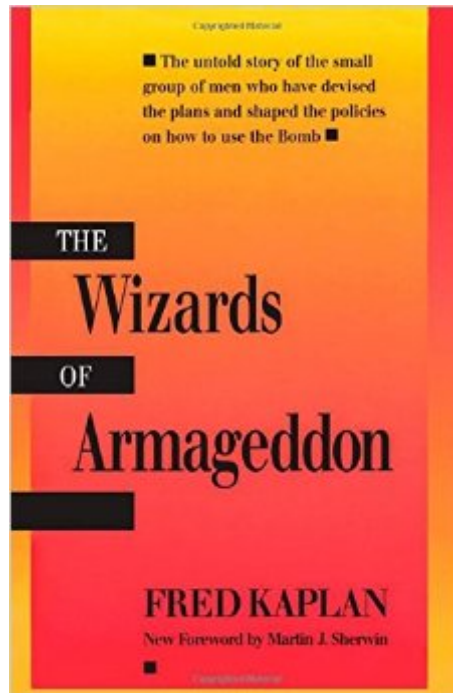


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The Wizards Of Armageddon (Stanford Nuclear Age Series)



Synopsis

This is the untold story of the small group of men who have devised the plans and shaped the policies on how to use the Bomb. The book (first published in 1983) explores the secret world of these strategists of the nuclear age and brings to light a chapter in American political and military history never before revealed.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Another wonderful Kaplan book to read along with *1959*. Together they constitute a great history of the period from 1947 (formation of RAND) to about end of the Viet Nam war in the 1970s. It was during approximately these years that were established policies effecting and affecting much about how our nation works presently and in future, in armed conflict. Let alone a pattern of how the USA came to dominate technological developments to the present through RAND. In particular, in the case of *Wizards*™, how our international relations and USA military applied new methods to quantitatively analyze policies and programs in planning eventuality of war. This was an era begun in use of quantitative methods (at the time named systems analysis or operations research) using which one could reduce complexities of armed conflict to realistic courses of action. For all those new technological (computers and communications) and analytical (statistics and economics for example) methods this book is worth reading. However I found of much greater significance how quantitative *systems analysis*™ methods tended to be misleading when based on flawed intelligence. There are two conspicuous examples in the Cold War and Viet Nam. In the Cold War

studies by RAND most e analysis was based on intelligence information indicating the USSR had a lead in both heavy bombers and nuclear weapons. In both cases later intelligence data seemed to prove they really did not have thousands of intercontinental nuclear ballistic missiles, they actually had four. A similar misinterpretation of heavy bomber intelligence showed there neither was as many airfields for this airplane as decided nor apparently as many bombers as estimated. This all came to light when Powers was shot down in a U-2 spy plane.

Fred Kaplan has done something very hard to achieve: portray a bunch of, well, nerds with sympathy and humor, explaining their trains of logic and their conclusions in readable prose. It is hard because most of them were micro-economists who lived in a world of utility functions, game theory, and loops of mathematical logic - just the kind of stuff that puts many off (like me) of "public policy" as an academic field that is dominated by economists who are little more than self-important if intelligent twits - with no practical wisdom whatsoever. However, this group was important because they were trying to encapsulate nuclear weapons into their rationalist methodologies. Kaplan's book is the ideal companion to Freeman's Evolution of Nuclear Strategy, which is so dry by comparison and yet covers the strategy better. It is a fun read, though a bit overwhelming to get through as there were SO MANY of them. (There was an added interest for me, as I knew some of these characters as a student and was unimpressed with them as thinkers while respecting their impact on public policy.) Whoever thought that microeconomists following their threads of logic could have had such an enormous influence on military strategy. I never would have! If I understood it, what they did was link military considerations into a mathematical methodology that could be studied and discussed and that offered conclusions - or predictions - if (tortuously) followed to their end. This helped military planners get a handle on these issues and (perhaps) to think more clearly. Much of quality of this book is due to the fact that Kaplan is a really good reporter and not an academic who is just shuffling papers.

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