

Lee, Rensselaer W., III. *Smuggling Armageddon: The Nuclear Black Market in the Former Soviet Union and Europe*. New York: St. Martin's, 1998.

Smuggling Armageddon is an examination of the threat posed by the actual and possible nuclear black market that has developed around the former Soviet Union. In fact, *Smuggling Armageddon* looks at two different stories of the nuclear black market. The first story describes the way in which Western states have been successful in stemming the flow of nuclear materials by the many amateur smugglers who entered the market after the Soviet Union's collapse. The second story describes a more organized and unseen trade, which possibly may exist and may be successfully transferring nuclear materials to more serious buyers. The author, Rensselaer W. Lee III, is an associate scholar at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and is President of Global Advisory Services. Lee's previous studies have been of another smuggling issue that affects national security, narcotics in Latin America. *Smuggling Armageddon* is a short book, just over 150 pages, but it draws concern to a rather serious issue.

The former Soviet Union appears to be continuing on its way to collapse and Russia has come to be considered by some the northernmost "failed state." It is Russia's weak government and poor economic condition that is to blame for the problems that Lee discusses in his book. Lee points out that Russian nuclear security, designed in the Soviet era, has mainly been concerned with keeping people out through the use of antiquated fences, locks and monitoring. This was enough when the threat was external. But the economic crises that have rocked the state and the need for cash have provided the workers with enough incentive to steal their once dearly guarded materials, in hopes of selling them abroad. Lacking has been a system to keep these workers from walking off with the material. Lee states that only recently have these facilities begun installing basic protective devices, including tamper proof seals, identification badges and closed circuit cameras. The majority of these improvements are the result of US concern and US aid, but the programs continue to advance slowly.

Workers stealing nuclear materials and those pretending to have nuclear materials are the basis of the first story Lee turns his attention to. These amateur smugglers and scam artists are responsible for the overwhelming majority of the known nuclear trade. " . . . The nuclear marketplace is heavily populated with disorganized peddlers, scam artists, and naive opportunists." (p. 64) It is this compilation of amateur criminals that the Western states have been greatly successful in defeating. Lee's research shows that nuclear material trafficking from the former Soviet Union to Europe has been decreasing substantially since 1994, reaching near zero in 1997. (p. 24) Much of the drop is attributed to the activities of Western agencies, and the fear of arrest they are causing among those involved. Much of the demand side of the market is artificial and has consisted of undercover police waiting to entrap the traffickers. Lee believes, however, that this amateur trade cannot be the whole picture.

This is where the second, and possibly more alarming, story begins. Lee turns his attention to the increasing power of the Russian Mafia. Currently the Mafia is unchecked by Russia's law enforcement agencies and in many sectors controls the economy. He

briefly examines the strength of such organizations; membership is in the hundreds of thousands armed with a plethora of military weapons from Kalashnikovs to anti-tank weapons. Lee then looks at the way in which these organizations have become transnational in nature, with over 100 groups operating in over 45 countries outside Russia. Lee's greatest concern is that the Russian Mafia has linked up with other international criminal organizations, such as La Cosa Nostra and the drug cartels. This link has led to a growing network of drug traffickers, natural resource smugglers and arms brokers who could easily restructure their activity to sell stolen nuclear materials should the proper occasion present itself. Western authorities discount this idea, putting forward the notion that the margin of profit in the black nuclear trade is too small to attract organized crime. Director of Central Intelligence John Deutch said that there was no evidence of organized nuclear trafficking, the Russian Federal Security Service says that ". . . there is no nuclear Mafia," and the major European states agree. Although no hard evidence exists to demonstrate organized trafficking in nuclear materials, Lee argues that if any serious buyers (states, large terrorist groups, multinational corporations) enter the market place they will not look to the small time criminals but rather they will contact the more reliable Mafia. These large time buyers would be able to spend enough money on the materials to provide the profit necessary to interest criminal organizations.

Finding reliable evidence of this organized trade is the difficult task Lee faces. Much of the evidence is anecdotal, based on the statements of the amateurs arrested in Europe that attest to organized crime connections. Other evidence, in particular the amount of material recovered in Europe not equalling the amount stolen in Russia, may be due to poor accounting not criminal stockpiling. The reality is that with no concrete evidence, anything is possible. Faced with this possibility Lee suggests the US further increase aid to Russia for materials protection control and accounting programs, counter trafficking infrastructure and greater international intelligence cooperation. As well, Lee suggests that the US do something to ease the economic situation of the workers in the Russian nuclear sector.

Smuggling Armageddon does a good job of examining the nuclear black market, stating its current size and shape and how it might be evolving into a more organized trade. It recognizes that proliferation through criminal networks is a threat to international security, and suggests what responses the US and the international community should undertake. Any scholar wanting a brief but substantive overview of the illegal nuclear trade and its future should add a copy of *Smuggling Armageddon* to their library.

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