

## Book Review: The Challenges of Nuclear Non-Proliferation by Richard D. Burns & Philip E. Coyle III

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**Burns, Richard D. and Philip E. Coyle III. *The Challenges of Nuclear Non-Proliferation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. xvi + 238 pages. Paperback, \$33.00.**

The front cover of this book has a powerful and foreboding image of a nuclear test in the Pacific. This seems a good choice because the authors have packed quite a bit of high quality and somber material into a short book. This book provides a useful account of the decisions and actors that have characterized the international efforts to rein in the spread of nuclear weapons since 1945. The authors faced a fundamental choice in how they approached the material. The standard approach to this topic focuses on individual countries that are either already or potentially ready to join the nuclear weapons club. These books typically have separate chapters on India, Pakistan, North Korea, Israel, and perhaps others. Burns and Coyle chose to focus on the efforts to build a non-proliferation regime encompassing institutions and norms. This approach generates some intriguing insights but comes at a cost. The main cost is that readers might wish for a detailed account in one location of what the authors call the secondary nuclear powers (India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea). Adopting the regime approach spreads those stories across chapters. As one example, the chapter on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) does not address the shock it received after the first Gulf War revealed that Iraq had a significant nuclear weapons program despite IAEA safeguards. A later chapter discusses the topic; however, the IAEA chapter seems incomplete without it.

The payoff of their approach comes when important regime elements, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the IAEA, warrant their own chapters, along with nuclear test bans and geographical non-proliferation zones. One especially attractive feature is that each of the chapters tells a story that stands on its own. In addition, several chapters are also subdivided so that readers can hone in on the parts of the complex narrative the book presents without necessarily wading through sections that are of less interest to them. Since chapters contain separate narratives, the text tends to go backwards in time as the new narrative evolves. This date hopping can happen even within chapters as the sub-narratives have their own histories. For example in one chapter, a section ends with reference to President George W. Bush, with the next section beginning with the early 1960s. Despite this, the authors have managed to keep from repeating themselves.

Their writing style is serious and conveys important concepts in a well-organized manner that allows them to avoid dragging readers into heavy details that often characterize works of this nature. There are occasional passages that stand out as questionable. One passage, for example, provides the name of two aides who appear nowhere else in the book and do not seem consequential enough to be worth cluttering up the text. In addition, in evaluating US and USSR nuclear testing policies, they opine, “Megaton-class bombs might still have a place in the thinking of Dr. Strangelove...” (p. 78). They occasionally err, or at least mislead the reader, as when they say “The original five nuclear weapons states (NWS) – the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, France and China—became the only permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and the only members with a veto.” (p. 191). This puts the NWS cart before the UN horse. However, these are minor complaints, and they do not detract from the overall high quality of the prose.

Overall, their tone and analysis seems to be sober and reasonable. They recognize an often-overlooked point that the early pessimistic predictions of rampant nuclear proliferation have not come true. They approach the topic with a clear bias in favor of non-proliferation and do not bother to take up seriously the pro-proliferation position most famously adopted by Kenneth Waltz. In addition, their concluding chapter exhibits a clear favoritism towards the P-5 as the legitimate nuclear weapons states. This dodges questions of why they get to have nuclear weapons while others cannot have them.

The book relies on widely available materials and provides links to the obscure ones. The bibliographic entries are solid and compressive in scope. Nearly every reader will learn something new, whether it is about the evolution of the non-proliferation regime or about the Eisenhower Administration's Atoms for Peace program, or any number of other interesting facts. The text seems ideal for advanced courses in international history or politics. It assumes that readers have a basic knowledge of world politics in the Post-WWII period. It would be a strong supplemental reading for advanced undergraduate or graduate courses in international security courses. It provides an often-ignored perspective on the Cold War. Non-proliferation is an issue area of great importance and one in which the US and USSR managed to collaborate even when their preferences were not identical. In the process, they grew to understand that at least some of the positions taken by the other side were legitimate.

The book raises intriguing questions and provides materials for the readers to address. One example is the question of an impending proliferation epidemic. According to this premise, we may be at a tipping point in which a type of domino effect might come into play, so that if a tenth nuclear weapons state arises, it raises the odds of an eleventh, and so forth. The authors raise this in their final chapter, and it seems that they did provide the readers with enough information to begin an answer. Most impressive is that despite the book's 2015 publication date, it does not seem outdated. Such endeavors, no matter how brilliant, always risk being overtaken by time and events. Readers will not necessarily be able to predict the next developments involving North Korea, but they will have the intellectual structures in place to make sense of those events.

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