



# ***WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND THE CRUCIBLE OF STRATEGIC CULTURE:***

**Kerry M. Kartchner**

Prepared for:

Defense Threat Reduction Agency  
Advanced Systems and Concepts Office

Comparative Strategic Cultures Curriculum  
Contract No: DTRA01-03-D-0017, Technical Instruction 18-06-02

This report represents the views of its author, not necessarily those of SAIC, its sponsors, or any  
United States Government Agency

31 October 2006





# Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Crucible of Strategic Culture

Kerry M. Kartchner

*It is more important to understand motivation, intent, method, and culture than to have a few more meters of precision, knots of speed, or bits of bandwidth.<sup>1</sup>*

-- Major General Robert H. Scales, Jr., U.S. Army (ret.)

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of “strategic culture” is undergoing a revival because it has become essential to better understand the reasons, incentives, and rationales for acquiring, proliferating, and employing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by diverse actors under circumstances that differ significantly from those for which previous analytical constructs now seem inadequate or irrelevant. If the United States and its allies are to assure prospective friends and partners in the common battle against WMD proliferation that their respective guarantees of extended security are credible, if they are to effectively dissuade potential proliferators from engaging in counter-productive acquisition of WMD, and if they are to deter and, if necessary, defeat those actors who rebuff these assurances and dissuasions, they need to understand the strategic cultural context for these objectives.

The purpose of this essay is to lay out a framework for an analytic approach to the intersection of WMD and strategic culture, and to set forth some initial hypotheses. That is, to examine the role of strategic culture in the thinking, decision-making, and behavior of states (and non-state actors) as they contemplate pursuing, possessing, or employing this class of weapons. But first, it is necessary to define “strategic culture” for the purposes of this project, and then to define “weapons of mass destruction” and those decisions regarding weapons of mass destruction we are most concerned with.

For the purposes of this essay, and the overall project, “strategic culture” is defined as “shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security

---

<sup>1</sup> Major General Robert H. Scales, Jr., “Culture-Centric Warfare,” *Proceedings*, September 2004.

objectives.” This definition draws on a rich literature in the application of culture to the study of foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> It further narrows this field, however, to the study of “strategic culture,” or those cultural tendencies “which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives” as noted in the definition above.

Strategic culture can manifest itself on many different levels, from the tribal or group level, to the organizational level, the national level, even to the civilizational level. Given the focus of this essay on issues related to weapons of mass destruction, the emphasis will be primarily on the national level. This is not to discount, however, the important insights and explanations that can be found through examining other levels; it is only to set out boundaries for this particular assessment.<sup>3</sup>

The term “WMD” has come to mean many different things, and is used in a number of different ways. However, for the purposes of this project, and as defined in the “Weapons of Mass Destruction Primer” prepared for this project by Paul Bernstein, weapons of mass destruction are defined as “nuclear chemical, biological and radiological weapons, and their associated means of delivery, primarily but not limited to ballistic missiles.”<sup>4</sup>

This essay is a preliminary assessment of the subject of how decisions, actions, behavior, and policies related to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) may be affected or influenced by a nation’s or group’s strategic culture. It is necessarily preliminary because a more complete analysis must be based on a more comprehensive database of case studies, and because the full range of factors that determine a nation’s or a non-state-actor’s decisions regarding WMD is beyond the scope of this project (but may usefully be explored in follow-on studies). In the context of the question of how strategic culture impacts on WMD decisions, then, we are interested in identifying shared beliefs and assumptions regarding the acquisition of WMD, its proliferation, its use, and international WMD norm compliance.

---

<sup>2</sup> This literature is most concisely compiled and succinctly examined in Valerie M. Hudson, ed. *Culture and Foreign Policy*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1997). See also the compilation of essays in a special edition of the journal *Political Psychology* by Valerie M. Hudson and Martin W. Simpson III, “Special Section on Culture and Foreign Policy,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1999): 667-801.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent exploration of U.S. strategic culture and nuclear weapons with an explicit focus on the organizational level, see Lynn Eden, *Whole World on Fire: Organizations, Knowledge, & Nuclear Weapons Devastation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> In his primer on WMD, Paul Bernstein further refers to W. Seth Carus, *Defining “Weapons of Mass Destruction,”* National Defense University Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction Occasional Paper 4, January 2006.

When a nation state or a group considers what its actions and policies are going to be regarding weapons of mass destruction, it faces a range of choices. It can renounce pursuing the acquisition of WMD, and submit to international standards and regimes of non-proliferation. Or, it can choose to pursue acquiring the technology to lay the basis for a future decision to develop nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons without actually proceeding to the manufacture of such weapons, but only to give it the option of doing so if circumstances change in the future. For the purpose of setting forth a framework for assessing the possible impact of strategic culture on these types of decisions, there are four key “decision matrices”<sup>5</sup> that this project is concerned with exploring:

1. *Strategic culture and compliance or noncompliance with international non-proliferation regimes and norms* – does strategic culture strengthen or undermine international or domestic norm-adherence policies and behavior?
2. *Strategic culture and the acquisition of WMD* – does strategic culture inform or determine incentives for acquiring WMD?
3. *Strategic culture and the proliferation of WMD* – does strategic culture promote or inhibit tendencies to proliferate WMD?
4. *Strategic culture and the use of WMD* – does strategic culture influence decisions to use WMD, either in the sense of wielding WMD for deterrence and coercive purposes, or in the sense of actually conducting attacks with WMD?

It is now widely accepted that understanding the regional and cultural context for U.S. foreign and defense policy, especially with respect to combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and preventing their use against the United States or its allies and friends abroad, is required to effectively promote U.S. nonproliferation objectives. This is in part due to the transition from a world dominated by a simple bipolar conflict with clear ideological underpinnings and motivations, to a vastly more complex world of numerous actors (both state and non-state) whose motivations are unclear, and whose objectives may not always be explicit, or are not conveyed in terms we understand.

---

<sup>5</sup> I use the term “decision matrices” because, of course, in any given case, it may not be a question of a single decision, but a series of decisions that eventually lead to a significant policy direction. Even the term “decision” may not be accurate in all cases, especially where there is little or no evidence of a specific decision, but where this analysis may be more concerned with general behaviors, certain actions, or stated or implicit policies that are reflected in how a nation or group acts toward or thinks about weapons of mass destruction, or may be expected to act, based on the hypotheses developed in this essay.

Traditional analytical frameworks may not apply in these cases. It seems apparent that deeper forces are at play behind the events that are unfolding in the present era, forces that trace their roots back in some cases hundreds of years in history, stretching far back beyond the relatively short period we knew as the Cold War. These forces have been shaped by religious and cultural factors that we do not readily understand, or that fall outside the conventional analytical frameworks we have previously employed. When traditional ways of understanding no longer seem adequate, it is natural that we should look for new ways to make sense of the world.

### **A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING STRATEGIC CULTURE AND WMD**

The potential relationships between strategic culture and national security policy and behavior related to weapons of mass destruction are explored below, followed by a discussion of each of these specific groups of decisions, actions, or policies.

Strategic culture offers the promise of providing insight into motivations and intentions that are not readily explained by other frameworks, and that may help make sense of forces we might otherwise overlook, misunderstand, or misinterpret. There are several reasons why it is especially important to apply strategic culture analysis to issues related to weapons of mass destruction.

First, there is increasing recognition that understanding strategic culture is vital to effectively implementing and safeguarding U.S. national security and foreign policy, and combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is among these policies' highest priorities. According to the Defense Science Board's 2004 Study on Strategic Communications, among others, hostility to U.S. national security goals and policies is undermining U.S. power, influence, and strategic alliances, and much of this hostility is driven by a lack of understanding of the cultural and regional context for U.S. policy.<sup>6</sup>

Cultural scripts can determine what is considered "rational." According to Valerie Hudson, "rationality itself may mean different things in different cultures." Hudson cites other studies showing that "differences in moral reasoning based on culture may skew traditional

---

<sup>6</sup> This report can be found at [http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic\\_Communication.pdf](http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic_Communication.pdf), accessed 7 October 2006.

assumptions of rational-choice theory.”<sup>7</sup> This has important implications for deterrence, and for understanding different motivations that various cultures may have for adhering to or rejecting international WMD norms, or for acquiring, proliferating, or employing weapons of mass destruction. For example, if one’s deterrence threats are considered “irrational” by the targeted society, they may not be considered credible, or they may be misconstrued. They may not even be considered threats, or they may be considered challenges to be confronted, thus having the exact opposite effect of that desired.

Second, it is important to “know one’s enemy” of course, to better assess new and emerging threats. Strategic cultural analysis can provide insights into identifying and evaluating emerging threats. But, it is also important to know one’s friends and allies, to know what assures them, what inspires their confidence in American security guarantees, or conversely, what undermines such confidence, and what the basis of their own threat assessments are.<sup>8</sup>

Third, those groups and states at present most interested in acquiring, proliferating, or using WMD often justify their policies and actions in cultural terms. Rather than dismissing such language as mere propaganda, strategic cultural perspectives underscore the importance of such language for understanding the motivations and intentions of these actors.

The following framework is presented as a potential basis for further exploring the relationship between WMD and strategic culture. It assumes that there are three aspects of strategic culture that affect WMD-related decisions and behavior:<sup>9</sup>

(1) Strategic culture can be considered a “shared system of meaning,” with language and terms that are understood and agreed within a given culture, and identifying and defining what is considered “rational” within a society. It is a way of interpreting the world, a way of relating to the community, its members, and the relationship of the community to other communities. It is based on “evolving meanings conditioned by historical precedent and contemporary experience.”

---

<sup>7</sup> Hudson cites two books by Amartya Sen, *Choice, Welfare, and Measurement*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982); and *On Ethics and Economics*, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of how and why U.S. culture inherently causes friction with other cultures, including with those we consider our friends and allies, see Andrew W. Stewart, “Friction in U.S. Foreign Policy: Cultural Difficulties with the World,” Carlisle: U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, June 2006. This report can be found at: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/PUB706.pdf>, accessed 7 October 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Drawn from Hudson, “Culture and Foreign Policy: Developing a Research Agenda,” in Valerie M. Hudson, ed. *Culture and Foreign Policy*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1997), pp. 1-24.

In this sense, strategic culture helps define the “means” of a group or nation’s national security policy.

(2) Strategic culture may be seen as a “collection of value preferences,” specifying what a group, state’s, or society’s appropriate security objectives and desires are. That is, strategic culture contributes to defining the “ends” of a group or nation’s national security policy.

(3) Strategic culture is a source of determining what constitutes allowable or optimal behavior, or a “template for human action,” relating ends and means in an appropriate, and culturally-sanctioned manner. Cultural influences can be considered a “template for human strategy” and those strategies can in turn be reflected in behavior. In other words, this aspect of culture relates the meaning of the first aspect of culture (a system of shared meaning), with the objectives representing the collective value preferences, and helps determine appropriate means for achieving those ends. Professor Hudson explains:

What culture provides its members is a repertoire or palette of adaptive responses from which members build off-the-shelf strategies of action. What matters is not the whole of culture, but rather ‘chunks’ of ‘prefabricated’ cultural response. We may not be able to predict choice and construction of a particular response by a particular member of the culture, but we can know what is on the shelf ready and available to be used or not.<sup>10</sup>

The above framework lays out certain propositions under the three categories for each of the four “WMD Decision Matrices” consisting of rejection of or adherence to international norms regarding WMD; the acquisition of WMD; the proliferation of WMD; or the employment of WMD in an attack, which are each treated more fully below.

### **Strategic Culture and International Norm Adherence**

Different cultures respond in different ways to the question of accepting and adhering to international law and generally accepted international norms. By international norms is meant both the explicit values recorded in the full range of international non-proliferation regimes, but also the implicit assumptions, values, and rules underlying international attitudes toward weapons of mass destruction, such as the “nuclear taboo,” or the assumption that nuclear weapons will only be used as instruments of last resort.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

A culture's predisposition to adhere and conform to international norms related to weapons of mass destruction, or that culture's preference for rejecting, ignoring, or flouting such norms, is an important strategic cultural indicator of how it will approach the other three decisional factors related to weapons of mass destruction. Since decisions related to acquiring, proliferating, or employing WMD are captured in one form of international legal constraint or another, whether a nation chooses to act against international norms is an important indicator of whether that nation can be assured, dissuaded, or deterred from acquiring, using, or employing WMD, or whether it must be confronted and ultimately defeated in a military sense in order to prevent its acquisition, proliferation, or use of WMD. This essay addresses norm adherence, then, as the first and foundational factor before proceeding to examine the cultural bases for acquiring, proliferating, or employing WMD.

According to the model, rejection or denial of international WMD regimes and norms is most likely to occur when:

(1) Such rejection or adherence is deemed "rational" within the system of shared meaning defined by the prevailing strategic culture, as sanctioned or endorsed by the keepers or holders of the strategic culture. For example, members of the culture may not view international norms as "valid" or "legitimate" especially if those norms were established by groups considered hostile to the given culture. They may not view them as relevant or enforceable, or they may even view them as tools of the adversary. These perspectives will often be conditioned by past historical experiences, shared narratives, or as precepts based on the culture's scriptural or written records.

(2) Such rejection or adherence is perceived by the holders or keepers of the strategic culture as enabling the group, organization, or state to achieve culturally-endorsed outcomes, or outcomes deemed appropriate by the prevailing strategic culture (whether at the organizational, societal, or systemic levels).

(3) The ends and means for achieving the culturally endorsed outcome (rejecting or adhering to international WMD norm adherence) are consistent with, or enabled by the "repertoire or palette of adaptive responses" deemed appropriate by the keepers or holders of that strategic culture.

In a study that explicitly addressed the cultural basis for compliance with the international nuclear nonproliferation regime, authors Glenn Chafetz, Hillel Abramson, and Suzette Grillot compared Ukrainian and Belarussian attitudes toward acceding to the Nuclear

Nonproliferation Treaty immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of these states as independent nations.<sup>11</sup> They found that differing Ukrainian and Belarussian role conceptions followed in part from cultural differences between the two states. Ukraine's greater perceived distinctiveness from Russia, as well as its Cossak tradition, versus Belarus' greater willingness to accommodate international desires, determined how these two countries approached the question of whether they should accede to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty as Nuclear Weapon States or Non-Nuclear Weapon States. Both had tactical and strategic nuclear assets on their territories at the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union, and both faced the decision of whether to give up these assets, or to embrace them as new nuclear powers. The international community, including the United States, was keen to have both nations forego their nuclear status, transfer the weapons on their territories to Russia, and accede to the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states, thus preserving the core international value of non-proliferation. Allowing Ukraine, Belarus, (and Kazakhstan) to retain nuclear weapons would have meant expanding the nuclear club.

Chafetz, Abramson, and Grillot concluded that "Belarus was consistently and overwhelmingly culturally disposed to accommodative roles and thus destined to meet international expectations. For Ukraine, however, decisions were more problematic because certain physical attributes and cultural features impelled it to see itself as a great power modeled after France and Russia. This national role conception in turn justified nuclear status."<sup>12</sup> Hence, Ukraine was reluctant to relinquish its nuclear weapon assets, while Belarus was more easily convinced to do so. The authors show that cultural factors, as reflected in how culture shaped national role conceptions, was an important determinant of how these two nations approached a specific international norm adherence issue.

Negative experiences with the international community can also affect a state's confidence in the ability of international norms and regimes to protect its interests, or defend it against violators, thus predisposing it to reject adherence to such regimes or norms. This was the case with Iran's experience during its eight year long war with Iraq, when the international community seemed aloof and unresponsive to Iran's complaints about Iraq's use of chemical

---

<sup>11</sup> Glenn Chafetz, Hillel Abramson, and Suzette Grillot, "Culture and National Role Conceptions: Belarussian and Ukrainian Compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime," in Valerie M. Hudson, ed., *Culture and Foreign Policy* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), p. 183.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

weapons. Consequently, Iranian leader's have lost confidence in international collective security mechanisms. Not only can such experiences lead to lack of confidence in international regimes, it can serve as a pretext for pursuing the acquisition of an independent deterrent. According to Anthony Cain, "The conspicuous failure of the international community to act against Iraq's overt use of chemical weapons in the [Iran-Iraq] war served as a catalyst for the Iranian chemical and biological weapons program."<sup>13</sup>

Even in cases where strategic culture exerts powerful sway over a nation's policies and behaviors, that influence can sometimes be overturned or rationalized. Painful national experiences can exert strong pressure on a country to deviate from or even reject strategic cultural preferences, leading to the emergence of a new strategic culture. For example, Iranian strategic culture initially predisposed the regime to forego the acquisition and employment of chemical weapons, based on the Prophet Mohammed's prohibition against using poison. This was a natural reflection of its strategic culture. However, after the Iranians suffered horrific losses from Iraqi chemical attacks during the Iran-Iraq war, accompanied by the failure of the international community to effectively act against or intervene with Iraq, Ayatollah Khomeini reversed this policy. According to Anthony Cain, "the decision emerged only after the international community failed to take action to condemn or curb Iraq's use of such weapons and after intense debates within Iran between Khomeini, the military, and the clerics."<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, this decision created the conditions for a revised strategic cultural acquiescence, or even justification, for the future acquisition of nuclear and biological, as well as chemical weapons. Cain observes: "Thus, a fundamentally secular decision based upon military effectiveness calculations had to pass through the filter of Islamic law to acquire the mantle of legitimacy. With the debate settled, however, the republic's leaders relied upon the new religious precedent to justify future nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons proliferation."<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Anthony C. Cain, "Iran's Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction," *Maxwell Paper No. 26*, Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, April 2002, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5. See also Julian Perry Robinson and Jozef Goldblat, *Chemical Warfare in the Iraq-Iran War* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1984). This report can be found at: [http://www.iranchamber.com/history/articles/chemical\\_warfare\\_iran\\_iraq\\_war.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/history/articles/chemical_warfare_iran_iraq_war.php), accessed 9 October 2006.

Different schools of thought exist with Islamic cultures which define the relationship between Islamic and non-Islamic international law.<sup>16</sup> In some cases, these traditions reject the legitimacy of international legal structures created outside the Islamic world, or in cases where international law has not served the interests of the Islamic community or its members. The current Iranian regime may feel less constrained by its legal obligations under the NPT because this obligation had been undertaken by the Shah's regime in 1970, prior to the Iranian revolution, and is probably seen, therefore, as not necessarily binding on the new government, as having been undertaken by an illegitimate regime, or as having been superseded by a superior (sharia) law.

### **Strategic Culture and the Acquisition of WMD**

There are many reasons why states may seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction, but from a strategic culture point of view, the question focuses on the domestic sources of such motivations, the strategic cultural filters through which recent experiences are processed, and the unique language used to justify such acquisition. According to the model, the following propositions seek to shed light on the nexus between WMD acquisition and strategic culture. Again, these propositions are offered in the spirit of prospective guidelines for further research, rather than as fully developed theses.

WMD acquisition is more likely to occur when:

(1) Acquiring WMD is deemed "rational" within the system of shared meaning defined by the prevailing strategic culture, as sanctioned or endorsed by the keepers or holders of the strategic culture. That is, adopting a decision to acquire chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons, can be deemed a rational course in terms understood, accepted, and endorsed by members of the strategic culture, and the costs and benefits of such a policy are deemed acceptable and bearable.

(2) Acquiring WMD is perceived by the holders or keepers of the strategic culture as enabling the group, organization, or state to achieve culturally-endorsed outcomes, or results deemed appropriate by the prevailing strategic culture (whether at the organizational, societal, or systemic levels, such as granting it the means to defend against its perceived enemies, or

---

<sup>16</sup> See the various traditions surveyed in Majid Khadduri, The Islamic Law of Nations (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966).

bestowing the prestige considered necessary to underwrite the strategic culture's established self-appointed regional, global, or systemic role conceptions.

(3) The ends and means for achieving the culturally-endorsed outcome (acquiring WMD) are consistent with, or enabled by the "repertoire or palette of adaptive responses" deemed appropriate by the keepers or holders of that strategic culture. For example, a strategic culture may provide the rationale for leaders to pursue acquiring WMD through imposing enormous deprivations on the given society.

There are some other considerations with respect to strategic culture and the acquisition of WMD. First, except for the so-called P-5 nations whose status as Nuclear Weapon States is codified in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, any other state's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons must be considered contrary to international law and international normative prohibitions against nuclear proliferation. For chemical and biological weapons, there are no equivalents to the P-5, since international agreements completely ban such weapons, while making no exceptions for states already possessing stockpiles of chemical and/or biological weapons. This means that acquiring WMD necessarily requires either violating (in the case of erstwhile adherents to the NPT, Chemical Weapons Convention, or Biological Weapons Convention), or rebuffing (in the case of those states who are technically not signatories or adherents to these treaties and conventions) international norms against WMD proliferation.<sup>17</sup>

Second, nearly every state that has initiated efforts to acquire a nuclear weapons capability (while outside the NPT regime) has made the decision to do so in the immediate aftermath of some national defeat, humiliation, or other crisis. For example, it seems Israel did so in the aftermath of the 1967 war. Pakistan apparently made its decision soon after the 1971 civil war that resulted in splitting the country, partly in response to India's threat to "go nuclear." Note the context of this decision as described by George Perkovich:

---

<sup>17</sup> In a survey of those states who are known to have undertaken nuclear weapon development programs, and either abandoned them at some point prior to actually producing a weapon, or later rolled back their nuclear programs, authors Chafetz, Abramson, and Grillot label several states as "violators" of international nonproliferation regimes, such as Israel. This is not technically correct except in those cases where the state in question had previously signed and acceded to the NPT. (For example, Israel has never joined the NPT, and thus has never assumed the legal obligations of an NPT member-state, but is labeled a "violater of the NPT" by Chafetz, Abramson, and Grillot.) A state that has neither signed nor ratified an agreement cannot be said later to have "violated" that agreement. Nevertheless, even those states that have not acceded to NPT membership while pursuing nuclear weapons acquisition can be said to rebuff the international nonproliferation regime because there is an established international "norm" against proliferation. See Chafetz, Abramson, and Grillot, "Culture and National Role Conceptions," especially pp. 170-72.

It is difficult to say precisely when Pakistan's nuclear quest began. We do know that the first Indian nuclear test in 1974 did not start Pakistan on its quest, as Pakistani propagandists used to insist. A seminal episode was the January 1972 meeting in the Chief Minister of Punjab's home in Multan, where Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto reportedly exhorted a gathering of Pakistan's nuclear technology establishment to produce a fission bomb in three years, as the Americans had with the Manhattan Project. Bhutto said he would spare no expense in helping them do it. The timing was telling. Pakistan was still bleeding from the amputation of half its former self: civil war in 1971 had just severed East Pakistan from West Pakistan: the eastern part became the independent country of Bangladesh. Bhutto, convening in the Punjabi heart of West Pakistan, was launching the bomb initiative only a month after the ignominious defeat of the Punjabi-dominated government and Army at the hands of unmartial Bengalis and their Indian supporters. Nuclear weapons would rebuild Pakistan's strength, heal its wounds, buttress its pride, and ensure better results in a future war."<sup>18</sup>

Of course, these decisions are clearly driven by considerations of realpolitik, and involve the classic realist mechanisms of balancing either externally or internally against a system threat. But from a strategic culture point of view, the threats were perceived in uniquely cultural and historic terms, and interpreted in ways understood throughout the community or society involved, and the terms used to justify the state's subsequent course of action were couched in its own unique strategic cultural language. For example, Iranian public statements have sometimes cited Iranian "culture" as one reason its leaders reject the pursuit of nuclear weapons. IRGC Commander Rezai rejected the pursuit of nuclear weapons in a 1994 interview, saying "Political logic, morality, our own culture and above all the situation in today's world does not allow us to have such deadly weapons."<sup>19</sup>

Third, a nation or society must be predisposed to resort to technological solutions to security dilemmas, even when faced with serious threats. That is, it must value science and technology, and have a cadre of personnel trained and educated in the engineering and physics of WMD. The decision to acquire WMD must be made in the context of having the technological wherewithal to pursue that option. Sometimes this means establishing a long-term plan to achieve access to the WMD materials, technology, or required expertise. Sometimes it means

---

<sup>18</sup> George Perkovich, "Could Anything Be Done To Stop Them?: Lessons from Pakistan," A Paper for the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, found at <http://www.npec-web.org/Essays/20060726-Perkovich-CouldAnythingBeDone.pdf>, accessed 7 October 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Paula A. DeSutter, *Denial and Jeopardy: Deterring Iranian Use of NBC Weapons*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1997), p. 45.

exploiting existing national capabilities and resources, other times it means acquiring it through theft or extortion. But from a strategic culture point of view, not all countries are capable of or willing to mount a WMD acquisition program.

Fourth, intervening international political developments may be interpreted as enhancing the symbolic appeal of nuclear weapons acquisition. Anthony Cain notes: “As for nuclear and radiological weapons, the respect India and Pakistan gained after demonstrating their nuclear capabilities is unlikely to have escaped notice in Tehran.”<sup>20</sup> “Respect” is a culturally-loaded concept, and is likely to be interpreted through a cultural lens, rather than a realpolitik lens.

### **Strategic Culture and WMD Transfer/Proliferation**

Once a state or group has acquired WMD, they may face powerful incentives to sell the technology or expertise to other states or groups, possibly to recoup the investment in acquiring it, or possibly to accrue allies in a common cause, or for the personal gain of its leaders. How might strategic culture influence a state’s or non-state actor’s motivations regarding proliferating WMD? According to the model developed above, proliferation of acquired WMD is more likely to occur when:

(1) Proliferating WMD is deemed “rational” within the system of shared meaning defined by the prevailing strategic culture, as sanctioned or endorsed by the keepers or holders of the strategic culture. That is, proliferation is seen as acceptable, or at least not proscribed, by the strategic culture.

(2) Proliferating WMD is perceived by the holders or keepers of the strategic culture as enabling the group, organization, or state to achieve culturally-endorsed outcomes, or outcomes deemed appropriate by the prevailing strategic culture (whether at the organizational, societal, or systemic levels).

(3) The ends and means for achieving the culturally-endorsed outcome (proliferating WMD) are consistent with, or enabled by the “repertoire or palette of adaptive responses” deemed appropriate by the keepers or holders of that strategic culture.

As noted above, there are several reasons why a state or non-state actor may choose to proliferate WMD. If a given strategic culture defies international norms and predisposes a state

---

<sup>20</sup> Cain, “Iran’s Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction,” p. 17.

to seek counter-balancing allies, that state may believe that selling or transferring WMD technology or expertise is in its interests. (e.g. North Korea) Alternatively, if a state has a culture that fosters independent actions or permits rogue players within its ranks, it may be predisposed to allow or overlook private efforts to sell or transfer WMD technology (e.g. the AQ Khan network). Another reason a state may choose to sell its WMD technology or expertise to raise funds as compensation for international isolation. Finally, a group or state may choose to sell or transfer WMD in order to destabilize or distract regional adversaries. Each of these reasons represents a strong realist calculation. However, each may also reflect a cultural perspective in terms of how the decision to transfer or proliferate WMD is justified within its own culture, and how that decision is represented to outside groups.

### **Strategic Culture and the Use of WMD**

The decision to acquire WMD does not necessarily equate with a decision to employ it.<sup>21</sup> There are many reasons to acquire and possess WMD, just as there are many ways to “use” them. Therefore, even if a given strategic culture provides the the rationale for acquiring or proliferating WMD, it may at the same time present strong inhibitions against the use of such WMD. Throughout the Cold War, weapons of mass destruction were developed, produced, and stockpiled mainly to serve as instruments of deterrence, but that may not necessarily be the case for new and emerging strategic cultures. Among traditional powers, there is a strong tradition of assuming that weapons of mass destruction will only be used as weapons of “last resort,” reinforced by international law and practice, as well as long-standing international norms. This is the basis of what is sometimes called “the presumption of non-use,” or in the case of nuclear weapons, the “nuclear taboo.”

Strategic culture may shape or influence the circumstances under which a state or group considers WMD use acceptable, appropriate, justified, or permissible. According to the model, employment of a group or state’s WMD is more likely to occur when:

---

<sup>21</sup> This issue is addressed with respect to terrorist acquisition of nuclear weapons in Lewis A. Dunn, “Can Al Qaeda be Deterred from Using Nuclear Weapons?” *Occasional Paper* 3, Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction, Washington, D.C., National Defense University Press, July 2005.

(1) Employment of WMD is deemed “rational” within the system of shared meaning defined by the prevailing strategic culture, as sanctioned or endorsed by the keepers or holders of the strategic culture.

(2) Employment of WMD is perceived by the holders or keepers of the strategic culture as enabling the group, organization, or state to achieve culturally-endorsed outcomes, or outcomes deemed appropriate by the prevailing strategic culture (whether at the organizational, societal, or systemic levels).

(3) The ends and means for achieving the culturally-endorsed outcome (employment of WMD ) are consistent with, or enabled by the “repertoire or palette of adaptive responses” deemed appropriate by the keepers or holders of that strategic culture.

There are few examples of the actual use of WMD in attacks. Chemical weapons, which have been used on several occasions, may be an exception, as are the small number of instances where biological agents have been employed. Therefore, with respect to evaluating the interaction of strategic culture and WMD use, it may be necessary to distinguish between chemical and biological weapons on the one hand, and nuclear weapons on the other.

To understand the potential relationship between strategic culture and the use of WMD, it is useful to lay out possible reasons or strategies for conducting attacks with WMD. Barry Schneider has identified five possible strategies for using WMD:<sup>22</sup>

- (1) To fracture an allied coalition, by threatening one or more members of that coalition in a way that forces them to stand down or withdraw from the coalition. This was Iraq’s strategy in the first gulf War, for example, in attacking Israel with ballistic missiles.
- (2) To attack or defeat the United States at home. Threatening the U.S. with high casualties could undermine the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence guarantees, or erode public support of a war effort.

---

<sup>22</sup> Barry R. Schneider, “Strategies for Coping with Enemy Weapons of Mass Destruction,” *Airpower Journal*, (Special Edition 1996), pp. 36-47, cited in Craig Black, “Deterring Libya: The Strategic Culture of Muammar Qaddafi,” *The Counterproliferation Papers*, Future Warfare Series No. 8 (USAF Counterproliferation Center: Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama), October 2000, pp. 14-15. This monograph is based on a chapter in the following: Barry R. Schneider and Jerold M. Post, *Know Thy Enemy: Profiles of Adversary Leaders and Their Strategic Culture*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: USAF Counterproliferation Center, November 2002), pp. 247-70.

- (3) Defeat or decimate a U.S. expeditionary force that threatened to occupy or overwhelm a local or regional defense.
- (4) “Secure the endgame.” Use as bargaining leverage to allow a leader to remain in power despite impending military defeat, for example, or to secure some other post-conflict arrangement.
- 5) To avenge the defeat of a regime, or to inflict punishment on the aggressor.

Anthony Cain describes two scenarios under which the Iranian government would consider resorting to chemical or biological weapons attack as “appropriate,” and thus falling within the model’s assumptions regarding what the culture deems as “rational” and “justified.” One scenario would be as a defensive response to an external threat, or retaliation for an attack. The second scenario would involve an offensive operation, possibly carried out through terrorist proxies, with the objective “to energize a global or, at least, a regional Islamist bid for power.”<sup>23</sup> In either case, Iranian strategic culture would provide the rationale or justification for such a decision in ways that had special meaning for internal audiences that shared the cultural vocabulary, even if external audiences did not understand or accept these explanations.

## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Strategic culture captures the domestic sources of foreign and defense policy behavior in ways that other theories of behavior cannot. Nevertheless, an approach based on strategic culture analysis should not be seen as competing with other well-established analytical models for explaining group or national behavior, such as neorealism, or constructivism. Rather, these respective approaches should each be seen as contributing insights and explanatory value in different ways to different issues, and at different times.

The foregoing essay has presented a conceptual model for organizing further research and analysis into strategic culture, especially with respect to WMD-related decisions, behaviors, and policies. This model consists of three sets of propositions within each of the four WMD decision matrices: (1) rejecting or adhering to international norms regarding the acquisition, proliferation, or use of WMD; (2) acquiring WMD; (3) proliferating WMD; and, (4) actually using WMD in an attack.

---

<sup>23</sup> Cain, “Iran’s Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction,” p. 11.

This conceptual model has further explained strategic culture as consisting of three different aspects: (1) strategic culture as “shared system of meaning;” (2) strategic culture as “collection of value preferences;” and, (3) strategic culture as “template for human action.”

The preceding analysis, as preliminary as it may be, suggests three main considerations for further research and analysis.

First, the model presented in this essay should be elaborated and expanded with respect to historical case studies related to WMD. Strategic culture as a “system of shared meaning” should be explored. The idea that strategic culture represents a “collection of value preferences” needs to be developed. The culturally-endorsed options that comprise strategic culture as a “template for human action” could be elucidated. To do this, more in-depth case studies and analytical efforts will need to be devised to focus on WMD specific decisions. This would include, for example, exploring the motivations and intentions behind different countries decisions to acquire WMD (Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea present especially intriguing examples).

A series of case studies could be developed to examine strategic culture as manifested within and among non-state actors.

Second, more study is needed to explore the relationship between strategic culture and the specific national security missions of assure, dissuade, deter, and defeat. The preceding essay has endeavored to set forth some preliminary hypotheses, but these need further empirical and analytical examination.

Further research and analysis into the linkages between strategic culture and other national security issues should be undertaken. For example, using a strategic cultural framework can almost certainly provide useful insights into:

- Threat assessment and threat anticipation. Strategic culture may help sort out which societies pose long-term threats.
- Understanding and confronting terrorism. The sources and motivations for terrorism are a subject of critical debate. Strategic culture may provide some understanding of the basis for terrorism.
- Democracy, negotiating style, predisposition to conform to international norms, laws, and regimes.
- Surprise attack.

Third, there is a case to be made for breaking out “nuclear weapons” into a special strategic cultural category. While this essay has generally treated “weapons of mass destruction” as a single category, drawing insights from instances related to chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, there are some reasonable arguments for distinguishing between chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons with regard to strategic culture. Not all strategic cultures lump these three types of weapons together into the same category. In some cases, strategic cultures make a distinction between chemical and biological weapons on the one hand, and consider nuclear weapons to be an altogether different issue on the other hand. Chemical and biological weapons use may be justified under some circumstances when nuclear weapons use cannot be condoned. Iranian strategic culture, for example, came to justify chemical weapons acquisition and use because these weapons had been used against Iranian citizens and soldiers. The same cannot be said of nuclear weapons.

Moreover, some states have had battlefield experiences with chemical and biological weapons, while only one state has been the subject of a nuclear weapon attack.

Finally, chemical weapons, and to some extent, biological weapons, have been around much longer than nuclear weapons, and states and non-state actors have had more history with these weapons. Chemical and biological weapons are cheaper and easier to acquire, need much less infrastructure, and exploit dual-use materials to a greater extent than nuclear weapons. They represent a lower technological threshold for acquisition.

In conclusion, strategic culture can be a powerful tool for understanding the reasons, incentives, rationales, and motivations for different cultures to acquire, proliferate, or employ weapons of mass destruction. Strategic culture analysis should be considered a supplement, and not a substitute, for traditional analyses based on realism. There are specific types of circumstances where realism is an inadequate explanation, or a poor predictor of behavior, and this is especially true with regard to understanding motivation and intent. However, as the model presented above makes clear, further work is needed to explore the explanatory value of strategic culture analysis, and the areas of intersection and divergence between strategic culture and other models of social and political behavior.