

**Quick Summary.** Lebow attempts to explain brinkmanship crises as a result of perceptual distortions (or misperception in Jervis' term). He uses the July crisis to illustrate this point. He argues that decision-making process is often different from what explained by rational process. He then proposes alternative approaches based on psychological theory: cognitive and motivational approaches.

**The cognitive approach** emphasizes the ways in which human cognitive limitations distort decision-making by gross simplifications in problem representation and information processing. People process and interpret information according to a set of mental rules that bear little relationship to those of formal logic, which is called "psycho-logic." Derived from psycho-logic is the principle of "cognitive consistency." According to this principle, people try to keep their beliefs, feelings, actions, and cognitions mutually consistent. We tend to believe that people we like act in ways we approve of, have values similar to ours, and oppose people and institutions we dislike. People we dislike, we expect to act in ways repugnant to us, have values totally dissimilar from ours, and to support people and institutions we disapprove of. Jervis undertakes a lot of work in this line. He proposes that these beliefs, organized as "beliefs," shape the way in which policy-makers may respond to external stimuli.

**The motivational approach** argues that human beings have a strong need to maintain images of the self or the environment conducive to their emotional well-being. This need then interferes with their ability to act rationally. Janis and Mann explain further by assuming that decision-makers are emotional beings, not rational calculators, that they are beset by doubts and uncertainties, struggle with incongruous longings, antipathies, and loyalties, and are reluctant to make irrevocable choices. Important decisions therefore generate conflict, defined as simultaneous opposing tendencies to accept and reject a given course of action. This conflict and the psychological stress it generates become acute when a decision-maker realizes that there is risk of serious loss associated with any course of action open to him. More often than not, decision-makers will respond to such situations by procrastinating, rationalizing, or denying his responsibility for the decision. These affective responses to stress detract from the quality of decision-making.

**Cognitive vs. Motivational Approach.** For Jervis, the starting point is the human need to develop simple rules for processing information in order to make sense of an extraordinarily complex and uncertain environment. Janis and Mann take as their fundamental assumption the human desire to avoid fear, shame, and guilt. Jervis describes cognitive consistency as the most important organizing principle of cognition. Janis and Mann contend that aversion of psychological stress is the most important drive affecting cognition. Whereas Jervis concludes that expectations condition our interpretation of events and our receptivity to information. Janis and Mann argue for the importance of preferences. For Jervis, we see what we expect to see, for Janis and Mann, what we want to see.

However, these two approaches have one agreement about the implications of cognitive distortion for decision-making. Each approach emphasizes the tendency of policymakers to fail to see trade-off relationships, engage in postdecisional rationalization, and remain insensitive to information that challenges the viability of their commitments. In other words, they advance explanations for the behavior, which is detrimental to good decision-making. Several kinds of cognitive distortions Jervis and Janis and Mann refer to result in specific kinds of deviations from rational decision-making or what they call decision-making "pathologies." Each of these diminishes the probability that effective policy will be formulated or implemented. These are 1) the overvaluation of past performance as against present reality, 2) overconfidence in policies to which decision-makers are committed, and 3) insensitivity to information critical of these policies.

**The July 1914 Crisis** (I will not go into detail of what the crisis was all about – read from pp. 119-144, instead, I will just give take-home messages) suggests that cognitive distortions of German political leaders were a root cause of the failure of German policy. They led in the first place to the adoption of an unrealistic strategy based as it was on erroneous perceptions of how the other powers would respond to an Austrian attempt to subjugate Serbia. They were also responsible for the failure of German leaders to realize the extent of their miscalculations as the crisis unfolded. The overall effect of the decision-making pathologies in this crisis was to encourage policy-makers to challenge important commitments of their adversaries with the erroneous expectation that their adversaries would back down. Finally, when their cherished illusions were shattered, German leaders suffered a dramatic loss of self-confidence, which resulted in erratic and irresponsible behavior.

The German experience points to the conclusion that the most crucial consideration affecting the outcome of brinkmanship crises is the ability of governments to learn from the results of their past behavior and to modify their subsequent policies in response.