

Naval War College Review

Volume 36
Number 5 *September-October*

Article 22

1983

Strategic Weapons: An Introduction

Michael K. Doyle

Norman Polmar

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Doyle, Michael K. and Polmar, Norman (1983) "Strategic Weapons: An Introduction," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 36 : No. 5 , Article 22.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol36/iss5/22>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

agents such as Allen Dulles, William Colby, and now William Casey have directed it for most of its existence makes clear the continuity between the two organizations.

In many ways this is an important book, for Cave Brown has had the advantage over such previous Donovan biographers as Corey Ford in having had access to Donovan's massive files. This had enabled the author to study OSS operations in unparalleled depth; yet it has not resulted in a truly satisfying work. Despite the wealth of detail available to him, Cave Brown has had to infer many of the most important points in his study—Donovan's recruitment into intelligence work, the reasons for his eventual dismissal, the results of OSS operations—and often extrapolates more than the evidence warrants. This profusion of minutiae, along with Cave Brown's florid style, makes the book a chore to read. Many students of World War II intelligence activities will undoubtedly find this a rewarding book, but it is not the definitive book on Donovan or on the Office of Strategic Services. Still needed is a work more broadly based in sources and more convincing in its judgments (admittedly this might not be easy to achieve given the nature of intelligence work). But until such a monograph does appear, Anthony Cave Brown's "*Wild Bill*" *Donovan* must be reckoned with by those who want to learn about the OSS and its founder.

Lloyd J. Graybar
Eastern Kentucky University

Polmar, Norman. *Strategic Weapons: An Introduction*. Revised 2nd Ed. New York: Crane-Russak, 1982. 176pp. \$16.50 paper \$8.95

Norman Polmar's singular achievement in this brief treatise for the layman is to provide a dispassionate account of the strategic weaponry and delivery systems built by the United States and the Soviet Union over the last thirty years. As an introduction to the subject, Polmar's book is an excellent and useful catalog of the evolution of hardware and force structure on both sides, with some attention to the other nuclear powers—Great Britain, France, Red China, India, and "perhaps" Israel. Most importantly, Polmar has avoided the technocratic jargon that makes so much of the literature on this vitally important subject undecipherable for the concerned general reader. The National Strategic Information Center sponsored this timely revision of Polmar's earlier work, and deserves to be commended for doing so. It is this kind of balanced effort to understand a most complex issue that is conspicuously lacking in the current highly emotional debate over our future nuclear weapons policy.

Polmar has no axe to grind in offering this summary account of strategic weapons development. His central concern is to provide a chronological narrative of key evolutions in delivery systems from 1945 to the present. He is at his best when dealing with the major milestones in the evolution of weapon systems technology and its impact on force

structure. For example, this is one of the best brief accounts available of how the United States came to base strategic policy on a triad of delivery systems.

Equally invaluable for understanding the current impasse between the superpowers are Polmar's two chapters which treat present trends in weapon system development within the Soviet Union and the United States. Anyone interested in a straightforward and nonpartisan explanation of the obvious lack of coherence in US "strategic" policy would be well advised to read, for example, Polmar's description of the central issues in the MX debate. His treatment of the Trident program and of the decisions leading to a resurrection of cruise missiles as a viable technology are also valuable and instructive for anyone interested in understanding how these key weapon systems effect the newly emergent alternative to the traditional triad.

Strategic Weapons: An Introduction is very satisfactory in its treatment of the technological factors that drive the strategic arms race. It is less than satisfactory in dealing with the core question—the why of it all. Perhaps because the explanations of the why—of the key strategic policy decisions and the political assumptions on which they are based—are the most disputed and most emotionally provocative of all issues. Polmar has almost ignored them in this primer. By omitting the most contentious aspect of the subject, Polmar has ensured the nonpartisan character of his book. Anyone new to

these issues, no matter what side he takes in the current debate, can benefit from this work. However, we are also deprived of Polmar's insights into the degree to which political considerations, particularly intra- and inter-service rivalries, shape policy decisions that lead to the acceptance of one technology and the rejection of others. Clearly, the STRAT-X study of the late 1960s is a recognizable and classic case of this sort. Another vital issue slighted by Polmar is the integration of nuclear weapons into Nato and the implication of theater nuclear forces in negotiating with the Russians. Are such weapons "strategic" or not? After all, at least in the West, the political nature of "strategic" weapons will be decisive in shaping future policy.

Perhaps if this worthy book undergoes yet another revision, Mr. Polmar will treat the political aspect of these weapons with more depth. In the meantime this short treatise ought to be mandatory reading for all new students of the subject.

Michael K. Doyle
Alexandria, Virginia

Rausa, Rosario. *Skyraider: The Douglas A-1 "Flying Dump Truck."* Annapolis, Md.: Nautical and Aviation Publishing Co., 1982, 239pp. \$17.95
Known as the "Able Dog" in Korea and referred to as the "Spad" in Southeast Asia, the A-1 Skyraider was originally designed by Ed Heinemann and Douglas Aircraft engineers to take on the Japanese during the last campaigns against the