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Stone, Elizabeth

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COMPARATIVE STRATEGIC CULTURES LITERATURE REVIEW (PART 1)

Elizabeth Stone

Prepared for:

Defense Threat Reduction Agency
Advanced Systems and Concepts Office

Comparative Strategic Cultures Curriculum
Contract No: DTRA01-03-D-0017, Technical Instruction 18-06-02

This report represents the views of its author, not necessarily those of SAIC, its sponsors, or any
United States Government Agency

31 October 2006



Project Focus:

Despite the publication of many path-breaking books and scholarly articles on the subject of strategic culture, the research in this area has not cumulated into a coherent, productive field of study. However, with renewed policy interest in discerning the motivations and related sources of behavior of countries such as North Korea, Iran, Syria, Pakistan, India, and China, it is time to take a new look at comparative strategic culture.

Where the field has been:

Essentially, literature on comparative strategic culture has come in three waves of study:

1. *Wave 1: Early 1980s*
 - a. Focused mainly on explaining why Soviets and Americans apparently thought differently about nuclear strategy.
 - b. Scholars (Snyder, Gray, Jones) argued these differences were caused by unique variations in macro-environmental variables such as deeply rooted historical experience, political culture, and geography.
 - c. Shortcomings of Wave 1:
 - i. Definitional problem; too unwieldy (Still a problem).
 - ii. By subsuming patterns of behavior within a definition of strategic culture, first wave implied that strategic thought led consistently to one type of behavior.
 - iii. Alleged homogeneity of society's strategic culture across time proved problematic.
2. *Wave 2: mid-1980s*
 - a. Began from premise that there is a vast difference between what leaders think or say they are doing and the deeper motives for what in fact they do.
 - b. Strategic culture viewed as tool of political hegemony in realm of strategic decision-making.
 - c. Shortcomings of Wave 2:
 - i. Still has problems with symbolic discourse—linking culture and behavior.
 1. Not clear whether we should expect the strategic discourse to influence behavior; elites socialized in strategic culture they produce and thus can be constrained by symbolic myths their predecessors created
 - a. In a sense, one should expect cross-national differences in behavior to extent that discourses vary nationally
 2. second generation literature undecided as whether to expect cross-national differences in strategy.
3. *Wave 3: 1990's*
 - a. Both more rigorous and eclectic in its conceptualization or ideational independent variables, and more narrowly focused on particular strategic decisions as dependent variables.
 - b. All theories take realist edifice as target and focus on cases where structuralist-materialist notions of interest cannot explain a particular strategic choice.
 - c. Strengths of Wave 3:
 - i. Avoids determinism of first generation—leaves behavior out of independent variable.
 - ii. Explicitly committed to competitive theory testing, pitting alternative explanations against each other.
 - d. Shortcomings of Wave 3:
 - i. Focus on realism weaknesses is flawed
 - ii. Use of organizational culture as key independent variable in strategic choices is troublesome
 - iii. DEFINITION STILL TOO LOOSE.

Presently, the field rests largely in an ill defined, oft debated over netherworld. Comparative Strategic Culture concepts maintain their methodological limitations and the concept remains too amorphous and grossly oversimplified. However, despite this, scholars hold on to strategic culture's utility. As Iain Johnston has written:

Done well, the careful analysis of strategic culture could help policymakers establish more accurate and empathetic understandings of how different actors perceive the game being played, reducing uncertainty and other information problems

in strategic choice. Done badly, the analysis of strategic culture could reinforce stereotypes about strategic dispositions of other states and close off policy alternatives deemed inappropriate for dealing with local strategic cultures.

Where the field needs to go:

1. Learn from the past:

Need to learn from past mistakes and construct a more rigorous concept of strategic culture that specifies *inter alia* the scope and content of strategic culture, the objects of analysis and the historical periods from which these are drawn, and the methods for deriving a picture of strategic culture from these objects. (Johnston, 1995).

2. Utilize cross-discipline studies:

Need to accept that this concept of strategic culture stretches across multiple disciplines (sociology, psychology, political science, international relations theory) and cannot fully be strengthened unless all crossing disciplines are used. Especially on the basic notion of DEFINING strategic culture itself—it ultimately comes back to cognitive concepts of self, symbols, etc., for which sociological and psychological study is needed.

3. Address relevance of concept as applied to NON-STATE ACTORS:

Upon reviewing the literature, essentially nothing new has been written since the late 1990s, in other words—pre-9/11. If strategic culture as a discipline and lens is to survive, it must move beyond its state centric approach to explaining policy and behavior. Can strategic culture be used to analyze non-state actors? If yes (which I believe it can be), it is even more important to utilize a multi-discipline approach to predicting behavior. The concept of non-state actors further plunges political scientists into realms of needing to understand personal psychology, cognitive choice, symbols, cohesive cultures, etc. Behavior and actions of non-state actors cements strategic culture as a supra-individual concept—above and beyond the individual and within and among the state.

My emphasis of the need to focus on non-state actor psychology as well as the differentiation between democracy and Islamic rule is further testament that strategic culture concepts, even if pursued to better understand state elites' decision making on foreign or WMD policy, has been and will remain a cultural argument at the most basic level. In the post-9/11 environment, “know thy enemy” has never rung more true, and the true implications of the aphorism can and must be further explored using dynamic, cross-discipline, and complex concepts such as comparative strategic culture if the national security of the United States is to be kept secure.

Theoretical Concepts

Historical Background Pieces

- Colin Gray, “National Styles in Strategy: The American Example,” *International Security* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1981).
- Colin Gray, *Nuclear Strategy and National Style* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Press, 1986).
- Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options, R-2154-AF* (Santa Monica, CA, RAND, 1977).
- David R. Jones, “Soviet Strategic Culture,” in Carl G. Jacobsen, ed., *Strategic Power: USA/USSR* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

Essays

- **Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking About Strategic Culture," *International Security*, vol. 19 (Spring 1995).**
 - o The “must have” piece in any strategic culture info introduction
 - o Concludes literature (up until 1995) on strategic culture is both under and over-determined, and has so far been unable to offer a convincing research design for isolating effects of strategic culture
 - Essentially, this is still the case

- *culture*: different states have different predominant strategic preferences rooted in early formative experiences of state, influenced to some degree by philosophical, political, cultural, and cognitive characteristics of state and its elites
- Strategic culture theory doesn't reject rationality; instead, a historically imposed inertia on choice makes strategy less responsive to specific contingencies
- Problem for culturalists is to explain similarities in strategic behavior across varied strategic cultures.
- Too many definitions out there; still too vague on culture's relationship to choice—what does culture do in a behavioral sense?
 - We need a notion of strategic culture that is falsifiable.
- **Michael C. Desch, “Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies,” *International Security* 23, no. 1. (Summer, 1998), pp. 141-170.**
 - Highlights ongoing theoretical debate between culture theories and realism
 - Explains brief history of 3 waves of cultural theory, beginning with Cold War, then 1970s-1980s, then post-Cold War
 - 4 strands of cultural theorizing dominate current wave:
 - organizational
 - political
 - strategic
 - global
 - all cultural approaches take realist edifice as target, and focus cases where structural material notions of interest cannot explain a particular strategic choice
 - to make the case that cultural theories should supplant existing theories outperform realist theories in “hard cases for cultural theories
- **Fritz Gaenslen, “Culture and Decision Making in China, Japan, Russia, and the United States,” *World Politics* 39, no. 1. (Oct., 1986), pp. 78-103.**
 - Discusses basic tenets of cultural arguments
 - Hits on differences/weakness in the culture v. realism debate
 - cultures consists of assumptions about human nature
 - assumptions about causality, the possible, the desirable, the appropriate, nature of physical environment
 - Chinese, Japanese, and Russians tend to have different conceptions of “self” and “others” than do Americans, and former tend to be more collectivist than the latter
 - These different conceptions have implications for collective decision making under conditions of complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity
 - A focus on national culture is likely to obscure one's vision of the variety of behavior that can occur within societies
 - Cultural explanations are not and should not be about similarities, they must explain differences.
 - Under what circumstances is cultural explanation most persuasive?:
 - Smaller conceptual distance between cultural variables and what one wishes to explain by them
 - When individuals whose behavior is to be explained are unclear about structure of rewards/ punishments they face; when situation is characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity.
- **Jeffrey Legro, “Culture and Preferences in International Two Step,” *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 1 (March 1996).**
 - Rational choice analyses of international cooperation have slighted effect of state preference formation and influence of cultural forces in that process
 - Article addresses gaps by developing an explanation that specifies how organizational cultures of bureaucracies shape state aims and international outcomes

- Offers domestic-level cultural explanation of preferences that contrasts to common view that state desires are functionally determined or definitively constrained by international system
 - Organizational cultures of bureaucracies produce information, plans, and capabilities which can constitute state preferences in ways that need not efficiently correspond to international circumstances
 - Preference dynamics can be central to variations in international conflict and cooperation
 - Importance of culturally shaped preferences in issue areas—such as use of force in war.
 - When national security and survival are at stake, analysts tend to posit interests, emphasize strategic interaction, and discount bureaucratic influence.
- **Paul DiMaggio, “Culture and Cognition,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997), 263-287.**
 - Cultural theory has become highly sophisticated but not fully operational; need to focus on how people use culture
 - In past, culture defined as latent variable, influencing in common such manifestations as media images, responses, values; individuals assumed to acquire culture in course of socialization
 - Recent work depicts culture as fragmented across groups and inconsistent across its manifestations
 - Culture as a complex rule-like structures that constitute resources that can be put to strategic use
 - Make studying culture more complicated;
 - Once we identify culture as inconsistent, must identify units of cultural analysis and to focus attention upon relations among them
 - Once we acknowledge that people behave as if they use culture strategically, it follows that cultures into which people socialize leave much opportunity for choice and variation.
 - highlights importance of wedding all fields on culture together: sociology, social psychology, political science, etc.
 - emphasizes important cognitive concepts such as culture as supra-individual, and “pluralistic ignorance”: idea that people act with reference to shared representations of collective opinion that are empirically inaccurate
 - important implication to comparative strategic cultures
- **Michael Vlabos, “Culture and Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy* 82 (Spring 1991).**
 - too often cultural variations are seen only as national stereotypes and never move beyond myopic impression
 - Yet stereotypes lead to truths: other cultures are and will remain alien, and culture is source of people’s reality, and culture is bigger than countries.
 - Talks about “culture areas” that bound cultural identities
 - Talks about introduction of “the West” as concept
 - patterns of thought and behavior are shaped by culture; they are not products of mere nationalism
- **Stephen Peter Rosen, "Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters," *International Security*, vol. 19 (Spring 1995).**
 - About impact of social structures on amount of military power that can be generated by nations from different cultures
 - Argues social structures can affect generation of military power in two ways:
 - People in a political unit can identify themselves with social structures in ways that can create divisive loyalties within the political unit, creating fissures in the unit that reduce effective military power of the unit as a whole
 - Social structures than create fissures in unit at large may extend to military organizations of unit, causing military to insulate themselves from divisions created by social structures
 - IV: (2): 1. dominant social structures of a country, 2. degree to which the military organizations divorces themselves from their society
 - DV: Amount of offensive and defensive national military power that can be generated from a given quantity of material resources
 - Does NOT try to explain national military strategy or behavior of individual military commanders

Additional Sources:

- Martin Wight, "An Anatomy of International Thought," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 13 (1987).
- David S. Yost, "Political Philosophy and the Theory of International Relations," *International Affairs*, vol. 70 (April 1994).

- Yitzhak Klein, "A Theory of Strategic Culture," *Comparative Strategy* 10, no. 1 (1991).
- Samuel P. Huntington, "The West: Unique, Not Universal," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 75 (November/December 1996).

Books

- Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
- Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; paperback edition, 1992).
- Douglas J. Murray and Paul R. Viotti, eds., *The Defense Policies of Nations: A Comparative Study*, third edition (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

Country Studies

China

- **Andrew Scobell, "China and Strategic Culture," *Strategic Studies Institute* (May 2002).**
 - o *Strategic culture defined*: fundamental and enduring assumptions about role of war (both interstate and intrastate) in human affairs and the efficacy of applying force held by political and military elites in a country; assumptions will vary from country to country.
 - o Highlights importance of elites' perceptions of others' strategic cultures, as well.
 - Preconceived stereotype of strategic disposition of another nation, state, or people that is derived from a selective interpretation of history, traditions, and self-image.
 - o Using strategic culture lens on subject of China's use of force, two dimensions highlighted:
 - Nature and impact of China's assessment of its own strategic culture
 - Nature and impact of China's depictions of the strategic cultures of Japan and United States.
 - o Existing depictions of China's strategic culture are flawed
 - Country has dualistic strategic culture:
 - First strand: Confucian-Mencian, conflict averse and defensive minded
 - Second strand: realpolitik, favors military solutions and is offensive oriented.
 - o Both strands operative and influence/combine in dialectic fashion to form a "Chinese Cult of Defense"
 - o China views Japan as having extremely warped, violent, militaristic strategic culture
 - o Views U.S. as expansionist, offensive-minded, conflict-prone, obsessed with technology.

Additional Sources

- Jim Nichol, "Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests," *CRS Issue Brief for Congress* (November 12, 2004).
- Rosemary Foot, "China and the ASEAN Regional Forum: Organizational Processes and Domestic Modes of Thought," *Asian Survey* 38, no. 5 (May 1998), 424-440.
- David B.H. Denoon, Wendy Frieman, "China's Security Strategy: The View from Beijing, ASEAN, and Washington," *Asian Survey* 36, no. 4 (April 1996), 422-439.

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

South Asia

- Jessica Stern, "Pakistan's Jihad Culture," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2000).
- George K. Tanham, "Indian Strategic Culture," *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 15 (Winter 1992).
- George K. Tanham, *Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay*, R-4207-USDP (Santa Monica, Ca.: Rand Corporation, 1992).
- **V.K. Shrivastava, "Indian Army 2020: A Vision Statement on Strategy and Capability," *Strategic Analysis* 25, no. 6 (September 2001).**
 - o Scrutiny of events of the post-independence era points to the same set of shortfalls as those in the past. In an attempt to examine the Indian thoughts on strategy, George K. Tanham has observed, "Deeply embedded habits of thoughts related to Indian geography, history, culture.... exert a powerful influence....they will, in the foreseeable future, help to shape its strategic thinking and its strategy."

East Asia

- **Desmond Ball, "Strategic Culture in the Asia-Pacific Region," *Security Studies* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1993), 44-74.**
 - o Delineates principal purported elements of strategic culture in region, and assesses the extent to which they have real substance, application, impact on emerging security processes in region.
 - o Analysis suggests cultural factors will be less important than economic, technological, and strategic developments in determining new architecture of regional security.
- **Scott Snyder, "Patterns of Negotiation in South Korean Cultural Context," *Asian Survey* 39, no. 3 (May-June 1999).**
 - o Highlights understandings of cross-cultural influences on negotiation
 - o Examine misunderstandings in various international negotiations that may be traced to differences stemming from deeply held views on identity and action that have been shaped by culturally defined socialization processes (which reinforce cultural norms or conceptions of identity) within particular social structure.
 - o Uses case studies of the 1997 South Korean Labor Management Dispute and the South Korean-IMF Bailout Negotiations

Additional Readings:

- Yung Myung Kim, "Asian Style Democracy?: A Critique from East Asia," *Asian Survey* 37, no. 12 (December 1997), 1119-1134.
- Frank L. Miller, Jr., "Impact of Strategic Culture on U.S. Policies for East Asia," *Strategic Studies Institute* (November 2003).

Middle East

- **Anthony C. Cain, "Iran's Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction," *Air War College Maxwell Paper No. 26 (Maxwell Air Force Base: Maxwell, Alabama), April 2002.***
 - o Ascertains that U.S. leaders fail to comprehend Islamic Republic's struggle to reconcile tensions between faith and economic, diplomatic, and military functions of state power.
 - o Defines strategic culture simply from a policy/deterrence angle—focus on WMD.

- Iran is rational and deterrable.
- In order to prevent proliferation, must better understand Iranian decision making processes, which are highlighted by:
 - Distinguishing between Shi'ism espoused by clerics in government power, the politicized Islam that threatens moderate Muslim regimes in ME, and Islamic tenets to which peaceful Muslims adhere.
- challenge to U.S. policy will center on modifying our understanding of Iran to reflect the synergies and conflicts between various segments of Iranian polity that help to shape relations between U.S./Iran.
- For contemporary Iranian politics, reconciling demands of international statecraft and domestic consensus building with principles of religious dogma remains difficult.
- Increasing global trends of globalization coupled with contemporary international consensus centered on fighting terrorism may provide levers needed to ease tensions between U.S./Iran.
- U.S. policymakers can encourage Iranian actions with regard to changing policies about terrorism by acknowledging Islamic republic's legitimate aspirations for regional leadership.

Additional Sources:

- Mehran Kamrava, *Democracy in the Balance: Culture and Society in the Middle East* (New York: New York, Chatham House/ Seven Bridges Press, 1998), 300 p.
- Frederick Strain, "Discerning Iran's Nuclear Strategy: An Examination of Motives, Strategic Culture, And Rationality," *Air War College, Air University* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Alabama, April 1996).

Europe

- **Elizabeth Kier, "Culture and Military Doctrine: France between the Wars," *International Security*, vol. 19 (Spring 1995).**
 - Highlights differences between offensive and defensive military doctrine
 - Very heavily references throughout other strategic culture readings
 - Challenges portrait of civilians and military in choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines
 - Argues choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines are best understood from cultural perspective; two reasons:
 - Military doctrine rarely carefully calculated response to external environment
 - Civilian policymakers have beliefs about military's role in society, and these beliefs guide civilian decisions about organizational form of military
 - military organizations do not inherently prefer offensive doctrines: preferences cannot be deduced from functional characteristics and generalized across all military organizations
 - military organizations differ in how they view their world and the proper conduct of their mission, and these organizational cultures constrain choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines

Additional Sources:

- Idem, "France and the Gulf War of 1990-1991: Political-Military Lessons Learned," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 16 (September 1993).
- Dalia Dassa Kaye, "Bound to Cooperate: Transatlantic Policy in the Middle East," *Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (Winter 2003-2004), 179-195.

Theme-Related

Islam

- Roy P. Mottahedeh, “The Clash of Civilizations: An Islamicist’s Critique,” *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, vol. 2 (Autumn 1995).
- Pierre Hassner, “Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations: I — Morally Objectionable, Politically Dangerous,” *The National Interest*, no. 46 (Winter 1996-1997).

WMD

- **Greg Giles, “Strategic Personality: Overview of Case Studies,” SAIC (June 21, 1996).**
 - o Argues that explicit assessment of strategic personality can enhance understanding of WMD force building in particular countries.
- **Anthony C. Cain, “Iran’s Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction,” Air War College Maxwell Paper No. 26 (Maxwell Air Force Base: Maxwell, Alabama), April 2002.**
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 - o U.S. policymakers can encourage Iranian actions with regard to changing policies about terrorism by acknowledging Islamic republic’s legitimate aspirations for regional leadership.

Additional Sources

- Henry Rowen, "The Evolution of Strategic Nuclear Doctrine," in Laurence Martin, ed., *Strategic Thought in the Nuclear Age* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).
- Frederick Strain, “Discerning Iran’s Nuclear Strategy: An Examination of Motives, Strategic Culture, And Rationality,” *Air War College, Air University* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Alabama, April 1996).
- Craig Black, “Deterring Libya: The Strategic Culture of Muammar Qaddafi,” *The Counterproliferation Papers, Future Warfare Series No. 8* (USAF Counterproliferation Center: Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama), October 2000.
- Greg Giles, “Assessing Strategic Culture: New Analytical Tools for Hard Targets?” *SAIC Symposium on Strategic Culture of Hard Targets* (November 5, 1997).

Non-State Actors’ Strategic Culture

- Lee Harris, “Al Qaeda’s Fantasy Ideology,” Policy Review, www.policyreview.org , August 2002.



Comparative Strategic Culture: A Literature Review



- Rex Hudson, "The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?," *Federal Research Division, Library of Congress* (September 1999), 186 p.