

BOOK REVIEW

The MADness of Nuclear Targeting: Daniel Ellsberg and the Doomsday Machine

by Carl Osgood

The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner

by Daniel Ellsberg

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Oct. 26—On Jan. 25, 1991, Air Force Gen. George Lee Butler took command of Strategic Air Command (SAC), the nuclear warfighting arm of the Pentagon. The first task that Butler set for himself was a review of the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP), SAC’s plan for actually waging nuclear war against the Soviet Union. Butler had already spent the previous three years on the Joint Staff at the Pentagon trying to pry open the secrets of the SIOP—secrets which were withheld even from the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—but with only limited success.

Butler already knew, for example, that the targeting plan bore little relationship to the policy directives from the Pentagon, contained in a document called the Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy or NUWEP. The targeting plan—not the policy of the administration in power—actually drove nuclear force requirements and thus the demand for ever greater budgets.

Nonetheless, Butler was still astonished by what he found when he finally gained access to the SIOP at SAC headquarters in Omaha. He later recalled:

With the possible exception of the Soviet nuclear war plan, this was the most absurd and irresponsible document I had ever reviewed in my life. I came to fully appreciate the truth [that] we escaped the Cold War without a nuclear holocaust by some combination of skill, luck and divine intervention, and I suspect the latter in greatest proportion.

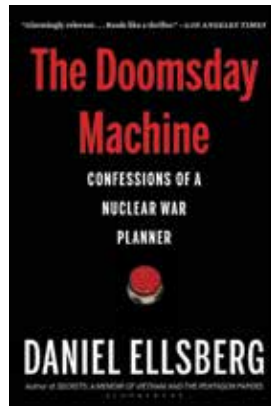
After he retired in 1994, Butler became an anti-nuclear campaigner, calling for abolishing nuclear weapons. His review of the SIOP became a crucial factor on his way to taking on that role.¹

Nuclear Plans Unknown to the President

Daniel Ellsberg was well familiar with the madness of nuclear targeting even before the first SIOP plan was put into effect in 1961. Ellsberg is justifiably famous for his disclosure of the mid-1960s studies of the Vietnam War, which became known as the Pentagon Papers. However, had the war in Vietnam not intervened, the Pentagon Papers might instead have been about nuclear targeting.

Ellsberg’s first exposure to nuclear targeting came in 1958, when he was sent, as part of a RAND study team, to Hawaii to study the command-and-control arrangements for U.S. forces in the Pacific. In studying the nuclear war plans of CINCPAC (Commander in Chief Pacific), Ellsberg found what he considered to be a “startling” omission. Ellsberg wrote in his 2017 book, *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*:

I presumed without question that at the highest level of nuclear planning, provision was made for conflicts that involved only the Soviet Union: arising, for example, over access to West Berlin or a Soviet attack on Europe or the United States. Yet, I soon discovered that in the plans of Pacific forces, from top to bottom, there was no provision at all for attacking only the Russian targets in their sphere. In every plan for war with the Soviet Union, Chinese targets (including every major city in China) were also struck.



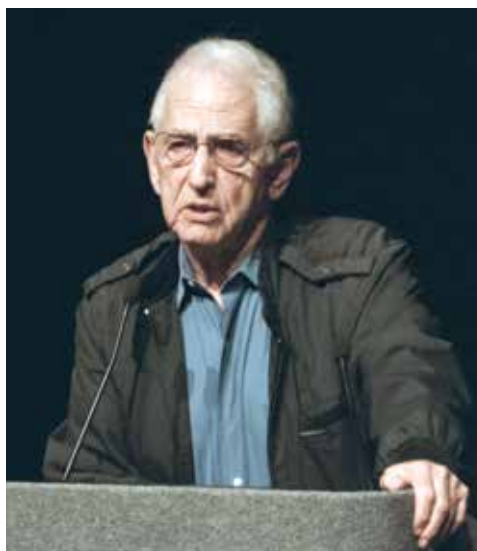
1. . As recounted by Eric Schlosser in his 2014 book, *Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety*.

As I gathered from talking with CINCPAC nuclear planners, there was a strong incentive for them to assume—and they did assume—that under any circumstances in which we were fighting Russia, we would also want to annihilate its Communist partners, the Chinese. Because of range limitations, almost no Russian targets lay within CINCPAC reach, except for a few in the area of Vladivostok and Siberia. Thus, if the president gave an order to attack only Soviet targets, CINCPAC forces, having destroyed Vladivostok and a few other minor targets in eastern Russia, would essentially have to sit out the war as observers—“on the sidelines,” as they thought of it—during the big game.

Ellsberg’s work on the CINPAC war plans gained him access to the military’s top-level nuclear war planning document, called the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP), the document on which all regional war plans, including CINCPAC’s, were based. Ellsberg reports that he was told that neither the Secretary of Defense nor even the President was aware of the nature, or even the existence, of the JSCP. This was in the days long before the Goldwater-Nichols legislation of 1986 put the Secretary of Defense in the chain of command between the military and the president. The military, as Ellsberg explains, didn’t always feel it necessary to involve the civilian leadership in what they considered to be their affairs. This was reflected in practices designed to keep the Secretary of Defense in the dark about the general plans for nuclear war.

Ellsberg wrote:

All this was intended to preempt the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] nightmare: that the secretary or a civilian working for him might see this acronym [JSCP] in a document, might ask what it meant, and then ask to see the plan. This could open the possibility of civilians working for the President actually reviewing the plan and demanding changes.



CC/Takomabibelot

Daniel Ellsberg, whose book exposes the madness of U.S. nuclear targeting.

Annex C of the JSCP contained the SAC war plan. The JSCP specified: “In the event of general war, Annex C would be executed”—but even the definition of “general war” was kept hidden. Ellsberg eventually found it in the JSCP:

General war is defined as armed conflict with the Soviet Union.... In general war, a war in which the armed forces of the USSR and of the U.S. are overtly engaged, the basic military objective of the U.S. Armed Forces is the defeat of the Sino-Soviet Bloc.

In other words, the lumping together of the Soviet Union and China in the war plan was baked in from the top. There was no alternative plan for any other level of conflict with the Soviet Union alone, not even, for example, if it were confined only to the Berlin enclave.

‘Destruction Defying Assessment’

The declassified documentation that has become available in the decades since Ellsberg took his notes on the JSCP, confirms much of what he recorded at that time. The Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP) was established by a memo promulgated by Secretary of Defense Thomas S. Gates on Aug. 16, 1960. The memo directed the development of a National Strategic Targeting and Attack Policy (NSTAP) and a National Strategic Target List (NSTL) along with the SIOP.

The SIOP “for attack of the targets” on the NSTL was “needed to insure maximum effectiveness, mutual support of forces and economy of force,” the memo said. The NSTL and SIOP were to be responsive to the NSTAP and “in consonance with the implementing directive to the commanders concerned.”

The commander of Strategic Air Command was designated the Director of Strategic Target Planning and thus had responsibility for the NSTL and the SIOP. A Joint Chiefs of Staff memorandum dated Aug. 19, 1960, clarified that the intent of the NSTAP was:

To provide guidance for the optimum employment of appropriate United States atomic delivery

forces in the initial strategic attack against the Sino-Soviet Bloc.

In other words, it re-codified the problem that Ellsberg had come across already in 1958.

Annex C of the JSCP, SAC's general war plan, became the first SIOP, called SIOP 62, which went into effect in 1961. Ellsberg wrote:

Following the guidance of the JSCP, the planners at SAC headquarters set out to weld all the warheads in the U.S. arsenal into one hydra-headed monster that would arrive on its targets as near simultaneously as possible, preferably before any Soviet warheads had launched.

On July 20, 1961, U.S. President John F. Kennedy received a briefing, not on SIOP 62, but on a study of the consequences of nuclear war. According to documents posted by the National Security Archive of Georgetown University in 2014², the briefing was based on a study by a group called the Net Evaluation Subcommittee (NESc), the existence of which had dated well back into the Eisenhower Administration. The summary of the study included a striking overview statement:

The scope and intensity of destruction and the shattering of the established political, military and economic structure resulting from such an exchange [a nuclear exchange—ed.] would be so vast as to practically defy accurate assessment.

Estimated population losses were huge: In the USSR and China, at the end of one month: 67 million and 76 million people respectively. The United States—

suffered severe damage and destruction from the surprise Soviet attack.... Tens of millions of Americans were killed outright; millions more died in subsequent weeks. The framework of the federal and of many state governments was shattered.

2. *Studies by Once Top Secret Government Entity Portrayed Terrible Costs of Nuclear War*, [National Security Archive, July 22, 2014](#).



John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum
President John Kennedy (right) with Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara (center) and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Maxwell D. Taylor.

The estimation was that between 48 and 71 million were killed and casualties increased during the year that followed (the American population in 1961 was 182 million).

It may have been after this presentation, described by Secretary of State Dean Rusk as “an awesome experience,” that a dismayed John F. Kennedy turned to Rusk and said: “And we call ourselves the human race.”

U.S. First-Strike Policy

Early in his book, Ellsberg dispenses with some popular myths about the purposes of the U.S. nuclear arsenal, thus helping to inform the account that follows. He notes that—

the *declared* [all emphases in the original] official rationale for such a system has always been the supposed need to deter—or if necessary respond to—an aggressive Russian nuclear first strike against the United States. This widely believed public rationale is a deliberate deception.

The nature, scale and posture of our strategic nuclear forces has always been shaped by the requirements of quite different purposes: To attempt to limit the damage to the United States from Soviet or Russian retaliation to a *U.S. first strike* against the USSR or Russia.

This capability presumes the willingness of the Unit-

ed States to launch a first strike in order to strengthen the credibility of U.S. threats “to prevail in regional, initially non-nuclear conflicts involving Soviet or Russian forces or their allies.” This is what Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin calls today “integrated deterrence” where, lurking behind every non-nuclear conflict that America is involved in—be it Russia in Ukraine, “defending” Israel against Iran, or against China over Taiwan—lies the implied threat of a U.S. nuclear first strike:



USAF/SAC Directorate of Information
Minuteman III missile, part of the U.S. nuclear defense.

The required U.S. strategic capabilities have always been for a *first-strike* force: not, under any president, for a U.S. surprise attack, unprovoked or “a bolt out of the blue,” but not, either, with an aim of striking “second” under any circumstances, if that can be avoided by pre-emption. Though officially denied, pre-emptive “launch on warning” (LOW)—either on tactical warning of an incoming attack or strategic warning that nuclear escalation is probably impending—has always been at the heart of our strategic alert.

Ellsberg also dispenses with the myth that the United States has not used nuclear weapons since Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945:

[U.S. presidents] have used them in the precise way that a gun is used when it is pointed at someone in a confrontation, whether or not the trigger is pulled. To get one’s way without pulling the trigger is a major purpose of owning the gun.

The best-known example of this might be President Richard Nixon’s “mad man theory,” to which



U.S. Air Force/Staff Sgt. Jack Sanders
U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin calls for an “integrated deterrence,” which brings with it the threat of a U.S. nuclear first strike.

Lyndon LaRouche thoroughly exposed the nature of Russell’s plotting in his 1994 article, “How Bertrand Russell Became an Evil Man.” LaRouche wrote:

In that 1946 report, Russell presents his motive for the continued use of the geopolitical threat of nuclear weaponry by himself, Winston Churchill, et al.: To blackmail Moscow into submitting to an agreement to transform the then recently es-

tablished United Nations Organization into the kind of one-world dictatorship for which his world-federalist utopians have continued to work throughout this century.

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev joined the plot to form a U.S.-Soviet condominium that subjected the world to a thermonuclear reign of terror, in the form of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), that lasted until 1991 but permitted side shows like Vietnam and Afghanistan, and brush fire proxy wars all over what was then called the

Third World, in order to prevent its economic development. That is the context for the madness of nuclear targeting that Ellsberg otherwise describes.

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Ellsberg devotes an entire chapter.

It Began with Bertrand Russell

Ellsberg’s failure is to not identify the source of such thinking, and for that we have to turn to Bertrand Russell. Russell was the one who set into motion the entire pernicious history that Ellsberg describes, as signified in his infamous article “The Atomic Bomb and the Prevention of War,” published in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* in October 1946. *EIR* founder