

Bioterror and Biowarfare: A beginner's guide by - Malcolm Dando, Oneworld Publication, Oxford, UK 2006

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Malcolm Dando convincingly argues that in the wake of rapid technological changes and spurt of international terrorism, we can not remain in our present situation—with holes such as the law enforcement problem in the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and deficiencies such as the lack of verification of the BTWC in the web of prevention and our scientific communities lacking the knowledge and awareness necessary to assist in the protection of their science from abuse.



In a world where developments in technology are too rapid and diverse that chasing its course and incorporating its implications into state-policy has become a daunting task, it is incumbent on the experts in science to have dialogue with the policymakers, the strategic community and the society in general. Malcolm Dando is an internationally renowned expert in Life Sciences and is a researcher in international security at Department of Peace Studies in the University of Bradford. He lends his expertise to the cause of meeting the two ends of technology and policy in the increasingly vulnerable domain of bioterrorism and bioweapons. After his several acclaimed articles and a seminal and specialized volume titled *The New Biological Weapons: Threat, Proliferation, and Control*(2001), it could be perhaps only him who could come up with this concise yet informative and comprehensive book *Bioterror and Biowarfare: A beginner's guide*.

Written in less than 200 small pages, the book provides an insightful peek into the problem of biological weapons. Divided into 10 chapters, the book presents an informed critique of the present biodefence and bioweapons control policies. The first four chapters are dedicated to outline a history of biological warfare since the pre-World War years upto 2004. This section underlines the critical issues, developments and policies concerning biological weapons in the said period. This also belies the idea that biological weapons are a credible but distant threat – from states using lethal biological agents indifferent campaigns to the various instances of its usage by non-state actors underlines the real risks involved and also the limitations of the arrangements such as Chemical and Biological Convention and other national policies.

Chapter five titled Biological Agents enlists and discusses the pathogens as categorized by the United States National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID) and also the anti-agriculture pathogens. From the most common pathogens of smallpox and plague to the Anthrax and Botulinum, the chapter discusses the production, dissemination, effects

and cautions regarding all these deadly pathogens. Chapter six titled “The Impact of Biotechnology Revolution” traces recent developments in the genomic sciences and the challenges posed by them – “This new knowledge may help us to prevent and deal with biological warfare and terrorism by giving us better means of detection, protection and treatment....yet, preventing the malign misuse of this burgeoning technology will be a major task in coming decades.”

In the last four chapters the author has discussed the likelihood of bioterror attacks, the existing prevention mechanism and the limitations of arms control and has provided with some generic yet comprehensive framework of dealing with such future threat scenarios. Dando underlines the gaps in the implementations and verification of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and prescribes more public debates and awareness over these issues to influence state policies – “It certainly seems that much greater public interest and scientific and medical community attention will be required if the regime is to fare better in the coming decades.” The book also looks into the intersections of international civil society, state-parties and the scientific community to grasp the reality and prevent eventualities. He emphasizes the need to update the BWC with taking into account the larger interests of all the stakeholders. The new set of threats caused by the so-called ‘non-lethal agents’ have also been covered in the book. Dando believes that a WMD scale use of biological agents is possible only at the level of state organized campaigns though the non-state actor could dreadfully use these pathogens to create civil and political panic for their malign purposes.

Malcolm Dando convincingly argues that in the wake of rapid technological changes and spurt of international terrorism, we can not remain in our present situation—with holes such as the law enforcement problem in the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and deficiencies such as the lack of verification of the BTWC in the web of prevention and our scientific communities lacking the knowledge and awareness necessary to assist in the

protection of their science from abuse. So we need to make some hard choices soon, or we may see the revolutionary new life sciences transforming the nature of conflict and greatly destabilizing international security.

Thus, this Beginner’s Guide provides us with informative debate and suggestions that it becomes a necessary reference for the scholarship in the area and the policymakers alike. On the flipside, the volume falls short of analyzing the political intricacies involved and given the problems before multilateralizing any new ventures in the domain or updating the BWC, this should have been an important area of concern. Though the author emphatically underlines the failures of adopting unilateral policies for biodefence, there is definitely a need to discuss how there can be forged a realistic commonality of interests to deal with biological threats in coming times. Also, the huge commercial interests in the life sciences continue to complicate any transparent, credible and verifiable systems of prevention and countermeasures. The global corporations in the field find their way to negligence through different national legislations and other legal/political loopholes – they also must be taken to the task.

Overall, the book stands worth of being a useful addition to the literature on the subject with its main thrust entirely convincing – the life processes at the core of human existence must not be manipulated for hostile ends.