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Book Reviews: Popular Books Section

(Page 11b - Review by Dr. Geeta Saluja, India)



FEATURED BOOK : REVIEW 1

ESSENTIAL READING

[Review 1] [Main Page] [Review 2]

Rating : 7.0
★★★★★★★ (7/5)

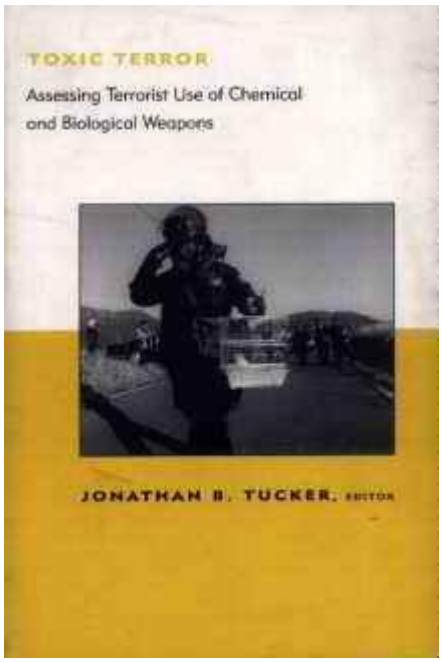
Toxic Terror: Assessing Terrorist Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons, [A book from the "BCSIA (Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs) Studies in International Security" series], 1st Edition, *Edited by* Jonathan B. Tucker. paperback, 6" x 9" [Cover Photo: A Japanese policeman in a protective suite used a cages canary as a primitive nerve gas detector during a search of Aum Shinrikyo headquarters in the Mt. Fuji foothills in late March 1995]

The MIT Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138: x + 303 Pages: Publication Date: 2000 [Fourth printing 2001]: ISBN-10: 0-262-70071-9. ISBN-13: 978-0-262-70071-9: Price $26.00/£16.95

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One of the several crises that the world is facing, terrorism, I believe acquires the topmost slot. This book is a promising attempt to draw attention of not only scholars, specialists and lawmakers but anyone towards the emerging sophisticated terrorist challenges; CBW being one of them. The book embodies a careful study of twelve historical cases and thereafter discusses the motivations, ideologies and psychological mindset behind such dreadful brutalities.

The book consists of 303 pages. The first chapter introduces us to chemical and biological warfare agents. The rest of the book presented in two parts-first part dealing with the study of twelve historical case studies and the second part considering the lessons gained by the study of these cases.

The introduction itself arouses the interest of the readers. The definition of terrorism theorized by the author is certainly befitting (page 10). The topics discussed-'Hurdles to Terrorist Acquisition of 'CBW' and 'New Breed of Terrorists' are of interest not only to specialists but to common reader as well.

The cases are discussed in detail. The writers have gathered even the minutest of information about the criminals and the incidents. A careful study of these cases reveals that: --

1. As we proceed towards the latest cases in the book we find the changing nature of terrorism. Terrorists now apply more advanced techniques for targeting masses and the process still continues. The schemes of Schwandner and Pera (R.I.S.E.) for a global release of biological agents, indicates an alteration in the concept of terrorism.

2. The book helps to know the possible places, which considered suitable for the use of CB agents so as to cause maximum causalities. It also gives an insight into the methods sought by the terrorists for the dissemination of CB agents.

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3. It becomes necessary to realize what role threats and hoaxes can play on masses if not the CBW agents themselves, for e.g.,

'A Watts Summer Festival concert at the Los Angeles Coliseum that was expected to attract 70,000 people drew only 3000.'

These altered figures in the case of Alphabet Bomber exhibit a wave of terror that terrorists can generate.

The spread of terror among masses also establishes that threats and hoaxes could not be neglected. As in the case of world trade center bombing, the threat-***"next time it will be very precise and WTC will continue to be one of our targets in the US unless our demands are met,"*** resulted in the collapse of these towers on September 11, 2001. However, there was no use of biological or chemical agents but terrorism played its part.

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4. A study of these cases reveals that women have started playing active role in modern terrorism. The Rajneeshee cult employed women for execution of their terrorist plans. The mastermind behind the acquisition and use of biological agents was Ma Anand Puja.

5. It has now become almost inevitable for governments to keep an eye on religious cults. Several such cults, for instance, have cropped up in India in recent years that play fool on the simple fraction of society and hoard enormous resources in the name of God.

6. One of the problems that surfaces in front of lawmakers is when people of higher ranks support terrorist activities and become contributors for the execution of criminal acts when the matter concerns their race, religion, or region, for instance-in the case study, 'Avenging Israel's Blood,' we find Chaim Weizmann-a chemist of high repute and Ernst Mohler, a leading Jewish industrialist who helped Jews in avenging the cruelties suffered by them.

There is vast information handed over to us by these historical cases. Their study also gives us an insight into changing trends and organized infrastructure used by terrorist organisations. But at the same time it also helps in identifying people like Kallick (R.I.S.E. 1972) who are quick to spot suspects and act accordingly to foil their plans.

However, the book would have become more interesting if the author had associated the description of terrorists and other related incidents with coloured illustrations such as photographs, maps, figures etc.

The second part of the book discusses the inferences drawn and strategies which could be devised for a check on terrorist activities. This part is of importance for policy makers, and specialists. The table 14.1 provides a concise review of several parameters across the case studies. The conclusion and lessons extracted from the case studies are helpful in building a platform for further studies and research work; particularly for unexpected attacks.

The appendix at the end of the book is no less interesting. The experts have tried to analyze the psychology of not only individual terrorists but that of groups who would not hesitate in using CBW agents over civilians. The writer exemplifies terrorists such as Osama Bin Laden who asserted in an interview-(page 283)

"..we don't consider it a crime if we tried to have nuclear, chemical, biological weapons."

Such declarations put a responsibility on researchers, scholars and policymakers to find out ways to prevent mess-casualty attacks and such threats should also evoke a sense of awareness among common people who are real targets.

In the end I would like to suggest people who have even the slightest of interest in the relevant field to read this piece of information. It is not so costly and has the information not readily available to the masses.



-Geeta Saluja

Dr. Geeta Saluja is a Wildlife Major, with a Ph.D. degree in wildlife from India. She has a strong liking for biology and chemistry, particularly biological and chemical terrorism. Her other areas of interest are environment awareness, astronomy and crime detection.

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