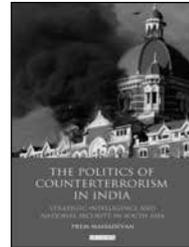

Book Review

The Politics of Counter-Terrorism in India: Strategic Intelligence and National Security in South Asia

Prem Mahadevan,

(London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2012)

£ 47



Prem Mahadevan couldn't have chosen a more apt title for the book and also couldn't have chosen a more appropriate time to release the book, as we have witnessed the politics of counter-terrorism and continue to watch it in the case of the setting up of the National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC) in India. None of the stakeholders has done his home work properly and all continue to politicise the issue basically to protect their 'turfs'. The author identifies the power struggle between the Centre and the state governments as one of the major factors that have been plaguing efforts to combat terrorism in our country, besides lack of political consensus and inconsistency in basic approaches.

The Politics of Counter-Terrorism in India: Strategic Intelligence and National Security in South Asia is a book which examines the role of our intelligence agencies in managing the national security and in particular in the counter-terrorism efforts of our country. This book first defines, then investigates, whether Indian counter-terrorist failures are *failures of intelligence, or failures to act on intelligence*. The book suggests that there is an ocean of difference between the failure to collect intelligence and the failure to act on it. The author concludes after detailed examination that they are basically failures to act on long-term warnings or strategic intelligence. Prem Mahadevan, in a logical sequence, has also examined the factors that have contributed to perpetuating the discontinuity between strategic and tactical intelligence.

The efforts of Mahadevan have to be lauded for conducting an empirical analysis on a topic on which very limited information is available through official channels. It is a well known fact that there is a lacuna of books and academic

data bank on the functioning of intelligence agencies in India. The ready access he got to discuss the minutiae of counter-intelligence work with several past professionals is the strong point of this book which adds to its authority on the subject. The lengthy notes at the end of the book help to clarify many points, which could not possibly be discussed in the body of the text without distorting the narrative flow and sequence.

Mahadevan aptly argues that *any evaluation of intelligence performance needs to take into account the limited resources of national level agencies*. He concludes that given the defensive nature of the Indian security policy, the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) have performed fairly well. However, either by design or by default, he omits to mention Military Intelligence. This book demonstrates how terrorist groups surround themselves with counter-intelligence defences to prevent leakage of their plans. The author lists lack of *political consistency, political consensus, operational capacity and operational coordination* as the main constraints of the intelligence and security forces which have dwarfed our counter-terrorism efforts as a nation.

The book gives a detailed account of strategic intelligence in India encompassing its genesis and shortcomings. Mahadevan has logically classified the shortcomings of the Indian intelligence agencies into systemic, organisational and external; thereafter, given a detailed elaboration of these shortcomings.

The book lists the sympathy of a section of the Indian population for terrorist groups as the main strength of terrorist movements. *The local support often screens terrorists from the national intelligence agencies*. The terrorists' willingness to eliminate suspected informers, their tight control over operational security and ability to conduct transnational operations gives great morale boosting strength to terrorist organisations. Sikh terrorism in Punjab, the Kashmiri separatist movement, and the rise of *jihadism*, accompanied by targeted killings, receive detailed attention from the author to explain his view-point. He has elaborated upon a few recommendations to overcome the terrorist counter-intelligence and outlines a major role for the intelligence agencies in undermining the terrorist counter-intelligence. The author labels that strategic intelligence identifies the long-term influences acting on a terrorist movement whereas tactical intelligence merely identifies the target for the security forces to eliminate. By highlighting the difference between strategic and tactical intelligence, this book disputes the wisdom of current efforts to enhance counter-terrorism effectiveness. The author offers valuable suggestions to bridge the gap between strategic and tactical intelligence which could have been elaborated further.

Mahadevan believes that the pan-Islamist threat has been handled with kid gloves. The government's policy of avoiding any major confrontation with Pakistan has been sending confusing signals to the armed forces, and perhaps even to the intelligence agencies. He states that despite being plagued by terrorism over the years, Indian policy-makers have not adopted a consistently offensive counter-terrorist posture. He has listed the government's inept handling of a few instances to support his observation. The emergence of militancy in Punjab, the outbreak of 'rebellion' in Jammu and Kashmir, besides communalisation and pan Islamism *jihadism* have been listed as case studies in the book, with a detailed analysis in each case.

The author affirms that besides political consistency, counter-terrorist efforts need political consensus and a unanimous approach to be effective. He has given voluminous illustrations from the above case studies to support his argument. He elaborates on 'vote bank politics' which has restrained our policy-makers from taking tough action against *jihadi* activities in the Indian hinterland. Mahadevan aptly sums up by observing that "as a result, despite having completely stamped out terrorism in Punjab and controlled it in Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian security forces have been unable to contain the spread of *jihadist* violence throughout India". In the end, he also stresses on the need to bring about an attitudinal changes in our mindset and approach to accord counter-terrorist operations the requisite priority they deserve.

Mahadevan identifies the inability of local police forces to independently follow up on intelligence warnings as being partly responsible for Indian counter-terrorist failures. He supplements his observation with elaborate analysis of Operations 'Bluestar', 'Rakshak I and II' in Punjab along with numerous security forces' operations in Jammu and Kashmir and the Indian hinterland. With the three case studies examined above, the author suggests that operational capacity is crucial to counter-terrorist success. He concludes that intelligence production in India is severely hampered by resource constraints.

In a critical analysis of the Indian counter-terror mechanism, the book identifies poor operational coordination among the intelligence agencies as a weakness of our counter-terrorism efforts. On the other hand, the book outlines that lack of operational coordination is not a stand-alone factor. "Rather it is a culmination of all other weaknesses" remarks Mahadevan. He further elaborates that information sharing becomes crucial only when the security forces fail to coordinate operations. Once again, he gives ample anecdotes from the above case studies. He identifies *the reduction in 'flash to bang' time* which is the

interval between the first indication of an impending event, and the event itself as a catalyst in reducing the possibility of preventing terrorist attacks. When intelligence consumers fail to follow up on strategic warnings of terrorist threats, the interval between 'flash' and 'bang' gets compressed .

While elaborating upon the prognosis of Indian counter-terrorism efforts, the author observes that the adoption of an offensive counter-terrorist policy would require massive upgradation of Indian intelligence capabilities and orienting them for offensive use. He further observes that it would also involve crafting a diplomatic strategy that portrays Pakistan as a weak state, unable to control radical elements within its borders. The book concludes that while warm relations with Washington and London should be maintained as a matter of course, India can simultaneously explore options for disciplining the Pakistani establishment through covert action.

Mahadevan, after having identified the pertinent problems with India's counter-terror mechanism, could have listed recommendations to overcome these shortcomings. The book would have achieved its aim in totality if the author had deliberated upon measures to improve the management of strategic intelligence in India. The identification of these measures is the need of the hour to reduce the discontinuity between strategic and tactical intelligence.

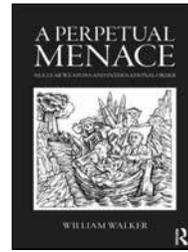
Overall, this book, with empirical analysis on such a contemporary subject, is likely to greatly benefit the students of internal security. The efforts of Mahadevan are commendable since the issues of counter-terrorism are complex. This maiden attempt ignites the hope that other such treatises on the intelligence mechanism of our country would follow in the near future.

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**A Perpetual Menace: Nuclear Weapons and
International Order**
William Walker
(London: Routledge, 2011)
Rs 7,599/-



The image of a radiation infused mushroom cloud is often the picture that is associated when one says the word ‘nuclear’. William Walker has titled his book from a famous quote by Niels Bohr, who had tried to warn President Franklin Roosevelt that “any temporary advantage [gained from the possession of the atomic bomb], however, great, may be outweighed by a perpetual menace to human security”.

In this book, Walker has traced the history of nuclear weapons, from the conception of the idea to the present-day debates on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. He has traced this history through an exploration of the international nuclear order that came to exist as a result of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He also probes the dilemmas being faced by the nuclear order, as more states demand nuclear technology for civil purposes. Despite its many weaknesses, the order has been, surprisingly, successful in preventing nuclear war and, most importantly, surviving. Ironically, it is the nature of the devastation that can be experienced as a result of the use of nuclear weapons in war or conflict that has placed limits on their use. States and their citizens are unwilling to allow the images from Japan to be repeated.

Walker has described the launch of the bomb as “the awakening”. It is aptly termed, to not just bring out, in chronological phases, what he terms, “ignorance of the weapons, possibility to its realization and catapult into world politics...” in a matter of a few years. It also proves to be an awakening in terms of the birth of various agencies, both within states and internationally, to prevent horizontal and vertical proliferation and to place controls on the use of nuclear technology.

Until the Soviet Union tested a nuclear device, the United States enjoyed a clear monopoly over the technology. After this monopoly was breached, it led to a situation in which both were trying to interpret the other’s capabilities, motives and adequate responses. While it would seem that the rivalry between the two would not allow them to cooperate, the author brings to the reader the

nuances in the relationship, a mix of diplomacy, and real politik, which helps deliver the nascent nuclear order. There was real concern that as the number of states with nuclear weapons technology increases, it would become difficult to control their behaviour. A need to build universal rules of non-proliferation and norms of behaviour was acknowledged. With the acceptance of this viewpoint, the cooperation to arrest the spread of nuclear weapons began in the 1960s and the negotiation on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was the main outcome. However, the treaty created two kinds of states: nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states. While some states accepted this divide, some others did not and a few challenged it (and continue to do so). The first major challenge came when India tested a nuclear device, to be followed by Pakistan and, at a later stage, by North Korea.

The test by India brought into the focus the need to regulate the trade in nuclear technology. Interest in nuclear technology as being more than just for weapons started in the 1950s, with the “Atoms for Peace” initiative. In the 1970s, the debate shifted to placing restrictions on civil nuclear commerce, to bring about adequate safeguards and assurances. The rules of civil nuclear trade were established through the agreement of the London Suppliers Guidelines, now known as the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 1976. Civil nuclear commerce received a setback as a result of the accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. While international trade staggered, the need to regulate trade in fissile materials to ensure that material was not diverted from civil to military use got strengthened. It was these stringent rules and regulations that led Pakistan to discover the means to evade them. As a result of this clandestine operation, the intelligence agencies would become actively involved in tracking weapons proliferation and the nuclear order would become more severe.

Two facts: one, no nuclear war was fought despite periods of acute tension between the two superpowers; and two, the need to limit the spread of nuclear weapons is an accomplishment of Cold War diplomacy. The Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987, established to remove a whole class of nuclear armed missiles, the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty that involved a balanced reduction of conventional forces in Central and Eastern Europe and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty I (START I), perhaps the most prominent of them all, which reduced the number of types of strategic weapons deployed by either side. These treaties were based on a relationship of cooperation. They were able to establish a nuclear order that continues to function even today.

The end of the Cold War led to, what the author has called a consolidation of the nuclear order with a review of the NPT and discussion on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) during the 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought with it, its own set of problems. The Soviet nuclear assets were located in territories that were now outside Russia. Questions were raised on which state was now in control of these assets, which parts of them would be dismantled, who would have the command and control of the nuclear forces, among many such other issues. Walker has called the post Cold War nuclear age the beginning of a second nuclear age. He points to the revival of Cold War style rivalries, especially in Asia and the Middle East, the arms race returning, with a number of states competing with each other, and the likelihood of new non-state actors also acquiring nuclear materials and technologies.

As more and more states express interest in nuclear energy, there is a possibility, however remote, that states could divert nuclear technology from civilian to military use. North Korea and Iran being the examples the author gives. There are exceptions to the nuclear order: India, Pakistan and Israel. They are nuclear armed states that are outside the purview of the NPT, thus, not bound to the treaty's rules. The fear of interactions among states, non-state actors and other unaccredited groups cannot be ignored. Such interactions could have devastating consequences, especially as both irregular warfare and illicit exchange in weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), including nuclear technology and materials, described by the author as irregular commerce, becomes a regular feature. Walker rightly points out that the nuclear order that has worked so well till now needs to be adjusted or "repaired" to this new international environment which faces new threats. However, one finds that the steps in that direction in the form of the CTBT and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) are still stuck. Walker has also given considerable importance for states to forcefully and steadfastly support nuclear elimination. As he says, "Just because nuclear disarmament is considered an ideal does not rob it of practical value". While the Cold War years gave ample weightage to non-proliferation, the nuclear order's future focus is on pursuing abolition of nuclear weapons. In his conclusion, he has expressed concern that the existing nuclear order, if it doesn't change, would be ineffective in overcoming contemporary challenges. The nuclear order cannot be taken for granted; it has faltered on some occasions but the successes have helped avoid nuclear anarchy and catastrophe. There have been no nuclear wars, a most remarkable achievement of the nuclear age.

In language that is devoid of academic jargon, the author has raised a number of interesting questions, answers to which would assist the characterisation of the future nuclear order. The book is, understandably, written from the perspective of the policies as formulated by the United States. However, one does feel the absence of counter-perspectives from the states taken as examples by the author or from the Soviet Union and later Russia. Nonetheless, it is a book that can be read by anyone interested in understanding the challenges nuclear weapons represent.

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