



## Former Pentagon Insider & Whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg warns of Nuclear War

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**Kevin Martin (moderator):** So, our last speaker is not here in person but technological wizardry will allow us to hear his remarks remotely via Skype. Daniel Ellsberg is best known among the authors and whistleblowers who in 1971 in an attempt to end the Vietnam War released the Pentagon's secret history of the US decision making from the end of the war, better known as the "**Pentagon Papers.**"

Of course, he was then sentenced to 115 years in prison, but that was thrown out later. For that mistake he was on Nixon's "Enemies List" as was Professor Chomsky. And to think about that for a minute, if Nixon were around today, might that be an improvement over, you know, the current president?

In 1961 Dan was a consultant to the Department of Defense and he drafted Secretary #of State# Robert McNamara's plans for nuclear war fighting. He lectures and writes on the dangers of the nuclear era and the need for whistleblowing with a credibility that very few people have on both of those topics obviously. He's a Senior Fellow at the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, he's the author of *Secrets* and his most recent book *The Doomsday Machine, Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner* which I highly recommend. He is the subject of the Oscar nominated documentary *The Most Dangerous Man in America* and of course he's a key figure in a recent Steven Spielberg film about the Pentagon Papers called *The Post*. He's also just one of the kindest people you could ever meet. Here he is. Everybody, say "Hi" to Daniel Ellsberg!

**Daniel Ellsberg:** Thank you very much. I couldn't hear any of the previous speakers, I did read Noam Chomsky's essay last night, very good.

What kind of country is Noam describing there? Our country. Clearly not one that observes any constraint from the UN charter, which it has ratified, or for that matter from our own constitution.

We're an empire, ought we call it a covert empire? "Covert" meaning, subject to plausible denial. Meaning, not only that something is secret, and denied, but that it is *plausibly* denied in the sense that evidence is provided, false evidence, selective evidence, misleading evidence, that denies the reality of who is doing what and who is in charge.

The fact that we *are* an empire has been denied for a long time. On the contrary our self-image is that of one that freed ourselves from the world's mightiest empire in our founding, and that we have been supposedly anti-imperial ever since. That's false.

Also, the means by which our empire is managed are denied and covered by plausible denial. Assassination, torture - like other empires, we use the means of empire in general, with one exception. In fact, we are exceptional in one respect, and it isn't torture, it isn't assassination, not bribery, or these other media of regime change, which is at the very essence of empire: deciding who is to rule, who is to die, who is to live, who is to govern other countries in our empire.

All of that is the unexceptional aspect of our empire. The exceptional part is that since 1945, there is an instrument of empire. We have created and deployed a machinery that could destroy most life on earth. The nuclear aspect, the machinery of what I've called the "Doomsday Machine" is an *American* contribution, and to regard that as an instrument of empire is our contribution to the practice of imperialism.

We're not alone in that, from 1949 our monopoly was broken. And I must say that although, the Pope for example, has called the very possession of nuclear weapons, especially now, a morally condemnable act, and the reasons for that should be clear enough,

I can't find it in myself to say that it was morally condemnable for the Soviet Union wanting to maintain its tyrannous control of its own people and its defensive - I would say, mainly - occupation of East Europe. Defensive against the possibility of a resurgent Germany, nevertheless tyrannous in itself, in order to remain, to maintain that, they acquired nuclear weapons, in the notion that that would deter, neutralize the threat of American nuclear weapons against them.

Likewise, China, facing hostility from both the Soviet Union in the early 60s and after the early 60s, *and* the US, I think, I can't condemn actually for acquiring nuclear weapons which may actually have made it less likely that an American use of nuclear weapons in circumstances where we continue to have a monopoly. Possibly, had China not had nuclear weapons, the use of them in Vietnam - as former president Eisenhower urged on president Johnson, a little-known fact, that might have occurred.

In any case, deterrence *can* work, after all, kidnapping can work, the blackmail of various kinds can work, they aren't all caught or convicted, the people who do that, certainly President Trump has been using the threat of nuclear weapons, actually using our nuclear weapons, I would say, in the way that other presidents have done very often, dozens of times, in the past. He used them when he points them at the head, essentially, of Kim Jong-un. Someone whose assassination we've practiced, that wouldn't require nuclear weapons.

But our invasion of North Korea, but also the possibility of "fire and fury such as they have never seen." Actually, when he makes that a particular threat, he may or may not realize that in fact the North Koreans have experienced "fire and fury" to the extent of the destruction of virtually every man-made construction in North Korea by fire and incendiaries and bombs in the early 50s.

They've experienced that at the hands of America and he simply might say that, adding the clear implication that this time might be nuclear. Harry Truman had already **(tricked?)** that in 1950. Eisenhower secretly threatened to do it in 1953 and came to believe that his threats had been crucial. Almost surely wrong in terms of the Korean armistice which has not led to a peace treaty up to this day, but nevertheless he believed that. His vice president Richard Nixon believed that and imitated that in Vietnam, without success, actually in 1969 and 1972, and on other occasions. So sometimes the threats are believed to have worked, sometimes they may actually have worked, sometimes not at all. And in those latter cases they might not have been necessary or they may have been bluffs. Hard to say. I'm not convinced that all of them were bluffs.

What does this instrument of imperialism which continues to this day mean for the future of our species? Most of, I think, you have seen pictures of the remnants of Nagasaki after an atom bomb, a plutonium implosion bomb was used on it in 1945 and you've seen a bare landscape, what was once a city with a few concrete buildings still standing, but you don't see other people who were in those buildings who are in or were in that empty space. The other iconic image we have of that period is the mushroom cloud, as over Hiroshima, rising into the heavens and into the stratosphere in fact; and again, you don't see the people under that, so that's an empty landscape, but it was not initially a desert.

However, so imagine then the shadows of the people who were eliminated by that blast. Actually almost no one I think has seen pictures of Tokyo on March, after March 9th and 10th 1945, some 5 months earlier but it was almost exactly the same. The iconic pictures that we see of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are really not different from what the heart of Tokyo looked like after the immense firebombing of March 9th, the night of March 9th, in which more people died by fire, burned alive or boiled in canals that were boiling in the firestorm that resulted, thousands of people boiled on that night.

It looks the same as Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the only difference is that it took about 300 bombers to do that to Tokyo and one bomber sufficed each for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but in terms of moral or strategic difference that doesn't make any difference after all. We had 300 bombers, in fact we put a thousand in the air on August 14<sup>th</sup>, as the emperor's surrender was coming back, before the bombers got back, was coming to the US before the bombers got back, in the last rage of the war, a thousand planes.

The 300, 200 to 300 bombers went night after night over Tokyo, again on Tokyo in May, but over 64 other cities in Japan for five months before Hiroshima and Nagasaki. So, the moral decision to wage war by killing civilians was taken even before 1945, especially by the Nazis and the Japanese and the British. The Japanese did not only make that a way of waging war, the Germans used it in the Blitz and against London, but it was the RAF and then the U.S. who picked it up as the central role of the air force and a major way of waging war.

Thus the atom bomb that came along was simply a more efficient, costless, more efficient way of massacring civilians, which by then was a tool of America. Not acting in that instance so much as an empire as in pursuing a war that had after all been begun by others. The extension of that instrument of war into the post-war period came very natural, especially to Curtis LeMay, the Chief of the Strategic Air Command who had in fact commanded the raid not in the air - because he knew the secret of the atom bomb and didn't want to get captured, presumably - but in his headquarters in the Marianas and the actual raid was accompanied by Gen. Thomas Power who became after LeMay the head of the Strategic Air Command, so nothing could have been more natural for them, than to pursue their mission as head of Strategic Air Command with a first atomic bomb, and by the end of the Truman administration, there were more than a thousand operational atomic bombs, mostly targeted on cities in the USSR.

When Eisenhower left office there were nearly 23,000 weapons, nuclear weapons, of which most or more than half were thermonuclear weapons, and that's a difference that most Americans don't really understand and the historic difference for civilization and our species ever since. I've found that in most audiences today, if I ask how many feel they know the difference between an A-bomb and an H-bomb, only 4 or 5 people raise their hands and the others aren't just being modest. If I ask how many don't know, they do raise their hands, the audiences as a whole. I don't know if that's true of this select audience but it might be. And the way I describe that to them very simply is this: when you're looking at a picture of the devastation of Nagasaki, you're looking at what happens to the heart of a city when an explosion occurs in it of the *trigger* to a modern thermonuclear weapon, an H-bomb, a fusion bomb.

Every such weapon, every H-bomb has a Nagasaki type plutonium implosion bomb as its detonator. As precaution act, you might say, as its trigger. And the early forms of that were a thousand times greater than the Nagasaki bomb in explosive yield, which in turn was a

thousand times greater, 20,000 tons equivalents of TNT, a thousand times greater than the 20-ton blockbusters of World War II, which were called that because they destroyed a city block, or the equivalence.

When Trump used what was called a MOAB, the “Mother of All Bombs” acronym, earlier this year, it was described as the largest bomb ever dropped. That’s simply untrue. It’s equivalent to the large bombs, 20-ton bombs the RAF was dropping in World War II, but the Nagasaki bomb was a thousand times greater in one bomb than in those bombs. And the earliest H-bombs were on the order of, the first one that we dropped, or exploded, was 15 million tons of TNT equivalent, or a thousand times greater than a Hiroshima bomb of 13 to 15 kilotons, and later we had bombs of 20 to 24 megatons (million tons), a thousand times greater than Nagasaki.

These are the instruments that we have been threatening and building and are proposing to rebuild now with a 1.7 trillion dollar program of modernization under Obama and continued somewhat enlarged under Trump. Now however the Russians since the mid-fifties, pardon, the mid-sixties have had a quite equivalent. Two doomsday machines on hair-trigger alert, confront each other, with possible false alarm in each. That could arise over a conflict in North Korea, in Syria, in the Ukraine, not immediately in Iran, but I think very likely nuclear weapons would be used against Iran, as vice president Cheney was urging in 2006.

This, then is the human situation that the entire world is hostage to the false alarms and the build-up, the policies of these two states in particular and to a lesser extent to the seven other nuclear weapons states. As Noam indicated, this is a species problem, all of the members of our species are threatened by it, everyone has a stake in changing the policies of all these nuclear states but above all of the U.S. and Russia.

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