

Book Review

*Weapons of Mass Destruction: Options for India*  
Ed. Rear Admiral Raja Menon (retd). 2004. New Delhi: Sage  
Publications. Price: Rs 330

Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, collectively known as Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), present a serious danger to humanity. These weapons, once recognised as tools of deterrence available to State actors, are now even feared as the weapons of choice for non-State actors. During the last few decades, the perceived threats from WMDs has become a significant issue in the foreign policy and national security agendas for many nation-States.

In the recent past, the WMD threat profoundly influenced the Bush administration's national security policies and shaped their foreign policy dogma. The invasion of Iraq (2003) challenged the concept of sovereignty and even identified the perceived proliferation of WMDs as a rightful reason for toppling a regime. At the same time, the absence of WMDs in Iraq had such an impact that many analysts started rating the WMD threat as an 'overstated threat'. However, the Iran, DPRK, South Korea and Taiwan exposé made people aware that the threat is far from over and existing non-proliferation policies of the international system are not sufficient to cap this threat.

Under this backdrop, a detailed description of existing WMD realities and the various international initiatives undertaken to tackle this threat by six experts in the book titled *Weapons of Mass Destruction: Options for India* is a most timely publication. The book goes beyond the descriptive level and provides a critique on various types of WMDs and its likely impact on civil society. Also, it evaluates the actual threat of WMDs and the likely scenarios that India needs to guard against. It carries out a threat assessment in the Indian context and most importantly provides a set of politico-military-administrative recommendations to tackle this threat.

The editor of this book, Rear Admiral (Retd) Raja Menon, has brought together a group of experts who have considerable experience in fields like the armed forces, diplomacy and academia, and have dealt with these issues directly or indirectly in some capacity in the past. Their background has helped them in corroborating their practical experience towards the evaluation of the subject in a more focused manner. The result is a book of uniformly high quality.

The book is divided into five parts, with each part dealing with different themes. Part I, titled Theory of Effectiveness, has three chapters dealing with nuclear, chemical and biological dimensions. Part II carries out a nuclear threat assessment in respect of India. Part III presents the current international non-proliferation regime scenario in respect of WMDs. Part IV and V evaluates India's negotiating positions and formulates India's options.

The book is richer in content on nuclear issues than on biological and chemical issues. But this is understandable, because amongst all WMDs it is nuclear weapons that are perceived to be the most dangerous. The global community is more concerned about these weapons because only five States are allowed to possess them under the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and three others possess them outside the NPT framework. The same is not the case with either biological or chemical weapons and their possession is illegal under the biological and toxic weapons convention (BTWC) and chemical weapons convention (CWC), respectively.

Nuclear issues are mainly dealt by Prof. Matin Zuberi, who has long experience of studying these issues. His contribution is excellent in its diagnosis and analysis of the limitations and ills of NPT. He explores the entire history of NPT and successfully articulates the logic of inequality embedded in it. He makes an interesting point about Homi Bhaba's vision, when he had predicted that verification efforts would be biased against developing countries, something that has now turned out to be a reality. He further mentions that Dr. Bhaba had foreseen the possibility of what happened in Iraq: the pursuit of nuclear weapon efforts in parallel with peaceful programmes under safeguards.

In the section explaining the reasons behind South Africa dismantling their nuclear programme, the author refrains from mentioning the racial angle behind this endgame. In another important chapter, titled *The Nuclear Non-proliferation Regime in Crisis*, the author analyses in detail the impact of the disintegration of the erstwhile USSR on the NPT. This chapter also gives a brief account of Pakistan and China's stated and unstated positions on NPT. The author also explores the problem of deterring 'rogue' states. The analysis on Iraq, Iran, North Korea and the A. Q. Khan network will attract reader attention, given their dominance in the current strategic discourse.

The book contains two more chapters on nuclear issues by different authors. These chapters essentially put the nuclear threat in perspective in the Indian context. A major drawback of these and a few other chapters is that the analysis is based on mainly western sources. Probably, the authors cannot be blamed, since few non-western works in these areas are available. However, the lethality assessments (number of casualties expected from WMD attacks), which are essentially based on 1970s and 1980s sources, need to be carried out again given the valuable information technology tools and mathematical modeling techniques that are now available. Certain other areas where one can disagree are the sections dealing with nuclear terrorist threats. The scenarios like a truck bomb ramming into a nuclear plant are

ridiculed by many safety analysts, who feel that the layered custom-made structures of nuclear plants would be very difficult to crack. Also, there is some repetition in Chapters 1 and 4.

Six chapters in the book are devoted towards an analysis of chemical and biological weapons threat. These chapters lucidly cover the nature of threat, the current status of chemical and biological weapons regimes, and provide a discourse on how India looks at them today and how it should do so in the future.

These chapters contribute much towards the understanding of the entire chemical and biological weapons scenario, and give the reader a comprehensive view on the subject, something that has been missing in many recent works on these subjects. However, like other contemporary publications, the book suffers from the same lacuna when it comes to describing various chemical and biological agents. For the average reader, the information detailing characteristics of chemical and biological agents make little sense while for an informed reader this information is irrelevant. Readers are generally aware of the dangers of chemical and biological weapons, and any agent-wise description generally gives a feeling of reading a school/college level textbook.

The chapter on protection against biological and toxin warfare successfully knits a complex web of understanding the 'health fraternity' in the Indian system and gives a comprehensive set of recommendations to tackle this threat at the government-level (both Central and state). However, this chapter could have merited an observation on the network of NGOs, as this could be handy for tackling chem-bio disaster management. In the Indian context along with bio terrorism, agro terrorism is also a perceived threat and an analysis of this threat could have enriched this chapter further.

The book gives a fascinating account of the 'WMD market' at Nawashahr, Pakistan. This two-page description puts the entire threat of WMD terrorism in the correct perspective. The chapter on trends in CWC and BTWC provides an interesting debate on related arms control regimes and their future and furnishes an India-centric formulation that can help India to serve its security interests. Particularly in case of biological weapons, openness, transparency and an attitudinal change among State parties can help build a global effort towards threat reduction. However, the United States' reluctance in this area is indicative of the fact that BTWC may not become relevant in days to come.

It may be added that the book could have become richer if some more attention could have been given towards its overall format. While the book has an introduction, there is no separate conclusion, leaving the reader with a feeling of an abrupt end. While each chapter concludes with a set of recommendations, a chapter giving the overall picture of the threat and India's options in totality could have helped contextualise the rigorous analysis carried out in the book. Also, the introduction fails to provide a holistic view about the nature of the threat, what needs to be done,

the limitations and compulsions of States towards an arms control regime and instead digresses more towards only biological threats and BTWC. In the introduction, the entire concept behind this project and the aim behind giving 'policy' recommendations could have been better explained (on page 247, there is brief reference that this study was undertaken for studying the implications of chemical and biological weapons).

The book talks of only defensive measures to tackle the WMD threat. No mention is made about the need for developing technologies like Agent Defeat Weapons (ADW) that are capable of physically destroying such weapons at the weapon sites. Also, the book, which is essentially devoted to disarmament regimes, could have done some crystal gazing regarding the likely fallouts of the NPT and BTWC, which are due for review in 2005 and 2006, respectively.

Overall, this edited volume provides a comprehensive view of the current global WMD scenario and options for India thereof. The contributors need to be complimented for doing a painstaking work in meshing various disarmament regimes, WMD terrorism threats, safety and security aspects, and suggesting a national strategy to counter this threat.

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