COMPARATIVE STRATEGIC CULTURES: LITERATURE REVIEW (PART 2)

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Comparative Strategic Culture
Literature Review

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INTRODUCTION

This survey of existing literature on comparative strategic culture unearthed a substantial amount of material, building on the literature review conducted in 2005 by the Naval Postgraduate School’s Center for Contemporary Conflict. The objectives of the 2006 update were two-fold: 1) to locate additional literature on the subject of strategic culture and 2) to focus on strategic culture as it pertains to the views, acquisition, and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by both state and non-state actors. This paper provides highlights of some of the new material added to the bibliography.¹

The field of strategic culture is interdisciplinary with substantial contributions made from the fields of business, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and international relations. This paper, however, looks more closely at five specific fields and sub-fields which can influence an actor’s decision to acquire, proliferate and/or employ WMD—proliferation, religion/theology, actor-specific analyses, sociology and psychology. This paper does not review each strategic cultural variable in great detail; what it does do, however, is provide an introduction to some of the key variables that can influence WMD decision-making. Admittedly, discriminating between essential and non-essential information is a challenging task because most of the literature contributes, in some way, to a more complete understanding of strategic culture. But the fundamental question, for the purposes of this project, is determining what forces and factors influence state and non-state behavior with respect to WMD acquisition, proliferation and employment. Is there a universal framework for forecasting an actor's behavior?

METHODOLOGY

Focusing this review on WMD required a creative use of a variety of specific search terms. For example, one search combination included the phrases “nuclear culture” and “first strike.” Another combination included “biological weapons” and “perception.” A variety of
databases were used to conduct the search. They include: Journal Storage (JSTOR), the Open
Source Center (formerly FBIS), LexisNexis, and Intellink, as well as standard Internet search
engines.

A tremendous amount of literature related to strategic culture was unearthed. Over 114
sources were found in all. Most of the literature was in the form of scholarly publications
published by Western academics, scholars and analysts. There appeared to be a shortage of non-
Western perspectives on strategic culture. However, there were a few sources from British and
Indian authors.

This review is expansive, including literature on decision-making, business culture,
political psychology, and so on. The results of the literature review indicate that strategic culture
is not a parsimonious theory. Rather, the literature indicates that many different strategic cultures
exist; each state and non-state actor has its own history, paradigm and operational code.

Thirty nine of the 114 strategic culture sources surveyed (34 percent) dealt with WMD.
Those 39 sources were overwhelmingly nuclear, focusing less on chemical and biological
weapons. The literature focused on Russia and the Former Soviet Union, China, North Korea,
India, South Africa, Iran, Iraq, the European Union, NATO and al Qaeda. The survey turned up
surprisingly little information on Japan, South Korea, Pakistan, and Israel. There appears to be a
dearth of literature focusing on the Latin American, Caribbean, and African states.

The WMD strategic culture literature has been organized into five categories:
proliferation (general), religion/theology, actor-specific, sociology and psychology. Each of
these categories has a key work that can be used for an overview of the sub-field:

Proliferation (General)
- Barry R. Schneider, “Nuclear Proliferation and Counter-Proliferation: Policy Issues
  pp. 209-234

Religion/Theology
- Stephen Kierulff, “Belief in ‘Armageddon Theology’ and Willingness to Risk
  1991), pp. 81-93

Actor-Specific
- Lewis A. Dunn, “Can al Qaeda Be Deterred from Using Nuclear Weapons?” Center
  University Press, July 2005)

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1 Last updated 19 May 2006 for delivery at the Comparative Strategic Culture Curriculum project Phase II
  conference in Deer Valley, Utah.
CULTURE BY CATEGORY

Low-Intensity Conflict and Insurgency

While not all of the sources surveyed dealt specifically with WMD acquisition, proliferation and use, a number of the sources have been included in this review because they offer particularly useful insights into strategic culture. According to a 1996 article in Parameters by Department of Defense analyst Dr. Paul M. Belbuowski, entitled “Strategic Implications of Cultures in Conflict,” a thorough understanding of culture is especially important in the context of low-intensity conflict and peace operations.\(^2\) Often neglected cross-cultural discrepancies, such as different conceptions of time, can have a tremendous impact on military operations—from understanding the adversary to developing a sound strategy for victory. For example, the Western conception of time is both quantitative and progressive, whereas Indian philosophy views time in a more cyclical sense. Cultural details are often overlooked; their study, however, can provide increased understanding and situational awareness for decision-makers. Belbuowski laments, “Unfortunately, philosophers of culture, cultural anthropologists, and others are frequently overlooked as indirect contributors to strategy and policy formulation. Their insights into the ways of being of other peoples are invaluable for the long-range forecasting and prediction for foreign policy vision.”

Montgomery McFate in “The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture” states that, “Cultural knowledge and warfare are inextricably bound.”\(^3\) He argues that the ongoing insurgency in Iraq is a “wake-up call to the military that culture matters.” The author explains that cultural understanding has implications, both operationally and strategically. For example, during the Vietnam era, anthropologists excelled at bridging the gap between the military and

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indigenous tribes. McFate offers a unique perspective in the discussion of strategic culture as a cultural anthropologist and a defense policy fellow in the Office of Naval Research.

**WMD Policy**

What impact does strategic culture have on an actor’s desire to acquire and use WMD? In a 2001 article in the *Journal of Peace Research*, Dr. Rajesh M. Basrur writes that the “restraint, stability and minimalism” of India’s nuclear policy is best explained by its strategic culture. Basrur breaks the concept of strategic culture into three parts: 1) the level of assumptions and beliefs, 2) the operational level and, 3) the structural frame. He argues that an analysis of Indian strategic culture as it pertains to nuclear weapons reveals examples of tempered responses to external and domestic pressures for change with a “positive disposition toward arms control.” Of course, this is the perspective of an Indian scholar. A Pakistani scholar or a French scholar would likely have an alternative interpretation of India’s behavior.

Dr. T.V. Paul of McGill University writes in “Great Powers and Nuclear Non-proliferation Norms: China in South Asia” that great powers are driven more by power and national interests than concerns over supporting or violating established security norms. Paul argues that China has contributed to proliferation in South Asia, despite its public acceptance of the international nonproliferation regime. Paul’s argument runs counter to those of strategic culture theorists. These types of cogent arguments help to identify deficiencies in the theory of strategic culture and add significant value to the discussion. In his 1996 book entitled *Morality, Prudence, and Nuclear Weapons*, Steven P. Lee looks at the military and ethical decisions surrounding nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War era with a focus on the future of nuclear deterrence. Lee works to provide a comprehensive normative framework for the understanding of nuclear deterrence policy. He investigates both the ethical and strategic dimensions of deterrence.

Peter Van Ham of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations asks in “WMD Proliferation and Transatlantic Relations: Is a Joint Western Strategy Possible?” whether a

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joint Western strategy to combat proliferation is achievable.⁷ He argues that while the United States and Europe approach WMD proliferation differently, a joint Western policy is needed. In a paper presented in September 2003, entitled “The European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) – a Strategic Culture in the Making,” Per M. Martinsen asked whether a European strategic culture is possible.⁸ While significant progress has been made over the past three decades in terms of EU integration, the EU’s military and civilian shortfalls in capabilities—from the failure to create a deployable joint force to problems in improving C4ISR capabilities—are preventing the development of a single European strategic culture.

Professor Michael Baun argues that the EU’s strategic culture has been shaped by the tragedies of the past 100 years and that each state has its own traditions and paradigms.⁹ For example, France and Britain are much more likely to use force than Germany or Sweden. In a similar vein, Joanna Spear, writing in Arms Control Today in November 2003, argued that the rift between the United States and Europe over the threat posed by Iraq has led a common European “strategic personality” to emerge.¹⁰ Spear believes, however, that one area in which a transatlantic consensus has been reached is on the need to curb the proliferation of WMD. But she is quick to note that the United States and the European Union differ on approach. According to Spear, the Europeans emphasize a multilateral, carrot-based diplomacy while the United States favors a “stick-based diplomacy” in form of military force or economic sanctions. Clearly, recent events with Iran have shown that the EU is not adverse to threatening sanctions to confront noncompliance.

**Strategic Culture and Personality**

In a 1999 paper published by the Air Command and Staff College, Major Kimberly Crider argues that today’s multipolar strategic environment has increased the likelihood of

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conflict. The culprit, Crider explains, is the variety of ways state and non-state actors view and react to the challenges and opportunities in the international system. These differences in perception result from culture. It is culture, according to the author, that forms our perceptions, assumptions and guides our behaviors. Crider uses cultural changes to analyze potential implications for Sino-US relations. Not surprisingly, the author identifies differences in culture that lead the two states to approaching security challenges from unique perspectives. In “War and Misperception,” an article published in the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Dr. Robert Jervis describes how inaccurate inferences, miscalculations and misjudgments about how others will react to one’s policies have routinely led to armed conflict. Similarly, Glen Fisher, a veteran Foreign Service Officer suggests that the human mind is programmed by culture to perceive and respond to the world in certain ways. Professor John Duffield believes that while more recently scholars have embraced cultural approaches to understand state behavior, reliance on political culture has been neglected.

In a piece entitled “The Operational Code of Mao Zedong: Defensive or Offensive Realist?” Huiyan Feng asks whether China’s strategic culture is offensive or defensive in orientation as a result of Mao Zedong’s own strategic orientation. While scholars like Alastair Johnston have argued that China has a propensity for aggression, Huiyan argues that China’s behavior in the Korean War, Sino-India War, and the Sino-Vietnam War illustrates a defensive pattern of behavior. The author analyzes the content of Mao’s foreign policy speeches using the automated Verbs in Context System (VICS). The author concludes that Johnston’s cultural realist understanding of Mao is not entirely accurate, that while Mao exhibited a tendency toward offensive realism, his operational code was much more complex. Analyst Shivaji Mukherjee believes that China has a “weak martial tradition,” evidenced by the writings of Sun Tzu and Confucius. This has led to its preference for strategic defense and minimal use of force and,

11 Major Kimberly A. Crider, “Strategic Implications of Culture Historical Analysis of China’s Culture and Implications for United States Policy,” Air Command and Staff College, *Wright Flyer* No. 8 (September 1999).
arguably, its stated no-first-use policy.\(^{16}\)

Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, writing in November 2005, noted that Germany was the first country to issue a “categorical refusal” to support the US-led invasion of Iraq.\(^{17}\) The author believes that Germany’s refusal does not signify Germany’s desire to abandon the Transatlantic alliance nor that it is staunchly pacifist. Rather, the German refusal simply meant that the German threshold for military engagement was not crossed. Those thresholds are often determined by strategic culture. Dr. Theo Farrell, in his piece entitled “Strategic Culture and American Empire,” writes that there is significant value in studying U.S. strategic culture vis-à-vis U.S. military policy.\(^{18}\) Farrell also makes a historical comparison between the British Empire and the United States. The author also explained the methodological challenges posed by the study of strategic culture.

Dr. Michael Evans, head of the Australian Army’s Land Warfare Studies Centre (LWSC) at the Royal Military College in Canberra concludes that Australia’s political and warfighting culture has been pragmatic, but that its strategic culture has a tendency to be overly theoretical and has failed to provide constructive guidance during times of war and crisis.\(^{19}\) Research conducted by anthropologists studying the causes of war in pre-industrial times have concluded that “war behavior” cannot be easily reduced to simply material factors or culture, explains Columbia Professor Dr. Jack Snyder.\(^{20}\) Snyder explains that material, institutional, and cultural elements should be evaluated simultaneously to most accurately assess a society’s preference for armed conflict. Ben D. Mor explores the concept of international rivalries which he argues develops when a “protracted threat perception” is developed in the early stages of a conflict.\(^{21}\) Future interaction between the two actors only reinforces the hostile beliefs and behaviors toward the two in an unbreakable cycle. Mor cites Israel’s national security paradigm and its evolution throughout the early years of the Egyptian-Israeli rivalry.

\(^{16}\) Shivaji Mukherjee, *India, China and No-First-Use: Strategic Culture or Realpolitik?* (Institute for Conflict Management, July 2001).


In a 2001 study commissioned by DTRA’s Advanced Systems and Concepts Office on the “Strategic Personality and the Effectiveness of Nuclear Deterrence,” Caroline F. Ziemke, Phillippe Loustaunau, and Amy Alrich of the Institute of Defense Analyses explore the efficacy of nuclear deterrence by providing country-specific analyses of both Iraq and Iran. They offer unique insights through their meticulous dissection of each state’s “strategic personality” and subsequent impact on deterrence.22

**Religion**

Before September 11, 2001, many in the Western world failed to appreciate the role religion played in international politics, according to Drs. John Carlson and Erik Owens of the University of Chicago Divinity School.23 The two argue in “The Sacred and the Sovereign: Religion and International Politics” that the convergence of politics and religion is not always catastrophic, but that there is a balance to be found. Many religious traditions and ideas coincide with the “political quest” for justice and human dignity.

Adding an empirical element to this discussion, Cultural Anthropologist Dr. Stephen Kierulff concluded from a survey of 281 adults that belief in “Armageddon Theology” is strongly associated with certain political attitudes, such as the belief that the US will attack Russia before the year 2010, believing in one’s ability to survive a nuclear war as well as the willingness to use nuclear weapons and risk nuclear war.24 The adults surveyed were from various religions backgrounds—Christians, Utilitarians, Jews, agnostics, atheists and others. Kierulff’s paper was published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* in 1991.

**Gender, Sex and Nuclear Weapons**

One study from 1991 conducted by Patricia A. Gwartney-Gibbs and Denise H. Lach

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concluded that women are more pessimistic in their views toward nuclear war than men. One explanation for this phenomenon is the inherent biological difference between men and women: childbearing. Another study considered Australian students’ attitudes toward nuclear weapons. The results showed that men expressed strong support for nuclear weapons, while both men and women with strict “law-and-order” attitudes supported nuclear weapons. A 1987 paper by Mark P. Jensen entitled “Gender, sex roles, and attitudes toward war and nuclear weapons” also sought to test the hypothesis that men are more supportive of war than women and that masculinity drives decisions to make war and acquire nuclear weapons. Unlike the other studies, neither masculinity nor femininity were the only factors contributing to attitudes on war, according to Jensen.

WMD Use

What is the likelihood that terrorists would use WMD? D. Gressang IV in his piece entitled “Audience and Message: Assessing Terrorist WMD Potential” argues that examining the terrorists’ perceptions and expectations of its audience, and its rhetorical messages provide substantial insights into terrorists’ decisions. Dr. Lewis A. Dunn explored the concept of al Qaeda's use of WMD in a July 2005 monograph published by the National Defense University Press. He concludes that it is reasonably likely that al Qaeda would employ WMD to achieve its objectives. However, he adds that a nuclear weapon may also be seem as too valuable to use; al Qaeda may view a nuclear weapon as more valuable as a deterrent or political tool.

WMD Acquisition

What about the desire to acquire nuclear weapons? Psychologist Michael G. Wessells in "Social-Psychological Determinants of Nuclear Proliferation: A Dual-Process Analysis" assesses the motivations of nuclear proliferators and concludes that proliferation is driven by

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26 Mark P. Jensen, “Gender, sex roles, and attitudes toward war and nuclear weapons,” *Sex Roles*, Volume 17, Numbers 5-6 (September 1987).
security fears, power, prestige and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Major Richard M. Perry in a 1997 paper entitled “Rogue or Rational State? A Nuclear Armed Iran and US Counter Proliferation Strategy,” suggests that Iran’s push for nuclear weapons is a calculated strategic campaign aimed at achieving regional hegemony. In “Hegemony and Culture in the Origins of NATO Nuclear First-Use, 1945-1955,” Andrew M. Johnston argues that the United States, through the process of cultural socialization blended the previously unique strategic cultures of its European allies into a single Western strategic culture endorsing NATO’s nuclear first-use policy.

Dr. Emanuel Adler believes that the theoretical expectations developed by experts to guide negotiations with the Soviet Union became the foundation for the ABM Treaty. He contends that the arms control “epistemic community” was an aggregation of several factions that shared common threads and suggest that an epistemic community requires limited coherence to cooperate and influence behavior. The author believes that this argument poses a challenge to structural realists and similar paradigms.

**Weapons Designers**

What about the people who build the weapons? Do they have a strategic culture? According to Hugh Gusterson, they do. Gusterson’s book, *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War*, examines the culture of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and reveals that the scientists have their own brand of humor, habitual secrecy, and temperate emotions. The book reveals that many of the scientists are Christians who believe in the morality of their work and the scientists hail from both sides of the political spectrum.

A 1999 paper by Professor Valerie M. Hudson of Brigham Young University entitled

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“Cultural Expectations of One’s Own and Other Nations’ Foreign Policy Action Templates” tests the frequently held assumption that states are predisposed to behave in predictable ways in certain situations given their “behavioral dispositions.” Citizens from Russia, Japan, and the United States were asked to identify the most likely and least likely responses to a variety of foreign policy situations by their own country and the two other countries. Hudson explains that the results indicate that such “foreign policy action templates” do exist, at least in the minds of the citizens tested, whose behavioral responses for their own country and the other countries tended to match.

The Western Bias

Analysts Joseph Bermudez and Sharon Richardson attempt to combat the cultural biases of Western analysts looking at North Korea. In an imaginary report delivered by an individual close to the regime, the authors attempt to construct the tone and perspective of an individual inside the North Korean power structure, offering an interesting glimpse into how the regime and its decision-makers operate. The authors acknowledge that their monograph cannot be proven by hard data but is meant to stimulate discussion and encourage alternative thinking.

CONCLUSION

There is no shortage of literature on the subject of strategic culture. One challenge is distilling in the information into a useful, policy-relevant framework. This is difficult since strategic culture is not universal. A parsimonious theory of strategic culture does not exist. Each state actor, non-state actor and organization has their own operational code, their own history, their own assumptions, and own strategic culture.

Additional WMD Strategic Culture Readings

Proliferation (General)

Religion/Theology

Actor-Specific

Sociology
- “Culture, Society and Nuclear Weapons in South Asia,” Amsterdam, May 9 - 11, 2005, Social Sciences Research Center, available at


**Psychology**


