Also by Alex Abella

Shadow Enemies:
Hitler's Secret Terrorist Plot
Against the United States (coauthor)

Final Acts

Dead of Night

The Great American

The Killing of the Saints

SOLDIERS OF REASON

The RAND Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire

Alex Abella

Mariner Books
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
Boston New York

First Mariner Books edition 2009

www.hmhbooks.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Abella, Alex.
Soldiers of reason: the RAND Corporation and the rise
of the American empire/Alex Abella.—1st ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. RAND Corporation—History. 2. RAND Corporation—Influence.
3. Research institutes—United States—History—20th century. 4. Military
research—United States—History—20th century. 5. United States—
Intellectual life—20th century. 6. United States—Foreign relations—
1945–1989. 7. United States—Foreign relations—1989–
8. United States—Military policy. I. Title
AS36.R35A24 2008
355'.070973—dc22 2007030691
ISBN 978-0-15-101081-3
ISBN 978-0-15-603344-2 (pbk.)

Text set in Sabon
Designed by Lydia D'moch

Printed in the United States of America
DOC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my wife and children, who never wavered.

Ad astra per aspera.

was their closeness to the Soviet Union and the ease with which they could be attacked, not to mention the coordination needed before pushing their launch button. (Unlike manned bombers, which could follow a fail-safe policy, a missile, once launched, was hard to stop, much less to recall.)

Wohlstetter also warned that the Soviets saw IRBMs as a form of encirclement, and a preparation for a first strike by the United States—which, we must remember, had not been ruled out by Eisenhower. This observation is corroborated by the story of Khrushchev staring out of his vacation home in Crimea at the Black Sea and asking his guests what they saw. When they answered, "Nothing," he replied, "I see U.S. missiles in Turkey aimed at my dacha."[31]

In his article, Wohlstetter advocated the development of nonnuclear armaments and modern technology, which would render a nuclear response unnecessary, anticipating the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) implemented in the 1990s:

> I would conjecture that if one considers the implications of modern surface-to-air missiles in the context of conventional war in which the attacker has to make many sorties and expose himself to recurring attrition, these weapons would look ever so much better than they do when faced, for example, with the heroic task of knocking down 99 percent of a wave of, say one thousand nuclear bombers. Similarly, advances in anti-tank wire-guided missiles and anti-personnel fragmentation weapons, which have been mentioned from time to time in the press, might help redress the current balance of East-West conventional forces without, however, removing the necessity for spending more money in procurement as well as research and development.[32]

Wohlstetter also pointed the way to the development of Star Wars, the antimissile defense system advocated by the Reagan administration in the 1980s and pursued by successive Republican administrations:

> If we could obtain a leakproof air defense, many things would change. A limited war capability, for example, would be unimportant. Massive retaliation against even minor threats, since it exposed us to no danger, might be credible. Deterring attack would also not be very important.[33]

Wohlstetter's genius was to marshal numerical arguments and wed them to a broad and consistent, if extremely pessimistic—that is, "realistic"—view of history. He assumed that the people on the other side thought like RAND analysts; it was the mirror-imaging problem of intelligence agencies, the presumption that when the other side weighs the risks and possible benefits, it comes to the same rational conclusion as your side does. Wohlstetter was attributing to the Soviet leadership a level of monstrosity that had rarely been seen in history; outside of RAND and Pentagon contingency plans, no nation has ever *deliberately* sent twenty million of its people to their death in war for possible political gain.*

A point to consider is whether a society that is not controlled by a single ruler, as the Soviet Union was under Stalin or Germany under Hitler, is even capable of sacrificing millions of its citizens in this kind of venture. A purely quantitative analysis misses the historical fact that collective-leadership governments, like the Soviet Union's in 1959 under Khrushchev, no matter how authoritarian, cannot afford to take those chances as the leadership will quickly splinter into opposing factions. Only absolute rulers—or a nation under attack—may take such risks.

One might well counter that Japan, under a collective leadership,

---

* I am indebted to Daniel Ellsberg for this observation.