BOOKS & ARTS

Keeping up with the nuclear neighbours

Since acquiring atomic weapons, India, Pakistan and North Korea have not engaged in major warfare. But nuclear deterrence alone does not buy peace — diplomacy must keep the balance, says **George Perkovich**.

The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21st Century Asia

Edited by Muthiah Alagappa

Stanford University Press: 2008. 592 pp.
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The cold war distorted definitions of 'normal' nuclear behaviour. The giant antagonists, the United States and the Soviet Union, built gargantuan arsenals poised for launch at a moment's notice. They poked and prodded each other until the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 chastened them to give arms control a chance. Notwithstanding a series of treaties meant to manage their nuclear competition and help shape a global nuclear order — from the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963 through to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II 30 years later — Washington DC and Moscow ordered the construction of thousands more nuclear weapons and kept them ready for use, even when no crisis was at hand.

By the mid-1970s, China, Israel and India had nuclear explosives, and Pakistan and South Africa were preparing to join them. These nations treated nuclear weapons differently. They built relatively few, did not deploy them for immediate use and kept them largely out of political view. South Africa disarmed in the early 1990s, and North Korea became nuclear-armed. Of the nine countries that have nuclear weapons today, the United States and Russia are hardly typical.

The Long Shadow illuminates the different ways that nuclear-armed states have sought to extract the benefits of nuclear weapons while minimizing their risks.

Muthiah Alagappa has masterfully edited 14 chapters by leading experts covering the United States, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia, and, more broadly, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the prospects of nuclear terrorism in Asia. Alagappa frames and then interprets these chapters with two of his own. Some chapters are superb, the rest are good. None is bad.

The book suffers from a stretched definition of Asia — from Israel eastwards, through the United States, north to Russia and south to

"The threats of direct conflict are low, but concerns about the nuclear future are high."

South Korea fears a possible nuclear threat from its neighbour, and sees US negotiators as crucial players.

Australia — that includes all nuclear-armed states except France and the United Kingdom. Jamming so many countries into one regional construct is unhelpful. Alagappa betrays the problem when he repeatedly generalizes about Asia but then adds that Iran and the Middle East depart from whatever pattern he is describing. The chapters on Iran and Israel, by Devin Hagerty and Avner Cohen respectively, are solid. But they don't add much. Whether the Middle East nuclear challenge ends in disaster or security will depend more heavily on factors other than the nuclear policies of the Asian states to the east.

Asian states have not engaged in major warfare since 1979, which is before India, Pakistan and North Korea acquired nuclear weapons. Alagappa extols the peaceable effects of nuclear deterrence, but it is not clear that deterrence has caused the relative absence of hostilities. With so few threats of direct conflict, the need for nuclear deterrence as a military tool has been low. Indeed,

contrary to Alagappa's nuclear bullishness, the nuclear programmes of North Korea, Pakistan and Iran have caused more insecurity than they have alleviated.

Worldwide, there are only three sources of conflict with pressing probabilities of nuclear escalation — between the United States and China over Taiwan, between India and Pakistan and between Iran and the United States or Israel. In each, as Alagappa recognizes, "nuclear deterrence today operates largely in a condition of asymmetric power relationships". Nuclear weapons may partially equalize the military balance of power between states, but this "benefit" is circumscribed. Behaving aggressively behind a putative nuclear shield to change a regional balance would invite other powers "to resort to full-scale conventional retaliation. The onus of escalation to the nuclear level then shifts to the conventionally weaker, revisionist state that initiated the crisis ... there is no certainty that international diplomatic intervention would favor the revisionist state."

The India-Pakistan nuclear relationship often

JUNG YEON-JE/AFP/GETTY

produces intense international hand-wringing. Danger does lurk there, largely owing to Pakistan's political crisis and reluctance to formalize the territorial status quo with India. Stimuli for conflict emerge from Pakistan; competitive logic and political imperatives may lead both states to brinkmanship. As suggested in the chapters on India, by Rajesh Rajagopalan, and on Pakistan, by Feroz Hassan Khan and Peter Lavoy, both countries recognize that nuclear weapons make a war between them unwinnable. Yet they remain unable to transform this recognition into a confident peace that would empower Pakistan's civilian leaders to press the army and intelligence services to concentrate on internal security rather than nurturing low-intensity violence in India and Afghanistan.

The comparative advantage of *The Long Shadow* emanates from the chapters on Japan, China, South Korea and North Korea. Paradoxically, in northeast Asia the threats of direct conflict are low, but concerns about the nuclear future are high. This suggests the political, more than the specifically military, importance of these weapons.

Michael Green and Katsuhisa Furukawa write in the book that nuclear weapons are increasingly present in Japanese thinking, but not as war-fighting instruments or protection against existential threat. "Rather, it is the specter of political and strategic entropy that would be associated with a collapse of the US extended deterrence commitment that is animating strategic thinking in Japan." North Korea's bomb and improved Chinese capabilities reopen "the old question of whether the United States would protect Japan even at the risk of inviting nuclear strikes against US cities". Some Japanese strategic thinkers worry that the United States might "conclude a bilateral arms control agreement with Beijing that endorses protection of Chinese limited nuclear strike capability against the US". They fear this would decouple the United States from Japan.

Kang Choi and Joon-Sung Park describe how South Koreans have an "excessive fear of nuclear threat" combined with a "fear of abandonment" by the United States, and its opposite, "fear of entrapment". They argue that South Korea's fear of abandonment "could soar if the United States tacitly accepted North Korea's nuclear weapon status". Conversely, the fear of entrapment "would linger as long as the public believes that a US military strike on North Korea is possible".

Doubts about the credibility of extended deterrence were much greater during the cold war, as Green and Furukawa and Choi and Park document. Still, policy-makers in

Washington, Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing must undertake concerted diplomacy to instil political-strategic confidence in the region in ways that reduce rather than raise the salience of nuclear weapons.

The Long Shadow offers useful guidance to this end. None of the authors urges US retrenchment from the region or rethinking of Japanese, South Korean or Taiwanese nuclear abstinence. Acquisition of nuclear weapons by these countries would only exacerbate insecurity and reduce US commitments to act to defend peace and stability there. Instead, greater effort must be made to enhance the transparency of intentions and capabilities, bolster conventional deterrence and foster unity in dealing with North Korea.

Leaders in the United States and China together hold a key. China will not become more cooperative and transparent and limit its strategic build-up if the United States does not clarify that it is prepared to accept China's nuclear deterrent. This would mean limiting missile defences and certain non-nuclear strike capabilities. Sino-American strategic accommodation need not devalue the US extended deterrent, as some in Japan

may fear. As long as nuclear weapons remain, the United States will extend its deterrence umbrella to its allies. To reassure Japan of this, leaders in Washington, Beijing and Tokyo must undertake more forthright strategic dialogues. Framing such dialogue with an explicit objective of creating conditions for incremental, verifiable steps towards nuclear disarmament would add an important Asian dimension to the global effort to live up to the promise made in the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the future of which has come into question.

The shadow in this volume's title refers to the chastening threat of nuclear war. The complexity and particularity of the nuclear story in each country surveyed reminds us that the people responsible for preventing the darkness of nuclear war would benefit from the light that careful scholarship can provide. The illumination offered in *The Long Shadow* should be welcomed. ■

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Pugwash, nukes and peace

After years of backsliding on nuclear-weapons proliferation by the world's superpowers, President Barack Obama has stated that he intends to "make the goal of eliminating all nuclear weapons a central element" in nuclear policy. His recently appointed chief science adviser, physicist John Holdren, spent ten years as chairman of the executive committee for the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, the peripatetic annual meeting of scientists and statesmen to discuss ways to control nuclear weapons. It is named after the Canadian village of Pugwash, Nova Scotia, where its first conference was held under the sponsorship of a wealthy Canadian philanthropist, Cyrus Eaton.

The late Joseph Rotblat would have been heartened by these recent political developments. Rotblat was the youngest signatory of

the 1955 Russell-Einstein Manifesto against nuclear weapons, which gave rise to the first Pugwash Conference at the height of the cold war in 1957. Rotblat dedicated more than half

a century to the fight to abolish nuclear weapons. In 1995, he and the Pugwash organization shared the Nobel Peace Prize.

Two edited collections on Rotblat were published soon after his death in 2005 at the age of 96. As yet there is no substantial biography, although one is being prepared by the writer Andrew Brown. Now, Rotblat is the focus of *The Strangest Dream* — a Canadian documentary film (<http://tinyurl.com/cnehl3>) made to celebrate the centenary of his birth — which is intelligent, vivid and all the more powerful for its restraint; and the subject of two brief but interesting books — Martin Underwood's *Joseph Rotblat* and Kit Hill's

The Strangest Dream

Film directed by Eric Bednarski
Produced by the National Film Board of Canada

Joseph Rotblat: A Man of Conscience in the Nuclear Age

by Martin Underwood
Sussex Academic Press: 2009.
144 pp. £17.95

Professor Pugwash, The Man Who Fought Nukes: The Life of Sir Joseph Rotblat

by Kit Hill
Rylands: 2008. 80 pp. £8.99