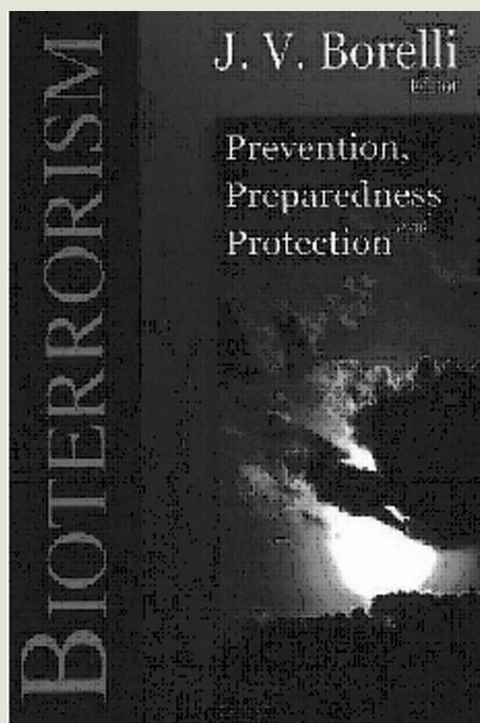


Book Review

Bioterrorism – Prevention, Preparedness and Protection: (2007), Edited By J.V. Borelli, Nova Science Publishers Inc

Gunjan Singh

*The author is Research Assistant at
IDSA, New Delhi.*



This book deals with the essential three P's of Bioterrorism - Prevention, Preparedness and Protection. Various scholars in this field have contributed to this 2007 publication. It is a collection of eight essays which presents an analysis of the United States Public Health System and its preparedness in a situation of bioterrorism.

Essentially this work offers detailed information on Bioterrorism, Legislation to Improve Public Health Preparedness and Response Capacity. It primarily looks into the Legislation related to Public Health in the United States of America. It highlights the current and the proposed legislation. The benchmark is set as the Anthrax attack in the Post 9/11 scenario.

The section "*Bioterrorism: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Role in Public Health Protection*" (Janet Heinrich), discusses the United States Center for Disease Control's preparedness and research activities on bioterrorism and the remaining gaps that could hamper the response to bioterrorist events. The argument is that though the response to a bioterrorist attack is almost same as the response under any kind of terrorist attack there are a few specific actions that set the two apart. The unique responses are health surveillance, epidemiologic investigation, laboratory identification of biological agents and the distribution of antibiotics to a large segment of the population to prevent the spread of an infectious disease. The argument is extended to the section "*Bioterrorism: Public Health Preparedness*" -(Robin J. Srrongin and C. Stephen Redhead). The authors conclude that mending the gaps in the current public health fabric of the United States will require significant long-term commitments from the federal government, including investments and improvement in laboratory capacity,

regional planning, workforce training, epidemiology and surveillance systems, information systems, and communication systems and media relations.

Since the book is written in the post Anthrax attack, the section, “*Developing and Validating Diagnostic assays for Biodefense*” states that the process of development and validation of an assay to be used as a screen for biothreat presents unique challenges. It stresses that the legislation which is functional in the United States does not address the spread of diseases through a bioterrorist attack. The information presented in the book can help researchers reach the goal of an appropriately and fully characterised validated assay.

One of the most novel aspects in this book is that it deals with the utility of the emerging technologies like Nanotechnology as a protective tool against chemical and biological warfare agents.” As it is perceived that the future wars or terrorist attacks may include invisible hazards such as a variety of deadly and poisonous invisible/unknown chemicals. The usage of such newer technologies can help in combating chemical and biological threats.

The book has highlighted a number of aspects related to the biological warfare and has also provided a variety of technical information. It is a well researched and analyzed work. But though the book manages to cover a wide range of issues related to the current debate around bioterrorism the primary drawback for an international audience would be that the main focus is the Public Health System in the United States. As a result, it will have a restricted global acceptance. As the basis of analyses is the United States Public Health System the views expressed have mostly the Western perception of these things.

However, still the information provided in

the book could help the developing countries to some extent in formulating their respective legal and public health structures.

The book fails in bringing out the concerns of the developing countries with respect to Bioterrorism. There is complete absence of any comparative analysis except with Brazil. Thus it appears that there is no common experience that the US shares with the other countries in the world when it comes to bioterrorism.

After 12 years of the Anthrax attack in the United States it has been seen that there is no repetition of any similar attack in the United States or elsewhere. The major instruments of terror and destruction, even after attempted biological warfare, have been the conventional ones. The most important controversy surrounding the anthrax attacks in the United States is that its origin is still unknown and there is a noddle of suspicion that points towards the United States labs and scientists.

Though the book is based on one of the most debated issues of the security arena, the focused concentration on the United States has restricted the understanding of the subject to a specific country and a specific situation.