

Book Review
By
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Mohamed ElBaradei, *The Age of Deception: On Nuclear Diplomacy in Treacherous Times*
(New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011),
pp 327.

Mohammed ElBaradei was the Director General of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency from 1997- 2009. As DG of IAEA he was the key person who handled high stake conflicts relating to nuclear matters and set a high bench mark in nuclear diplomacy. ElBaradei's vivid narrative gives even the ordinary reader an understanding of this esoteric subject.

Divided in 12 Chapters, the book is a mix and match of debate and dialogue over sensitive nuclear issues with critical states like Iraq, North Korea, Iran and Libya. It is also the reflection and introspection of the author during his dealing with the nuclear states.

Mr. ElBaradei's account gives us a peek inside the nuclear fray, from back door channels exchanges in US and Baghdad, and to the Pyongyang which was aspiring to become a nuclear power. As director IAEA he endeavored to make it function not as a spy, or security agency, but took steps to look for qualitative and quantitative discrepancies in treating the concerned states with dignity they deserved. In doing so he had to confront the Bush administration's hard core policies on Iraq, containment of the ambitious North Korea, and the West's stand off with Iran. He conduct, as IAEA Chief, presented him to the world as a unique independent voice, which was equally credible both in the Arab world and the West. He also established the IAEA's credentials as a neutral regulatory authority.

The Bush administration was convinced that Saddam Hussein was deceiving the international community on nuclear and chemical weapons. The IAEA was designated to inquire and confirm this perception. The agency conducted 247 inspections at 147 sites in Iraq from November 2002 until March 2003 and found no evidence that Iraq had either nuclear or chemical weapons. However, the United States refused to change its view and launched a war on Iraq. The harshest reality of the Iraq War, and its extended aftermath, was the loss of civilian lives in very large numbers. The effects of these tragic occurrences, impacted negatively on the United States and upon ElBaradei himself as IAEA chief. Based on his Iraqi experience ElBaradei hopes on that another Iraq like war would not take place in future. He openly criticizes 'us' versus 'them'

approach when dealing with other states by great powers and insists on diplomacy to deal with the contentious issues.

ElBaradei hints at the atomic energy agency's weaknesses as well. He points to Agency's limited mandate for inspection of nuclear sites and recommends that UN Security Council should give more authority to IAEA to carry out inspections. He also emphasizes more intelligence sharing from the big powers. He is critical of Washington for not disclosing intelligence that Syria was building a nuclear facility, and refraining Israel from targeting that facility in 2007. He is appreciative of the United Nations successes in some areas but thinks that it is not very proficient or courageous when it comes to sensitive political matters and national prerogatives. ElBaradei portrays the United States and great powers as part of the problem and not much helpful in finding solutions to the international disputes. He is also critical of the United States for offering dialogue to North Korea but refusing negotiations with Iran "without preconditions."

ElBaradei positively advocates diplomacy as the main choice in counter-proliferation. He is however, mindful of "the increasing distrust between cultures" as a barrier to "an enduring and collective security" system in the world. Unless a system that ensures the security of all states is in place, this problem will persist and states would continue to build nuclear weapons. Barriers created by non proliferation regimes may increase the risks of violation by states but may not stop them from making these weapons. He exhibits more consideration for non-Western proliferators and their needs than for the major powers and their security and political concerns which is not practical in terms of real security problem of these states.

"The Age of Deception" provides the discourse for a serious debate even as it helpfully recounts the International Atomic Energy Agency's journey and tribulations as it evolved from a relatively unknown group of experts into an organization with growing international clout.

The content of the book is quite satisfying in terms of the richness of material, its reference and authenticity. Author's first hand knowledge of various issues make the book all the more interesting for the reader particularly the portions about events leading to IAEA's role with respect to WMD programmes in Iraq and description of its inspections in that country. The book gives technical, professional, and practical aspect of nuclear related issues and concerns in a simple to understand language. The term repeatedly used by the author is diplomacy. He repeatedly emphasizes on political tools to deal with nuclear weapon states. The book is candid in criticizing the US and its allies for preferring power politics to outreach. The analysis of 'haves' versus 'have nots' is overlooked in order to assure the possibility of reconciliation. It is a useful contribution to the literature on the issues of nuclear proliferation and security. In the debate on usefulness of force and alternate means for dispute

resolution between states, Mr. ElBaradei stands on the side of those who prefer diplomacy over coercion in inter-state relations for a safe and secure future.