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James DeNardo

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In *The Amateur Strategist*, James DeNardo explores how the everyday person reasons about nuclear strategy. His data reveal surprising patterns of thinking on basic issues from the Strategic Defense Initiative, arms control, and proliferation to the end of the Cold War. The book describes a fascinating cast of players, including “Nice Hawks” like Ronald Reagan, who wanted to give SDI to the Russians, and the “NIFFs,” whose procurement rule, expressed simply, was: “If they have it, we don’t want it, but if they don’t have it, we should get it.” To explain his remarkable evidence, Professor DeNardo presents an innovative theory of intuitive deterrence reasoning. He then confronts the theory with data from professional nuclear strategists. His sophisticated demonstration that professional strategists reason like novices – that we are *all* Amateur Strategists – challenges the intellectual foundations of modern deterrence theory, public opinion studies, and game theory.

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# THE AMATEUR STRATEGIST

*Intuitive Deterrence Theories and the Politics  
of the Nuclear Arms Race*

JAMES DENARDO

*University of California, Los Angeles*



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For my favorites,  
Laura and Carol

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## Acknowledgments

As you will shortly discover, *The Amateur Strategist* does not fit neatly into any of the conventional niches that organize academic life in the social sciences. It combines security studies, game theory, cognitive psychology, democratic theory, and social statistics in a rather unconventional blend. Such research would be difficult to pursue in many universities, where resources are allocated to narrowly focused “fields” and short time horizons preclude efforts to immerse oneself in new things. I have been lucky to find a home at UCLA that actively encourages boundary-crossing research. My work has been nurtured by wonderfully supportive colleagues and friends, who worked together to create an exceptionally stimulating intellectual atmosphere. It is a pleasure, now, to recall their kindnesses and to express my gratitude to them.

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