

grates them skillfully into a larger conception of cognitive decision making, the overall effect is still incomplete. Of the more recent literature, Stein's summary of cognitive research in *Rational Decision-Making: Israel's Security Choices* is perhaps most useful.¹⁰⁴ None of the contemporary political science literature, however, fully utilizes current findings from cognitive psychology. A survey of the cognitive-psychology literature would illustrate the dangers of assuming that misperception and other varieties of misunderstanding can easily be corrected.¹⁰⁵

The point in looking at various sorts of cognitive processes is to suggest that misperception (considered broadly) is a complex phenomenon that is not likely to be dealt with easily or well by unsophisticated, simple-minded and frequently ill-informed rationalistic approaches such as those seen in many discussions of Confidence-Building. The cognitive-psychology literature dealing with "judgement," for instance, provides some useful illustrations of how people make errors when they evaluate information. These sorts of errors are typical of the failures that constitute many aspects of misperception and misunderstanding. People normally use special sets of rules and structures (such as judgemental and inferential "heuristics" – simplifying problem-solving techniques – and "knowledge structures") to interpret complex information. Although these cognitive "devices" generally function quite well in simplifying the complexities of modern life, they

sometimes prove to be inappropriate. Nisbett and Ross have collected a number of illustrations. They argue that people frequently interpret events according to simple initial perceptions; frequently fail to grasp the causal relationships ("co-variation") between events; seriously over-estimate the role of dispositions as causes of behaviour; discount the importance of "base-rate data" in performing probabilistic estimates; and persevere in judgements regardless of overwhelming evidence indicating that they are wrong.¹⁰⁶

A list of information processing *biases* should serve to illustrate how important cognitive processes are to understanding how we err interpreting information in a complex, unstructured environment. Robin Hogarth¹⁰⁷ has compiled an excellent summary of biases which include: *availability* (an acquisition error that distorts the recollection or understanding of the frequency with which events occur); *selective perception* ("people structure problems on the basis of their own experience," "people seek informa-



¹⁰³ Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

¹⁰⁴ Stein and Tanter, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-47.

¹⁰⁵ Probably the most useful introduction to this literature is Morton Hunt, *The Universe Within: A New Science Explores the Human Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982). A very well regarded and highly recommended text is Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky (eds.), *Judgement Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Another very important book is Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgement* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1980). Two additional works of central interest are: Thomas S. Walsten (ed.) *Cognitive Processes in Choice and Decision Behavior* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980) and Robin M. Hogarth, *Judgement and Choice: The Psychology of Decision* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1980).

¹⁰⁶ See Mort La Brecque, "On Making Sounder Judgements," *Psychology Today*, June 1980, for a summary of the Nisbett and Ross findings.

¹⁰⁷ *Judgement and Choice: The Psychology of Decision*, pp. 165-179.

