

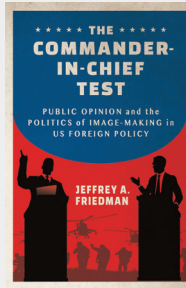
The Commander-In-Chief Test: Public Opinion and the Politics of Image-Making in U.S. Foreign Policy

By Jeffrey A. Friedman

Cornell University Press, 2023, 234 pages, \$39.95, ISBN: 9781501772924

Reviewed by Fatma Rana Korgan, Marmara University

In the book, *The Commander in Chief Test: Public Opinion and the Politics of Image-Making in U.S. Foreign Policy*, Jeffrey A. Friedman presents an alternative understanding of the common ideas around foreign decision-making and the policy application process. The alternative challenge the understanding that each issue has somewhat of an impact on the processes of presidential policy and that there is not a sizable pattern. He points out the problematic correlation between personal image-making and foreign policy positions. The book does not necessarily provide a formula for success in foreign policy making and the popularity of a leader but rather makes the patterns visible of what, at times, can be an unpredictable relationship.



the book's points from its direction but provides the reader with some more added insight. Friedman also recognizes the possible errors in the data that the book provides, which nevertheless satisfies the reader with enough tangible proof.

By questioning the ideals of democracy in decision-making, which are accepted collectively on a surface level, Friedman argues that U.S. foreign policy decisions are disconnected from public opinion, with a prevalence that cannot be ignored. This brings up the question of then what is the driving force when it comes to foreign policy? and here 'image making' comes into play (p. 15). The concept of image-making is covered widely throughout the chapters, and it is explained as what leaders and their people have in mind while making and implementing foreign policies. It is worth noting that Friedman does not convey this idea in an absolutist manner or without examining the complexities around it.

The common notions of issue voting and the role of democracy in foreign policymaking are the dominating ideas for a highly anticipated situation, such as an election or a war. Friedman dissects the foreign decision-making process from an alternative point of view to what the discourse is used to and presents some new explanatory concepts. He does this in a way that combines both quantitative and qualitative data mostly from examples of the past seven decades. The cases examined, prove the points that the book is trying to make most of the time, and the examples given correspond to its claims. He clarifies the nuances in a way that does not derive

Detached from democratic ideals, seemingly unpopular stances on foreign policy issues become the very thing that makes a leader competent in the eyes of the public. Competence in the context of the book encompasses two main virtues: strength and good judgment. According to Friedman's argument, with decisive issues like a war or a political conflict, a leader can personalize a given for-

eign policy matter and use it while crafting his or her image. This leads to the cultivation of public opinion solely through persuasion without delving too much into the actual contents of the given foreign policy.

The idea of image making shaping foreign policy relies on some historically consistent feedback on the part of public opinion. The book's theory reflects that the size of a leader's character is much more common among the public than comprehending the actual substance of a complex foreign policy issue. The book shows that voters value competence in a leader. This competent leader in question then must reassure safety and the national interest, stand up to challenges, and possess good judgment. Friedman presents us with two different styles of displaying competence. First, the hawk is more prone to military intervention and unilateralism. The text provides examples of the Vietnam War, Iraqi intervention, and increase in military spending during the Kennedy Administration in chapters 4 through 6 to prove why hawkishness is a more consistent strategy when it comes to demonstrating a competent image. The alternative to that is the dove, which is associated with good judgment. Since the behavior and decisions, a dovish leader makes are more nuanced and harder to assess, they rarely end in success. However, the book gives us some examples of displaying good judgment that resulted in favor of a leader opposite a firm hawk, like the Johnson campaign in 1964 against presidential candidate Senator Goldwater.

The theme of making use of an unpopular foreign policy stance is classified as the concept of "issue image trade-off" (p. 41) in the book, and it becomes a very useful theme throughout chapters to fall back on in places where explaining an unpopular foreign policy decision is needed. In a broader sense, it clari-

fies why the U.S. ends up in wars seemingly nobody really wants. However, Friedman does not tie all his findings on hawkish policies, to this mostly undemocratic way of policymaking, and realizes the complex issue that is U.S. foreign policymaking. For example, the historical and sociological environment in which the 2004 election took place is acknowledged, while the goal of the book is not to examine these factors in detail.

Evaluability bias is another factor in which voters tend to assign less value to complex matters of foreign policy. If one lacks the ability to evaluate an attribute, the voters tend to assign less value to it. This dynamic leads to voters making judgments that may not reflect their true preferences. Resting against the data he touches upon throughout the book, Friedman explains why such unpopular policies, like increasing military spending, become the very thing that creates a strong image for a leader.

The evidence exhibited in the book to support the arguments includes electoral and foreign policy opinion polls and insights into past presidential campaigns. The insider perspectives on campaign planning processes especially show the book readers how Friedman's concepts play out in reality, rather than trying to read behind the lines of statistics.

The book's concepts can be applied to countries other than sufficient to explain the different circumstances of different regions. Friedman gives the Brexit example near the end of his conclusions, yet it is necessary to conduct new research while examining new forms of states and societies. At the same time, the book does not make such claims.

The not-so-straightforward dynamics of U.S. foreign policy-making and the role strong

leadership image plays in this equation bring up whole new sets of questions worth investigating, as Friedman points out. One cannot help but apply these concepts to the current political environment and make some illuminating inferences. The book is undoubtedly a great source for anyone curious about the relationship between foreign policy and personal images of leaders. Its question-driven narrative, while at times can feel repetitive, also makes sure that anyone without prior knowledge of the subject can still get the points that Friedman is making. Without relying merely on party brands and issue ownership, which leave out how the issue can

build the image, the concept of image-making is provided with a broader ground with this fresh set of themes combined in the book. While the book explains the subjects mentioned above thoroughly, it does not provide in depth explanations of these case studies as there are many historical factors effecting the outcome. It should be noted that Friedman does not claim that the information presented captures all the contributors of the cases examined. *The Commander in Chief Test: Public Opinion and the Politics of Image-Making in U.S. Foreign Policy*, can be a supporting addition for those who are interested in foreign policy issues.

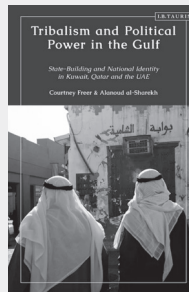
Tribalism and Political Power in the Gulf: State Building and National Identity in Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE

By Alanoud al-Sharekh and Courtney Freer

London: I. B. Tauris, 2021, 224 pages, \$26.95, ISBN: 9780755644896

Reviewed by Dilruba Zeynep Kalin AlAbab, Qatar University

Tribalism, bedouinism, and tribal politics are constantly a topic of interest in Gulf Studies. The persistence of publications revolving around the relationship between tribes and the state proves that such notions remain relevant and valid in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) political context. In their book, *Tribalism and Political Power in the Gulf: State Building and National Identity in Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE*, Courtney Freer and Alanoud al-Sharekh deal with tribes as modern and political units and explore how such terms are used, pointing to different meanings attached depending on the context. Therefore, they successfully highlight the dynamic and changing nature of the tribe, along



with tribal values and customs, as adjusting and evolving elements in a political and social environment rather than having a single, stable definition. They selected Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE —GCC's 'super-rentier states'— as their case studies for a comparative approach, believing them to be the best exam-

ples of rentier state theory in the Gulf, given their similar circumstances.

The book has eight chapters, including an introductory and a conclusive chapter. The second chapter discusses the relationship between the *badu*, a term used to describe tribal populations but has become more a mark of identity, and the ruling families from a histori-