



Posting Past Armageddon

April 7, 2026

“I call it the Madman Theory, Bob,” President Richard M. Nixon told his chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman.

“I want the North Vietnamese to believe I’ve reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We’ll just slip the word to them that, ‘for God’s sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about communism. We can’t restrain him when he’s angry — and he has his hand on the nuclear button’ and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace.”

It’s not a theory, of course. It’s a *ploy* — and one that did not work out great for Nixon.*

So how’s it working for Donald Trump?

Buried in his book about being a wheeler-dealer, Mr. Trump notoriously advances a notion eerily similar to Nixon’s

Madman strategy. Trump likes to keep those with whom he is negotiating “guessing.”

He says this often. We cannot be shocked, then, if we’re all kept guessing about his Iran strategy.

His litany of flip-flops from early March to the present day has been breathtaking, even for Trump. “We won the war.”; “We defeated Iran”; “You never like to say too early you won. We won. In the first hour it was over.”; “If NATO doesn’t help, they will suffer something very bad.”; “We neither need nor want NATO’s help.”; “I don’t need Congressional approval to withdraw from NATO.”; “The Strait of Hormuz must be protected by the countries that use it. We don’t use it, we don’t need to open it.”; “Open the fuckin’ Strait, you crazy bastards, or you’ll be living in Hell — JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah.”

Upping the ante on Tuesday, Trump [posted](#) that “a whole civilization will die tonight.” Then he [agreed](#), a few hours later, to “suspend the bombing and attack of Iran for a period of two weeks.”

Did the madman ploy work?

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.

* When Nixon and Trump corresponded years ago, Dick told Donald that Mrs. Nixon thought Trump would win if he ran for office. Did Pat sniff another practitioner of her husband’s infamous ploy?

NOTE: See H.R. Haldeman, *The Ends of Power* (1978), p. 122.