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For a time in the early 1980s, extreme forms of certain generalizations about Soviet and U.S. societies provided the intellectual justification for the refinement of nuclear warfighting strategies in the United States. The former Soviet military was said to exhibit a preference for preemptive, offensive uses of force that was deeply rooted in Russia's history of external expansionism and internal autocracy. The United States, on the other hand, tended to exhibit a tendency towards a sporadic, messianic and crusading use of force that was deeply rooted in the moralism of the early republic and in a fundamental belief that warfare was an aberration in human relations.[1]

Such characterizations of the superpowers' strategic predispositions have been examined under the analytic category of "strategic culture." Although the term remains loosely defined, the past decade has seen a growing amount of research on the relationship between culture and strategy. The characterizations noted above had obvious policy implications at one time, and thus imply

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1. Colin Gray, "National Styles in Strategy: The American Example," *International Security,* Vol. 6, No. 2 (Fall 1981); Colin Gray, *Nuclear Strategy and National Style* (Lanham, Md.: Hamilton Press, 1986); Carnes Lord, "American Strategic Culture," *Comparative Strategy,* Vol. 5, No. 3 (1985); Richard Pipes, "Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War," *Commentary,* Vol. 64, No. 1 (July 1977), pp. 21–34. During the early years of the Reagan administration, Gray served as an adviser to the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, while Pipes was in the National Security Council. Pipes was also a member of Team B, the hawkish group of outside advisers to then–CIA director George Bush, which along with the Committee on the Present Danger (of which Pipes and Gray were both members) comprised influential proponents of war-fighting–war-winning nuclear capabilities to counter the alleged Soviet preference for war-fighting nuclear doctrines. Their views were the basis of strategic culture–like arguments made by the Reagan administration about the nature of the Soviet threat. See "Soviet Strategic Objectives: An Alternative View, Report of Team 'B'" (December 1976), in Donald P. Steury, compiler, *Estimates on Soviet Military Power 1954–1984* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1994), pp. 329–335.

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shortcomings in ahistorical and non-cultural structural models of strategic choice at the heart of mainstream international security studies. Thus it seems worthwhile to take a closer look at the analytic value of strategic culture.

This article assesses the progress that has been made in studying strategic culture, examines the conceptual and methodological problems in the literature, and offers some possible solutions. It also suggests some caution about using strategic culture as an analytic tool. I begin by reviewing the literature on strategic culture and argue that the dominant approach to strategic culture is at the same time under-determined and over-determined, and has so far been unable to offer a convincing research design for isolating the effects of strategic culture.[2] On the basis of this critique, I then offer a definition of strategic culture that is observable and falsifiable, and suggest a number of ways of conceptualizing its relationship to behavior. Finally, I suggest that the link between strategic culture and behavior should be approached with a great deal of care. Research on the symbolic elements of strategy suggests that strategic culture may not have a direct independent and societal-specific effect on strategic choice. At the same time, literature on group formation and in-group–out-group differentiation suggests that a wide variety of disparate societies may share a similar *realpolitik* strategic culture. Thus strategic culture may have an observable effect on state behavior, but contrary to much of the existing literature on strategic culture, it may not be unique to any particular state.

International Security Studies and Strategic Culture

The question of culture did not attract much attention in international security studies and international relations theory until the last ten to fifteen years, when interest in culture, strategic culture, and other ideational explanations for the behavior of states has grown. Much of this new research is consistent with the conclusion of Joseph Nye and Sean Lynn-Jones that strategic studies has been characterized by American ethnocentrism and a concomitant neglect of "national styles of strategy."[3]

2. It is under-determined because strategic culture alone is held to have a strongly deterministic effect on behavior, and over-determined because the concept of strategic culture is viewed as an amalgam of a wide range of (potentially competing) variables or inputs.
3. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., and Sean M. Lynn-Jones, "International Security Studies: A Report on a Conference on the State of the Field," *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 14–15. See also Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979).

Most of those who use the term "culture" tend to argue, explicitly or implicitly, that different states have different predominant strategic preferences that are rooted in the early or formative experiences of the state, and are influenced to some degree by the philosophical, political, cultural, and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites. Ahistorical or "objective" variables such as technology, polarity, or relative material capabilities are all of secondary importance. It is strategic culture, they argue, that gives meaning to these variables. The weight of historical experiences and historically-rooted strategic preferences tends to constrain responses to changes in the "objective" strategic environment, thus affecting strategic choices in unique ways. If strategic culture itself changes, it does so slowly, lagging behind changes in "objective" conditions.

This does not imply that the strategic culture approach necessarily rejects rationality—though some of its proponents mistakenly treat strategic culture as opposed to assumptions of rationality.[4] Indeed, strategic culture is compatible with notions of limited rationality (where strategic culture simplifies reality), with process rationality (where strategic culture defines ranked preferences or narrows options), and with adaptive rationality (where historical choices, analogies, metaphors, and precedents are invoked to guide choice).[5] But the strategic culture approach does seem potentially incompatible with game rationality. Whereas strategies in games focus on making the "best" choice depending on expectations about what other players will do, strategic culture, as the concept has been used to date, implies that a state's strategic behavior is not fully responsive to others' choices.[6] Instead, a historically imposed inertia on choice makes strategy less responsive to specific contingencies. Thus, in the view of some American analysts of Soviet strategic culture, the Soviets did not adopt American MAD-based deterrence doctrines, as U.S. policy makers had once predicted they would, since Soviet strategic culture-based preferences

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4. See Jonathan Adelman and Chih-yu Shih, *Symbolic War: The Chinese Use of Force 1840–1980* (Taipei: Institute of International Relations, 1993); and David T. Twining, "Soviet Strategic Culture—The Missing Dimension," *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1989), pp. 169–187.
5. All terms are taken from James March, "Bounded Rationality, Ambiguity and Engineering of Choice," *The Bell Journal of Economics*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Autumn 1978), pp. 590–592.
6. Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980). A burgeoning literature, however, points out that in multiple equilibria games (e.g., coordination games, iterated prisoners' dilemma games, etc.), ideational variables may explain why players' expectations converge on certain equilibria, and how initial preferences and perceived payoffs are defined. See James D. Johnson, *Symbol and Strategy: On the Cultural Analysis of Politics* (University of Chicago, Ph.D. dissertation, 1991).

were formed prior to the nuclear revolution and the development of American nuclear doctrine.

Rather than rejecting rationality *per se* as a factor in strategic choice, the strategic culture approach challenges the ahistorical, non-cultural neorealist framework for analyzing strategic choices. The neorealist framework discounts the accumulated weight of the past in favor of a forward-looking calculation of expected utility. The neorealist paradigm assumes that states are functionally undifferentiated units that seek to optimize their utility. Usually utility is unproblematically defined as power, often as capabilities and resources. Hence states will act to expand and maximize their capabilities as long as the opportunities to do so exist. Strategic choices will be optimizing ones, constrained only, or largely, by variables such as geography, capability, threat, and a tendency of states to refrain from behaviors which clearly threaten their immediate survival.[7]

Most of the proponents of the strategic culture approach, however, would fundamentally disagree with this conclusion. In their view, elites socialized in different strategic cultures will make different choices when placed in similar situations. Since cultures are attributes of and vary across states, similar strategic realities will be interpreted differently. So the problem for culturalists is to explain similarities in strategic behavior across varied strategic cultures. Conversely, the problem for structuralists is to explain differences in strategic behavior across strategic cultures when structural conditions are constant. While there is no *a priori* reason for predictions about strategic choice derived from strategic culture to be different from predictions derived from ahistorical structural approaches (any differences depend on the content of a strategic culture), there is no *a priori* reason for them to be the same either. The possibility

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7. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *The War Trap* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 29–30 and 64; John A. Vasquez, "Capability, Types of War, Peace," *Western Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (June 1986), p. 321; John A. Vasquez, "Foreign Policy Learning and War," in Charles Hermann, et al., eds., *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), pp. 367–368. This quick summary admittedly imputes to realist theory far more consistency about state preferences than really exists in the theory. The assumption that states prefer to maximize power, not simply seek mere survival, is controversial, but without it realist models of strategic choice become indeterminate, just as economic expected utility approaches become harder to model without the use of money as the content of utility. See Mancur Olson, "Toward a Unified View of Economics and the Other Social Sciences," in James E. Alt and Kenneth A. Shepsle, eds., *Perspectives on Positive Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 218. On the inconsistencies about preferences in realist theory see Fareed Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Summer 1992), pp. 190–196; and Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 72–107.

of different predictions about state behavior underscores the value of exploring the concept of strategic culture, while approaching its analytic value with caution.

THE FIRST GENERATION: OVER-DETERMINED AND UNDER-DETERMINED EXPLANATIONS

The work on strategic culture can be divided into three generations. The first generation, which emerged in the early 1980s, focused mainly on explaining why the Soviets and the Americans apparently thought differently about nuclear strategy. Borrowing from Jack Snyder's work on strategic culture and Soviet limited nuclear war doctrine, authors such as Colin Gray and David Jones argued that these differences were caused by unique variations in macro-environmental variables such as deeply rooted historical experience, political culture, and geography.[8]

Gray contended that the American national historical experience produced "modes of thought and action with respect to force" that resulted in a unique set of "dominant national beliefs" with respect to strategic choices. These beliefs produced a peculiarly American appoach to nuclear strategy which stressed that nuclear wars could not be won because the human costs would erase any meaningful concept of victory, that the United States could preserve a technological capacity to provide an effective nuclear deterrent in the face of any Soviet numerical advantages in nuclear weapons, and that arms control dialogue could teach the Soviets to speak the American nuclear language, leading to greater strategic stability. Gray concluded that this relatively homogenous American strategic culture differed fundamentally from that of the Soviet Union, and that Americans were generally incapable of thinking strategically, that is, about planning for, fighting, and winning a nuclear war.[9]

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8. Jack L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options*, R-2154-AF (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1977). See also Gray, "National Styles"; Gray, *Nuclear Strategy;* and David R. Jones, "Soviet Strategic Culture," in Carl G. Jacobsen, ed., *Strategic Power: USA/USSR* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1990), pp. 35–49. Snyder was the first to coin the term "strategic culture," which he defined as the "sum total of ideals, conditional emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of the national strategic community have acquired though instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy"; Snyder, *Soviet Strategic Culture*, p. 9. However, he did not find the roots of Soviet strategic culture deep in Russian historical-cultural antecedents, nor did he view strategic culture as narrowly determining strategic choice. Indeed, Snyder has distanced himself from the first generation of literature. See Jack L. Snyder, "The Concept of Strategic Culture: Caveat Emptor," in Jacobsen, *Strategic Power.*
9. Gray, "National Styles."

Jones argued, similarly, that there were three levels of inputs into a state's strategic culture: a macro-environmental level consisting of geography, ethno-cultural characteristics, and history; a societal level consisting of social, economic, and political structures of a society; and a micro level consisting of military institutions and characteristics of civil-military relations. This strategic culture did not just delimit strategic options; it pervaded all levels of choice from grand strategy down to tactics.[10] These three sets of variables, Jones argued, produced a Soviet strategic culture that placed a premium on offensive grand strategies.

Despite its innovative focus on culture and strategy, the first-generation work exhibited a number of serious shortcomings. First among these was a definitional problem. For one thing, the concept of strategic culture was extremely unwieldy. Technology, geography, organizational culture and traditions, historical strategic practices, political culture, national character, political psychology, ideology, and even international system structure were all considered relevant inputs into this amorphous strategic culture. Yet, arguably, these variables are different classes of inputs; each could stand by itself as a separate explanation of strategic choice. If "strategic culture" is said to be the product of nearly all relevant explanatory variables, then there is little conceptual space for a non-strategic culture explanation of strategic choice. This makes valid tests of a strategic culture–based model of choice extremely difficult.

In addition, by subsuming patterns of behavior (e.g., Gray's "modes of action") within a definition of strategic culture, the first generation implied that strategic thought led consistently to one type of behavior. How does one evaluate a strategic culture where thought and action seem inconsistent with each other? Or, alternatively, is it always the case that one type of behavior reveals one set of distinct patterns of strategic assumptions? The first generation's use of the notion of strategic culture led it to the sweepingly simplified conclusion that there was one American strategic culture, distinct from one Soviet strategic culture, which made the United States incapable of fighting and winning a nuclear war. Like most mechanically deterministic cultural arguments, this conclusion missed ample counter-evidence. For example, planners in the Strategic Air Command had all along considered counterforce warfighting and war-winning nuclear options.[11]

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10. Jones, "Soviet Strategic Culture," p. 35.
11. Greg Herken, *Counsels of War* (New York: Knopf, 1985); Peter Pringle and William Arkin, *SIOP: The Secret U.S. Plan for Nuclear War* (New York: Norton, 1983); Scott Sagan, "SIOP-62: The Nuclear

Finally, the alleged homogeneity of a society's strategic culture across time is problematic. It seems somewhat muddled to argue that a single strategic culture emerges from its multiple inputs when each of these inputs could arguably produce alternative, even contradictory strategic cultures. If the first generation holds to its amorphous definition of strategic culture, it would be more logical to conclude that the diversity of a particular society's geographical, political, cultural, and strategic experience will produce multiple strategic cultures, but this possibility is excluded by the narrow determinism of the first-generation literature.[12]

The first-generation analysts would reject the criticism that they are mechanical determinists, claiming only that strategic culture *tends* to lead to particular strategic behaviors, or that strategy is *in part* a product of culture. If this is the case, however, the literature is ill-equipped to isolate which part and how much of strategy comes from strategic culture. To make this less determinist claim, the literature would have to provide an explanation as to why particular modes of strategic behavior are prominent at particular times. Moreover, to admit that within a particular state there are competing strategic tendencies—as a less determinist claim would have to do—is also to admit the possibility that a similar range of competing strategic tendencies exists in other states; in other words, that the range of strategic options available to one state is great enough that there might be significant overlap with other states. If this is the case, then unique historical, geographical, and experiential conditions in any particular society count for much less, since these cannot explain why similar or almost similar ranges of strategic choices are present in other unique societies.

A second set of problems concerns the relationship between strategic culture and behavior. Given the all-encompassing nature of strategic culture, the first generation rules out the possibility of a disjunction between strategic culture and behavior. The literature assumes that strategic culture has a measurable effect on strategic choice, that it exists "out there," a monolithic, independent, and observable constraint on all actors' behavior. There is little or no appreciation of the instrumentality of strategic culture: its potential for conscious manipulation to justify the competence of decision-makers, deflect criticism, suppress dissent, and limit access to the decision process. This is unfortunate;

War Plan Briefing to President Kennedy," *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), pp. 22–51; and Robert Scheer, *With Enough Shovels: Reagan, Bush and Nuclear War* (New York: Random House, 1982).

12. Snyder does recognize the possibility that different subcultures can undergird competitive strategic preferences. See Snyder, *Soviet Strategic Culture*.

by rejecting instrumentality, the first generation is logically forced to conclude that if a link between strategic culture and behavior is not found, then strategic culture does not exist, a conclusion the literature would be loath to make.[13]

A third set of problems concerns the process of deriving an observable strategic culture. To what sources does one look as repositories or representations of strategic culture? From which time periods should these sources be taken? Why are certain historical periods considered formative sources of strategic culture and others not? How is strategic culture transmitted through time? Does it change appreciably through its transmission? None of these questions is explicitly asked or answered by the first generation.

THE SECOND GENERATION: AMBIGUOUS INSTRUMENTALITY

The second generation of literature on strategic culture, appearing in the mid-1980s, started from the premise that there is a vast difference between what leaders think or say they are doing and the deeper motives for what in fact they do. Strategic culture is seen as a tool of political hegemony in the realm of strategic decision-making; it establishes "widely available orientations to violence and to ways in which the state can legitimately use violence against putative enemies."[14] These orientations undergird a declaratory strategy that legitimizes the authority of those in charge of strategic decision-making. Operational strategy, on the other hand, reflects the specific interests of these decision makers. Thus, in the case of American nuclear policy, according to Bradley S. Klein, actual operational strategy stressed warfighting in defense of American hegemony's interests, while declaratory strategy was used instrumentally by political elites to fashion a culturally and linguistically acceptable justification for operational strategy, and to silence or mislead potential political challengers.[15]

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13. Cultural analyses of religion, ideology and organizations note that coherent, integrated, consistent sets of ideas and values may have only a tenuous connection to observable behavioral choices. See Edmund S. Glenn, et al., "A Cognitive Interaction Model to Analyze Culture Conflict in International Relations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (March 1970), pp. 35–50; Henri Broms and Henrik Gahmberg, "Communication to Self in Organizations and Cultures," *Administration Science Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Summer 1983), pp. 482–495; David Laitin, "Political Culture and Political Preferences," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 82, No. 2 (June 1988), p. 591.

14. Bradley S. Klein, "Hegemony and Strategic Culture: American Power Projection and Alliance Defence Politics," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April 1988), p. 136.

15. Ibid., pp. 139–140. See also Bradley S. Klein, "The Textual Strategies of the Military: Or, Have You Read Any Good Defense Manuals Lately?" in James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro, eds., *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1989), pp. 99–100.

Although strategic culture is instrumental, according to the second generation, it does not come out of the pockets of political and military elites. Klein implies that strategic culture is a product of historical experience. Since these experiences differ across states, different states exhibit different strategic cultures.[16] But since there is a radical delinkage between strategic culture and behavior, and since the latter is the reflection of the interests of a hegemonistic group, strategic choice is constrained by these interests rather than by strategic culture. It is therefore possible that states speak different strategic-culture languages—as hawkish critics of U.S. MAD concepts were wont to point out about the USSR—but that states' body languages (e.g., operational doctrines) are essentially similar.[17]

The second generation is not without its problems, however. The key issue is the relationship between the symbolic discourse—the strategic culture—and behavior. It is not clear from the literature whether we should expect the strategic discourse to influence behavior. Instrumentality implies that decision-making elites can rise above strategic cultural constraints which they manipulate. Yet recent scholarship on leadership suggests a dialectical relationship between strategic culture and operational behavior: elites, too, are socialized in the strategic culture they produce, and thus can be constrained by the symbolic myths which their predecessors created.[18] This raises the possibility that elites cannot escape the symbolic discourses they manipulate, and that thus one *should* expect cross-national differences in behavior to the extent that these discourses vary cross-nationally.

Indeed, the second-generation literature seems undecided whether to expect cross-national differences in operational strategy. On the one hand, one might argue that, to the extent that the symbolic discourse delegitimates certain strategic options by placing these outside the boundaries of acceptable debate, the range of strategic possibilities open to states varies across strategic cultures. Thus there is a possibility that behavior may vary. On the other hand, there is

16. Klein, "Hegemony and Strategic Culture," p. 139.
17. A variation on this theme of instrumentality is provided by Robin Luckham in his study of "armament culture." Luckham defines armament culture as arms fetishism which establishes a causal relationship between modern weapons, military superiority over enemies, and security. Human consciousness accepts and embraces the weapons-security link, which serves the interests of strategists, political leaders, soldiers, arms manufacturers, and other producers of this arms culture. This phenonemon is not unique to particular ethno-cultural systems, but is unique to contemporary levels of global industrialization, militarization and marketization. Robin Luckham, "Armament Culture," *Alternatives*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Summer 1984), pp. 1–2.
18. See Edwin P. Hollander, "Leadership and Power," in Gardner Lindsay and Elliot Aronson, eds., *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Vol. 2 (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1985), pp. 485–537.

a strong implication in the literature that elites around the world ought to share similarly militaristic or *realpolitik* strategic preferences, since different national strategic discourses all try to accentuate "us-them" differences, and lead to similarly stark visions of a threatening external world.[19] These images tend to correlate with zero-sum conceptions of conflict and beliefs in the efficacy of force. The second-generation literature cannot solve this problem, in part because most of this work has not looked at enough comparative cases to trace whether certain discourses and symbolic languages have actually narrowed debate, or to determine whether this narrowing differs across cases, and whether the choices and options that remain are different across cases.

THE THIRD GENERATION: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS AN INTERVENING VARIABLE

The third generation, which emerged in the 1990s, tends to be both more rigorous and eclectic in its conceptualization of ideational independent variables, and more narrowly focused on particular strategic decisions as dependent variables. Some use military culture, some political-military culture, and others organizational culture as the independent variable, but all take the realist edifice as target, and focus on cases where structural-materialist notions of interest cannot explain a particular strategic choice. Their definitions of culture, for the most part, explicitly exclude behavior as an element, thereby avoiding the tautological traps of the first generation. Other than this, however, the definitions do not vary dramatically from those found in discussions of political culture, organizational culture, or the first generation work on strategic culture. The sources of these cultural values are, however, less deeply rooted in history, and more clearly the product of recent practice and experience.

The third generation exhibits some strengths over the previous two. First, it avoids the determinism of the first generation. In part, as noted, this is because it carefully leaves behavior out of the independent variable. In part it is because some scholars conceptualize culture in such a way as to allow it to vary. Jeffrey Legro, for instance, allows for variation in both cultural and noncultural variables because, for him, culture is rooted in recent experience, and not in deeply historical practice as posited by the first generation.[20] Likewise, Elizabeth Kier

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19. David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); and Rebecca S. Bjork, *The Strategic Defense Initiative: Symbolic Containment of the Nuclear Threat* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
20. Jeffrey W. Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint during World War II* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995).

views political-military culture as a product of changing domestic political contexts, hence varying as domestic politics varies. She also examines her cases cross-sectionally and longtitudinally, thus introducing variation in military cultures across time and across societies.[21]

Second, this generation is explicitly committed to competitive theory testing, pitting alternative explanations against each other. Legro tests a realist model against institutionalism and organizational-culture explanations of restraint in war. Kier pits structural realism, bureaucratic organizational models, and the concept of military culture against each other. This strength highlights the methodological weakness of the first generation.

However, a few questions in this emerging literature are worth examining. First, the careful focus on strategic choices that are not explained well by realism brings with it some drawbacks. Given that, in neorealism, state preferences as to ends can range from mere survival to power maximization, the range of optimal strategies can vary dramatically depending on which end of the preference spectrum one examines. Thus, without using some arbitrarily determinant version of realism, it is hard to set up conclusive tests pitting a neorealist model of strategic choice against ideational or cultural models.

A second problem concerns the use of organizational culture as a key independent variable in strategic choice. The third generation work shares the first generation's belief that ideational or cultural variables indeed have an observable effect on behavior. In doing so, however, it neglects a key strain in the second generation of organizational culture literature that posits that symbolic (cultural) strategy may not have any causal effect upon operational doctrine. Some of the third generation literature safely avoids the problem because the dependent variable *is* behavior and not foreign policy or strategic doctrine statements. But in some instances, military doctrine is the dependent variable, and this raises the under-explored question whether declared and operational doctrines are different.

Third, the definition of culture used by the third generation is a fairly standard one: culture either presents decision-makers with limited range of options or it acts as a lens that alters the appearance and efficacy of different choices. This definition therefore requires some other variable to explain why particular choices are finally made. In other words, if organizational culture

21. Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

creates preferences which, in the process of policymaking, delimit options available to decision-makers, where does the preference-ranking that governs choice among these limited options come from? Moreover, if culture is neither a reflection of an individual's beliefs nor a mere aggregation of beliefs captured by modal points in a distribution of beliefs, then any one individual will not be completely socialized in that culture; no individual will share all the cultural predispositions of any other. Yet in times of foreign policy crises, a small number of identifiable individuals usually make strategic decisions. If these individuals do not completely reflect the values of a military or strategic culture, then this attenuates the connection between those values and the behavior, since the relationship is mediated by individuals who are not wholly representative of that culture. If this is the case, the power of culture as an independent variable diminishes.

SUMMARY

The literature on strategic culture and strategic culture–like concepts seems to suggest contradictory conclusions: either a state's historically and culturally rooted notions about the ends and means of war limit the strategic choices of decision-making elites, as the first and third generations argue, or they do not, as the second generation holds. The research problem for each conclusion differs as well. The first conclusion implies that research ought to focus on how to isolate strategic cultural influences on behavior from the effects of other variables. The latter implies that we need to look at how strategic culture is used to obscure or mask strategic choices that are made in the interests of domestic and international hegemons. In both cases, the strategic culture approach seems to offer an alternative to neorealist explanations for strategic choices.

Each of the three generations of research on strategic culture has its own sets of conceptual and methodological problems. It is the first generation, however, whose conceptualizations and research dominate the literature on strategic culture at the moment, and which has generally failed to push the concept of strategic culture forward very far.[22] To avoid some of the pitfalls of this work, what might a reconstructed strategic culture approach look like?

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22. For a recent example of the use of first-generation conceptualizations see Desmond Ball, "Strategic Culture in the Asia-Pacific Region," *Security Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn 1993), pp. 44–74.

A Reconceptualization of Strategic Culture

The first step is to learn from past mistakes and construct a more rigorous concept of strategic culture that specifies *inter alia* the scope and content of strategic culture, the objects of analysis and the historical periods from which these are drawn, and the methods for deriving a picture of strategic culture from these objects. Then it is necessary to explicate a research strategy that can credibly measure the effects of strategic culture on the process of making strategic choices. The goal is to see if culture (at least in the realm of strategy) can be rescued from its traditional status as a residual variable.

A DEFINITION OF STRATEGIC CULTURE

There is no shortage of definitions of *culture.* Many refer to culture as collectively held semi-conscious or unconscious images, assumptions, "codes," and "scripts" which define the external environment.[23] These codes, images, and scripts enable a group to "cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration."[24] In Clifford Geertz's view, cultural assumptions constitute a "system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life."[25] Dominant subcultures can impose cultural forms on other groups, manipulate them, or convince other subcultures that these dominant cultural forms are in fact their own forms. In this sense, cultural forms can be designed to preempt challenges to the status quo.[26] There remains, however, a frustrating level of vagueness about culture's relationship to choice, that is, about what it is that culture *does* in a behavioral sense.[27]

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23. Aaron Wildavsky, for instance, calls culture those "codes enabling individuals to make much out of little. Thus cultures may be conceived of as grand theories . . . from whose initial premises many consequences applicable to a wide variety of circumstances may be deduced." Wildavsky, "Change in Political Culture," *Politics,* Vol. 20, No. 2 (1985), p. 95. See also Linda Smircich, "Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis," *Administrative Science Quarterly,* Vol. 28, No. 3 (Summer 1983), pp. 347–351; and Glenn, "A Cognitive Model," p. 41.
24. Edgar Schein is cited in Samuel H. Barnes, "Politics and Culture" (unpublished manuscript, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor), p. 4. See also Roger Keesing, "Theories of Culture," in Bernard Siegal, et al., eds., *Annual Review of Anthropology,* Vol. 3 (1974), pp. 75–76 and 91.
25. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 89. For Geertz and other anthropologists, then, culture can include ritual behavior, and does not remain solely in the ideational realm. As used by political scientists, however, culture is primarily ideational, so as to differentiate it from behavior as the dependent variable.
26. Sebastian Green, "Understanding Corporate Culture and its Relation to Strategy," *International Studies of Management and Organization,* Vol. 18, No. 2 (1988), p. 19.
27. Implicit in some of the terminology is a sense that there is no one-to-one correspondence between cultural forms and observable decisions. "Culture does not explain particular choices

Political scientists who have used the notion of *political culture* have generally not wandered far from these definitions. Thus political culture is viewed as political codes, rules, recipes, and assumptions which impose a rough order on conceptions of the political environment. Specifically, political culture encompasses assumptions about the orderliness of the political universe, the nature of causality, principal goals in political life, the relative value of risk-acceptant versus risk-averse strategies, who belongs to the political community, what types of events, actions, and institutions are political, and the trustworthiness of other political actors.[28] Political culture is 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,"[29] but it can also be used instrumentally to eliminate alternative institutions, ideologies or behaviors from the body politic.

In sum, despite variations in the terminology and emphasis found in definitions of culture or political culture, there are a number of common elements: culture consists of 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. Cultural patterns and behavioral patterns are not the same thing: in so far as culture affects behavior, it does so by limiting options and by affecting how members of these cultures learn from interaction with the environment. Multiple cultures can exist within one social entity (community, organization, state, etc.), but there is a generally dominant culture whose holders are interested in preserving the status quo.

What might a useful definition of *strategic culture* look like? In essence, we need a notion of strategic culture that is falsifiable, or at least distinguishable from non-strategic culture variables; that captures what strategic culture is supposed to do, namely provide decision-makers with a uniquely ordered set of strategic choices from which we can derive predictions about behavior; that

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which individuals make. Its explanatory power is primarily restricted to setting the agenda." David J. Elkins and Richard E.B. Simeon,"A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?" *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (January 1979), pp. 130–131. See also Barnes, "Politics and Culture," p. 19; and Charles D. Elders and Roger W. Cobb, *The Political Uses of Symbols* (New York: Longman, 1983), p. 85. Unfortunately, this characterization verges on relegating culture once again to the role of a contextual variable, and forces us to look at other mediating variables to explain why particular choices are made.

28. Elkins and Simeon, "A Cause in Search of Its Effect," p. 132. See also the list of "latent dispositional structures" in Elders and Cobb, *Political Uses*, p. 44; and see Lowell Dittmer, "Political Culture and Political Symbolism," *World Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (July 1977), pp. 553–554.

29. Elkins and Simeon, "A Cause in Search of Its Effect," p. 128.

can be observed in strategic cultural objects; and whose transmission across time can be traced.

For simplicity's sake it seems best to begin by selectively transfering core elements of culture to strategy. I assume that strategic culture, if it exists, is an ideational milieu which limits behavioral choices. But I also assume that from these limits one ought to be able to derive specific predictions about strategic choice. I am partial, then, to using an initial definition of strategic culture that paraphrases Geertz's definition of religion as a cultural system.[30] Strategic culture is an integrated "system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors) which acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious."

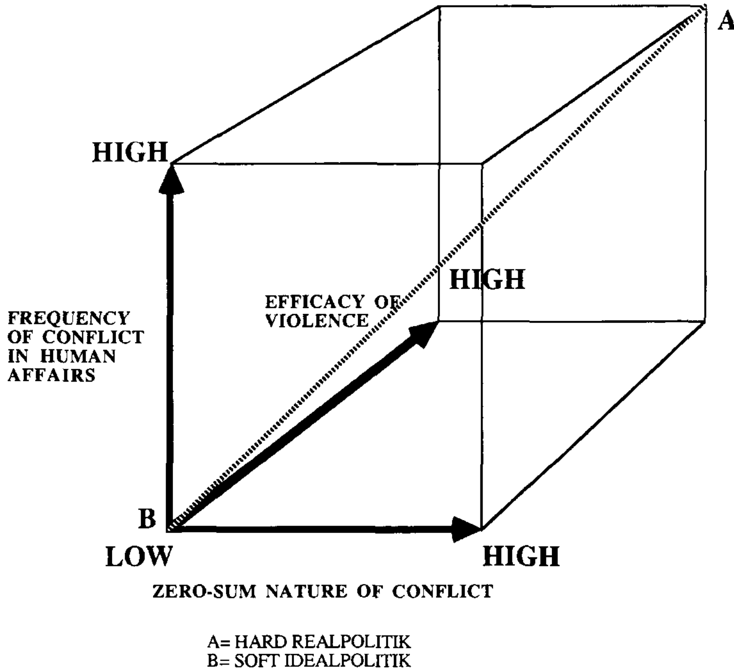
The problem remains of relating strategic culture to behavioral choices. How strategic culture affects the specific choice is an extremely complex problem. But before we can hope to conclude that it *does* affect this choice, at the very least we have to show first that strategic culture limits in some way the options considered. Hence the need to trace strategic culture from its sources, through the socialization process, to the values and assumptions held by particular key decision-makers. This requires developing observable indicators for the presence of strategic culture so as to trace them through these first two stages.

Thus strategic culture as a "system of symbols" comprises two parts: the first consists of basic assumptions about the orderliness of the strategic environment, that is, about the role of war in human affairs (whether it is inevitable or an aberration), about the nature of the adversary and the threat it poses (zero-sum or variable sum), and about the efficacy of the use of force (about the ability to control outcomes and to eliminate threats, and the conditions under which applied force is useful). Together these comprise the central paradigm of a strategic culture (see Figure 1). In this sense, the central paradigm provides information that reduces uncertainty about the strategic environment; but it is shared information that comes from deeply historical sources, not from the current environment.

The second part consists of assumptions at a more operational level about what strategic options are the most efficacious for dealing with the threat environment, as defined by answers to the first three questions. These lower-

30. Geertz, *Interpretation*, p. 90.

Figure 1. The Central Paradigm of a Strategic Culture.



level assumptions should flow logically from the central paradigm. Depending on where along these continua particular groups are placed, their strategic preferences ought to vary accordingly. At the high end of all three, for instance, a group ought to rank offensive strategies highest, since these are more likely to deal effectively with zero-sum threats than are accommodationist strategies. At the low end, the group ought to prefer more accommodationist, diplomatic tools, since at this end threats can be managed through trade-offs, logrolling and suasion.

It is at this level of preferences over actions where strategic culture begins to affect behavioral choices directly.[31] Thus the essential empirical referent of a

31. This parallels Charles Taber's argument that a state's range of strategic choices (and its preferred choice from this range) is set by specific images and metaphors about the strategic environment at time *t*. These in turn are derived from a broader, more deeply rooted, less contingent collection of central heuristics (a paradigm) that outlines a sense of the nature of this

strategic culture is a limited, ranked set of grand-strategic preferences that is consistent across the objects of analysis (e.g., textual sources for potential answers to the central paradigm) and persistent across time.[32] This ranking is not, therefore, necessarily responsive to changes in non-cultural variables such as technology, threat, or organization.

I use *ranked* preferences instead of a simple menu of strategic options for two main reasons. First, it is quite possible that there will be enough range in the menu of strategies on the policy agenda within any one society that there will be considerable overlap in the menus across societies. By looking at preference *rankings* one can weigh these strategic options on this menu of choice within each society. If different societies have different strategic cultures they ought to put different weights on these choices, that is, to rank them differently. This assumption allows for testing for consistency in strategic culture across objects of analysis within a particular society, and thus for differences between societies.[33] This approach also provides a concept of strategic culture which is falsifiable. If preference rankings are not consistent across objects of analysis, then a single strategic culture can not be said to exist at that point in time.[34] Conversely, a strategic culture can be said to exist and to persist if one finds consistency in preference rankings across objects of analysis from formative historical periods up to the period under examination.

Second, I use strategic preferences that are ranked because these should yield more explicit predictions about behavorial choice than simply an unranked menu of choices. *Ceteris paribus*, if we assume that, given a particular strategic culture, a state has a preference for some particular strategy, then we are better able to develop predictions about behavior against which predictions from

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environment and how force fits in. See Charles Taber, "Modern War Learning: A Markov Model," paper presented to the Midwestern Political Science Association conference, Chicago, 1987, pp. 3–4. There are similarities as well with Ole Holsti's definition of belief systems and Alexander George's concept of operational codes. See Ole R. Holsti, "The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study," in James N. Rosenau, ed., *International Politics and Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1969), p. 544; and Alexander George, "The Operational Code: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 1969), pp. 190–222. The difference, however, is that strategic culture refers to collectively held preferences, and analysis focuses on collectively produced and shared cultural artifacts rather than on an individual's belief system or operational code.

32. Here I adapt Wildavsky's cultural theory of preference formation. See Aaron Wildavsky, "Choosing Preferences By Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (March 1987), pp. 3–20.

33. Elkins and Simeon, "A Cause in Search of Its Effects," p. 133.

34. Individual objects or texts, of course, may embody ranked preferences. But if there is no congruence across texts then we cannot talk about shared preferences or a strategic culture.

non-strategic culture models of choice can be tested. This makes isolating the effects of strategic culture from those of other variables easier.

The definition above meets the criteria I set out for assessing the analytic value of strategic culture: it makes the concept falsifiable; it can provide empirical predictions about strategic choice which can be tested against other models of choice; it has, in principle, empirical referents (e.g, symbols and ranked preferences) which can be observed in strategic culture objects (e.g, texts, documents, doctrines); and its evolution (even dissolution) over time can be traced, as long as the one can observe whether successive generations of decision-makers are socialized in and share the basic precepts of the strategic culture.

OBJECTS OF ANALYSIS

Much of the strategic culture literature does not really specify what exactly should be analyzed when looking for a culturally-based ranked set of grand strategic preferences. What sorts of strategic culture "artifacts" or objects of analysis might embody these ranked preferences? In principle the variety of objects of analysis could be formidable. They could include the writings, debates, thoughts and words of "culture-bearing units" such as strategists, military leaders and national security elites; weapons designs and deployments; war plans; images of war and peace portrayed in various media; military ceremonies; even war literature.[35]

One way of getting around this problem is simply to analyze the content of a sample of objects from the period under study, compare these with a sample from a past period, and assume that if there is congruence in preference rankings, a strategic culture exists and has persisted across this historical time. The longer the period across which this congruence stretches, the more powerful and persistent the strategic culture. Many of those from the first generation of work on strategic culture take this route. But as Mary McCauley warns, "what we cannot assume from the existence of two similar sets of beliefs at different periods of time is that they enjoy an unbroken existence. The 'same' beliefs can sprout from different roots, at different periods."[36]

It is important, therefore, that the content analysis of strategic cultural objects begins at the earliest point in history that is accessible to the researcher, where

35. For a more comprehensive listing, see Luckham, "Armament Culture," Tables 2 and 3.
36. Mary McCauley, "Political Culture and Communist Politics: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," in Archie Brown, ed., *Political Culture and Communist Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 24.

initial strategic culture–derived preference rankings may reasonably be expected to have emerged. From this point one moves systematically forward. This way one can determine whether later strategic culture is a direct descendent of a formative strategic culture, a return to earlier patterns, a break from more recent ones, a reflection of a particular subculture, or non-existent.

In essense, much of the work on strategic culture is rigidly deterministic because it asks "Here is a set of strategic assumptions; where do they come from?" The researcher then moves back in time to a point where she or he finds similar assumptions. This guarantees that the researcher will find continuity, which is then labeled strategic culture. The alternative is to ask the question, "Here are some past, historical strategic assumptions; where do they go?" This approach, however, almost guarantees that the researcher will be overwhelmed with potential objects of analysis. It is probably best, then, to choose those texts which the researcher can show were available to strategic decision-makers during their socialization process.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

How should one go about analyzing the objects of analysis? How should one discern the central elements of a strategic culture, if one indeed exists? The best approach is to be fairly eclectic: different methods might tap into different levels of meanings in the texts, and also act as cross-checks on the meanings uncovered by each method separately. Two forms of content analysis, in particular, could be quite useful for the analysis of strategic culture, namely cognitive mapping and symbol analysis.

Since the researcher is interested in what the objects of analysis appear to be telling a strategist to do, namely, how to rank and choose among options, causal judgments are critical units of analysis. As David Dessler notes, causal judgments—assumptions about what kinds of behavior are likely to lead to what kinds of outcomes—are central in decision-makers' reasoning about how certain types of actions will affect their environment in such a way as to secure basic foreign policy goals.[37] Cognitive mapping is one technique that can be used to uncover the linkages between certain causal axioms and their estimated

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37. Hence a critical unit of analysis is the "policy argument," defined as the "network of statements that a) defines policy goals and standards and b) recommends the adoption of a particular policy option or criticizes the recommended adoption of another, on the basis of projected event-trends linked to the specific implementation of specific policy options." David Dessler, "Notions of Rationality in Conflict Decision-Making," paper presented to International Studies Association annual conference, Anaheim, Calif., 1986, pp. 18–19.

behavioral effects. "A cognitive map is designed to capture the structure of causal assertions of a person with respect to a particular policy domain, and generate the consequences that follow from this structure."[38] The analysis involves rigorously analyzing the contents of a particular document or sample of documents, and drawing graphically all cause-effect statements in this sample. This enables the researcher to uncover deeper causal arguments that may be obscured by surface logics and perfunctory language. The technique enables the researcher to trace the relationship between different types of (proposed) strategic actions and the results that are considered to have both positive and negative value. One can then compare the cognitive maps to determine how similar the estimations of the efficacy of different strategic choices are across texts.[39]

As for symbol analysis, literature in anthropology and organizational studies (and increasingly in political science) suggests that symbols are the vehicles through which shared decision rules, axioms, and preferences are manifested empirically, so that culture can be communicated, learned, or contested.[40] From a symbolic perspective, then, strategic culture may be reflected by symbols about the role of force in human affairs, about the efficacy of certain strategies, and hence about what sorts of strategies are better than others. The possibility that certain symbols can cue certain repertoires of behavior accords with recent thinking in social psychology on cognitive processing and social cueing. These symbols act as "mental aids" or heuristics which make complex environments more managable for decision-makers, and suggest ways of responding to this environment.[41] An analysis of symbols in strategic texts, then, may reveal a great deal about how strategic axioms in a text might be interpreted behavior-

38. Robert Axelrod, ed., *Structure of Decision: The Cognitive Maps of Political Elites* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976).
39. Comparisons could be made simply by overlaying maps on top of each other to see if similar cause-effect relationships hold. Or alternatively one could use statistical procedures like Kendall's W (coefficient of congruence) to measure the degree of congruence in the ranked sets of preferences across texts.
40. "A symbol is any object used by human beings to index meanings that are not inherent in, nor discernable from, the object itself. Literally anything can be a symbol: A word or a phrase, a gesture or an event, a person, a place, or a thing. An object becomes a symbol when people endow it with meaning, value or significance." Elder and Cobb, *Political Uses*, p. 28. See also Andrew M. Pettigrew, "On Studying Organizational Cultures," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (December 1979), p. 574; J. Zvi Namenwirth and Robert Philip Weber, *Dynamics of Culture* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p. 21; Johnson, *Symbol and Strategy*.
41. Charles A. Powell, et al., "Opening the 'Black Box': Cognitive Processing and Optimal Choice in Foreign Policy Decisionmaking," in Hermann, *New Directions*, p. 204; Lance Bennett, "Perception and Cognition: An Information-Processing Framework for Politics," in *Handbook of Political Behavior*, Vol. 1 (1981), p. 76.

ally, that is, what sorts of strategic preference rankings are constituted by these axioms.

In analyzing symbols one could examine a variety of units of analysis, including frequently used idioms and phrases which are axiomatically accepted as valid descriptions of a strategic context (e.g, "if you want peace, prepare for war"), key words which appear to embody certain behavioral axioms, or which are used to describe legitimate actions directed at an adversary (e.g, "deterrence"), and analogies and metaphors which function as shorthand definitions of a strategic environment and which supply a repertoire of responses to it (e.g, "Munich").[42]

Of course, symbolic analysis should be used with caution. The interpretations of symbolic meanings may change across time even while the symbols themselves remain constant.[43] Protecting one's analysis from this potential pitfall is a daunting methodological task. But precautions can be taken, such as being inclusive when choosing symbols for analysis, and seeking corroboration of the implications of certain symbols through cognitive mapping and other content-analysis techniques.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The utility of strategic culture as an analytic concept disappears rapidly without an effort to test for its effects on strategic behavior. One of the problems that has plagued cultural analysis, however, has been precisely the difficulty in determining the relationship of attitude to behavior. Often the problem shows up when the link between group values, an individual's attitudes, and the individual's behavior is left unspecified. Thus, at the very least one must identify strategic culture–based preference rankings, trace them from the objects of analysis through to the attitudes of specific decision-makers, and by doing so outline likely modes of transmission. If one can show the influence of strategic culture–derived preference rankings on cause-effect assumptions held by decision-makers before a decision, then one has done much to show

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42. Janet Kolodner and Robert H. Simpson, "Problem Solving and Dynamic Memory," in Janet Kolodner and Christopher Riesbeck, eds., *Experience, Memory and Reasoning* (Hillsdale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1986); Earl R. MacCormac, *A Cognitive Theory of Metaphors* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985), pp. 23–24; Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Unversity Press, 1992), p. 10.
43. David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 67–69.

where strategic preferences come from. From there one can look at the relationship between these preferences and actual decisions made over time and across strategic contexts.

In principle, then, linking strategic culture to behavior involves three steps. The first is to test for the presence of and congruence between the strategic preference rankings across the objects of analysis in the presumed formative time period. The second is to test for the presence of and congruence between preference rankings found in a sample of, say, policy documents taken from the decision process in the period of interest, and between these documents and the original objects of analysis. These documents should be taken from different times, across different strategic contexts. If strategic culture is to have a traceable behavioral effect, it must at least appear to have an effect on the action-oriented perceptions of key decision-makers.

The third step is to test for the effects of decision-makers' preference rankings on politico-military behavior. Here there are two related methodological issues: conceptualizing the relationship between strategic culture and behavior, and case selection. For the first issue, the research problem is to control for the effects of non-cultural variables which may provide competitive explanations of behavioral choices. This is not a clear-cut process. There are at least three productive ways of conceptualizing the relationship between strategic culture and other exogenous independent variables.

First, strategic culture may provide a limited range of choices or tendencies, but an intervening variable determines which tendency kicks in and when. For example, leadership change, elite transformation, bureaucratic politics, technology cycles, internal debates, or external crisis might cause a certain strategic culture to emerge dominant. While strategic culture does less explanatory work in this relationship, one could nonetheless hold the intervening variable constant across cases, vary strategic culture, and thus get a sense of the independent effects of the latter.

Second, strategic culture—as I have defined it—may appear as a consistent set of ranked preferences which persist across time and across strategic contexts. Decision-makers are sensitive to variation in structural or exogenous conditions in a culturally unique way, such that the interaction between cultural and structural conditions may (though need not) yield different predictions from purely non-ideational models of choice.

Third, strategic culture may mediate or moderate the effects of another independent variable, for example, by determining the institutional form of

policymaking.[44] This conceptualization of strategic culture as process overlaps with much of the organizational culture literature. One difficulty is that one would need an additional theory of politics to indicate why particular organizations and their cultures become dominant in the policy process. If policy is somehow a compromise between organizations, then choice will reflect a hybrid of strategic cultures. Nonetheless, in principle one could hold the first independent variable constant, and vary the culturally defined institutional policy process across cases.

The key issue is how to measure the separate effects of a potentially constant or slow-to-change variable, like strategic culture, on an outcome that is supposed to vary, like strategic choice. These three approaches all allow one to consider strategic culture as a constant which, in interaction with non-cultural variables, creates variation in the aggregate independent inputs into strategic choice. Each of these approaches therefore allows one to test the influence of strategic culture against purely non-cultural models in a wide range of cases.

As for case selection, in principle the research design ought to be comparative across states, where ahistorical, non-cultural variables are similar for all cases but variation in strategic cultures is maximized. As a first cut at strategic culture, however, a comparative design may be premature. Given my definition of strategic culture, the crucial first question is the consistency and persistence of strategic culture within a particular society. This issue, it seems to me, needs to be resolved before any cross-national comparisons can be of value. There is also a practical question: the familiarity with the strategic history of a state needed to carry out this research design is quite daunting. Comparative designs are, in the long run, essential, but realistically must probably wait until country-specific studies have determined whether or not a strategic culture exists.

This does not mean that comparisons within one state across time cannot be designed. If one assumes, for instance, that strategic culture is inert and slow to change, one could look at a fairly lengthy historical period in which competing models of strategic behavior can be tested against a strategic culture–derived model. One could look for periods where certain variables which *could* serve as the basis of alternative explanations are relatively constant. This allows the researcher to concentrate on testing a strategic culture model against one

44. See Martin W. Sampson, "Cultural Influences on Foreign Policy," in Hermann, *New Directions*, pp. 384–405.

or more competing models whose independent variables are not being held constant over this time frame.

The question is, of course, what are the alternative models out there? Much of the work on strategic culture or, more broadly, on ideational influences on state behavior, either explicitly or implicitly uses some variant of a structural *realpolitik* model as the logical alternative. The drivers in this model, as everyone who studies international relations theory is aware, are anarchy and the relative distribution of capabilities among states. Unique histories, cultures, ideas, norms and the like, are mostly irrelevant in the face of systemic constraints. One could pit some determinate version of this model, and other standard explanations (e.g., organizational interest, domestic politics, geopolitics, etc.) against a strategic culture model as long as the latter made distinctive predictions about strategic choice, or as long as some form of critical experiment could be set up to test for additional sets of predictions if the initial sets were similar. As I will suggest below, however, a structural *realpolitik* model has problems as a null hypothesis.

Some Caveats

Much of the impetus behind the research on strategic culture has been the conviction that decision-makers in different societies do indeed think and act differently from one another when faced with similar strategic circumstances and choices.[45] However, as I argue below, even if the procedures outlined here uncover the presence of a strategic culture, we need to treat the possibility of *a priori* differences in the content of strategic cultures across societies with a great deal of caution for two very different sets of reasons. The first is that strategic culture may exist but may not have any measurable behavioral effect. Work on organizational culture and psychology present contradictory arguments on this score. Some of this literature implies that strategic culture operates only at a symbolic level. Thus while we will find cross-cultural differences in a symbolic strategic discourse, we should expect fewer differences in behavior. Other work suggests that this symbolic strategic discourse will affect

45. The literature on Chinese strategic thought and practice, for instance, has stressed the allegedly anti-*realpolitik* themes in Chinese strategic culture: an inherent defensiveness, anti-militarism, and a stress on miminal violence or non-violence. This is allegedly in constrast to Western or European strategic traditions. This stereotyping, however, misses the dominant hard *realpolitik* tendencies in Chinese strategic culture. See Alastair I. Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Ming China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, forthcoming 1995).

behavioral choice. We need to sort out these implications before assuming that strategic culture has a measurable effect on behavior.

The second reason for caution comes from the possibility that strategic culture may indeed exist, but that different states may share a common strategic culture. This is not because these states face similar structural conditions or share similar formative historical and cultural experiences. Rather it is because, as states, they share a common process of identity creation, despite differences in regime-type, historical experience, level of economic development, geography, etc. If this is the case, then strategic culture may be an essential state-level variable explaining behavior, but this behavior may not vary much across states.

SYMBOLIC STRATEGY AND THE STRATEGY OF SYMBOLS

It should not be surprising that there may not be a clear causal relationship between strategic culture on the one hand and operational strategy on the other. According to a substantial body of literature on the role of symbols in human behavior in social psychology, anthropology, organizational culture, and linguistics, symbols can be used for three major related purposes, with differing effects on operational strategic choice.

One purpose is inwardly directed at the self, what the organizational culture literature calls "autocommunication." Unlike the conventional conceptualization of strategy as a process which "matches internal resources to environmental opportunities and threats,"[46] autocommunicative strategies are not specifically designed to be implemented or to be used in the organization's interaction with other actors. Rather, they are linguistic devices designed to reinforce the sense of competence and legitimacy held by decision-makers.[47] In security affairs, some argue that deterrence theory serves a similarly autocommunicative purpose. "As myth, deterrence theory presents an idealized ahistorical story of how strategic actors supposedly do behave, creating for decision makers a representation of how they should behave in managing national security."[48] To the extent that decision makers and strategic thinkers accept this

46. Green, "Understanding Corporate Culture," p. 22.
47. Broms and Gahmberg, "Communication to Self," p. 490; Henrik Gahmberg, "Semiotic Tools for the Study of Organizational Culture," in Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok, eds., *The Semiotic Web 1986* (Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987), p. 398; Gunnar Westerlund and Sven-Erik Sjostrand, *Organizational Myths* (London: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 42–45 and 120–122.
48. Timothy W. Luke, "What's Wrong with Deterrence? A Semiotic Interpretation of National Security Policy," in Der Derian and Shapiro, eds., *International/Intertextual Relations*, p. 214.

myth, their decisions, plans, and pronouncements take on an air of authority and competence. Declaratory nuclear doctrine represents what strategic decision-makers wish their decisions to look like, even though it may differ from operational doctrine.[49] From the autocommunication perspective, then, there are no reasons to expect that symbols, myths, and symbolic strategies have any effect on the behavior of the group. As long as idealized strategies are aimed only at reinforcing self-perceptions of competence and authority held by decision elites, there are no particular reasons why the behavior of the group cannot be generated by other processes such as inertia, standard operating procedures, or even rational choices made by operational decision makers.[50]

A second use of symbols by elites is directed at other members in the group. In this case, elites create an "official language" of discourse which excludes alternative strategies, undermines challenges to their authority, mobilizes support and otherwise upholds their hegemony in the decision process.[51] Those who use this language are recognized by others, not just themselves, as competent and legitimate authorities. Others in the group are therefore more likely to accept the correctness of decisions regardless of their nature or consequence. A symbolic strategic discourse, then, serves the same function as other symbols of authority such as uniforms, religious clothing, and formal titles.[52] In security affairs, Luckham suggests, the net effect of this symbolic discourse has been the creation of an ideology which justifies the hegemony of security intellectuals, military policy makers and arms manufacturers, and all those who accept a direct association between threats, weaponization, and security. [53] This argument is not the monopoly of post-modernist critics of U.S. strategic studies. Stephen Walt has also argued that strategic elites (military planners, military

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49. See Klein, "Hegemony and Strategic Culture," p. 138. Much earlier Singer had already pointed out the contrasts between a group's "official or articulated ideology" and its "operative ideology." J. David Singer, "Man and World Politics: The Psycho-Cultural Interface," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (July 1968), p. 145.
50. See Broms and Gahmberg, "Communication to Self," p. 489.
51. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1991), pp. 41–65; Richard M. Weiss, *Managerial Ideology and the Social Control of Deviance in Organizations* (New York: Praeger, 1986) pp. 35–47; Michael E. Urban, *The Ideology of Administration: American and Soviet Cases* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 5; Eric M. Eisenberg and Patricia Riley, "Organizational Symbols and Sensemaking," in Gerald M. Goldhaber and George A. Barrett, eds., *Handbook of Organizational Communication* (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1988), pp. 136–139.
52. Bourdieu, *Language*, p. 58; also see Charles Conrad, "Organizational Power: Faces and Symbolic Forms," in Linda L. Putnam and Michael E. Pacanowsky, eds., *Communication and Organizations: An Interpretative Approach* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983), pp. 186–192.
53. Luckham, "Armament Culture," p. 4. See also Klein, "Hegemony and Strategic Culture," pp. 134, 139.

industries, and security intellectuals) have bureaucratic, political, and personal interests in limiting strategic debates, just as those outside of the debates who want to join them have self-interested reasons to conform to the official language of strategic discourse.[54] To the extent that military organizations, or decision-makers who accept the paradigmatic assumptions of militaries, dominate the strategic decision-making process, the boundaries of strategic debate will be set by their language, logic, and conceptual categories. Thus, in contrast to the autocommunication literature, this argument suggests that strategic languages and symbols ought to constrain behavior measurably.[55]

A third purpose behind the use of symbols has to do with the creation and perpetuation of a sense of in-group solidarity directed at would-be adversaries. Ernest Bormann argues that a political community first needs to exist as a "rhetorical community" bound together by shared myths and languages which underscore the uniqueness of the community.[56] Since uniqueness, like power, exists only in relation to something else, the process of defining a sense of community also establishes who does not belong and thus who is a potential threat. The more the language of a group's strategic discourse creates distance between the values of the in-group and those of the "other," that is, the more

54. Stephen M. Walt, "The Search for a Science of Strategy: A Review Essay on 'Makers of Modern Strategy'," *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), pp. 147–148. See also Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 31.

55. There are three other related ways in which the symbolic discourse could narrow options. One is through "blowback" or "echo," where strategic symbols, initially wielded instrumentally by elites against alternative strategic visions, over time are internalized by these same elites or successive generations. They thus come to limit the search for alternative means to a particular end. (One needs to ask, however, why would elites at time t not already have internalized justifications used earlier in the domestic game at time t–n? If elites at time $t+n$ internalize these justifications and transform them into decision heuristics, then how does narrow self-interest explain the variance in behavior after time t?) Another way symbolic strategy may constrain behavior is through the use of historical analogies to identify the nature of a strategic problem and, hence, the most efficacious responses. Whether analogies are rationalizations used to limit debate or justify behavior, or are genuinely believed to be valid, to the extent that they govern decision-making, "all alternatives not having historical precedent are eliminated without being considered further." See Yaacov Vertzberger, "Foreign Policy Decisionmakers as Practical Intuitive Historians: Applied History and its Shortcomings," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (June 1986), p. 229. Finally, options may be limited as an unintended result of the deliberate manipulation of strategic symbols by decision elites. As these conceptions of the nature of the international environment become rooted in mass perceptions and public attitudes (which Charles Kupchan calls strategic culture), efforts by elites to change strategic course become constrained by public opinion and by the requirements of domestic political legitimacy. Charles Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), pp. 90 and 487.

56. Ernest G. Bormann, "Symbolic Convergence: Organizational Communication and Culture," in Putnam and Pacanowsky, *Communication and Organizations: An Interpretative Approach*, pp. 100–106.

the adversary is dehumanized, the more legitimate are any and all actions, particularly coercive ones, directed at the adversary.[57] At the same time symbolic strategic discourse can rationalize these behaviors when they are inconsistent with the self-professed preferences of the group.[58] By renaming objectionable behavior in ways that are linguistically acceptable, the group can carry out behaviors which members might otherwise oppose.[59] Myths used to describe both the behavior of the group and that of the adversary can "explain and reconcile contradictions between professed values and actual behavior," thus providing both a resolution of cognitive dissonance as well as a public justification for behavioral choices.[60]

This cognitive dissonance argument suggests that, far from narrowing the range of strategic choices in an effort to reconcile these with professed preferences, decision-makers may use strategic symbols and myths to justify or to obscure these differences. Indeed, it may well be that an idealized level of strategy, in so far as it accentuates in-group and out-group differences, and thus creates a zero-sum perception of the relationship, may justify a wide variety of behaviors directed at the adversary. Any and all choices framed in the language of the idealized level of strategy will appear more legitimate and authoritative.

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57. Donald T. Campbell and Robert A. Levine, "Ethno-centrism and Intergroup Relations," in Robert Abelson, et al., eds., *Theories of Cognitive Consistency: A Sourcebook* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), pp. 552.

58. Symbolic strategy can "disguise the motives for social action." Urban, *The Ideology of Administration*, p. 8.

59. Luckham, "Armament Culture," p. 15.

60. Pettigrew, "Studying Organizational Cultures," p. 576. See also Herbert C. Kelman and Reuben M. Baron, "Determinants of Modes of Resolving Inconsistency Dilemmas: A Functional Analysis," in Abelson, *Theories of Cognitive Consistency*, p. 673. Steven Kull found in his interviews of American "defense intellectuals," for instance, that Manichean images of the U.S.-Soviet relationship were used—sometimes even consciously—to mask or deny the reality of mutual vulnerability and mutual threat. This denial was necessary, in the view of some of his informants, because to accept that the structure of the superpower relationship created mutual threat would be to deny the moral correctness of the American responses to the Soviet threat, and thus would remove the moral justification for American strategic war plans. Steven Kull, *Minds at War: Nuclear Reality and the Inner Conflicts of Defense Policymakers* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), pp. 308–316. If the discrepancy between proposed behavior and self-professed values is very obvious, it can be rationalized by an appeal to the alleged inevitability of the circumstances. A particular response is unavoidable because the disposition of the adversary is such that all options except one are unreasonable. The action is thus not really a choice, and hence cannot be subject to sanction for contravening the values of the group. See Thomas G. Hart, "Cognitive Paradigms in the Arms Race: Deterrence, Detente and the 'Fundamental Error' of Attribution," *Conflict and Cooperation*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1978), pp. 147–161; Richard Herrmann, "The Empirical Challenge of the Cognitive Revolution: A Strategy for Drawing Inferences about Perceptions," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (June 1988), pp. 175–203.

We have, then, three broad arguments for a possible disjuncture between an idealized strategic culture and operational choice. Moreover, these explanations are somewhat at odds with each other about whether and how much a symbolic strategic discourse constrains behavior. They suggest the possibility that strategic culture will have little to do with strategic choice, and indicate the analytical problems this possibility raises.

CULTURAL REALISM AND CULTURAL IDEALISM

The second broad caveat concerns the possibility that strategic cultures may indeed have a measurable effect on the behavior of states but that this effect may not vary much across large groups of states. Suppose a state's position along the three dimensions of the central paradigm shown in Figure 1 were determined by some characteristic common to all states, perhaps that all states are collections of social groups where group cohesion is created by the deliberate construction of myths about the nature of the group. This process is common to most states. However, there is considerable evidence in anthropology and social psychology that the construction of group identities involves the creation of in-group–out-group tensions. Variation in the intensity or tightness of in-group identification ought to be positively related to variation in the devaluation of the out-group. Thus, as in-group identification intensifies, it should be easier to denigrate out-groups and to identify them as potential threats. Indeed, according to some of the social-psychological literature, intense in-group identification is positively related to aggressive behavior towards out-groups.[61] One might hypothesize, therefore, that the greater the intensity and exclusiveness of state identity, the closer a state will be to the high extreme along the three dimensions of the central paradigm. States sharing these levels of in-group identification will tend to share strategic cultures which exhibit hard *realpolitik* characteristics. Conversely, states with weak in-group identification, or states which perceive other states as sharing values characteristic of the in-group, are more likely to be influenced by *idealpolitik* strategic cultures. This may help account for why democracies do not fight each other, yet willingly fight non-democracies. As Bruce Russett and others have argued, Western democracies have developed a shared sense of identity such that "liberal

61. See especially Jonathan Mercer, "Anarchy and Identity," *International Organization* (forthcoming). See also Daniel Druckman, "Nationalism, Patriotism and Group Loyalty: A Social Psychological Perspective," *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 38, Supplement 1 (April 1994), pp. 47–48; and Marc Ross, *The Culture of Conflict: Interpretations and Interests in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 11–12 and 40.

democracy" tags a state as one which shares key domestic political values with other democracies. That is, liberal democracies tend not to reflexively view each other as zero-sum threats because they learn that other democracies prefer accommodation and negotiation. Since each side believes this is the case for the other, the assumptions of the hard *realpolitik* central paradigm become hard to maintain.[62] Thus while democracies are separate states, technically live under conditions of anarchy, and face changes in relative power from time to time, they perceive each other as members of a larger in-group or community. Non-democracies, on the other hand, do not share these values, and thus remain part of the devalued out-group, and legitimate targets of violence.

This raises a number of interesting implications. First, note that structural conditions play at best a secondary role in determining the strategic preferences of states. Anarchy is a constant among democratic states, between democracies and non-democracies, and among non-democratic states. Yet there is considerable variation between democratic pairs and others in the amount of conflict among the actors. Variation in strategic behavior is a function of variation in strategic preference rankings, which in turn is a function of variation in a state's position along the three dimensions in the central paradigm. This variation, in turn, is a function of variation in the intensity of in-group identification. Thus, following the logic of this argument, there are two ideal types of strategic culture: the *idealpolitik* extreme shared by states in the democratic security community, and the *realpolitik* extreme shared by states operating outside this zone, including democratic-nondemocratic dyads. These strategic cultures are still key determinants of state behavior, but these are shared across large numbers of states which differ on a wide variety of unit-level dimensions.

Second, while the argument here is not inconsistent with Alexander Wendt's general conclusion that "anarchy is what states make of it," it suggests that because *realpolitik* may be inherent in the way state identities are constructed, it is not so easy for states to break free from the constraints of *realpolitik* strategic culture.[63] That is, democratic zones of peace in an anarchical international

62. Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post–Cold War World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992); and Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Collective Identity in a Democratic Community: The Case of NATO," paper presented at the Third SSRC/MacArthur Workshop on Norms and National Security, Stanford University, October 7–8, 1994.

63. Wendt has argued that *realpolitik* behavior is not a product of anarchical international structures alone, but instead a function of how states identify who their friends and enemies are, a function in part of how they identify themselves. States are not predisposed to view each other competi-

environment are possible because the intensity of in-group identification can vary under anarchy. But state formation biases strategic cultures towards the *realpolitik* end of the central paradigm because, for the most part, political entrepreneurs and group members all prefer tight, intense group identification to loose and inclusive identities. Thus structural realists may be right about the durability of self-help *realpolitik* behavior, but for the wrong reasons. The source of this durability may not be anarchy, but rather the shared strategic cultures of the units. Interestingly the very existence of a zone of democratic peace may be the critical test. The persistence of this zone in the face of anarchy and changes in relative capabilities would suggest that *idealpolitik* behavior is ideational in nature. But if this is so, then it is logically possible that zones of *realpolitik* conflict are also ideational in nature and persist independent of anarchy.

Finally and relatedly, if ideas about group identification, rather than about structure, are the source of strategic culture and hence strategic behavior, then state preferences over actions are fundamentally constructed at the state level. This suggests that both *realpolitik* behavior and *idealpolitik* behavior are ideational in origin, since they are independent of international structure (anarchy) and domestic political structure (regime type). If *idealpolitik* and *realpolitik* behaviors are independent of system structure, then we cannot speak of ideational versus structurally derived, interest-based models of strategic choice, since there are no interests which are not ideationally based at the state level. This would suggest that structural-realist models of choice do not make good null hypotheses for ideational models, since the effects of anarchical structures and relative power on *idealpolitik* choice are small (as the democratic peace implies), and on *realpolitik* choice they are spurious (as ideational *realpolitik* implies).

This second caveat, then, challenges both traditional work on strategic culture—particularly of the first generation—*and* the structural realists. It suggests

tively or threateningly, but at some point choose to accept this perception. He proposes that the self-help view of the world can be introduced into state identity formation through the existence of a "predator state," which forces other states to engage in "competitive power politics, to meet fire with fire, since failure to do so may degrade or destroy them." The question is, where do predator states comes from? Wendt notes only that predation could come from unit-level causes like human nature or domestic politics. The argument presented here suggests that one possible source of *realpolitik* behavior is a *realpolitik* strategic culture, associated with intense in-group identification, and hence inherent in the process of state or group formation. See Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), p. 408.

a research program focused as a first step on scaling the intensity of in-group identification in states across different interstate systems and different distributions of power, seeing whether elements of an *idealpolitik* or *realpolitik* strategic culture show up, and then correlating these two variables with a measure of the coerciveness in state interactions. It implies working hypotheses that challenge both the view that unique strategic cultures matter because they reflect unique differences in the historical development of each state, and the view that strategic culture does not matter because structures account for most of the variation in strategic choice.

Conclusion

I have tried here to outline some of the theoretical and methodological issues at stake in the study of strategic culture. Despite its growing profile in international relations and security studies, strategic culture remains undertheorized. Much empirical work on strategic culture has also been hampered by a lack of methodological rigor. One result is that within the literature there are very different conclusions about the explanatory power of strategic culture, with some work hewing to an extreme determinism, while others implying that strategic culture will not have much effect on behavior at all. There is, in short, a great deal of confusion over what it is that strategic culture is supposed to explain, how it is supposed to explain it, and how much it does explain.

Nonetheless, even with the caveats, the possibility that strategic choice is in large measure determined by values or assumptions with roots deep in a state's ideational history is an intriguing one both theoretically and in policy terms. Theoretically, it fundamentally challenges structural explanations of choice that rely on ahistorical calculations of interests and capabilities, even though, depending on the content of particular strategic cultures, the predictions of the two approaches could be very similar. Strategic culture holds out the possibility that structural *realpolitik* explanations are dependent on the presence of prior *realpolitik* strategic cultures, since without *realpolitik* interpretations of interests and capabilities, changes in these variables are meaningless and therefore indeterminate.

In policy terms, the notion of strategic culture leaves open the possibility that strategic preferences and state interests are somewhat more amenable to purposive change than structural realists might assume, even though cross-national studies may conclude that cultural *realpolitik* is a hardy norm in international relations. Done well, the careful analysis of strategic culture could

help policymakers establish more accurate and empathetic understandings of how different actors perceive the game being played, reducing uncertainty and other information problems in strategic choice. Done badly, the analysis of strategic culture could reinforce stereotypes about the strategic predispositions of other states and close off policy alternatives deemed inappropriate for dealing with local strategic cultures. One wants to avoid ill-informed but momentous strategic decisions like the deterministic leap of logic made in the Reagan administration that centuries of Russian insecurity and autocracy necessitated the American development of warfighting and war-winning strategic capabilities.

Care in using strategic culture as an analytic tool is especially important as American policy attention shifts to, for instance, the Asia-Pacific region, an area where U.S. images of the "other" have been rife with stereotyped generalizations about particular "strategic styles." In discussions about security architectures for the region, there is a growing acceptance that East Asian strategic culture embodies preferences for informal and bilateral arms control, or embraces more cautious, defensive conceptions of the use of force in coercive diplomacy.[64] This may indeed be the content of East Asian strategic culture, but there are depressingly few rigorous behavioral analyses of these propositions. Moreover, to accept that these particular predispositions are deeply rooted in strategic culture is also to imply that there is less value in pressing for formal, multilateral security processes than would be the case if these preferences reflected the more narrow interests of politicians or bureaucracies, or if they remained at the level of symbolic discourse. It would be a shame if opportunities to develop effective, highly institutionalized multilateral constraints on the military doctrines, force postures and behaviors of states in the region were missed or never created because these were mistakenly deemed incompatible with deeply rooted, slow-to-change strategic cultures.

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64. See, for instance, Ball, "Strategic Culture in the Asia-Pacific."