

Book Review

Reshmi Kazi and Ashild Kolas, (Eds.) *India in Global Nuclear Governance*, (New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2019), Price: Rs. 620.00, Pages: 152.

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The global nuclear discourse, which is less than a century old, appears to be at a crossroad for a variety of complex reasons. Increasing threats to safety and security of nuclear technology as well as resources during the last few decades are more pressing issues as compared to other factors like proliferation, disarmament, nuclear brinkmanship, etc. However, nuclear energy has evoked a sense of zest, since it has an edge over other forms of energy; around 13 per cent of world electricity is accrued from nuclear sources; radioactive materials are thus, now used in many sectors enriching human life. On the other hand, it has also evoked a sense of fear and disgust due to its use in two nuclear weapons in war and many more are believed to be piled up to be used; three major nuclear accidents have occurred; besides the fear of slippage of nuclear technology/material to the terrorist hands always looms high. Therefore, the balance sheet seems mixed implying that *we succeeded as much we failed with nuclear technology*.

To conclusively argue as to whether we failed nuclear technology or nuclear technology failed us is a matter of pure conjecture at this stage. But it must be acknowledged that nuclear technology or nuclear energy *cannot be ignored* as it has the potential to meet the energy requirements of humanity as a whole. What therefore warranted is a better governance paradigm to address inherent loopholes in the nuclear regimes. This edited volume under review “envisages a more comprehensive and predictable nuclear governance architecture for the future, and discusses how India might play a proactive role in this effort.” (p. xii).

Comprised of seven chapters written by both Indian as well as foreign experts in their respective domains, the editors claim that the book attempts to provide “deep insight into India’s contribution in building and improving sustainable nuclear security architecture as seen from abroad”. (p. xiii) But what is missing, at the outset, is probably a specific chapter outlining the broad contours of the global nuclear governance architecture and discourse, in vogue, to contextualize India’s narrative. Undoubtedly each chapter is arranged thematically addressing specific aspects of global nuclear governance and India; but locating India’s role and concerns within a holistic narrative on global governance structure would have made the flow lucid and complete.

As the contributing authors in the volume and the editors have rightly observed, India has significant reasons to ensure stringent safe-keeping of its nuclear infrastructure. The worsening regional security environment, clandestine proliferation and thriving terror and smuggling networks in the neighbourhood, and above all, the unique nature of its nuclear program, necessitate nuclear security in India to be a priority. India is conscious of the fact that credible threats to nuclear infrastructure exist and it is striving real hard for a semblance of protection in coordination with international agencies and stakeholders; it has undertaken several physical security, technological, and legal measures to strengthen its nuclear security system in cooperation with the international agencies and stakeholders.

However, the editors’ optimism about India becoming a player in, rather than becoming an object of, the world’s export control regime, and consequently India’s “opportunity and space to build a platform for itself as a global player”, in the nuclear safety and security discourse (p. xxi) should be chewed with a pinch of salt. There are huge hurdles to overcome, the editors also agree, which warrants “some truly creative diplomacy to disarm the holdouts,” rightly the editors suggest. India seems positioned a step closer to the NPT-signatory nuclear weapon states in regard to the nuclear ban treaty, while far away from them when it comes to nonproliferation treaty. In regard to nuclear safety-security regime, India is front runner and proactive. It undoubtedly has been a tight rope walk for India at the global sphere.

Domestically, India has managed to lay down a country-wide nuclear infrastructure along with the implementation of “a good system of regulations and procedures. Even so, the situation is not perfect today, and improving it while at the same time, keeping up with the large growth in the nuclear programme, will constitute a big challenge in the years to come.” (p. 19) As far as India’s role in mitigating nuclear challenges is concerned, Roshan Khanijo

in chapter 2 says India can help in many areas with its unique expertise and experience. (p. 30) Regarding the future of global nuclear governance, she pertinently raises the question “why threats like nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation still continues?” Should the nuclear governance mechanism be restructured? “Or do we amend the major treaties to incorporate the new members?” (p. 32) Any attempt to tamper with the NPT will open the proverbial Pandora’s Box, leading to more chaos in the governance system in place than is already there. This may be a long-term goal but in the short-term, the imperative “is to innovate and adapt pre-existing measures.”

Kanika Rakhra, in chapter 3, delves into the rationality of NPT regime and how India has been a *de facto* adherent of the regime. India’s “spotless image” provides a correct learning and a “good model for other outlier states to emulate in the years to come.” But the important questions like “Is the NPT past its age?” and “Should there be a new treaty for all?” raised by Rakhra in the beginning remain unanswered. Evidently, the world has not yet found an alternative regime narrative except for the argument of amending the NPT. The predominant argument to address the proliferation menace today is through technological means – proliferation resistant nuclear technology “to ensure that the use of the civilian nuclear fuel cycle remains an unattractive mean to acquire material for a nuclear weapons programme.” (p. 56).

Reynaldo Morales in chapter 4 elaborates various advanced reactor concepts, where the global nuclear future seems to be lying but then, he realistically rules out, that “there is no magic solution to eliminate proliferation risk.” (p. 78) The author unfortunately, missed out a discussion on India’s unique three stage nuclear programme, which is inherently safe-secure and proliferation resistant. Also, a reference to the aims and objectives of India’s centre of excellence – the Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP), could have clearly highlighted India’s future plans in this domain.

Reshmi Kazi, on the other hand, bridging the gap, elaborates the role of GCNEP in its totality, and how it supplements India striving “towards an upgraded nuclear security system, embedded within the framework of a strong nuclear security culture.” (p. 90) Despite India’s good intentions and hard work, it faces the challenges of taking along its neighbor Pakistan for outreach programmes as nuclear safety-security is a common concern. (p. 100) Probably India has to forgo its reactive, defensive nuclear diplomacy and adopt creative and constructive moves to take others along the same path it has chosen. Priyanjali Malik in chapter 6 suggests, “India should not be held back, either by the scatchiness of its dealings with its neighbours, or indeed the raucousness of

its internal democratic debate.” (p. 118) As she rightly points out, India must propagate to break the link between NPT membership and membership of the export control regimes. As France has been accommodated when it was not a part of NPT, India’s case is not that difficult to make.

The last chapter dealing with humanitarian concerns and the nuclear ban treaty argues that it provided India with a “strategic opportunity” and “a platform” to put the pressure on the NWSs. But India’s pattern of participation, in the treaty negotiations gives an impression that India has leaned closer towards the NWSs. India could have lead the initiative instead of leaving the process mutedly to avoid any diplomatic tension. If India “is currently in a unique position to bridge the two camps [NWS and NNWS] and actively contribute to an international nuclear disarmament process”, can it also lead the world nuclear security discourse, to the post-NSS phase? Is there any eagerness in the domestic political leadership level to take the onus and initiative to plan for post-NSS agenda? Can India bring back the nuclear disarmament and nuclear ban debate to the CD framework? There are many more questions than answers, which India and the world, together, are likely to confront in the decades lying ahead.

Overall, the volume is a revisit of the Indian nuclear discourse highlighting how integral it is with the global nuclear discourse currently. The young authors have undoubtedly attempted to focus their issue areas intricately, raising the pertinent questions which the world have no easy answers. I can safely conclude that the volume is a valuable contribution to the existing pool of literature on nuclear security architecture and a must read for scholars and academicians having interest in this domain.