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978-1-107-11385-5 - Emotions in International Politics: Beyond Mainstream  
International Relations

Edited by Yohan Ariffin, Jean-Marc Coicaud and Vesselin Popovski

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## EMOTIONS IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

In recent years, social scientists have increasingly recognized the interconnectedness of thought and emotions. Nowhere is the role of passions more evident than international politics, where pride, anger, guilt, fear, empathy, and other feelings are routinely on display. But in the absence of an overarching theory of emotions, how can we understand their role at the international level?

*Emotions in International Politics* fills the need for theoretical tools in the new and rapidly growing subfield of international relations. Eminent scholars from a range of disciplines consider how emotions can be investigated from an international perspective involving collective players, drawing evidence from such emotionally fraught events as the Rwandan genocide, World War II, the 9/11 attacks, and the Iranian nuclear standoff. The pathbreaking research collected in this volume will be a valuable theoretical guide to understanding conflict and cooperation in international relations.

Yohan Ariffin is senior lecturer at the Institut d'Etudes politiques, historiques et internationales of the University of Lausanne. His work addresses the role of normative and affective ideas in international relations. He has held research fellowships at the London School of Economics, the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the Institut d'Etudes politiques, Paris.

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# Emotions in International Politics

BEYOND MAINSTREAM INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Edited By

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## Foreword

This book is an important challenge and corrective to rationalist approaches that assume that politics is a rational activity or can be best described and predicted by rational models. This assumption flies in the face of several millennia of evidence to the contrary. Rationalist approaches further assume that reason is some objective process independent of the motives of actors. However, it can readily be shown that reason, especially when it applies to risk, generates different logics depending on whether actors are motivated by fear, interest or honor.<sup>1</sup> Strangest of all is the application of rationalist models to foreign policy, a subject in which emotions and passions are routinely on display and often the driving forces for leaders, elites and peoples.

All mammals display emotions, but only humans are thought to have sophisticated cognitive capabilities. Many philosophers have valued reason over emotions and considered the former a means of taming the latter and enabling us to rise above animals in our behavior and accomplishments. For Aquinas, most emotions were related to capital sins. In his 1649 *Passions de l'Âme* [Passions of the Soul], Descartes equated emotions with “uproar,” “social unrest,” vehemence and rowdiness. For Kant, they were illnesses of the mind (*Krankheiten des Gemüts*), although he touted the therapeutic value of the emotions associated with the sublime. Social science is steeped in this tradition.

Psychologists associate reason with complex cognitive processes that entail logical inference. Political scientists frame reason in terms of means-ends relationships. They have long considered emotional arousal damaging to both inference and goal seeking. Only recently, and thanks in part to neuroscience, have a minority within both disciplines begun to consider the beneficial consequences of emotions for

<sup>1</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chs. 3 and 10.

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social and political behavior.<sup>2</sup> The present book is among the first studies to explore this relationship in the domain of international relations.<sup>3</sup>

International relations scholars have borrowed extensively from cognitive psychology. They use cognitive biases, heuristics and prospect theory to study foreign policy decision making.<sup>4</sup> Some – myself included – have used motivational models of decision making, drawing on Irving Janis and Leon Mann.<sup>5</sup> Psychobiography, rooted in Freudian concepts, has illuminated the careers and policy decisions of such well-known figures as Martin Luther, Mahatma Gandhi, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon.<sup>6</sup> Again, with few exceptions, these scholars turn to emotions to explain deviance from what they consider rational behavior and generally attribute bad outcomes to emotional arousal or the personality structure responsible for it.<sup>7</sup>

Research in neuroscience indicates that emotions are involved in all stages of decision making, and generally in a positive way. They help us to decide what information deserves our attention and how it should be evaluated and acted upon. Reason and affect are so closely entwined in formulating goals and decisions that it is almost impossible to separate them. People who succeed in doing so do not become highly rational and effective actors, but pathological ones. Instrumental reason divorced from emotional commitments reinforces people's conceptions of themselves as autonomous and egoistic. It leads them to act in selfish, if sometimes efficient, ways and to frame relationships with others in purely strategic ways. They treat others as means, not ends in themselves, to use Kant's famous distinction. In these circumstances, the pursuit of self-interest is likely to intensify conflict and undermine or prevent the emergence of communities that enable actors to advance

<sup>2</sup> An important exception is George Marcus, W. Russell Neuman and Michael Mackuen, *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Especially noteworthy is Annette Freyberg Inan and Daniel Jacobi, eds., "Forum on Human Nature and International Relations," forthcoming in *International Studies Review*.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Jack L. Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Rose McDermott, ed., Special Issue of *Political Psychology* on prospect theory, and *Risk-Taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory to American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Nonviolence* (New York: Norton, 1969); Arnold A. Rogow and James Forrestal, *A Study of Personality, Politics, and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1963); Alexander L. George and Juliette George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (New York: Dover Publications, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> Important exceptions are discussed in Rose McDermott, "The Feeling of Rationality: The Meaning of Neuroscientific Advances for Political Science," *Perspectives in Politics* 2 (December 2004), pp. 691–706.

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their interests and satisfy their spirit more effectively by means of cooperative behavior. Modern social science, which welcomes, even propagandizes, the conception of human beings as autonomous, rational actors is thus part of the problem, not a solution to it.

Such a framing appeals to many scholars as scientific and helpful in promoting peace and cooperation. But rationalist models cannot explain these phenomena. The most that realist, liberal institutionalist, social capital and “thin” constructivist theories and models can do is identify conditions likely to facilitate cooperation (e.g., coordination, leadership, institutions, trust), in situations where actors are already predisposed to cooperate. They tell us nothing about how this commitment comes about or how it can be encouraged in an otherwise hostile environment. The more interesting and fundamental question, and one addressed by several chapters in this book, is accounting for an underlying propensity and willingness to cooperate with a given set of actors. In its absence, order is impossible, and cooperation, if possible at all, is unlikely to extend beyond the most obvious, important and self-enforcing issues.<sup>8</sup>

Conflict and war also require analysis of the ways in which reason and affect interact. Elsewhere, I explore the role of anger arising from sleights to one’s standing as an important cause of war. Several chapters in this volume also explore the role of emotional arousal in war and terrorism.

There is much to be done in elaborating the relationship between reason and affect, and emotions and passions, at the individual, group, national and international levels. The essays in this volume offer insight into these questions and will prove a valuable inspiration and resource for other like-minded scholars.

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<sup>8</sup> Martha Finnemore and Stephen Toope, “Alternatives to ‘Legalization’: Richer Views of Law and Politics,” *International Organization* 55, no. 3 (2001), pp. 743–758.

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