

# The Academy of Political Science

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## POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

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Volume 122 · Number 2 · Summer 2007

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*Political Science Quarterly*  
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members of his administration debated their positions (p. 429). Moreover, despite Powell's qualifications as the architect of the 1991 Gulf War and a former National Security Advisor and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, there also was never a point at which he was asked for his considered views on the matter. And for all of his skepticism about military intervention, Powell was called upon to make the case before the Security Council that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. He did so with impressive fluency, drawing on the most persuasive intelligence then available, but no such weapons have ever been found.

This is a fascinating and instructive work, but it must be mined by the reader to yield some of its most interesting implications. It would have profited from a less exclusive focus on individual events and greater attention to their larger context. It also would have been helpful if DeYoung had quoted more extensively from her interviews with Powell. For example, in a key concluding passage on Powell's code of organizational loyalty and its implications for his failure to advance his views more effectively, it is not clear whether DeYoung is paraphrasing assertions Powell made to her or presenting her own views of his seeming convictions (p. 516). Finally, the book might well have concluded with a sustained discussion of the relationship between Powell the man and his performance in the Bush administration. A tantalizing clue is provided in a 1960 military performance evaluation DeYoung unearthed on the 23-year-old Lieutenant Colin Powell: "He expresses his opinions quietly and convincingly. If his recommendation is not accepted, then he cheerfully and promptly executes the decision" (p. 37).

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**Why Leaders Choose War: The Psychology of Prevention** by Jonathan Renshon. Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 2006. 240 pp. \$49.95.

Will fear of North Korean or Iranian nuclear weapons development result in preventive or preemptive military strikes by the United States or others? If preventive war is based on a perception that an adversary cannot be deterred, will the "war on terror" result in an increasing number of preventive actions by more countries? Or have the costs of the Iraq war dampened optimism about their efficacy? Jonathan Renshon's timely and important analysis sheds light on these questions by focusing on the beliefs and psychology of leaders. He refutes realist accounts of decision making based on objective assessments of relative military capability alone, and shows how leaders particularly matter in explaining decisions regarding preventive action or war, since the information on which such decisions are based—information about an adversary's potential actions in the future—is by nature limited and ambiguous.

To delineate the factors that influence decisions about preventive war, Renshon compares three cases in which leaders used force in a preventive

fashion—British action in the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, Israel’s preventive strike against the Osiraq nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981, and George W. Bush’s preventive war in Iraq—with two cases in which leaders decided against such action—Harry Truman’s and Dwight Eisenhower’s decisions against striking Soviet nuclear capabilities, and India’s and Pakistan’s determinations to refrain from destroying one another’s developing nuclear capabilities. He argues persuasively that the factors that contribute to a decision to initiate preventive action are: a perception of declining power relative to an adversary; an inherent bad-faith image of the adversary; a belief that war is inevitable; a belief that there is only a short “window” in which to act; a situation that is believed to favor the offensive; and “black-and-white thinking.”

Renshon’s analysis is sure to capture the attention of policymakers, scholars, and students alike (including my own undergraduate honors students, among whom the book inspired lively debate), and makes a strong contribution to security studies and to political psychology. Although the book is strong conceptually, more original evidence (interviews or archival research) could have been brought to bear to show that individual leaders played a determining role in decisions against preventive action and that a leader’s personality traits become evident over a long period of time or in a cross-section of issue areas, rather than in just one particular decision. Also, apparent inconsistencies in the description of a trait need to be explained. For instance, Renshon argues that President George W. Bush thinks in black and white terms but is cognitively flexible (pp. 115–117, 122). Renshon commendably acknowledges the complexity of politics and does not force a parsimonious framework onto a diverse set of cases. Nevertheless, he shies away from arguing that any variable, or combination of variables, is necessary or sufficient to explain a decision for or against preventive action (when traits such as the degree of black-and-white thinking and the perceived strength and permanence of the bad-faith image seemed to separate out cases in which action was initiated as opposed to cases in which a leader opted against preventive action).

I strongly and wholeheartedly recommend *Why Leaders Choose War: The Psychology of Prevention*, as it fosters critical thought and contributes to theory building by placing leaders front and center in explaining why countries make the consequential decisions to advocate or to oppose preventive war or preventive strikes. An engaging read for a variety of different audiences.

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**Before the Next Attack: Preserving Civil Liberties in an Age of Terrorism** by Bruce Ackerman. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2006. Cloth, \$26.00; paper, \$17.00.

Law professor Bruce Ackerman proposes that in the near future, we adopt two framework statutes to govern congressional action after the next devas-