

Jervis, Robert. 2017. *How Statesmen Think – The Psychology of International Politics*. Princeton University Press, 304 pp. \$105 (Paperback)

Robert Jervis's *How Statesmen Think* is a collection of twelve essays previously published in different academic journals from 1986 to 2010. The book's primary aim is to inform how a psychological lens can be applied to analysing foreign policy decision-making. This psychological lens considers human biases and cognitive limitations, which offers a new perspective, often omitted by more traditional international relations (IR) scholars. Jervis highlights that historically, "[...] standard notions of rationality are not so much incorrect as insufficient [...]" (p. 3) to comprehend political behaviour. To broadly apply a psychological lens in IR, the book examines multiple political events instead of a single case study. Analyses across contexts allows the author to identify patterns and gain broader insights about political behaviour. The title *How Statesmen Think* is somewhat narrow, as the discussion also covers the decision-making of foreign policy offices or groups rather than just that of individual statesmen. The author also outlines the limitations of the explanatory power of psychological theories in IR, addressing the differences between psychological experiments and political contexts. The book is organised into four parts: Political Psychology (PP), Heuristics and Biases, Political Psychology in International Relations, and Psychology in National Security.

The first part discusses critical theories in PP through two essays, "Understanding Beliefs" and "The Drunkard's Search". It explores political belief formation using cold and hot cognition theories, differentiating between rational assessments and emotional influences. These cold and hot cognitive systems form an individual's political beliefs and perceptions. According to Jervis, traditional IR scholars emphasize analysing cold cognitive processes to understand political behaviour. Therefore, Jervis discusses the 2003 Invasion on Iraq to highlight the importance of considering the hot cognitive system. Jervis defines "theory-driven beliefs" as widely accepted perceptions on specific issues. Before invading Iraq, US policymakers expressed many such beliefs. Jervis critically examines the lack of rational justifications for such beliefs. For instance, the strategy of spreading democracy was only raised by US officials, as no Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) were detected. Thus, Jervis names the human tendency to avoid trade-offs as a greater impactor on US foreign policy decision-makers than a rational risk assessment, as they were highly influenced by their personal need for security and pre-existing expectations about Iraq's intentions while weighing the risk of Iraq owning WMD and the risk of a US invasion. The metaphor of Drunkard's Search depicts the use of information shortcuts and bounded rationality

of foreign policy decision-makers, who prefer readily available and easy-to-comprehend information over the costly gathering and processing of new information. For example, Jervis discusses “static indicators” such as numbers and positions of troops utilized as intellectual shortcuts in the Cold War by the US military to assess the intentions of the USSR.

Part two, called “Heuristics and Biases”, contains two essays on Kahneman and Tversky’s representativeness bias and prospect theory. According to Kahneman and Tversky, representativeness bias is a cognitive shortcut or heuristic that describes the human tendency to estimate the frequency of an event based on its perceived similarity to a stereotype, often disregarding the actual statistical frequency. Jervis explores the decision-maker’s overestimation of aggression through the representativeness heuristic, highlighting a disregard for actual aggression rates. He summarises that the judgement of foreign policy decision-makers often relies on stereotyped base rates and highlights that “[...] the base rate is not objective or provided [...] by an authority [...]” (p. 73), which possibly leads to an overweighted focus on stereotyped frequencies. Next, Jervis highlights prospect theory by Kahneman and Tversky as a crucial theory for political behaviour as it postulates traditional notions of rationality and provides insights into the likelihood of conflict escalation. Prospect theory by Kahneman and Tversky entails that people are risk-averse in the possibility of achieving gains but are risk-tolerant in the face of avoiding losses. Jervis applies prospect theory to understand the escalating commitment of US foreign policymakers in the Vietnam War. He explains that US decision-makers, fearing the high costs of defeat, adopted risk-accepting behaviours under prospect theory, leading to seemingly irrational strategies to secure victory.

Four essays comprise the book’s third part and discuss PP theory’s applicability and limitations in analysing political behaviour. The first essay focuses on signals and indices, which are exchanged through verbal and non-verbal communication. According to Jervis, they help to make inferences about others’ behaviours but are simultaneously tricky to interpret as they land on the “[...] perceivers’ needs, theories, and expectations [...]” (p. 124). Thus, this essay aims to combine theories of signalling and perceptions, a field lacking academic attention, according to Jervis. The following two essays highlight the challenge of applying psychological theory to foreign policy decision-making because it is often either descriptive, due to actors frequently behaving outside the expectations of the theoretical model, or prescriptive, with findings from oversimplified psychological experiments lacking generalizability across different cultures and societal contexts. Therefore, Jervis highlights the necessity to combine PP theory with game theory as an analytical tool to comprehend political actors. He underlines that game theory anticipates other actors’ behaviour and helps model decisions and strategies based on preferences or available choices. However, as psychological factors influence political decisions, including PP theory is crucial as it aids in explaining how preferences and anticipations are formed. The third essay discusses tensions between the intelligence community (IC) and the US government. Jervis notes a stark contrast between the comprehensive, critical focus of the IC and the directive, defensive stance of US policymakers. The fourth

essay takes a new approach to the previous essays as it solely focuses on the identity crisis of the US and the USSR impacting the outcomes of the Cold War. Jervis highlights that both sides viewed each other through their cultural lens. Thus, the Cold War could only end when the Soviet Union started adopting more Western values, such as Gorbachev's promotion of free trade and cooperation with Western countries.

The final part, "Psychology and National Security", comprises four essays. The first essay starts with integrating perception and deterrence theory. Jervis reasons that deterrence is highly subjective as it relies on perceived credibility and intentions interpreted by the opponent, which are influenced by the values and beliefs of the respective decision-makers. Similarly, the second essay discusses inadvertent wars caused by the impact of crisis instability, which Jervis defines as a phenomenon caused by the lack of credibility that no side strikes as a surprise. This crisis instability creates fear, impacting the foreign policy decision-makers ability to process information, draw inferences, and objectively interpret their opponents' signals. In the third essay, Jervis discusses the "positive feedback" loop in decision-making, where initial beliefs, such as the domino belief, serve as self-fulfilling prophecies. Specifically, in conflicts, initial beliefs held by foreign policy decision-makers will trigger a policy response, which can result in a victory over the perceived aggressor or a defeat. In both scenarios, the initial belief becomes reinforced, leading to the decision maker's desired outcome or manifesting the initial belief as the threat increases. Jervis describes this positive feedback as essential to understanding the US government's decision-making in the Cold War. The final essay, discussing the "Rashomon Effect", illustrates the varied perceptions different decision-makers have of identical situations, highlighting cultural and contextual influences.

The book enhances regional security studies by showcasing how psychological insights can explain foreign policy decision-making. Jervis's analysis of bounded rationality using static indicators is crucial for regional security decision-makers who often deal with neighbouring states they know well. This familiarity initiates using heuristics to manage the abundance of information effectively. Integrating political psychology with representativeness bias and prospect theory by Kahneman and Tversky is particularly relevant for regional security, as it aids in estimating conflict escalation likelihood among closely interacting states. This underscores the need for cautious threat assessments based on stereotyped base rates and highlights the risk-accepting behaviours opponents might display when facing losses, which is critical in a regional context where historical rivalries and proximities influence perceptions. Jervis's examination of tensions between the IC and national governments offers valuable insights for mitigating internal conflicts within regional security frameworks. His discussion on perception and misperception in crises underscores the threat of crisis instability, which can lead to significant misinterpretations of opponents' signals, a common issue in regions with high interaction levels. Jervis also emphasizes the importance of challenging initial beliefs, such as the domino effect, to prevent positive feedback loops that exacerbate conflicts in a regional setting. Finally, the Rashomon Effect highlights the necessity for regional security decision-makers to understand how cultural and contextual factors influence

opponents' perceptions and responses, which is vital in regions with diverse political and cultural landscapes.

To conclude, *How Statesmen Think* by Robert Jervis offers a comprehensive examination of the role of political psychology in foreign policy decision-making, highlighting its applicability and limitations. Jervis demonstrates how theories such as Kahneman and Tversky's representativeness bias and prospect theory or the Rashomon effect provide valuable insights into understanding the psychological underpinnings of political behaviour and the risks of conflict escalation. He underscores the importance of considering bounded rationality and cognitive biases when analysing foreign-policy decisions, emphasizing that traditional notions of rationality are often insufficient. Jervis also addresses the challenges of applying psychological theories to real-world decision-making, noting that greater generalizability of psychological experiments across diverse societal groups and states is still needed.

Juliane Wesselmann is a Ph.D. Candidate at Trinity College Dublin, Department of Political Science. E-mail: wesselmj@tcd.ie; ORCID: 0009-0009-6128-2279.