

Book Review

WEAPONS OF THE WEAK

Derek D. Smith: *Deterring America: Rogue States and the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. x, 197. \$24.99.)

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In this book, Derek Smith adds vigor to the ongoing debate over the counterproliferation strategy of the United States. The primary task of Smith's book is twofold. First, it seeks to explain why, given that the September 11 attacks have raised the grave specter that Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) might be transferred from rogue states to undeterrable terrorists, the U.S. counter strategy has not yielded concrete outcomes. Second, it proposes a more nuanced U.S. response to WMD proliferation.

In part 1, Smith reassesses the traditional deterrence theory on which U.S. strategy rests, identifying a list of challenges. Interests may be so asymmetric that a rogue state might risk national survival for reasons such as honor or religious commitment. Weak states may attack the strong in the belief that they have no other option. The list also includes cultivating an image of irrationality and millenarian regimes that would attack with WMD even if their vital interests were not at stake. Combined with the probability that more rogue states would choose to deter American intervention by seeking WMD, these challenges could make the current U.S. strategy self-defeating because the United States, after the Iraq War, would probably "back down from similar confrontations given the inherent risks posed by a less ambiguously WMD-armed adversary" (5).

Part 2 is comprised of two case studies, Iraq and North Korea. It explains the failures of U.S. deterrence as inattentive to both asymmetric interests and the varying motivations of rogue states to develop WMD. In 1991, Saddam Hussein's threat to employ WMD against the coalition forces failed to materialize not because of deterrence, but probably because the United States did not directly "threaten Hussein's grip on power with an attack on Baghdad itself" (49). In 2003, Saddam's threats to use WMD were vague, and his capability was limited. The author argues that when U.S. deterrence apparently worked, it was at an extremely high cost, and the lesson other rogue states might draw is that a conventional military with limited WMD capability would not be sufficient to deter U.S. intervention. Regarding the other case study, Smith explains the outcome of North Korea's nuclear crisis

(1993–1994) in terms of Pyongyang’s communication of an irrationality image and North Korea’s WMD capabilities that deterred the U.S. The second Korean crisis (2002–2005) was diffused by a combination of North Korea’s strong deterrent capability and an asymmetry of interests, since “the threat to U.S. vital interests are [*sic*] only potential and probabilistic” (90).

In part 3, the author evaluates current U.S. counterproliferation strategies, concluding that each has serious problems. Export controls face the difficulty of monitoring dual-use materials; missile defenses could easily be bypassed by alternative means (September 11, for example); passive defenses are a long way from providing adequate protection; counterforce (preemptive and preventive war) and interdiction (Proliferation Security Initiative—PSI) are legally restricted. As an alternative, Smith proposes establishing a global quarantine against all forms of WMD transfer that sanctions international interdiction operations on the high seas. Smith suggests a broad interpretation of the self-defense principle in article 51 of the United Nations Charter as a legal justification for this quarantine.

Indeed, Smith’s critical reassessment of deterrence theory is a valuable contribution since it elaborates unconventional aspects of post-Cold War deterrence in light of increasing WMD-proliferation and the possible conflict between mismatched adversaries such as the U.S. and rogue states. Furthermore, Smith’s theoretical construct complements Christopher Layne’s recent “leash-slipping” theory as they both bridge a gap in the existing literature by introducing novel perspectives on how states balance against or deter the United States. In “leash-slipping” balancing—distinct from hard balancing (armament), soft balancing (diplomacy), and economic prebalancing—states “do not fear being attacked by the hegemon [but] they build up their military capabilities to maximize their ability to conduct an independent foreign policy” (“The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States’ Unipolar Moment,” *International Security* 31, no. 2 [Fall 2006]: 9). Examples include Britain’s attempt to create a “third force” between 1945 and 1948 and the European Union’s security and defence policy.

The main deficiency of Smith’s work, however, is its inability to incorporate this impressive theoretical construct into the country studies and the prescribed strategy. First, Smith acknowledges that other cases such as Iran, Syria, and Libya all merit analysis, “but lack the same level of explicit deterrent threat” (43n). Nonetheless, deterrence is about *both* capability and credibility. This weakness is manifested in the 2003 Iraqi crisis. The alleged Iraqi WMD capability proved to be nonexistent, unlike those of Iran or Syria. Saddam also made no clear threat to use them. Asked about the WMD during a Revolutionary Council meeting prior to the war, Saddam replied that “Iraq did not have WMD ... [and] was insistent that Iraq would give full access to UN inspectors ‘in order not to give President Bush any excuses to start a war’” (Kevin Woods, James Lacey, and Washington Murray, “Saddam’s Delusions: The View From the Inside,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 3 [May/June 2006]: 6–7).

91 Second, Smith presents the global quarantine as the best alternative
92 between a greater reliance on PSI or forcible disarmament (153–54).
93 However, a more plausible alternative is to address the causes of prolifer-
94 ation. Though Smith stresses the need for an understanding of the motiv-
95 ations of rogue states to acquire WMD (either regime maintenance or
96 regional security), his prescribed strategy misses the mark since it does not
97 address them. Smith maintains that negotiated agreements with rogue
98 states to give up WMD are “fairly unlikely” (100), even though negotiations
99 have led to successes. The credibility of the U.S. threat was a necessary but not
100 sufficient condition for having Libya give up its WMD programs. In the deal
101 he negotiated in 2003, Colonel Qaddafi insisted on assurances that the United
102 States would not seek regime change (Bruce W. Jentleson and Christopher
103 A. Whytock, “Who ‘Won’ Libya? The Force-Diplomacy Debate and Its
104 Implications for Theory and Policy,” *International Security* 30, no. 3 [Winter
105 2005–2006]: 47–86). Jentleson and Whytock assert that if “Libya had to
106 guard against policy concessions opening the way to efforts at regime
107 change, it would have been less likely to make its dramatic policy changes”
108 (76). Likewise, North Korea was willing to suspend its nuclear weapons
109 program in the 1994 Agreed Framework only when it was offered security
110 guarantees and economic incentives.

111 Moreover, the proposed global quarantine is impractical. Even in the unli-
112 kely event that it was to obtain the consent of the majority of states and
113 become real, a quarantine would probably have the same limits of export con-
114 trols that Smith highlights, particularly controlling the transfer of dual-use
115 items. Also related is the problem of compliance. The historical record
116 suggests that neither legal commitments nor technical restrictions prevented
117 a committed state from acquiring WMD. Realistically, rogue states might
118 respect the agreement on paper but cheat in practice, as Non-Proliferation
119 Treaty members Iraq, Libya, North Korea, and Iran did with regards to
120 their nuclear facilities. If Smith had followed his own theoretical premises
121 concerning the motivations of rogue states more carefully, he might have
122 recognized that the solution to WMD proliferation lies in security guarantees
123 and/or regional security arrangements that both national and international
124 nonproliferation strategies urgently need to address.

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