

**Nathan E. Busch, Joseph F. Pilat.** *The Politics of Weapons Inspections: Assessing WMD Monitoring and Verification Regimes*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017. 400 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-5036-0160-4.

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Nathan Busch and Joseph Pilat have authored a very timely work given the controversies surrounding the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the often compromised international attempts to control their spread through inspections and disarmament agreements. From the current controversy over the 2015 Iran nuclear deal to the rapidly broken agreement with Syria to remove its chemical weapons and the failed attempts to constrain North Korea's nuclear ambitions, it is difficult to escape the topic and its relevance in contemporary politics. Despite the international treaties, inspection authorities, and norms established against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the authors note at the outset that South Africa developed a small nuclear arsenal without being detected, the Soviet Union created an extensive biological weapons program that escaped notice, and North Korea developed a ballistic missile and nuclear weapons capability, just to name a few instances. The list of failures, however, does not negate the need to improve the inspection process, and the main value of this work is its concrete suggestions for doing so. It is therefore a relevant and useful guide for policymakers confronting the challenges of WMD proliferation.

Busch and Pilat walk a careful line to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the various weapons inspection regimes of the past few decades. While clearly acknowledging their flaws, they also point to successes that, while incomplete in many cases, provide possible lessons for the future. Above all, the authors underscore the political nature of the process, which can obscure the lessons that should be learned from each experience. In discussing the Iraqi case, for example, the authors note that, "owing to the extreme politicization of the topic ... misconstrued lessons from the Iraqi case have caused some prominent policy-makers and analysts not only to overstate the capabilities of monitoring and verification but, perhaps even more damaging, to introduce new standards for noncompliance that could undermine the effectiveness of these regimes" (p. 81).

The volume is constructed around several case studies: the case of cooperative disarmament in South Africa in the early 1990s, the voluntary disarmament of Libya in the mid-2000s, and the imposed disarmament of Iraq following the 1990-91 Gulf War. All three cases offer important lessons that the authors compile in a final chapter. The South African case is of particular interest because it represents a rare instance of a state "coming clean" after successfully developing a nu-

clear deterrent in secret. As the authors note, however, even in a situation where the state in question cooperated fully with international inspectors to verify its disarmament, significant questions remained, and “it is unlikely that we can fully know whether South Africa’s declaration was correct and complete” (p. 72).

The analysis of these cases is then applied to several current issues in disarmament and verification, including North Korea, Syria, and Iran. In all of these cases, the authors note that the countries in question have more than just nuclear weapons programs; all three are known to have extensive chemical and biological weapons programs. Both chemical and biological weapons are far more difficult to contain within the protocols of weapons inspections because so much of the basic material is dual use with legitimate commercial purposes. And while there is an inspection organization and protocol for chemical weapons, the Biological Weapons Convention lacks an enforcement mechanism.

One point that comes across in the final chapters is that WMD inspection and verification is difficult under the best of circumstances, and destined to be an interpretive and political process in most cases: “As demonstrated in the case of Libya, and apparently to a lesser extent in South Africa, there can be a temptation to lower the standards for compliance when a country appears to be cooperating” (p. 245). Busch and Pilat argue that apparent cooperation should not be an excuse to lower standards and that the past record of non-compliance and deception “should be grounds for a *higher* verification standard” (p. 245). Yet, as the authors document, the political factors often press in the opposite direction. Despite decades of Iranian deception, the desire of some to reach any agreement on Iran’s nuclear program led “then-IAEA director-general Mohammed El-Baradei [to go to] to great lengths to downplay the significance of Iran’s violations, as he all but admitted later” (p. 206).

The authors recommend several improvements to the process. In particular, they note the need to develop better technical tools to aid weapons inspections and provide policymakers with more reliable intelligence. Increasing the research and development budget of the relevant agencies to improve technical capabilities is a reasonable suggestion, but always a difficult sell in a political environment characterized by a competition for resources among the bureaucracies. A perhaps more practical recommendation the authors make is to use more of the intelligence capability of the private sector. Given the vast increase in commercially available satellite imagery in recent years, this publicly available resource could be a boon to the weapons inspection process that would “improve consensus building in the international community about suspect WMD programs because they could allow states to build a case based on unclassified intelligence that may be less open to questioning or suspicions of doctoring intelligence” (p. 249).

Although this is a readable and useful work for anyone interested in the particular case studies or means of improving the process of weapons inspections, it lacks a central theoretical focus. In addition, the authors are clearly experts in the field but are seemingly reluctant to use their experience or contacts to flesh out the case studies. Most of the source material is secondary, relying on previously published analysis or otherwise available information. A work of this nature would benefit from interviews with weapons inspectors or archival surveys that would provide the reader with something otherwise unavailable.

That said, this is a valuable work for its categorization of the various types of inspection regimes, as well as for its practical suggestions. It is relevant for the policymaking community as well as those academics with a particular interest in the issues of proliferation and inspection regimes.

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