

Book Review

Governing the Bomb: Civilian Control and Democratic Accountability of Nuclear Weapons

Review by Rajiv Tewari



Governing the Bomb: Civilian Control and Democratic Accountability of Nuclear Weapons

Edited by Hans Born, Bates Gill and Heiner Hanggi

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The book “Governing the Bomb: Civilian Control and Democratic Accountability of Nuclear Weapons” is written under the aegis of SIPRI, Geneva. It traces the historical growth of nuclear doctrines and studies nuclear governance issues in the eight nuclear power states of the world under the head of executive, legislative, military and the civil society including media and think tanks in the respective countries. Governance issues in all these countries have been analysed and shortcomings listed. It gives an insight into what constitutes democratic control of nuclear weapons and the endemic security surrounding them. It highlights the issue of proper balance between civilian oversight and military autonomy and presents findings and analysis reflecting the full spectrum of SIPRI research on the subject of democratic accountability of nuclear weapons. Authors include both SIPRI researchers and respected academics and practitioners.

The editors of the book are Hans Born, senior fellow at Geneva Centre of Democratic Control of Armed Forces; Bes Gill, Director of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Geneva and Heiner Hanggi, Assistant

Director, Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Geneva. All of them have vast experience in the field of nuclear disarmament and have dealt with three issues in the book. These are:

- Strengthening good governance linked with nuclear weapons.
- Linking weapon development with governance.
- Greater scrutiny and analysis.

The editors have analysed the power and role of Executive, Military, Legislature and the civil society including the think tanks in the nuclear armed nations which include India, Pakistan and Israel and have taken the US as the bench mark for nuclear governance.

In the US, adequate checks and balance exist to ensure that the military decision is spread throughout the government. The interplay between the Executive, Legislature, Government, NGOs (Non Government Organisations) and civil society including the think tanks is one of the main vehicles for democratic governance of the US nuclear arsenal. The historical evolution of the nuclear doctrine is covered well. In spite of the high and advanced level of control the book informs that in the year 2007 a B52 bomber flew over Central United States with 6 nuclear missiles.

The Russian structure lacks democratic control over the decision making process and is limited to a small number of people. The historical background is covered adequately and the transition post cold war is highlighted well. The reduction of funding and the lack of modernisation of nuclear arsenal and insistence on maintenance of the triad of ground, air and sea based weapons has been analysed to show its impact on command and control infrastructure modernisation.

The coverage of the French and the Chinese model of nuclear governance is the most interesting as it covers the aspect of “nuclear monarchy” and lack of democratic accountability. France has a near absolute political and civilian control over the military. In the French model the French president along with a close group of CEMP (Chef d'état-major particulier) which is the presidents personnel military staff and the CEMA (Chef d'état-major des armées) the defence and national council that decides on all the policy matter regarding the French nuclear arsenal. In France, the public have a benign view of nuclear power as it provides 80 per cent of the country's power requirement.

China's doctrine, force structure and deployment are least transparent and understood. The study brings out the blurring of the traditional

distinction between civilian and military interest which has complicated the analysis of nuclear weapons. In the view of the authors, the whistle blowers, informed civil society or a doctrine of extended deterrence or joint weapons development within a traditional democratic country is missing in China. The key actors in China are the Chinese Communist Party, the People Liberation Army and the Chinese defence industrial and scientific community. In view of the “no first use” policy of China the book points out that China is likely to operate in a chaotic post nuclear attack environment. Thus the requirement of a robust command and control system is of utmost importance. The most interesting issue is that China operates neither on launch on warning nor a launch under attack posture. Mao argued that China’s nuclear attack can come weeks or months after the initial attack. Complete lack of decision on the composition of the supreme command is a grey area in the Chinese nuclear scenario.

Pakistan’s nuclear governance covers only the aspects that are visible. No reference is made to the asymmetric threat to the security of nuclear weapons. This aspect should have been covered as it constitutes the most potent threat in view of the increasing radicalisation of Pakistani society. The chapter on Pakistan states that the years 1986-98 were a period of “non weaponised deterrence” implying thereby that the nuclear weapons components and fissile material were produced but remained short of mating warheads with the delivery system. Time for crisis management was thus available while the decision to use nuclear weapon was being taken.

The authors opine that in the opinion of the Pakistan government, nuclear weapon capability is the best guarantor available for peace, stability and the absence of all out war. They highlight the absence of a sophisticated and advanced command and control system in the country which has a bearing on the security and use of the weapon. The issue of short time lags of three to five minutes being too short for rational response and even the issue of launch on warning leading to miscalculations has been dealt with in detail.

The author has described various thresholds that may force Pakistan to use the nuclear weapons against India. These include the space threshold, military threshold, economic threshold and domestic destabilisation. The role of the Strategic Plan Division (SPD), the Employment Control Committee, the Development Control Committee and the Strategic Force Command is described in sufficient detail. The lack of coverage of the influence of non state actors in Pakistan’s nuclear governance remains a drawback.

While covering the nuclear governance issues in India the study says that the nuclear weapons are not subjects to democratic accountability. Although under civilian control, they are subjected to a combination of controls by the political leaders, nuclear and defence scientists and the military. The book says that neither the judiciary nor the legislature performs an oversight role. The study surprisingly says that the civil society and the media plays limited role in informing the public. The author further says that the role of the media and the civil society and the media is going to be limited as long as the weapons are undeployed and de alerted. It is only when the weapons are deployed and are under democratic control that then they would provide a severe test for all the Montesquieu's trias politica government framework, in which the three independent branches keep each other in check .This ideal situation will ensure that the endemic secrecy surrounding them is done away with.

The book is an important source of information for serious students of disarmament and of political science. The coverage of the nuclear governance issues are done well and are informative in nature. The coverage of the influence of non state actors on the governance issue could have given more depth to the work carried out by SIPRI. It is a must read for all scholars and students of international relations and strategic studies including those interested in finding out the status of control of our nuclear weapons.

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Bridge On The River Meghna: The Dash to Dhaka

Review by Lt Col A K 'Sam' Sharma (Retd)



Bridge On The River Meghna : The Dash to Dhaka

Maj Gen Ashok Kalyan Verma

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This book is essentially an account of operations of 18 Rajput, the Infantry Battalion Maj Gen Ashok Verma was commanding during the Bangladesh war of 1971. It is a labour of love too: Gen Verma is former Colonel of The Rajput Regiment. Written with rare candour, elan and straight-talking style of a battle-hardened infantry commander, it brings home, in very gory detail, the battles of Akhaura (Battle-Honour of the Rajputs) and Ashuganj in technicolour. One can almost hear the bullets whizzing past, the heavy artillery guns going all boom-boom, the enemy RCLs blasting our PT-76s to smithereens, own PT-76s knocking out jeep borne RCLs of the enemy, own RCLs knocking out Pakistani Chaffe tanks, the IAF Hunters shrieking in low level strafing runs, and the formidable Meghna Bridge coming down behind the trees on the skyline in one mighty sloosh and whump! Lt Rajinder Mohan of 63 Cavalry photographed it, again as a Major when he went on a private visit to the battle-field. Why it reads almost like a war-movie script! His company commanders fought valiantly under his orders: Jimmy Abraham, Tarsem Sharma, CM Choudhary, BG Singh and Pritam Singh ... et al. Many were wounded, evacuated and replaced. The Battalion fought like tigers. Many jawans who were conspicuous for their devotion to duty were national sportsmen: men like Sub Maj Om Prakash, Hav Chote Lal...etc. The Battalion had one officer, one JCO and 25 OR killed in action, with three officers, one JCO and 69 OR wounded! The CO was 'Mentioned –in –Despatches'.

Lt Gen Sagat Singh, the Commander 4 Corps, was tasked to secure area up to the river Meghna. As events unfolded and operations got under way, Sagat grabbed the opportunity with both hands, when it presented itself, and showed his mettle, his brilliance. The enemy was bottled up after the Meghna Bridge went down. They just gave up once the Bridge came down. Sagat though on his feet; consulted Group Capt Chandan Singh, and took his chances, despite the temporary reverse for 18 Rajput at Ashuganj. He ordered an unscripted dash

for Dacca, as the MO Dte had neither allotted resources nor even planned for the capture of Dacca! The IAF MI-14s were ferrying 4/5 GR 'johnnies', even as the Rajputs were still warding off the Pakistanis at Ashuganj. The enemy was in disarray, after having blown up the kilometer-long Bridge in haste, as reserve demolition. The Indian Army vertically enveloped the hapless defenders, who in any case had not catered for adequate depth to Dacca. 101 Area troops lead by Maj Gen Nagra closed in from the North rapidly. Lt Gen Jacob, the Chief of Staff in HQ Eastern Command, put them under 4 Crops just short of Dacca. 2 Para jumped near Tangail and really put the cat amongst the pigeons.

Jacob, himself, rushed off by air and made sure that Lt Gen AAK Niazi sign on the dotted line on a 'yet to be approved by AHQ' Surrender Document, in a public ceremony, presided over by Lt Gen J S Aurora, the Eastern Army Commander! The IAF rose to the occasion and thundered in repeated low level passes over Government House, to bring Pakistani Governor Malik and his advisor Rao Firman Ali to their senses and agree to surrender. The UNO sat stunned. The US Seventh Fleet just waited in wonderment, in the Bay of Bengal, helplessly. The Chinese did not come hurtling down the mountain passes. The geography was changed; the cartographical landscape altered forever! History was made, and it came to stay! And Bangladesh was created after a lightning campaign.

Verma does not mince his words, and Mishra, his Brigade Commander, comes in for a fair amount of criticism. There was inadequacy of artillery support for attacking Akahura and Ashuganj, in set-piece battles. A squadron of light armour was considered adequate to provide covering fire in pursuit! By trial and error Verma evolved the technique of "attack by fire" and infiltration to get the better of the enemy in the strongly built-up defences. The Brigade HQ remained far too much in the rear. The radios were at the extreme ranges. The two forward brigades leaning on the Meghna did not have any bridging equipment to speak of, despite the well known obstacles of the marshy riverine terrain that precluded fast moving operations. The leading elements of the resourceful Indian Infantry did what they always did. They improvised and crossed over in commandeered country made-boats! But the heavy equipment could not.

Replete with maps, sketches and battle-photos, the book is a treat for the military historian. He will enjoy the blow by blow accounts from both sides, as the beauty of this book, indeed is the masterly way in which Verma has recounted battalion/company level actions from the enemy's perspective as well. For this he relied on "Bangladesh at War" by Maj Gen KM Shafiullah and "Mukti Bahini Wins Victory" by Maj Gen ATM Abdul Wahab. Brig Saddaiullha who was defending

Ashuganj, with whom, in the heat of the battle, Verma had many a verbal duel in purple prose, was also confabulated with. So in a way, this book is also an attempt in bridging the gap between Indian Army and Mukti Bahini perceptions and claims. During operations a joint strategy of wearing out the enemy, before defeating him in detail on the objectives held strongly by him was evolved. This paid off handsomely despite the initial heavy losses at the set-piece IA/EBR attacks on Dhalai/Kamalpur. Verma gives all their due and the Mukti Bahini and the locals come in for praise. He is very effusive of Sagat's leadership too, and rightly so.

Particularly insightful is a chapter titled, "A Later Analysis". In it Verma discusses the entire Liberation War in the context of the Principles of war as enunciated by Von Clausewitz. He surmises, that, whereas the Indians had catered to almost all of them and hence got to relish the sweet tastes of victory, the Pakistanis flouted most norms and hence had to swallow only a bitter pill of a humiliating defeat and having to live with the ignominy of going into Indian PsOW Camps with 93,000. Another incisive chapter, titled, "Last Word" has been scripted by Lt Gen JFR Jacob, the erstwhile Chief of Staff Eastern Command during Op 'Cactus Lily'. He clarifies on the controversy about the importance of Dacca and its being 'the centre of gravity'.

An unforgettable read by all accounts.

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