

Whole World on Fire; Organizations, Knowledge, and Nuclear Weapons

Devastation, by Lynn Eden, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2004, xiv+365 p., illustrations, index, end notes. Reviewed by James W. Kerr, a named protagonist.

This is an exemplary book, albeit one with a single omission that diminishes its potential shine. Nobody has ever produced such a masterful summary of the ins and outs of strategic targeting. Her analyses are to the point and her conclusions are valid. She has chosen to focus on the rationale for rejecting the substantially greater reach of thermal radiation in favor of the presumably greater coverage produced by blast overpressure.

She argues that this choice is wrong on several counts, among them overkill or wasteful use of our weapons. My personal bias is on her side but most targeters disagree.

In the 1940s and '50s, I analyzed a lot of targets, mostly as training, and I always chose the thermal radius and was always overruled by my superiors. I discussed this in a pseudonymous article published in *Army Magazine* in 1956, but note that I always picked the dominant effect radius, whether blast or thermal. See "Choose Your Atomic Weapons," *Army Magazine*, May 1956, by Major Duelo (what editor tagged me with that lame pseudonym?).

As for that omission, she makes quite a case for the seriousness of the insistence of using blast, and not thermal, radius. She builds right up to a good polemic but it never materializes. I was almost hoping she would fix blame or name names. She did all the homework. But, oh well...