

do more of the explanatory work as long as he includes both ideational and material?

Since Tang regards an endogenous explanatory schema as a key criterion of acceptability (p. 93), he is sharply critical of all explanatory theories that rely on exogenous factors to account for transitions (e.g., p. 54). However, when he explains the transition from an offensive to a defensive realist world in Chapter 3, there seems to be no endogenous basis for the first nation-state in the offensive world that follows a defensive approach; at the right time, the defensive approach will prove more successful than the offensive, and eventually, all, or nearly all, states will follow suit (p. 103).

Evolutionary grand theories do not have much in the way of policy implications because, like evolutionary biology, they do not tell us anything about the future—save that things will at some point change and the world will be different. However, Tang offers several predictions, for example, that there will never be a “harmoniously institutionalized ‘world state’ or ‘world society’” (p. 110). Since the prediction draws both on the current book and on his *A General Theory of Institutional Change* (2014), one might think that the derivation of predictions is justifiable, until he points out that the institutional theory is also “SEP-based” (ibid). Predictions do follow from some systems theories, for example, from A.F.K. Organski’s classic power transition chapter in *World Politics* (1958), which, on the grandest scale, predict that when all major states are fully industrialized, there will be far fewer significant regional power transitions and, hence, reduced transition-induced warfare. Since Tang contends that his theory is also a macro-sociology of IR, his claim that no superior theory to the SEP is possible is a prediction, but also runs afoul of the widely accepted Duhem-Quine thesis about the impossibility of final theories in empirical sciences.

Good scholarship on grand questions is thought provoking, and *Social Evolution* is indeed a good one that should receive considerable attention from students of contemporary IR theory. While the argument is wide-ranging and fairly complex, it does not require any specialized technical background. The book is of particular interest to students and scholars interested in theories of international relations.

National Security Through a Cockeyed Lens: How Cognitive Bias Impacts U.S. Foreign Policy. By Steve A. Yetiv. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. 168p. \$24.95. doi:10.1017/S1537592715004326

— Todd H. Hall, *University of Oxford*

Human beings do not always act in conformance with the expectations of rational decision making. They frequently overestimate the extent to which others understand the motives for their actions. They are more

likely to blame their own negative behaviors on situational factors, but view those of others as stemming from character or disposition. They may overly focus on particular values or aspects of situations while neglecting others. They may fit new information to existing beliefs, rendering the latter unfalsifiable. They see patterns where none exist. They can become overconfident. And they can engage in short-term thinking.

This is but a small list of the many deviations that cognitive psychologists and others working in similar areas have observed in experimental settings. Steve A. Yetiv tells us that these are also behind some of the most important choices and outcomes within international relations over the past 50 years. Leaders of the Soviet Union thought that outside actors would view their invasion of Afghanistan as a limited, defensive move, but others—United States decision makers in particular—saw it as offensive and expansionist. The reason? The biases at work in how we view our own versus others’ behaviors. President Ronald Reagan permitted the Iran-Contra Affair to occur, putting weapons in the hands of the Iranian government in the hope that it would help free U.S. hostages held in Lebanon. Here, too, a cognitive bias was at work: a tunnel-vision-like focus on the hostages that overrode the consideration of other values. In these cases, as well as others involving Al Qaeda’s perceptions of the United States, U.S. planning for the Iraq War, and U.S. energy policy, Yetiv presents a bias (or set of biases) he views as key to explaining the decisions and actions of the parties involved.

The author is writing in a tradition that includes, among others, Robert Jervis’s *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (1976) and Richard Ned Lebow’s *Between Peace and War* (1981) in that he examines the ways in which humans—and policymakers in particular—may deviate from the expectations of rationalist models due to cognitive biases. The arguments and findings of Daniel Kahneman, the Nobel-prize-winning author of *Thinking: Fast and Slow* (2011) play a particularly large role in his account. Indeed, those familiar with *Thinking* will likely recognize many of the biases Yetiv outlines. His contribution is not that he has identified new phenomena, but that he has used existing research into cognitive biases to shed light on a range of decisions and behaviors by actors on the international stage. What is more, he also offers suggestions concerning how we can “debias” our decision making.

National Security Through a Cockeyed Lens is not a piece of technical, scholarly work, however. As Yetiv himself writes, the book is “written for a broad audience. . . . It may well be of interest to academics, but it is designed to appeal to students and educated general readers” (p. 6). This choice of target audience means that the book is quite accessible and easily read in one or two sittings, but it also means that its arguments and methodology may raise some questions for an academic reader.

For one, as Yetiv again himself notes, the cases in the book are “handpicked” and not intended as “tests of the importance of cognitive biases” (p. 6). And although each case highlights a specific bias or set thereof, they demonstrate quite a range of levels of analysis, policy areas, and actors that for a scholarly audience would require a greater level of theorization. The case studies would appear strongest where the focus is on individual actors (i.e., top decision makers during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iran-Contra crisis, or the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq War), cases where there is ample evidence available and it is easier to pinpoint and argue for possible biases on the part of the individuals involved. The analyses become more tricky, however, when the book looks at state-level policies—such as energy policy—and outlines “irrational behavior” from the perspective of a general notion of national interest. For instance, in explaining why the United States remains dependent on oil, Yetiv points to biases toward short-term thinking and the status quo, as well as an aversion to action when not in a domain of loss (pp. 72, 89–92). Yet he also recognizes the problem of egotistical behavior on the part of individuals and organizations (pp. 89–90), behavior that may be quite rational when we shift levels of analysis. Egoism may not be desirable, but it is something quite different from a cognitive bias, at least as the latter is traditionally understood, and one might argue that such egoism—combined with existing incentives and institutions—is the real problem.

Building on this last point, there also exists the potential danger that when highlighting potential cognitive biases, we as analysts may simply be pointing to policies with which we disagree. The rational/irrational and biased/unbiased dichotomies have quite normative overtones, and there are many reasons other than cognitive bias that individuals may differ in their interpretations of ambiguous evidence or views concerning the most desirable policies. From an academic perspective, Yetiv could have done more to outline the criteria by which we can objectively classify a belief, decision, or behavior as irrational or biased, given the preexisting beliefs and desires of the actors involved, as well as the information and choices available to them. In fact, without such clarification, he opens himself up to the criticism that his use of the labels “irrational” or “biased” may conveniently coincide with his policy preferences.

All the same, *National Security Through a Cockeyed Lens* is a good read and quite thought provoking. It does an excellent job of making findings concerning cognitive biases accessible to a broad audience and offering illustrations of where they might be relevant for understanding international relations, especially in cases focused on elite policymakers. This book would work well as a text for introductory courses on international relations and foreign policy, and specific chapters could be of use in more focused courses on U.S. foreign policy, the Cold War, or

terrorism. It also is a good book to recommend to lay people interested in psychology and international relations.

Europe in the New Middle East: Opportunity or

Exclusion? By Richard Youngs. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 240p. \$80.00.

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— Caterina Carta, *Vesalius College*

The so-called Arab Spring, and the ensuing blaze that flared up in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region, constituted an “exogenous shock” for the European Union. At a time of economic crisis and internal turmoil in Europe, this exogenous shock further compounded the EU’s own identity crisis. Richard Youngs puts his finger right on it: While Arab protesters voiced in the streets the same entreaties that the EU sought to promote since the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in 1995, the EU did not directly trigger the upheaval, nor did it manage to react steadfastly to the telluric landslide that turned the MENA region upside down. The Arab Spring confronted the EU with the doomsday of its own contradictions and inefficiencies in its southern neighborhood. Moreover, its aftermath further required the EU to cope with radically mutated international dynamics, a dramatic shift in the regional balance of power, differentiated pathways to democracy in the region, and a revival of radical Islamism.

Against this backdrop, *Europe in the New Middle East* pledges to assess the EU’s reaction to the “mix of promise and peril” inherent to the Arab Spring, with an eye on grasping the long-term impact of the European policy response over the development of EU foreign policy (p. 2). Youngs seeks to provide “the first systematic and detached assessment” of the European response to the Arab Spring in the period 2010–14 and to evince how the EU could still deploy regional influence in the long run (p. 3).

To meet this ambitious goal, the author structures his book as follows. Chapter 2 introduces the analytical framework. Chapters 3 and 4 contextualize the status quo ante Arab Spring, in the MENA region and in EU policymaking, respectively. Chapters 5 and 6 present an “optimistic”/positive and a “pessimistic”/negative assessment of the EU’s response to the Arab Spring. Chapters 8, 9, and 11 look at emerging and ongoing regional conflicts, focusing on Syria, Libya, and the abiding Israel–Palestine conflict. Chapters 7 and 10 delve specifically into the mounting preoccupations with Islam and the EU’s evolving economic and energy interests in the region.

Chapter 2 identifies five analytical narratives to explain the evolution of EU policies toward the Middle East (p. 5). Youngs establishes a connection among “narratives,” “underlying dynamics” of the EU–MENA