



STRATEGIC CULTURE: REFINING THE THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

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Strategic Culture: Methodologies for a Research Program

Jeannie L. Johnson

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written to establish the utility of strategic culture analysis in forecasting problems and improving policy performance in international relations. It is regarded by most of its advocates as a supplement to realism, neo-realism and constructivism theory. Where realism posits that state actors behave rationally, strategic culture analysis points out that rational behavior is culturally dependent. Values weighed by a rational actor in a cost/benefit analysis are often ideational as well as material and cannot be accurately assessed without a substantive knowledge of the actor's preferences. That knowledge, complex and messy as it is to obtain, is a worthy pursuit. This essay is an effort to systematize, in part, a strategic culture research program that can move us closer to that goal.

As pointed out in Jeffrey Lantis' superb article, strategic culture suffers from lack of a defined set of assumptions or codified theoretical construct. The agreed upon foundation for strategic culture consists mainly of a consensus on including culture as a variable in analyzing foreign policy and security decisions. The purpose of this essay is to combine the wisdom of our case study authors and the patterns which surfaced in their work in order to come to some consensus on how, exactly, to pursue the study of strategic culture. We will examine the analytical approach used to construct our case studies, consider lessons learned, and propose efforts toward further refinement.

CASE SELECTION

Given the prominent role that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) play in international security concerns, we selected country cases that would highlight states of particular interest to our U.S. government sponsor with regards to WMD decision-making. Our authors were asked to investigate the influence of strategic culture on state decisions to adhere to WMD related international norms, or to acquire, proliferate, or use biological, chemical or nuclear weapons. The United States was selected as a baseline case, and one that would touch on use, international norms, and an extended period of non-use. Russia and China add to the baseline dimension.

These two states provide highly researchable cases, since area experts, government specialists, and academicians devoted extensive time and resources to understanding their WMD histories, inner workings, and decision-making structures during the Cold War. An obvious choice for inclusion are two nuclear aspirants currently making headlines—Iran and North Korea. Their flouting of international norms, propensities toward proliferation, and heated rhetoric vis a vis the U.S. make them hard to ignore. Both are secretive and coy regimes and posed significant challenges for our authors.

Pakistan and India share the world's most dangerous nuclear border. In addition to evaluating scenarios for use between these two countries, our authors were asked to examine the decisions behind bucking the international system by acquiring weapons in the first place, and, in the case of Pakistan, setting up an extensive proliferation regime.

Israel is a unique case study given its policy of nuclear “strategic ambiguity.” Investigating why some countries decide to overtly declare their nuclear programs—in violation of current international norms (India, Pakistan, North Korea)—and why others choose a path of ambiguity, is an intriguing question. Given the dangers in its neighborhood, and its opportunities for nuclear use, Israel's decision to keep these weapons under wraps is remarkable.

Looking forward, we selected two cases that represent potential nuclear aspirants. Although Syria does not have the material capability to pursue a full WMD arsenal at this time, they may someday seek nuclear weapons. Dealings in their neighborhood suggest that a WMD stocked Middle East is one possible future scenario. Evaluating the strategic culture of a country sitting on the sidelines, determining whether to get in the game, may tell us something about how domestic beliefs and processes influence this critical decision.

Our final case study steps completely outside the normal parameters of strategic culture studies and investigates the applicability of this mode of analysis to a non-state actor—al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden has made clear that he is interested in acquiring a nuclear weapon and has gone to great lengths to forge Islamic justification for its use against the United States.¹ Given the proliferation of non-state security concerns, one test for the utility of strategic culture as a foreign policy forecasting tool will be its ability to shed light on the preferences and modes of

strategic behavior of actors outside the traditional nation-state body.

As is suggested by our case selection, nuclear weapons are of paramount concern. That said, our cases offer enlightening material about use, and reactions to use of biological and chemical weapons as well.

CASE STUDY OUTLINE

The primary problem faced by strategic culture analysts is honing down the wide range of variables that may be termed "cultural" and presenting strategic culture analysis as a usable model. Studies under the rubric of "strategic culture" range the spectrum, some focusing primarily on organizational culture within particular security bureaucracies, and others taking in the entire spectrum of ideational and material influences on a country.

Preliminary discussions on the subject of strategic culture had illuminated the troublesome fact that aspects of national and organization culture that may play a strong role in security policy within one regime may not necessarily match those factors which play the primary role in an alternative regime. With this caveat in mind, we asked our authors to work with an agreed upon definition of strategic culture, and to offer suggestions within the text of their case studies regarding the applicability and utility of this definition for their respective regimes. Our definition:

Strategic culture is that set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives.

The authors were asked to think about the factors shaping the strategic culture under study, and to profile its resultant characteristics. Areas of specific evaluation included geography, shared narratives, relationships to other groups, threat perception, ideology and religion, economics, and type of government and leadership style. Authors were asked to probe further by asking:

- Are there single or multiple strategic cultures within the state?
- What is the rate of change? What causes change?
- Who maintains the culture?
- What does it say about the enemy?

¹ An extension discussion of this is found in Michael Scheuer's book, *Imperial Hubris*, Potomac Books, (2004)

- What does it say about conflict, the international system, the utility of violence, and the laws of war?
- How important is strategic culture in the formation of security policy relative to other factors?

Finally, our writers were encouraged to include any other factors appropriate to their case.

Requiring the particular focus on weapons of mass destruction served several useful purposes. In addition to testing the utility of strategic culture in helping explain international security behaviors, it narrowed the scope of the research to a more manageable level, and gave structure to the questions investigated by our authors. In addition, the combined data of our finished case studies have helped illuminate which variables within strategic culture tend to play a strong role across regime types, allowing for some refinement in our research design.

REFINING THE THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

Our direction to case study authors was purposefully flexible and culturally comprehensive. One of the challenges this presented when attempting to draw comparisons with other strategic culture work was a mismatch regarding levels of analysis. A multitude of factors, and of actors, influence security policy in any given state (see Figure 1). Determining which of these appropriately fall under the auspices of “strategic culture” continues to pose a challenge for its theoretical development. Without an agreed research process each author in this field is able to focus on a level of preference and call their study “strategic culture”.

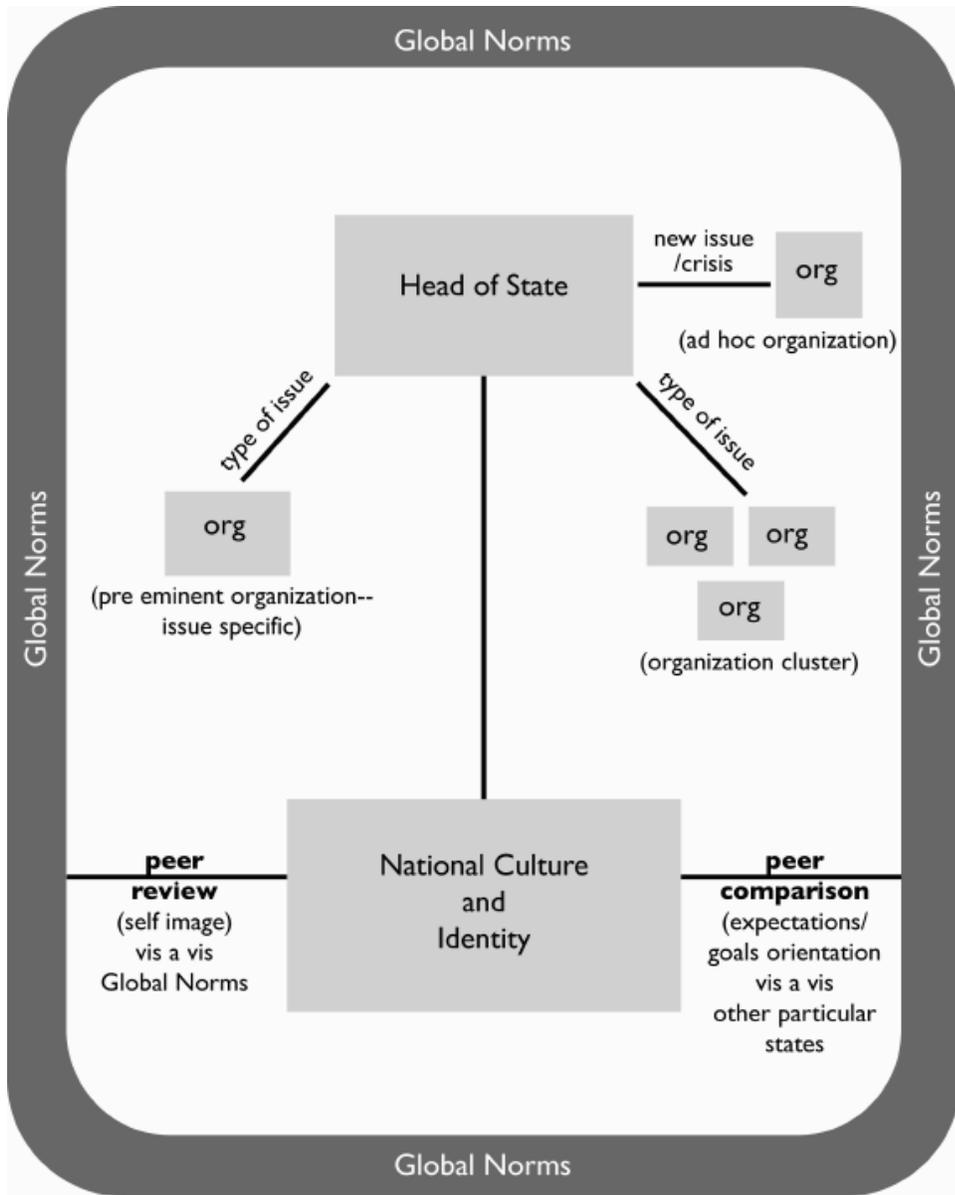


Figure 1: Factors Involved in Developing National Security Policy

If strategic culture is ever to attain credibility as a field of study, it must be confined to some variables and not others. Some important influences on security policy do not appropriately fit into the strategic culture framework. As Colin Gray points out, in order to merit the rubric "culture", the variables we consider must have a somewhat lasting nature:

We must insist that culture in its several identities – public, strategic, military-organizational – should consist of assumptions and ideas that are strongly held. Its roots might not be very deep, and the plant might be a recent development, but

it has to be hardy to be worthy of the description, cultural. Culture does not refer to mere opinions, to fashionable attitudes, or to shifting patterns of behavior.²

Strategic culture certainly can change, but not at the level of the whims of a new administration. The agendas of new administrations are important and must be considered for an accurate forecast of a country's next moves on security policy. Such policy issues are not, however, "strategic culture." Strategic culture is the medium through which those agenda items are processed.

Strategic culture is an existential reality: nation-states do have established notions and habits regarding security policy, but that does not mean that these must play the primary role in guiding said policy. An elite cadre may have an agenda item that would be considered counter-cultural for that nation (as has often been argued regarding pre-emption for the United States) but are able to push it through the resistant mechanisms of strategic culture nonetheless. This may be due to strong material realities, an unexpected crisis, the repeated failure of past strategic culture norms, etc. A full accounting of the factors contributing to any particular security decision might be: "Elite agendas processed through national culture, the national policy process and organizational culture, married to material capabilities, and inhibited or advanced by external actors."

Levels of Analysis

My review of our commissioned case studies as well as numerous others in the strategic culture field has led to the follow suggestions for narrowing the strategic culture parameters. The two most common, and appropriate, levels of analysis which surface in the literature are national culture and organizational culture. National culture provides the context in which organization culture, and its attendant processes, are formed. Therefore coming up with a more clearly defined research program for national culture (as it pertains to security concerns) is a necessary first step in our aim of nailing down the components of strategic culture.

It must be stressed, however, that national culture is only one part of the essential data

² Colin Gray, "Out of the Wilderness: Prime-Time for Strategic Culture", unpublished essay prepared for the Nuclear Security Forum, July 2006, p.11

needed to construct a complete picture of a nation's strategic culture. Two more levels of analysis must take place. First, a strategic culture analyst must determine the national policy making process for security issues. Who are the actors involved? What is their rank vis a vis one another? Which is likely to take the driver's seat given the particular policy question under review? What are the rules, stated and unstated, of their engagement with one another? Secondly, an analyst must peer inside the organizational structure of each of the competing, relevant actors. Do they house internal agendas in competition with prevailing national culture? What are their decision mechanisms? What institutional habits have been ingrained into the participants? The combination of national culture, national policy processes, and organizational culture make up the domestic phenomenon termed "strategic culture."

Already, professionals in the academic world study each of these three components. Ethnographers make their trade by delving into the mysteries of local and national cultures, comparativists in the field of political science amass and analyze data on the form and efficacy of various national policy processes, and the study of organizational culture—determining the outlines of institutions and their internal rules, doctrines, and incentive structures—has become a common mode of employ by international as well as domestic political theorists.³

A fair question then, is what the study of "strategic culture" hopes to add. The first point would be that strategic culture allows for a security lens to be placed on all of the aforementioned study. It points researchers to a specific task, and corrals data in a way particularly useful to foreign policy.

Second, strategic culture fills a gap in international relations theory. It allows that most actors are likely rational, but insists that rationality must be understood within a cultural context. It explores the ways in which agents within national populations, political administrations, and security related institutions are, to use the more common phrase, "rationally bounded" in their decision-making. Being a culturalist, this author takes exception at the pejorative meaning "bounded" implies. While some strategic cultures may be objectively deficient (where efficiency and accuracy of information are concerned), much of what distinguishes "rational" decisions from one society to another are value preferences, not deficiencies in thinking or

³ For a particularly good example of this type of research see William C. Mitchell and Randy T. Simmons, *Beyond Politics*, Westview Press, (1994)

organizing.

Our task, then, is determining how particular national beliefs, decision-making processes, and bureaucratic reflexes direct rational decision-making in security policy. Of most interest are those security decisions which other theoretical constructs (particularly realism) have difficulty explaining, such as security moves which preference ideational values over material interests, or which seem to reflect bureaucratic habit more than clear-headed cost/benefit analysis, or are based on misappropriated perceptions of the outside world.

Due to the nature of the case study outline provided to our authors, our cases focus heavily on national culture and less so on organizational culture. Our question, “who maintains the culture?” alluded to the institutions and actors which process security policy, but did not outline a specific set of questions to examine. Therefore, the remainder of this essay will focus on the lessons learned, and refinement enabled in the study of national culture through the efforts of our case study authors.

COMMON THEMES ACROSS THE CASES

National Culture

Nearly all strategic culture analysts spend a good deal of time articulating aspects of national culture which play a role in influencing security policy. As is understood by any student of culture, a rubric as elastic as “national culture” captures a tremendous number of variables. Our first task in refining the theoretical construct and methodological processes for strategic culture is to determine which of these variables are pertinent to the formulation of rationality as regards security policy for a particular regime. The end goal is a research design that will make a security approach to national culture more accessible to the average graduate student or policy analyst.

Christopher Twomey raises early on in his paper on China that many of China’s attributes and strategic moves are similar to those any other rational actor may employ. This is likely true for many states. It is, however, the distinctness of another’s strategic culture that we are most interested in – those attributes which are alien enough from our own ways of thinking and doing that we misread, mispredict, or misapply foreign policy in the common global arena.

The Model

In an effort to create a more parsimonious research model, we must hone down national culture variables to those that consistently have effect on security policy and that are value-laden for that culture. Four variables which seem to provide such a baseline include identity, values, norms and perceptive lens. Each will be discussed in turn.

Identity

A nation-state's view of itself, comprising the traits of its national character, its intended regional and global roles, and its perceptions of its eventual destiny. Most theorists might agree that nation-states are self-interested, and seek their own net gain. Even economists, however, clarify that rationally self-interested actors are pursuing personal, not universal goals:

Thus, the economic statement that man is thought to be rational is a fairly modest one. It merely means that he attempts to achieve his goals, and that he devote at least some thought, some of the time, to how to do it.⁴

Rather than accept the blanket assumption of absolute power-seeking offered by neo-realism, (primarily defined in military and economic terms), strategic culture analysis assumes that states may have diverse goals based on a normative understanding of who they are, and what role they should be playing.

For instance, in Murhaf Jouejati's survey of Syria, he notes that Syrian self-identity as "champion of Arab rights" meant that they acted on interests that realism would have difficulty explaining:

Although Syria could have stayed out of the war in 1948, the then small Syrian army rushed to the frontline in support of its Palestinian brethren in their conflict with the emerging Jewish state. In 1956, although Egypt alone was the target of the tripartite Israeli/British/French alliance, Syria joined the conflict – out of Arab solidarity... During the 1960s, although Israel's attempts to channel water from the Jordan River to the Negev desert did not affect Syria, the Syrian Government set out to divert the Jordan River's head waters – fueling tensions between Arabs and Israelis that culminated in the Six Day War.⁵

4 Richard B. McKenzie and Gordon Tullock, "The Economic Approach to Human Behavior", *The New World of Economics*, (1981) p.9

5 Murhaf Jouejati, "The Strategic Culture of Syria" (2006)

Values

In a cost/benefit analysis, the material and/or ideational factors which are given priority, and selected over others. The recent debacle over the Danish printing of unflattering cartoons of Muhammad illustrates the point of divergent social values fairly nicely. For Westerners viewing the situation, the value at stake was clearly freedom of the press and freedom of expression. By Western standards, civilized values require the “maturity” to handle offensive press. An act of violence in reaction to a printed cartoon was clearly childish and barbaric; in short, “irrational.”

For Muslims, the value at stake was, instead, defense of the sacred. Muhammad comprises an essential part of Islamic sacred sphere, and it is the duty of Muslims to defend it, even at the cost of bloodshed. Certainly not all Muslims share this view at the same level, but enough did to cause an international uproar.

Rodney Jones’ assessment of India stresses the strong value placed by Indians on modern scientific and instrumental knowledge and its affect on two forms of security policy: weapons manufacture and negotiating style:

This trait drove India’s investment in modern science and engineering across the board, its acquisition of modern military technology and large standing military forces, its development of nuclear and missile capabilities – against international opposition, and its secret development of chemical weapons. [In addition,] this trait is conducive to Indian practitioners in strategic decision-making and negotiations being better informed and more analytically focused than most of their external interlocutors.⁶

Norms

Accepted and expected modes of behavior. An evaluation of norms may illuminate why some rational means toward an end goal are rejected as unacceptable, even though they would be perfectly efficient. Tannenwald and Price have explored the non-use of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons as a case in point.⁷

Greg Giles explores the power of national norms on security policy in a number of places

⁶ Rodney Jones, “India’s Strategic Culture” (2006)

⁷ Richard Price and Nina Tannenwald, “Norms and Deterrence: The Nuclear and Chemical Weapons Taboos” found in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed. *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 114-152

in his work on Israel. One particularly poignant example focuses on the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) conclusions about engagement in the 1987 Intifada:

Eventually, the IDF command publicly acknowledged that it could not engage in the types of operations needed to eliminate the Intifada without violating societal norms. In essence, IDF Chief of Staff Dan Shomron declared that there was no acceptable military solution to the uprising and that it had to be resolved politically.⁸

A second example highlights the limits on the power of elites to use societal norms to package controversial decisions. Judaic tradition transfers the sin of war to the party that initiates it. Thus, the distinction between wars forced upon the state (i.e. obligatory) and wars selected (i.e. optional) is of profound ethical importance. “Ethically, the former are considered ‘just’ wars that require full public support, while the latter lack consensus and, by extension, moral clarity.”⁹

The 1982 invasion of Lebanon put Israeli norms to the test. All prior wars had been cast as no-choice wars. The political and military leaders at the time tried various tactics at framing the 1982 confrontation in the same way. Their efforts failed.

In contrast to all prior wars, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon was deemed [by the public] to be a “war by choice” and consequently at odds with traditional Jewish definitions of a just and legal war. This triggered a national debate that deepened the questioning of fundamental beliefs and assumptions at the core of Israeli strategic culture...As the goals of the operation expanded, and Israeli casualties mounted, initial public support for the war dissipated.¹⁰

Perceptive Lens

Beliefs (true or misinformed) and experiences or the lack of experience, which color the way the world is viewed. As is widely understood, behavior is based on the *perception* of reality, not reality itself. Perceptions of “fact,” of our own histories, of our image abroad, of what motivates others, of the capabilities of our leadership and our national resources, and other security-related ideas, all play a strong role in forming what each regime believes to be rational foreign policy.

8 Gregory Giles, “Continuity and Change in Israel’s Strategic Culture” (2006), p. ____.

9 Giles, quoting Charles Ben-Dor, “War and Peace: Jewish Tradition and the Conduct of War,” *Israeli Defense Forces Journal*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Fall 1986), pp. 47-50.

A number of distressing examples of the policy implications of a powerful and highly controlled national perceptive lens come from North Korea. Joseph Bermudez points out that the US is portrayed as the primary enemy and one that is perfectly willing to use WMD against the North Koreans:

During the [Korean] war both [North Korea} and People's Republic of China suffered from repeated, and to them, unexplained outbreaks of infectious diseases such as influenza, Dengue fever, and cholera. These outbreaks caused large numbers of civilian and military casualties. While the leadership knew that it was untrue, they fabricated the story that the US was employing biological, and to a lesser degree chemical, weapons against their units in Korea and against villages within the PRC itself.¹¹

North Korea sees itself as morally stronger than the United States, and President Kim Jong Il has characterized U.S. tactics in the Gulf War as “child’s play.” The erroneous beliefs Kim holds, and perpetuates, are rarely challenged by subordinates who fear to raise any issues that may be perceived as negative. This results in a misinformed perceptive lens sustained by circular verification.¹²

The Variables Evaluated

The nature of each of these four variables is constructed to avoid eclipsing data pertinent to the study of strategic culture, while maintaining a common framework for comparison. Case studies conducted through a common framework will provide the opportunity for hypotheses to surface concerning the influence of strategic culture on security policy and mark the beginning stages of theory-building in this field.

Selecting identity, values, norms and perceptive lens as our core variables present several advantages. First, each has a specific security dimension. Among other things, identity tells us the global role a nation-state intends to play and its likely aspirations. Values determine which principles, and material goods, are negotiable and which are not. A study of norms will help us understand which means are more likely to be employed than others in attaining state goals. And examining a nation’s “perceptive lens” may contribute significantly to understanding the character of bounded rationality operating within a state. Data perceived as fact by a national

¹⁰ Giles, p.____.

¹¹ Joseph Bermudez, “An Overview of North Korea’s Strategic Culture” (2006)

population need not have any semblance to the truth.

A second advantage of these particular variables is that each remains expansive enough to capture much of what is important about national culture. Inputs such as geography, history, access to technology, experience with regime types, religious traditions, etc., *create* identity, values, norms, and a group’s perceptive lens. In some ways these four variables can be viewed as security-related outputs of national culture. (See Figure 2).

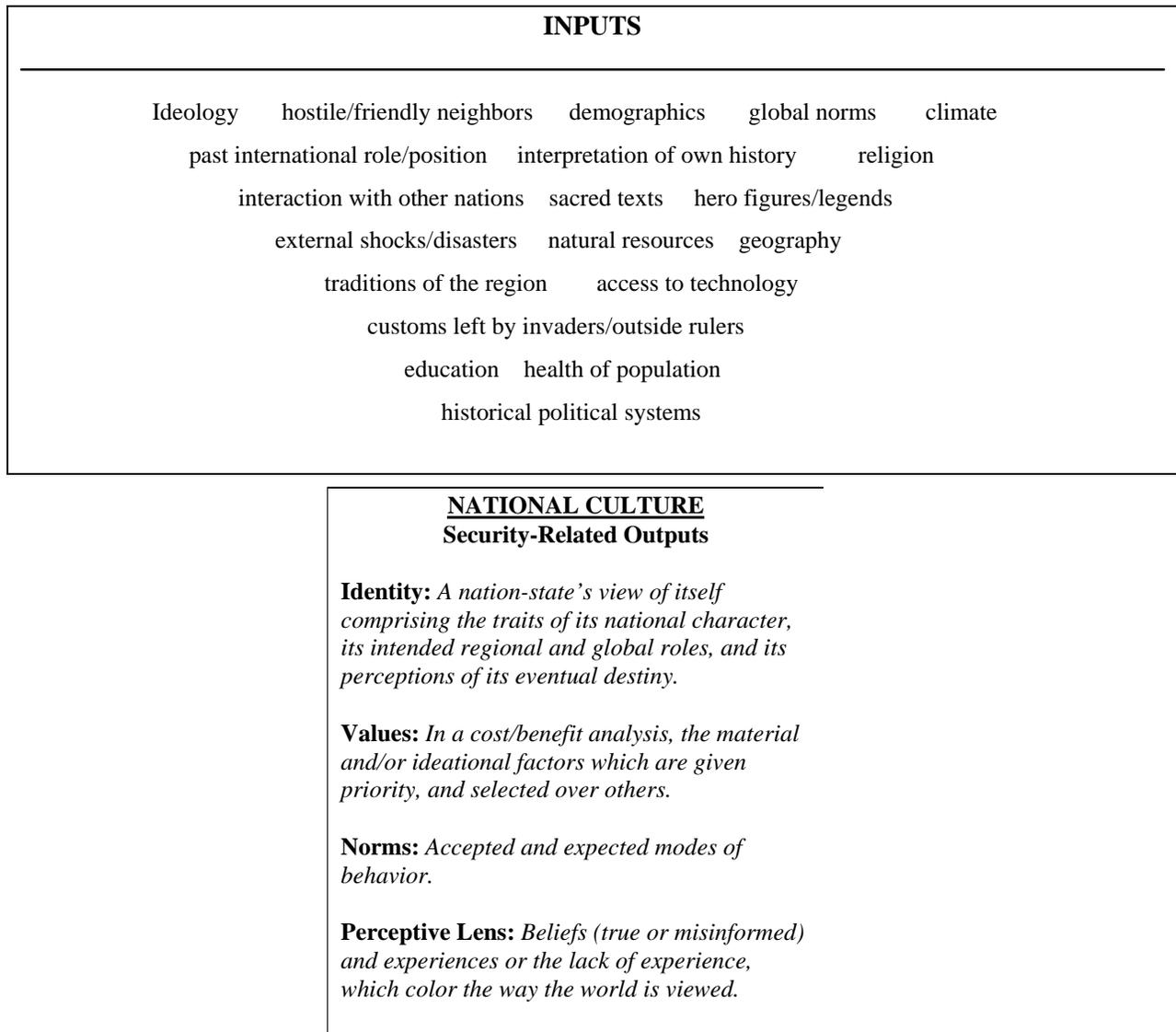


Figure 2: Inputs to Strategic Culture

Constructivists have paved the way in suggesting methods for measuring the impact of at least two of these variables on national policy – identity and norms.¹³ Interesting methodologies have also surfaced regarding the tracking and prioritizing of accepted narratives which give us a window into “perceptive lens.”¹⁴ Work in all three fields shows a great deal of promise and provides a foundation of research for strategic culture analysts to build on in further developing measurement methods. Before we can measure the impact of these variables on security policy, however, we must first examine methods of unearthing cultural data in the first place.

RESEARCH METHODS

The question might fairly be asked, “How does one research such seemingly subjective variables?” Researching culture, as it pertains to security matters, is not a well practiced art form in the discipline of political science. Therefore, our analysts will need to stretch to include methodologies from other disciplines, particularly ethnography and sociology. These methods often include widely employed techniques such as polling and focus groups. Closed regimes are not grounds easily subjected to some of these mechanisms, however, and more creative solutions have to be employed.

Some of the mechanisms suggested here might be employed by an individual researcher, while others require the resources of a broad institution. The aim is to encourage both. Currently U.S. intelligence processes focus on political, economic, security and leadership analysis of a regime. Nowhere are analysts trained with specific skills in unearthing cultural data, or assigned the task of defining the parameters of a foreign society’s rationality. Analysts often recognize the need to know some basic information about a foreign culture and seek it out on their own, but the practice is not institutionalized, nor is it given much by way of attention, or resources. As a result, the intelligence community is left open to serious policy mistakes. Understanding culture is essential in forecasting events, building goodwill on the ground,

13 See, for example, Andrew P. Cortell and James W. Davis, Jr., “Understanding the Domestic Impact of International Norms: A Research Agenda”, *International Studies Review*, Vol 2, No 1, (Spring 2000), pp. 65-87; Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, “Norms, Identity, and Their Limits: A Theoretical Reprise”, found in Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security*, pp. 451-497; and Theo Farrell, “Constructivist Studies: Portrait of a Research Program”, *International Studies Review*, Spring 2002, pp. 49-72.

14 Stephanie Kelley, “Rumors in Iraq: A Guide to Winning Hearts and Minds”, *Strategic Insights*, Volume IV, Issue 2 (February 2005)

engaging in successful negotiations, and the entire host of other occupations within our foreign policy structure. Wars for hearts and minds are not won by the culturally ignorant.

As academia refines the tools used for strategic culture analysis it will become more attractive to institutions conducting analysis on foreign policy in defense, diplomatic and intelligence circles. The build-up of case-studies provided by individual researchers will provide a launching pad for more comprehensive analyses of this sort. Thus, the methods suggested here have an eye toward both individual and institutional level research.

Transparency of methodology is important to any scientific pursuit. One requirement of future strategic culture studies, therefore, should be a description of the methods employed for ascertaining notions about the identity, values, norms, and perceptive lens held by another society. In that spirit, the following is a sampling of methods based on interviews with our case study authors, as well as a wide range of students and scholars pursuing work in strategic culture or related fields. Given that the syllabus this essay supports is intended for upper level undergraduates, the methodologies will be examined from the most basic and obvious to the more sophisticated.

Select a Specific Security Question

Perhaps one of the most important contributions of our project to the methodology of strategic culture was discovering the utility of starting with a specific question. Willis Stanley, in his study of Iran's strategic culture, emphasizes the notion that the breadth of strategic culture analysis is only manageable, and useful, when it is directed by a specific question. Rather than striving to form national profiles that could be pulled off the shelf and applied to any situation, he argues for a narrower approach that is determined by the question asked. All of the case studies provided in this syllabus focus on the aspects of strategic culture that influence decisions regarding weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Therefore, Stanley notes,

The focus on WMD decision-making bounds the discussion in an important way. Those parts of the regime that directly take or influence WMD decisions are the only concern. How Iran decides its agricultural policies or its views on censoring films are not particularly relevant to this subset of security decisions.¹⁵

15 Willis Stanley, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran" (2006)

Stanley makes a strong point for the methodology of strategic culture analysis. If it is to become a useful analytic tool for policy-makers, as well as academicians, the task must be feasible.

Reading In

Nearly all authors begin with the assumption that one must conduct a thorough background investigation to become familiar with a regime's history, geography, internal social codes, and general interactions with other states. As pointed out, again by Willis Stanley, if not conducted strategically, this task can be overbearing:

...there is a continuity of human history is and around the Iranian plateau that extends from the emergence of Neolithic society and agriculture around 8000BCE through to the present day. In order to capture such a broad sweep of history within the confines of "strategic culture," it is important to begin with the question: to what end do we hope to apply our findings?¹⁶

One way to gauge those aspects of history most important for in-depth study is by listening to historic references made in national political rhetoric, private conversation, lessons in school, and reflected in the artwork and symbols that decorate public and private places. Traumatic historical events are particularly important as they often imprint a nation's social psychology. In addition, tracking interactions with other nations over time often reveals themes and consistent patterns of behavior.¹⁷

Tapping Into the Population

Useful interaction with the population under survey can range from rudimentary (i.e. daily records of anecdotal interaction¹⁸) to highly institutionalized methods (i.e. sophisticated polling conducted nation-wide.)¹⁹ One popular method for both institutions and individual researchers is targeted focus groups. Much has been written on this particular survey technique, but the advice of our authors is that effective focus groups must be preceded by an in-depth

16 Willis Stanley, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran" (2006) p.

17 Interview with Rodney Jones, (2006)

18 Kathryn Moss, interview (2006)

19 Kate Spears, interview (2006)

study of the issue at hand so that the interviewer can select a sampling of *relevant* focus participants and can frame questions appropriately.²⁰

One effective device used by ethnographers is to narrow their interviews to key keepers of local culture. These people have frequent contact with other members of the community, and that contact results in extended conversation. As a result, they tend to harbor the notions, language modes, and perceptive lens of the local community.²¹

An important window into norms, and the color of a group's perceptive lens, is discovering "conventional wisdom" for an area—the things everybody knows.²² Compiling, and analyzing oral traditions may take a number of different forms.²³ The author of a recent popular survey of Iran attempted to do this by engaging in dialogue with persons from a sampling of all of the society's castes and factions, and starting each conversation with the same question, "Tell me your story."²⁴ The patterns and themes developed across conversations helped uncover generally accepted notions about self and others. Additional probing may reveal notions of identity—what is taken for granted as a natural role for the nation, what is expected, and what is controversial.²⁵

One fairly inventive young scholar from Monterey's Naval Postgraduate School proposed an alternative to official polling—the systematic study of "rumint" (rumors intelligence).²⁶ She surveyed and prioritized the issues on the minds of Iraqis by tracking the frequency of rumors. For instance, she demonstrates that the current Iraqi notion that the United States is behind the Iraqi insurgency stems not so much from a determined belief that the United States is evil, but from the perception that it is impossible that a superpower with the might of America couldn't stop the insurgency if it wanted to. Therefore, it must be behind it. Her work produced a number of surprises for U.S. officials concerning Iraqi attitudes and priorities.

Dr. Deborah Wheeler, a specialist in near-east studies, is conducting research on online discussions in the Middle East—particularly amongst women who otherwise do not speak out.

20 Willis Stanley, interview (2006)

21 Shaun Kjar, interview (2006)

22 Stanley, interview (2006)

23 Kami Capener, interview (2006)

24 Afshin Molavi, *The Soul of Iran: A Nation's Journey to Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005)

25 Chris Boyd, interview (2006)

26 Stephanie Kelley, "Rumors in Iraq: A Guide to Winning Hearts and Minds," *Strategic Insights*, Volume IV, Issue 2 (February 2005), at www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2005/Feb/Kelleyfeb05.asp.

Chat rooms and editorials posted as pseudonymed blogs may be one way to evaluate the thinking of otherwisely reticent populations.²⁷

Christine Fair, an analyst writing on Iran, suggests alternative approaches for first-hand interviews with citizens of a repressive regime:

Utiliz[e] consulates of countries where Iranians seek U.S. visas (India and Turkey) to collect and develop information during the visa interview process. Defense attachés may also engage their in-country counterparts in countries where military cooperation with Iran are ongoing to gain insights into Iran.²⁸

Interviews are recommended with the full range of expatriates. Students living abroad, for instance, will not have the same outlook as dissidents, but both have the value of being able to compare their circumstances abroad with belief and values at home.²⁹ State officials who have defected, as well as state officials who remain employed, are another obvious choice for interview.³⁰ Second-hand interviews—interviewing those who frequently interact with members of the culture—are also very useful, especially in cases where the populace does not feel comfortable speaking openly about their thoughts and opinions.³¹

Bermudez notes that when information is hard to come by, as it is with North Korea, even interviews with travelers and a careful look at their photographs can prove beneficial. In North Korea's case it helps unveil the genuine state of affairs for the state's population (regarding, for example, roads, electricity, phone service, and health conditions) in contrast to state claims about their situation.³²

Content Analysis of Texts

Texts taught in school should receive particular emphasis in an analysis of a nation's common threads. Historical texts are forced to explain perceptions of a nation's own history, its view of others, acceptable methods of warfare, common justifications for past behavior (norms), and so on. Societal values are taught to children explicitly, and without subtlety in the early

27 Deborah Wheeler, interview (2006)

28 C. Christine Fair, "Iran: What Future for the Islamic State?" found in *The Muslim World After 9/11* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2004), p. 244

29 Vance Daniels, interview (2006)

30 Murhaf Jouejati, interview (2006)

31 Stanley, interview (2006)

32 Bermudez, interview (2006)

stages of education. Their texts may include hero legends, songs, rhymes, fables and oversimplified anecdotes from the nation's history.³³ Which figures are celebrated? Which despised?³⁴ Why?

Education and other socialization processes also result in a body of shared literature considered "classic". What are the messages in this body of work? How widely are they read? How often referenced?³⁵

Military texts are essential sources of information on the values, identity, and acceptable methods of achieving security within a regime. Christopher Twomey recommends a deep survey of all sorts of doctrinal texts – telegrams, military orders, descriptions of training regimens, diaries, memoirs, communications between military leaders, etc.³⁶ This study would reveal national aspirations over time (identity) as well as accepted norms for achieving them, and perhaps more particular values such as views on the use of manpower, and loss of life.³⁷

Tracking Political Rhetoric

Fritz Ermarth notes that a first assignment in weighing the value of political rhetoric within a nation is to track its correlation with actual behavior in the past. Tracking over time, and across politicians, may yield generalizations about the reliability of government speeches as concerns sincere goals and security objectives.³⁸ For instance, Chris Twomey points out that the Chinese culture tends to weigh private comments more heavily than public statements, and that inflammatory public statements need to be qualified accordingly.³⁹

Analysis of public rhetoric may assist strategic culture analysts in assessing norm strength. Cortell and Davis, as well as Kowert and Legro, have argued that a norm's strength may be measured, in part, by the frequency with which it is referenced by statesmen proposing a course of action, or legitimizing one taken.⁴⁰ The measurements proposed in this work might also be applied to variables such as identity, and perhaps national values.

33 Jeremy Moyes, interview (2006)

34 Spencer Taylor, interview (2006)

35 Stanley, interview (2006)

36 Twomey, interview (2006)

37 Amanda Haycock, interview (2006)

38 Ermarth, interview (2006)

39 Twomey, interview (2006)

40 Andrew P. Cortell and James W. Davis, Jr., "Understanding the Domestic Impact of International Norms: A

In some cases it is politically incorrect to speak of one's historic strategic culture, so there is an absence of political rhetoric on the topic. Rodney Jones notes the case of Japan. Therefore it may benefit analysts to speak to "outsiders" who have lived in, but are not born to, the strategic culture in question. In the case of Japan, Jesuit priests who lived for extended periods of time in country were more likely to speak freely of Japan's history and predilections than Japanese statesmen.⁴¹

Extended Observation of Public Behavior

Public reactions to the moves made by state leadership may highlight areas of congruence or cleavage between the understanding of values and norms fostered by the populace and the behavior of state officers. Disaffection may come in the form of protest, local grumbling, or biting humor pointed at political officials, while congruence might manifest itself through strong turnout for state events and parades, voluntary displays of state insignia, or healthy membership in state-related organizations.⁴²

More subtle mechanisms for evaluating priorities and values within a culture might include careful attention to salutations and conversations between members of the population meeting for the first time. How does one introduce oneself? By way of profession? Clan ties? Religious affiliation?⁴³ What aspects are most valued?

Views of other actors, especially neighbors, may be measured in part by the acceptance of neighboring modes of dress, expression, foods eaten, names given to children, and so on.⁴⁴

Evaluating the Output of the Media and the Artistic Community

Depending on the level of independence enjoyed by news, entertainment, and artistic producers within a population, these may yield significant insight into a nation's identity, and its core norms and values. Christopher Twomey notes the onerous level of work involved in a

Research Agenda", *International Studies Review*, Vol 2, No 1, (Spring 2000) pp. 65-87; and Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, "Norms, Identity, and Their Limits: A Theoretical Reprise," in Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security*, pp. 451-497.

41 Jones, interview (2006)

42 Gentry Lawrence, interview (2006)

43 Anne Richey, interview (2006)

44 Davis Anderson, interview (2006)

comprehensive review of these sources and points by way of commendation to two authors who have tackled it: Peter Hays Gries on China, and Ted Hopf on Russia.⁴⁵

Where the media is completely controlled, it may still offer up some material for strategic culture analysts. State propaganda illuminates the identity, norms and values that the state hopes to achieve, as well as the perceptive lens that it is trying to inculcate into the population.

In a free society the media helps identify cleavages in the strategic culture – often framed as political debates.⁴⁶ In addition, a free media may be a reliable watchdog for norms violations within the state. The flurry of reporting on U.S. excesses in Guantanamo and at Abu Ghraib manifest norms violations that are considered serious and newsworthy in the United States, but may not be treated that way in other countries.

As a mirror of popular thinking, the media may also reveal shared values and norms through the justifications given for feeling favorably toward certain conflicts or state actions.⁴⁷ On a lighter note, the very fabric of television sitcoms is their exaggerated presentation of the violation of norms. They may prove a useful, and entertaining, research method.⁴⁸

Assessing Institutional Influence

In determining core values within Israeli society, Greg Giles looked first to shared, institutionalized, socialization processes. He pinpoints the IDF since all Israeli citizens are trained through this institution due to universal conscription. Giles points out further that the respect of this institution, and its ability to continue influence, is manifest by the high numbers of young people polled who said they would be willing to serve in the IDF even if it were an all-volunteer force.⁴⁹

Understanding Symbols

45 Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002)

46 Giles, interview (2006)

47 Davis Anderson, interview (2006)

48 Chelsea Curtis, interview (2006)

49 Giles, interview (2006)

Much may be communicated within a population through the strategic use of symbols. Giles notes that the star of David on the Israeli flag makes clear claims about the state's identity. Of particular interest are those symbols that people choose to display in their homes.⁵⁰

Physical manifestations such as architecture, street names, statues, and memorials demonstrate which aspects of a nation's history it chooses to preserve and celebrate. Understanding who are the heroes, and why, lends itself to understanding national values.⁵¹

For instance, the Serbian hero, Prince Lazar, has national admiration not because he won wars, but because he stood up to an overwhelming adversary and was defeated with honor. A famous painting of his battle in 1389 (*Kosovo Girl*) is found in a good number of Serbian homes. Stronger awareness of this cultural norm may have helped Balkan analysts more accurately project Serbian President Milosevic's willingness to endure the extended 1999 bombing campaign "Rational" judgments crafted through a U.S. prism led us to believe that Milosevic would fold within three days. NATO prepared for the short campaign, and was forced to make hasty judgments and operational adjustments in order to fight an extended engagement.

Follow the Money

Budget lines, more than political rhetoric, may represent the priorities of a state system. To the extent that budget lines are knowable, several analysts keep close watch on where the state is placing its money.⁵²

CONCLUSION

While certainly not a comprehensive list, this brief sampling of methods for studying national strategic culture is meant to whet the appetite of would-be analysts and act as a catalyst for the generation of further research methods.

The primary contribution of this essay is refining the study of national culture for use within the strategic culture construct. The hope is that a pursuit of national culture based on the four-pronged security-based approach will prove inclusive and flexible, and will allow for the beginnings of a systematic study of strategic culture. The goal, from this point, is to develop

50 Chris Boyd, interview (2006)

51 Jessica Avalos, interview (2006)

some level of analytical parsimony for the other two aspects of strategic culture—national policy processes and organizational culture. And then use this combined tool to unearth patterns in strategic culture that lend themselves to the formation of useful hypotheses.

Several questions that these hypotheses may answer include:

- What causes change in strategic culture? Are some more likely across the board than others? (external shocks, influx of new information/communications, significant demographic shifts, etc.)
- Does the presence of a charismatic leader diminish the influence of strategic culture?
- Is a homogeneous strategic culture more influential than a contested one?
- Are top-down cultures (cultures taught and enforced through government mechanisms) less likely to persist over time?
- Do ideational factors within strategic culture, such as identity, play a stronger role in influencing policy when domestic infighting seems to threaten their existence?

A fairly widespread assumption within strategic culture circles is that national strategic cultures are unlikely to be perfectly homogeneous. More likely they will house a number of competing narratives and practices that relate to security policy. Devising measurement tools which allow us to assess which of those competing ideals is likely to have most sway in the security process is part of our task as strategic culture analysts. The fact that a strategic culture may not be entirely cohesive does not diminish the importance of its study. It will allow analysts to more accurately frame the risks in attempting to forecast policy behavior for that actor, and may illuminate for us cleavages within the support base of our adversaries that may be exploited.

Despite the challenges that exist for the study of strategic culture it is a worthy, and important enterprise. In the words of Colin Gray, “One cannot make a virtue of cultural ignorance.”⁵³ As complicated and resistant to theory as the study of strategic culture may be, it remains in our national interest to pursue it.

52 Ermarth, Jouejati, and Stanley interviews (2006).

53 Gray, p. 19