

Miscellany 44: Joseph George Caldwell's Predictions for 2009

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Commentary on recent news, reading and events of personal interest.

Every year, there are numerous predictions of what might happen during the year. Most of those are “unconditional” predictions – they are not contingent on the occurrence of other events. Most predictions of rare or unexpected or unusual events that have dates associated with them will fail to materialize.

Here are my “predictions” for 2009. They are all presented as “subjective probabilities” (similar in concept to the Doomsday Clock of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*). Since the likelihood (probability) of many of them is highly contingent on the event of global nuclear war (GNW), I present them in three ways: (1) the probability of the event conditional on no global nuclear war (in 2009); (2) the probability of the event conditional on global nuclear war (in 2009); and (3) the unconditional probability of the event. The third probability – the unconditional probability – is simply the “weighted average” of the two conditional probabilities, where the weights are the probabilities of the conditioning events (no GNW or GNW). In mathematical notation:

$$\text{Prob}(E) = \text{Prob}(E \mid \text{no GNW}) \text{Prob}(\text{no GNW}) + \text{Prob}(E \mid \text{GNW}) \text{Prob}(\text{GNW}),$$

where “E” denotes the event.

In the table, “GNW” stands for “global nuclear war,” “Prob.” stands for “probability” and “cond.” stands for “conditional.” If a probability is very small, it is assigned a value of zero, even though it is positive.

If you place any faith in my subjective probabilities, then the significant implications of the following table are clear: (1) If you want to survive for another year, pray that global nuclear war does not occur; and (2) If you want to end mass extinction and the destruction of the biosphere, pray for global nuclear war.

If you don't like my predictions, substitute your own subjective probabilities in the table, recalculate the unconditional probabilities, and see what you get.

Event (to occur in 2009)	Probability of event, conditional on no global nuclear war (GNW)	Prob. of no GNW	Prob. of event, cond. on GNW	Prob. of GNW	Unconditional prob. of event
1 Global nuclear war (GNW)	0	0.9	1	0.1	0.1
2 Major breakdown in the planet's ecosystem	0.1	0.9	0.5	0.1	0.14
3 Collapse of the biosphere	0	0.9	0	0.1	0
4 Death of the biosphere	0	0.9	0	0.1	0
5 End of the sixth mass species extinction	0.1	0.9	1	0.1	0.19
6 Precipitous drop in	0.1	0.9	1	0.1	0.19

human population					
7 Extinction of mankind	0	0.9	0.01	0.1	0.001
8 Collapse of global industrial society	0.1	0.9	1	0.1	0.19
9 Collapse of the global financial system	0.1	0.9	1	0.1	0.19
10 Establishment of a "New World Order" (global synarchy)	0.1	0.9	0.3	0.1	0.12
11 Revolution in the USA	0.1	0.9	1	0.1	0.19
12 Assassination of a prominent political figure	0.5	0.9	1	0.1	0.55
13 Passing of Hubbert's Peak	0.5	0.9	1	0.1	0.55
14 End of massive use of fossil fuels	0.1	0.9	1	0.1	0.19
15 Major new disease	0.1	0.9	0	0.1	0.09
16 World-wide famine	0.1	0.9	1	0.1	0.19
17 Volcanic winter	0	0.9	0	0.1	0
18 Nuclear winter	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.1	0.1
19 New ice age	0.1	0.9	0.5	0.1	0.14
20 Global flooding (sea rise of 10 meters)	0.1	0.9	0.5	0.1	0.14
21 Any major geological event	0.2	0.9	0.7	0.1	0.25
22 Islamist nuclear bomb on a Western city	0.1	0.9	0	0.1	0.09
23 Islamist nuclear bomb on Jerusalem	0.1	0.9	0	0.1	0.09
24 Israeli nuclear bomb on Tehran	0.1	0.9	1	0.1	0.19
25 Nuclear war between India and Pakistan	0.2	0.9	1	0.1	0.28
26 Nuclear war between USA, Russia and China	0.3	0.9	1	0.1	0.37
27 Nuclear bomb on any city	0.3	0.9	1	0.1	0.37
28 Nuclear bombs on Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo	0.2	0.9	1	0.1	0.28
29 Nuclear bomb on Rome	0.1	0.9	1	0.1	0.19
30 Nuclear bomb on a major dam (e.g., Aswan, Boulder, Volta)	0.1	0.9	1	0.1	0.19
31 Destruction of the Washington Monument	0.5	0.9	1	0.1	0.55
32 Torpedoing of a large cruise ship	0.5	0.9	0	0.1	0.45
33 Major asteroid hit	0	0.9	0	0.1	0
34 Planetary spiritual awakening	0	0.9	1	0.1	0.1
35 Coming of the Messiah	0	0.9	0.5	0.1	0.05
36 You will survive	0.9	0.9	0	0.1	0.81
37 Your grandchildren will survive	0.9	0.9	0	0.1	0.81