Fallout: Nuclear Diplomacy in an Age of Global Fracture

Strategic Nuclear Sharing

Nuclear Desire: Power and the Postcolonial Nuclear Order

The study of nuclear proliferation – and non-proliferation – has become a favourite pastime of many political scientists working on international security issues, to the point that few dimensions of the problem have not been covered in depth over the past 25 years. Yet three recently published books seek to bring new academic perspectives. While very different in scope, ambition and style, all three eschew the quantitative prism through which so much contemporary political science is conducted, especially in the United States.

Grégoire Mallard’s *Fallout* tackles a seemingly arcane topic: the question of ‘transparency’ (as opposed to ‘opacity’ or ‘ambiguity’) with respect to treaty interpretations. The book uses this filter to offer insights into the general question of the interpretation of international law in diplomacy, with an emphasis on the legal and political particularities of the European approach. From a policy standpoint, an added benefit of Mallard’s work is to shed light on the European input into the global non-proliferation regime (a story heretofore largely untold), and particularly on the way the ‘Eurofederalists’ around Jean Monnet (one of the ‘fathers’ of the European project) ‘wrote parts of the most important nuclear nonproliferation treaties proposed by the US government after the war’ (p. 9). Proponents of European integration succeeded in safeguarding European ‘exceptionalism’ by preserving the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) system alongside the adoption of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, and exerted tremendous influence over the construction of the global non-proliferation regime. In Europe itself, the federalists failed in their ambition to establish a common military nuclear programme, but succeeded in securing the equal legal treatment of all the major European powers, including Germany. All this came at a price: Mallard goes so far as to claim that ‘the challenges [that India, Iran and Pakistan] mounted against the NPT framework found their origin in the European nuclear settlement of the mid-1970s’ (p. 246). But the author also believes that the example of EURATOM’s relationship with the IAEA, and of the subtle diplomatic craftsmanship exhibited by a generation
of Western diplomats, could be instructive for any attempt to harmonise the
global rules of nuclear conduct.

Why do countries deliberately (though rarely) share military-related nuclear
technology, know-how and hardware? This is the question raised by Julian
Schofield in *Strategic Nuclear Sharing*, a short book with prose as bland as its title,
but which represents an interesting contribution to the emerging sub-field of
‘supply-side proliferation’. The author’s definition of nuclear sharing is histori-
cally and conceptually extensive, since it includes Nazi Germany’s assistance to
Imperial Japan, and the mere basing of nuclear weapons on the territory of an
ally (an inclusion justified, according to him, by the reaction this may elicit from
third parties). Schofield seeks to demonstrate that security choices and impera-
tives are the dominant incentive in decisions to share. His nuanced conclusion
is that ‘sharing may accelerate proliferation, or delay it if it is done intelligently
... but it is not the driver of proliferation’ (p. 131).

Shampa Biswas’s *Nuclear Desire* is a very different kind of book. Coming
from the realm of post-colonial studies, the author promises to bring a refresh-
ing perspective to the causes of nuclear proliferation – all the more so given her
experience as an Indian student living in the United States when New Delhi
conducted its nuclear tests in 1998. A central feature of the book is the question
of ‘nuclear fetishism’. On this, the author is on the mark about a few points,
such as when she describes how new nuclear nations are as guilty of such fet-
ishism as the older ones may have been. (Anyone who has seen the replicas of
ballistic missiles and testing sites in Pakistani cities will know what she means.)
And the feminist discourse underlying the use of such faintly sexual terms as
‘nuclear abstinence’, ‘nuclear restraint’ and ‘nuclear taboo’ is not without its
merits. But Biswas’s book will leave most readers of *Survival* perplexed. While
well researched from a factual point of view, it is ultimately a long, often self-
centred ramble of the kind that many critical theorists seem to enjoy writing
(and, quite possibly, reading). Some passages are barely comprehensible: this
reviewer has yet to figure out, for example, how and why nuclear weapons’
‘destructive power appears to escape the limits of epistemology’ (p. 173). Yet
the presence of such passages does not prevent the author from lambasting the
‘technostrategic language of nuclear policy’ (p. 132).

There is nothing wrong in principle with the idea of a modern Marxist
perspective on nuclear proliferation or a ‘Foucauldian analysis of the non-
proliferation regime’ (p. 19). But there is no excuse for evaluating only the ‘costs’
of nuclear policies, and the ‘waste’ that they produce, without any discussion
of whether the security benefits that deterrence provides are real or imagined.