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Nonlethal Weapons: A British View

By Robert J. Bunker Copyright 1998

Hundreds of documents and articles have been published about nonlethal weapons (NLW) since the 1960s. However, few books had been published on the subject.1 As NLW significance becomes more recognized for the operational advantages they provide in Western urban and “failed-state” settings, more books are appearing. Malcolm Dando’s book A New Form of Warfare: The Rise of Nonlethal Weapons and Nick Lever and Steven Schofield’s book Nonlethal Weapons: A Fatal Attraction? Military Strategies and Technologies for 21st-Century Conflict are two of the first books to appear.” All three authors are academics with ties to the fields of peace studies and conflict resolution.

In their own ways, both books represent significant contributions to NLW literature and, therefore, belong in every military officer’s professional library. The books are useful overviews of recent NLW historical development and employment, do an excellent job of covering various NLW technologies, fully discuss the ethical and legal implications surrounding NLW, provide us with an “over-the-seas” perspective and are well researched. However, neither book contains an in-depth look at current NLW operational employment concepts—which is probably best, given this subject is outside the authors’ research focus.

The books have an undercurrent of NLW “arms control.” These are not “how to” books for military and police officers. They are policy-directed works attempting to influence the debate swirling around these weapons’ fielding and future. As a result, readers must approach both books with the understanding that an implicit arms-control agenda exists. Therefore, I strongly caution readers to question the authors’ inherent policy positions.

Malcolm Dando’s book focuses on US psychochemical incapacitants and their development. Dando holds a doctorate in neurophysiology and wrote Biological Warfare in the 21st Century.2 Given the focus of this current book, however, only the short second chapter, “Benign Interventions with Nonlethal Weapons?” provides an overview of more traditional NLW subjects.

Other chapters cover peacekeeping and describe the Inhumane Weapons Convention and effects of delayed-action weapons such as land mines, which is meant to be an example of the human tragedy that psychochemical NLW can cause when they are not restricted by international agreements. The book also touches on chemical agents, the human nervous system, brain chemistry and US psychochemical incapacitants. The author’s concern is the need to rethink arms control and the implications of NLW incapacitants with regard to benign interventions or a new arms race.

When thinking about the ideas in this book, I had the most trouble with the following quote: “[T]he development and fielding of many of these weapon systems will call into question the arms control regime we have so far managed to erect and will complicate efforts to proceed further with the necessary process of military de-escalation upon which stability and security will depend in the next century.”3

While arms control may be viewed as a means to provide stability and security among some national groups, arms control is meaningless in regard to rogue states and nonstate groups. In 1957, Abba Eban, Israeli ambassador to the United States, said, “International law is the law which the wicked do not obey and which the righteous do not enforce.”4 If some US scholars’ predictions are accurate and NLW do turn out to be as militarily significant as the development of gunpowder-based weapons, it is imperative that US military forces continue to lead the field.

Nick Lever and Steven Schofield’s book provides a more general treatment of NLW than does Dando’s.5 As a result, for most readers it is a far more useful and informative work. Lever and Schofield hold doctorates and have published many works on this subject.

The book covers NLW and the post-Cold War environment; technology and the development of
may be more of a necessity than these authors ever imagined.

The one point on which I totally agree with both books’ authors is that not all NLW are benign. Yet, it may be this fact’s implications where we also most strongly differ. A few years back, T. Lindsay Moore and I commented on “the potential for a new form of martyrdom based on those living, not dead” to arise from these weapons’ long-term disabling capabilities.5 The authors of these books see warfare’s dark form, which could emerge from employing some of this weaponry by Western military forces, and thus seek an arms-control regime to stop it. I already see that form of warfare emerging with the return of the nonstate soldier to the battlefield, and I project it only a matter of time before criminal-soldiers begin using nonbenign forms of NLW against US forces and noncombatants. Given such a scenario, it would be suicidal for the United States to accede to an NLW arms-control regime meant to limit interstate conflict when, in fact, the threat is intransitive war waged by non- and transnational groups at odds with the Western nation-state form.

Both books advocate the use of NLW only if such weapons were to make war less destructive and more humane. Outside of these “idealistic” parameters, these weapons are viewed with great suspicion. The authors consider it inherently immoral for these weapons to be developed to further Western military superiority in warfare. However, in a world where nonstate groups and new warmaking entities—such as cartels—are challenging legitimate political and social institutions, these weapons’ advanced warfighting advantage is no longer a luxury but a necessity for US forces.5

## Notes


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.


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## All That We Can Be: The Military and Minorities

By Billy R. Dickens

The post Cold-War era forced many analysts to reevaluate the US military’s role. Jingoistic concepts such as *detente*, containment and geopolitical equilibrium are relics of a former time. We now witness an epidemic of democracy spreading throughout former totalitarian regions. The US military is finding itself in an odd slate of defense disequilibrium and mistaken identity. Some new demands on the Armed Forces are reflected in activities such as “nation building,” drug interdiction and social engineering. One of the more problematic issues the military faces is the challenge to be more socially sensitive in securing equal opportunity for disenfranchised minorities while defense downsizing continues.

Many critics argue that the military has moved with all deliberate speed to achieve this goal. Consequently, progress has been sporadic at best. Thomas E. Hicks, writing in the July 1997 *Atlantic Monthly*, cites a growing chasm between the military and society. His provocative essay, “The Widening Gap Between the Military and Society,” argues that military personnel are feeling increasingly more alienated from the society they have sworn to protect. The alternative argument stresses that the military is the best example of true meritocracy, resulting in unencumbered opportunities for all, provided individuals meet standards and expectations. Who is correct? Charles C. Moskos and John S. Butler’s book *All That We Can Be* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1996) seeks to ascertain whether the military—the US Army in particular—has been successful in fully integrating disparate members into an environment that offers promise, potential and promotion opportunities.