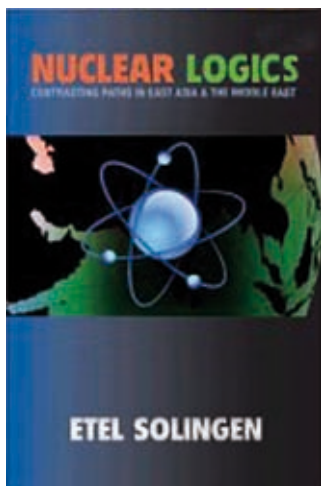


## Nuclear Logics



By Etel Solingen

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**Reviewed by Gp Capt Ian Shields**

When I first picked up this book I rather anticipated an International Relations (IR) theory rant against the iniquities of nuclear weapons. I was, however, pleasantly surprised that it was much more than that; indeed, although very firmly rooted in IR theory it is well-balanced, does not rant and does approach the issue from the IR feminist viewpoint.<sup>1</sup> Instead, this book offers a detailed and frequently illuminating insight into the complex question of why some States acquire nuclear weapons, others consciously choose not to, and others acquire but then voluntarily surrender their Weapons programme. As if this is not enough in itself to recommend this book, its sub-title,

“Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East” means that this book will have interest wider than to IR theorists or those studying the nuclear issue; anyone with an interest in the complex geo-political make-up of either the Middle East or East Asia will gain a useful insight into State behaviour in these regions from this study.

Solingen sets out her stall early. She acknowledges that the book cannot ever be truly current, such is the pace of change in both regions. Indeed, she admits to having been in an advance stage of research and writing when North Korea undertook its 2006 test. However, much of what she says, and certainly her analysis, will withstand the test of time. Solingen approaches the issue of the logic of the nuclear weapons question in four stages. First she examines the contrasting IR theories of why States act as they do over this question, then looks in detail at selected countries in each of her two study regions to seek common ground, before concluding with a more general review.

Let me first address where I think her book falls slightly short. The introduction, which acts as her first chapter, is largely repeated in Chapter Two where she conducts the bulk of her IR theory analysis. This is more of an irritation than a fault, but I was surprised in the subsequent two sections where she examines the actions of nine States across the two regions (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and North Korea in East Asia, then Iraq, Iran, Israel, Libya and Egypt in the Middle East) that she confines her IR analysis only to neo-realism. Solingen (very effectively) proves that neo-realist analysis of the Actions of these nine States cannot adequately answer the question of why some States acquire the nuclear option while others do not, and in this she rather betrays her colours as being against the neo-realist model. She does not attempt to analyse her question from

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the viewpoint of other IR models in these chapters, confining herself instead to an implied criticism of neo-realism. Finally, while I accept that she could only look at a limited number of countries in the two regions (and one could quibble whether Libya was the Middle East of the Maghreb) I felt that Saudi Arabia should have been included in the Middle East review.

So much for weaknesses, but this book more than makes up for this with its strengths. Her depth of research is humbling; the notes (sensibly saved to the end of the book rather than appearing as footnotes) run to some 50 pages and are immaculately presented. Solingen's writing style is fluid and easy to read, and she weaves a compelling thread throughout the book. From the East Asia section, I would particularly pick out the chapter on North Korea; even if you have no interest in that country's nuclear ambitions this is an excellent review of the workings of this closed society. Her analysis, that the twists and turns of North Korean foreign policy (such as can be detected) say as much about Kim's efforts to retain power but wrong-footing not only the international community but also his own internal detractors, strikes me as very sound. She rightly highlights the difficulties in dealing with such regimes and that conventional Western thinking does not easily understand such actors. Indeed, her introduction of the Juche Idea (the official State ideology of North Korea and its political system, based on the idea that mankind can master and control everything) displays not only Solingen's own understanding of North Korea, but the complexity of our engagement with a political system we find so alien.

Within her review of the Middle East, I was equally taken by her analysis of the Iranian quest for the nuclear option. Solingen draws four broad conclusions as to why Iran is

seeking such weapons: external threats in the 1980s (Iraq); how Islam could be used to justify their actions; the contempt with which the (inward-looking, insular and arguably inexperienced) political leadership treated international institutions, international actors and international law; and the degree to which the more radical elements of the Iranian leadership use the nuclear issue for regime survival. Not only are her conclusions drawn from well-presented arguments within her text, but offer a good insight into the Iranian leadership. This is indeed quality work.

But Solingen saves her best to last. Her final chapter, "Findings, Futures and Policy Implications" returns to the different IR theory models with which she started, and looks at the issue from a number of approaches (with a hint that she tends towards the Constructivist model). If IR theory models do not appeal, turn to her closing eleven pages where she analyses Policy Implications and argues convincingly for the need for engagement and dialogue, using Libya as an example of how it is possible to move States away from the nuclear path.

Early in this very good book Solingen states: "Nuclear choices have wide-ranging implications for international security" – a sentiment with which it is hard to disagree. As the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty continues to be challenged, why some States acquire nuclear weapons but others do not is worthy of serious academic study. Solingen has set herself an immense task with this book, and to a very large extent succeeds. This book is worth seeking, and reading.

## Notes

1 The feminist theory of international relations is a broad term given to works of those scholars who have sought to bring a concern with gender into the academic study of international politics.

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