



How The New York Times Sat on a Story Daniel Ellsberg Gave Them

Description

Talking with Kevin Gosztola, the renowned whistleblower reveals how the paper of record didn't act for forty years on information he leaked to them

In 2021, Pentagon Papers' whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg shared a copy of a top-secret study with *New York Times* reporter Charlie Savage on the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1958. It was presented by the newspaper as "another unauthorized disclosure" by the "famed source."

The study from 1966 showed the United States military had drawn up plans for nuclear strikes against mainland China after Chinese military forces attacked Taiwan.

"American military leaders pushed for a first-use nuclear strike on China, accepting the risk that the Soviet Union would retaliate in kind on behalf of its ally and millions of people would die," Savage wrote.

But what Savage and the *Times* did not know is that Ellsberg had already provided a copy of this sensitive report to *Times* reporter Tom Wicker in 1981 before he traveled to Japan, and the *Times* declined to publish details from it. Ellsberg made this revelation in an interview I did with him on March 3 as part of the launch of my new book, *Guilty of Journalism: The Political Case against Julian Assange*.

A reporter from the *International Herald Tribune*, which was owned by the *Times*, attended the press conference in Japan in May 1981, according to Ellsberg.

A "long story" was published about what Ellsberg said at the press conference, however, the report omitted the fact that he had laid out a top-secret study and allowed members of various Japanese political parties in attendance to translate the study into Japanese for their official records.

Ellsberg informed the Japanese that they would likely be treated as a "nuclear target" if the U.S. government launched a nuclear war. "All of our warships had nuclear weapons in the Japanese harbor, which the public didn't know and their government denied."

Wicker died in 2011, which means it is difficult to figure out what he did with the study and why the *Times*

ignored it. However, a report from May 21, 1981, which did not include a reporter byline, described what Ellsberg revealed to the Japanese public.

“Daniel J. Ellsberg, the former Defense Department official who made available the Pentagon Papers about the war in Vietnam, said today that the United States Navy stationed a ship storing nuclear weapons within 300 yards of the Japanese coast in 1961,” the *Times* reported.

Ellsberg claimed that the ship holding nuclear weapons was a “small amphibious vessel known as an LST, or landing ship tank, anchored off a Marine air base at Iwakuni.” Both senior Naval officers and State Department officials maintained the ship’s presence was part of an unwritten understanding between the U.S. and Japan.

The report mentioned the news conference that Ellsberg “called a news conference for tomorrow morning” and that he “gave *The Washington Post* a copy of a memorandum that he said he wrote in 1971 describing the stationing of the ship with nuclear weapons off Japan.”

Richard Halloran, who was a foreign correspondent in Asia for the *Herald Tribune*, reported on the news conference on May 22.

“Mr. Ellsberg said at a news conference this morning that his account of the 1961 incident was recorded in a memorandum he dictated 10 years later,” Halloran wrote. “The memorandum, which he made available to reporters and which came to light yesterday, covered a period when, as a Government official, he inquired into the deployment of nuclear weapons and their command and control systems.”

“He said in the memorandum that, in 1958 and 1959, ‘Japan had as the central provision of its security arrangements with the United States the explicit agreement in writing that no nuclear weapons would ever be stationed in Japan.’”

Halloran later added that Ellsberg said the ship bearing nuclear arms was there in 1967, and the ship’s home port was on Okinawa, “which was then under American control.” It had “anchored for long periods off Iwakuni in the guise of an electronics repair ship.”

Unfortunately, Halloran died in 2020 so it’s impossible to ask him what he recalls from the press conference with Ellsberg in Japan.

The Pentagon reviewed the study, “The 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis: A Documented History,” in 1975. Significant details were kept from the public, as Savage noted.

“The pages that the government censored in the official release of the study describe the attitude of Gen. Laurence S. Kuter, the top Air Force commander for the Pacific. He wanted authorization for a first-use nuclear attack on mainland China at the start of any armed conflict.

“To that end, he praised a plan that would start by dropping atomic bombs on Chinese airfields but not other targets, arguing that its relative restraint would make it harder for skeptics of nuclear warfare in the American government to block the plan.”

Kuter maintained at one meeting that limiting the war geographically to air bases would have merit, particularly “if that proposal would forestall some misguided humanitarian’s intention to limit a war to

obsolete iron bombs and hot lead.”

Ellsberg had never talked about this publicly because he had feared any comments might alienate reporters at the *Times*, but after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and given a few months to live, he no longer had a reason to keep this episode a secret.

According to Ellsberg, he did not tell Savage that the *Times* had once had the study because he was afraid that might discourage him from covering it in 2021—forty years later.

Ellsberg presumed a “phone call from somebody” in 1981 had emphasized the fact that the study was still top secret, and the newspaper was advised not to report on it. They “must have checked it with somebody.”

“It [was] not mentioned in the U.S that I had done this,” Ellsberg recalled. “So I didn’t get prosecuted that time.”

The U.S. Justice Department could have prosecuted Ellsberg in 1981 and accused him of violating the Espionage Act once again. In fact, in 2021, Ellsberg openly encouraged the DOJ to charge him for leaking top-secret information to the news media so he could challenge the constitutionality of the 1917 law.

With U.S. saber-rattling over Taiwan, the study took on renewed relevance, and to Ellsberg, the policy of readiness and threats to blow up the world in order to hold on Taiwan do not look much better than Russia President Vladimir Putin’s threats of nuclear destruction to protect his country’s control over Crimea and the Donbas.

by Kevin Gosztola

Category

1. Army-Wars-Conflict Zones-Military Tech.
2. Main
3. Politics-Geopolitics-Gov.-Events

Date Created

04/13/2023