
90	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
91	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
92	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
93	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
94	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
95	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
96	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
97	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
98	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
99	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
100	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
101	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
102	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
103	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
104	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

105	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
106	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
107	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
108	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
109	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
110	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
111	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
112	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
113	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
114	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
115	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
116	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
117	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
118	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
119	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
120	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
121	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
122	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
123	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
124	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
125	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
126	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
127	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
128	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
129	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
130	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
131	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
132	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
133	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
134	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
135	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
136	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
137	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
138	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
139	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
140	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
141	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
142	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
143	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1



144	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
145	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
146	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
147	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
148	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
149	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
150	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
151	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
152	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
153	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
154	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
155	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
156	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
157	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
158	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
159	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
160	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
161	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
162	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
163	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
164	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
165	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
166	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
167	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
168	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
169	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
170	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
171	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
172	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
173	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
174	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
175	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
176	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
177	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
178	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
179	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
180	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
181	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
182	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

**Figure A.2: Open-ended questions that would be used to interview willing preppers**

### **Prepper Interview Questions**

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1. I wanted to start by having you tell me a little bit about yourself...
2. What made you get into prepping...why do you do it?
3. What do you see as the greatest threats that you face?
4. In your view, what is the government's role in your life, and how would you rate our current government?
5. Would you be willing to describe for me some of the preparations that you have made?

## Key Terms

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**Bug-out Bag-** A bag that is prepared in advance of an emergency that can be accessed at a moment's notice in the event of an emergency. These bags are meant to sustain an individual for a short period, until (s)he can acquire more permanent accommodations. These are also known as *Go Bags*, or *72 Hour Kits*.

**Contraceptive Corn-** A genetically modified form of corn that has the ability to prevent fertilization in women, and that is capable of killing sperm in men.

**Executive Order 13606-** (National Defense Resource Preparedness) This act essentially gives the President the authority to take a very wide range of steps to procure any resources deemed necessary for the national security of the United States. In other words, during a state of emergency, federal officials could claim the materials that have been stockpiled by preppers for the good of national security.

**Grandma's Pantry-** A campaign started by the National Grocer's Association in the 1950's to help the nation's women to prepare in the event of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Relying on the notion that everyone's grandma was always ready for the unexpected visit, the program provided lists and recommendations to help the nation's wives and mother's get ready for the unexpected nuclear war.

**Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA)-** An agency created by the Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950 that was meant to educate the American civilian population on how to best prepare for the event of nuclear war.

**Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-** (1) An agency created in 1979 by executive order from President Jimmy Carter, that replaced the FCDA. The goal of FEMA is emergency preparedness in general terms, not just nuclear threats. (2) Within the prepping world, FEMA has also come to mean "Foolishly Expecting Meaningful Aid".

**Genetically Modified Organism (GMO)-** A plant or animal whose genes have been altered in some way, usually to produce greater yields.

**Heirloom Seeds-** Seeds that have not been genetically modified or cross-pollinated, and as such, will bear fruit generation after generation.

**HNWI-** High-Net-Worth Individuals. Preppers that have amassed large fortunes, and who use a portion of their assets for prepping purposes. There are entire prepping communities that have been established for these individuals. New Zealand is the top destination of choice for many within this group.

**Kiloton-** A kiloton is a measurement of explosive power. One kiloton is equivalent to one thousand tons of TNT. The bomb used on Hiroshima yielded a blast of fifteen kilotons.

**Megaton-** A Megaton is a measurement of explosive power. One Megaton is equivalent to one million tons of TNT. The largest bomb ever exploded was *Tsar Bomba*, and was detonated by the Soviet Union on October 30, 1961. It yielded a blast of fifty megatons.

**Nuclear Freeze Movement-** A 1980's movement that sought to end the testing, production, and proliferation of nuclear weapons.

**Nuclear Winter-** A term that rose to prominence during the social and political debates that followed the 1983 movie *The Day After*. This is the idea that a full nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union would result in radiated dust clouds, so large that they are capable of blocking out most of the sun's rays; thus throwing the Earth into a nuclear ice age.

**Palate Fatigue-** Repeated and prolonged exposure to the same types of foods. Over time, an individual can develop a revulsion to the food, preferring instead not to eat.

**Prepper-** (1) An individual who seeks not only to survive in a state of crisis, but to thrive. These individuals seek to insure a near continuation of their present living conditions, should a life-changing event occur. As such, preppers stockpile provisions in an effort to prepare for a perceived threat. (2) For the purposes of this piece, a prepper is defined as one who prepares for the long-term survival (a month or more) of a number of potential threats, while trying to achieve a lifestyle as near to that of their current lifestyle as possible. A prepper thinks long-term, and for a variety of possibilities. Furthermore, preppers tend to think past the constructs of America's current society; such as the economy, pharmaceuticals, or power grid. A prepper thinks in terms of a future barter economy, herbal medicine, or the use of solar and wind power.

**Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)-** Also known as the *Star Wars Program*, this was a plan by President Ronald Reagan to create a space-based weapons system that could destroy inbound Soviet missiles before they could reach the United States.

**Survivalist-** An individual who is able to live off the land, or what can be found in their environment, should the need arise. The basis of this mindset is mere survival.

**TEOTWAWKI-** The End of the World as we Know it. A TEOTWAWKI event could be measured at the individual level (job loss, health crisis), or at the global level (global economic collapse, nuclear war, etc).

**The Greenbriar Hotel-** A West Virginia hotel where the US government secretly built an underground bunker capable of housing all 535 members of Congress, as-well-as a staff of up to 565. Meant to insure political continuity in the case of a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union, the secrecy of the site was compromised in 1992 after the release of a Washington Post story. Following the release of the story, the site was immediately decommissioned by the US government. Similar sites were also constructed for the President and key officials from the Pentagon.

**The Maginot Line Argument-** The idea that having access to a bomb shelter would cause one to over-estimate their own security in the case of a nuclear war.

**WROL-** Without Rule of Law. When society breaks down to the point that there is no longer any form of law enforcement in place to protect civilians and their property.

**Y2K Scare-** (Year Two Thousand) Millions of Americans stockpiled supplies in anticipation of a computer crash that would have been caused by the Y2K glitch, where computers would interpret the year 2000 coded as (00) as the year 1900 coded as (00). The fear was that power plants and other key systems would cease to function. For many of today's preppers, this event first introduced them to the world of prepping.

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