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Useful work, but need for a broader perspective

by Brian Martin

NUCLEAR ISSUES: INTERNATIONAL CONTROL AND INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION by D. A. V. Fischer.
(Department of International Relations,
ANU, 1981, pp. 126.)

One of the key findings of the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry, First Report in 1976 was, 'The nuclear power industry is unintentionally contributing to an increased risk of nuclear war'.

Since then the issue of the spread of the capability to make nuclear weapons has been central in the Australian debate over uranium mining.

The Government has justified uranium mining by saying this will reduce proliferation, while opponents of uranium mining have argued the contrary view.

In this context some enlightenment might be expected from D. A. V. Fischer, formerly the assistant director-general for external relations of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the body responsible for worldwide inspection and control of civilian nuclear technology.

Fischer in *Nuclear Issues* presents a straightforward view of proliferation from the point of view of international regulation, with a treatment of the problems of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, the development of safeguards agreements (especially the Non-Proliferation Treaty) and the prospects for the near and long term.

The book also looks at the experience of the IAEA as a body fostering international co-operation over nuclear technology.

Although efforts by the IAEA and others to regulate the use of nuclear technology are well intentioned, they clearly are insufficient. Fischer notes that the dependence of 'peace' on a 'balance of terror' is something which 'obviously cannot endure forever' but that 'it has become almost impossible to believe that we shall ever again have a world free of nuclear weapons'.

A deficiency in Fischer's treatment in tackling this problem is the almost exclusive focus on nation States as individual actors, at times reasonable or recalcitrant, but always indivisible. This perspective is a natural one in studying international relations, but it has severe limitations.

On the one hand it is necessary to analyse the forces promoting nuclear power and nuclear weapons: the communities of nuclear scientists and engineers, the military-industrial complexes, and the forces behind economic and social imperialism.

On the other hand it is necessary to take into account citizens' movements against nuclear power and (especially since 1980) nuclear weapons around the world, which favour the phasing out and elimination, rather than the regulation, of nuclear power and nuclear weapons.

Fischer scarcely mentions either of these powerful forces. So while this book provides a clear view of proliferation problems from the point of view of international regulation, by omission it should warn us of the necessity to go beyond this perspective.

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