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DEBATE OR DIALOGUE

The Psychology of Leaders in World Politics

Who Fights for Reputation: The Psychology of Leaders in International Conflict. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018). By Keren Yarhi-Milo.

Reviewed by Robin Markwica
Response by Keren Yarhi-Milo

Emotional Choices: How the Logic of Affect Shapes Coercive Diplomacy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). By Robin Markwica.

Reviewed by Keren Yarhi-Milo
Response by Robin Markwica

Review of *Who Fights for Reputation: The Psychology of Leaders in International Conflict.*

After decades of relative neglect, the past few years have seen a renaissance in the study of leaders and their psychology in international politics. A number of scholars have shown how leaders' beliefs, background, experience, emotions, and other attributes influence their decision-making (see, for example, Holmes, 2018; Horowitz, Stam, & Ellis, 2015; Jervis, 2017; Kertzer, 2016; Rathbun, 2018; Saunders, 2011; Wheeler, 2018; Yarhi-Milo, 2014). Their work has attained particular salience since the assumption of the U.S. presidency by Donald Trump in 2017. Keren Yarhi-Milo's new book, *Who Fights for Reputation*, contributes to this budding literature by highlighting the role of leaders' psychological dispositions in their foreign policy choices.

Experts in international relations have long debated whether and how leaders can gain or lose an international reputation for resolve (see, for instance, Mercer, 1996; Press, 2005). What they have largely neglected, Yarhi-Milo argues, is that U.S. presidents differ in their willingness and likelihood to fight for their reputation. Why are some of them prepared to run grave risks—even waging war—over nonvital issues in order to demonstrate resolve, while others are not? The existing literature refers to the role of hawkishness, cults of reputation, or cultures of honor, among other factors (Dafoe & Caughey, 2016; Snyder & Diesing, 1977; Tang, 2005). Yarhi-Milo explains this variation by investigating the interaction between two key variables: decision-makers' psychological disposition of self-monitoring and their beliefs about the efficacy of military force.

The author relies on the standard construct of self-monitoring developed by psychologist Mark Snyder (1974) and later revised by Snyder and Gangestad (1986), which has gained widespread

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popularity in the fields of social and personality psychology. It contends that humans vary in the degree to which they monitor and control their public appearances. They are assumed to be either high or low self-monitors depending on their responses to a set of questions in a self-monitoring test. High self-monitors tend to strategically cultivate their image in order to maintain or enhance their social status. Yarhi-Milo focuses on three main behavioral tendencies of high self-monitors: They are inclined to manage their emotional expressions (expressive self-control); they often draw attention to themselves in social situations (social stage presence); and they tend to adapt their behavior in order to gain social advantages (other-directed self-presentation) (pp. 22–23). Due to these proclivities, the author posits, high self-monitoring leaders are more likely to pay attention to, and fight for, their reputation for resolve in the eyes of international adversaries and allies during interstate crises. Low self-monitors, on the other hand, are less concerned about their social status. They tend to lack the motivation and ability to monitor their self-presentation and to modify it in a way that would improve their public standing. Instead, they typically act according to their own beliefs, attitudes, and values, even if this results in disadvantages for them. Consequently, Yarhi-Milo hypothesizes that low self-monitors will be significantly less likely to care about, let alone fight for, a reputation for resolve (p. 26).

The second variable that Yarhi-Milo concentrates on to explain decision-makers' variation in their willingness to fight for face is their beliefs about the effectiveness of military force, which she locates on a dovishness-hawkishness spectrum. By combining these two variables, she is able to generate a typology of four ideal-typical leaders along with a series of testable hypotheses: First, low self-monitor doves ("reputation critics") tend to doubt the relevance of reputation for resolve and to refrain from using force over nonvital issues. Second, high self-monitor doves ("reputation believers") are generally reluctant to use force but they are significantly more willing to fight for face than their low self-monitor counterparts because they regard a reputation for resolve as a means to enhance their social status. Third, low self-monitor hawks ("reputation skeptics") are inclined to be militarily assertive, but they are less likely to get engaged in crises that involve only reputational considerations and no perceived material stakes. Finally, high self-monitor hawks ("reputation crusaders") are more motivated to get involved in and escalate such crises because they believe in the efficacy of force and the significance of reputation and status on the world stage (pp. 35–38).

Yarhi-Milo employs a sophisticated multimethod research design to test these hypotheses empirically. To begin with, she presents results from two online survey experiments that she and Joshua Kertzer conducted on samples of U.S. and Israeli citizens to evaluate the microfoundations of the dispositional theory in a controlled setting. The findings reveal that the hawk/dove dichotomy alone is insufficient to account for variation in the willingness to fight for face. Contrary to conventional wisdom, hawks do not necessarily care more about reputation for resolve than doves. In both surveys, high self-monitor doves—but not their low self-monitor counterparts—were prepared to use force when they viewed their reputation as being at stake (p. 57). Next, Yarhi-Milo uses an original survey she conducted with 68 presidential scholars to identify the self-monitoring levels of all 11 U.S. presidents from 1945 to 2008. Kennedy, Johnson, Reagan, and Clinton get classified as high self-monitors, while Ford, Carter, and George H. W. Bush turn out to be low self-monitors. The remaining presidents—Truman, Eisenhower, Nixon, and George W. Bush—were close to the midpoint score and could thus not be sorted into either category (p. 74). Linking these results with measures of leaders' beliefs in the effectiveness of military force, the author carries out a statistical analysis on a data set of all militarized interstate disputes in which U.S. presidents were involved between 1945 and 2008. She finds that high self-monitor presidents are about twice as likely to engage in and initiate the use of military instruments as their low self-monitoring counterparts (p. 100).

In the last three chapters of the book, Yarhi-Milo tests the predictions of her theory in qualitative case studies of crisis decision-making by three U.S. presidents: Carter, a low self-monitor dove; Reagan, a high self-monitor hawk; and Clinton, a high self-monitor dove. For each leader, she has

chosen three or four international crises where material stakes were seen as relatively low and the use of military instruments varied. As the only low self-monitor dove in the sample of U.S. presidents, Carter kept resisting strong pressure from some of his top advisers to use military instruments in order to protect U.S. reputation for resolve when the Soviets increased their activities in the Horn of Africa and in Cuba. After the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979, it was Carter's concern about American strategic interests in the Middle East—rather than worries about reputation—that led him to escalate his policy toward Moscow, Yarhi-Milo maintains. Reagan and Clinton differed in their beliefs about the efficacy of force, but both were high self-monitors. Reagan's hawkish outlook reinforced his eagerness to use military instruments in response to any crisis that he saw as a test of U.S. resolve. Dovish Clinton, on the other hand, was generally reluctant to employ America's military might, but he was willing to escalate when he perceived a (potential) loss of face.

Who Fights for Reputation teaches us a great deal about the psychology of leaders in international conflict, but it also raises some questions, which open up fruitful areas for future research. On a number of occasions, Yarhi-Milo notes that high self-monitors may value a reputation for resolve for its "psychological benefits," rather than its material advantages (pp. 12, 28, 37–38, 266), but she does not elaborate on the nature of these benefits. Are they related to self-esteem, satisfaction, pleasure, ontological security, or other psychological needs, and, if so, what does this tell us about the deeper motivation behind the quest for reputation? The psychological benefits associated with a reputation for resolve also made me wonder if a perceived *lack* of reputation for resolve comes with certain psychological *costs*, such as low self-esteem, dissatisfaction, pain, or ontological insecurity. If so, Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory would suggest that high self-monitors will behave differently depending on whether they see themselves as operating in a domain of reputation gain or loss. This accords with a growing body of scholarship that questions the uniformity of Snyder's self-monitoring construct (on which Yarhi-Milo's dispositional theory relies). A number of psychologists assert that it is made up of two independent dimensions: What they term *acquisitive* self-monitoring is associated with efforts at gaining social approval and status, whereas *protective* self-monitoring relates to attempts to avoid social disapproval and status loss (see, for example, Arkin, 1981; John, Cheek, & Klohnen, 1996; Rauthmann, 2011; Wilmot, Kostal, Stillwell, & Kosinski, 2017). A promising avenue for future research would be to examine the effects of these distinct forms of self-monitoring on political decision-making in order to gain a more differentiated picture of this psychological trait.

Another criticism that has been leveled against Snyder's concept of self-monitoring relates to its assumption that any individual falls into one of two categories—low or high self-monitoring. As Yarhi-Milo's survey of presidential experts has demonstrated, more than one-third of the 11 U.S. presidents under investigation were positioned in between these two categories (p. 74). Hence, standard self-monitoring theory was not able to shed much light on their behavior. Future work may want to draw on recent research in personality psychology that seeks to transform self-monitoring from a categorical into a dimensional construct (see Wilmot, 2015). This might allow for a more nuanced analysis of the extent to which actors seek to control their public appearances.

Finally, Yarhi-Milo suggests that her theory is generalizable across different regime types and time periods (p. 40). The results from her and Kertzer's survey on an Israeli sample represent a promising start, but several cross-cultural psychologists question whether Snyder's self-monitoring construct can be sensibly applied to non-Western societies. They point out that he developed it almost solely on U.S. samples, and they argue that it focuses on elements of self-presentation predominant in individualistic cultures. In their view, it fails to capture important aspects of self-monitoring in collectivistic cultures, such as a person's role in ingroups and the status of significant others. Consequently, they propose to revise the concept and measure of self-monitoring in a way that makes it sensitive to cultural variation (see, for instance, Gudykunst et al., 1989; Gudykunst, Gao, & Franklyn-Stokes, 1996; Guillaume & Funder, 2016; Li & Zhang, 1998; Trubisky, Ting-Toomey,

& Lin, 1991). Future studies on political decision-making could build on this body of research to explore cultural differences and similarities in self-monitoring more systematically.

In sum, Yarhi-Milo advances a highly original argument about the effects of self-monitoring and beliefs about the efficacy of force on U.S. crisis decision-making, which she evaluates in an imaginative multimethod research design. She makes a powerful case that leaders' personality characteristics need to be taken seriously in the study of international conflict, which resonates strongly in our current era. *Who Fights for Reputation* is a must read for anyone interested in political psychology and foreign policy. More conceptual and empirical work is necessary, however, to fully appreciate how political decision-making is shaped by degrees of self-monitoring by policymakers from different cultural backgrounds.

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Response from Keren Yarhi-Milo

I thank Robin Markwica for his kind words on my book and his thoughtful comments. In his review, Markwica raises several promising avenues for future research that I think deserve more discussion.

Markwica suggests that it might be worthwhile to transform self-monitoring from a categorical into a dimensional construct. He argues that this might be helpful due to the fact that more than one-third of the U.S. presidents under investigation were positioned between the categories of low and high self-monitors. I agree that thinking about a dimensional construct could be a welcome addition to future studies, but not necessarily for the reason Markwica notes. Indeed, one of the main reasons some presidents fail to achieve a score that puts them statistically in the low or high categories of self-monitoring is because of the small number of historians who took the survey. As a result, we should not interpret these results as indicating that a categorical measure of self-monitoring is inadequate or not useful, but rather that it is harder to capture statistically due to a small survey sample size. Nevertheless, I concur with Markwica's broader idea that future studies could benefit from incorporating a more nuanced analysis of different aspects of self-monitoring. I believe that disaggregating self-monitoring into ideal type categories of acquisitive versus protective self-monitoring, as Markwica suggests, might be useful for students seeking to gain a more nuanced understanding of how high self-monitors deal with situations of loss or gain in status, for example.

Finally, and more importantly, is Markwica's call for future scholarship to probe whether the observed link between high self-monitoring and concerns for reputation for resolve travels across different cultures. It is worth reiterating that the theory I posit in *Who Fights for Reputation* highlights the interaction between personality and situation in that high self-monitors will seek to take actions that increase social status in any particular domain. Through survey experiments and case

studies I show that, in the specific domain of international crises, both high self-monitoring U.S. leaders and the Israeli and U.S. publics perceive resolve as an important social currency that accords their nation higher status/standing. The idea of looking at whether the relationship between status and resolve holds in other cultural contexts is therefore a promising avenue for future empirical research. I agree that a reasonable starting point to extend the analysis would be in the context of non-Western societies, but I suspect that the Western/non-Western dichotomy is unlikely to reveal significant differences because there are examples of cultures across that divide that value resolve in their status hierarchy. Perhaps a more useful starting point is to think about particular countries/societies where appearing resolute might not be seen as an important social currency during international crises for either cultural-normative or historical reasons. Moreover, I believe that an additional and important extension of the analysis in this book would be to shift the domain from international crises to other foreign or domestic issue areas where reputation for resolve may not necessarily be the social currency that accords status. In such cases, the theory I posit should lead us to expect that high self-monitors will seek to cultivate a different kind of reputation.

In sum, I am grateful for Markwica's review and share his vision of how future studies can build on the theory and empirical strategy in *Fighting for Reputation* and apply its core elements to test the behaviors of leaders and individuals in other cultural contexts and domains.

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Review of Robin Markwica's *Emotional Choices: How the Logic of Affect Shapes Coercive Diplomacy*.

Robin Markwica's *Emotional Choices: How the Logic of Affect Shapes Coercive Diplomacy* is one of the most powerful books ever written in the field of international relations on the role of affect in shaping the coercive use of force. In this book, Markwica incorporates insights and evidence from experimental research in social psychology and neuroscience to develop a theory that pushes beyond the idea that affect, or emotions, matters in explaining leaders' behaviors. Rather, Markwica zooms in on an especially intriguing and crucial puzzle in international relations: What prompts decision-makers to defy threats from more powerful coercers, and when do they give in? To be sure, this is not the first book that has wrestled with this question, and Markwica offers balanced and convincing accounts of most alternative explanations scholars have offered to date. But the book's main claim is that to best understand what guides leaders' behavior, we need to view decision-makers as *Homo emotionalis* rather than *Homo economicus* or *Homo sociologicus.* In particular, Markwica argues that to best understand how leaders targeted by coercive threats are affected by the emotions they experience, we ought to focus on the role of five key emotions: fear, anger, hope, pride, and humiliation. Each of these emotions, Markwica convincingly argues, generates unique behavioral impulses and appraisals that make targets more or less likely to yield to the demands of the coercer.

The rest of the book develops the theoretical foundations of these claims, generates observable implications that follow from his emotional choice theory, and tests them in case studies on the decision-making of the Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, during the Cuban Missile Crisis and those of the President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, during the crisis leading up to the Gulf War. The theory and the empirical testing are restricted to the perspective of the leaders of the target state. As Markwica admits, examining the interplay between the emotional choices of the coercer and those of the target state would have been more compelling. This is because the emotional choices of the coercer could affect, as well as be affected by, the demands set for the target state. Moreover, a dynamic account of the emotional interplay between leaders would have allowed us to draw a more comprehensive set of policy implications. At the same time, however, the task this book sets out to accomplish is

significant in its own right, and the analysis is novel and rigorous even if we restrict the analysis to the emotional choices and behaviors of the target state.

The book pushes the development of the emotional logic of leadership decision-making forward by offering several important theoretical contributions. In the rest of this review I will highlight these contributions, while also noting new dilemmas that they generate or open questions on which they are silent.

The first, and perhaps the most important, contribution of this book lies in delineating the role of the five key emotions on the probability of compliance with the coercer's demands. Thus, rather than claiming that emotions in general affect general choices, the books shows that these five emotions in particular are most relevant to understanding the dynamics of coercion. The focus on these emotions is well justified on theoretical and empirical grounds. These emotions include both positive and negative valences; they also offer distinct appraisal and action tendencies; and they are some of the most salient emotions leaders experience in times of international crises. Of the five emotions the book analyzes, students of international relations would be perhaps more familiar with the implications of fear, humiliation, and anger on the behavior of leaders. But the nuanced treatment of pride and hope is certainly novel.

Another contribution is Markwica's insistence that emotions themselves are shaped by the cultural milieu in which they are embedded and as such are neither stable nor independent. This theoretical move allows Markwica to analyze the role of emotions in a particular cultural and normative context. Contextualizing emotions in such a way is important: Because cultures, norms, and identities are bound to vary over time and space, they will affect how people experience and express emotions. But this approach to studying the role of emotions comes at a price. As Markwica admits, such a move requires scholars to shift the analysis away from one that purely relies on the psychology of the individual and instead first inductively construct the social and cultural context that could shape how individuals will likely feel and express those emotions. This process of contextualization puts a significant burden on the analyst or scholar; it limits our ability to generalize or predict behavior, and it leaves open the question of whether these background variables are doing more of the causal work than the emotions that are felt and expressed.

Markwica not only acknowledges these limitations, but he also embraces them. The contextualized approach to emotions that this book presents resists treating emotions as "objects" or "properties," and as such, resists using causal or constitutive forms of explanations to studying them. Instead, *Emotional Choices* relies on process analysis in which "events exert influence over each other by becoming connected with each other while being continuously in motion" (p. 119). Using this analytical lens, Markwica explicitly pushes against conceptualizing the relationship between emotion and decision-making as a cause and effect. Rather, he views emotions as "participant processes that give rise to changes in the process of choice behavior" (p. 119). Having defined the relationship between emotions and behavior in such a way, Markwica is at liberty to depart from a classic approach to process tracing that seeks to reveal the causal chain. Instead, Markwica adopts an interpretive process tracing to empirically explore the match between the appraisal and action tendencies of the five key emotions on the one hand, and the leaders' behavior on the other.

Emotional Choices should therefore be seen as offering a middle ground between arguments that seek to assign emotions a powerful, independent, and systematic causal role, and those that see emotions as epiphenomenal. In a similar vein, *Emotional Choices* is walking a fine line in terms of allowing for the strategic expressions of emotions—real or fake—for instrumental reasons. But here too the burden on the analyst is quite significant: Scholars have to first delineate the preferences of the actors, their interests, and the audiences toward whom they orient themselves. The book offers a systematic way of doing so, and yet in order to convincingly separate the different possible manifestations and uses of emotions leaders feel and express in a crisis, scholars would need access to a significant and particular kind of evidence that is typically not easy to come by. And even then, much

of the analytical burden is placed on the analyst's discerning of actors' instrumental emotiveness versus sincere expression of emotions.

At the end, though, *Emotional Choices* demonstrates that this approach is feasible to execute. The case studies are compelling in the accounts they offer and show that an emotional lens proves a useful, additional approach to understanding the decision-making process of leaders. In the analysis of the pre-Gulf War crisis, for example, Markwica emphasizes factors to which existing scholarship has not paid sufficient attention. In particular, the analysis of contextual and behavioral manifestations of anger and humiliation play a key role in Markwica's account of why Saddam Hussein rejected the United Nation's ultimatum. He is able to show evidence of those emotions in the historical record, as well as evidence of behavior that is consistent with the appraisal tendencies that follow from those emotions, such as confidence in control and optimistic risk estimates. The empirical analysis has many strengths, although it remains unclear what the counterfactuals are and whether some of the claims are really falsifiable. More critically, the empirical research design strategy was a bit confusing: It is not entirely clear how the reader should conceive of these two case studies. Are they plausibility probes? Should we feel confidence about generalizing from those cases? Are they representative case studies? Or critical ones? If so, why? Finally, the case analysis, while thorough and interesting, could have pushed further on the added value that *Emotional Choices* offers relative to other existing narratives of those crises. In what ways does the analysis here complement other methods, and in what ways is it in tension with them?

A related issue, outside the scope of this book, has to do with what is typically referred to as the "aggregation problem." Like most studies in international relations that focus on the beliefs, emotions, and psychology of individuals, this book also struggles when it comes to theorizing and empirically accounting for how the "emotional choices" of leaders during a crisis aggregate to *group* decision-making. This is not an easy issue to deal with, and Markwica's book admits the limitations of its analysis. At the same time, the focus on crisis decision-making in case studies where the leaders exerted significant power over the decision-making process and outcome should perhaps relieve some of our concerns. This becomes a more pressing question when we move beyond that universe of cases and seek to explore how the logic of emotions affect dynamics across different levels and units of analysis.

Emotional Choices makes an important contribution to the growing body of literature on the interaction between psychology and international relations. The theory and methodological approach Markwica uses are novel and significantly advance not only our understanding of their role in decision-making but also how to study them systematically. This book provides exceptionally useful resources on the interdisciplinary body of evidence on the role of emotions from different subfields, and it offers a systematic testing of its main claims. In so doing, *Emotional Choices* should be a required reading not only to anyone who is interested in understanding the logic of coercive diplomacy, but also to students seeking to explore how to make sense of the messy world of emotions and systematically apply those insights to understand the political behavior of leaders.

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Response from Robin Markwica

I am grateful for the opportunity to be in dialogue with Keren Yarhi-Milo, and I very much appreciate her generous and constructive comments.

It may help to begin with a short summary of the book's research design. I have used a most-similar method where the two cases share a number of commonalities but differ in their outcomes. Both the Cuban missile crisis and the Gulf conflict represent instances of U.S. coercive diplomacy

in which the targeted country was ruled by an authoritarian regime with a single leader wielding supreme power. Whereas the Cuba case amounts to a success in American coercive diplomacy, the Gulf conflict is deemed a failure because Saddam Hussein did not voluntarily withdraw his troops from Kuwait. I use the two case studies to evaluate emotional choice theory through a structured, focused comparison of the decision-making processes around a total of 16 major choices in detailed historical narratives. The evaluation suggests that the five key emotions generally shaped the leaders' behavior in the ways the theory's propositions predicted. This can give us the confidence to draw contingent generalizations to other instances of coercive diplomacy in which coercers are militarily stronger and target leaders enjoy supreme domestic authority.

Yarhi-Milo encourages me to bring into sharper relief the added value that emotional choice theory offers relative to the conventional explanations of the case studies. Due to space constraints, I will limit myself to one finding from each case: Most scholars contend that Khrushchev ultimately agreed to remove his missiles from Cuba because Kennedy had impressed on him—by words and deeds—his resolve to attack the island. As a result, they often advise policymakers today to send costly signals in crisis bargaining. Yet, my research shows that this view is inconsistent with Khrushchev's perception and feeling at the time. The available sources suggest that he was deeply afraid that the young president was about to lose control over his emotions or be overthrown by hardliners in the U.S. administration, bringing about a nuclear escalation. It is doubtful whether he would have contemplated a withdrawal of the missiles as readily if he had assumed that JFK was in full control of the situation and resolved to bend his (Khrushchev's) will. This would likely have revived his anger at Kennedy, which might have spurred him on to defy U.S. demands.

Most existing accounts of the Gulf conflict assert that Saddam Hussein rejected American coercive diplomacy in January 1991 because he believed the United States would not attack, because he thought the United States was seeking to overthrow him, or because he felt his people demanded resistance. Recently released Iraqi government files have helped me to disconfirm those claims. These documents demonstrate that Saddam Hussein's decision-making was guided by a complex set of emotions: He found it difficult to let go of Kuwait because its conquest served as a continuous source of pride for his narcissistic self. He also came to nourish hope that he would be able defeat the American troops with the support of foreign volunteer fighters. Moreover, he tried hard to down-regulate his fear of a U.S. attack because his identity placed a taboo on the experience of this emotion. Any fear that he may have felt came to be overlaid by an intense sense of humiliation and anger at what he saw as the Bush administration's degrading behavior. It was primarily the combination of these emotions and identity dynamics that shaped his desire to resist in the face of all adversity.

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