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# Roundtable on Dr. Shore's Book, A Sense of the Enemy

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## Rountable on Dr. Shore's Book, A Sense of the Enemy

November 10, 2016

On September 15, 2016, the Smith Richardson Foundation hosted a roundtable discussion of Dr. Zachary Shore's book, *A Sense of the Enemy: The High-Stakes History of Reading Your Rival's Mind*. Leading foreign policy experts from the intelligence community, the Defense Department, think tanks, and universities met at the Willard Hotel's Grand Suite to consider ways in which nations can better understand their adversaries. Professor Shore provided the keynote address, outlining his book's thesis. The Director of the National Intelligence Council then offered commentary on the book. The group next delved deeply into the challenges and benefits of the book's concept of pattern-break analysis. According to General H. R. McMaster, who reviewed the book in *Survival*, "This is an important book. Shore's study and conclusions will prove helpful to analysts and leaders struggling to identify which information is important and which information is distracting. It makes a compelling case for developing the skill of strategic empathy and, in particular, the ability to interpret breaks in previous patterns of an adversary's behaviour."

The ability to read people is always useful, but it is absolutely crucial in foreign affairs when lives are at stake. To do it well requires "strategic empathy" – the power to discern someone's underlying drivers and constraints. As a historian of international conflict, Zachary Shore wanted to know where strategic empathy comes from. When leaders read others well, was it luck? Or did they have a method? In *A Sense of the Enemy*, Shore found that leaders understood their enemies best not by studying a pattern of past behavior, but by scrutinizing behavior during what he calls "pattern breaks." Pattern breaks are those moments when normal routines are upended and standard operating procedures are completely overturned. Pattern breaking moments could be any dramatic events: a nuclear disaster, a massacre, or even a peaceful revolution. How leaders acted at these moments revealed more about their underlying drivers than did their long pattern of past behavior. Meaningful pattern breaks happen more often than we might expect.

To read an excerpt from *A Sense of the Enemy*, [click here](#).

