



International Journal of Nuclear Security

Volume 7 | Number 1

Article 7

5-16-2021

Book Review of "Global Nuclear Developments: Insights from a Former IAEA Nuclear Inspector" by Pantelis F. Ikononou

Arjun Banerjee
University of Tennessee Knoxville

Follow this and additional works at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/ijns>

Recommended Citation

Banerjee, Arjun (2021) "Book Review of "Global Nuclear Developments: Insights from a Former IAEA Nuclear Inspector" by Pantelis F. Ikononou," *International Journal of Nuclear Security*. Vol. 7: No. 1, Article 7.

<https://doi.org/10.7290/ijns070107>

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/ijns/vol7/iss1/7>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Volunteer, Open Access, Library Journals (VOL Journals), published in partnership with The University of Tennessee (UT) University Libraries. This article has been accepted for inclusion in *International Journal of Nuclear Security* by an authorized editor. For more information, please visit <https://trace.tennessee.edu/ijns>.

Book Review

Global Nuclear Developments: Insights from a Former IAEA Nuclear Inspector

Ikonomou, Pantelis F.

Springer, 2020, 240 pages, ISBN 9783030469962 (hardcover) | ISBN 9783030469979 (epub), Price: \$99.99 (hardcover) | \$79.99 (Kindle).

Reviewed by Arjun Banerjee

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

With a touching dedication to his grandchildren “in the hope that they will live in a world free of nuclear weapons,” a sentiment shared by numerous professionals working in the nuclear security and disarmament circuits, Pantelis F. Ikonomou sets the perfect stage for what is to follow in this excellent work. The author brings in his career-long expertise from important and sensitive programs, projects, and missions he has served in with the mother of all nuclear 3S (safety, safeguards, and security) organizations, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Ikonomou tries to answer certain big, and somewhat normative, questions in his book, questions such as “are nuclear weapons a ground-breaking choice for achieving a balance of horror, also called ‘deterrent’, or are they a fatal irrationalism and the last human error? Do they represent the most dangerous human ‘success’? Are they the evidence of scientific rationality or of political absurdity?” (5). Ikonomou also covers a lot of ground in this book and keeps the reader continually hooked with personal anecdotes from his life. For instance, he narrates an interesting story of a certain Roger Richter he knew from around the time the Israeli strike on the Iraqi Osirak reactor occurred (1981). Richter worked with the IAEA but at the time produced official statements that contradicted the then-Director-General of the IAEA, which led to serious controversies. Further, he casts much-needed light on the way certain countries tend to apply pressure to the organization and gives the reader the sense that “there is a lot of politics involved” (50) in an international organization such as the IAEA. These personal, grounded stories make it far easier for a layperson to connect with this book, as the writing clearly conveys the sense that the creation of nuclear weapons was a colossal political fallacy despite being a tremendous scientific achievement. His treasure trove of experiences is noticeable from his writing, and they add an extra dimension to the book that make it at the same time more interesting as well as more enriching (pun intended), allowing the book to transcend what otherwise may have turned out as merely a useful guide for beginners in the field of nuclear security.

The formatting and chapter organization of the book are clean and flow logically and smoothly. They cover the most important global flashpoints/areas of concern when it comes to the IAEA’s work. The nuclear program development connection between Libya, China, and Pakistan is presented with interesting facts. Moreover, the links between the current nuclear weapons-holding states are pointed out poignantly by the author – viz., how they happened to develop their weapons. The author weaves a clear mental spiderweb of connections for the reader. Ikonomou also provides a good balance of technical as well as historical and political aspects of nuclear security and the IAEA’s work. Useful annexures at

the end contain charts and tables on the status of nuclear arsenals of countries as of 2019, the text of a 1939 letter from Einstein to the then-U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a global overview of power reactors and global nuclear shares, and so on.

Ikonomou's writing is lucid and easy to understand despite his first language being clearly not English. While this book was originally written in Greek, it is indeed useful to the English-speaking world at large to have the same insights in a language they understand to cater to a far wider audience beyond just Greece. However, one would find a few minor typos through the book, e.g., in the Acknowledgements section – the author refers to Mohammad ElBaradei's book "expressing in stark terms his [g]uest (sic) for peace", or in the Introduction chapter, the famous Lise Meitner happens to be spelt as "Lisa" Meitner. Some of the USA-related terminology is a tad off the mark – there is officially no "US Minister of Foreign Affairs" (MoFA) position; rather, the equivalent of a MoFA that exists in many countries is known in the US as the Secretary of State (28).

The author also seems to believe that a resolution to the North Korean nuclear crises can only happen if the U.S. and North Korea indeed sit down and rationally thrash out their differences together. While there exists now, to my mind, a razor-thin possibility with the new U.S. Government in power for that to occur, it seemed quite ironic to think about at the time of the book's publication, at least with the then-existing political dispensation, to even imagine these two countries doing so with their respective leaders perceived globally as two of the most irrational to be in power.

Ikonomou's solid work ties up his whole narrative into a well thought out conclusion. The author provides an interesting glimpse into the future in the concluding pages of a tetra-polar alliance of nuclear powers – which, according to the author, are the USA and UK plus; Russia and India plus; China, Pakistan, and the DPRK plus; and France and Israel plus. What this signifies is the cementing of new foundations on which new nuclear power alliances are being forged – that is, a structure dominated by four pillars and backed by peripheral states "strategically selected by criteria of history, current pragmatism or future necessity" (153). This is not a bad thing, he observes, and might in fact "allow the temporary de-escalation of the current nuclear race and weapons' 'modernization', making possible the creation of a global climate of stability and trust."

Ultimately, Ikonomou humbly poses a few thought-provoking, even moving, questions to the two nuclear superpowers – Russia and the USA – as to why they revive in full consciousness a nuclear race thirty years after the Cold War has ended, or why are they taking steps that disregard the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which those very countries have been instrumental in drafting, thereby essentially and paradoxically undermining the global nonproliferation regime?

No doubt, that committed crusaders against nuclear weapons such as Ikonomou are needed in today's world. One can only hope that they can get their strong message for nuclear disarmament across to the powers that be before it is too late.