

BOOK REVIEWS

Identity and the Bomb

by Michael Busch

The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy. By Jacques E.C. Hymans. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. ISBN: 0521850762

Given the increasingly grim forecast of a “nuclear renaissance,” and renewed concerns of uncontrollable atomic weapons proliferation, Jacques E.C. Hymans’s *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation* provides a refreshingly positive antidote to the glum literature on international security. Traditional security studies generally seek to explain why so few countries have acquired nuclear arsenals, despite widespread desire and technical capacity in the international arena. In stark contrast, Hymans asks why any nation-state has the bomb at all. Rejecting conventional realist, institutionalist, and constructivist approaches to understanding foreign policy decision-making, Hymans crafts a new theoretical model for shedding light on why certain countries make the “revolutionary” decision to go nuclear. Drawing deeply from social psychology perspectives on human behavior, Hymans counter-intuitively argues that most decision makers are not naturally inclined to want nuclear weapons, nor are they willing to assume the grave responsibilities of having them.

At the heart of Hymans’ theoretical framework rests the notion of “national identity conceptions” (NICs). According to Hymans, a NIC “is an individual’s understanding of the nation’s identity—his or her sense of what the nation naturally stands for and of how high it naturally stands, in comparison to others in the international arena.”¹ The dual dimensions of national identity conceptions identified by Hymans generate four ideal-types into which state decision makers can be classified. Of the four, Hymans postulates that only ideal-typical “oppositional nationalist leaders – who experience the combined emotions of fear and pride—are likely to be highly motivated for nuclear weapons acquisition, while leaders of other types of NICs are not likely to be so motivated.”²

Hymans holds his theory up against the fire of four distinct case studies. Bookending this set are the nuclear histories of two countries that acquired the

Michael Busch is Research Associate at the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies and Adjunct Lecturer of Political Science at the City College of New York. He is currently a fellow at the Center for the Humanities and a doctoral student in International Relations where he specializes in the politics of humanitarianism and the United Nations.

bomb: France and India. These cases are balanced by those of two more countries—Australia and Argentina—that could have, but did not. Each boasts a creative blend of quantitative analysis and considerable archival research that elegantly supports Hymans' hypothesis. The nuclear narratives spun by Hymans demonstrate that nation-states, as such, are not responsible for going nuclear. Instead, the responsibility falls on individual leaders possessing certain psychological profiles.

The chapter on France convincingly argues that national consensus on the nuclear issue was far from unanimous in de Gaulle's Fourth Republic. While moderate French leaders favored abandoning the country's nuclear weapons program in the immediate post-war period, it was the oppositional-nationalist prime minister Pierre Mendès France who insured the building of a bomb. The case of India, to be sure, is more complex. Its flirtations with nuclear weapons were consummated in India's "peaceful nuclear explosion" in 1974. Yet as Hymans shows, this episode was less a product of Indira Gandhi's desire for an atomic arsenal, and more the result of ill-advised power politics. Indeed, India's weapons program remained dormant until the election of Atal Behari Vajpayee's oppositional Hindu nationalist government in 1998.

The Australian case study outlines the country's puzzling record of nuclear ambitions. Its brief determination to acquire atomic weapons in the late 1960s, according to Hymans, reflects the oppositional nationalism of the country's Prime Minister John Gorton. The "chilling of those [nuclear] passions," Hymans claims, came with the election of Gough Whitlam's moderate Labor Party, which decisively ended Australia's bid to join the nuclear crowd.³ The book's lynchpin, and indeed its inspiration, however, comes in the chapter on Argentina. Contrary to conventional wisdom which suggests that Argentina was locked in an arms race with Brazil throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s, Hymans demonstrates that the country never seriously considered going nuclear. Tellingly, the father of Argentina's nuclear program confesses to Hymans that "[t]he bomb is in the human heart or it isn't... the bomb was not in our hearts."⁴

The book concludes by outlining the policy implications of its analysis. Hymans starts by "puncturing common myths" common to nuclear security studies. He dispenses with claims that states seek nuclear weapons strictly for deterrence, for international status, or for the personal gain of individual decision-makers. Perhaps most controversially, however, Hymans takes issue with the conventional wisdom that the international "non-proliferation regime is the most successful arms control treaty in history" because it has been the "proverbial finger in the dike blocking a flood of new nuclear weapons states."⁵ Instead, he argues that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) normatively reinforces the psychological predispositions of most world leaders to remain nuclear weapons-free.

The ramifications of this assertion are of highest importance. Concerns abound in the security literature—not to mention in international policy circles—that the NPT demands stricter measures to prevent further nuclear proliferation. No less a

body than the United Nations Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change concluded as much in 2004, when it argued for greater application of Security Council action in cases of nuclear non-compliance. Yet if Hymans' analysis is correct, more stringent controls will have little effect on oppositional nationalists bent on acquiring nuclear arsenals, and will only amplify the resentment of nuclear-abstaining states toward the existing regime.

As current events make plain, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation* provides a timely and useful perspective on proliferation threats —both real, and imagined. In the current climate of fear permeating proliferation analysis, the book offers a dash of optimism on the nuclear front. Weapons acquisition is a choice, not a predetermined outcome. Bellicose efforts at nonproliferation, Hymans warns, will create more oppositional nationalist leaders than it can hope to restrain. Sensitive diplomacy and increased cooperation between states, however, will enjoy better results. While the ultimate threat to international security may never be entirely eliminated, Hymans concludes, at the very least it can be safely quelled.

Notes

¹ Hyman, 13.

² Hyman, 35.

³ Hyman, 114.

⁴ Hyman, ix.

⁵ Hyman, 216.

The Iraqi Predicament: People in the Quagmire of Power Politics

The Iraqi Predicament: People in the Quagmire of Power politics. By Tareq Y. Isamael & Jacqueline S. Ismael. London: Pluto Press. 2004. ISBN: 074532150X

by Mahmud A. Faksh

The book, *The Iraqi Predicament: People in the Quagmire of World Politics*, examines Iraq's place in the arena of Middle East and world politics in the post-1990-1991 Gulf War. It provides a survey of Iraq's recent history in the context of the broader political landscape of the region, giving a detailed account of the unfolding tragedy under the UN sanctions regime, and analyzing U.S. foreign policy toward Iraq within the framework of U.S. regional involvement. It is a story of people caught in the throes of "a dictator, a hegemony, and an ineffectual bureaucratic international structure."¹

The study begins by exploring the international setting since the Gulf War that has produced the current global environment. According to the author, this time period is marked by degradation as demonstrated in the relationship between Iraq, the U.S., and the UN. Chapter one outlines the course of U.S. foreign policy since the early twentieth century, culminating in an American global hegemony, with the United States as the driving technological, economic, and military power. The U.S. invasion, occupation, and regime change in both Afghanistan and Iraq set a new standard in world politics: "the globalization of manifest destiny as a principle in international relations."²

In chapter two, the author explains the impact of the Iraqi question on Arab politics. It shows how sanctions and war in Iraq have exacerbated regional tensions and made a state-society schism—the disparity between official statements and practice and public opinion—deeper than ever. The chapter presents an overly detailed historical account of the sanctions and the sanction-busting attempts, punctuated with too many dates and long quotes from official Arab declarations and appeals to lift the sanctions, which went unheeded. The resulting public disenchantment with the impotent and sometimes complicit Arab regimes has made these regimes increasingly dependent on coercion and external powers. State

Mahmud A. Faksh is a professor of Political Science at the University of Southern Maine. He also served as an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He has published extensively on Middle Eastern and Islamic affairs. He is the author of *The Future of Islam in the Middle East: Fundamentalism in Egypt, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia*.

authoritarianism and the attendant suppression of open public discourse made religious expression the dominant mode of popular political culture in the Arab world, feeding the forces of Islamic activism.

Chapter three delves into U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East in the post-9/11 period and the ensuing invasion of Iraq. It shows how the American mainstream media has been employed and exploited as an “adjunct” of the American government to direct the discourse on American policy in the Middle East. The author postulates that U.S. Middle East policy is anchored in “a mutually reinforced dialogue between two intertwined themes: media exploitation and unilateralism,” and describes how this dialogue has shaped the course of American foreign policy in the region, leading to the invasion of Iraq.³

The thrust of the arguments in chapter three is that the war in Iraq was driven by geopolitics and economics. The author convincingly argues that the United States sought the imposition of a *pax-Americana* through “global domination” and “maintaining the dollar hegemony” as the “fiat currency” for global oil transactions. Furthermore, this international reserve currency helped to subsidize American prosperity by having to invest the petrodollars and the dollar reserves in U.S. assets.

The author concludes that the American folly in Iraq is an exercise in the “arrogance of power,” using its unchallenged military might to protect its global domination in the geopolitics of energy through direct control of oil resources against potential challengers in Asia and Europe. And the media toed the official line, questioning nothing and believing everything. All this, according to the author, was abetted and encouraged by a powerful Zionist lobby, the Christian right-wing forces, and influential conservative think-tanks—“the department of pundits”—who have exerted an overwhelming influence on American foreign policy in the Middle East.

Chapter four discusses the thirteen-year old UN sanctions, in response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in the summer of 1990, as tools of domination by the United States and as a means of oppression by Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship. It demonstrates how the United States, as the world’s sole superpower, influenced and directed UN punitive resolutions on Iraq to consolidate its hegemony over the Middle East. The comprehensive and intrusive nature of the sanctions went far beyond tools of coercive diplomacy to become a means of “domination and oppressive containment of Iraq,” which resulted in a monumental humanitarian crisis engulfing “a population trapped in the quagmire of international politics.”⁴ The Gulf War and the seemingly never ending sanctions devastated Iraq’s social infrastructure and ravaged the civilian population, leaving Saddam Hussein more oppressive than ever. In the end, the pervasiveness and severity of the sanctions and oppression rendered the second oil richest country in the Middle East feeble and chaotic.

Chapter five examines the two dimensions of the Iraqi tragedy: the imposition of ruthless military rule under the Ba’th and isolation and suffocation by the

international system. The author correctly argues that following the 1958 revolution and the attendant strides in social and economic development in the 1960's and 1970's, "the seeds of deconstruction were being sown."⁵ Oil revenues, coupled with chauvinist nationalism and military aggrandizement under the Ba'ath, buttressed Saddam's dictatorship and began the process of decomposition of Iraq's public welfare system. With the onset of the Iran-Iraq war, social policy was marginalized and public policy was subordinated to militarization. All this, along with widespread human rights violations, was carried out with the tacit acquiescence of the international community.

Social and economic decomposition was accelerated by the Gulf War and the strict implementation of the sanctions, only to be compounded by the invasion and occupation of Iraq and the ensuing insurgency which brought the country to the point of total collapse. Today, with the mounting nihilistic violence of al-Qaeda and bloody sectarian fratricide, proceeding to the book's completion, Iraq is quickly descending into the abyss.

The final chapter surveys the history of Soviet and post-Soviet relations with Iraq, which went through periods of close cooperation and a cooling of relations. The chapter shows the interplay of history, geopolitics, and economics which shaped Russian foreign policy toward Iraq. It discusses the changing Soviet policy toward the Middle East during Mikhail Gorbachev's time in office. Specifically it explained how the Soviet Union was unable to influence the direction or scope of U.S. military action during the Gulf War, reflecting the realities of American ascendancy and Soviet decline in a unipolar world.

In the post-Soviet period, the book gives a detailed explanation of the Russian diplomatic moves at the UN to soften the blows of the sanctions and to halt Anglo-American military actions against Iraq. What emerges from this account is that Russia was neither capable of taking independent action to end the sanctions or block Western military operations. Nor was it willing to face the United States as this was not in its national interest. In the end, there was little it could realistically do to stop a U.S. war on Iraq.

On the whole, the book offers a good historical analysis of the Iraqi tragedy in the context of global power politics and the international political economy of oil. It provides a useful background read for the general public as well as for students of the Middle East and international politics. Although it was published more than three years ago, the book remains relevant and topical in light of the current disintegration of state and society in Iraq. Finally, a couple of minor errors should have been penciled in: the first name of Jalal Talibani was misspelled as Yalal,⁶ and the official

Matthew Omolesky is an alumnus of the Whitehead School of Diplomacy. He is currently a juris doctor candidate and research assistant at The Ohio State University, and has written for publications including *Europe2020* (France), the Dusseldorf Institute for Foreign and Security Policy (Germany), and the Social Affairs Unit (UK).

position of Tariq Aziz was misstated as prime minister, instead of deputy prime minister.⁷

Notes

- 1 Ismael, x.
- 2 Ismael, 8.
- 3 Ismael, 41.
- 4 Ismael, 90.
- 5 Ismael, 127.
- 6 Ismael, 29.
- 7 Ismael, 195.