

Nuclear Strategy – Reconsidered*

Colonel Ali Ahmed**

The author of the book under review, Dr Sudha Raman, is the Research Coordinator at the Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation at the USI, New Delhi. Her book is the outcome of her doctoral thesis at the Disarmament Wing at the School of International Studies, JNU where late Dr M Zuberi, the renowned thinker on nuclear question, was her supervisor. The book deals with a compelling, though relatively ignored, angle on the nuclear issue - that of the morality of nuclear weapons. She approaches this challenging issue through the perspective of 'Just War' doctrine. Thus, within the covers of the book are two vast subjects, Nuclear Strategy and 'Just War'.

The author copes with the matter by first reviewing the development of nuclear deterrence in the USA during the Cold War years. She takes a particularly close look at nuclear targeting as it developed in pace with the evolution of doctrine from that of massive retaliation, through flexible response to assured destruction. Thereafter, she moves on to discussing the Christian Doctrine of 'Just War' as it developed over the millennium. Finally, she examines the implications of Just War doctrine for nuclear deterrence. This chapter relies on her M Phil thesis 'Ethics and Nuclear Strategy' based on the Pastoral Letter on War and Peace by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the US of 1983 that is rightly excerpted as an appendix. Her refreshing reflections bring the arguments up to date from the Cold War to the age of terrorism. Her conclusions form the remainder of the slim volume made bulky by forty pages of bibliography, one that could be improved by grouping references under appropriate sub-headings.

Just War theory has seven principles to guide reflection on legitimacy of waging war. These are relevant to the starting of war or *jus ad bellum* - criteria for permissibility of war. The seven considerations for waging war are: legitimate authority, just cause, peaceful intention, last resort, reasonable proportionality, hope for success and after due declaration. In so far as *jus in bello* - permissible conduct in war - considerations are concerned, these are proportionality and discrimination.

Against these nine principles of the two streams of 'Just War', Raman engages with deterrence strategies over three decades, from containment dating from the Truman period to the Strategic Defence Initiative of Reagan. In doing so, she tackles deterrence and the possible consequences of its

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breakdown into strategic nuclear war or limited nuclear war. In the course of her discussion on deterrence she grapples with terms such as counter value, counter force, decapitating, collateral damage, targeting sets and lists. These are set against more demanding concepts related to Just War such as peace, justice, moral limits and legality. The book, therefore, requires to be re-read for the pay-off of clarity on the arguments.

The Pastoral Letter gives out the position of the Church on the nuclear question. The specifics of this position include the general inadmissibility of nuclear war; striving for nuclear superiority must be rejected; and nuclear deterrence must be a step closer to eventual nuclear disarmament. Certain policy relevant observations till today are : halting of testing, production and deployment of new weapons, negotiated cuts in arsenals, support for a comprehensive test ban treaty, removal of short range nuclear weapon systems and strengthening command and control. The major recommendations are : adoption of a 'policy of no first use' and for development of an alternative defence posture.

The Author's conclusion is that nuclear weapons are incompatible with the 'Just War' doctrine. Ambiguity attends her assessment of deterrence as strategy in light of its desired consequences of keeping war itself at bay and in case of war, limiting it to the lowest levels of nuclear use and destruction. Even the Pastoral Letter admits to the necessity of deterrence, but is against vertical proliferation in its support for the concept of 'sufficiency'. Her pragmatic acceptance of the seeming contradiction is best explained in her own words, "It has never been really easy to come up with a clearly defined policy that would contain nothing regrettable or destructive."

Morality of nuclear weapons has been utilised by both their votaries and denouncers to forward respective arguments. The nuclear maximalist Bharat Karnad devotes some space in his voluminous '*Nuclear Weapons and Indian Security: The Realist Foundations of Strategy*' to the morality of these weapons in the *Kautilyan* tradition of indigenous realist thinking. Noted nuclear abolitionists Bidwai and Vanaik are equally persuasive in citing Indian tradition on the amorality of these weapons in their book, '*South Asia on a Short Fuse : Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament.*'

Raman avoids the subcontinental context in restricting her treatment of deterrence of the Cold War only through the Just War lens. That this area has already been covered by Western writers as evidenced in the bibliography, should spur the Author into tackling the two issues in their context closer home. The book, however, is ground breaking in so far as the subject not having been comprehensively addressed by any Indian writer so far. Thus, she is uniquely positioned in light of her grasp of the twin subjects to add another to her corpus.