



# ***STRATEGIC CULTURE: FROM CLAUSEWITZ TO CONSTRUCTIVISM***

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## ABSTRACT

This paper charts the evolution of the theory of strategic culture through several generations of scholarship and explores contemporary arguments about the role of culture in shaping national security policy. The paper devotes special attention to policies related to weapons of mass destruction and threat assessment. Key questions include: Do cultural theories provide useful explanations of national security policy? Is strategic culture “semi-permanent,” as most of its supporters suggest, or can it evolve over time? And how universal is strategic culture? The essay concludes that while constructivism has generated new attention to ideational foundations of national security policy behavior, there remains substantial room for refinement of the research program.

## INTRODUCTION

Cultural approaches to strategic studies have existed in various forms for hundreds of years. The argument that culture influences national security policy is grounded in classic works, including the writings of Thucydides and Sun Tzu. Clausewitz advanced these ideas by recognizing war and war-fighting strategy as “a test of moral and physical forces.” The goal of strategy was much more than defeat of the enemy on the battlefield—it was the elimination of the enemy’s morale.<sup>1</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, national character studies linked Japanese and German strategic choices in World War II to deeply rooted cultural factors. Russell Weigley’s 1973 classic, *The American Way of Warfare*, further underlined the importance of cultural roots of strategic dispositions. Jack Snyder’s work on Soviet nuclear strategy during the Cold War directed scholarly attention to the key link between political and military culture and strategic choice.

Recent events have renewed scholarly interest in the role of culture in international security. Scholars and practitioners have begun to interpret challenges like democratization in Iraq, U.S.-China trade disputes, nuclear tensions with Iran, and the war on terror through the lens of national identity and culture. Contemporary scholarship claims that a focus on

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<sup>1</sup> Karl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993): 26.

strategic culture offers valuable perspective on military doctrine and critical choices such as nuclear strategy and the use of force.

This essay charts the evolution of the theory of strategic culture through several generations of scholarly work inside, and outside, the discipline. Particular attention is devoted to the relationship between strategic culture and policies on weapons of mass destruction. Key questions include: What are the ideational foundations of national security policy? Do cultural theories, newly inspired by constructivism, provide the most accurate explanations of security policy? Is strategic culture really “semi-permanent,” as its supporters suggest, or can strategic culture evolve? Who are the ‘keepers’ of strategic culture? And how universal is strategic culture? I conclude that while contemporary works on strategic culture offer promise, there remains substantial room for development of more reflexive models. The multi-faceted approach offered by the Comparative Strategic Cultures project may allow us to recognize greater nuances in competing systems and further energize our potential for accurate threat assessment.

## **EARLY ORIGINS OF THE CULTURAL APPROACH**

The “national character studies” of the 1940s and 1950s represented some of the first social scientific efforts to draw connections between culture and state behavior, based largely on anthropological models.<sup>2</sup> This work defined the roots of a nation’s character, or culture, in language, religion, customs, socialization, and the interpretation of common memories.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, national character studies became popular tools for threat assessment during World War II. These studies drew intense criticism, however, because of concerns about stereotyping and the reification of the concept of culture.<sup>4</sup>

Prominent sociologists and anthropologists including Mead, Douglas, and Levi-Strauss, nevertheless continued to probe links between culture and behavior. In one of the most influential anthropological works on the subject, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973),

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2 Two of the most prominent scholars of national character were Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946), and Geoffrey Gorer, *The American People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1948).

3 David J. Elkins and Richard E.B. Simeon, “A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?” *Comparative Politics* 11, no.2 (January 1979): 127-128.

4 For popular exceptions to this argument see Nathan Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951), and Adda B. Bozeman, *Politics and Culture in International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).

Geertz defined culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.”<sup>5</sup> He provided a useful model of culture and suggested ways that patterns of meanings could lead to distinct behaviors.

Political scientists Almond and Verba launched a high profile study of the concept of political culture in the 1960s, defining it as “that subset of beliefs and values of a society that relate to the political system.”<sup>6</sup> Political culture, they argued, includes a commitment to values like democratic principles and institutions, ideas about morality and the use of force, the rights of individuals or collectivities, and predispositions toward the role of a country in global politics. Political culture manifests itself on at least three levels: “the cognitive, which includes empirical and causal beliefs; the evaluative, which consists of values, norms and moral judgments; and the expressive or affective, which encompasses emotional attachments, patterns of identity and loyalty, and feelings of affinity, aversion, or indifference.”<sup>7</sup> Parsons described culture as comprised of “interpretive codes” including language, values, and even substantive beliefs like support for democracy or the futility of war.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1980s, interdisciplinary studies linking culture and politics had grown in popularity.<sup>9</sup> Sociologist Ann Swidler proposed a more complex model of connections between culture and state behavior, mediated by cultural “strategies of action.” Swidler defined culture quite broadly as consisting of “symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as lan-

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5 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); See also Sherry B. Ortner, ed., *The Fate of Culture: Geertz and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

6 Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965): 11-14.

7 John S. Duffield, *World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions, and German Security Policy After Unification* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999): 23; See also Robert D. Putnam, *The Beliefs of Politicians: Ideology, Conflict, and Democracy in Britain and Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Putnam, “Studying Elite Political Culture: the Case of ‘Ideology,’” *American Political Science Review* 65, no.3 (September 1971): 651-681; Bert A. Rockman, *Studying Elite Political Culture: Problems in Design and Interpretation* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976).

8 See Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1951).

9 Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

guage, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life.”<sup>10</sup> Building on the arguments of Weber and Parsons, she contended that interest-driven strategies are significant mediating conditions for state behavior.<sup>11</sup>

But while sociological models of culture became increasingly complex, subsequent studies of political culture yielded little theoretical refinement during this period. Critics argued that the approach was epiphenomenal and subjective, and that proponents of political culture made exaggerated claims about its explanatory power.<sup>12</sup> Cultural interpretive arguments remained alive in area studies, but fell out of favor in political science with the behavioral revolution.

### **STRATEGIC CULTURE AND COLD WAR NUCLEAR POLICY**

In 1977, Jack Snyder brought the political cultural argument into the realm of modern security studies by developing a theory of strategic culture to interpret Soviet nuclear strategy. Snyder suggested that elites articulate a unique strategic culture related to security-military affairs that is a wider manifestation of public opinion, socialized into a distinctive mode of strategic thinking. He contended, “as a result of this socialization process, a set of general beliefs, attitudes, and behavior patterns with regard to nuclear strategy has achieved a state of semi-permanence that places them on the level of ‘cultural’ rather than mere policy.”<sup>13</sup> Snyder applied his strategic cultural framework to interpret the development of Soviet and American nuclear doctrines as products of different organizational, historical, and political contexts, along with technological constraints. The result was his prediction that the Soviet military exhibited a preference for the preemptive, offensive use of force and the ori-

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10 Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no.2 (April 1986): 273.

11 Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1946a[1922-3]): 220; See also Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1958 [1904]); Related works describing the growing interest in connections between culture and political developments include: Ronald Inglehart, “The Renaissance of Political Culture,” *American Political Science Review* 82, no.4 (1988): 1203-1230; Harry C. Triandis, *Culture and Social Behavior* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994); Aaron Wildavsky, “Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation,” *American Political Science Review* 81, no.1 (1987): 3-21.

12 See Charles Lockhart, “Cultural Contributions to Explaining Institutional Form, Political Change, and Rational Decisions” *Comparative Political Studies* 32, no.7 (October 1999): 862-893; Lowell Dittmer, “Political Culture and Political Symbolism: Toward a Theoretical Syntheses,” *World Politics* 29 (1977): 552-588; Ruth Lane, “Political Culture: Residual Category or General Theory?” *Comparative Political Studies* 25, no.4 (1992): 362-387.

13 Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options*, R-2154-AF (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1977): 8; See also Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981).

gins for this could be found rooted in a Russian history of insecurity and authoritarian control.

Snyder's contributions resonated with other security policy analysts, and subsequent work on strategic culture such as Booth's *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (1979) continued to explore the ideational foundations of nuclear strategy and superpower relations. Gray (1981) suggested that distinctive national styles, with "deep roots within a particular stream of historical experience," characterize strategy-making in countries like the United States and the Soviet Union. He defined strategic culture as "modes of thought and action with respect to force, which derives from perception of the national historical experience, from aspirations for responsible behavior in national terms" and even from "the civic culture and way of life." Thus, strategic culture "provides the milieu within which strategy is debated" and serves as an independent determinate of strategic policy patterns.<sup>14</sup>

In simple terms, this "first generation" of work on strategic culture described a synergistic link between strategic culture and WMD policy. Snyder and Gray argued that culture was a semi-permanent influence on policy shaped by elites and socialized into distinctive modes of thought. Nuclear strategy of potential adversaries could be predicted. Snyder's approach described a Soviet preference for the offensive, preemptive use of force and explained modernization initiatives in the nuclear infrastructure to support this orientation. The result of this study was new attention by scholars to the potentially predictive power of strategic culture.

However, critics asserted that the operationalization of strategic culture was problematic and subjective. They suggested that strategic cultural models were tautological, as it would be nearly impossible to separate independent and dependent variables in a reliable way. Skeptics also charged that strategic cultural interpretations were by definition unique, drawing upon narrow and contextual historiography as much as anthropology. Furthermore, both supporters and detractors believed that the concept of strategic culture was fairly static, focusing on enduring historical orientations with strong predictive capability. Writing in 1988, Gray said that "social science has developed no exact methodology for identifying distinctive national cultures and styles." Literature on the "academically unfashionable subject

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14 Colin Gray, "National Style in Strategy: The American Example," *International Security* 6, no.2 (Fall 1981): 35-37.

of national character” was anecdotal at best, yet he believed that learning about the “cultural thoughtways” of a nation was crucial to understanding a country’s behavior and its role in world politics.<sup>15</sup> Finally, structural realists had no room for so-called ‘thick’ descriptive studies and were quick to sweep the concept of strategic culture to the side in their drive for more powerful and parsimonious models. Klein argued that only a “comparative, in-depth study of the formation, influence, and process of change in the strategic cultures of the major powers in the modern era” could make a useful contribution to studies of war and peace.<sup>16</sup> With the abrupt end of the Cold War—and, perhaps ironically, the nonuse of nuclear weapons by the superpowers—the concept of strategic culture once fell into disfavor.

### **STRATEGIC CULTURE REDISCOVERED: THE RISE OF CONSTRUCTIVISM**

In the 1990s, a new generation of scholarly work reasserted the utility of cultural interpretations.<sup>17</sup> Theoretical work on strategic culture, domestic structures, and organizational culture advanced significantly in this period, intersecting ever more frequently with the rise of constructivism. In a pathbreaking 1992 work, Wendt argued that state identities and interests can be seen as “socially constructed by knowledgeable practice.”<sup>18</sup> According to Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner, constructivism recognizes the importance of “intersubjective structures that give the material world meaning,” including norms, culture, identity and ideas on state behavior or on international relations more generally.<sup>19</sup> Constructivists argue that “national identities are social-structural phenomena,” which provide a “logic

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15 Colin Gray, *The Geopolitics of Superpower* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988): 42-43.

16 Yitzhak Klein, “A Theory of Strategic Culture,” *Comparative Strategy* 10, No.1 (1991): 3; See also Richard W. Wilson, *Compliance Ideologies: Rethinking Political Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Charles A. Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

17 Some of the most influential works in this area for security studies are: Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Alastair Iain Johnston, “Thinking about Strategic Culture,” *International Security* 19, no.4 (Spring 1995): 32-64; Stephen Peter Rosen, “Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters,” *International Security* 19, no.4 (Spring 1995): 5-31; Elizabeth Kier, “Culture and Military Doctrine,” *International Security* 19, no.4 (Spring 1995): 65-93; Richard J. Ellis and Michael Thompson, eds., *Culture Matters: Essays in Honor of Aaron Wildavsky* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997); Yosef Lapid, “Culture’s Shop: Returns and Departures in International Relations Theory,” in Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil, eds., *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996).

18 Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, no.2 (Spring 1992): 392.

19 Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane, and Stephen Krasner, “International Organization and the Study of World Politics,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 679.

of appropriateness” regarding policy choices.<sup>20</sup> Hopf believes that the paradigm offers “a promising approach for uncovering those features of domestic society, culture, and politics that should matter to state identity and state action in global politics.”<sup>21</sup>

The constructivist research program devotes particular attention to identity formation, with connections to organizational process, history, tradition, and culture. According to Hudson, constructivism “views culture as an evolving system of shared meaning that governs perceptions, communications, and actions...Culture shapes practice in both the short and long term. At the moment of action, culture provides the elements of grammar that define the situation, that reveal motives, and that set forth a strategy for success.”<sup>22</sup> But constructivists focus primarily on social structures at the systems level, with special attention to the role of norms in international security.<sup>23</sup> Norms are defined as “intersubjective beliefs about the social and natural world that define actors, their situations, and the possibilities of action.”<sup>24</sup> Tannenwald’s studies of the nuclear taboo and the norm of non-proliferation, along with Legro’s work on military restraint during World War II, have generated a great deal of scholarly attention.<sup>25</sup>

Although the central tenets of constructivism were familiar to many—Geertz’s work clearly had a significant influence on contemporary thinking, for example—this was successfully framed as a paradigmatic challenge to neorealism. One of the most controversial prongs of this challenge was the assertion by some constructivists that their approach would,

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20 Jacques E.C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.17; See also Stephen Saideman, “Thinking Theoretically about Identity and Foreign Policy,” in Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, eds., *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp.169-170.

21 This, in spite of its proclaimed ontological agnosticism. See Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations,” *International Security* 23, no.1 (Summer 1998), p.914; See also Jeffrey W. Legro, “Culture and Preferences in the International Cooperation Two-Step,” *American Political Science Review* 90, no.1 (March 1996): 118-137.

22 Valerie M. Hudson, ed. *Culture and Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1997): 28-29.

23 For more detailed studies of norms in world politics, see Alexander Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation and the International State System,” *American Political Science Review* 88, no.2 (1994): 384-396; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no.4 (1998): 887-917; Jeffrey Checkel, “Norms, Institutions and National Identity in Contemporary Europe,” Arena Working Paper 98/16 (Oslo: Advanced Research on the Europeanisation of the Nation-State, University of Oslo, 1998).

24 Alexander Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” *International Security* 20, no.1 (1995): 73-74.

25 Nina Tannenwald, “Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo,” *International Security* 29, no.4 (Spring 2005): 5-49; Tannenwald, “The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use,” *International Organization* 53, no.3 (Fall 1999): 83-114.

assuredly, supplant neorealism as the dominant paradigm in the discipline. While this has not been accomplished, the rise of constructivism has clearly energized a new wave of strategic cultural research.

### THIRD GENERATION STUDIES

Johnston's *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (1995) is often cited as the quintessential third generation work on strategic culture. The study set out to investigate the existence and character of Chinese strategic culture and causal linkages to the use of military force against external threats. Johnston takes the concept of strategic culture seriously as an "ideational milieu that limits behavioral choices," from which "one could derive specific predictions about strategic choice." But Johnston chose several unconventional approaches for his cultural study. First, he selected the intriguing period of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) as the focus for his contemporary theoretical test. Second, he adopted a methodological approach that offered a clear separation between the independent variable, cultural orientations, and the dependent variable, military strategy. He said, "China has exhibited a tendency for the controlled, politically driven defensive and minimalist use of force that is deeply rooted in the statecraft of ancient strategists and a worldview of relatively complacent superiority."<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, Johnston concluded that there were two Chinese strategic cultures in action: "one a symbolic or idealized set of assumptions and ranked preferences, and one an operational set that had a nontrivial effect on strategic choices in the Ming period."<sup>27</sup> Perhaps ironically, these cultures actually exhibit some classic elements of realpolitik.

Specialized studies of German and Japanese strategic culture also reflect third generation approaches.<sup>28</sup> Berger's *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (1998) focused on "antimilitarist political-military cultures" to explain patterns in

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26 Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995): 1.

27 Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, x.

28 Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security* 18, no.2 (Fall 1993): 71; See also Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers will Rise," *International Security* 17, no.2 (Spring 1993): 5-51.

those countries' foreign policy behaviors.<sup>29</sup> Berger noted that while Japan's economic and technological power placed it in a position to become an economic and perhaps even military superpower at the end of the Cold War, the persistent postwar culture of antimilitarism truly defined Japanese security policy in the 1990s. According to Berger, cultural beliefs and values act as a distinct national lens to shape perceptions of events and even channel possible societal responses. In this sense, he states, "cultures enjoy a certain degree of autonomy and are not merely subjective reflections of concrete 'objective' reality."<sup>30</sup> In a similar vein, Banchoff developed a consciously constructivist, "path-dependent" model of foreign policy whereby he argues that decisions taken at critical historical junctures have shaped the development of foreign policy over time.<sup>31</sup> Duffield adds that far from setting off in adventurous new directions, "Germany has exercised considerable restraint and circumspection in its external relations since 1990."<sup>32</sup> To Duffield, "[t]he overall effect of national security culture is to predispose societies in general and political elites in particular toward certain actions and policies over others. Some options will simply not be imagined...some are more likely to be rejected as inappropriate or ineffective than others."<sup>33</sup> In a more recent work, Malici employs a congruence procedure to convincingly argue that German elites subscribe to a "culture of reticence" in security affairs.<sup>34</sup>

Contemporary studies of military organizational cultures offer promise as well. Kier described the significance of organizational culture in the development of French military doctrine.<sup>35</sup> Rosen provided a compelling account of the ways that the military and organizational cultures in India have shaped strategy over time. To Rosen, military culture is comprised of the "beliefs and assumptions that frame...choices about international military behavior, particularly those concerning decisions to go to war, preferences for offensive, ex-

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29 Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 1; See also Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-militarism," *International Security* 17, no.4 (Spring 1993): 119-150.

30 Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, 9.

31 Thomas Banchoff, *The German Problem Transformed: Institutions, Politics, and Foreign Policy, 1945-1995* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999): 2.

32 John S. Duffield, *World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions, and German Security Policy After Unification* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999): 4; See also Duffield, "Political Culture and State Behavior: Why Germany Confounds Neorealism," *International Organization* 53, no.4 (Autumn 1999): 765-803.

33 Duffield, "Political Culture and State Behavior," 771.

34 Akan Malici, "Germans as Venetians: The Culture of German Foreign Policy Behavior," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 2 (2006): 37-62.

35 Kier, "Culture and Military Doctrine: France between the Wars."

pansionist or defensive modes of warfare, and levels of wartime casualties that would be acceptable.”<sup>36</sup> According to these studies, organizational culture can be interpreted as an independent or intervening variable that directly influences strategic choice.

Another important dimension of third generation work, the study of security norms, lies at the intersection of culturalist and constructivist research. Norms are defined by Katzenstein, Jepperson, and Wendt as standards “of right or wrong, a prescription or proscription for behavior for a given identity.”<sup>37</sup> One of the areas of normative study most closely related to weapons of mass destruction and threat assessment is focused on the non-nuclear norm or taboo.<sup>38</sup> To address the puzzle of why nuclear weapons were never employed by the superpowers during the Cold War, strategist Thomas Schelling first raised the concept of a “nuclear taboo” in the 1960s. He described an emerging tradition of nonuse of nuclear weapons: “a jointly recognized expectation that [nuclear weapons] may not be used in spite of declarations of readiness to use them, even in spite of tactical advantages in their use.”<sup>39</sup>

In more recent, provocative works, Tannenwald, Price, and Paul characterize a taboo as “a particularly forceful kind of normative prohibition that is concerned with the protection of individuals and societies from behavior that is defined or perceived to be danger-

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36 Rosen, *Societies and Military Power*, 12.

37 Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security,” in Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p.54; Farrell and Terriff add that norms are “intersubjective beliefs [that are] rooted in, and reproduced through, social practice.” Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, *The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, and Technology* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p. 7.

38 T.V. Paul, “Nuclear Taboo and War Initiation in Regional Conflicts,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39, no.4 (December 1995): 696-717; Alexander Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” *International Security* 20, no. 1, (1995), pp. 73-74; Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation and the International State System,” *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994): 384-396; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887-917; Jeffrey Checkel, “Norms, Institutions and National Identity in Contemporary Europe,” Arena Working Paper 98/16 (Oslo: Advanced Research on the Europeanisation of the Nation-State, University of Oslo, 1998); Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security,” in Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security*, pp. 33-75; and, of course, Tannenwald’s own work: “Stigmatizing the Bomb,” pp. 5-49; Tannenwald, “The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use,” *International Organization* 53, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 83-114.

39 Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, Second Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980): 260.

ous...something that is not done, not said, or not touched.”<sup>40</sup> The nuclear taboo literature places special emphasis on the power of morality and related norms in shaping state behavior. As Tannenwald argues, “nuclear weapons have come to be defined as abhorrent and unacceptable weapons of mass destruction” over the past fifty years. This moral opprobrium has become so acute that the use of nuclear weapons today is “practically unthinkable.”<sup>41</sup> These optimists claim that taboos represent “bright line” norms that have significant constitutive effects.<sup>42</sup>

### **A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR STRATEGIC CULTURE AND WMD POLICY**

Generations of scholarship have produced greater understanding of ties between culture and state behavior. Strategic cultural studies have provided rich descriptions of particularistic cultures and identities, and researchers have acknowledged important links between external and internal determinants of national security policy. Cultural studies have been informed by cross-disciplinary linkages to anthropology, historical research, sociology, and psychology. Inspired by constructivism, scholars have begun to explore ways in which strategic culture is shaped and may evolve over time. As a result, even skeptics have acknowledged that contemporary works on culture offer much more than an ‘explanation of last resort.’

But this survey of the literature also points to substantial room for refinement of the research program. Areas for further attention include the need for a common definition of strategic culture to build theoretically progressive models, delineation of the ways that strategic culture is created, maintained, and passed on to new generations, the question of the universality of strategic culture, and refinement of models of linkages between external and internal determinants of security policy. While some scholars suggest that adoption of cultural models represents a fundamental rejection of structure, contemporary research suggests more comprehensive models of state behavior can be developed short of falsification of the

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40 Tannenwald, “Stigmatizing the Bomb,” 8; See also Franz Steiner, *Taboo* (London: Cohen and West, 1956), p. 21; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

41 *Ibid.*, 5.

42 These ideas relate to recent work on the relationship between “national identity conceptions” and decisions to acquire or develop nuclear weapons; Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation*.

realist program.<sup>43</sup> Contrary to neorealist critiques of ideational frameworks, few cultural scholars believe that this really is an either-or theoretical debate. Furthermore, many cultural scholars recognize the need for a defined ontology as well as falsifiable, middle-range theory. In this spirit, we offer a “to-do” list for the development of new, progressive models of strategic culture in comparative perspective.

## 1. Develop Common Definitions

Given decades of scholarship on cultural determinants, one might assume that strategic culture has become an accepted *independent* variable in causal modeling. It has not. Snyder’s definition of strategic culture as “a set of semi-permanent elite beliefs, attitudes, and behavior patterns socialized into a distinctive mode of thought” set the tone for decades of investigations.<sup>44</sup> Today, scholars seem to agree that distinct political cultures may exist, but definitions still blur the line between preference formation, values, and state behaviors. Pye’s definition of culture as “the dynamic vessel that holds and revitalizes the collective memories of a people by giving emotional life to traditions” is a case in point.<sup>45</sup> Here, strategic culture becomes a generator of preferences, a vehicle for the perpetuation of values and preferences, and a force of action in revitalization and renewal of these values. Rosen’s characterization of strategic culture as the “beliefs and assumptions that frame...decisions to go to war, preferences for offensive, expansionist or defensive modes of warfare, and levels of wartime casualties that would be acceptable” also blurs the line by including reference to the rules that might govern conduct in war.<sup>46</sup> Delineating culture as an independent variable remains challenging, and some scholarly efforts have bordered on tautology wherein domestic political structures are identified as both reflecting and shaping political culture.<sup>47</sup>

Constructivism has energized work on strategic culture, but it has not advanced the search for a common definition. Elkins and Simeon argued three decades ago that culture is

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43 Colin S. Gray, “Strategic culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back,” *Review of International Studies* 25 (1999): 49-69; Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, “Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods,” *Mershon International Studies Review* 40, no.2 (October 1996): 229-254.

44 Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options*, 8.

45 Lucian W. Pye, *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimension of Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985): 20-22.

46 Rosen, *Societies and Military Power*, 12.

47 Pye, as quoted in Lowell Dittmer, “Political Culture and Political Symbolism, Toward a Theoretical Synthesis,” *World Politics* 29, no.4 (July 1977): 555.

a “shorthand expression for a mind set which has the effect of limiting attention to less than the full range of alternative behaviors, problems and solutions which are logically possible.”<sup>48</sup> Constructivists often seem to adopt this shorthand approach to descriptions of culture as comprised of both the ideas about strategic choice and the choices themselves. Hudson’s contention that culture is “an evolving system of shared meaning that governs perceptions, communications, and actions” seems intuitively correct, but offers little in the way of testable hypotheses.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the professed ontological agnosticism of constructivism may not provide a sufficient base for theory-building in strategic cultural studies. Scholars must recognize the difficulty of drawing linkages between political structure and state behavior but yet seek consensus on explanatory boundaries.<sup>50</sup>

Johnston offered one of the most promising avenues for a progressive research program on strategic culture by characterizing culture as “an ideational milieu which limits behavior choices.” But in so doing, his efforts have drawn fire from both first generation culturalists and constructivists. Johnston frames strategic culture as “shared assumptions and decision rules that impose a degree of order on individual and group conceptions of their relationship to their social, organizational or political environment.” While he noted that strategic subcultures may exist, “there is a generally dominant culture whose holders are interested in preserving the status quo.” This approach to strategic culture as a set of shared assumptions and decision rules allows one to separate the strands of culture from dependent variable outcomes like strategic choice. Furthermore, Johnston’s conceptual approach to strategic culture was designed to be falsifiable, “or at least distinguishable from non-strategic culture variables...[that would] provide decision-makers with a uniquely ordered set of strategic choices from which we can derive predictions about behavior.”<sup>51</sup> This work is certainly informed by progress in political psychology as well as contemporary sociological studies of the complex connections between culture and state behavior.

Participants in the Comparative Strategic Cultures project workshops (2005-2006) have developed a definition that encompasses some of the contributions, and recognizes

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48 David Elkins and Richard Simeon, 1979 “A Cause in Search of its Effects, or What does Political Culture Explain?” *Comparative Politics* 11 (1979): 132.

49 Hudson, *Culture and Foreign Policy*, 28-29.

50 See Wilson, “The Many Voices of Political Culture: Assessing Different Approaches,” 246-273.

51 *Ibid.*, 246.

some of the pitfalls, of past scholarship. According to Kartchner, et al., strategic culture is a set of “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 objectives.”<sup>52</sup> This approach recognizes strategic culture as a product of historical circumstances and national identity, but also allows it a role in shaping decisions about strategy. This and other work in the latest generation of strategic cultural studies tend to be more focused in its conceptualization of variables for study.

## **2. Explore the Origins of Strategic Culture**<sup>53</sup>

History shows us that there are many sources of strategic culture, encompassing both material and ideational factors. Clearly, geography, climate and resources have been fundamental factors in strategic thinking throughout the millennia and remain important sources of strategic culture today. For many, geographical circumstance is the key to understanding why some countries adopt particular strategic policies rather than others. Proximity to great powers has been viewed as an important factor, for example, and the security policies of Norway, Finland, and even Canada reflected this throughout the Cold War.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, while most territorial borders are settled by negotiation, others have been forged through conflict and remain contested. Some states have multiple borders and may be confronted by different strategic factors at each point of contact with neighboring states: that is, they could have to respond to multiple security dilemmas. This has clearly shaped strategic orientations in countries like Israel, for example, which has developed a sizable nuclear arsenal for defense. Equally, ensuring access to vital resources is critical to strategy. Geographic factors in the context of a changing global territorial and resource landscape consequently continue to exert influence on strategists in the 21st century.

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52 Kerry M. Kartchner, Summary Report of the “Comparative Strategic Culture: Phase II Kickoff Workshop,” Defense Threat Reduction Agency Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (Washington, DC: February 13, 2006).

53 These ideas are drawn from Jeffrey S. Lantis and Darryl Howlett, “Culture and National Security Policy,” with Darryl Howlett, in John Baylis, James Wirtz, Eliot Cohen, and Colin S. Gray, eds., *Strategy in the Contemporary World* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2006).

54 Nina Graeger and Halvard Leira, “Norwegian Strategic Culture after World War II. From a Local to a Global Perspective,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 40, no. 1 (2005): 45-66; Henrikki Heikka, “Republican Realism. Finnish Strategic Culture in Historical Perspective,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 40, no. 1 (2005): 91-119.

History and experience are important considerations in the birth and evolution of states, and the strategic cultural identities that comprise them. International relations theory has identified several kinds of states ranging from weak to strong, colonial to post-colonial, and pre-modern, modern and postmodern. This raises the prospect that different kinds of states may confront different strategic problems and with varying material and ideational resources, apply unique responses.<sup>55</sup> For newly-formed states the difficulties of nation-building can compound insecurities and help shape strategic cultural identities. Conversely, for those states with a deep history the longevity of their existence may prompt consideration of factors that contribute to the rise and fall of great powers or civilizations and shape their policies to suit.

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<u>Physical</u>	<u>Political</u>	<u>Social/Cultural</u>
Geography	Historical Experience	Myths and Symbols
Climate	Political System	Defining Texts
Natural Resources	Elite Beliefs	
Generational Change	Military Organizations	
Technology		

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<-----{Transnational Normative Pressures}----->

**Figure 1: Potential Sources of Strategic Culture**

As illustrated in Figure 1, another source of strategic culture is the nature of a country’s political institutions and defense organizations. Some countries adopt a broadly Western liberal democratic style of government while others do not. Some are considered mature democracies while others are undergoing democratic transformation and are in various stages of consolidation. Where the latter are concerned there may be cultural variables such as tribal, religious or ethnic allegiances that operate within and across territorial boundaries that determine the pace and depth of consolidation. Similarly, many regard defense organizations as being critical to strategic cultures but differ over the precise impact these have. Military doctrines, civil-military relations and procurement practices also may affect strategic culture.

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<sup>55</sup> Colin Gray comments that “different political and strategic cultures confront distinctive geostrategic problems through the prisms of their individual historical circumstances, and with unique sets of assets and liabilities, will make somewhat individual choices.” Colin S. Gray, “The American Revolution in Military Affairs: An Interim Assessment,” *The Occasional*, Wiltshire, UK: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 1997): 28.

Similarly, where civil-military relations are concerned, it is argued the debate is not so much about military doctrines, “but the preconditions for the deployment and the kind of rationality that is at stake in those deployments.”<sup>56</sup>

Myths and symbols are considered to be part of all cultural groupings. Both can act as a stabilizing or destabilizing factor in the evolution of strategic cultural identities. The notion of myth can have meaning different from the traditional understanding as something unfounded or false. John Calvert writes that it can also refer to “a body of beliefs that express the fundamental, largely unconscious or assumed political values of a society—in short, as a dramatic expression of ideology.”<sup>57</sup> Work on symbols has also suggested that these act as “socially recognized objects of more or less common understanding” and which provide a cultural community with stable points of reference for strategic thought and action.<sup>58</sup>

Many analysts regard key texts as important in informing actors of appropriate strategic thought and action. Traditional analyses of peace and conflict have long pointed to the influence of such texts throughout history and in different cultural settings. These may follow a historical trajectory—from Sun Tzu, who wrote the *Art of War* during the time of the warring states in ancient China, through the writings of Kautilya in ancient India, and into western understanding as a result of Thucydides commentary on the Peloponnesian Wars and Clausewitz’s observations of the Napoleonic period. At the same time, there may be competition between texts for influence on society.<sup>59</sup>

Generational change, technology, and transnational norms are also regarded as important sources of strategic culture.<sup>60</sup> Both generational change and technology, particularly information and communications technology, can have important ramifications for issues of empowerment and strategic reach. The arrival of the Internet is a relatively recent phenomenon, yet there are now generations who have grown up with this medium of information and communication. This is also a world of individual and group empowerment that is both global in scope and potentially unique in its implications as a dual-use technology. While in-

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56 Neumann and Heikka, “Grand Strategy,” 16.

57 John Calvert, “The Mythic Foundations of Radical Islam,” *Orbis* (Winter 2004).

58 Charles Elder and Roger Cobb, quoted in Stuart Poore, “Strategic Culture,” in John Glenn, Darryl Howlett and Stuart Poore, *Neorealism versus Strategic Culture*, p. 63.

59 Nikolaos Ladis, “Assessing Greek Strategic Thought and Practice: Insights from the Strategic Culture Approach,” Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Southampton, UK, 2003.

60 Theo Farrell, “Transnational Norms and Military Development: Constructing Ireland’s Professional Army,” *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no.1 (2001): 63-102.

formation and communications technology has transformed societies, it has also allowed individuals or groups to communicate in novel ways and cause disruption at a distance.

Finally, Farrell argues that norms can define “the purpose and possibilities of military change” and in providing guidance concerning the use of force.<sup>61</sup> He has studied how transnational norms of military professionalism have influenced national policies and the process by which this occurs. Farrell considers that transnational norms can be transplanted into a country’s cultural context either through a process involving pressure on a target community to accept the new norms (termed “political mobilization”), or by a process of voluntary adoption (termed “social learning”). Norm transplantation, as Farrell refers to it, can thus occur via a process of incremental adoption over time eventually achieving a cultural match between the transnational and national norms.<sup>62</sup>

Given the range of potential influences on the development of strategic culture, it is imperative for studies to accurately gauge the dynamics at work in any particular society. Material factors form only one important pillar of the milieu that can influence strategic choices. More nuanced (and well informed) cultural studies will identify predispositions and related ideational factors that may also shape security policy.

### **3. Identify the Keepers of Strategic Culture**

Identifying strategic culture as a set of shared assumptions and decision rules prompts the question of how they are maintained, and by whom? Most scholars prefer descriptions of political and strategic cultures as the “property of collectivities rather than simply of the individuals that constitute them.”<sup>63</sup> Wilson proposed: “In the most general sense political cultures are socially constructed normative systems that are the product of both social (for example, rules that coordinate role relationships within the organizations) and psychological (for example, the preferences of individuals) influences but are not reducible to either...A political culture is not simply the sum of individual preferences, nor do preferences, especially those of any given individual, necessarily correspond with normative prescriptions.”<sup>64</sup> Ac-

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61 Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, eds., *The Sources of Military Change. Culture, Politics, Technology*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001): 7.

62 Farrell, “Transnational Norms and Military Development,” 63-102.

63 Duffield, *World Power Forsaken*, 23.

64 Wilson, “The Many Voices of Political Culture,” 12.

knowledging strategic culture as an “important ideational source of national predispositions, and thus of national security policy,” suggests deep, but vague, cultural foundations for state behavior, however.

If political culture is truly manifested in cognitive, evaluative, and expressive dimensions, it is conceivable that actors who carry those values might be identified. In fact, various political leaders and institutions are engaged in historical interpretation and development of the foreign policy path. This, in turn, prompts coalition- and consensus-building efforts by specific political players. To Duffield, “institutional sources of national predispositions are likely to reside in the central governmental organs charged with the formulation and execution of policy.” They may shape policy by “organizational processes, routines, and standard operating procedures may constraint the types of information to which decision makers are exposed.”<sup>65</sup> Berger suggests that political culture can only be understood as a combination of norms and political institutions which “exist in an interdependent relationship.”<sup>66</sup>

It is quite clear that elites are often the purveyors of the common historical narrative.<sup>67</sup> Most scholars agree that elites are instrumental in defining foreign policy goals and the scope and direction of policy restructuring in the face of new challenges. Furthermore, there is a general consensus in the literature that elites are cognitively predisposed to maintain the status quo. However, contemporary works on policy discourse tend to argue that strategic culture is best characterized as a “negotiated reality” among elites. Leaders clearly pay respect to deeply held convictions such as multilateralism and historical responsibility, but the record of past behavior for many countries also shows that leaders chose when and where to stake claims of strategic cultural traditions; they decided when and where to consciously move beyond previous boundaries of acceptability in foreign policy behavior. Ultimately, contemporary scholarship contends, elite behavior may be more consistent with the assertion that leaders are strategic “users of culture” who “redefine the limits of the possible” in key foreign and security policy discourses.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the constructivist literature suggests

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65 Duffield, *World Power Forsaken*, 29.

66 Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, 11-12.

67 See, for example, Sanjoy Banerjee, “The Cultural Logic of National Identity Formation: Contending Discourses in Late Colonial India,” in Hudson, ed., *Culture and Foreign Policy*.

68 Cruz, “Identity and Persuasion,” p.278; For more on the strategic “use of culture” see Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51 (April 1986): 273-286.

that leaders can effectively be “norm entrepreneurs” in leading a state to conceptualize a specific strategic path.<sup>69</sup>

Political institutions—including military organizations, parties, and domestic coalitions—may also have a significant impact on foreign policy behavior. The organizational culture literature suggests that state behavior is a function of specific institutional orientations. Studies of Japanese and German foreign policy decisions in the 1990s argue that there are enduring institutional manifestations of strategic culture. But the keepers of the culture need not strictly be *military* bureaucracies. Indeed, in Germany the Foreign Minister has dominant control over foreign and security policy. In Japan, political institutions from the *Diet* to the Liberal Democratic Party to the Self-Defense Forces share commitments to a foreign policy of restraint.<sup>70</sup> Whether or not military bureaucracies are the most common keepers of strategic culture around the world, it remains the case that the influence of organizational culture on state behavior is mediated by other institutions and by the policymaking processes in democratic states.

Finally, studies of public attitudes toward strategic choice suggest some measure of consistency over time. Contemporary works on casualty sensitivity and the war in Iraq, for example, suggest a surprising amount of stability in public views on war. These studies argue against the traditional ‘Almond-Lippmann’ consensus that the public opinion is unstable and malleable. Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler assert that the public will tolerate even high numbers of U.S. combat casualties in conflicts where they believe in the ‘rightness’ of the war and in the likelihood of success.<sup>71</sup> These works coincide with more sensitive studies of prudential views in the U.S. public toward the use of force.<sup>72</sup>

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69 For more on this see Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Kimberly Martin Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Richard Price, 1998, “Reversing the Gun Sights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Land Mines,” *International Organization* 53, no.3 (1998): 613-644.

70 Duffield, *World Power Forsaken*, p.72.

71 Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler, “Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq,” *International Security* 30, no.3 (Winter 2005/2006): 7-46.

72 Bruce Russett, *Controlling the Sword: The Democratic Governance of National Security* (Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

#### 4. Identify Scope Conditions for Strategic Culture

The events of September 11 and the subsequent war on terrorism have prompted renewed attention to the role of culture in shaping state (and non-state) behaviors. While constructivism offers a fairly ambitious research agenda, I would contend that it is important for cultural theorists to first consider the potential for middle-range theory development. It may indeed be possible to develop scope conditions within which strategic culture could have a stronger impact on security policy. To this end, we can examine both classic perspectives and contemporary debates on strategic culture. For example, one of the most intriguing questions in the subfield actually carries over through several generations of scholarship: what types of actors are most likely to have defined strategic cultures? Snyder made a strong case for the influence of strategic culture in Soviet nuclear policy; and subsequent studies effectively framed U.S. and Soviet cultures within the larger Cold War context. But does the literature imply that authoritarian systems more likely to have defined strategic cultures than are democratic systems? Or, are authoritarian systems simply less likely to have definable strategic subcultures? Can non-state actors have strategic cultures? Can regional organizations or meta-cultural groups have some form of strategic culture?

First, much of the existing literature on strategic culture tends to focus on its role in authoritarian states, implying that there are more measurable strains of strategic culture manifest in rigorous political ideology, doctrine, and discourse. Studies of the North Korea emphasize the core ideology of self-reliance (*Juche*), which prioritizes national security over all other policy concern (even meeting basic human needs). The cult of personality of Kim Jong-Il allows some measure of continuity in expression of military priorities, doctrine, and orientations. Iran also has a fairly definable strategic culture. Iranian strategic culture is rooted in a nearly 3000-year history of Persian civilization that lends itself to a fascinating combination of “cultural superiority,” “manifest destiny” and Iran’s “deep sense of insecurity.”<sup>73</sup> Giles argues, “specific attributes of Shi’ism, which was adopted by Persia in the sixteenth century, both reinforce and expand certain traits in Iranian strategic culture.”<sup>74</sup> In

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73 Gregory F. Giles, “The Crucible of Radical Islam: Iran’s Leaders and Strategic Culture,” in Barry R. Schneider and Jerrold M. Post, eds., “Know Thy Enemy: Profiles of Adversary Leaders and Their Strategic Cultures,” U.S. Air Force Counterproliferation Center (July 2003): 146; [www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/cpc-pubs/know\\_thy\\_enemy/index.htm](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/cpc-pubs/know_thy_enemy/index.htm).

74 Giles, “The Crucible of Radical Islam,” 147.

summary, a combination of political institutions with historical, cultural, religious, and geographic influences constitute Iran's "strategic personality" or culture.

A fascinating debate has emerged over whether the European Union (EU) can establish a strategic culture. The EU formalized a common European Security Strategy (ESS) for the first time in its history in December 2003. Some hailed the achievement as marking a common European strategic culture, but others question whether the EU will ever be capable of forging a bond of common threat perceptions and interests. Optimists such as Cornish and Edwards (2001) contend that "there are signs that a European strategic culture is already developing through a socialisation process." They define EU strategic culture as simply "the institutional confidence and processes to manage and deploy military force as part of the accepted range of legitimate and effective policy instruments."<sup>75</sup> To Meyer (2004), the European Council vote on ESS in December 2003 provided a necessary "strategic concept" around which to focus attention and resources.<sup>76</sup> However, Lindley-French (2002) charges that Europe lacks both the capabilities and will to establish a common foreign and security policy in the foreseeable future. He characterizes the Europe of today as "not so much an architecture as a decaying arcade of stately structures of varying designs reflective of a bygone era."<sup>77</sup> Given serious disagreements over threat perception, Rynning (2003) concludes that the "EU is unlikely to develop a coherent and strong strategic culture" any time soon.<sup>78</sup>

Huntington's 'civilizational thesis' certainly pushes the envelope of theoretical interpretation.<sup>79</sup> He contended that states are part of broader civilizations that share strong bonds

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75 Paul Cornish and Geoffrey Edwards, "Beyond the EU/NATO Dichotomy: the beginnings of a European strategic culture," *International Affairs* 77, no.3 (2001): 587; See also Kerry Longhurst and Marcin Zaborowski, eds., *Old Europe, New Europe and the Transatlantic Security Agenda* (London: Routledge, 2005).

76 Christoph O. Meyer, "Theorising European Strategic Culture: Between Convergence and the Persistence of National Diversity," Centre for European Policy Studies, CEPS Working Document No.204, June 2004, <http://www.ceps.be> (accessed 12 September 2004).

77 Julian Lindley-French, "In the Shade of Locarno? Why European defence is failing," *International Affairs* 78, no.4, 2002, p.789; See also Steven Eberts, Lawrence Freedman, Grant Charles, Francois Heisbourg, Daniel Keohane, and Michael O'Hanlon, *A European Way of War* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2004); Stephan Keukeleire, "European Security and Defence Policy without an European Foreign Policy?" in Hans-Georg Erhart, ed., *Die Europäische Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik: Positionen, Perzeptionen, Probleme, Perspektiven* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2002): 231-242.

78 Sten Rynning, "The European Union: Towards a Strategic Culture?" *Security Dialogue* 34, no.4 (December 2003): 479.

79 Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no.3 (1993): 22-49; "If Not Civilizations, What? Paradigms of the Post-Cold War World," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no.5 (1993), pp.186-194; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

of culture, societal values, religion, and ideologies. The most important of these bonds, he argued, is religion, and “the major civilizations in human history have been closely identified with the world’s great religions.”<sup>80</sup> Meta-cultural ties, taken to the broadest level of categorization, are civilizational identities that shape modern world politics and predispose identity groups toward conflict.<sup>81</sup> However, the civilizational thesis has drawn sharp criticism from the scholarly community. Area studies experts are critical of Huntington’s willingness to propose the sweeping generalizations that were necessary to undergird the civilizational thesis. Recent investigations of Huntington’s claims have concluded that there is no statistically significant causal linkage before, during, or after the Cold War.<sup>82</sup> In the end, Huntington’s work may have undermined some of the careful, social scientific progress that had been achieved in the cultural research program.

Can the concept of strategic culture apply to non-state actors operating across territorial boundaries where identities may be formed in the realm of cyberspace? The advent of the cyber revolution has generated several issues concerning our understanding of conflict and security.<sup>83</sup> Emily Goldman writes that security threats related to cyberspace “range from the systematic and persistent, to the decentralized and dispersed, to the accidental and non-malevolent.”<sup>84</sup> Additionally, while acknowledging that the technologies associated with globalization have enabled terrorist groups to conduct operations that “are deadlier, more distributed, and more difficult to combat than those of their predecessors,” James Kiras argues that these same technologies “can be harnessed to defeat terrorism by those governments with the will and resources to combat it.”<sup>85</sup> According to Victor Cha’s globalization security spectrum, “The most far-reaching security effect of globalization is its complication of the

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80 Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 47.

81 Ibid., 318.

82 Errol A. Henderson and Richard Tucker, “Clear and Present Strangers: The Clash of Civilizations and International Conflict,” *International Studies Quarterly* 45 (2001): 317-338; See also Errol A. Henderson, “The Democratic Peace Through the Lens of Culture, 1820-1989,” *International Studies Quarterly* 42 (September 1998): 461-484.

83 Gregory J. Rattray, “The Cyberterrorism Threat,” in Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism. Understanding the New Security Environment*, (Guilford: McGraw-Hill, 2002), pp. 221-245; Stuart J.D. Schwartzstein, ed., *The Information Revolution and National Security. Dimensions and Directions*, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1996).

84 Emily O. Goldman, “Introduction: Security in the Information Technology Age,” in Emily O. Goldman, ed., “National Security in the Information Age,” special issue, *Contemporary Security Policy* 24, no. 1 (April 2003): 1.

85 James D. Kiras, “Terrorism and Globalization,” in John Baylis and Steve Smith, eds., *The Globalization of World Politics. An Introduction to International Relations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 479.

basic concept of ‘threat’ in international relations.”<sup>86</sup> Technology enhances “the salience of substate extremist groups or fundamentalist groups because their ability to organize transnationally, meet virtually, and utilize terrorist tactics has been substantially enhanced by the globalization of technology and information.”<sup>87</sup>

Finally, it may also be possible to identify scope conditions under which one is more likely to find constitutive effects of strategic culture. In a classic study, Holsti lays out five “decisional settings” in which belief structures tend to have a great impact on decision-making, including: “situations that contain highly ambiguous components and are thus open to a variety of interpretations”; “non-routine situations that require more than the application of standard operating procedures and decision rules”; “responses to events that are unanticipated or contain an element of surprise”; and even “long-range policy planning...that inherently involves considerable uncertainty.”<sup>88</sup> These hypotheses suggest that ideational foundations may be more significant in specific contexts.

More recently, Kartchner has hypothesized that a set of conditions may enable strategic culture to play a more dominant role in state behavior. They include: “when there is a strong sense of threat to a group’s existence, identity or resources, or when the group believes that it is at a critical disadvantage to other groups; when there is a pre-existing strong cultural basis for group identity; when the leadership frequently resorts to cultural symbols in support of its national group security aspirations and programs; when there is a high degree of homogeneity within the group’s strategic culture; and when historical experiences strongly predispose the group to perceive threats.”<sup>89</sup> Clearly, efforts to establish scope conditions within which we are more likely to identify strategic cultures that have constitutive effects represents important progress toward middle-range theory.

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86 Victor D. Cha, “Globalization and the Study of International Security,” *Journal of Peace Research* 37, no. 3 (2000): 391-403; See also John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, eds., *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime and Militancy* vol. I (2001), p. 1. <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1382/>.

87 Cha, “Globalization and the Study of International Security,” 392. See also, Audrey Kurth Cronin, “Behind the Curve. Globalization and International Terrorism,” *International Security* 27, no.3, (Winter 2002/03): 30-58.

88 Ole Holsti, “Foreign Policy Formation Viewed Cognitively,” in Robert Axelrod, ed. *Structure of Decision* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp.18-54; See also Alexander L. George, “The Causal Nexus between Cognitive Beliefs and Decision-Making Behavior: the ‘Operational Code’ Belief System,” in Lawrence S. Falkowski, ed., *Psychological Models in International Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979): 95-124.

89 Kartchner, Summary Report of the “Comparative Strategic Culture: Phase II Kickoff Workshop.”

## 5. Develop Models of Strategic Cultural Change

The focus of most studies of strategic culture is on continuity of state behavior. Eckstein suggested that the socialization of values and beliefs occurs over time. Past learning becomes sedimented in the collective consciousness and is relatively resilient to change. Lessons of the past, therefore, serve as a tight filter for any future learning that might occur.<sup>90</sup> Those scholars who address the potential for change (inspired by Weber, Habermas, and Immanuel Wallerstein), face a great deal of criticism. However, an intriguing characteristic of the latest generation of cultural studies is the recognition of the possibility of change over time. If historical memory, political institutions, and multilateral commitments shape strategic culture, then, recent studies argue, it would seem logical to accept that security policies will evolve over time.<sup>91</sup> This contribution to the strategic culture literature is informed both by studies of foreign policy restructuring and constructivist ideas on foreign policy as discourse. Essentially, this work seeks to challenge “the distinction between behaviour and culture” by considering “culture as practice.”<sup>92</sup> It also represents a response to the criticism of prior generations of cultural models as static and unresponsive to systemic pressures.<sup>93</sup>

Under what conditions can strategic culture change? When might foreign policy decisions transcend the traditional bounds of strategic culture? In my own work on the subject, I contend that at least three factors can cause “strategic cultural dilemmas” and produce changes in security policy. First, external shocks may fundamentally challenge existing beliefs and undermine past historical narratives. According to Farrell, a shock is often a “necessary condition for radical change...[shocks] undermine the legitimacy of existing norms, shift power within communities, and enable norm cultural entrepreneurs to construct a new consensus around alternative norms.”<sup>94</sup> For German leaders in the 1990s, the scale of the humanitarian tragedies in the Balkans served as a catalyst for consideration of policy options outside the traditional bounds of German strategic culture. The recognition that groups were being systematically targeted for genocide and ethnic cleansing created a moral imperative for German action. Some experts have even suggested that ethnic cleansing in Bosnia eroded

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90 Harry Eckstein, “A Culturalist Theory of Political Change,” *American Political Science Review* 82 (1998): 796.

91 Banchoff, *The German Problem Transformed*, 2.

92 Rasmussen, “What’s the Use of It?” 71.

93 See, for example, Charles Lockhart, “Cultural Contributions to Explaining Institutional Form, Political Change, and Rational Decisions,” *Comparative Political Studies* 32, no.7 (October 1999): 862-893.

94 Farrell, “Transnational Norms and Military Development,” 82.

the moral legitimacy of pacifism on the German political left and led to an atmosphere more permissive of the use of force to stop such violence.<sup>95</sup>

However, most scholars rightly assert that any process of change would not be easy. Potential catalysts for change, Berger argued, might be “dramatic events or traumatic experiences [such as revolutions, wars, and economic catastrophes],” that would “discredit thoroughly core beliefs and values.”<sup>96</sup> Such change would be accompanied by extreme psychological stress and would require a resocialization process, involving participation by various groups in the crafting of a compromise on a new political cultural orientation.<sup>97</sup>

Second, foreign policy behavior may break the traditional bounds of strategic cultural orientations when primary tenets of strategic thought come into direct conflict with one another. In other words, a country with interpretive codes of support for democracy and an aversion to the use of military force faces a strategic cultural dilemma when confronted by a challenge to democracy that necessitates a military response. The Japanese government confronted this question in relation to the struggle for self-determination in East Timor. The same type of dilemma may arise from a conflict between commitments to multilateralism and unilateral convictions that norms are being violated. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky said that cultures remain vital only if their core principles continue to generate solutions that satisfy human needs and make sense of the world.<sup>98</sup> Products of this strategic cultural *dissidence* include occasional state defections from multilateral arrangements, the development of alternative diplomatic initiatives, or stipulations for policy cooperation.

Thus, strategic cultural dilemmas define new directions for foreign policy and demand the reconstruction of historical narratives. Changes—including abrupt and fairly dramatic reorientations of security policy behavior—appear to be possible, and strategic cultural models must be more reflective of the conditions that draw out such changes. Indeed, Swidler recognized that the relationship between state behavior and strategic culture becomes especially apparent “in unsettled cultural periods...when explicit ideologies govern action [and] structural opportunities for action determine which among competing ideologies

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95 Jeffrey S. Lantis, *Strategic Dilemmas and the Evolution of German Foreign Policy Since Unification* (Westport: Praeger, 2002).

96 Duffield, *World Power Forsaken*, 23.

97 *Ibid.*, 14.

98 Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1990): 69-70.

survive in the long run.”<sup>99</sup> As NATO leaders implement a new strategic concept, China pursues liberalized trade, and the United States leads a global war on terrorism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, strategic cultural models must themselves adapt for long-term relevance.

Third, elites play a special role in strategic cultural continuity and change. Perhaps Berger is correct that strategic culture is best understood as a “negotiated reality” among foreign policy elites. While leaders clearly pay respect to deeply held convictions associated with strategic culture, the story of foreign policy development may be best understood as the pursuit of legitimation for preferred policy courses that may, or may not, conform to traditional cultural boundaries. Indeed, Hymans contends that identity is as much *subjective* as intersubjective, and that leaders often adopt their own specific conceptions of national identity from among a competitive marketplace of ideas.<sup>100</sup> Both the constructivist and culturalist literature agree on the possibility for norm entrepreneurs to approach events, frame the discourse, and begin constructing a new discursive path toward objectives. Indeed, sociologist Cruz contends that elites have much more latitude than scholars generally allow. They may “recast a particular agenda as most appropriate to a given collective reality or...recast reality itself by establishing a (new) credible balance between the known and the unknown.” In short, Cruz argued, they “redefine the limits of the possible, both descriptively and prescriptively.”<sup>101</sup>

In many ways, the U.S. response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, is illustrative of these agents of strategic cultural change. The Bush administration’s declaration of a war on terrorism represented a fundamental conversion in strategic culture prompted by an external shock. President Bush and top advisors embraced a new direction in U.S. security policy based on their reinterpretation of the threat matrix. New strategic cultural orientations include a positive affirmation of American dominance in international security affairs, with priority consideration of homeland security, a new doctrine of preemption that includes a willingness to use military force to achieve security objectives, and a preference for unilat-

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99 Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” 273.

100 Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation*, 19; See also Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris, eds., *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

101 Cruz acknowledges that this raises a critical dichotomy between culture as a system of meaning and culture as practice; Cruz, “Identity and Persuasion,” p.278.

eral action to reduce external constraints on U.S. behavior.<sup>102</sup> However, these changes have been extremely difficult and even traumatic for the American polity, prompting deep divisions over questions like the constitutionality of executive action, the degree of U.S. sacrifice in the war on terror, and a shift in alliance and security relationships in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>103</sup>

## **6. Consider Policy Implications: Strategic Culture and Coercive Diplomacy**

The theory of strategic culture offers tremendous opportunity for progressive study of strategic choice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but it clearly contains a few pitfalls as well. I would contend that there is a great deal of potential utility in strategic cultural studies if scholars truly pursue the goal of cumulation outlined here. Progressive models of strategic culture operating from similar sets of assumptions about the sources, influences, and implications of identity have the potential to be highly valuable policy tools. Strategic cultural models speak to concerns in key policy arenas as well, including responses to countries seeking weapons of mass destruction. If one accepts that there are truly different strategic cultural profiles, and that they shape security policy choices around the world, then major powers should tailor their policies to accommodate these cultural differences to the extent possible. Regarding threat assessment, for example, there are significant questions about the applicability of western and traditional models to non-western countries. Studies of Iranian and North Korean decision-making systems, for example, that focus on the dysfunction of the process may ignore significant cultural differences that allow those systems to focus on specific ends and means without traditionally western orientations. A multi-faceted cultural approach allows us to recognize the nuance of competing systems and may further energize our potential for accurate threat assessment.

These arguments are supported in the limited scholarship on identity and strategic choice. For example, George argues “the effectiveness of deterrence and coercive diplomacy is highly context dependent.”<sup>104</sup> In a recent article, Jentleson and Whytock recognize that at

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102 Theo Farrell, “Strategic Culture and American Empire,” *SAIS Review* 25, no.2 (2005), pp.3-18

103 Jeffrey S. Lantis, “American Strategic Culture and Transatlantic Security Ties,” in Kerry Longhurst and Marcin Zaborowski, eds., *Old Europe, New Europe and the Transatlantic Security Agenda*, 2005

104 Alexander L. George, “The Need for Influence Theory and Actor-Specific Behavioral Models of Adversaries,” in Barry R. Schneider and Jerrold M. Post, eds., “Know Thy Enemy: Profiles of Adversary Leaders and Their Strategic Cultures,” U.S. Air Force Counterproliferation Center (July 2003): 271-310; [www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/cpc-pubs/know\\_thy\\_enemy/index.htm](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/cpc-pubs/know_thy_enemy/index.htm).

least three different strategies of coercive diplomacy may be selected to achieve strategic objectives in counterproliferation: “proportionality, reciprocity and coercive credibility.”<sup>105</sup> These scholars contend that different strategies of coercive diplomacy may be used effectively to achieve specific objectives, but that the selection of these strategies should be “tailored” to match the national identity conceptions of the target state. Finally, drawing on theories from political psychology, Hymans contends that the decision to develop a nuclear arsenal is “extraordinary,” and can be found to be rooted in the national identity conceptions that leaders carry with them.<sup>106</sup> Understanding different national identity conceptions, Hymans contends, can help us to predict whether leaders will ultimately decide to take that significant step.

Recent U.S. efforts to deal with nuclear programs in rival states like North Korea and Iran are illustrative of the complexity of the challenges. Efforts to dissuade and deter potential enemies from developing nuclear weapons have largely been unsuccessful to date. This is not to say, of course, that U.S. diplomacy has been unsophisticated in identifying the challenges and recognizing nuances in cross-cultural communication. But one could argue that progressive models of strategic culture can only help to inform selection of policies targeted toward specific strategic cultures. Assuming that concepts like coercion, risk, and deterrence are highly culturally specific, the development of more reflexive models becomes essential for both international cooperation and security policy success.

## CONCLUSION

While constructivism may represent a paradigmatic challenge to structural realism in the discipline today, most supporters of strategic culture have adopted the more modest goal of ‘bringing culture back in’ to the study of national security policy. In fact, these research traditions are more similar than some would believe. Scholars must work to overcome barriers to integration of these two approaches into a more comprehensive model of strategic culture formation, implementation, and change. Some argue that one of these barriers is a certain defensiveness on the part of neorealists, who contend that culturalists (and constructiv-

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105 Bruce W. Jentleson and Christopher Whytock, “Who ‘Won’ Libya? The Force-Diplomacy Debate and its Implications for Theory and Policy,” *International Security* 30, no.3 (Winter 2005/2006), pp.47-86

106 Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation*, 18.

ists) simply seek to supplant neorealism. But ultimately, even Desch allows that cultural theories might supplement neorealism by helping to explain time lags between structural change and alterations in state behavior, by accounting for seemingly ‘irrational’ state behavior, and in helping to explain state actions in “structurally indeterminate situations.”<sup>107</sup> The cases of the evolution of German and Japanese security policies are better understood as a product of domestic political adjustments (rooted in culture, traditions, and common historical narratives) to changing international circumstances. Far from an exclusive interpretation, progressive models that explore external-internal linkages and their impact on discrete, strategic choices represent an important avenue for theoretical advancement.

Culture is clearly a factor in contemporary international security, but research still needs to be done on its depth and scope of influence. The Comparative Strategic Cultures project (2005-2006) assembled a range of experts to address strategic culture in practice around the world. Participants are very cognizant of the warning that in seeking to identify causal relations there is a risk of over-simplifying the social world. Considering strategic culture as “a dynamic interplay between discourse and practice” offers a means for accommodating the issue of the mutable nature of strategic culture. Similarly, it may illuminate both how strategic culture evolves from generation to generation and is transformed by competing groups through negotiation and debate.<sup>108</sup>

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107 Ibid, p.166.

108 Darryl Howlett and John Glenn, “Epilogue: Nordic Strategic Culture,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 40, no. 1 (2005), p. 129.