



Dismantle the American Doomsday Machine – Daniel Ellsberg on RAI (12/13)

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PAUL JAY: Welcome back to Reality Asserts Itself on The Real News Network. I'm Paul Jay.

In his book *Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*, Daniel Ellsberg ends with some recommendations. Here's what he writes. He proposes that the United States, first of all, commit to a no first use policy for nuclear weapons. Two, probing investigative hearings on our war plans, especially in the light of nuclear winter. Three, eliminating ICBMs, intercontinental ballistic missiles. Next, forgoing delusions of preemptive damage limiting by our first strike forces. Giving up the profits, jobs, and alliance hegemony based on maintaining that pretense. Otherwise dismantling the American doomsday machine. Both parties, as currently constituted, oppose every one of these measures. This mortal predicament did not begin with Donald J. Trump, and it will not end with his departure. The obstacles to achieving these necessary changes are posed not so much by the majority of the American public, though many in recent years have shown dismaying manipulability, but by officials and elites in both parties and major institutions that consciously support militarism, American hegemony, and arms production and sales.

Now joining us again is the former nuclear war planner, and now activist for undoing nuclear war planing, Daniel Ellsberg. Thanks for joining us again.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Good to be here. Thank you.

PAUL JAY: These proposals, let's go through them sort of one by one. But I want to start with the issue of nuclear winter. [coughing] You call for congressional hearings into the issue of nuclear winter. When you look at the Pentagon and what they're planning, a new nuclear bomb called the B61-12, which is supposed to be like all kinds of different nuclear bombs all wrapped into one, from exploding on high to actually burrowing into the earth and exploding in the earth. Both Russia and the United States and China developing hypersonic weapons, airplanes that are supposed to be able to evade all forms of defense systems. Both the United States, Russia, and China for that matter, but particularly the United States, which apparently is going to spend what, a trillion dollars over the next 30 years, much of it in the next 10 years. They're—all the major powers, and particularly the United States, are not acting like they believe nuclear winter is real. How controversial is it, and what makes you believe it is real? And why is there a need for congressional hearings?

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Their ignoring the reality of nuclear winter has nothing to do with raising doubts about it. Actually, none of these countries have actually presented studies or done studies that would even raise doubts about it. They just ignore it. And they do that because it's in their interest, to the extent that it's in their interest to build these weapons, which in the light of nuclear winter serve no military purpose or national security purpose,

whatever. So they, there have in fact never been hearings on the actual effects, even aside from smoke, of our nuclear attack options, or the difference that any of them might make.

The big point about nuclear winter, by the way, is on the one hand that it kills nearly everyone, instead of nearly everyone in the Northern Hemisphere only. But is that a real moral difference? To initiate the hemispheric massacre raises all the same moral issues as killing nearly everybody. The difference that it makes is that it means that going first makes absolutely no difference whatever from going second. And yet all of these countries, in particular the U.S. and Russia, I should say, have built their systems on the presumption that it is, however bad it is to go first, they don't have to, they don't have to pretend that would be costless. But it's better than going second. Actually, it isn't. Plausible as that is. Yes, our ICBMs, for example, could destroy many or most of Soviet ICBMs; fixed, vulnerable missiles like that. Isn't that good, to do away without those? No, because the Soviet submarines that we can't target with our intercontinental ballistic missiles, even if we do diminish them through anti-submarine warfare, we'll still have more than enough missiles on our cities to destroy our society and actually to cause nuclear winter.

So it doesn't make any difference. All that's involved is, as I say, the jobs, profits, donations—on both sides, by the way, political influence. And the pretense with our allies, our allies in particular, that we still stand as their protector against a more or less nonexistent threat from Russia now, or in the past the Soviet Union. But again, an illusory one in the sense that it depends on a promise, an assurance, and a readiness to initiate omnicide in the event that they are attacked.

PAUL JAY: And from an American's point of view, even if there is no nuclear winter, the United States is gone, and the United States is in the Northern Hemisphere.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Yes. That's right. Doesn't make that—it doesn't actually make that difference to what happens in America. Although most of our weapons, like the B61-12 and so forth, are all directed toward, in principle, in theory, reducing the number of weapons they can send, and thus, in theory, reducing damage to the United States. It won't. Even without smoke, the Soviet submarine missiles will destroy the United States.

PAUL JAY: And the doctrine previously, and hard to believe it isn't still the doctrine, that if a war broke out with Russia, the United States also goes after China. There's no way the Americans are going to let-

DANIEL ELLSBERG: I don't know if that's still necessarily the truth.

PAUL JAY: But isn't it hard to imagine the United States-

DANIEL ELLSBERG: I think China has every reason to worry that we do not plan to leave them as the sole surviving superpower.

PAUL JAY: They're not going to let China left standing, and Russia and the United States taking each other out.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Yeah. Why not? Well ... not. Just not. You could say won't you need, won't we need help? Well, really, they won't be much help from anybody. What is the use of destroying everybody? What's the use of destroying the Russian culture, ability to reconstruct, whatever? No use, but ... maybe it'll deter them.

PAUL JAY: We know there's a very strong presence of evangelical Christianity in the armed forces. And in fact, we've done stories on this, that the evangelical movement is actually helped, nurtured, promoted at many levels of the senior military command. Is there a kind of taste for the apocalypse in some of this nuclear war planning?

DANIEL ELLSBERG: I can't really judge that, but I have known for a long time that—for example, President Reagan was very influenced by evangelical thinking. Possibly—well, Jimmy Carter was a born again Baptist. Harry Truman, and I don't think anyone has ever made the point, that the President Harry Truman, who on the prospect of nuclear weapons wrote in his diary, writing in 1945, this may be the fire prophesied in Ezekiel. And some historians, like my friend Peter Kuznick, have interpreted this to mean that he realized what an earth-shattering, horrific development this was. But remember, he talked about it at the same time, both in his diary and in public, this may be the most terrible or the most wonderful thing that ever happened. He thought it was very good that it was given to our hands.

But I think nobody looked back, from what we now know of the significance of the, not just all born again, but a major fraction of the fundamentalist evangelical thinking in this country which points toward Armageddon as a necessary prerequisite to the rule of the Messiah on earth for a thousand years. Is it possible that Harry Truman foresaw that as an inevitable, and perhaps desirable, event? That would seem absurd, except in the context of this, where the Left Behind series on the effects of the Rapture and the [Messiah] and so forth have actually sold more than 60 million copies. [In the world agree] many people believe that.

PAUL JAY: And the current-

DANIEL ELLSBERG: It's not reassuring to know that many of our military leaders also may look on nuclear Armageddon, as prophesied in the Bible, as a terrible but necessary development toward messianic rule.

PAUL JAY: And the current vice president, Mike Pence, is apparently quite a serious evangelical.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Pence is very likely, very likely in that-

PAUL JAY: And who knows, the way things are going in DC right now, might be a president before 2020.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Yeah. But I must say, here we have an outlook that's far out of my own experience, and I'm really speculating about it.

PAUL JAY: The issue of nuclear winter is controversial. There are some studies that have shown that it won't be as serious as the people who say it will happen to say. But there's never been a serious-

DANIEL ELLSBERG: You can't really say 'some.' Very few. I'm told—and I believe this is true—by Alan Robock and Brian Toon now, who are major environmental scientists now, that there is now, as of the last ten years, not 30 years ago, virtually as much consensus about the effects of this soot in the stratosphere as there is about climate change. And the doubters of that are as few and far between.

My understanding, by the way, is the main uncertainty that does remain is how much of this soot that ends—smoke, and toxic—the black material that is generated by these firestorms will actually reach the stratosphere. My understanding is there's very little controversy at all about the effects of the calculations of 150 million tons of smoke in the stratosphere that has been made. The question, in the absence, of course, of any adequate experimental verification of this, and hopefully there will remain an absence of adequate experimental verification, is how much of the smoke will reach the stratosphere. And there is some uncertainty about that.

PAUL JAY: The other one of your proposals, that the United States should declare it will not be the first to use nuclear weapons. Why does the United States not want to say that?

DANIEL ELLSBERG: On the one hand, we have allies who believe that—like Japan, and others—who believe that this adds to some extent to deterrence of any war, any armed conflict involving them with, for example, China. The assurance that the U.S. would defend our allies not only with conventional forces, in which we're by far the preeminent force the world has ever seen, in fact, but with nuclear weapons as well; by initiating nuclear weapons, as we always promised to do with NATO.

Now, it may well add somewhat to their deterrence. But as I say, at the cost of rationalizing and supporting a structure that has a genuine risk of destroying most life on earth. Is that necessary, either to their defense or our national security? No. I would say not. That's my opinion. But that hasn't really been addressed very strongly as to whether they really need that, as opposed to whether it serves current structures of power, and alliance, and hegemony, and so forth.

Unless it's necessary, it's wrong. It's terribly wrong. And it hasn't ever really been necessary. Was it necessary to build a doomsday machine, or let's just say a hemisphere-destroying system? No. That was never necessary. But it was useful, profitable, helped the Air Force, helped R&D.

Let me make a general point that applies to all of these preparations. President Reagan said, and got President Gorbachev easily to agree, he did agree, nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. What he didn't say was it has never been threatened—or I should put it differently. What he didn't say was it must not be threatened, or prepared for, or risked. In fact, at the very moment that he said that, and throughout his term, was in the largest buildup, the only one comparable being that under John F. Kennedy, actually, when I was still working as a consultant. But President Reagan's buildup was then the largest. We're now in the midst of a third huge buildup. And he continued that, despite saying that the war must never be fought. He was preparing to fight it.

[00:14:59] The reason for that, I think, is that each president has wanted to be able to threaten nuclear war, however mad it might be to carry out the threat. He did not think it was mad to make the threat. It was useful to us in a number of ways, or he thought it might be. And even if he didn't personally think it was useful, he thought it would be politically damaging for him to give that up; to say we would not initiate. It would have made him vulnerable to a domestic rival, to complaints with allies. And that's still true. President Obama wanted, as early as 2010 and then in reviews in 2016, and then in his—'13, and then in his last year in office, 2016, he pressed quite strongly for the Defense Department to be willing to enunciate no first use. Sole use is to deter a nuclear attack. We will not initiate or threaten to initiate nuclear war under any circumstances.

He received kickback from the Department of Defense, and the Department of Energy, which makes the weapons, and the Department of State, Kerry, who responded to some allies, we don't have time in our last year to bring them around, realize that they don't need this, and it's better for the world not to have it. So we gave that up, along with giving up ICBMs.

Now, ICBMs have been essentially obsolete for over half a century. Since submarine-launched weapons became available on both sides, which can't be targeted by the other side's ICBMs, and which can, in fact, destroy entire target systems, entire societies by themselves, the ICBMs have been nothing other than a hair trigger, a lightning rod for attack if the other side fears that war is coming. Getting rid of them has always been the right thing to do, for 50 years. Secretary of Defense Perry, under Clinton, recommended, or wanted, to get rid of ICBMs. I should say he now is being very public as an ex-defense secretary that we should get rid of our

ICBMs. So has General Cartwright, the former commander of Strategic Command, the successor to Strategic Air Command, SAC.

Cartwright and Perry have both called for no first use. So the idea that these aren't sound military ideas is unfounded, and yet they persist. I come back to my earlier point. No president has really wanted—I didn't say this, but I'll say it. No president has really wanted a nuclear war. There have been a few individuals that thought that was a good solution to the contest with communism. No president has thought that. But every president wanted to threaten it and prepare for it. And the preparation, in part, is not only to support the threats, although it is in part that. And not only for alliance reasons. The preparation is very profitable. And that means that campaign donations flow to the candidate who is for spending such weapons as now, and more significantly, flow away from him if he should depart from it. He or she should depart from that.

So really no president, and no candidate, including Hillary Clinton, for example, has really proposed conversion, in a large sense. George McGovern, actually, [coughing] fatefully did call for let's come home, America. Let's declare peace somehow. As radical a notion as having a peace treaty with North Korea; after over 50 years, and we don't have a peace treaty. Let's come home and declare peace on the world, and devote these resources—not totally disarm, but simply stop trying to pretend to run the world, or trying to run the world, and convert those resources that we now spend, our largest industry if you look at the Defense Department and Energy altogether, to peaceful uses of various kinds. Health, education, infrastructure, solar energy, renewable energy, the various kinds.

Boeing and Lockheed, if we could find a way to convert them, would perhaps change their political influence on this—I think that may be what's required. But just to say that is to show how difficult the job is.

PAUL JAY: Please join us for the next part of our series with Daniel Ellsberg on Reality Asserts Itself.