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Sannia Abdullah

Center for International Security and International Cooperation

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Book Review

Nuclear Deviance: Stigma Politics and the Rules of the Nonproliferation Game

Michal Smetana

Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland; 2020, 312 Pages
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Reviewed by Dr. Sannia Abdullah

Affiliate at Center for International Security and International Cooperation (CISAC), Stanford University, where she was a Stanton Nuclear Security Postdoctoral Fellow (2017-2018). Recently, she completed her fellowship at Center for Global Security and Cooperation, Sandia National Labs.

In *Nuclear Deviance*, the author analyzes why some states are harshly treated by the nonproliferation regime, while others are granted exceptionalism in the existing nuclear order. Michal Smetana, with a new theory of nuclear deviance, describes a complex relationship of stigma politics with power and poses an interesting question for scholars to analyze if “deviance” is a neutral concept. In this scholarly contribution, the author explains that norm violation and deviance observed by state actors do not receive even treatment. “The inherently political character of stigma politics brings up the issue of double standards and divergent treatment of different actors in the nuclear order.” The premise of this argument is that nuclear order is based on fragile grounds, and “so are the categories of what constitutes a “normal” or “deviant” conduct in nuclear affairs” (p. 218). This book fills the gap on norms contestation by explaining the effect of norm violators in international politics.

This book argues that state behaviors are “stigmatized” as a consequence of infringing norms and are, therefore, labeled as “rogue,” “pariah,” or as threats to international security. The author uses the interactionist approach to study the relationship between stigmatization and deviance. The stigma politics in this book are “understood in the context of interstate amity and enmity, broader normative conceptions, images of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ states, geopolitical and strategic interests, power relationships in international politics... .” To demonstrate this stance, Smetana uses three dissimilar cases (Iran, North Korea, and India) showing how states violate norms, enter into stigma politics, use diverse strategies to reverse the stigmatization labeled on them, sometimes find success in reconstructing the “new” image/identity or being a “deviant” or at times end up being a “defiant” actor who “condemn[s] the condemners.” For instance, Iran and North Korea were labeled as “rogue states” for developing nuclear weapons in violation of the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) rules. However, India—after the 1974 (peaceful nuclear explosion) and 1998 nuclear tests—successfully reinvented its “deviant” identity and was accepted as “normal” within the nuclear order. Likewise, the examples of exceptionalism continue with other countries including Egypt, South Korea, Libya, Japan, and Syria.

After the 1998 nuclear tests, the NPT in-group states condemned India's nuclear tests, and claimed them in violation of NPT norms. However, the stigma image was reversed with the support of the United States and its allies, who refrained from imposing bigger sanctions on India. The 'norm enforcers' such as the U.S.A., China, Russia, and France tried to discipline India's behavior temporarily with public shaming and the imposition of economic and military sanctions. India was encouraged to join the NPT as a Non-Nuclear Weapons State (NNWS) after disarming its weapons, like South Africa. However, Smetana notes how "from an early stage, the United States and some other countries have been differentiating between India's potential *restraint* and *reversal* as two qualitative stages of normalcy" (p.198). India thus chose to reframe its discourse towards "restraint". The author quotes Jaswant Singh, who claims that "India's strategy was to play for the day when the United States would get over its huffing and puffing, and with a sign of exhaustion or a shrug of resignation, accept a nuclear-armed India as a fully responsible and fully entitled member of the international community" (pp. 200-201). Therefore, India went from a "deviant", then became a "responsible nuclear weapons state" and declared its doctrine based on no-first-use, minimum credible deterrence, non-deployment force posture, and denunciation of the arms race. Many of the above declarations, however, are now questionable in reality.

Iranian nuclear ambitions are presented as another case of norm violation here. The non-cooperation on transparency and non-compliance of IAEA safeguard inspections thus attracted the world's criticism. Iran tried to reconstruct its "deviant" image of nuclear proliferation and justified the acquisition of "sensitive technology", enrichment and reprocessing facilities under the peaceful uses clause of NPT, claimed the need for nuclear energy to fuel the country's growing energy demand, and described weapons of mass destruction (WMD) possession against Iran's defense policy and religious philosophy. However, despite these assurances, Iran could not reverse the stigma of norm violation. Iran's agreement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) accepted its right to peaceful uses of nuclear technology while accepting its status as an NNWS party to the NPT. According to the author, JCPOA was a stigma reversal to integrate Iran into "normalization." The Trump administration showed dissatisfaction over Iran's intentions and raised concerns over its "non-compliance" by strengthening the economic and military sanctions, thus reverting to stigmatization.

The case of North Korea (DPRK) is different from the other cases mentioned above. As a 'deviant,' "North Korea's list of transgressions ranges from human rights abuse to the support of terrorism, abductions of foreign citizens, and threats of war toward its neighbors," and it ultimately pursued the path of nuclear weapons while being a signatory of NPT's NNWS. The non-compliance of the Agreed Framework increased tensions between DPRK and the U.S.A. for developing nuclear weapons and withdrawal from NPT. North Korea conducted a series of nuclear tests and faced several sanctions from the UNSC as coercive diplomacy, although none of those dissuaded it from possessing nuclear weapons. The Trump administration tried 'stigma reversal' strategies to engage Kim Jong-un in starting a sustainable dialogue for the country's nuclear rollback. The talks forestalled because DPRK seeks to maintain its nuclear status and wishes to enter into arms control measures whereas, the norm enforcers like the U.S.A., hope to see North Korea completely disarmed.

The author is commended for the bold move of describing nuclear politics on the slippery slope of norms contestation. However, certain aspects of the theory need clarification for empirical purposes. For instance, the terms "reversal" and "deconstruction" of stigma are confined to norm violation. This jargon could also infer the rollback of the nuclear programs or denuclearization that did not happen in the instance of any of these case studies. Who controls stigma politics? How can stigma politics be differentiated from coercive diplomacy when both serve the same purpose of targeting state and non-state actors for their objectionable behavior? The concept of stigma politics to study deviance does not lead us to new findings at this point. As a reader, I do not fully understand why the opportunity of stigma reversal or de-stigmatization was easy for India and not for Iran and North Korea. Those who believe in the Realist paradigm already know that most of the IR theories explain state behaviors on national interests,

alliance-building, and military power. The nuclear exceptionalism of the nonproliferation regime towards India and continued stigmatization of Iran and North Korea reflects the power of geo-strategi, economic stability, and political preferences. Likewise, defiance and shaming theories also elucidate condemnation for norm violation. The author mentions that North Korea's ballistic missile program is "...a key defiant symbol, a "badge of honor," of North Korea's strength and independence" (p. 174). Also, what is the strength of norms in the existing nuclear order? How can deviance be measured? If treaty violation is the basis of stigma politics as described in the book, then why were Russia or the United States never stigmatized for violating the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, even when the United States formally withdrew from it this year? The most important question remains: Who determines the 'normal' in world politics? How do we know if 'normal' is a value-neutral concept? Another consideration missing in the book is how the author did not touch upon the contending argument of 'haves' and 'have-nots' between norm enforcers and norm violators. The norm enforcers expect compliance from NNWS, but what is the compliance mechanism for Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) such as China? Is the concept of 'deviance' applicable to norm enforcers in the existing nuclear order, or is it confined to new nuclear weapons states only?

A good book not only concludes interesting findings but also leaves its readers with important questions. Smetana's book, therefore, is a valuable addition in the literature that offers useful insights on the political behaviors of Iran, North Korea, and India. It also questions the uniformity of the nonproliferation regime. It is recommended for scholars who are interested in learning more about norms, nuclear nonproliferation policies, and theories of 'deviance' and 'stigma politics.'