

Appalling stories about the big one **TO WIN A NUCLEAR WAR** **THE PENTAGON'S SECRET WAR PLANS**

Mittelstaedt, Martin. **The Globe and Mail** [Toronto, Ont] 09 May 1987: C.19.



Abstract

Although it is generally conceded the world stood on the edge of nuclear destruction during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the authors, both nuclear physicists, document a depressing list of other cases. These include the numerous crises over Berlin, Vietnam at Dien Bien Phu (when the United States wanted to lend the French a few atomic bombs) and the Chinese Islands of Quemoy and Matsu.

Full Text

Appalling stories about the big one **TO WIN A NUCLEAR WAR THE PENTAGON'S SECRET WAR PLANS**

Saturday, May 09, 1987

MARTIN MITTELSTAEDT

BY MICHIO KAKU AND DANIEL AXELROD *Black Rose*, 357 pages, \$17.95 (paper) REVIEW BY MARTIN MITTELSTAEDT The setting is May, 1953, in the White House. President Dwight Eisenhower presides over a meeting of his National Security Council, along with virtually the entire top political and military leadership of the

United States. The topic: whether to drop atomic bombs on China and Korea and risk beginning the Third World War.

The war planners decide to ready their nuclear forces, but hold off using them to see if negotiations to end the war produce results. Quite unexpectedly, the talks make progress and the conflict starts to wind down. The United States backs away from the nuclear precipice.

The incident is one of many described in *To Win A Nuclear War*, a book that documents the thinking of U.S. leaders and nuclear strategists during the roughly two dozen times they've planned or threatened to use nuclear weapons since 1945.

The details of these plans emerged largely through painstaking freedom-of-information searches conducted by Michio Kaku and Daniel Axelrod on recently declassified U.S. government documents. As former U.S. attorney-general Ramsey Clark states in the foreword, these records form "an appalling story."

What the documents reveal is that U.S. leaders have regularly itched to use the bomb, but have refrained - not out of moral qualms over killing millions of people, but rather because total victory couldn't be assured.

Although it is generally conceded the world stood on the edge of nuclear destruction during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the authors, both nuclear physicists, document a depressing list of other cases. These include the numerous crises over Berlin, Vietnam at Dien Bien Phu (when the United States wanted to lend the French a few atomic bombs) and the Chinese Islands of Quemoy and Matsu. Perhaps the most intriguing cases were secret U.S. studies, some made within months of defeating the Nazis, to nuke the Soviet Union, then an ally. The studies went by such suggestive names as Totality, Pincher, Bushwacker and Broiler.

For example, two months after Nagasaki, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff commissioned a study of an atomic attack on the Soviet Union using 20 to 30 A-bombs, either in retaliation for Soviet aggression or in a preventive war in which the United States launched a surprise attack without provocation.

Bushwacker, a 1948 plan, was even more ambitious. It studied how the United States might defeat and then occupy the Soviet Union. The first step was to decapitate its leadership structure through an atomic attack, and then to take on the defeated remnants of the Communist Party through an expected guerrilla war.

With the partisans defeated, the Soviet Union would be split, with the Baltic states and Moslem areas made into separate countries. The United States then planned to import White Russians and members of the Czarist aristocracy who had fled after the Bolshevik Revolution to rule what remained.

Pincher, another postwar scheme, planned for 50 bombs to be dropped on the Soviet Union to destroy its leadership and economic structure. But the plan was viewed as flawed because U.S. war planners feared the Red Army might, in a desperate counter attack, overrun Western Europe.

The authors contend that these various schemes go beyond the hypothetical contingency plans so common to military thinking. For one thing, the plans frequently emphasized nuclear first strikes as responses to conventional crises. As well, they were often discussed not at the level of the lowly Pentagon analyst but at the highest reaches of the U.S. military and government establishments. "Hypothetical war plans left the contingency phase and became operational battle plans during the Korean crisis of 1953, the Vietnam crisis of 1954 and 1969, and the series of Quemoy-Matsu crises during the fifties," they write.

Although most of the top planners have been keen to use nuclear arms, the authors found in the secret documents that "there has always been a tiny minority" of senior officials who have been reluctant to resort to atomic warfare for moral reasons or because genocide was, in the words of one of these dissidents, "abhorrent to the American people."

While much of the book concerns internal debates over nuclear war strategies from 1945 to the early seventies,

the authors use this information in an attempt to explain the current U.S. Administration's desire for a Star Wars system. Star Wars is regularly portrayed as a defensive shield that will protect the United States from nuclear weapons, but the authors believe it will also provide a great deal of nuclear capability.

They argue that the major problems for the United States in launching a nuclear war in the past was uncertainty over achieving total victory at acceptable costs. In the immediate postwar period, when the United States had a nuclear monopoly, there was the fear the Soviets could take over Europe even after absorbing an atomic attack. Then later, the U.S. homeland became vulnerable to Soviet retaliation, precluding a nuclear strike as a reasonable option.

But Star Wars, combined with other recent improvements in nuclear weaponry, might give the war planners a first-strike capability and a defence to absorb any feeble Soviet counterattack.

"A superpower with a leaky Star Wars system may feel emboldened to strike first from behind its shield, knocking out the enemy's weapons, and then using the shield to deflect a weakened retaliatory blow," they write. That makes the authors nervous, and they expect nuclear tensions to heighten in the nineties, when the system is put in place.

All this talk of nuclear war makes the book a chilling read. To Win A Nuclear War will probably become a classic for two unlikely groups - armchair militarists on its historical aspects and peace activists for what might lie ahead. Martin Mittelstaedt reports from the New York bureau of The Globe and Mail.

All material copyright Bell Globemedia Publishing Inc. or its licensors. All rights reserved.

Details

Title	Appalling stories about the big one TO WIN A NUCLEAR WAR THE PENTAGON'S SECRET WAR PLANS
Author	Mittelstaedt, Martin
Publication title	The Globe and Mail
Pages	C.19
Number of pages	0
Publication year	1987
Publication date	May 9, 1987
Year	1987
Place of publication	Toronto, Ont.
Publication subject	General Interest Periodicals--Canada

ISSN 03190714

Source type Newspapers

Language of publication English

Document type NEWSPAPER

Last updated 2010-06-25