

# A guy named Satan: General Boykin's claims

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [November 15, 2003](#) issue

Before Old soldier Lieutenant General William G. Boykin “just fades away,” as General Douglas MacArthur said they all do, let me examine his contributions to theology. Assigned to lead the U.S. in the pursuit of Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and other enemies, he spellbinds the nation and inspires our enemies (and previously unimpassioned Muslims) to fury with the theological dicta that he repeats, in uniform, before evangelical audiences. I am not sure his critics have plumbed the theological possibilities that Boykin represents in his four best-known (here italicized) claims:

- *“I knew that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol.”* The man with the smaller, unreal, idol-god was militia leader Osman Ali Otto in Somalia, whom God let Boykin defeat in 1993. Misguided critics who thought Boykin was speaking of Allah learned that his “comments to Osman Otto in Mogadishu were not referencing his worship of Allah but his worship of money and power; idolatry.”

Note how deftly the prophetic Boykin has set us up. Which is the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth and which is virtually the least so? Which is most tempted and which most succumbs to the temptation to worship money and power? Ask Billy Graham. Ask the pope. Ask your friendly neighborhood minister-priest-rabbi-imam. Ask the moralists and ethicists and prophets. We are. So, our “bigger” money and power won. Glad to have that clarified.

- *[Our president is] “in the White House because God put him there.”* Some were offended that General Boykin told fellow evangelicals “in the army of God, in the house of God, in the kingdom of God” that they had been “raised for such a time as this.” And that we are being governed by someone who holds office not thanks to hanging chads or the Supreme Court but “because God put him there.”

If you follow the apostle Paul in Romans 13, as Boykin, being evangelical, must, you will agree that the general has it right: our ruler is indeed “of God.” But as a Bible-believer Boykin knows that all rulers, including the warlords of Somalia, were put in place by God, since the Bible states that “the powers that be are ordained of God.” Paul was probably writing about Saddam Nero, the Roman emperor. Whoever resisted that killer and his like, then, “resisted the ordinance of God.” Sorry to be so literal, but Boykin is a literalist.

- *“What threatens us is “not Osama bin Laden. It’s not what you can see. . . . It’s the enemy in the spiritual realm . . . a guy named Satan.”* Since tracking the terrorist enemy is Boykin’s assignment, how reassuring to find that that enemy is “a guy” even more hidden than Osama bin Laden. Catching bin Laden would be beside the point.

- *“Whether you understand it or not [this picture shows] a demonic spirit over the city of Mogadishu . . . that’s not a fake, that’s not a farce.”* Some unimaginative critics deride Boykin for showing church groups a TV picture of black slashes in the sky over Mogadishu back during the cosmic battle of 1993. By telling his audiences to see the slashes Boykin verges on the self-contradictory. That the invisible demonic spirit leaves visible signs should make it easy for Boykin to track down bin Laden, Hussein and other leavers of smudges and slashes. I recommend that our side follow those traces to their source, in a more productive and less expensive war on terrorism than the one we are now fighting.