A-Bomb Politics

The haves vs. the have-nots

Reviewed by Glenn C. Altschuler

"There is no evil in the atom," Adlai Stevenson declared in 1952. "Only in men's souls."

No one understands this better than Mohamed ElBaradei. Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency from 1997 to 2009—and winner of the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize—ElBaradei has spent much of his professional life trying to prevent nuclear terrorism, proliferation and war.

In *The Age of Deception*, ElBaradei provides a blunt, behind-the-scenes analysis of negotiations between the nuclear "haves" and "have-nots," including Iraq, North Korea and Iran, and makes recommendations, some of them highly controversial, about how to achieve an "enduring and collective security."

The Iraq war, ElBaradei writes, was an egregious example of a pervasive pattern. The U.S., Israel and, to some extent, the nuclear nations of Western Europe, he argues, not without reason, want to be in charge and "to push, to prod, to put pressure, to set deadlines, to dominate the debate, to inflict punishments." Holding on to their own arsenals "like a security blanket," with thousands of weapons still on "hair trigger" alert, they treat as pariahs or rogues countries seeking entry to their exclusive club.

The author views the "stalemate" with North Korea and Iran through this prism. He maintains, not always persuasively, that sanctions, diplomatic isolation and military force always backfire. These responses have at times strengthened the hand of hard-liners in Pyongyang and Tehran. But Israel's bombing of the Dair Alzour facility in Syria in September 2007, whether or not it was unlawful or unethical, appears to have had the desired effect.

While castigating the Western powers, ElBaradei comes close to giving Iran a free pass. But agree with him or not, he gives voice to attitudes and feelings that are widely shared in the Middle East—and beyond. For this reason alone we should pay attention to him.

On at least two counts, moreover, ElBaradei is surely right: Nuclear diplomacy is "a tedious, wrenching business." And since collective security is "the only quest worth pursuing," there's no viable alternative to it.

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The Age of Deception: Nuclear Diplomacy in Treacherous Times

by Mohamed Elbaradei
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