

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the topic of preparations for a possible conflict with the USSR in the US between 1945 and 1957. Many books and articles have been written about the cultural aspects of civil defense programs, which were the most publicly known ways of framing the nuclear war, but the almost completely omit how civil defense activities related to other war planning (i.e. military and mobilization planning). Based mostly on a wide range of primary sources, the dissertation details how the assumption about the nature of the armed struggle between the nuclear superpowers affected the plans and the way they were communicated to the public. It uses evolutionary theory approach to military history to analyze the development of the civil defense doctrine within the context of military planning. It argues that it was seen as essential for enabling the US to continue to wage war having been attacked first by nuclear bombs and that this perception changed only gradually between 1953 and 1957. Analyzing it, as most authors writing on the subject do, as mostly a morale building exercise with little to no purpose outside the realm of psychology leads to misrepresentation of the effort. The dissertation acknowledges that the premises on which the program was built were made obsolete by new weapons development before any meaningful progress on said programs had been achieved, thus making the program effectively useless. However, it concludes that assuming it was seen as such by its planners at the time they planned it leads to a distorted understanding of how the program fit into the military strategy and diplomacy of the US and the overall post WWII militarization of the American public life.