

Stephen Holmes, The Matador's Cape: America's Reckless Response to Terror. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, Pp. x, 267, \$30.)

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Holmes casts Osama bin Laden as the matador, and America as the clumsy, enraged bull. According to Holmes, the United States responded in a "prerational" way to 9/11, the matador's swirling cape, by embarking on the ill-conceived and disastrous invasion of Iraq. This error was the result of a cognitive bias—a psychological tendency of an injured person (or government or state) to retaliate against an identifiable person (or government or state) not responsible for the injury, using the most convenient tools at hand, when the actual source of injury is diffuse, complex, and not susceptible to easy remedies.

The book contains many provocative and interesting arguments, and its energy and flair carry the reader along, but, cobbled together from book reviews and disparate essays, it lacks focus. Part I argues that "religious extremism" did not cause 9/11 but that the perpetrators had complex motives and purposes. Part II argues that the Bush administration has overrelied on military force because "capabilities create intentions" (p. 73) and America's greatest capability is its military reach; that the occupation failed in part because of Rumsfeld's preference for speed over mass, and in part because Cheney and Rumsfeld did not think that anarchy in Iraq would harm American interests; and that America invaded Iraq in the first place for numerous reasons, many of them inconsistent—including the desire to solace traumatized American voters, to increase the power of the executive branch, to avenge the attempted assassination of George H.W. Bush, to destroy a threat to Israel, to protect access to oil, and so on (p. 126). Part III contains a sparkling review of Samuel Huntington's book on the Clash of Civilizations; reviews the debates between liberals about the merits of humanitarian military intervention; and criticizes the argument that the U.S. should advance democracy by force in places like Iraq. Part IV argues that the Bush administration's violation of civil liberties is not as serious as its obsession with secrecy; that the Bush administration's unilateralism or opportunistic multilateralism is not as serious as its excessive reliance on the military; that although "in some rare cases, harsh interrogation may actually be necessary" (p. 257), the Bush administration has been excessively dismissive toward the "rule of law"; and that John Yoo is wrong to argue that the president has the power to go to war without congressional authorization. The Conclusion reverts to a recurrent theme, namely, that the Bush people (Cheney and Rumsfeld above all others) went to war in Iraq because a tangible enemy, a nation state, is easier, psychologically and politically, to address than an intangible enemy; and that capabilities (the military) drive intentions. Instead, the U.S. government should have focused on nuclear nonproliferation, so as to deprive terrorists of their most destructive weapons.

It gradually becomes clear to the reader who is led by the subtitle to expect an overall evaluation of the American war-on-terror strategy that Holmes really has only one target in mind: the war in Iraq. He barely mentions the military response to Afghanistan, but appears to approve of it. He barely mentions, or mentions not at all, the criminal prosecutions of terrorists; electronic interception;

money-tracing; intelligence sharing with foreign governments; and the U.S. government's diplomatic efforts to coordinate the response to international terrorism.

Holmes does repeat the familiar complaint that the Bush administration has violated the "rule of law" but he understands that all "rule of law" constraints involve tradeoffs, and he ends up going easy on the Bush administration for many civil liberties violations. But because he does not describe the policies in any detail, or their consequences, their costs or their justifications, the reader has no reason to accept either the criticisms or Holmes's claim that Bush has been no worse than his wartime predecessors. Holmes thinks that the Bush administration has acted with excessive secrecy but he does not provide an empirical account to back up this complaint, and surely he understands that publicity has costs as well as benefits, and so he cannot fall back on an analytic or universalistic claim that secrecy is always bad.

An especially strange omission in Holmes' account is Congress. He blames Iraq on the administration's penchant for secrecy and its belief in virtually unlimited executive power during emergencies. But the Iraq invasion was debated publicly for months; the administration laid out its case, badly but publicly; and, crucially, it received enthusiastic congressional authorization. Thus, the chapter criticizing John Yoo's idiosyncratic argument that the framers gave the executive the power to start a war without congressional consent is off the point. The administration did not rely on this argument, and did not need to, because Congress gave it what it wanted. Indeed, Holmes never mentions the Patriot Act and its renewal, the Detainee Treatment Act, the Military Commissions Act, the post 9/11 Authorization to Use Force, and the bureaucratic reorganization that produced the Department of Homeland Security.

The most distinctive claim of the book is that the invasion of Iraq was a "prerational" response to 9/11, that it reflected a "cognitive bias" that causes people with hammers to treat all problems as nails. The hammer here is military force. But Holmes admits that there were many causes for the Iraq invasion, even that 9/11 was just a pretext for an invasion sought for other reasons, in which case the invasion could not possibly have been a response to 9/11, let alone a response driven by a cognitive bias. And if the hammer-nail bias really interfered with decisionmaking, then how was the Bush administration able to put so much effort into domestic and international law enforcement? Curiously, the cognitive-bias theory absolves the Bush people of much of their culpability. If they were gripped by prerational biases, then their response was not fully within their conscious control. Presumably, the never-mentioned members of Congress shared the same biases, as did the public, and the invasion's many supporters among the pundit class. All of this suggests skepticism about Holmes' claim that a President Gore would have avoided Bush's errors. He, too, would have been armed with the hammer of American military might, and would have been looking for nails. It might be true that outrage about 9/11 made Americans more willing to lash out at imagined enemies—this claim does have resonance and may explain the administration's efforts to link 9/11 and Iraq—but this seems more like a constraint on elected officials than a basis for condemning them, a problem for Gore even if an opportunity for Bush. Probably more important, the cheap, astounding victory (as it then seemed) in Afghanistan, the graveyard of empires, gave the Bush administration a sense of military invincibility that threw it off course.

The tone of the book is of continuous indignation, even rage, at the Bush administration, but Holmes is too intellectually honest to state as fact conjectures that he cannot prove; these concededly speculative conjectures plus his final judgment that the Bush officials were gripped by a prerational bias hardly justify the overheated rhetoric. His obsessive focus on Cheney, Rumsfeld, and (to a lesser degree) Bush illustrates well his claim that there is a psychological tendency to blame identifiable persons for complex problems, and to ignore the intangibles—such as how a vast, creaking bureaucracy, electoral politics, and the fog of international relations, might prevent well-meaning officials from taking optimal actions. Holmes is raging at human fallibility.

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