

Strategic Culture and National Security Policy

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Culture has become fashionable in mainstream international relations scholarship in the post–Cold War era. One of the most surprising aspects of the renaissance of scholarly interest in culture has been the emerging consensus in national security policy studies that culture can affect significantly grand strategy and state behavior. Scholars and practitioners have begun to interpret events like the U.S.–China standoff over a downed spy plane in 2001 or escalating tensions between Palestinians and Israelis through the lens of national identity and culture. While these concepts found their way into classic works on international conflict, including Carl von Clausewitz’s *On War* in 1831 and Quincy Wright’s *A Study of War* in 1942, descriptions of actual causal linkages remained vague.¹ During the Cold War, scholars attempted to develop a theory of political culture, and Jack Snyder drew these ideas into security policy studies by coining the term “strategic culture” in the late 1970s. Nevertheless, critics charged that there was little progress toward the development of a unified theory of culture that might rival neorealism, and at the end of the Cold War, even supporters were concerned that culture remained “the explanation of last resort” for puzzling state behavior.²

Today, scholars have rediscovered the theory of strategic culture to explain national security policy.³ Alastair Johnston’s exploration in 1995 of “cultural

¹Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* [1831], ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976); Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942).

²Lucian W. Pye, as quoted in Valerie M. Hudson, ed., *Culture and Foreign Policy* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1997), p. 2.

³Some of the most influential works in this area for security studies include: Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Alastair Iain Johnston, “Thinking about Strategic Culture,” *International Security* 19, No. 4 (1995), pp. 32–64; Stephen Peter Rosen, “Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters,” *International Security* 19, No. 4 (1995), pp. 5–31; Elizabeth Kier, “Culture and Military Doctrine: France

realism” in Chinese security policy during the Ming dynasty, for example, suggests that societal characteristics have influenced state behavior throughout much of the history of human civilization. Others have devoted attention to studying the surprising German and Japanese security policy reticence in the post–Cold War era and have suggested that their unique, “antimilitarist” strategic cultures account for most of the continuity in their behavior from 1990 to the present. In an intriguing branch of cultural theory, Samuel Huntington posited that civilizational (or “metacultural”) differences would increase the likelihood of international conflict, and some practitioners have used this idea to interpret the events of September 11, 2001, and the war on terrorism.⁴

This essay charts the evolution of the theory of strategic culture through several generations of scholarly work inside and outside the discipline. Key questions that guide this investigation include: What are the ideational foundations of national security policy? Do cultural theories, newly inspired by constructivism, provide the most accurate explanations of security policy in the post–Cold War era? Is strategic culture really “semipermanent,” as its supporters suggest, or can strategic culture evolve? Who are the “keepers” of strategic culture? Under what conditions are policy decisions culturally bound? Although scholars disagree about the implications of ideational models, even skeptics now describe the “third wave” of cultural theories as a potential supplement to neorealism.⁵ I conclude that contemporary works on strategic culture offer some compelling arguments, but several avenues remain to develop more reflexive models of strategic culture.

THEORETICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Many international relations scholars interpreted the end of the Cold War as a grand strategic opportunity for countries to reflect on their past, present, and

between the Wars,” *International Security* 19, No. 4 (1995), pp. 65–93. See also Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); Richard J. Ellis and Michael Thompson, eds., *Culture Matters: Essays in Honor of Aaron Wildavsky* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997); Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in Forty-Three Societies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), pp. 289–290.

⁵ See Michael C. Desch, “Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies,” *International Security* 23, No. 1 (1999), pp. 156–180.

future. Neorealists predicted that the United States could define the new world order as the sole surviving superpower; Russia and the former Soviet republics would be disabled by a fragmentation of their power; and the People's Republic of China might eventually rise to become a true rival to American hegemony. Scholars also predicted that countries that once had been sidelined and constrained by the Cold War, such as the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan, would normalize their foreign policy by taking on a more assertive profile that focused on strategic interests backed by the threat of force.⁶ For example, Michael Stürmer argued that developments in Europe after the Cold War placed Germany at the *Bruchzone* (geostrategic crux) of the continent, leading to an "obligation to embrace realism, clarity of goals, and predictability of means."⁷

With more than a decade of post-Cold War experience behind us, critics charge that neorealism has fallen short in predicting major events (such as systemic change) and does not describe adequately national security policy patterns in a dynamic, new international system. While I do not intend to detail the scholarly debate over the utility of realism, it is important to note that systemic change has prompted a reexamination of the dominant paradigm in the discipline. By the mid-1990s, criticism of systemic approaches even emerged in national security studies, once the bastion of support for parsimonious, rational models of state behavior. Works by Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, Jack Snyder, Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein, and others contended that neorealist frameworks could not fully explain major security policy changes such as the end of the Cold War or shifting balances of power.⁸ Ethan Kapstein

⁶See select chapters from Karl Kaiser and Hanns W. Maull, eds., *Deutschlands neue Außenpolitik, Band 1: Grundlagen*, (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1995), including Christian Tomuschat, "Die Internationale Staatenwelt an der Schwelle des Dritten Jahrtausends," pp. 15–37; Michael Stürmer, "Deutsche Interessen," pp. 39–61; Hans-Peter Schwarz, "Das Deutsche Dilemma," pp. 81–97; Helga Haftendorn, "Gulliver in der Mitte Europas: Internationale Verflechtung und Nationale Handlungsmöglichkeiten," pp. 129–152. See also Michael Brenner, Wolfgang F. Schlör, and Phil Williams, *German and American Foreign and Security Policies: Strategic Convergence or Divergence?* (St. Augustin, Germany: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 1994); *Interne Studie*, No. 98.

⁷Michael Stürmer, *Die Grenzen der Macht: Begegnung der Deutschen mit der Geschichte* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1992), p. 247; see also Michael Stürmer, "Deutsche Interessen," in Kaiser and Maull, eds., *Deutschlands neue Aussenpolitik*, pp. 39–61. For a similar argument, see Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Die Zentralmacht Europas: Deutschlands Rückkehr auf die Weltbühne* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1994).

⁸See Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992); Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991). See also

argued in 1995 that structural realism “qua theory, must be viewed as deeply and perhaps fatally flawed. Yet at the same time, qua paradigm or worldview, it continues to inform the community of international relations scholars.”⁹ This argument expressed an emerging scholarly opinion that these and related works had led us into a period of theoretical crisis in which the discipline found itself dissatisfied with existing theories but not yet able to construct adequate alternatives.

POLITICAL CULTURE

Political culture has become one of the most enduring—and controversial—alternative theoretical explanations of state behavior. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba first developed the concept of political culture in the 1960s as “that subset of beliefs and values of a society that relate to the political system,” and their studies set the tone for consideration of the theme for four decades.¹⁰ Political culture may include a commitment to values like democratic principles and institutions, ideas about morality and the use of force, the rights of individuals or collectivities, or predispositions toward the role of a country in global politics. According to proponents of the theory, political culture becomes manifest on at least three levels: “the cognitive, which includes empirical and causal beliefs; the evaluative, which consists of values, norms and moral judgments, and the expressive or affective, which encompasses emotional attachments, patterns of identity and loyalty, and feelings of affinity, aversion, or indifference.”¹¹ Talcott Parsons has referred to culture as being comprised of

Richard Rosecrance and Zara Steiner, “British Grand Strategy and the Origins of World War II,” and Matthew Evangelista, “Internal and External Constraints on Grand Strategy: The Soviet Case,” both in Rosecrance and Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, pp. 124–153 and 154–178.

⁹Ethan B. Kapstein, “Is Realism Dead? The Domestic Sources of International Politics,” *International Organization* 49, No. 4 (1995), p. 751.

¹⁰See Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 11–14.

¹¹John S. Duffield, *World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions, and German Security Policy after Unification* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 23; see also Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*; Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, eds., *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); Robert D. Putnam: *The Beliefs of Politicians: Ideology, Conflict, and Democracy in Britain and Italy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973), and “Studying Elite Political Culture: The Case of ‘Ideology,’” *American Political Science Review* 65, No. 3 (1971), pp. 651–681; Bert A. Rockman, *Studying Elite Political Culture: Problems in Design and Interpretation* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976).

“interpretive codes,” including language, values, and even substantive beliefs like support for democracy or the futility of war.¹²

Broadly speaking, scholars contend that political culture has both anthropological origins—in language, religion, customs, and socialization—and historical origins in shared experiences (and the interpretation of common memories). Political cultural dynamics shape not only prevailing public sentiments, but also the development of political institutions. According to Elkins and Simeon:

Political culture consists of assumptions about the political world . . . that focus attention on certain features of events, institutions, and behavior, define the realm of the possible, identify the problems deemed pertinent, and set the range of alternatives among which members of the population make decisions. Political culture, then, is a short hand 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. Since it represents a “disposition” in favor of a range of alternatives, by corollary another range of alternatives receives little or no attention within a particular culture. Most people in any culture, therefore, will take for granted a particular course of action or consider only a few alternatives. That they choose from a restricted set will, for most of them, remain below the threshold of consciousness, because they seldom encounter individuals who take for granted quite different assumptions.¹³

Most twentieth-century scholarship on the significance of culture was actually developed across several other disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, and psychology. The “national character studies” of the 1940s and 1950s defined early efforts to draw connections between culture and state behavior based largely on anthropological models.¹⁴ While these works became controversial, prominent sociologists and anthropologists (including Margaret Mead, Mary Douglas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and others) continued similar lines of investigation of culture. In one of the most influential anthropological works on the subject, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Clifford Geertz defined culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of

¹²See Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1951).

¹³David J. Elkins and Richard E. B. Simeon, “A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?” *Comparative Politics* 11, No. 2 (1979), pp. 127–128.

¹⁴Two of the most prominent scholars of national character were Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946), and Geoffrey Gorer, *The American People* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1948); Criticism included Alex Inkeles and D. J. Levinson, “National Character: The Study of Model Personality and Sociocultural Systems,” in G. Lindzey, ed., *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison Wesley, 1968).

inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.”¹⁵ He provided an ideal model of how culture shapes interpretation of the world around cultural groups and may lead to distinct behaviors.

By the 1980s, a select group of political scientists, primarily comparativists, had begun to further investigate linkages between culture and politics. Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky’s *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers* represented a truly interdisciplinary approach to the study of how specific cultural type groups responded to environmental challenges.¹⁶ Sociologist Ann Swidler further defined cultural interpretations by proposing a more complex model of connections between culture and state behavior, mediated by cultural “strategies of action.” Swidler broadly defined culture as consisting of “symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life.”¹⁷ Building on the arguments of Max Weber and Parsons, she contended that interest-driven strategies are important mediating conditions on state behavior.¹⁸

While sociological models of culture became increasingly complex, subsequent studies of political culture yielded little theoretical refinement beyond the ideas first raised by Almond and Verba. Critics argued that the approach was epiphenomenal and subjective, and they argued that proponents of political culture often made exaggerated claims about its explanatory power.¹⁹

¹⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 89.

¹⁶ Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1982).

¹⁷ Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51, No. 2 (1986), p. 273.

¹⁸ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1946 [1922–23]), p. 220; see also Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1958 [1904]); Parsons, *The Social System*, p. 11. Related works describing the growing interest in connections between culture and political developments include: Ronald Inglehart, “The Renaissance of Political Culture,” *American Political Science Review* 82, No. 4 (1988), pp. 1203–1230; Harry C. Triandis, *Culture and Social Behavior* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994); Aaron Wildavsky, “Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation,” *American Political Science Review* 81, No. 1 (1987), pp. 3–21.

¹⁹ Elkins and Simeon, “A Cause in Search of Its Effect,” p. 127. On criticisms of political culture, see Charles Lockhart, “Cultural Contributions to Explaining Institutional Form, Political Change, and Rational Decisions,” *Comparative Political Studies* 32, No. 7 (1999), pp. 862–893; Lowell Dittmer, “Political Culture and Political Symbolism: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis,” *World Politics* 29, No. 4 (1977), pp. 552–

Cultural interpretive arguments fell out of favor with the behavioral revolution in the social sciences.²⁰ The concept remained alive in area studies in the 1970s, but it garnered less attention in mainstream international relations scholarship.

STRATEGIC CULTURE AND NATIONAL STYLE

The concept of linkage between culture and national security policy exists in classic works, including the writings of Thucydides and Sun Tzu. Carl von Clausewitz advanced these ideas by recognizing war and war-fighting strategy as “a test of moral and physical forces.” The goal of strategy was much more than defeat of the enemy on the battlefield, it was the elimination of the enemy’s morale. Writing of the Westphalian system, Clausewitz argued that three important elements come into play in any war: the government, which sets the objectives for the war; the armies, which fight it; and the peoples who support it. Clausewitz stressed that leaders should not forget the real potential of a mobilized mass society, as he had witnessed firsthand in defeats by Napoleonic armies marching for the glory of the empire.²¹

In 1977, Jack Snyder brought the political culture argument into modern security studies by developing a theory of strategic culture to interpret Soviet military strategy. In some ways, this was an attempt to challenge the unitary rational actor assumption in security policy studies, based on the conviction that domestic political conditions could shape even nuclear strategy. Snyder suggested that elites articulate a unique strategic culture related to security-military affairs that is a wider manifestation of public opinion socialized into a distinctive mode of strategic thinking. He contended that “as a result of this socialization process, a set of general beliefs, attitudes, and behavior patterns with regard to nuclear strategy has achieved a state of semipermanence that

583; Ruth Lane, “Political Culture: Residual Category or General Theory?” *Comparative Political Studies* 25 (1992), pp. 362–387; Marc Howard Ross, “Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis,” in Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, eds., *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 42–80.

²⁰Elkins and Simeon, “A Cause in Search of Its Effect,” pp. 127–145; some criticism of this work was directed back at what Michael Desch called the “first wave” of cultural theories—national character studies—developed during World War II. For a recent summary of the limits of political culture, see Richard W. Wilson, “The Many Voices of Political Culture: Assessing Different Approaches,” *World Politics* 52, No. 2 (2000), pp. 246–273.

²¹Michael Howard, “Clausewitz, Man of the Year,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1991, p. A17.

places them on the level of ‘cultural’ rather than mere policy.”²² Other important elements of strategic culture, according to Snyder, include the context associated with perceived security threats and technological development; strong cognitive content associated with attitudes and beliefs; historical legacies; and beliefs about the role of the military and concerned institutions in the policy-making process.

Snyder applied his strategic cultural framework to interpret the development of Soviet and American nuclear doctrines as products of different organizational, historical, and political contexts and technological constraints. He claimed that these different cultural contexts led U.S. and Soviet decision-makers to ask different questions about the use of nuclear weapons and develop unique answers. The result was his prediction that the Soviet military would exhibit a preference for the preemptive, offensive use of force, and the origins for this could be found rooted in a Russian history of insecurity and authoritarian control. Ultimately, Snyder argued that strategic culture was “semipermanent” and that new problems and developments would not be assessed objectively but rather through the perceptual lenses provided by strategic culture.

Snyder’s contributions had resonance for other security policy analysts, and subsequent work on strategic culture such as Ken Booth’s *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* was directed toward the ideational foundations of nuclear strategy and superpower relations. Colin Gray’s *Nuclear Strategy and National Style* also suggested that distinctive national styles, with “deep roots within a particular stream of historical experience,” characterize strategy making in countries like the United States and the Soviet Union. While arguing that characteristics of national style are based on historical and anthropological roots, Gray focused more on the tenuous connections between a national style and its effects on policy choices. He defined strategic culture as “referring to modes of thought and action with respect to force, which derives from perception of the national historical experience, from aspirations for responsible behavior in national terms” and even from “the civic culture and way of life.”²³ Thus, strategic culture “provides the milieu within which strategy is debated,” and it serves as an independent determinant of strategic policy patterns. Like Snyder, Gray maintained that strategic culture would be a semipermanent influence on security policy. He claimed that “short of a new historical experience that undeniably

²²Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1977), R-2154-AF, p. 8; see also Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981).

²³Colin S. Gray, *Nuclear Strategy and National Style* (Lanham, Md.: Hamilton Press, 1986), pp. 36–37.

warrants a historically discontinuous response,” national style would be an enduring explanation of state behavior.²⁴

Although these arguments drew attention to the role of domestic conditions in shaping national security policy behavior, critics asserted that the operationalization of strategic culture also was problematic and subjective. They suggested that strategic cultural models were tautological, as it would be nearly impossible to separate independent and dependent variables in a reliable way. Critics also charged that strategic cultural interpretations were by definition unique, drawing upon narrow and contextual historiography as much as anthropology. Furthermore, both supporters and detractors believed that the concept of strategic culture was fairly static, focusing on enduring historical orientations with strong predictive capability. This left little room for development of a cross-national study of the phenomenon.

Even supporters of strategic culture called for more careful study. Gray wrote in 1988, “Social science has developed no exact methodology for identifying distinctive national cultures and styles.” Literature on the “academically unfashionable subject of national character” was anecdotal at best, yet he believed that learning about the “cultural thoughtways” of a nation was crucial to understanding a country’s behavior and its role in world politics.²⁵ Booth called the formation of military strategy “a peculiarly ethnocentric business,” and Yitzhak Klein argued that only a “comparative, in-depth study of the formation, influence, and process of change in the strategic cultures of the major powers in the modern era” could make a useful contribution to war and peace studies.²⁶ There were few attempts at comparative study on the subject in the 1980s.²⁷ With the abrupt end of the Cold War, strategic culture once again fell into disfavor.²⁸

²⁴Colin S. Gray, “National Style in Strategy: The American Example,” *International Security* 6, No. 2 (1981), p. 35.

²⁵Gray, *The Geopolitics of Superpower* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), pp. 42–43.

²⁶Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), p. 20; Yitzhak Klein, “A Theory of Strategic Culture,” *Comparative Strategy* 10, No. 1 (1991), p. 3. See also Richard W. Wilson, *Compliance Ideologies: Rethinking Political Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Charles A. Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994).

²⁷See Roland H. Ebel, Raymond Taras, and James D. Cochrane, *Political Culture and Foreign Policy in Latin America: Case Studies from the Circum-Caribbean* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

²⁸This challenge to cultural theories is well articulated in Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen, eds., *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); see also Desch, “Culture Clash.”

STRATEGIC CULTURE REDISCOVERED

In the 1990s, a new generation of scholarly works reasserted the utility of cultural interpretations. In the aptly titled book, *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, Lapid set the tone for this revival of interest:

Culture and identity are staging a dramatic comeback in social theory and practice at the end of the twentieth century. . . . Political realists—who, under the impact of their Waltzian move to neorealism have harshly marginalized culture and identity—are cautiously partaking in this trend. Similarly, following a period of hostile indifference to “ideational explanations” the time for ideas seems to have come around once again in International Political Economy.²⁹

Inspired by the rise of constructivism and what Desch called “a renaissance of interest in culture in security studies,” researchers plunged into the gap between structural expectations and security policy realities, with models of culturally bound state behavior.³⁰

The rise of constructivism in the post–Cold War era influenced theoretical work on strategic culture, domestic structures, and organizational culture. Ted Hopf argued that constructivism promised “to return culture and domestic politics to international relations theory.” Given its proclaimed ontological agnosticism, the paradigm

envisions no disciplinary divides between international relations and comparative subfields (or any fields for that matter). Constructivism has no inherent focus on “second image” accounts of world politics. . . . Constructivism provides a promising approach for uncovering those features of domestic society, culture, and politics that should matter to state identity and state action in global politics Any state identity in world politics is partly the product of the social practices that constitute that identity at home.³¹

The constructivist research program devotes particular attention to identity formation, with connections to organizational process, history, tradition, and

²⁹ Yosef Lapid, “Culture’s Ship: Returns and Departures in International Relations Theory,” in Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil, eds., *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1996), p. 3.

³⁰ Desch, “Culture Clash,” p. 145. For constructivist foundations of ideational models, see Alexander Wendt, “Identity and Structural Change in International Politics,” in Lapid and Kratochwil, eds., *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, pp. 47–64. See also Ellis and Thompson, eds., *Culture Matters*.

³¹ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations,” *International Security* 23, No. 1 (1998), p. 914; see also Jeffrey W. Legro, “Culture and Preferences in the International Cooperation Two-Step,” *American Political Science Review* 90, No. 1 (1996), pp. 118–137.

culture. Alexander Wendt articulated the constructivist stance that state identities and interests are “socially constructed by knowledgeable practice” and addressed the thorny issue of how identity and interests are formed.³² According to Valerie Hudson, constructivism “views culture as an evolving system of shared meaning that governs perceptions, communications, and actions Culture shapes practice in both the short and long term. At the moment of action, culture provides the elements of grammar that define the situation, that reveal motives, and that set forth a strategy for success.”³³ The rise of constructivism clearly allowed a new wave of strategic cultural research with some promising avenues for further development.³⁴

Related studies of national security policy highlight the importance of culture. Alastair Johnston’s *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* sets out to investigate Chinese strategic culture and causal linkages to China’s use of military force against external threats. But Johnston chose several unconventional research approaches to explore the theme. For example, he selected the intriguing period of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) as the focus for his contemporary theoretical test, and he openly acknowledged his skepticism regarding the assumptions of area studies work that China has a unique or special unexplained quality in state character and behavior. He wrote that strategic cultural arguments assert “China has exhibited a tendency for the controlled, politically driven defensive and minimalist use of force that is deeply rooted in the statecraft of ancient strategists and a worldview of relatively complacent superiority.”³⁵ Based on careful historical analysis, Johnston concluded that there were two Chinese strategic cultures in action: “one a symbolic or idealized set of assumptions and ranked preferences, and one an operational set that had a nontrivial effect on strategic choices in the Ming period.”³⁶ Ironically, he found that while China does have characteristics of unique strategic cultures, these cultures actually exhibit some classic elements of realpolitik.

³² Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, No. 2 (1992), pp. 391–426.

³³ Hudson, ed., *Culture and Foreign Policy*, pp. 28–29.

³⁴ Arguably the most important book to define this new wave of scholarship on strategic culture was Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security*. This collection of works linked theory and national security policy through essays that focused on how norms, institutions, and other cultural features affect state interests and policies. From the beginning, Katzenstein acknowledged the interdisciplinary nature of the inquiry, calling this “a book written by scholars of international relations rummaging in the ‘graveyard’ of sociological studies” (p. 1).

³⁵ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. x.

Scholars also have conducted research on links between culture and national security policy behavior in other areas of the world. For example, Elizabeth Kier described the significance of organizational culture in the development of French military doctrine.³⁷ Stephen Rosen provided a compelling account of the ways that the military and organizational cultures in India have shaped strategy over time.³⁸ In another fascinating work, Roland Ebel, Raymond Taras, and James Cochrane argued that the cultures of Latin American countries are distinctive, identifiable, and highly influential in the development of domestic and foreign policies.³⁹

The Strategic Cultures of Germany and Japan

Another significant research program in this new wave of literature can be found in specialized studies of German and Japanese strategic culture. Neo-realists predicted that these countries would soon rise to the challenge of the post-Cold War era and pursue a natural path toward military dominance. For example, Kenneth Waltz coyly suggested at the beginning of the 1990s that “Germany may ultimately find that reunification and the renewed life of a great power are more invigorating than the struggles, complications, and compromises” of European integration.⁴⁰ These predictions seemed to fall short in their interpretations of the behaviors of these countries in the early post-Cold War era, and some scholars turned their attention to alternative explanations.

Thomas Berger’s *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* explored the continuity and restraint of these countries’ security policies in the post-Cold War era by focusing on their “antimilitarist political-military cultures.”⁴¹ Berger noted that while Japan’s economic and technological power placed it in a position to become an economic and perhaps even military superpower at the end of the Cold War, the persistent postwar culture

³⁷ Kier, “Culture and Military Doctrine.”

³⁸ See Stephen Peter Rosen, *Societies and Military Power: India and Its Armies* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

³⁹ Ebel, Taras, and Cochrane, *Political Culture and Foreign Policy in Latin America*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security* 18, No. 2 (1993), p. 71; see also Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise,” *International Security* 17, No. 2 (1993), pp. 5–51.

⁴¹ Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 1.

of antimilitarism truly defines Japanese security policy today.⁴² To Berger, Japan's experience in the Gulf War proved that the country was following a unique path:

Just when the world was expecting Japan, together with the newly united Germany, to begin to take over from the United States the mantle of leadership in their respective regions, both countries were plunged into virtual policy paralysis by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Instead of revealing a new assertiveness, Japan had great difficulty responding to the crisis, dispatching a token mine-sweeping flotilla only after hostilities had ceased, and only grudgingly offering financial support after much internal bickering. The Japanese public appeared totally unimpressed with arguments stressing the importance of meeting aggression or defending the principle of national sovereignty Instead of raising international ethical or political issues, the domestic debate focused almost entirely on the need to appease the Americans versus adherence to Japan's position as a peace nation, as embodied in Article 9 of the constitution, and guarding against a rekindling of militarism.⁴³

According to Berger, cultural beliefs and values act as a distinct national lens to shape perceptions of events and even channel possible societal responses. In this sense, "cultures enjoy a certain degree of autonomy and are not merely subjective reflections of concrete 'objective' reality."⁴⁴ Berger argued that these subjective interpretations allow special historical interpretations to develop over time:

What then accounts for German and Japanese antimilitarism? The answer to this question can be found neither in any feature peculiar to either country, nor in commonalities in their positions in the international system. In the final analysis, German and Japanese antimilitarism can best be explained by each nation's struggle to draw lessons from its troubled past. In both cases, these lessons were shaped by the fierce political debates of the early postwar years, which took different routes in each country and provided the resulting anti-military sentiments of each with decidedly distinct flavors In Japan, by contrast, the dominant perspective was one of dual victimization. On the one hand, the Japanese felt they had been victimized by the blind ambition of Japan's wartime military leadership. On the other hand, they also felt victimized by the United States and other foreign nations, which in the Japanese view had conducted a ruthless campaign of conquest in order to increase their own power.⁴⁵

⁴²These ideas are also developed in an earlier work: Thomas U. Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Antimilitarism," *International Security* 17, No. 4 (1993), pp. 119–150.

⁴³Ibid., p. 129.

⁴⁴Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, p. 9.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 6–7.

Berger assumed that political-military cultural interpretations are relatively static and resistant to change for at least three reasons. First, existing political cultural content is widely shared, so “alternative sets of ideas are relatively few and enjoy little support within the society, thus limiting the possibility that a given political culture might be readily supplanted.” This argument was echoed by Jeffrey Legro, who noted that political culture is a collective property “generally not reducible to individuals.”⁴⁶ Second, Berger argued that some standard elements of strategic culture, “especially the evaluative and affective components,” are very difficult to disconfirm. Third, he argued, “even the potentially disconfirmable cognitive elements are buffered by the psychological phenomenon of consistency seeking. Information that reinforces existing images and beliefs is readily assimilated, while inconsistent data tend to be ignored, rejected, or distorted in order to make them compatible with prevailing cognitive structures.”⁴⁷ Thus, antimilitarist sentiments had become deeply institutionalized in Germany and Japan through a process of legitimated compromises. Japanese public opinion, despite the end of the Cold War and growing trade frictions with the United States, continues to favor a gradualist approach to defense policy and opposes any large increase in the Japanese defense budget.

Thomas Banchoff’s *The German Problem Transformed* explored the evolution of German foreign policy as a product of both historical memory and geopolitical circumstances. Banchoff developed a constructivist “path-dependent” model of foreign policy, whereby he argues that decisions taken at critical historical junctures have shaped the development of foreign policy over time. These foreign policy paths form traditions and routines then adopted by political institutions. “Together,” he concluded, “interlocking institutions and political consensus sustained German foreign policy continuity across the 1990s divide.”⁴⁸

In related works, John Duffield contended that political culture has significantly influenced contemporary German foreign policy within a broader international environmental context.⁴⁹ Duffield emphasized the special nature of the new German security policy, marked by a high degree of continuity and

⁴⁶ Jeffrey W. Legro, *Cooperation under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint during World War II* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 20.

⁴⁷ Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, p. 24. See also Deborah Welch Larson, “The Role of Belief Systems and Schemas in Foreign Policy Decision Making,” *Political Psychology* 15, No. 1 (1994), p. 25.

⁴⁸ Thomas Banchoff, *The German Problem Transformed: Institutions, Politics, and Foreign Policy, 1945–1995* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 2.

⁴⁹ Duffield, *World Power Forsaken*, p. 2; see also Duffield, “Political Culture and State Behavior: Why Germany Confounds Neorealism,” *International Organization* 53, No. 4 (1999), pp. 765–803.

moderation. He stated that far from setting off in adventurous new directions, “Germany has exercised considerable restraint and circumspection in its external relations since 1990. . . . In short, notwithstanding initial fears to the contrary, Germany has acted with little more assertiveness and independent-mindedness in the area of national security than it did during the Cold War.”⁵⁰

This restraint is clearly the product of Germany’s national security culture, a subcomponent of political culture, Duffield contended. Germany’s culture is characterized by beliefs and values, including “deep skepticism about the appropriateness and utility of military force,” a preference for multilateral action, a drive to be viewed as a reliable partner, and “a strong aversion to assuming a leadership role in international security affairs.”⁵¹ Duffield writes, “The overall effect of national security culture is to predispose societies in general and political elites in particular toward certain actions and policies over others. Some options will simply not be imagined Some are more likely to be rejected as inappropriate or ineffective than others.” He argued that information inconsistent with “prevailing cognitive structures” tends to be discounted and is, after all, very “rare in international relations.”⁵² To Duffield and other proponents of strategic culture, German and Japanese security policies have exemplified the culturally bound model.⁵³

THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS AND INTERSTATE DISPUTES

Huntington’s “civilizational thesis” emerged in the post–Cold War era as one of the most controversial branches of cultural theory.⁵⁴ Like works on strategic culture, the origins of the thesis can be traced back to national character studies of the 1940s, as well as to Cold War anthropological studies. Huntington contended that states are part of broader civilizations that share strong bonds of culture, societal values, religion, and ideologies. The most important of these bonds, he argued, is religion, and “the major civilizations in human history

⁵⁰Duffield, *World Power Forsaken*, p. 4.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵²Duffield, “Political Culture and State Behavior,” p. 771.

⁵³Duffield, *World Power Forsaken*, p. 6.

⁵⁴Samuel P. Huntington: “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, No. 3 (1993), pp. 22–49; “If Not Civilizations, What? Paradigms of the Post–Cold War World,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, No. 5 (1993), pp. 186–194; *The Clash of Civilizations*; and “The Many Faces of the Future: Why We’ll Never Have a Universal Civilization,” in Robert Jackson, ed., *Annual Editions: Global Issues 99/00* (Guilford, Conn.: Dushkin/McGraw-Hill), pp. 15–18.

have been closely identified with the world's great religions."⁵⁵ Metacultural ties, taken to the broadest level of categorization, are civilizational identities that shape modern world politics. According to Huntington, these civilizations include Islam, Hinduism, Western Christianity, Confucianism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Buddhism, the Latin American, Japanese, and "possibly African."⁵⁶ When dealing with states from different regions of the world, Huntington argued that leaders would employ a cultural realist strategy (or "civilizational realpolitik").⁵⁷

The crux of the civilizational thesis is Huntington's argument that conflict is more likely to occur between states of different civilizations in the post-Cold War era. Specifically, he claimed that civilizations would clash for such reasons as increased interaction among peoples of different civilizations; the de-Westernization and indigenization of elites in non-Western states; increased economic regionalization, which heightens civilization consciousness; and a global resurgence of religious identity that is replacing diminishing local and state-based identities. In addition, demographic and economic changes shifted the balance of power among civilizations as the capabilities of non-Western states, especially Asian and Islamic states, were rising to challenge Western hegemony.⁵⁸ Ultimately, Huntington insisted, decisionmakers would be "much more likely to see threats coming from states whose societies have different cultures and hence which they do not understand and feel they cannot trust."⁵⁹

Huntington offered up a series of anecdotal examples to support his thesis, including the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia along civilizational "fault lines," the breakdown of political unity in Eastern Europe, and increased tensions between the Western and Islamic worlds. Recently, scholars and practitioners have linked Huntington's thesis to the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent war on terrorism. Even though his work stops far short of systematic, empirical investigation, Huntington boldly concluded that there is an increased salience of civilization membership in contemporary global politics and that these basic differences would generate conflict.

Although these arguments encouraged some investigation of metacultural ties, area studies experts have been particularly critical of Huntington's willingness to propose the sweeping generalizations that were necessary to undergird the civilizational thesis. Proponents of cultural interpretations take issue with Huntington's reduction of civilizational identity to a focus on religion. They claim that this represents an oversimplification of more complex anthropological and sociopsychological chords that define a cultural (or perhaps meta-

⁵⁵ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 47.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 289–290.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁵⁹ Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," p. 34.

cultural) group. Others have challenged Huntington's work on the obvious limitations of empirical foundation. Taken to the extreme, some proponents of cultural interpretive arguments have suggested that Huntington's work undermined the careful, social scientific progress that had been achieved in the cultural research program.

Recent scholarly investigations of Huntington's claims have challenged fundamentally the civilizational thesis. Empirical analyses of the relationship between civilization membership and interstate war between 1816 and 1992 have concluded that there is no statistically significant linkage before, during, or after the Cold War. In fact, some periods of study revealed an increased likelihood of conflict between states in the same civilizational grouping as opposed to the predicted intercivilizational conflict thesis.⁶⁰

A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR STRATEGIC CULTURE

Generations of scholarship have produced greater understanding of ties between culture and state behavior. Strategic cultural studies have provided rich descriptions of particularistic cultures and identities, and researchers have acknowledged important links between external and internal determinants of national security policy. Cross-disciplinary linkages to anthropology, historical research, sociology, and psychology have informed cultural studies. Inspired by constructivism, scholars have begun to explore how strategic culture is shaped and may evolve through research programs such as discursive analyses. As a result, even skeptics have acknowledged that contemporary works on culture offer much more than an "explanation of last resort."

This survey of the literature also points to substantial room for refining the research program. Areas for further attention include developing a common definition of strategic culture to build theoretically progressive models; delineating the ways that strategic culture is created, maintained, and passed on to new generations; and refining linkage models between external and internal determinants of security policy. While some scholars suggest that adopting cultural models represents a fundamental rejection of structure, research in the post-Cold War era suggests that more comprehensive models of state behavior can be constructed short of falsification of the realist program. Contrary to

⁶⁰Errol A. Henderson and Richard Tucker, "Clear and Present Strangers: The Clash of Civilizations and International Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly* 45 (2001), pp. 317–338; see also Errol A. Henderson: "The Democratic Peace through the Lens of Culture, 1820–1989," *International Studies Quarterly* 42 (1998), pp. 461–484; "Culture or Contiguity: Ethnic Conflict, the Similarity of States, and the Onset of Interstate War, 1820–1989," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, pp. 649–668; and "Is the Democratic Peace an Imperialist Peace?," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 2000.

neorealist critiques of ideational frameworks, few cultural scholars believe that this really is an “either-or” theoretical debate. Some have moved on to a new, progressive stage for the development of generalizable, cross-national comparative frameworks.⁶¹

Developing Common Definitions and Progressive Models of Strategic Culture

After decades of scholarship on cultural determinants, we might assume that strategic culture has become an accepted independent variable in causal modeling. It has not. Snyder’s definition of strategic culture as “a set of semipermanent elite beliefs, attitudes, and behavior patterns socialized into a distinctive mode of thought” set the tone for further investigations.⁶² While contemporary studies show some convergence of opinions about strategic culture, deeper disagreements remain about its definition, content, and implications for security policy.

Duffield argued that political culture can influence markedly state behavior, but he correctly pointed out the need for further clarification of the research program:

There is still a need for more basic evidence concerning the presence or absence of distinct political cultures, their content, and their effects on the policies of other states and during different historical periods. It makes little sense to engage in cross-national comparisons of political culture until its existence and impact have been established in specific instances. As case studies cumulate, however, scholars should increasingly seek to situate their work in an explicitly comparative framework. Such an approach is necessary to identify the range of values that different elements of political culture may hold.⁶³

Scholars today seem to agree that distinct political cultures do exist, but definitions still blur the line between preference formation, values, and state behaviors. Lucian Pye’s definition of culture as “the dynamic vessel that holds and revitalizes the collective memories of a people by giving emotional life to traditions” is a case in point.⁶⁴ Here, strategic culture becomes a generator of preferences, a vehicle for the perpetuation of values and preferences, and a force of action in the revitalization and renewal of these values. Rosen said that

⁶¹ See, for example, Albert S. Yee, “The Effects of Ideas on Policies,” *International Organization* 50, No. 1 (1996), pp. 69–108.

⁶² Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture*, p. 8; see also Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism*.

⁶³ Duffield, “Political Culture and State Behavior,” p. 792.

⁶⁴ Lucian W. Pye, *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimension of Authority* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 20–22.

strategic culture includes the “beliefs and assumptions that frame . . . choices about international military behavior, particularly those concerning decisions to go to war, preferences for offensive, expansionist or defensive modes of warfare, and levels of wartime casualties that would be acceptable.”⁶⁵ While more focused on preference structures, this definition includes reference to the rules that might govern conduct in war. In his own effort to develop a theory of strategic culture, Klein offered two different definitions of strategic culture: “the habits of thought and action” and “the set of attitudes and beliefs held within a military establishment concerning the political objective of war and the most effective strategy and operational method of achieving it.”⁶⁶

Delineating culture as an independent variable is challenging, and some scholarly efforts have bordered on tautology, wherein domestic political structures are identified as both reflecting and shaping political culture.⁶⁷ Definitions of strategic culture are further complicated by constructivist arguments that culture cannot be a permanent influence on state behavior. Rather, “constructivism views culture as an evolving system of shared meaning that governs perceptions, communications, and actions At the moment of action, culture provides the elements of grammar that define the situation, that reveal motives, and that set forth a strategy for success.”⁶⁸ Scholars must recognize the difficulty of drawing linkages between political structure and state behavior but seek consensus on explanatory boundaries.⁶⁹

Huntington’s civilizational thesis suggested that cultural identity actually transcends state boundaries and may be mostly a function of shared religious convictions. This metacultural argument raises serious questions about contemporary efforts to develop comparative frameworks of national strategic cultures. That being said, many cultural scholars have concluded that the civilizational model has failed to contribute to the research program defining the origins of culture in common national historical experience. It seems that while Huntington offered one of the boldest “levels of analysis” on the subject—and drew greater popular attention to the explanatory power of culture along the way—some regard it as having undermined theoretical progress in the study of political and strategic cultures.

Johnston offered one of the most promising avenues for a progressive research program on strategic culture by characterizing culture as “an ideational milieu which limits behavior choices.” This milieu consists of “shared assumptions

⁶⁵ Rosen, *Societies and Military Power*, p. 12.

⁶⁶ Klein, “A Theory of Strategic Culture,” pp. 3–23.

⁶⁷ Pye, as quoted in Lowell Dittmer, “Political Culture and Political Symbolism,” p. 555.

⁶⁸ Hudson, ed., *Culture and Foreign Policy*, pp. 28–29.

⁶⁹ See Wilson, “The Many Voices of Political Culture.”

and decision rules that impose a degree of order on individual and group conceptions of their relationship to their social, organizational or political environment.” While he noted that strategic subcultures may exist, “there is a generally dominant culture whose holders are interested in preserving the status quo.” This approach to strategic culture as a set of shared assumptions and decision rules allows us to separate the strands of culture from dependent variable outcomes like strategic choice. Furthermore, Johnston’s conceptual approach to strategic culture was designed to be “falsifiable, or at least distinguishable from non-strategic culture variables . . . [that would] provide decisionmakers with a uniquely ordered set of strategic choices from which we can derive predictions about behavior.”⁷⁰ This work is certainly informed by progress in political psychology, as well as contemporary sociological studies of the complex connections between culture and state behavior. In sum, there is real potential in the latest generation of work on strategic culture, which has tended to be more focused in its conceptualization of independent variables such as strategic cultural principles and dependent variables in specific security policy decisions.

Who Are the Keepers of Strategic Culture?

Identifying strategic culture as a set of shared assumptions and decision rules prompts the question of how they are maintained—and by whom. Most scholars prefer descriptions of political and strategic cultures as the “property of collectivities rather than simply of the individuals that constitute them.”⁷¹ For example, Richard Wilson argued:

In the most general sense political cultures are socially constructed normative systems that are the product of both social (for example, rules that coordinate role relationships within the organizations) and psychological (for example, the preferences of individuals) influences but are not reducible to either A political culture is not simply the sum of individual preferences, nor do preferences, especially those of any given individual, necessarily correspond with normative prescriptions. Indeed, the mismatch is at times quite glaring. Yet it is essential to understand the goals that are embodied in both individual preferences and normative prescriptions, for it is the dynamic relationship between the two that underwrites the stability or instability of political systems.⁷²

Acknowledging strategic culture as an “important ideational source of national predispositions, and thus of national security policy” suggests deep but vague cultural foundations for state behavior. If political culture is truly manifest in cognitive, evaluative, and expressive dimensions, it is conceivable that

⁷⁰ Johnston, “Thinking about Strategic Culture,” p. 45.

⁷¹ Duffield, *World Power Forsaken*, p. 23.

⁷² Wilson, “The Many Voices of Political Culture,” p. 12.

actors who carry those values might be identified. In fact, various political leaders and institutions are engaged in historical interpretation and development of the foreign policy path, which prompts coalition- and consensus-building efforts by specific political players. Duffield notes, “Institutional sources of national predispositions are likely to reside in the central governmental organs charged with the formulation and execution of policy.” They may shape policy by “organizational processes, routines, and standard operating procedures” that “constrain the types of information to which decision makers are exposed.”⁷³ Berger contends that political culture is best understood as a combination of norms and political institutions that

exist in an interdependent relationship, each relying upon the other in an ongoing way. Formal institutions play a role in anchoring broader society beliefs and values and provide continuity and permanency to them. Culture forces, in turn, influence the shapes institutions take and provide them with legitimacy and meaning. The interaction between formal institutions and the beliefs and values prevalent in a given society becomes particularly relevant in periods where the political system is undergoing change.⁷⁴

Elites are often the purveyors of the common historical narrative.⁷⁵ Most scholars agree that elites are instrumental in defining foreign policy goals and the scope and direction of policy restructuring in the face of new challenges. Furthermore, there is a general consensus in the literature that elites are cognitively predisposed to maintain the status quo. But Berger’s work on policy discourse recognized that strategic culture is best characterized as a “negotiated reality” among elites. Leaders clearly pay respect to deeply held convictions such as multilateralism and historical responsibility. Yet the record of past behavior for many countries also shows that leaders choose when and where to stake claims of strategic cultural traditions and when and where to consciously move beyond previous boundaries of acceptability in foreign policy behavior. Contemporary scholarship contends that elite behavior may be more consistent with the assertion that leaders are strategic “users of culture” who “redefine the limits of the possible” in key foreign and security policy discourses.⁷⁶

⁷³ Duffield, *World Power Forsaken*, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, pp. 11–12.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Sanjoy Banerjee, “The Cultural Logic of National Identity Formation,” in Hudson, ed., *Culture and Foreign Policy*.

⁷⁶ Consuelo Cruz, “Identity and Persuasion: How Nations Remember Their Pasts and Make Their Futures,” *World Politics* 52, No. 3 (April 2000), p. 278. For more on the strategic “use of culture,” see Swidler, “Culture in Action.”

Authors have recognized that political institutions—including parties and domestic coalitions—greatly affect foreign policy behavior.⁷⁷ The organizational culture literature, for example, suggests that state behavior is a function of specific institutional orientations. Yitzhak Klein said that the primary bearers (and users) of strategic culture are

those in every country . . . who are charged with defining the military objective of war and devising the means of achieving it In modern times and nations, however, our definition generally refers to professional military establishments . . . [in which] strategic cultures tend to change slowly. Through long years of peace they ruminate upon their distinctive burdens of historical and institutional experience, habits of thought and action. . . . The effect of strategic culture is likely to be felt most prominently at the level of operational thinking. . . . If strategic culture is partly a product of military experience, combat is its greatest educator. A nation with frequent combat experience is likely to fare better in choosing a strategy to fit its doctrine, and operations to execute its strategy, than one whose officers must learn from journals.⁷⁸

Legro concurred that the organizational culture of the military has dramatic bearing on security policy behavior because it tends to be isolated, highly regimented, and distinct.⁷⁹ Kier's work on the organizational culture of the French military and Rosen's examination of Indian military policies offer compelling examples of this connection.⁸⁰

Studies of Japanese and German foreign policy decisions in the 1990s certainly suggest that there are enduring institutional manifestations of strategic culture. Questions remain about when institutions are more inclined to maintain and perpetuate common historical narratives than to legitimize "necessary" foreign policy behaviors inconsistent with tradition. For example, recent studies suggest that the military bureaucracies in both Germany and Japan have played interesting, if marginal, roles in the development of security policy. Given that broad strategic cultural norms are characterized as "antimilitarist," Berger and others focus their descriptions on the restrictions of military activism in the system. In Japan, the Self-Defense Forces that were created in 1954 fall under a severe set of restrictions in mission and armaments. The Japanese

⁷⁷ Klein posited that military organizations could be important purveyors of political culture, but this study is focused upon elite discourse and not institutional cultural orientations inside the Ministry of Defense. See Klein, "A Theory of Strategic Culture"; related works on organizational culture include Legro, *Cooperation under Fire*; Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁷⁸ Klein, "A Theory of Strategic Culture," pp. 12–13.

⁷⁹ See Legro, *Cooperation under Fire*.

⁸⁰ See Kier, *Imagining War*.

legislature has passed a series of resolutions forbidding overseas troop deployments, and these restrictions have become a norm in Japanese political-military culture. In Germany, restrictions on military activism were established in articles of the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Constitutional Law), and political institutions have perpetuated this culture of restraint. The German Foreign Ministry actually has had dominant control over security policy development in the Federal Republic during the past fifty years, while the Defense Ministry “plays only a relatively small part in the security policy process.”⁸¹ Finally, we should note that critics charge that the influence of organizational culture on state behavior is mediated by other institutions and by the policy-making process in democratic states.

Public opinion is an important part of the ideational milieu that defines strategic culture, and it must help to shape the broad parameters of acceptable state behavior. This is particularly the case in parliamentary democracies, where government stability is founded directly upon popular support. Yet recent case studies suggest that public opinion has only a limited effect on the actual scope and timing of security policy behavior. In the case of Germany, for example, the evidence shows that public attitudes were surprisingly dynamic and malleable in response to international challenges like the Persian Gulf War and the humanitarian tragedies that followed. Other interpretations from the literature suggest that public attitudes toward security policy matters have been mostly mixed.⁸²

Continuity or Change? The Evolution of Strategic Culture

The focus of most strategic culture studies is on continuity of state behavior. In his 1988 article, “A Culturalist Theory of Political Change,” Harry Eckstein suggested that the socialization of values and beliefs occurs over time. Past learning becomes sedimented in the collective consciousness and relatively resilient to change. Lessons of the past serve as a tight filter for later learning that might occur.⁸³ This description highlights the accepted mantra of continuity in cultural determinants of state behavior (for both supporters and detractors of cultural theories).

⁸¹Duffield, *World Power Forsaken*, p. 72.

⁸²This conclusion is derived from a structured, focused comparison of case studies of German foreign policy behavior in the 1990s. See Jeffrey S. Lantis, “The Moral Imperative of Force: The Evolution of German Strategic Culture in the Kosovo Crisis,” in *Comparative Strategy* 21, No. 1 (January–March 2002); see also Peter F. Trumbore, “Public Opinion as a Domestic Constraint in International Negotiations: Two-Level Games in the Anglo-Irish Peace Process,” *International Studies Quarterly* 42, No. 3 (1998), pp. 545–565.

⁸³Harry Eckstein, “A Culturalist Theory of Political Change,” *American Political Science Review* 82 (1988), p. 796.

An intriguing characteristic of the latest generation of cultural studies is the gradual recognition of the possibility of strategic cultural change over time. If historical memory, political institutions, and multilateral commitments shape strategic culture, then, recent studies argue, it would seem logical to accept that foreign policies around the globe are undergoing “enduring transformations.”⁸⁴ This useful contribution to the strategic culture literature is informed by both studies of foreign policy restructuring and constructivist ideas of foreign policy as discourse. It also represents a response to the criticism of prior generations of cultural models as static and unresponsive to systemic pressures.⁸⁵

Those scholars who have reluctantly acknowledged that strategic culture can change believe that such a process would not be easy. Potential catalysts for change, Duffield argued, might be “dramatic events or traumatic experiences [such as revolutions, wars, and economic catastrophes]” that would “discredit thoroughly core beliefs and values.”⁸⁶ Such change would be accompanied by extreme psychological stress and would require a resocialization process, involving participation by various groups in crafting a compromise on a new political cultural orientation. In this sense, political culture may be understood as a form of consensus or historical narrative that then becomes stabilized and legitimated by subsequent generations of political leaders.⁸⁷ These ideas represent a step toward the refinement of strategic cultural models.

Of particular note is Berger’s assertion that strategic culture is best understood as a “negotiated reality” among foreign policy elites. While leaders clearly pay respect to deeply held convictions associated with strategic culture, the story of foreign policy development may be best understood as the pursuit of legitimation for preferred policy courses that may, or may not, conform to traditional cultural boundaries. In a recent study, Cruz contended that elites have much more latitude than scholars generally allow. They may “recast a particular agenda as most appropriate to a given collective reality or . . . recast reality itself by establishing a (new) credible balance between the known and the unknown.” In short, Cruz argued, they “redefine the limits of the possible, both descriptively and prescriptively.”⁸⁸

Under what conditions can strategic culture evolve? When can foreign policy decisions transcend the traditional bounds of strategic culture? Some surveys of German security policy decisions in the post–Cold War era, for example,

⁸⁴ Banchoff, *The German Problem Transformed*, p. 2.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Lockhart, “Cultural Contributions.”

⁸⁶ Duffield, *World Power Forsaken*, p. 23.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁸ Cruz acknowledges that this raises a critical dichotomy between culture as a system of meaning and culture as practice, in “Identity and Persuasion,” p. 278.

suggest that the evolution of strategic culture may be more abrupt, less difficult, and more prevalent than traditional scholarly orientations would allow. German responses to the recent Kosovo crisis represent an interesting example. In my own work on the subject, I contend that at least two conditions in this crisis caused “strategic cultural dilemmas” and produced changes in German national security policy. First, external shocks may have served to fundamentally challenge existing beliefs and undermine past historical narratives. For German leaders, the scale of the humanitarian tragedies in the Balkans in the 1990s served as a catalyst for consideration of policy options outside the traditional bounds of German strategic culture. The recognition that groups were being systematically targeted for genocide and ethnic cleansing created a moral imperative for German action. The intensity of external shocks prompted a reexamination on all sides of the proper response. Neither economic power nor diplomacy was sufficient to prevent these tragedies, and even pacifists were forced to consider the use of military force as the final option to end the conflict. Some experts have even suggested that ethnic cleansing in Bosnia eroded the moral legitimacy of pacifism on the German political left and led to an atmosphere more permissive of the use of force to stop such violence. High-ranking German officials have contended in interviews with me that ethnic cleansing was the primary catalyst for restructuring German foreign policy and changing domestic political alignments in the post-Cold War era.

Second, foreign policy behavior may break the traditional bounds of strategic cultural orientations when primary tenets of strategic thought directly conflict with one another. In other words, a country with interpretive codes of support for democracy and an aversion to using military force faces a strategic cultural dilemma when confronted by a challenge to democracy that requires a military response. The Japanese government confronted this question in relation to the struggle for self-determination in East Timor. The same type of dilemma may arise from a conflict between commitments to multilateralism and unilateral convictions that norms are being violated. Products of this strategic cultural dissonance include occasional state defections from multilateral arrangements, the development of alternative diplomatic initiatives, or stipulations for policy cooperation.

One of the best examples of dissonance as a product of a clash of strategic cultural values played out through the evolution of thought in the Green Party on the use of force by Germany in the 1990s. Debates about restructuring German foreign policy led to a resurfacing of past divisions in the party between moderate (*Realos*) delegates and pacifists/liberals (*Fundis*). *Realos* Green leader Joschka Fischer wrote in 1994 of the change in thinking by the political left on the normalization of German foreign policy. Fischer described the party’s support for German integration into the EU and for participation in the NATO alliance. Furthermore, he called for a new degree of German foreign policy realism while maintaining a profile as a “civilian power” and abstaining from

the use of military force abroad.⁸⁹ In the summer of 1995, Fischer distributed a position paper to colleagues inside the party that acknowledged the need for German military action in response to pressing international imperatives like the prevention of genocide.

In 1999, it was Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer who held the governing coalition together to keep Germany involved in the air war over Kosovo. Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping said that the Kosovo crisis taught Germany, Europe, and the NATO alliance that they must “adapt to the challenges evolving from a dynamic international security environment.”⁹⁰ The Kosovo crisis was one instance where Green Party leaders realized that their defection from the government could ultimately shatter the NATO alliance and delay progress toward European integration.

Thus, strategic cultural dilemmas define new directions for foreign policy and demand the reconstruction of embedded historical narratives. In the spirit of paradigmatic shifts, these changes take time and energy for common acceptance, but they are distinctly new paths. Perhaps Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky captured this cognitive dissonance argument best when they said that cultures remain vital only if their core principles continue to generate solutions that satisfy human needs and make sense of the world. They contended, “When cultures cease to provide such solutions, when they cease to make sense, their members begin to doubt them, and if plausible alternatives are available, members ultimately defect.”⁹¹

Democratic states are founded upon embedded national security values that can be tested in the face of strategic cultural dilemmas. Changes—including abrupt and fairly dramatic reorientations of security policy behavior—appear to be possible, and strategic cultural models must be more reflective of the conditions that draw out such changes. This argument is consistent with Legro’s findings that “reality can be socially constructed However, when the contradiction between external conditions and cultural tendencies becomes too great, culture will likely adapt.”⁹² But it is also important to add that citizens of countries that experience strategic cultural change often view this as adaptation to circumstances rather than overt aggression. As Gunther Hellmann points out in a post–Cold War discursive analysis of German scholarship on the future of

⁸⁹ See Joschka Fischer, *Risiko Deutschland: Krise und Zukunft der deutschen Politik* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1994).

⁹⁰ German Information Center, “German Minister of Defense, Rudolf Scharping, at the Eisenhower Lecture NATO Defense College in Rome,” *This Week in Germany*, January 11, 2000, p. 2.

⁹¹ Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 69–70.

⁹² Legro, *Cooperation under Fire*, p. 231.

foreign policy, realist interpretations played a significant role in most non-German views of German foreign policy, but they represented only “a minority perspective in the German discourse” itself.⁹³

CONCLUSION

While constructivism may represent a paradigmatic challenge to structural realism in the discipline today, most supporters of strategic culture have adopted the more modest goal of “bringing culture back in” to the study of national security policy. In fact, these research traditions are more similar than some would believe. Scholars must work to overcome barriers to integrating these two approaches into a more comprehensive model of strategic culture formation, implementation, and change. Some scholars argue that one barrier is a defensiveness by neorealists. For example, Desch sought to make a critical distinction between the models:

There is no question that virtually all cultural theories tell us something about how states behave. The crucial question, however, is whether these new theories merely supplement realist theories or actually threaten to supplant them. I argue that when cultural theories are assessed using evidence from the real world, there is no reason to think that they will relegate realist theories to the dustbin of social science history. The best case that can be made for these new cultural theories is that they are sometimes useful as a supplement to realist theories.⁹⁴

By framing the argument in this manner, neorealists knowingly set up cultural theories for failure. They may mischaracterize contemporary studies of strategic cultures as frequently emphasizing “the uniqueness within, rather than the similarity across, cases.” Ultimately, even Desch allows that cultural theories might supplement neorealism by helping to explain time lags between structural change and alterations in state behavior, by accounting for seemingly “irrational” state behavior, and in helping to explain state actions in “structurally indeterminate situations.”⁹⁵ For example, the cases of the evolution of German and Japanese security policies are better understood as a product of domestic political adjustments (rooted in culture, traditions, and common historical narratives) to changing international circumstances. Far from an exclusive interpretation, progressive models that explore external-internal linkages and their impact on discrete, strategic choices represent an important avenue for theoretical advancement.

⁹³Gunther Hellmann, “Goodbye Bismarck? The Foreign Policy of Contemporary Germany,” *Mershon International Studies Review* 40 (1996), p. 26.

⁹⁴Desch, “Culture Clash,” p. 141.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 166.