

# H-Diplo REVIEW ESSAY 290

27 November 2020

**Michal Smetana. *Nuclear Deviance: Stigma Politics and the Rules of the Nonproliferation Game.***

Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. ISBN: 978-3-030-24224-4 (hardcover, \$84.99)

<https://hdiplo.org/to/E290>

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**M**ichal Smetana's *Nuclear Deviance* is about the sociology of political deviancy and the labeling of certain actors in the international arena as nuclear deviants. The book explores the process of political stigmatization, by which hegemonic states in the international order attempt to impose 'deviant' labels on other actors in the international system. According to the book's conceptualization, once these attempts are successful, a process of political stigmatization takes place, and the stigma becomes a part of the actor's identity, forcing the actor to grapple with and react to it by devising certain mitigation strategies. Within the nuclear field, this process of stigmatization translates into a nuclear actor being labeled as a 'rogue,' or 'bad,' one which attempts to undermine the nuclear regime, and subvert its existing norms.

The book's theoretical contribution to contemporary nuclear studies lies mainly with its ability to bridge the existing gap between sociological theories and concepts on the one hand, and nuclear proliferation studies on the other. In doing so, the book ties in with recent studies that introduced psychological concepts and leader-based theories into the field.<sup>1</sup> The book contains two main sections, a theoretical one comprising of three chapters which outline the main concepts (chapters 2-4), and an empirical section containing three chapters, analyzing the cases of Iran, North Korea, and India (chapters 5-7). For scholars interested in understanding the structure of the nuclear regime, chapter 4, which charts the emergence of the current nuclear order and its related norms, is a particularly useful resource, covering the inherent normative tension contained within the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) with regards to nuclear possession, as well as normative issues relating to the framing of nuclear tests.

The book is premised on the insight that since the current nuclear order is built upon "ill-defined, contestable" normative structure, the categories of what constitutes "good" or "normal" behavior, versus "bad" or "deviant" behavior, are just as ill defined, allowing for a constant contestation of how these categories are defined (19). More specifically, when analyzing how deviant nuclear behavior is constructed, Smetana adopts a two-stage approach. First, he frames the concept of 'deviance' as an intersubjective, socially constructed notion, which is continuously negotiated through a process of stigmatization. Second, he demonstrates how the construction of the label of 'deviance' constitutes processes which "contest and affirm the boundaries between 'right' and 'wrong' behavior in society" (15). Thus, within the nuclear realm, Smetana charts how "the understanding of what is 'good' and 'wrong' behavior in nuclear order changes over the course of time," and how some behaviors, which were once acceptable, gradually become contested and "eventually stigmatized" (19). Consequently, certain

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Christopher Way and Jessica L. P. Weeks, "Making It Personal: Regime Type and Nuclear Proliferation," *American Journal of Political Science* 58: 3 (July 2014): 705-719; Matthew Fuhrmann and Michael C. Horowitz, "When Leaders Matter: Rebel Experience and Nuclear Proliferation," *The Journal of Politics* 77:1 (January 2015): 72-87; Rachel Elizabeth Whitlark "Nuclear Beliefs: A Leader-Focused Theory of Counter-Proliferation," *Security Studies* 26:4 (2017), 545-574.

nuclear behaviors, above ground nuclear testing can serve as one example here, go from being acceptable, to being labeled as deviant.

Of the three empirical chapters, the chapter that deals with Iran is the most persuasive one, and it can serve as a primer for scholars who are interested in the history of recent attempts to curtail the Iranian nuclear program. The chapter explores the process of stigma imposition on Iran, which, as a result of this process, was labeled as a 'nuclear deviant. According to Smetana's analysis, following the successful imposition of this stigma, Tehran opted to actively employ a combination of "stigma-management strategies," rejecting the claim that it intends to develop nuclear weapons, thus denying transgression against the governing nuclear norms (143). In addition, Iran has also adopted "counter-stigmatizing discourses," which were aimed at Iranian domestic audiences as well as non-aligned actors of the international community, though in the latter case, the attempt had ultimately failed. Finally, with the conclusion of the 2015 Iran deal (known for its acronym, JCPOA), Iran has managed to accomplish partial de-stigmatization of its nuclear program. The most significant achievement of this partial de-stigmatization has to do the JCPOA's implicit recognition of Iran's right to enrich uranium, an activity which the U.S. and some of its allies previously tried to restrict (151).

Smetana demonstrates that the international community opted to use the crisis surrounding Iran's nuclear behavior as an opportunity reshape nuclear norms (159). The U.S. and its allies used the crisis to introduce a new set of norms dubbed the 'gold standard,' which was aimed at strengthening the non-proliferation regime and its rules. These new rules prohibit nuclear actors interested in the development of a civilian nuclear program from perusing uranium enrichment and plutonium production activities. The significance of this normative development was demonstrated this summer when the United Arab Emirates' (UAE's) first nuclear power plant came online, following its previous and meticulous adherence to the new 'gold standard.'<sup>2</sup> In comparison, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia refuses to accept the new standard.<sup>3</sup>

The chapter that deals with North Korea shows how the country demonstrates its on-going treatment as a "bizarre, deviant country," which does not abide by "normal" rules and regulations. Following the stigmatization process which unfolded around the discovery of its nuclear program, North Korea has largely failed in its attempt to reverse or 'manage' the stigma imposed on it. Smetana criticizes the lax response of the international community to North Korea's decision to withdraw from the NPT treaty at the turn of the century, as Pyongyang's NPT membership was left "in a rather strange 'limbo' state" (189). This was indeed a missed opportunity to use the crisis around North Korea's NPT withdrawal to bolster the norms relating to the treaty and the universality of its norms. It also demonstrates that labeling and stigmatizing actors' nuclear behavior is not enough, if this labeling is not backed by a clear, consistent policy.

Of the three empirical chapters, the one dedicated to India is the most intriguing since it embodies a successful process of stigma reversal. The first chapter explores how following its 1998 nuclear tests, and the ensuing global condemnation India received due to them, it was labeled as a nuclear deviant. However, as opposed to North Korea and Iran, India had managed to successfully pursue stigma management strategies aimed at normalizing its nuclear image. The key to this success lies with India's rising global status at the end of the Cold War, and its relationship with the U.S. In other words, India's stigma reversal attempt was successful since the U.S. was willing to work to change the norms governing nuclear technology transfers within the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), an international club of countries who export nuclear technology. This move, backed by the United States, cemented India's global status as a legitimate nuclear actor. The U.S. was willing to portray India within the international community as a responsible, 'normal' nuclear actor, despite not being a member of the NPT or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). This process led to India's "legitimization" in the nuclear sphere (216).

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<sup>2</sup> Natasha Turak, "The UAE becomes the first Arab country to launch its own nuclear energy program," 3 August 2020, CNBC, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/03/uae-becomes-first-arab-country-to-launch-local-nuclear-energy-program.html>

<sup>3</sup> Keith Johnson, "Who's Afraid of Saudi Nukes?" *Foreign Policy*, 22 February 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/22/whos-afraid-of-saudi-nukes-123-kashoggi-mbs-russia-china/>

In its concluding chapter, the book describes how the construction of “the rogue image” within the international arena has enabled the “discursive separation” between rogue states, often portrayed as “enemies of civilization,” and all other ‘normal’ or ‘good’ nuclear actors (219). But the differences between different kinds of ‘bad,’ or different shades of deviant behavior, are often lost on the international community. Smetana notes that despite the difference with regards to their NPT status, Iran and North Korea “have been frequently stereotyped together as a specific category of nuclear rogueness,” while other countries who were identified as having violated their NPT commitments, like South Korea and Egypt, were not treated similarly (219).

One point of criticism is the relevance and importance of considerations that are not captured by the main theory that the book puts forth about the stigmatization process in the nuclear realm. To be clear, while the book does not ignore such considerations, they do not play a significant part in the theory. The most dominant factor here is the significant, singular, role the U.S. plays within the nuclear non-proliferation regime in the construction of norms, or in the stigmatization and de-stigmatization process. Smetana indeed notes “the key importance” of the role the U.S. plays in imitating the stigmatization process and explains that this is “not entirely surprising” (222).

In the three cases reviewed in the book, as in many others, the U.S. has historically thrown its weight behind - or against - certain nuclear actors, thus de-facto legitimating or delegitimizing their nuclear behavior. Hence, an important question left unanswered is the degree to which the process exist without the United States. Can other actors in the international community initiate such a move alone, and can they counter the U.S. in this arena? In the Iranian case, for example, are we about to see Iran’s nuclear program destigmatized by Russia and China, despite U.S. objections? Or is the U.S. powerful enough to impose its will on the process? That the book triggers such follow-up inquiries is proof of its relevance to today’s discussion of nuclear proliferation.

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