



## *A Sense of the Enemy: The High Stakes History of Reading Your Rival's Mind* by Zachary Shore.

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Just as Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August*<sup>1</sup> influenced President John Kennedy and helped defuse the Cuban Missile Crisis, so Zachary Shore's new book may help prevent some future leader from stumbling into war: "Understanding what truly drives others to act as they do is a necessary ingredient for resolving most conflicts where force is not desired. It is, in truth, an essential first step toward constructing a lasting peace" (189).

Shore (Naval Postgraduate School) focuses on what past national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Josef Stalin thought about the intentions of other nations' governments, often perceived as enemies or potential enemies. His afterword reveals the author's sources and methods, and his previous books<sup>2</sup> attest to his familiarity not only with historical works but also behavioral studies from other fields. The introduction to the book defines "strategic empathy" (a political theory term) as

the skill of stepping out of our own heads and into the minds of others. It is what allows us to pinpoint what truly drives and constrains the other side. Unlike stereotypes, which lump people into simplistic categories, strategic empathy distinguishes what is unique about individuals and their situation. To achieve strategic empathy, you must first identify the information that matters most.... Leaders are better served not by straining to perceive patterns of behavior but by focusing their attention on behaviors at pattern breaks. It is at these moments when statesmen typically reveal their underlying drivers—those goals that are most important to them. These episodes can also expose much about a leader's character, showing the kind of measures he is willing to employ. (2, 6)

Both drivers and constraints can "become apparent when an opponent behaves in a way that imposes genuine costs upon himself—costs with long-term implications. The enemy need not change his behavior at those times. He might continue on exactly as he had done before. The pattern break simply provides an opportunity for revealing what he values most. It acts as a spotlight, illuminating qualities that might otherwise be hidden" (8).

Chapters 1-7 provide twentieth-century case studies of how strategic empathy has or has not been employed. Two of its best practitioners were Gandhi (chap. 1) and Gustav Stresemann, the German foreign minister of the 1920s (chaps. 2-3). Shore concentrates on Gandhi's assessment of the 1919 British massacre of Amritsar, which killed some four hundred Indians, and the response of politicians and the general public in Britain. He identifies a pattern break, where the British reaction to the massacre revealed what they valued most and how they were likeliest to act in the future. "What makes the Amritsar pattern break so compelling is that Gandhi actually determined that the majority of British leaders were not, in fact, supportive of harsh repression" (15). He concludes that Gandhi's passive

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1. NY: Macmillan, 1962.

2. *Blunder: Why Smart People Make Bad Decisions* (NY: Bloomsbury USA, 2008); *Breeding Bin Ladens: America, Islam, and the Future of Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins U Pr, 2006); *What Hitler Knew: The Battle for Information in Nazi Foreign Policy* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2002).

resistance tactics, which eventually led to Indian independence, could effectively shame politicians and their constituencies into avoiding such brutality in the future.

Shore acknowledges that Gustav Stresemann was of “many minds,” but locates his main driver in a desire “to restore German greatness by any reasonable means” (67–68). The presence of victorious First World War powers like Britain and France on one side and a Soviet government wishing to topple his Weimar government on the other made such a restoration especially difficult. But a secret military agreement with the USSR enabled Germany to avoid some of the disarmament provisions imposed by western governments. A pattern-breaking moment occurred in December 1926, when an opposing German politician revealed details of the arrangement in the Reichstag.

The ensuing reaction of foreign governments disclosed their own main drivers as well as the strategic-empathy skills of Stresemann, who correctly foresaw that Britain and France would not react severely to details of the pact and that the Soviets wanted German military cooperation more than an overthrow of the Weimar government. Until his death in 1929, Stresemann’s ability to discern the main drivers of Western and Soviet foreign policies maximized the gains a defeated Germany could achieve. The Great Depression, however, then dealt all of the players a new hand.

Chapter 4, “Stalin the Simulator: The Problem of Projected Rationality,” demonstrates that, in contrast to Stresemann, Stalin’s “lack of both emotional empathy and strategic empathy dramatically affected his behavior” (75), specifically, his failure to anticipate Hitler’s intended invasion of the USSR in mid-1941. In Shore’s view, the Soviet leader foolishly believed Hitler would act reasonably (like himself) and avoid a two-front war. Skillful strategic-empathy leaders do not project their own personality onto others or presume others will act rationally.

Shore thinks Stalin’s main driver was “preserving his own power” and that ideology always came second to this (76). But Hitler was different: he was hell-bent on establishing Germany as the supreme world power and implementing his racist policies. Shore sees the “Night of the Long Knives” (29–30 June 1934) and the “Night of Broken Glass” (*Kristallnacht*, 9 Nov. 1938) as pattern breaks that tipped Hitler’s hand: they exposed, respectively, his stress on maintaining the support of the German military and the importance of his racial policies. “*Kristallnacht* revealed ... Hitler’s inability to restrain his anti-Jewish, anti-Bolshevist obsession” (94), even when it harmed his diplomatic goals. “Looking back, it seems all too clear that acquisition of living space and extermination of Slavs and Jews were paramount” (86), but Stalin could not grasp Hitler’s main motivations.

In chapter 5, Shore argues that Franklin D. Roosevelt differed sharply from Stalin in assessing Hitler’s main “drivers.” Unlike his Soviet counterpart, FDR did not imagine Hitler would think like himself in a given situation. Instead he relied on intelligence sources like, for example, his ambassador to Germany (1933–37), William Dodd, who sometimes communicated with him directly.

Chapters 6 and 7 mainly concern North Vietnam’s Lê Duẩn, the chief strategist during his country’s war with the United States: “When it came to recognizing the enemy’s constraints, [his] strategic empathy for America was strong. He saw that America was highly vulnerable in a protracted war, and he shaped Hanoi’s behavior in ways that would exploit those weaknesses” (109). He also realized the United States “had interests and commitments around the globe, and becoming overcommitted and bogged down in Vietnam would limit its ability to act elsewhere” (132).

Although Shore does not consider him as skilled as Stresemann, the Vietnamese strategist shrewdly concluded from the American response to the Tonkin Gulf incident (1964)—a pattern-break event—that the United States was willing to escalate its involvement in Vietnam. Lê Duẩn stated in 1965 that “the more troops the Americans send into our country, the more bases they build in our country, and the more they employ the most vicious and barbaric methods to bomb, shoot, and kill” (136), the more anti-American Vietnamese opposition will develop. He also believed that greater US involvement

would mean more American deaths and, consequently, increasing domestic opposition to the war. Shore suggests that Lê Duẩn cold-heartedly tolerated large numbers of Vietnamese deaths (ultimately almost three million) in order to heighten anti-Americanism and the chances for uniting Vietnam under communist control.

In chapter 8, Shore insists that past behaviors do not always determine future actions, especially if the context changes. Also, he writes, “relying on national characteristics ... for prediction is of minimal utility” (160). To illustrate these points, he criticizes in detail two reports that tried to predict enemy behavior: the 1907 British Crowe Memorandum regarding Germany, and US diplomat George Kennan’s 1946 “telegram” about dealing with the Soviet Union. Shore believes these documents heightened the tensions that triggered, respectively, World War I and the Cold War. He warns, too, that thinking an enemy country or leader always views compromise as weakness is dangerous and frustrates the search for any common ground. In the end, he reverts to one of his main points: that “Beneath the superficial level of leadership style, and deeper down than the realm of worldviews, lies a single or small set of core drivers—the motivations most vital to a leader” (163), and that pattern breaks best reveal these drivers.

In chapter 9, “The Continuity Conundrum: When the Past Misleads,” Shore contends that overreliance on massive amounts of data to aid in prediction has serious drawbacks. While granting that, for example, prognosticator Nate Silver, “America’s election guru,” often uses big data, he notes that Silver has warned<sup>3</sup> that “we often go astray when we focus on the facts and figures that scarcely matter” (168). In a section entitled “Yoda in the Pentagon,” however, he praises the decades-long work of Andrew Marshall, director of the Office of Net Assessment (ONA), who had an impressive knack for distinguishing facts that mattered from those that did not: “ONA’s ability to think like the enemy, to step out of the American mindset and into another’s, represented true value” (179).

Although his book is highly analytical, Shore adds color and fascinating detail to the portrayals of his main characters: “Squat and stocky, a lover of good food and wine, Stresemann never saw fit to exercise. He consumed his work like his meals, spending long hours and late nights at his desk. There was an intensity to his manner, whether opining on high literature or dissecting political alignments” (25). A contemporary said of the German foreign minister that “The moment he sat down opposite a man, he was no longer confined within his own personality, he felt himself into the other man’s mind and feelings with ... amazing accuracy” (27). Shore writes that Soviet Foreign Minister Georgi Chicherin, “Conversant in English, French, German, Italian, Serbian, and Polish ... could dictate cables in multiple languages simultaneously” (28). He does sometimes, however, provide more detail than needed regarding a leader’s background and domestic political maneuvering. His discussion of Lê Duẩn in chapter 6 is a case in point.

As is almost inevitable in any work interpreting foreign leaders’ actions and intentions, Shore sometimes makes ill-advised generalizations. For instance, in writing that “by 1926, the Soviet pattern of putting ideology first in foreign affairs had reversed” (71), he underestimates the pragmatism of Soviet foreign policy in the early 1920s, when obtaining trade, recognition, and credits, was its critical goal. And, too, in stressing the significance of “pattern breaks,” he sometimes exaggerates the meaning of a particular occasion to make his point. It did not take Mikhail Gorbachev’s response to Chernobyl in 1986, which Shore identifies as a pattern break, to prove “he was a truly different leader from those who had preceded him” (7). On a more fundamental, semantic level, one wishes Shore had more pre-

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<sup>3</sup> In *The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail—But Some Don't* (NY: Penguin, 2012).

cisely discriminated the “strategic empathy” so crucial to his main line of argument from other types of empathy.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these caveats, *A Sense of the Enemy* will reward all readers concerned with foreign-policy strategy, be they scholars, intelligence analysts, or policymakers.<sup>5</sup>

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4. An earlier attempt to make such a distinction, not cited by Shore, is Stanley A. Renshon and Deborah Welch Larson, eds., *Good Judgment in Foreign Policy: Theory and Application* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002) 37–41.

5. The book is already exerting an influence. In their excellent *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, rev. ed. (Washington: Brookings Inst Pr, 2015) 5, Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy write that Shore’s method of analysis “is the essence of our approach in this book.” See further, Shore’s article “Conflicted Putin: Is This a Pattern-Breaking Moment?” *Psychology Today* (10 Feb. 2015) – [www.miwsr.com/rd/1606.htm](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1606.htm).