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Contents

STRATEGIC CULTURE AND POLICY SOLUTIONS

REVIEW ESSAY

From the Editor

An ironic feature of U.S. strategic culture is a rather distinctive disinterest in the study of our own or others' strategic cultures. The U.S. security institutions find themselves energized about cultural study during irregular conflicts in which the cost of cultural ignorance is made plain, but they persist in under developing the ability to apply that same cultural acumen to great power conflict and key relationships with allies. During the last 100 years of fighting, U.S. defense institutions have repeated a pattern of investing in cultural study during short bursts of counterinsurgency fighting and then abandoning it along with its lessons learned at the termination of conflict. As a consequence, U.S. planning efforts—including those now being designed for future great power conflict—suffer from an unnecessarily narrow optic and fail to account for the full range of perspectives and plausible courses of action considered by an adversary. America's allies know it and are frustrated by it. More importantly, U.S. adversaries know it and plan to exploit it.

The study of strategic culture accounts for the ways in which the culture of a group, whether it be the constructed culture of a nascent terrorist organization or the enduring culture of a nation, impacts thinking and decision making regarding defensive and offensive approaches to security. Within a complex state like Russia or China, one must account for sweeping national narratives that cultivate collective mentalities and impact decision making but must also include the internal cultures of key organizations within the nation's security community. These organizations often develop distinctive identities, values, perceptions, and habits of practice that can be consequential in moments when the organization's leaders wield instruments of state power.

In the first section of this special edition of the *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* (JAMS) on strategic culture, Drs. Ali Parchami, Ofer Fridman, Neil Munro, W. A. Rivera, and Major Evan Kerrane provide strategic culture profiles on key U.S. adversaries: Iran, Russia, and China. Their work reflects the complexity involved in identifying and analyzing the narratives and drivers that compete for dominance across these three strategic culture landscapes. Acquainting ourselves with the multivariate and often-contested internal constructs that produce the behavior of our adversaries helps expand our own

thinking about the range of possible and plausible competitive strategies we are likely to see from them.

The second section of this issue highlights the utility of understanding not only U.S. adversaries but also American allies and partners. Drs. Matthew Brummer and Eitan Oren examine the effort by Japan's military leaders to shift their own strategic culture through an influence campaign aimed at altering domestic perceptions concerning the appropriate role for the military and thereby expanding its ability to more actively cooperate with the United States in maintaining peace and stability in Asia. Whether they are successful has direct implications for U.S. alliance constructs in the Pacific and the action that might be reasonably expected from Japan should U.S. conflict with China become kinetic. Katie C. Finlinson offers analysis that benefits U.S. deterrence and nonproliferation efforts. She employs a two-tiered research approach—leveraging both strategic culture and analysis of national role conception—as a useful framework for assessing the propensity of the United Arab Emirates to consider weaponizing civilian nuclear knowledge and infrastructure. Finlinson offers an approach repeatable for other potential over-the-horizon states and demonstrates the interplay between a state's strategic culture and powerful exogenous factors—like security assurances from the United States and potential nuclear acquisition by Iran—in determining outcomes. Finally, Dr. Mark Briskey offers a look at the aspects of Pakistan's strategic culture that exist as an outgrowth of its army's most formative historic experiences and have resulted in deeply entrenched perceptions of self, of key adversaries, and perceptions of the past that must be understood by Western partners seeking Pakistan's cooperation and partnership in the region.

Our third section offers a close look at the ways in which cultural analysis can illuminate policy options on particularly difficult problem sets. One of these is assessing will to fight on the part of both allies and adversaries. Dr. Ben Connable recommends a diagnostic tool developed and trialed by the Rand Corporation that demonstrates promise in advancing the ability of defense institutions to anticipate will to fight in kinetic conflicts but also will to act in consequential ways by great powers engaged in strategic competition. Benjamin Potter, Emilee Matheson, and Jeffrey Taylor follow with applications of the Cultural Topography Framework, an approach to cultural data assessment and application that benefits from the insights supplied by the sort of comprehensive strategic culture profiles offered in section one of this issue and translates these into actionable intelligence against discrete problem sets. Their work, respectively, illuminates policy options for containing a potentially escalatory situation in Transnistria, decreasing violence and looting through a more effective reintegration strategy for former members of the Lord's Resistance Army in Central Africa, and reexamining the value of technological advances in the U.S. nuclear arsenal, which may be having a deleterious impact on its deterrence strategy. The special issue concludes with a review essay by Dr. José de Arimatéia

da Cruz, which offers readers critical analysis of three volumes of strategic culture scholarship.

The articles collected for the special issue demonstrate a range of ways in which the study of strategic culture delivers critical insights to policy planners and strategists. Understanding other great powers on their own terms—the identities they seek to establish or defend, the values that inform their policies, the norms of strategic competition or warfighting that they deem acceptable and effective, and the worldview they espouse (whether an accurate fit with objective realities or not)—prepares policy makers to craft plans and strategies in ways that are tailored for maximum advantage vis-à-vis a particular adversary. Given the steady shutdown of cultural inquiry labs and training facilities across the U.S. defense and security community, it is worth issuing a stern reminder that the advantage of knowing one's enemy is far more consequential when engaged in great power conflict than in the irregular conflicts in which U.S. institutions have learned its worth. This issue of JAMS is provided as a resource to both reinforce that point and supply a wealth of initial material in advancing it.

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An Iranian Worldview
The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic

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Abstract: Highlighting the nexus between the Islamic Republic's strategic culture and behavior, this article argues that Iran's clerical leadership is ideological in its orientation but has always demonstrated tactical nous and pragmatism. Domestically, it pursues Islamification in conformity with Khomeinism. Regionally, it fosters conditions that might force the United States and its European allies out of the Middle East and oblige local governments to seek accommodation. Its network of regional affiliates and proxies are primarily tools of deterrence to safeguard the regime. Nevertheless, Tehran has a penchant for opportunistically promoting regional instability and arming substate actors to ensnare adversaries in protracted conflicts. Its interventionist proclivities are also borne out of domestic exigencies. Paradoxically, the regime compensates for its diminishing legitimacy by becoming even more aggressive at home and adventurous abroad. There are growing signs, however, that the Islamic Republic's strategic culture may be its undoing.

Keywords: Iran, strategic culture, proxy warfare, Shia Islamism, instability

For the past four decades, the main exponent of the Iranian worldview has been the governing regime of the Islamic Republic. Dominated by a clerical hierarchy that draws on Shia Islamic conventions and Iranian national identity, it is a hybrid subculture with its own distinctive outlook, values, and norms. Built around its founding father's *velayat-e-faghih* doctrine, domestically it espouses conservatism through the Islamification of every facet of life.[1] Internationally, it is fervently revisionist with an ingrained hostility toward the West and the United States in particular. Bent on exporting its revolutionary ideals, it straddles the lines between a modern nation-state and a transnational Islamist

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polity. This duality is reflected in its structures and a fractious body politic that is characterized by intense institutional and factional rivalries.

The regime has sought to capitalize on Iran's Shia identity by presenting itself as its sole custodian and chief proponent. Adopted in the sixteenth century as the state religion of a reconstituted Persian Empire, Shiism has ever since been used by the country's rulers to mold a unified national identity across Iran's vast territory with its ethno-culturally diverse population. Shia identity imbues Iranians with a sense of exceptionalism: after all, it was the influence of Iranian civilization that transformed an Arab tribal creed into a religion that could be endorsed by other nationalities and cultures. Iranians regard Shiism as the embodiment of the Islam intended by the Prophet and regard themselves as the faith's true torchbearers.[2]

Central to Shiism is *mazloumiat*—the principle of confronting injustice, even against great odds and at the cost of self-sacrifice. It has strong appeal for a nation whose history is punctuated by invasions that laid waste to its cities and saw its population repeatedly massacred. Subjugated by a succession of Arabs, Turks, and Mongols, Iranians never succumbed to their conquerors by surrendering their language and traditions. National identity is, therefore, another incontrovertible driver that shapes the Iranian worldview. At its core is a dichotomy between perpetual belief in victimization and optimism in inevitable resurgence. Pride in the richness of Iran's ancient civilization encourages long-term thinking but can also infuse Iranians with misplaced overconfidence.

The Islamic Republic's Strategic Culture

The Iranian worldview is informed by the perceptions, values, and norms that define its strategic culture.[3] Since 1979, the main conduit of this culture has been the regime that was established by Ayatollah Khomeini. His unique interpretation of the *velayat-e-faghih* doctrine envisaged a polity governed by an Islamic jurist or "guardian" with extensive political and theological authority over the state and its people. Khomeini's thesis was controversial, even among Shia clerics, for the powers it granted to the guardian. Equally contentious was its transnational implications for bestowing on the guardian a mandate to intervene in the affairs of the wider Islamic community.[4] Railing against the influence of foreign cultures, Khomeini singled out Western imperialism—and pro-Western governments in Muslim-majority states—as the source of moral corruption and Islamic decline. His *velayat-e-faghih* demanded the total expurgation of non-Islamic influence from Islamic societies, the expulsion of Westerners, and the overthrow of regimes that did their bidding.[5]

The worldview of the Islamic Republic was, therefore, revisionist from its inception. The regime's identity revolves around an in-built hostility toward Western culture, especially its liberal democratic values. It is an antipathy generated partly out of historical grievances—specifically the national and Islamic experience of humiliation by Western imperialists. It is also informed by the Shia principle of *mazloumiat*: the imperative that the oppressed must rise up

against oppressors. The regime views the existing international order as intrinsically unjust: a hegemonic construct created and maintained for the benefit of what Khomeini—and his adherents—describe as "world arrogance."[6] Ideally, the Islamic Republic would like this order to be overturned. For its part, it has adopted a resistance culture domestically and, on the world stage, defiance.

If the regime's rhetoric is to be believed, its overarching objective is to restore the dignity and status of the Islamic world by bringing about conditions that are conducive to a "Muslim awakening."[7] To achieve this, it claims the Islamic Republic will free the "oppressed masses" from the shackles of Western hegemonic influence by exposing the corruption and subservience of governments that serve as Western lackeys. In line with this affectation, the Iranian state media routinely describes the country's supreme leader as *Vali Amr Muslemin*—the "leader of all Muslims." It is a self-righteous ideology that may have carried some substance when Khomeini was alive, but the rhetoric quickly betrays its hollowness when weighed against the core value most cherished by the regime.

Core Value(s) of the Regime

Regime security outweighs all other considerations for the Islamic Republic's leadership. Under its *maslahat-e-nezaam* or expediency diktat, electoral outcomes, the Iranian constitution, Shia traditions, and even Islamic law may be set aside should they contravene the regime's interests.[8] When expedient, the regime has been willing to discard ideology and suspend its antipathy toward even the bitterest of foes. A history of secret negotiations and cooperation with the United States, provision of safe passage for al-Qaeda fighters to enter Iraq, and the arming of Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan are examples of singular pragmatism when the regime has felt imperiled.[9] Even as it vehemently condemns the suffering of Muslims elsewhere, in the name of expediency the self-professed "leader of the Islamic world" can turn a blind eye to the internment of Uighur Muslims in China and oversee its proxies engage in sectarian cleansing in the urban battlefields of Syria.

The nexus between self-preservation and expediency are apparent in the regime's external and internal behavior. Ideologically, the Islamic Republic remains committed to exporting its revolution. But some three decades after the death of Khomeini, the security of the regime is the key variable in all its strategic calculations. Convinced that Washington—and the Saudis and Israelis—are intent on engineering regime change, Tehran is determined to take the war to its enemies in the place and time of its choosing. It is a strategy designed to keep opponents off-balance and provide the regime with leverage in negotiations. Surrounded by hostile states and the might of the U.S. military, Tehran has been using instability as a tactical tool. Knowing that stability is a core U.S. objective in the Middle East—and vital to the security of Israel and the conservative Arab states—the Islamic Republic promotes and aids perpetual radicalization at a substate level.

In creating a network of transnational proxies, Tehran has compensated for its conventional military weakness by enhancing its asymmetrical capabilities. Its substate affiliates—comprised of ideological surrogates, groups with overlapping interests, and mercenaries—are an instrument of deterrence that can be deployed to coerce opponents and project Iranian influence. With thousands of armed militias scattered across the region, Tehran aims to reduce the risk of a direct confrontation with its enemies by making war with Iran a high-cost enterprise.[10] The regime is naturally opportunistic: whenever an opening has presented itself, it has exacerbated and deepened its opponents' difficulties, as with the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. In other instances, it has ensnared adversaries into protracted conflicts, such as the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen.

By aiding so-called revolutionary forces, Tehran hopes to further inflame anti-Western sentiment. In the short term, growing hostility may distract and preoccupy the U.S. and regional opponents, reducing their currency and influence. In the intermediate to long term, Tehran hopes to wear down the United States and its European allies by facilitating their voluntary extrication from the Middle East. Left on their own, Washington's regional partners may either be soft targets or are likely to seek terms and accommodations. In reality, although the Islamic Republic has been a consequential player in major regional events, especially in terms of influencing conflicts, this has entailed considerable political and economic costs without producing the geopolitical outcomes Tehran desires. Its steadfast persistence with a costly policy of limited gains suggests that the expulsion of the West, and the geopolitical reconfiguration of the Middle East, are strategic ideals but regime security remains the core objective.

Regional interventionism is an imperative that is also influenced by domestic developments. With a faltering economy, a rise in sociopolitical discontent, and declining popular legitimacy, the regime has been seeking validation and supporters outside its borders. By pouring money and amenities into mainly Shia Arab communities, the clerical hierarchy has always sought a constituency outside Iran. This goes beyond a desire to project influence: an overseas constituency yields some legitimacy to the regime's pretension that it is a transnational polity dedicated to all Muslims. The resettlement of some of this constituency within Iran also embeds a loyal power base that, if and when necessary, can be deployed against the Iranian population.[11] For these reasons, as its domestic troubles mount, the Islamic Republic is likely to entrench itself further across the Middle East.

An extraterritorial constituency is not without challenges and risks. The majority of Shia communities in the Arab world view Iranian intervention with disdain. Angry protesters—from the shores of Lebanon to Iraqi cities and towns—have been taking to the streets to condemn this interference and what they call "Iranian Islam."[12] Ironically, rather than be embraced as the savior it claims to be, the Islamic Republic is often viewed as an imperialist power by the very communities it regards as its natural overseas constituency. Ethnocultural

differences notwithstanding, Iranian machinations in the Arab world have a history of raising the suspicions of Arab governments, leading to an intensification of sectarian violence and the persecution of Shia Arabs.

Financial investments overseas also stir up domestic resentment. With living standards falling, angry Iranian protesters have periodically taken to the streets to denounce the regime's regional largesse. Chants of "no Gaza, no Lebanon, I give my life for Iran" betray a growing nationalist undertone.[13] In response, the regime has acted quickly and ruthlessly by unleashing violence against unarmed protesters. In the expediency of protecting the regime, the distinction between criminality and the act of sinning has been blurred to dissuade outward expressions of discontent. Even criticism of the clerical leadership can entail prosecution and capital punishment under the crime of "waging war against God."[14]

Identity, Inner Dynamics, and Norms

Even prior to the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Iran's clerics had their own corporate identity: a distinct ethos and outlook shaped by seminary education and manifested by a distinctive dress code and way of speaking. Before 1979, *Ruhaniyat*, the clerical class, was esteemed in Iranian society. With a few notable exceptions, such as the Constitutional Revolution (1905–11) and Iran's short-lived experimentation with popular democracy (1951–53), the *Ulema* (senior clergy) viewed interfering in politics as undignified and beneath them.[15] Instead, the religious establishment gave its full support to the reigning monarch and, in return, received royal patronage and the privilege of consultation in decisions pertaining to social and religious norms.

Khomeini changed this long-standing convention by advocating the politicization of the clergy. In doing so, he contributed to a widening rift between the regime's clerical hierarchy and Shia traditionalists in seminaries. Moreover, political empowerment ensured that his clerical followers would be exposed to the same divisions, temptations, and vested interests that tend to plague most governing classes. In the early postrevolutionary years, internal differences were encapsulated by two factions. Radical ideologues viewed Iran largely as a launching pad for a transnational Islamist struggle. Dismissing Iranian identity, and contemptuous of international protocols and borders, ideologues advocated an all-out regional war against the enemies of Khomeinism. The opposing camp, comprised of pragmatist conservatives, preferred to consolidate the foundations of the regime before embarking on transnational operations. This group was mindful of the sensitivities of the Iranian public for fear that, if their needs were ignored and national interests not upheld, the regime could be imperiled.[16] Both blocs fully subscribed to Khomeini's worldview but differed on strategy and timing.

In the post-Khomeini era, factional differences gradually became subsumed in institutional turf wars and interpersonal enmities.[17] From the 1990s onward, the factions coalesced into two broad camps, representing a conservative coalition and a bloc consisting of technocrats and reformers. The former has broadly

supported the vast powers entrusted in the Office of the Supreme Leader, has close ties with Shia seminaries, religious foundations, the security services, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). It encourages securitization and sociocultural Islamification and retains a deep-seated ideological enmity toward the United States and other liberal democracies. The reform movement seeks to divest the supreme leader of some of their powers by granting elected officials the authority to effect real change. To this end, it promotes a culture of accountability, the liberalization of society and the economy, and the easing of tensions with the West.

Splinter groups within each bloc ensure that factional allegiances are fluid: for instance, a party identified as conservative may align on social issues with reformers but support a hard-line position on the United States. Oddly, the reform movement encompasses individuals who in the 1980s would have been recognized as ideologues, while among hard-liners are pragmatists from the same era. In contrast to the 1980s, factional tensions are no longer confined to strategy but now reflect a divergence in ideology and norms, including differences over each bloc's ambitions for the character of the regime. Increasingly, these disagreements are underlined by the desire of hard-liners to make the final transition to a full-blown revolutionary theocracy by abandoning any residue of republicanism. In contrast, their opponents would like to establish a genuine republic that merely has an Islamist orientation.[18]

The factional rift is exacerbated by a system that allows for limited electoral representation to provide a veneer of popular legitimacy. Conflict between the elected and nonelected organs of the state are often played out in public, though it is not always clear to what extent the drama is real or staged for domestic and international consumption. It is a duality that makes it difficult to understand the processes for decision making and the forces that influence policy making. For instance, it is recognized that a number of organizations with ties to the Office of the Supreme Leader operate outside the remit of the elected government.[19] The executive branch—headed by the president—can neither scrutinize their activities nor control their budget.[20] Among them is the IRGC, whose commanders are only answerable to the supreme leader and whose vested interests and priorities, including extraterritorial operations, can contravene the policies of the government of the day.[21]

Further incongruity is caused by parallel institutions—often, though not always, representing the elected and nonelected elements of the regime. The Islamic Republic has numerous departments and agencies with overlapping responsibilities that foster jurisdictional wrangling. This is exemplified by the 2021 struggle between the Ministry of Interior and the Guardian Council over the required criteria for presidential candidates.[22] Rivalries between parallel organizations that undercut one another has reached such dangerous proportions among the intelligence community that a former minister has publicly warned the authorities about its consequences. In a 2021 interview, Ali Younesi, a former intelligence chief (2000–2005), publicly denounced the culture of "in-

fighting" between "parallel organizations" that attack one another and, in so doing, allow "foreign infiltrators" to operate with impunity across the country.[23]

These structural shortcomings are accentuated by the regime's penchant for inundating the public with contradictory statements on issues ranging from the rate of unemployment, inflation, to who gave the order for the security forces to open fire on unarmed protesters.[24] Secrecy, misdirection, and misrepresentation have become norms for the Islamic Republic's authorities. *Taqiyya*—the practice of resorting to dissimulation—is a well-known principle in Islamic tradition. If Mohammad Javad Zarif is to be believed, the culture of dissimulation is now embedded within the regime's inner core. As revealed in a leaked interview with Iran's foreign minister, after the Ukrainian passenger flight was shot down by an IRGC missile in January 2020, Revolutionary Guard commanders adamantly denied any responsibility for the incident, and in a closed meeting urged Zarif and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to strenuously deny the regime's culpability.[25]

Officials so routinely make statements that are later exposed as untrue, and habitually attack and contradict one another, that public confidence has been steadily eroded in the regime's ability to govern. The bitter blame game has fostered a culture of apathy among a disillusioned electorate who are sporadically manifesting signs of passive resistance.[26] The latest in a long list is the mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the prevailing culture of securitization, the policy of politicizing the pandemic has resulted not only in widely suspected distortion of the death rates but also in endemic failures by the authorities to deliver on their vaccination promises—with no single minister or state body assuming responsibility for the fiasco.[27]

Nuclear Controversy

Iran's nuclear program encapsulates many of the characteristics that define the regime's strategic culture. The Islamic Republic vehemently objects to international efforts that seek to monitor and curb its nuclear activities. Its indignation stems in part from a worldview that portrays the West as duplicitous and hypocritical. The regime likes to point out that Iran's nuclear program dates back to the prerevolutionary era, when the Pahlavi monarchy (1925–79) was openly expressing a desire to turn Iran into a world power.[28] Yet, despite such blatant ambitions, the country's nascent nuclear program received direct Western assistance from both the United States and the Europeans.[29]

Discarded in the immediate postrevolutionary period, renewed interest in the nuclear program arose in the mid-1980s. Although the Islamic Republic maintains that its program is strictly civilian—with the supreme leader issuing a religious *fatwa* (ruling) on the matter—it has met with a wall of international condemnation. This plays into the regime's ideological narrative that portrays Iran as a victim of selective application of international law, and the West as hypocritical for ignoring the nuclear activities of other countries, such as Israel and India. The West, according to the regime, is determined to protect its vest-

ed interests in a hegemonic order by keeping the Islamic Republic boxed in and preventing its rise from challenging the existing system.[30]

Publicly, the Iranian regime maintains that its nuclear program is necessary for generating power for a large country with a growing population. Its infrastructure, it insists, has been devastated by four decades of sanctions and lack of foreign investment. When confronted with the fact that Iran has vast reserves of oil and gas, the regime offers the further justification that civilian nuclear power is a right under international law; and conforms to the Islamic Republic's mantra of forging an independent path free from foreign influence. While these explanations should not be dismissed out of hand, the controversy surrounding Iran's program often obscures a simple truth: the preservation of the regime is the key to understanding Tehran's nuclear outlook.

Tellingly, it was around 2002 that the scale of Iran's nuclear program was first publicly exposed by an Iranian opposition group that revealed covert facilities and extensive investment in dual-use technology. Iran's nuclear ambitions make sense in the light of the geopolitical developments that accompanied the Global War on Terrorism.[31] The U.S. military buildup along the Islamic Republic's periphery, President George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech, which lumped Iran with North Korea and Iraq as potential targets—and Vice President Dick Cheney's ominous threats about "real men" marching on Tehran, were all indicative of an existential threat.[32] The fate of Saddam Hussein in Iraq—in sharp contrast to a nuclear-armed North Korea—would have been a lesson not lost on the Iranian leadership.

It may seem counterintuitive to propose a link between regime security and nuclear policy when the latter has precipitated a raft of secondary U.S. and European punitive measures on top of international sanctions imposed on Iran by the United Nations (UN) Security Council. Undoubtedly, it is a high-cost strategy that seems to yield little in tangible dividends and has instead put the Islamic Republic in an ever-greater bind economically while confirming its status as an international pariah. Yet, the fact that Tehran is willing to accept these costs—even at the risk of further alienating a disgruntled Iranian population—shows the imperative of the nuclear program for the regime.

Alongside Iran's growing ballistic missile capability, nuclear technology provides the regime with leverage in negotiations with the world's leading powers. Under the cover of nuclear talks, the Islamic Republic's representatives can engage in direct discussions on a wide range of issues with their Western counterparts, including the Americans. Drawing on support from Russia and China, albeit intermittently, Iran's nuclear diplomacy looks to secure short-term concessions from the West in search of longer-term political and security settlements. It uses the threat of uranium enrichment and the installation of ever-more advanced centrifuges as bargaining chips to sustain the dialogue. Negotiations may also occasionally provide the regime with an opportunity to play off the European powers against one another and against Washington.[33]

Tehran's ultimate objective of securing guarantees against regime change have not so far materialized, but the 2015 *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA) shows that its nuclear policy has not been entirely in vain.[34] Leading world powers know that, short of a major military undertaking, Iran's nuclear program can only be slowed down—mainly through sanctions, sabotage, and targeted assassinations—but cannot be entirely halted nor Tehran's know-how be quickly reversed. Conversely, high-profile nuclear negotiations have given the regime some international prestige, a platform, and much-needed domestic collateral by providing a weary Iranian public with hope of an end to the sanctions regime.

In the West, there are contrasting opinions over the efficacy of negotiating with the ayatollahs and disagreements about whether Iran has a covert nuclear weapons program or merely dual-use installations that can be converted into something more sinister. According to reports produced during the past two decades by the U.S. intelligence community, the aim of the regime may not be to produce weapons per se but to have the capability to do so.[35] This has raised questions about Tehran's intermediate- to long-term objectives, especially as it continues to master the art of ballistic missile technology. Nor are international concerns alleviated when Iran's nuclear program is managed by the IRGC—the organization entrusted with the regime's expeditionary operations, including illicit activities such as money laundering and traffic in small arms and training of a host of regional substate entities.

The ambivalence that surrounds Iran's nuclear intentions is characteristic of the regime. So is Tehran's repeated attempts at dissimilation. Misrepresentations of the program as entirely civilian, and the camouflaging of key facilities, are consistent with the norms of the Islamic Republic. They go hand in hand with measures conceived to mislead international inspectors, such as the geographical dispersion of nuclear installations, which have the dual purpose of discouraging aerial bombing. Also characteristic of the regime is the bifurcation of nuclear functions between the Office of the Supreme Leader and elected officials. Jurisdiction over nuclear policy lies exclusively with Ayatollah Khomeini. Yet, delegations dispatched to nuclear negotiation are diplomats who tend to be nominated by the elected government, even if they operate under strict instructions of the supreme leader.

In practice, the executive and legislative branches of the Iranian government have no say on nuclear policy. But this has not stopped rival factions from attacking one another—or the elected government—for perceived shortcomings. The Hassan Rouhani administration, for example, is regularly targeted by parliamentary hard-liners for making too many concessions to the West.[36] Surprisingly, the regime allows for a lively discourse to play out in the media that is imbued with contrasting points of view regarding Iran's handling of nuclear diplomacy. Naturally, there is never any acknowledgment of the limitations imposed on negotiators by the supreme leader nor his culpability as the country's

ultimate nuclear arbiter. As with other spheres of life in the Islamic Republic, there is palpable dissonance between who controls and shapes policy and the assigning of responsibility and blame.

Ever since President Donald J. Trump unilaterally pulled the United States out of the treaty, voices that consider the JCPOA as "capitulation" to the West have become conspicuously louder in Iran. Instead of the boom in trade and foreign investment that was promised by the JCPOA, the Islamic Republic has been subjected to what the Iranian leadership calls economic warfare. A perpetual sense of victimization and outrage at Western duplicity has led to pressure by hard-liners for Iran to abrogate its existing commitments under JCPOA. In December 2020, a parliamentary bill was passed to stop all international inspections.[37] But such theatrics by Iran's elected institutions do not belie the reality that nuclear policy is made elsewhere. Tehran will remain engaged in nuclear negotiations because it desperately needs economic relief to ease the pressure on the regime and, ideally, a settlement that provides it with security guarantees. The 2021 presidential victory of Ebrahim Raisi—a man with close links to the supreme leader and the security services—will not change this imperative.

Growing Tensions

When considering the Iranian worldview, we must acknowledge that modern Iran is a nation-state of around 85 million people. The majority may identify as Persians, but the country is also home to a growing Azeri Turkic (Azerbaijani) population as well as Kurds, Balochis, Lurs, Arabs, and other ethnicities. While predominantly Shia Muslim, Iran has a Christian Armenian and Assyrian community dating back to antiquity, and the largest Jewish population in the Middle East outside of Israel. The Iranian-born diaspora around the world, estimated at around 4 million, has a diverse worldview shaped partly by its environment. Additionally, we must be aware of the *Persianate*: the term scholars use for societies along Iran's periphery whose history, language, and culture are extensively influenced by Iranian traditions.[38]

Yet, since 1979, the Islamic Republic has used the extensive tools at its disposal to submerge Shia and Iranian national identity in subordination to the regime's Khomeinist ideology. In projecting itself as the embodiment of Shia Islam, it wears its international pariah status as a badge of honor by portraying Iran's isolation as the virtue of *mazloumiat*—the fate that befalls the righteous in the struggle against the injustices of tyrannical oppression. As a result, it has formalized a sense of perpetual victimization by portraying the country as being consistently under siege—attacked by domestic and international enemies for no other fault than defying a grievously unjust international order and exposing the malevolence of its hegemonic benefactors.[39]

In response to stringent international sanctions, the regime continuously urges Iranians to accept the sacrifices necessary for economic and cultural resistance.[40] While a convenient rationalization for the regime's domestic failures and its decades of economic mismanagement, it is a narrative that is wearing

thin. By inextricably identifying itself with Shiism, and by hijacking its rituals and traditions to its service, the clerical hierarchy has contributed to a widening dissonance between public and private religion. Although opinion polls are not readily available in a country that is autocratically governed, reports suggest a growing rift between people's private beliefs and what they disapprovingly regard as *Islam-e-Akhondi*—the "Islam of the clerics."[41] It is not clear whether behind closed doors Iranians are abandoning Islam, Shiism, or merely the regime's representations of it. But 40 years of Islamism is changing popular perceptions of religion.

A sharp decline in mosque attendance and negative attitudes toward the clerical class have been accompanied by a rise in secularism and covert conversions to other religions, including Iran's pre-Islamic Zoroastrian faith and, in particular, Christianity.[42] The regime is also finding itself at the wrong end of the very resistance culture it has been promoting. Not coincidentally, the eternal struggle against tyranny is just as much a central theme in Iranian national mythology as it is in Shiism. From chants of "death to the dictator" by protesters condemning the supreme leader, to women pushing back against the mandatory hijab, a sizable segment of the Iranian public exhibits its disenchantment with social restrictions and "clerical Islam" in everyday life.[43]

Not unlike the structures of the regime, duality is a characteristic feature of Iranian culture. Visitors are often surprised by the disparity between the average Iranian's conceit in public and how they conduct themselves in private. The experience of two and a half millennia of turbulence and change has instilled in Iranians a predilection for playing the long game: perseverance in adversity and not revealing too much of one's intentions under duress or in negotiations. These traits are identifiable in the way the Islamic Republic has operated internationally. Domestically, however, the regime is not immune from its dangers. Twentieth-century Iranian history shows that popular expressions of support for a regime can be fleeting, with demonstrators quickly changing sides when expedient.[44] The mass rallies that officials claim show passionate enthusiasm for the Islamic Republic may be subject to this pattern, not least because the authorities are known to use a combination of handouts and intimidation of public sector workers to bolster numbers.[45]

Just as problematic for the regime is a steady resurgence in Iranian nationalism. As heirs of a succession of great empires, and as proprietors of a language that was once lingua franca from the Indian subcontinent to Anatolia, Iranians have an exaggerated view of their rightful place in the world.[46] For a time, this played into the regime's interventionist proclivities. While frowning on manifestations of pride in Iran's pre-Islamic history, the clerical leadership has periodically—and selectively—used nationalism by redefining it within Islamist ideology and incorporating it into its narrative. For example, by framing the country's nuclear policy as a matter of national pride, and by depicting international curbs as efforts to prevent Iran from reclaiming its rightful place as a regional power, the regime has successfully co-opted nationalism in support of

its controversial program. Similarly, in drawing attention to the substitution of "Arabian" for the Persian Gulf, the regime insists that its invocation by Western commentators shows that enmity is not confined to the Islamic Republic but is directed more perniciously at Iran's heritage.

By casting itself as the champion of Iranian national unity, the regime has sought to link itself to the survival of the nation-state: without the Islamic Republic, it warns, the West will dismember the country along ethnic lines to prevent Iranian resurgence.[47] There are, however, tensions between the regime's selective application of nationalism and Iranian collective identity and attitudes. For instance, the clerical hierarchy celebrates the Arab-Muslim conquest of Persia as a splendid turning point in history whereas, for a vast majority of Iranians, it was nothing short of a travesty.[48] The regime's diminishing popularity has seen a commensurate upsurge in public fascination with Iran's pre-Islamic past. Annual gatherings around the tomb of Cyrus the Great—the founder of the Persian Empire—have been accompanied by public defiance in commemoration of Iranianism sans Islam. Notable among them is the Zoroastrian ritual of jumping over fires before the Iranian New Year—a tradition that the authorities have been unable to stop despite concerted efforts.

The struggle to keep the "un-Islamic" behavior of the public at bay has been echoed in political circles by warnings about the return of the "Iranian School"—the fear that the prevailing Islamist ideology might be subsumed into Iranianism.[49] Keeping Iranian nationalism submerged is likely to be a challenge. Iran's population is young and has no memory of the heyday of the revolution. It looks to the West for inspiration, and it is influenced by a large and strident expatriate community that is predominantly secular, nationalistic, and intensely hostile to the Islamic Republic. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Iranian literature, language, and ancient festivities have also seen a mini-revival in the Persianate—notably the countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan. Even as the regime continues to promulgate Islamism in favor of Iranianism, Iranian identity remains a powerful driver in the strategic culture of a people who are more likely to turn their back on Khomeinism than abandon their history and traditions.

Conclusion

Since 1979, the Islamic Republic regime has been the dominant voice in expressing the Iranian worldview. In the service of promoting Khomeinism, its leadership has often demonstrated uncanny pragmatism in drawing selectively from Iran's Shia and national identity to build consensus around itself. But rising discontent over draconian social controls, mismanagement of the economy, and falling living standards have been chipping away at the regime's popular legitimacy. The intensification of factional politics, interdepartmental rivalries, and the culture of accusations and recriminations among officials are paralyzing the regime from within. With the old consensus crumbling, recent developments suggest that the supreme leader—and his orbit—are intent on bringing

an end to structural and factional divisions by replacing plurality with an absolutist theocracy.[50] This may create a more unitary state but at the cost of stripping away any remaining vestiges that connect the regime to the popular will. History shows that no regime that has subordinated Iranian national identity to its ideology has survived for long.

Endnotes

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The Russian Mindset and War
Between Westernizing the East and Easternizing the West

Ofer Fridman, PhD

Abstract: Russia is the biggest country in the world, stretching from Vladivostok in the far east to Kaliningrad in the west. It bridges Europe and Asia not only in geographic terms, but also, as many social scientists observe, in its culture, society, and the way to think about the world. The Russian mindset is neither European nor Asian. Instead, it is a unique puzzle constructed from the ideas, habits, and practices of both. Therefore, this article argues that in an attempt to decode Russian strategic behavior, special attention should be given to the complex interplay in the Russian mind between both Western and Eastern ways of seeing things and interpreting events.

Keywords: Russian strategy, strategic mindset, military science, Russian history

In discussing the Russian mindset, the first thing that comes to mind is the famous verse written by Fyodor Tyutchev in 1866:

> Russia cannot be known by the mind
> Nor measured by the common mile:
> Her status is unique, without kind—
> Russia can only be believed in.[1]

In Russia and the West, many books, treatises, essays, and articles have been written discussing the mysterious "Russian soul" and its incompatibili-

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ty with Western logic. Indeed, as contemporary Russian political philosopher Boris Kagarlitsky put it: "universal 'European' models usually failed in Russia." However, he also added that "the attempts to analyse Russian history from the standpoint of national exclusivity and 'originality' hopelessly failed as well."[2] Instead, he suggested to understand Russia's history within the complex system of economic, political, and ideological interaction between the West and the East.

Following Kagarlitsky's suggestion, this article sheds light on how the Western and Eastern ways of thinking about the world in general and war in particular have expressed themselves in the Russian approach to war, strategy, and military science.

Russian Mindset between the West and the East

Ivan Solonevich, a renowned Russian political philosopher of the first part of the twentieth century, claimed:

> Russia is not Europe, though it is neither Asia or Eurasia. It is simply Russia. A completely peculiar national and cultural complex, equally distinguishable from both Europe and Asia.[3]

Such an isolationist view of the Russian history and identity is very popular in Russia and "is shared by a significant part of Russian intellectuals, regardless of their ideological convictions."[4] As Kagarlitsky puts it: "Samuel F. Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations* somehow became instantly fashionable, even before anyone had time to read it."[5]

For the last 200 years, two main ideological camps have been waging a bitter fight for the interpretation of Russian history, identity, and destiny in the world: the Westerners and the Slavophiles. The former see Russia as a part of the European civilization that, due to unfortunate circumstances, found itself left behind. The latter see Russia as a unique civilization on its own, "the main features of which," as Solonevich put it, "were quite clearly defined earlier than European influence or Asian invasions could leave their mark on Russia."[6] In other words, while the Westerners see Russian exceptionalism as an anomaly (that should be eliminated by turning Russia into a "proper" European state), the Slavophiles see it as Russia's "special way" (that should be cherished and preserved at any costs). Moreover, both camps are "absolutely unanimous in their understanding of Russian history as isolated and 'special,' not subject to the common in other countries' logic."[7]

There is, however, a third, though not very popular camp of historians and political scientists, who argue that Russia's uniqueness can be explained not by the "mysterious Russian Orthodox soul" or failing attempts to catch up with the West, but by the specific geographic, economic, political, and cultural position of Russia between the West and the East.[8] Their lack of popularity stems from two main reason. First, they suggest that Russian mindset has been shaped by the "barbaric" East—the Mongols, against whom, according to the

commonly accepted in Russia argument, Russia selflessly defended the Western civilizations, allowing them to flourish during the Renaissance.[9] Second, the complex idea that "in the national body of Russia, there are islands and oases of Europe and Asia as well" contradicts the simplicity of the arguments presented by both the Westerners and the Slavophiles.[10] This idea neither claims that Russia was left on the backyard of Europe at the behest of history and should do everything to catch up and become a "normal" member of the European family, nor does it advocate for the unique Russian Orthodox civilization developed in isolation. Instead, it claims that Russian history is a process of blending and mixing of Eastern and Western traditions, views, practices, and philosophies.[11] It claims that Russia's geographical, historical, and cultural place between European civilization in the West and Islamic, Confucian, and Indus civilizations in the East has played an instrumental role in designing the Russian character throughout the whole of Russian history.[12] Pyotr Chaadayev, one of the greatest Russian philosophers of the nineteenth century, whose views, which were controversial for his time, instigated the polarization between the Westerners and the Slavophiles, envisioned the yet-to-come destiny of Russia:

> Stretching between two great divisions of the world, between the East and the West, leaning one elbow on China, the other on Germany, we should have combined in ourselves two great principles of spiritual nature—imagination and reason, and unite in our civilization the history of the entire world.[13]

If the Russian mindset is a puzzle constructed from the pieces of Eastern imagination and Western reason, then the first step toward its assembling should be a better understanding of these two different worldviews.

Much ink has been spilled discussing the differences between the Western and Eastern philosophies, cultures, traditions, characters, and mindsets: from general analysis of cultural differences rooted in different history, geography, religion, and social composition to very practical examinations of how these differences have shaped respective organizational cultures and leadership patterns.[14] The most intriguing analyses, however, come from cultural psychologists, who argue that Western and Eastern societies not only see the world differently, but they think about it differently.[15] According to cultural psychologist Richard E. Nisbett, the difference between the Western and Eastern ways of thinking can be explained by the difference between the Western atomistic worldview, shaped by the independent and individualistic nature of the Western society, and the Eastern holistic approach, rooted in the Eastern traditionally interdependent and collective social structures.[16] Therefore, in an attempt to understand the puzzle of the Russian approach to war and strategy, the following examination focuses on how the pieces of the Western (American) atomistic worldview have been combined with the Eastern (Chinese) holistic approach to produce a unique (and often heterogeneous) mix.[17]

Understanding the Pieces:
American vs. Chinese Approaches to War

Much has been written on the American way of war—from the classic *The American Way of War* by Russell F. Weigley, to more contemporary works by Benjamin Buley, Colin S. Gray, Adrian R. Lewis, and others.[18] While each one of the scholars sheds light on a set of different aspects, most agree that in the American mind, a war is seen as an unfortunate obstacle—an anomaly, which is "not a continuation of political intercourse, but a symptom of its failure."[19] As Gray put it: "Americans have approached warfare as regrettable occasional evil that has to be concluded as decisively and rapidly as possible."[20] This isolation of war from the general context of normal international relations seems to be consistent with "the Western focus on particular objects in isolation from their context," which is rooted in "the individualistic or independent nature of the Western society."[21] This American atomistic attitude extends not only to their understanding of war but also to their general interpretation of international relations. Since they see the world as "a relatively simple place, composed of discreet objects that can be understood without undue attention to context," their tendency to demonize the leaders of their adversaries as the main drivers of confrontation, at the expense of the political context these leaders operate in, should not be surprising.[22]

While Americans attribute behavior to the actor, Chinese people tend to attribute the same behavior to context.[23] The Eastern Asian cultures see the world as a much more complex place, understandable in terms of a systemic whole rather than in terms of isolated parts. "The collective and interdependent nature of Asian society," Nisbett argues, "is consistent with Asian's broad, contextual view of the world and their belief that events are highly complex and determined by many factors."[24] This Chinese orientation toward a holistic view of the world, rooted in the philosophy of Confucianism, has predisposed their mindset toward solving their problems through searching for a systemic balance and harmony, rather than the Western tendency to isolate problematic elements and eliminate them. Since the Renaissance, this search for harmony in Confucianism has often led Western scholars to advocate the pacifist nature of Chinese culture.[25] For example, writing about "the pacifist character of Confucianism," Max Weber claimed, "the Confucianists, who are ultimately pacifist literati oriented to inner political welfare, naturally faced military powers with aversion or with lack of understanding."[26] Aside from Confucianism, virtually all strains of Chinese philosophy frowned on the use of force, including Laozi (Daoist), Mozi (Mohist), and even Sunzi (Sun Tzu).[27] Indeed, Sun Tzu uses the word *li* (force), only nine times in his entire *Art of War*, while Carl von Clausewitz uses *Gewalt* (force or violence) eight times in the two paragraphs that define war alone.[28] The popularity of this cultural argument cannot be overemphasized, though, a more careful examination of the Chinese approach to war suggests that if the path to balance and harmony should be paved by the means of war, the Chinese do not hesitate to do it.[29]

However, going to war, the Chinese, unlike their American counterparts, do not define it as a violent anomaly in international relations. Instead, they see it as a natural interaction within the complex system of interactions, in which violence has an important, though not determinative, role. From Sun Tzu's maxim "to break the enemy's resistance without fighting is the foremost excellence," to the contemporary *Unrestricted Warfare,* the Chinese mindset approaches war as a complex mix of interactions (violent or not), when "whoever is able to mix a tasty and unique cocktail for the future banquet of war will ultimately be able to wear the laurels of success."[30]

Constructing the Puzzle: Russian Mindset and War, Strategy, and Military Science

Analyzing the differences between Western and Eastern thinking, Nisbett starts with philosophers, acknowledging that they themselves are the products rather than "the progenitors of their respective cultures."[31] Therefore, in an attempt to understand the Russian approach to war, it seems right to start with the history of Russian philosophy and its place on the West–East divide.

On the one hand, a brief examination of the traditional roots of Russian philosophy suggests that the Russian view of the world must be much closer to the Chinese holism, rather than Western atomism. "In the world," wrote a prominent Russian imperial philosopher Vladimir Odoyevsky, "as in a good cotton mill, every cog clings to another."[32] In analyzing the manifestation of holism in the Russian philosophy, Alexander Ishutin argued that "while in the Western philosophical discourse the idea of the systemic whole is just one of the philosophical paradigms, in the Russian philosophy—it is an important, fundamental and unifying component."[33]

On the other hand, when it comes to the philosophical view on the phenomenon of war, it seems that the long history of military interactions with the West had undermined the Eastern orientation of the Russian mindset. Russian philosophers, historians, and military thinkers have been traditionally divided between those who see war as a natural part of the nation's interaction (as the systemic whole) and those who call to isolate it as something evil that contradicts human nature.[34] This contradiction was best demonstrated by Fyodor Dostoevsky's short story "Paradoxalist," in which he explores the contradiction between war as "a scourge on humanity" and war that "brings benefits only, and, therefore, absolutely necessary" as a dialogue between two protagonists.[35]

During the last 200 years, several ideological divisions have been shaping the interpretation of the nature, role, and place of war in Russia—similar to the aforementioned division between the Westerners and the Slavophiles, though without any specific correlation. The first divide is about the place of war in human life. On the one side of the argument are those who consider war as an inherent and eternal part of the holistic system of international relations: from General of Infantry Genrikh Leer, the nineteenth century's founding father of Russian strategic school, who saw war as "a quite natural phenomenon in the

lives of societies . . . one of the most rapid and powerful civilisers of humanity," to contemporary Major General Alexander Vladimirov, who argued that "war has become an inherent part of human existence and its specific characteristic, and will be as such as long as humanity exists."[36] On the opposite side are those who argue that declaring war to be something inherent to human nature is a mistake: from Lieutenant General Evgeny Martynov, "a distinguished Russian Imperial and Soviet military theoretician," who wrote his seminal 1899 *The Responsibilities of Politics in Its Relations with Strategy* "in anticipation of those long-desired times when diplomacy will find a way to abolish armed clashes between peoples," to contemporary Major General Ignat Danilenko, who argued that an assumption that wars could never end "limits the study of war as a social phenomenon . . . [as] it restricts military science to the problems of preparing and waging armed struggle only."[37]

Another interesting division in Russian understanding of war is about the role of violence. Some Russian thinkers, similar to the Chinese tradition, define war in a broader sense, in which violence is an important, though not necessarily required ingredient. Others, being good students of the Western thought in general and Clausewitz in particular, limit war to the violent use of force only. In Imperial Russia, General of Artillery Nikolai Medem, "Russia's first professor of strategy," criticized Clausewitz's emphasis on the use of force, arguing that his focus on battles is too simplistic as "all and any considerations should have the goal of weakening or destroying, by whatever means, the enemy's forces and depriving him of the means to defend himself."[38] On the contrary, Leer echoed Clausewitz, arguing that "war is one of the instruments in the hands of politics, the most extreme instrument to achieve a state's goal."[39] In the early Soviet Union, these were Major General Alexander Svechin and Lieutenant General Andrey Snesarev, who sought to expand the nature of war beyond armed struggle—writings of whom were prohibited in the post–World War II Soviet military thought that adopted a more Western worldview that "war consists of armed struggle only."[40] However, the collapse of the Soviet Union reignited the debate on whether violence and armed struggle are definitive characteristics of war or whether it should be understood in a broader context of all means and methods.[41]

While the Russian understanding of war has been jumping through the loops of the Western approach that tries to restrict it to a violent clash of wills that should be resolved as quickly as possible and the Eastern approach that sees war in the broader context of all means and methods of international relations, it seems right to argue that the Russian understanding of strategy has always inclined toward the Eastern holistic worldview. The American traditional atomistic disaggregation of strategy into the ends, means, and ways, which has been generally adopted by the West, has never found supporters in Russia.[42] From Imperial Russian general Genrikh Leer, through early-Soviet major general Alexander Svechin and late-Soviet marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, to the contemporary dictionary of the Russian Ministry of Defence, strategy has always been under-

stood in Russia as an art of combining different elements to achieve the desired goals in the specific context of a given situation.[43] "All great commanders," argued Medem in 1836, "were truly great because they based their actions not on pre-drafted rules, but on a skillful combination of all means and circumstances."[44] Almost a hundred years later, in the beginning of the twentieth century, Alexander Svechin confirmed this understanding, stating that "strategy is an art of combining preparations to war with groups of operations to achieve the goal defined to the armed forces."[45] Almost another hundred years later, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, Alexander Vladimirov argued that "national strategy is the theory, practice and art of governing a state . . . [that] defines and fulfills a combination of strategic (fundamental) goals, directions of [the] state's existence and actions . . . as well as the security, development and wellbeing of its people."[46] Fully adopting the Eastern tradition that emphasizes the constantly changing nature of reality, rather than the Western tendency to seek universal rules, Russian strategists have traditionally highlighted the importance of the contextual situation to create the most effective combination.[47] In other words, the Russian view on strategy-making is much closer to the approach expressed by Liang Qiao and Xiangsui Wang in their *Unrestricted Warfare* than to Arthur F. Lykke's formula of "ends-ways-means" and its Western followers.[48]

While the Russian perspective on the nature of war has fluctuated between the Western and Eastern approaches, and the understanding of strategy has gravitated toward the Eastern tradition, the history of the development of Russian military science presents a good example of the fusion between Western reason and logic and the Eastern type of dialecticism that seeks "not to decontextualize but to see things in their appropriate context."[49] As discussed, the Russians incline to see war not as an isolated event, but as a phenomenon embedded in the meaningful whole of society. Therefore, it is not surprising that they were among the first to argue that war is a sociological phenomenon, analysis of which should be done through the prism of all social sciences. Years before the beginning of World War I, General of Infantry Nikolai Michnevich, coined "sociology of war," arguing for its creation as an extension of social sciences on military affairs.[50] During the interwar period, another Russian general, Lieutenant General Nikolai Golovin, advocated the idea that "any researcher who desires to analyse war not through a narrow 'utilitarian-military' prism, but through a 'purely scientific' one, must . . . understand that the main goal of the analysis of war is its examination as a phenomenon of social life."[51] By the end of the twentieth century, General of the Army Makhmut Gareev, argued in the same vein: "in his research endeavours, any military researcher must use all fields of sciences related to war and military, equally operating with socio-political, economic, mathematic and other fields of knowledge."[52] By combining the Eastern tradition that "events do not occur in isolation from other events, but are always embedded in a meaningful whole," with the Western inclination "to use logical rules to understand events," the Russians created a system of military science that consists of numerous laws, interconnected meth-

odologies and interacting postulates—"the methodological polestar for how to think about war in a scientific fashion."[53]

Conclusion

As demonstrated, the Russian views on war, strategy, and military science, similar to the Russian culture and general mindset, combine both the Western atomistic approach and the Eastern holistic way of thinking. However, as it was shown, the Russians do not necessarily subscribe to either of them, but pick and choose from both, whatever fits their own blended way of thinking about the world.

For example, in their understanding of war in general and the place of armed violence in it in particular, there is no clear gravitation to either of the sides. The debate on whether violence is a fundamental part of war or if a war can be waged by nonmilitary means without violence has been an open question in the Russian military discourse for the last 200 years, with no visible solution on the horizon. However, when it comes to understanding strategy, the Russian mindset clearly gravitated toward the Eastern holistic tradition that seeks contextualized solutions and rejects the idea of universally applicable rules and formulas. A completely different tendency can be seen in the case of Russian military science, which represents a good example of a harmonious combination between the Western logic and reason and the Eastern tendency to see the bigger picture. In other words, the Russian worldview is constructed through the process of mixing and matching these two very different approaches, producing something uniquely Russian. It adopts what works and rejects what does not.

In the beginning of the Great Patriotic War (1941–45), the Soviet propaganda machine, following its Western counterparts, tried to isolate the Nazi regime from the German people. However, this ideological separation between the German people and the Nazi regime seemed too artificial to the Russian mind, shaped by the idea of collective responsibility and punishment.[54] The collectivistic roots in the Russian mindset advocate the responsibility of an individual for the whole collective, and vice versa; therefore, the notion of separation between Nazi Germany and the German people simply did not resonate.[55] As a result, the message was adjusted to make the word "fascist" synonymous with "German": "the Soviet propaganda machine transformed everything associated with Germany (regime, military and people) into one evil, inhuman, and barbaric collective of faceless creatures."[56] Thus, the Soviets (Russians) first tried the Western approach that attributes behavior to the actor (the Nazi regime); however, once it failed, they turned to the Eastern approach that attributes behavior to the context (everything German).

This raises an important question: How would one know whether the Russian approach gravitates toward the Western way of thinking or the Eastern one? The problem is that there is no clear-cut answer to this question. There are, however, two recommendations that can help find an answer. First, in an

attempt to decode Russian behavior, researchers should be aware of the complex interplay in the Russian mind between both Western and Eastern ways of seeing things and interpreting events. This recommendation is particularly important for the Western scholars who intuitively recognize the Western influences, but just as easily omit the Eastern traditions with which they are less familiar. The Russians are indeed good students of Clausewitz. But this is the point—they are his students, not followers. They Russified him through their Eastern minds and souls. They filtrated Clausewitz through the Eastern holistic imagination, and, therefore, any attempt to analyze Russia only through the Western prism would ultimately be one-sided and misleading. The second recommendation is to continue the approach adopted by this article: to examine not merely the content of analyzed phenomenon but also the process, as well as the multitude of factors that influenced it throughout its development.

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China's Identity through a Historical Lens

Neil Munro, PhD

Abstract: This article takes a strategic culture approach to describe China's identity. It narrates how historical events of the past 150 years have shaped tensions between national feelings of superiority and inferiority, demands for development and equality, the thirst for freedom and longing for security, and China's territorial ambitions and geopolitical reality. It then discusses China's approach to two areas of potential conflict—Taiwan and the South China Sea. It concludes with reflections on Chinese ideas about international order.

Keywords: strategic culture, China, identity, international relations, Taiwan, Chinese Communist Party, CCP

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to give a simple description of China's identity by summarizing salient features of its history and relating them to current issues in great power competition. The importance of understanding China has never been greater, particularly for military and diplomatic leaders of the world's preeminent power, the United States. In part, this is due to rising tension in the bilateral relationship, where terms like *strategic competition* and *rivalry* increasingly displace *partnership* or *cooperation*. In part, this is due to the West's relative ignorance of China compared to China's understanding of the West. Popular understandings of China are tainted by the influence of previous generations of writers who, in the service of various imperial projects, constructed the East as exotic, effeminate, and dangerous.[1] This leads to two common mistakes. The first is to demonize China, regarding everything Chinese

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with suspicion, skepticism, fear, or mistrust. The second is to idealize it, treating Chinese knowledge as a source of special insights and taking too seriously some of the things that the Chinese like to say about themselves, such as "China seeks a harmonious world." In part, the need to understand China better comes from the brute fact of China's rise: its gross domestic product (GDP), which is second only to that of the United States, or bigger if one measures it in purchasing power parities; and its military capabilities, which while still less impressive than those of the United States and Russia, are on a rising trajectory. [2]

This article takes a strategic culture approach.[3] The author is concerned with describing the key historical events that formed China's identity. Identity is defined as the "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."[4] The international relations approach closest to strategic culture is constructivism, which problematizes the formation and transformation of state interests and provides explanations for them in terms of historical processes of identity formation.[5] As Jeannie L. Johnson points out, "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."[6] Therefore, being equipped with a rational mind and a set of internationally transferable assumptions about state behavior is often insufficient. Strategists need to ground such assumptions in a deep understanding of the identity of the actor.

China's identity is the outcome of a series of tensions emerging from its history. China has risen as a great power in the modern world after taking several wrong turns and what it describes as a "Century of Humiliation." Along the way, tensions have emerged between feelings of superiority and inferiority, between the needs for development and equality, between demands for freedom and order, and between China's territorial ambitions and geopolitical reality. John Gerard Ruggie suggests a conception of time as "different temporal forms that bring deeper and wider 'presents' into view" and a conception of space as a "social construct that people, somehow, invent . . . [and which] generates emergent properties of its own."[7] Seen in this light, China's identity is a complex historical phenomenon, but there is no mysterious essence that one must have spent decades in China to grasp.

The structure of the article is chronological, following the broad outlines of Chinese history during the past century and a half, before opening out into a discussion of current geopolitical issues and concluding with a characterization of the tensions underlying China's identity.

China's Inferiority-Superiority Complex

China is driven to be an overachiever. Iver B. Neumann writes that "if Russia had an inferiority complex towards Europe in 1991, a quarter-century down the road that has been inverted into a superiority complex."[8] Neumann's starting point is that all states have a need for recognition and that citizens' beliefs

determine the grounds on which recognition may be sought. China is different from Russia in that instead of a kind of defensive pride, China continues to have feelings of superiority and inferiority simultaneously. Psychologists define "subjective overachievement" as the co-occurrence of self-doubt and anxiety over performance, which drives an individual to exert extra effort, leading to better results than expected.[9] Like the straight-A high school student who lacks popularity but works harder than their peers and eventually ends up with a much better income, China has made it in the material sense.

However, China's feeling of superiority does not rest on GDP alone. As its diplomats never tire of reminding foreign journalists, Chinese civilization is 5,000 years old. It is an exaggerated claim, since not much is known about the first 2,000 years, and there were several long periods when China was split into multiple states or ruled by foreign dynasties. Nevertheless, there is a remarkable degree of cultural continuity, owing in part to the use of ideograms, which make even very ancient texts intelligible.[10] Admiral Zheng He's voyages around Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean at the beginning of the fifteenth century demonstrated China's interest in the outside world. His ships dwarfed the one Columbus would sail to America 90 years later. Crucially, however, the purpose of the voyages was to "placate and moralize" rather than trade and conquer, and the Sino-centric tribute system demanded that Zheng He should confer gifts from the Ming emperor, thus gaining face and establishing obligation, rather than demanding trade or other concessions.[11] Confucianism, China's tradition-al system of ethics, values social stability through hierarchy, and therefore what mattered in international relations was the establishment of a pecking order. The maps of the world prepared by Jesuits at the Ming court 200 years later prove that at the highest level, at least, China's rulers were aware of the size and shape of the major continents, even if the zest for expensive voyages had faded.[12] However, the next dynasty, the Qing, turned to a policy of active self-isolation, motivated by the fear that southern China, which had seen large-scale rebellions in support of the Ming, would become too prosperous if allowed to trade freely, creating alternative power centers.[13] Security concerns thus lead the Qing to restrict foreign trade to just one guild, known in English as the Cohong (from the Chinese *Gonghang*), based in Guangzhou (Canton), in the far south of the country.

Humiliation and Glory

China's sense of inferiority comes from the "Century of Humiliation" begin-ning with the First Opium War (1839–42). Provoked by Chinese attempts to curtail the trade in opium, the British sent a fleet of 42 ships, including HMS *Nemesis* (1826), Britain's first oceangoing iron warship. The Chinese had only swords, spears, primitive muskets, and seventeenth-century cannon with which to repel attacks by long-range naval artillery. The fact that they fortified Guang-zhou while leaving other ports vulnerable showed a basic lack of understanding of how to fight wars at sea. The British had the ability to transport troops quick-

Figure 1. HMS *Nemesis* in action. Painting by William Adolphus Knell

Source: Christie's, LotFinder: entry 6231156.

ly along China's coast and the steam-powered *Nemesis* was able to maneuver in the shallow waters of Chinese rivers. The Qing dynasty's lack of preparation and strategic ignorance were not fully analyzed in China until 1995 when Mao Haijian published *Tianchao de Bengkui* (*Collapse of the Heavenly Dynasty*).[14] The outcome of the war forced the Qing to abolish the Cohong, open five ports to international trade, accept permanent diplomatic envoys, pay an indemnity, cede Hong Kong in perpetuity, provide extraterritoriality for British subjects, fix import tariffs, and provide a most-favored nation clause to Britain.[15] Whatever Britain received, the United States and France also demanded.

The First Opium War set a pattern: the presentation of unreasonable demands, swift violence from the foreign powers, and the signing of an unequal treaty obliging the Chinese to make concessions and pay reparations. The Second Opium War (1856–60), the Sino-French War (1883–85), the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) form a continuing series of aggressions in the Chinese mind, all aimed at stripping China of its sovereignty and pillaging its wealth. During this period, modernization and industrialization were thrust on China by foreigners who saw the economic potential and wanted a piece of it, treating the Chinese as a colonized people. The sign "No dogs and no Chinese allowed!," which appears in Bruce Lee's 1972 film *Fist of Fury*, may not have existed in the form it appears in the film, but for the first 60 years of its existence until 1928, Huangpu Park in Shanghai did have regulations banning the admission of Chinese, unless they were police or servants accompanying a foreigner, as well as bans on dogs and bicycles.[16]

The end of China's civil war put an end to such humiliation, a turning of the tables best symbolized by People's Liberation Army (PLA) artillery crippling HMS *Amethyst* (F116) as the ship made its way up the Yangtze to relieve another British ship at Nanjing in the summer of 1949. Mao Zedong's speech to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in September that year—including the famous sentence "the Chinese people have stood up!"—celebrated victory over the Japanese, the European imperialist powers, and the Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) party, but it also warned of the need for continuing vigilance against "reactionaries."[17] Thus, the "liberation" did not end internal strife, which continued hand in hand with the construction of the People's Republic of China. Mao envisaged a united front under the leadership of the working class, but in reality, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) stood above all classes and Mao stood above the CCP.[18] From that point on, the CCP identified itself with China and its propaganda conflated the two. De jure and in practice, the PLA was and remains the CCP's army.

Development versus Equality

Deng Xiaoping's verdict on the founder of the PRC, echoing Mao's verdict on the Soviet Union, was that he was 70 percent good and 30 percent bad. In the same statement, Deng also said that China would never do to Mao what the Soviet Union had done to Stalin. The refusal to completely repudiate past leaders is an important feature of CCP ideology, keeping the party anchored to its past and limiting the range of possible futures. The "30 percent" is a terse admission of the suffering that Mao had inflicted to build a basic command economy. Through the Great Leap Forward (GLF), Mao tested two great idées fixes: that man's will rather than objective social and economic laws is the most important force in history, and that the undeveloped consciousness of the peasants conferred an advantage because their minds were like a blank sheet of paper. Mao failed to consider overreporting, a side effect of his absolute power, which meant that grain harvest statistics were inaccurate and too much food was taken out of the countryside to fund industrialization. Compounded with natural disasters, the GLF caused a famine costing about 30 million lives between the spring of 1959 and the end of 1961.[19]

After a decisive break with the Soviet Union, perceived as taking too soft a line with the West, Mao applied the same idea of blankness to youth, turning them into Red Guards and using them to attack the political and social elites, whom he perceived as corrupt and wavering in ideological commitment.[20] In the Cultural Revolution, thousands of intellectuals and officials were beaten to death and millions of city dwellers were sent into the countryside to work on farms. When Red Guard factions started fighting one another, Mao called in the army to restore order. After Mao's death, his wife, Jiang Qing, and three of her henchmen took the blame for the Cultural Revolution and were put on trial. In 1981, the so-called Gang of Four were all given long sentences and China made a decisive break with Mao's extreme leftism.

The debate within the CCP on Maoist ideas had focused on whether "relations of production" (class struggle) or "productive forces" (industrialization and technology) were the priority in building Communism. Mao's view was that fixing relations of production came first. When the Central Committee passed a resolution in 1958 attempting to soft pedal the Great Leap Forward, warning against "impetuous actions" and "utopian dreams" and reasserting that building Communism would take considerable time and could only be done after developing the productive forces, Mao was annoyed and the next year those who disagreed with him, including the Defense Minister Marshall Peng Dehuai, were purged as members of an "anti-Party clique."[21] Deng's reevaluation of Mao meant the return to power of those holding to more orthodox interpretations of Marxism-Leninism.

However, the world in 1979 did not look the same as the world in 1959. Undemocratic but capitalist states in East Asia had started their ascent to industrialized status.[22] In June 1981, the *People's Daily* carried an article entitled "Principal Problems of the Soviet Economy" in which the economist Lu Nanquan pointed out that while huge investment had helped build a sound industrial base, overreliance on this method of economic growth had reduced economic efficiency, resulting in sluggish economic growth.[23] A new assessment of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy had begun.

Reform and Opening Up, as Deng's policies became known, delivered what China craved—rapid development and, at last, respect on the international stage. It was a case of "crossing the river by feeling for the stones," as the CCP did not have an established blueprint. Hence, Deng was praised for pragmatism and a gradual, decentralized approach whereby policy ideas were tried out in small areas before being scaled up. This created a pro-reform constituency, including enterprises and regions where policies had worked, and the nonstate sectors of the economy demonstrated innovation and took up the slack when the state sector was eventually downsized.[24] The most important change in the early years was the introduction of the Household Responsibility System, which was a euphemism for decollectivization: family farms replaced the people's communes.[25] Township and village enterprises (TVEs) and private enterprises began to account for a steadily increasing share of the value of industrial output.[26] Deng was happy to humor Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and President Ronald W. Reagan when they lauded him as "market reformer." Yet, in ideological terms, he was far from liberalism, as his reinterpretation of Marxism involved the assertion that China was in the "primary stage of socialism."[27] In this stage, China would remain a dictatorship under the leadership of the CCP and its focus would be on economic development.

Freedom versus Order

Political and economic liberalism diffused into China, and a rift developed between those who wanted to move more quickly on the economy and even experiment with political reform and hardliners who wanted to stick closely

to orthodox Marxism-Leninism. Protests broke out after the April 1989 death of General Secretary Hu Yaobang, a reformer, over a perceived failure by the party leadership to mourn him properly. Events escalated as students occupied Tiananmen Square and began to make diverse demands. At the end of May, Mikhail Gorbachev made an untimely visit, the first Sino-Soviet summit since the 1961 split, further increasing the pressure on the hardliners. On the night of 3–4 June, Deng gave the order to clear the square by force. To Western media, who were in the city to cover the summit, the narrative was clear: a pro-democracy movement had been crushed. Western governments applied sanctions and investors pulled out. Deng defended himself by saying it was a "counter-revolutionary rebellion" that was "bound to happen and was independent of man's will."[28] The "6–4 Incident," as the Chinese call it, showed the limits of political liberalization but also brought marketization into question. The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe at the end of the year and the disintegration of the Soviet Union two years later stimulated deep reflection on what had gone wrong.[29] Deng's southern tour in 1992 bolstered his position against conservatives, and he was able to convince the CCP that rapid development was their only means of salvation.

From the crucible of these events, a mentality combining cynicism, materialism, and nationalism emerged among Chinese elites in the 1990s. Materialism was the obverse of Communist ideology and reflected the zeitgeist of the previous decade.[30] Cynicism was a response to corruption resulting from the "commodification" of state power, disappointment with the outcomes of 1989, and loss of belief in Communism.[31] Chinese propagandists like to frame the growth of nationalism in this period as a reaction to repeated provocations by Western powers, specifically U.S. talk about "containing" China, attempts to spread democracy through "peaceful evolution," and memories of the century of humiliation. Indeed, nationalistic books like *China Can Say "No!"* had huge commercial success.[32] However, the CCP also encouraged state-led nationalism, for example, through a "patriotic education campaign" in schools and universities.[33] Nationalism began to replace Communism as the basis for social solidarity.

Current Geopolitical Tensions

Chinese nationalism has a popular dimension. Citizens protested in 1999 against the accidental bombing by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, again in 2001 after a U.S. spy plane collided with a Chinese jet near Hainan, causing the death of the Chinese pilot, and in 2005, 2010, and 2012 against Japan over various issues. The 2005 and 2012 protests included attacks on property and individuals. Official commemoration of past humiliation at the hands of foreign powers draws mass participation but also sometimes arouses skepticism.[34] There is little evidence that nationalism has ever gotten out of the CCP's control, or that the regime has ever felt pressured to modify its diplomatic stances in response to popular pres-

sure. Participation in protest activity is predicted by social network diffusion.[35]

After their victory over the KMT in 1949, the CCP set out to build the *Zhonghua minzu* or "Chinese people" with the Han majority at its core. This involved exoticizing 55 ethnic minorities to assimilate them, to "recognize ethnic diversity into irrelevance" by conferring autonomous status on titular minority regions and various privileges on minorities while simultaneously depriving them of their ability to self-organize.[36] This "first generation" ethnicity policy came under criticism after the Soviet collapse because it was perceived to have "politicized" ethnicity.[37] Protests in Tibet and Xinjiang, provoked by economic inequality and religious and identity issues, reinforced the regime's perception that the first-generation policy was not working. In 2009, clashes between members of the Uighur nationality and Han Chinese in Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi, convinced the CCP that a new approach was needed for this region. Even though violence was perpetrated by both sides, the authorities blamed the Uighurs and resorted to totalitarian methods of suppression involving mass internment, intensified surveillance, indoctrination, and restrictions on religious practice. The solution found by the regime is tantamount to cultural genocide. Uighurs are included in the *Zhonghua minzu* but at the same time prevented from feeling part of it.[38]

Officially known as the Republic of China (ROC), Taiwan is the rump regime established by the KMT after they fled the mainland in 1949. The PRC regards it as a renegade province. China's Anti-Secession Law of 2005 commits China to pursue peaceful reunification, but, according to Article 8, in the event of "secession" or if the "possibilities of a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted" China will use "non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity."[39] Although the adoption of the law is sometimes portrayed as a threat, U.S.-based scholar Suisheng Zhao argues that, on the contrary, it seeks to balance emotional pressures with national interests.[40] War is thus the last resort to be used only after every other means has been tried. A factor preventing war is the ambiguous position of the United States. The Taiwan Relations Act (1979) does not commit the United States to defend the island, but it does allow the United States to sell arms to it or defend it if the United States president so decides. In 1992, representatives of the CCP and KMT reached a consensus recognizing the principle of "one China," but they shelved the question of which regime, the ROC or the PRC, should constitute the state. China's interpretation of the principle is that Taiwan should eventually join the PRC under a "one country, two systems" arrangement analogous to Hong Kong. Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan's president since 2016 from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), has not accepted the consensus as a basis for relations with China.

China claims almost the whole of the South China Sea and pursues its claims with "creeping assertiveness," a strategy combining negotiation with occupation.[41] It has built runways and fortifications on disputed atolls, pouring concrete over coral reefs, which took thousands of years to grow, and used "mar-

Map 1. Competing claims in the South China Sea

Source: Voice of America, adapted by MCUP.

itime militia" to coerce other countries' vessels into leaving the area. In 2009, China referred to the South China Sea as a "core interest," a term used for Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet. It has claimed the status of an archipelagic state so that it can treat the South China Sea as an internal sea; it applies an expansive interpretation to the land features that can be used as the basis for claiming territorial seas and an exclusive economic zone, and it claims the right to regulate military activities within these areas.[42] When in 2016 the Philippines won an arbitration ruling under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) supporting its claim to part of the Spratly Islands, China refused to recognize the arbitration court, even though it is an UNCLOS signatory. China's protestations that the South China Sea islands form part of its "historic territory" do not stand up to scrutiny: indeed, when Chinese nationalists first began to

agitate for sovereignty over the Spratlys and the Paracels in the first few decades of the twentieth century, there was confusion between the two archipelagos.[43] There are questions about what China hopes to achieve in the South China Sea, but it appears to some military observers to be part of a wider strategy aimed at neutralizing U.S. deterrence against an operation to retake Taiwan.[44]

China's approach to the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands dispute is similar. They have created an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) surrounding the islands, requiring civilian aircraft to identify themselves, and regularly send an enlarged coast guard fleet to patrol the area. China believes Japan's claim to the islands is based on the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which ended the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895, and therefore the islands should have been returned by Japan after the Second World War.[45] Japan believes that the islands were part of the Ryukyu Kingdom, which was annexed by Japan in 1879, and therefore have nothing to do with the Second World War. Since the United States and Japan have a mutual defense pact, the United States could be obliged to defend the islands if China were to try to take them by force.

Conclusion: China's Identity

China repeats that it does not wish to be a hegemon, at least not on a global scale. The logic of the so-called Thucydides Trap is that when a rising power challenges the existing hegemon, conflict occurs more often than not.[46] Scholars have pointed to the dangers that emotions can bring to a power transition: an overconfident, ambitious China makes a strategic blunder, or an insecure, even paranoid United States overreacts to a provocation.[47] Other scholars have argued that the United States has less to fear and can even benefit from China's rise.[48] Be that as it may, China is preparing for conflict and has the second largest military budget in the world. Moreover, at 1.9 percent of GDP, its spending is both easily affordable and rapidly growing.

China wants security and respect within its existing borders, the opportunity to flourish as a key player in the global economy, plus Taiwan, the Diaoyu Islands, and control over the South China Sea. The concept of *geo-body* is useful in understanding the nature and extent of China's ambitions—it refers to the constructed homeland, which is "not merely space or territory . . . [but] a component of the life of nation . . . a source of pride, loyalty, love, passion, bias, hatred, reason, unreason."[49] Tibet, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang are all part of China's geo-body and China will go to war to defend its claims to them. It is doubtful, however, whether the CCP would risk a war with a major power over any territories that lie beyond its geo-body. It has yet to sink a U.S. or allied vessel engaged in freedom of navigation patrols in disputed territorial waters, though the possibility cannot be excluded.

China's ideas about international order today reflect its status as the largest economy in the world, measured in terms of purchasing power parities. It is no longer interested in promoting worldwide revolution, but it does want to change those rules of the game that it perceives as being to its disadvantage.

Given its approach to unresolved territorial disputes, it is reasonable to conclude that China views the world as anarchic and makes realist calculations about what other states might do. It tends to project the traditional Confucian view that respect for hierarchy is the best guarantee of stability: small countries should know their place. However, applying Confucian ideas to international relations requires also that powerful countries live up to the ideals of "true kingship" (*wangquan*) as opposed to "hegemony" (*baquan*) by showing benevolence to lesser powers and taking their responsibilities seriously.[50] China is keen to claim the mantle of legitimacy for its actions by framing them in terms of its own view of international order, one that is distinct from and superior to the liberal world order defended by the West.

While some Chinese might regard Confucian ethics as an overly idealistic basis on which to conduct foreign policy, values remain important. The 18th CCP Congress in 2012 delivered a "five in one" development strategy, focusing on economic, political, cultural, and social development as well as building an "ecological civilization."[51] The 19th Congress in 2017 renewed the commitment to green growth and recognized China's responsibility to the "community with a shared future for mankind," which was widely interpreted as a commitment to take climate change seriously.[52] Changes such as these, which are written into the Constitution of the Communist Party of China, represent strategic decisions taken at the highest level.

Traditional Chinese ideas challenge Western assumptions in other ways. Yaqing Qin argues that Western international relations theory is based on individual rationality, whereas China practices "relationality," which assumes that international actors base their actions on relations. Relations are logically prior to rational calculations, whether these be instrumental or normative; contrasting elements are mutually inclusive, not wholly separate, like yin and yang; and hence the natural state of the world is harmony, not conflict.[53] While these propositions might seem abstruse, they inform judgments about what is right and what is rational. Berating Chinese negotiators, as the Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken did in Alaska in March 2021 at the first face-to-face high-level talks after President Joseph R. Biden's election, shows a lack of concern for the relationship, and therefore seems irrational. China, by contrast, is scrupulous in attention to protocol and never fails to roll out the red carpet for visiting leaders of even the smallest powers. This helps it win support from other developing countries when it faces diplomatic confrontation with the West.

Russia, whom the Chinese call "the fighting nation," has played different roles in Chinese history, but must now be seen as an ally of China. U.S. foreign policy pushed these two countries closer together, through NATO expansion, the development of missile defense systems, promotion of democracy abroad, and denial of Chinese and Russian aspirations to great power status.[54] Russia's "strategic partnership" with China is a "constructive engagement and positive-sum cooperation, based on shared political, security and economic interests."[55] Among these interests, security is paramount. Russia is now seen as a

reliable partner for China in the struggle to make the world safe for authoritarianism. Despite some recent American rhetoric, China is not bent on exporting its own model of government. China feels comfortable with authoritarian powers and finds them easier to deal with, but perhaps unlike Russia, it has no messianic streak driving the export of its ideology.

China seeks to enlarge its influence but has a limited appetite for responsibility. While the hegemon is answerable to the international community for everything that happens, and worries about losing its position, the great power with limited responsibility can walk away from problems where the stakes are low. China seeks absolute control over its own geo-body, but beyond those boundaries, it has not been prepared to make great sacrifices for its vision of global order. Arguably, this is a more favorable position than hegemony.

China's identity has been formed by contradictory drives: feeling at once inferior and superior, meeting the needs of development and the desire for equality, assuaging demands for freedom and ensuring order, and bridging the gap between China's geo-body and geopolitical realities. It is only by keeping such tensions in mind that we can hope to understand how its leaders are likely to behave under pressure and to avoid the twin errors of underestimating or overestimating China's strength and the scale of its ambition. China takes great pride in its recent accomplishments, seeing them as a vindication of its choices and confirmation of its values. It believes that its destiny is to dominate East Asia, and through that to play a leading role in the world. The challenge for the United States today is to find a balance between moderating and accommodating that ambition without sacrificing its own values and political influence.

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The Strategic Culture of Resistance
Iranian Strategic Influence in Its Near Abroad

W. A. Rivera, PhD

Abstract: Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the strategic culture of resistance has dominated Iran's strategic objective and foreign policy preference formation. Iran is a revisionist state that lacks overwhelming military and economic dominance in its near abroad, as such two pillars have emerged to support and export their strategic culture of resistance: *adaptive resistance* (pragmatism) and *designed redundancy* (insulation and deniability). These two themes of resistance provide content and structure to their strategic influence campaigns. Strategic influence is the way in which elements of the strategic culture of resistance are executed in Iran's near abroad. To combat and defeat strategic influence campaigns, it is necessary to understand both the strategic cultural factors at play and the strategic influence campaigns that Iran deploys.

Keywords: Iran, strategic culture, strategic influence, influence operations, information operations, proxy strategy

S trategic influence is a way of operationalizing strategic culture. The author agrees with Jeannie L. Johnson and Jeffrey A. Larsen that "Strategic Culture is that set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and writ-

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ten), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives."[1] And the author agrees with Colin S. Gray and Fredrik Doeser that strategic culture is not determinative; rather, it shapes the space of possible priorities, decisions, "whatever the mix of factors that we believe have produced a decision and its consequent strategic behavior, all of the people and the organizations within which they function are more or less distinctively encultured."[2] In other words, "strategic culture structures what options are considered to be appropriate, effective, and productive by a specific actor in decisions to participate in military operations, thereby influencing, but not determining, the actor's behavior."[3] Strategic culture is precisely important in that it provides a shaping context for decision making, for prioritizing strategic objectives, and foreign policy preferences.

Many Iranian elite decision makers, for example, continue to see Iran as a revolutionary state, locked in an existential battle against the United States and its proxies in the region, primarily Israel and Saudi Arabia. These perceptions and values are products of a strategic culture born and steeped in resistance. Yet, this strategic culture of resistance is not determinative. Adaptive resistance (described below) defines how Iran remains a highly agile and pragmatic actor. Designed redundancy (described below) defines how the elite insulate themselves from outside pressure by creating duplication in their governance structure, which occludes their decision-making process and also prevents any one faction or organ of state to dominate. This principle extends to their operations, for example, using multiple proxies in the same region, increasing plausible deniability. Designed redundancy and adaptive resistance are twin features of Iran's strategic culture of resistance. They had to be adaptive and duplicative to survive and thrive in a hostile environment. These same principles, however, often generate new ways of thinking about resistance among the elite. As the revolutionary generation gives way to a younger crop of leaders, eager for progress and change, Iran observers should be looking for signs of change in their strategic culture.

Yet, there is no guarantee that the strategic culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) will change. This is largely because of the role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a force of strategic culture continuity at home and abroad. In their doctrine and practice they embody the principles of Carl von Clausewitz: "The object in war is not usually to destroy the enemy physically, rather is it [*sic*] to subordinate his will to ours."[4] In fact, the IRGC states so explicitly in their doctrine:

> In order to achieve ideological, political, security and economic self-reliance we have no other choice but to mobilize all forces loyal to the Islamic Revolution, and through this mobilization, plant such a terror in the hearts of the enemies that they abandon the thought of an offensive and annihilation of our revolution.[5]

Note that planting "terror in the hearts of the enemies" *is* strategic influence, because to sow terror is to destroy the will of the enemy. This indicates how deeply ingrained strategic influence is in the IRGC and IRI's strategic culture of resistance, as this article will demonstrate below. It is also important to note that Islamic resistance, thusly conceived, cannot be entirely defensive but requires an offensive and internationalist component. And it is correct in the author's estimation to think of strategic influence as an operationalization of this broader principle. In other words, "Strategic Influence is the use of the elements of national power—diplomatic, military, economic, *with and through information*—to shape the information and operational environment in order to erode the will of the enemy. . . . This 'new' way of war is predicated on building narratives, activating identities, mobilizing proxies, and disorienting targets through the use of information in service of strategic goals."[6] Therefore, eroding the will of the enemy is the goal of strategic influence, but knowing the will of the enemy requires understanding their strategic culture.

If Iran's strategic culture is one of resistance, then actions that reinforce the will to resist are counterproductive and actions that erode the will to resist are desirable. This may seem tautological, but it is not. After 40 years of sanctions and targeted kinetic strikes, the United States has not eroded Iran's will to resist; rather, they have reinforced it. This would indicate that the United States does not understand Iran's strategic culture and therefore cannot design their strategic influence campaigns to counter Iran at home or in their near abroad. Iran's influence grows in the region despite many setbacks precisely because their narratives of resistance resonate with many who see themselves as oppressed. Iran has demonstrated and continually messages that through resistance comes triumph. Thus, the raised AK-47 Kalashnikov rifle that appears in the IRGC logo appears in the logos of the various militias that form to resist and potentially triumph over the United States and its proxies. Whether one believes this to be true or not is almost irrelevant; it is effective.

However, if we agree that strategic culture is important, and it is hard to imagine anyone but the most materialist among us thinking it is not, then why introduce the concept of strategic influence? What value does it add? Strategic influence relies on strategic culture in two significant ways. First, strategic culture, as described, sets objectives and limits on what strategy and operations seek to achieve and how. For example, Doeser explains how strategic culture shaped the Finnish government's decision not to participate in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Libyan campaign in 2011: "In the Finnish case, strategic culture made a difference by informing decision-makers that participation in OUP would be inappropriate, since, inter alia, it would entail a deviation from Finland's long-standing policy of refraining from military-demanding operations."[7] Second, strategic culture provides the content of narratives that justify strategies and operations and are used to activate identities and mobilize audiences. For example, Michael J. Boyle and Anthony F. Lang found two competing strategic culture models operating in U.S. decisions re-

garding interventions—limited and vindicationist; they differ in the degree to which the United States seeks to remake the conquered country into its own image (vindicationist), usually through the drafting and implementation of an American-like constitution. However, "in practical terms, both 'ways of intervention' operate like culturally embedded scripts that policymakers can access during interventions."[8] In the case of a revisionist state like Iran, resistance provides both the language for justification and the content of its messaging. That is, resistance is the *stuff* of strategic influence.

When strategic culture is operationalized in strategic influence, particularly through narrative, the temptation may be to dismiss the cultural aspects as convenient tropes that are manipulated for practical gain. This could lead to a fundamental misunderstanding of one's rival. A tactical retreat is not a surrender. An adaptive resistance strategy remains committed to resistance but is not irrational or suicidal. Because culture in general, and strategic culture in particular, are communicated through narratives is not to say that they are artificial and constructed to purpose. "Those cultures emerge and change as a kind of natural phenomena. They are the ever evolving product of the many efforts peoples make to explain their past, understand their present, and anticipate their future."[9] Therefore, Iranian strategic influence relies on narratives and targeted kinetic actions to bolster elements of their strategic culture of resistance. And to further Gray's point, if strategic influence is the operationalization of strategic culture, then understanding one will shed light on the other and provide genuine insight into the decision-making processes of the observed.

But more to the practical point of understanding, anticipating, and countering Iran's strategic influence campaigns in their near abroad, it is imperative to understand Iran's strategic culture, its perspective on its own identity, its perceived role in the world, and its historical and contemporary challenges and goals. To do so means attempting to think as Iran's leadership thinks, to understand their history as they do, to understand, ultimately, their mythmaking and myth-propagation as foundations for their strategic influence. Myths are key to strategic influence because the mobilization of audiences is in large part why strategic influence is used; myths create narratives, themes, and frames that enable influence. Therefore, understanding foundational myths, cultural myths, and the like enables a more accurate representation of Iran's influence campaigns. To do so is not to believe but to understand Iran's projected perspective, which is essential to success.

As noted, for Iran there are two main drivers in this strategic policy making process: adaptive resistance and designed redundancy. The author found the term *resistance* used throughout the discourse of Iran's political elite. The IRI was born from revolution, but the revolution was more than just a replacement of the local ruling elite; it was an act of resistance against the global order. At that time, the global order was bipolar, and resistance was encapsulated in the slogan, "neither East nor West."[10] From that time forward, there has been a strong anti-U.S. and anti-Western ideological strain captured in the

term "Westoxification."[11] In a profound sense, the rhetoric and praxis of the Iranian revolutionary regime have developed as a rejection and counterweight to Western, primarily U.S. power. Their rhetoric (i.e., their use of history and victimization) and their praxis (i.e., their use of political and military proxies) are in service of influence strategies designed to humiliate the United States and reconstruct the regional and global order. Understanding the depth, breadth, and strength of anti-Western sentiment is critical to developing a more efficacious orientation toward the Iranian political elite. Yet, to say that Iran is a revisionist power intent on changing the status quo in the Middle East and beyond is not to say that they are radical or irrational. On the contrary, their approach to strategic influence requires them to be pragmatic: to triumph where possible and to turn defeats into rhetorical victories where necessary. Further, their ideological focal points at any given time are reflective of their goals and the current, usually local, political realities on the ground. That is, their resistance is ideological, but it is adaptive. This characteristic of Iran's strategic culture goes beyond rhetoric; the form and substance of its decision-making structure is also adaptive, albeit consistently anti-Western and revisionist.

A thorough examination of Iran's decision-making structure reveals an intricate and multilayered structure of checks and balances—designed redundancy. Designed redundancy serves three key purposes. First, it is designed to obfuscate the decision-making process to the outside world to prevent external interference. Second, by dispersing powers throughout the system, designed redundancy works to prevent any one institution or faction from taking over the entire system. Third, in operations, by using multiple proxies, designed redundancy enables plausible deniability. Two outcomes of this designed redundancy are consensus decision making and, since consensus is desirable if not necessary in most cases, the ability for key actors to veto. As such, designed redundancy makes the Iranian system resistant to change and influence, even as its external strategic policies are adaptive. Consensus, however, can often be easy to derive and maintain, is resistant to change, and antithetical to U.S. interests or desires. Consensus is easier to reach when it is based on shared cultural values. For example, even those actors Western media outlets refer to as "reformers" strongly defend Iran's right to a peaceful nuclear program, including domestic enrichment. In this case, as in other cases of technological advancement and economic development, there is widespread agreement among the political elite and often public sentiment supporting it. Part of this is the belief that the United States is an enemy of Iran and is trying to keep it from progressing. Part of it is predicated on an understanding of Iran's historical role as a leader of human rights, mathematics, science, and technology.[12]

These two defining characteristics of Iran's strategic policy making—designed redundancy and adaptive resistance—are prominent in Iranian strategic influence. Who is driving policy is not always clear to outsiders, and it is not always clear which factions have formed a consensus, or which factions oppose it. It is not always clear, either, whether foreign policy outcomes such as

the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action are a rapprochement with the West or an adaptation designed to gain time and influence for Iran to achieve their revisionist end goals—or both. These uncertainties, although the ideology of the observer may collapse them with a certainty all their own, are very much designed and create disorienting effects. Disorientation, along with narrative building based on myths, activating identities, and mobilizing proxies are the ways in which strategic influence works. The next section will explain Iran's strategic culture more in depth; the following section goes into the practical application of strategic culture through strategic influence.

Iran's Strategic Culture

Iranian strategic culture is built on a long history of both glorious empire and achievement but also persecution and victimization.[13] This collective memory and this shared history paved the way for the 1979 revolution. In addition to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's charismatic power and the strong organization of the religious institutions, what gave the Islamic Revolution impetus was the blending of the religious and nationalist identities that his *velayat-e faqih* system embodied (rule of the jurisprudent). That is, Khomeini was able to mobilize mass resistance through the deployment of cultural identity myths to build a system of resistance. This system was built to reject the shah and his government, but also to resist the West, especially the United States, the shah's puppet masters, as they would have it.

Resistance against oppression is the key theme of the IRI's strategic culture. It predated Khomeini's rise to power and could be found in the writings and lectures of Ali Shariati, a sociologist with strong ties to Western thought:

> Among his western intellectual mentors, Shariati was most excited by the writing of Franz Fanon, whose *The Wretched of the Earth* so touched him and his friends that they translated it from French into Persian. It was from Shariati and his friends' translation of the title of this book as *Mostazafin-e Zamin* that Khomeini borrowed his rallying cry in support of the oppressed and dispossessed.[14]

But the recognition of oppression does not always result in resistance. It was Khomeini's charisma and leadership, his exhortation to revolution, his ability to take the teachings of Shariati and merge them with Shia theology to go from mobilization to revolution. That is, he was able to effectively unite two cultural frames into a single strategic culture:

> Shia beliefs and mythologies form important foundations of the Islamic Republic's ideology. Its historical sense of grievance, for example, is heavily influenced by Khomeini's interpretation of the Shia as dispossessed, betrayed, and humiliated by the powerful and corrupt. Islam becomes a tool of resis-

tance; it is, as Khomeini often argued, the champion of all oppressed people.[15]

Khomeini saw resistance as an Islamic duty, for the IRI and Islamic peoples everywhere. Simply put, the culture of Islamic resistance that the IRI promotes is built on a shared history of oppression, usually by a despot supported by the West. This strategic culture of resistance is the fruit of their revolution, and it is the sum and summit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' raison d'être: "If our revolution does not have an offensive and internationalist dimension, the enemies of Islam will again enslave us culturally, politically, and the like, and they will not abstain from plunder and looting."[16] This is justification for the Islamic Republic, the IRGC, and for strategic influence. Note well how the IRGC speaks to "cultural enslavement." The fight against "Westoxification" was a fight against modernity, atheism, agnosticism, capitalism, socialism, and other "isms" that imposed a foreign culture on Iran. And for the elite of the IRI that culture is denotated by Islamic resistance. This is a clear indication that culture and strategic culture are not just academic exercises but core motivations for decision makers. These points indicate how deeply ingrained strategic influence is in the IRGC and IRI's culture of Islamic resistance.

It is also important to recognize that Islamic resistance, thusly conceived, cannot be entirely defensive but requires an offensive and internationalist component. As Michael Eisenstadt puts it, "The 'resistance doctrine' exhorts its adherents to stand fast in the face of enemy threats, to push boundaries, and eschew compromise on matters of principle in the belief that in a zero-sum struggle, compromise is a sign of weakness that will be exploited by the enemies of Islam. It posits that victory is achieved by imposing costs and by *demoralizing the enemy*—through relentless psychological warfare, through terrorizing and bleeding its people and military, and by denying it battlefield victories."[17] The IRI creates and exploits narratives of oppression, resistance, and triumph by recalling and recasting their history of overcoming overwhelming odds and emerging victorious. According to this narrative, triumph is a product of faithful adherence to Islamic resistance.

For Iran to increase the range and effectiveness of its strategic influence campaigns, its target audiences must "find consistency with deeply held cultural values."[18] Islam is a system of cultural values, among other things, and Islamic resistance also has broad cultural appeal. The Islamic Revolution, furthermore, put action to the words that resistance and Islamic duty are one and that faithful adherence to Islamic resistance leads to triumph. However, the type of system that is in place in Iran—the governance of the jurisprudent—is not attractive to the majority of Shia, let alone the majority of Muslims. Thus, Iran often draws on Persian culture, Islamic culture, and/or resistance culture to attract support.[19] Here, we see one facet of adaptive resistance—narrative framing. To mobilize on cultural frames/myths, the IRI must adapt its message based on the

audience. Where adherence to the *velayat* system is at play, authority, obedience, and loyalty are called on to sustain and expand the range of influence, mobilize audiences, and erode the will of the enemy. Where adherence to the *velayat* system is not at play, but the audience is Muslim, it is to cultural frames/myths of Islamic triumph over Western hegemony and imperialism, with the Islamic Revolution of 1979 being the primary example and model to which Iran appeals. Where Islam is not at play, resistance is used in a broader nonaligned way to appeal to a widely held sense of victimization, exploitation, and humiliation. It is worth noting that Khomeini's rhetoric about imperialism dividing Iranians into two classes—oppressors and oppressed—is written into the constitution as a mandate to stand with all oppressed people worldwide, regardless of faith.

There is, though, another important reason for Iran's usage of various cultural frames. Given the various ideological perspectives of the factions and the key governance bodies they control and given the structure of the IRI—designed redundancy—various messages emerge:

> Thus, we can see how the President performs one role in terms of representing Iran on the world stage, while the Supreme Leader maintains control over some important soft power tools, such as the Islamic Republic's international media operations and its cultural attaches and related cultural outreach centres through the ICRO [Islamic Culture and Relations Office].[20]

Edward Wastnidge's article highlights key cultural initiatives from the presidencies of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–97), Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005), Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–13), and a brief foray into Hassan Rouhani's (2013–present). Except for Ahmadinejad, whose bellicosity earned him scorn at home and abroad, the presidents of Iran have favored openness to the West, trade, and discourse. The highlight of this was Khatami's dialogue among civilizations: "Khatami himself sees the concept as forming a 'new paradigm' in international relations, thus evidencing its efficacy as a foreign policy tool. This was an idea that came from a perception of Iranian civilisational weight and importance in the world, much in the same way that the Shah also sought to use similar narratives."[21] That Iran is a great civilization—a great Islamic civilization—is the central theme for this strategic influence narrative. It certainly resonates with their long history and many accomplishments in math, science, art, military prowess, etc. It also works well with the fact that Iran is disadvantaged in other areas—militarily and economically. By relying on culture, Iran can speak to great powers as equals rather than from a position of weakness.

It is this reality that ultimately makes former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad such an anomaly. His rhetoric against Israel and the United States recalled early revolutionary fervor and was a dramatic departure from the presidencies of Rafsanjani, Khatami, and now Rouhani. While many hard-liners in Iran and elsewhere appreciated Ahmadinejad's hard stance against Israel,

the cost to Iran's prestige around the world was significant. The ratcheting up of sanctions against Iran's nuclear program was made easier by his bellicosity, which drew ire from the international community as well as other factions in Iran.[22] Nevertheless, cultural outreach was still an active part of statecraft during the Ahmadinejad years. In the aftermath of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, Iran saw opportunity to further its cultural reach among Shia and Farsi speakers. For example,

> Iran regularly draws on cultural commonalities such as the celebration of the Persian new year Nowrooz across the region, and invited regional heads to the first international celebration of Nowrooz in Iran in 2010. Under Ahmadinejad, Iran sought to establish a "Union of Persian Speaking Nations" between the three Persian-speaking states, which drew on cultural linkages as a means of furthering cooperation and making use of the common Persian bonds amongst them.[23]

The continuity in cultural outreach, particularly Islamic cultural outreach, occurred because of the designed redundancy of the IRI's system. While the president of Iran appoints the foreign minister, for example, the supreme leader of Iran uses key advisors as envoys. But the arena of cultural affairs is so important to Iran's leaders that they have created an organization charged with carrying out Islamic cultural diplomacy. The Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) was founded in 1995 to unify Iran's Islamic cultural diplomacy and coordinate bilateral cultural initiatives with other states. As is common in the IRI, given the designed redundancy of the system, the ICRO is affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance but works "under the guidance of the Supreme Leader who directly appoints members of the ICRO's ruling council."[24] According to its website, the ICRO's aims are:

1. Revival and dissemination of Islamic tenets and thoughts with a view to reaching the true message of Islam to the people of the world;
2. Creating awareness among the people of the world as regards the principles, the objectives, and the stance of the Islamic Revolution of Iran as well as the role it plays in the international arena;
3. Expansion of cultural relations with various nations and communities in general; and the Muslims and the oppressed, in particular;
4. Strengthening and regulating the existing cultural relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and other countries of the world as well as global cultural organizations;
5. Appropriate presentation of the Iranian culture and civilization as well as its cultural, geographical, and historical characteristics;

6. Preparation of the necessary grounds for the unity among Muslims and the establishment of a united front among world Muslims on the basis of the indisputable principles of Islam;

7. Scholarly debates and confrontations with anti-religion, anti-Islam, and anti-revolutionary cultures with a view to awakening the Muslims of the world regarding the divisive conspiracies of the enemies as well as protecting the rights of the Muslims;

8. Growth, development, and the improvement of the cultural, political, economic, and social conditions of the Muslims.[25]

These aims clearly demonstrate a commitment to revolutionary Islamic ideals. The ICRO's primary mission is to disseminate Islamic principles, but its second point clearly states that it is also about the IRI and its international relations. These first two points flow seamlessly into the third—outreach to Muslims and the oppressed of the world. For example, news articles on the ICRO website report on interuniversity cooperation with Iraq; cultural exchanges with Azerbaijan and the autonomous republic of Nakhichevan, among others; and much in the way of promoting Farsi and Islamic cultural values. However, in keeping with the other objectives listed above, there is also a great deal of outreach to non-Muslim countries. For example, in a show of continuity with the Khatami administration, there was an event featuring the dialogue among civilizations between Iran and China. Also, the head of the ICRO, Abuzar Ebrahimi Torkaman, and Polish deputy culture minister, Monica Smullen, met to explore avenues for reinvigorating and bolstering mutual cooperation in different cultural areas.

For Iran, this presentation of a softened foreign policy is important to mitigate the effects of the U.S. rhetoric about Iran being the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism and statements about Iran's intention to weaponize its nuclear program. Cultural exchanges are one way to mitigate the damage done to its image from these statements and restore standing. Cultural exchanges also pave the way for economic cooperation, particularly since the (once and future) lifting of sanctions. The message is consistent to a large degree, as Iran focuses on the greatness of their civilization, long cultural ties with various countries and cultures around the world, and the deep abiding values of Islam. However, they are also clear that resistance against oppression is a key part of Islam, including oppression against non-Muslims as well. However, strategic influence is not just about soft power; it is also about using kinetic action in service of eroding the will of the enemy.

The use of proxies should be understood as part of Iran's deliberate strategy to spread their influence throughout the Arab world, not just kinetic targeting. This is evident when one considers their use of framing: "Concurrent to the intensive use of proxies, Iran is deliberately trying to weaken regimes through information framing. Iran's addresses to the Arab world are framed to a specific

audience and with the tone of animosity toward the West and non-Muslims."[26] Based on their own and the region's experience with imperialism and colonialism and their more recent manifestations, Iran is able to portray itself and its allies, such as Hezbollah, as examples of successful resistance against the West. It is certainly true that "the use of allies and proxies is generally cheap, reduces risk, and acts as a force multiplier. It also provides some degree of deniability—plausible or implausible."[27]

But it is much more than that: the use of proxies in this way demonstrates the ideological message that resistance against the most powerful forces in the world and in the region (e.g., the United States and Israel) can be successful. It serves Iran's triumphalist message that emerges from its history, is encapsulated in its strategic culture, and embodied in its complex governmental structure. Therefore, while the focus on proxies for hard power deployment on the cheap is important, again, strategic influence demands that the importance of messaging cannot be overlooked, indeed, should be the focus. "Iran's support for [Hezbollah] . . . could deliver two important foreign policy goals: the capacity to fight Israel through a proxy . . . and the expansion of Shiite Islam's influence in Lebanon through Hizb'allah's developing role there."[28] It is precisely this intimate, intricate mingling of force and meaning that is the *stuff* of strategic influence.

It is with this understanding that the author reinterprets this approach. In other words, Iran must rely on proxies and messaging because "Iran's conventional military readiness, effectiveness, and capabilities have declined since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, and Iran has not been able to find a meaningful way to restore its conventional edge in the region."[29] Moreover, Iran would be foolish to rely on a large conventional force that could not survive a direct confrontation with either the United States or Israel. Rather, through the use of proxies and messaging, it uses asymmetric tools to achieve strategic goals with deniability, reduced risk, and at significantly reduced cost. Through Islamic resistance, Iran's strategic influence goals are to make the Middle East a hostile operating environment for the United States. Part of this strategy includes "characterizing the United States [as the Great Satan], [in which] Iranian revolutionaries were trying to emphasize the fact that America led Iran astray from its correct religious and spiritual path."[30] By extension, Iran is saying that the United States has done so to other Muslim nations and, in fact, continues to do so. Again, because the United States is the "Great Satan" according to Iran's messaging, it is the duty of every able-bodied Muslim to resist it. The direct challenge to Saudi Arabia should be clear. Saudi Arabia cannot be both keeper of the holiest sites of Islam, defender of the faith, and ally to the Great Satan. But Iran is careful not to directly attack Israel or Saudi Arabia. Against a near-power-rival such as the Saudis, Iran prefers asymmetrical and rhetorical approaches.

The danger is to misunderstand the asymmetric/proxy approach as a weakness. The other danger is to misunderstand groups such as Hezbollah as strictly a proxy group, militia, or terror group. Since the Iranian revolution, the IRGC

and Quds Force have been actively establishing resistance forces, such as Hezbollah, throughout their near abroad:

> Iran has tried to create militia proxies to expand its influence. And where these militias can be found, one can also find Iran's culture of resistance, jihad, and martyrdom being propagated as a first step toward institutionalizing Iranian influence in those societies, with participation in politics as the next step.[31]

Thus, the material disposition of groups armed, trained, and funded by Iran is incomplete without manifestations of the triumphalist and resistant narratives.

Reinforcing Iran's role as the main defender of the Islamic faith, Major General Qassem Soleimani, the former chief of the IRGC's Quds Force, spoke at an Iran–Iraq war veterans' ceremony and praised the Islamic Republic's decades-long effort to take the mantle of the Palestinian cause and boasted that Tehran's influence in the Middle East has expanded because of the Syrian Civil War. He excoriated Saudi Arabia, as is often the case among Iranian elites, for being puppets of the United States, for betraying the Palestinian cause, and therefore betraying Islam:

> If there's a lot of oil in a country . . . but mad logic rules, terrible events happen, and mad things like war with Yemen happen and these ignorant individuals are incapable of extinguishing this fire . . . Soleimani then chastised "some Arab countries" that are "surrounding" the "oppressed" Palestinians. Tehran has accused Arab states of "selling out" the Palestinian cause, because these same Arab nations have expanded ties with Israel over shared concerns about Iranian power.[32]

The central point here is not that these speeches and messaging efforts produce massive defections from the West or conversions to Shia Islam in the Middle East. It is that Iranian strategic influence has had considerable success and demonstrable impact. How they operationalize strategic culture through strategic influence is the subject of the next section.

Strategic Influence Application

Iran seeks opportunities to operationalize its strategic culture of resistance throughout their near abroad and to forge international partnerships with countries like Venezuela and North Korea, as well as near-peer rivals to the United States, China, and Russia. Resistance as a theme for narratives and organizing militias dates to Iran's 1979 revolution and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the Iran–Iraq war in the 1980s. What these events have in common is that they present opportunity structures that the IRGC/Quds Force exploit using strategic influence. They deploy discursive practices of resistance and arm, train, and fund resistance movements of various types and sizes and do not rely on an exclusively Shia identity. While it is certainly true that a shared religious

experience set the framework for Hezbollah's rise in southern Lebanon, it is dangerous to see it as strictly this and not to be able to recognize the commonality with movements the world over.

> Despite the mobilizational value of the Shi'ite cultural heritage of oppression and suffering, which accorded Shi'ite politicization a distinctly communal character, the chief determinants of Shi'ite activism in Lebanon have been the same social, economic and political conditions which have spurred Third World radical and populist movements to action.[33]

As Amal Saad-Ghorayeb goes on to explain, the initial Shia reaction was to ally themselves with nationalist and even socialist movements.[34] However, these movements in Lebanon, as in the broader Middle East, failed to coalesce or last very long because the secular nationalists were mostly seen as corrupt and as fronts for the West.[35] Anwar Sadat in Egypt, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and even the royal Saudis, though not secular, were seen as pawns of the West. The socialist and Communist movements faced as deep a problem because they had to defend not only secular but, in some cases, atheistic ideologies. Additionally, in places like Egypt and Syria where the ruling parties were nationalist and socialist the result was not empowerment and equality for the masses. Thus, frustration with other ideologies, coupled with constant misery and oppression, added to the political opportunity structures that Hezbollah was readily able to seize.[36]

Concerning the two other major opportunity structures, the Lebanese Civil War and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, both can be said to have had a disproportionate impact on the Shia of the south.[37] According to Saad-Ghorayeb, the Shia in the south suffered the most fatalities of any other group in the 15-year civil war. And there were the other indignities of the poor during war; more than 100,000 Shia were evicted from Ras al-Naba'a, Beirut, in August 1976.[38] But it is the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon in 1982 that is the most direct cause of Hezbollah's rise. They inflicted massive damage to 80 percent of Shia villages, including the almost total destruction of seven; they also killed more than 19,000 people and left 32,000 injured.[39] Not only did the civil war render the central government impotent to protect the Shia, the Israeli invasion had a religious and imperialist connotation that made the rise of a Shia religious resistance all but inevitable. The invasion may have catalyzed the rise of Hezbollah. Saad-Ghorayeb explains, "Expressed more explicitly by Nasru'llah, 'had the enemy not taken this step [the invasion], I do not know whether something called Hizb'allah would have been born. I doubt it'."[40] Yet, Lebanese Hezbollah claims not to want to impose Sharia or the *velayat-e faqih* doctrine in Lebanon. From their perspective, they seek to educate and lead by example. By creating a state within a state, by providing social services, by defending the weak, by resisting the oppressors, they are demonstrating the value of Sharia and the *velayat-e faqih* system. What Lebanese Hezbollah claims to do is prevent the United States and its allies from making Lebanon an oppressed colonial outpost or snuffing out the practice of

Sharia, where it is practiced. While Hezbollah as militia is not formally recognized as a part of the Lebanese military, their political participation guarantees the power of veto. This practice of maintaining the power of veto is a key feature of the designed redundancy aspect of Iran's strategic culture discussed above.

It is the author's contention that Iran is seeking to deploy a version of this model in Iraq. It does not seek outright control of Iraq. That is, it does not seek to fly its flag, so to speak, and overtly control the government in Baghdad. Rather it seeks a significant presence to influence decision making, enough freedom of movement for its agents to pursue Iran's strategic interests, and the ability to block events contrary to its interests—enhanced control of the northern Persian Gulf and a direct line of supply and support, a land bridge, to Lebanese Hezbollah, the Mediterranean, and the border with Israel. Iran is seeking to establish an arm of adaptive resistance to function with designed redundancy within the Iraqi system. Hezbollah remains a popular/populist movement and social mobilization influencer because of its myths of origin (much like the IRGC and the Popular Mobilization Forces [PMF], born out of conflict to serve the oppressed Shia) but also because it is "among" the people and of the people. This is what Iran was able to achieve in Lebanon with Hezbollah, and it is reasonable to expect it to want to replicate that success in Iraq. This is their motivation for supporting the PMF and its constituent militias. Yes, they are a highly cost-effective method of escalation control and plausible deniability, but their primary value lies in being an influence leverage point. In inciting and supporting Shia resistance in Lebanon, Iran has discovered a counter to the economic and military superiority of the West and its Middle Eastern allies through asymmetric political, military, and information warfare. The same model of resistance via proxy forces has been implemented in Iraq to great effect. The Popular Mobilization Forces, as a conglomerate of various factions, is certainly a proven military force; however, it is also an effective way to maintain unity of identity and effort among the various political wings as well.

In the case of Iraq, the opportunity structure is the chaos that began with the U.S. invasion in 2003 and continued through the recent battle against Daesh (a.k.a. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS). While Iraq is a Shia-majority country, it was not until the fall of Saddam Hussein that they gained the right of self-representation and only through the intervention of Grand Marja Ali al-Sistani that they gained one person, one vote self-rule. The methods by which Hussein and his Sunni ruling elite maintained control over a population that was more than 60 percent Shia could fairly be described as brutal oppression. Hussein, recognizing that the main opposition to his rule was not force of arms but ideas, spent a great deal of time suppressing political dissent and disrupting religious organization. This included assassination of key religious figures, closing of mosques, and other tactics and techniques.[41] It is no surprise, then, that post-invasion Iraq was plunged into a brutal civil conflict with widespread retribution against former Ba'ath party members and brutality against Sunnis in what began to look like ethnic civil war. In the immediate

aftermath of the invasion, the United States was ill-prepared for the Sunni insurgency or the Shia retribution. The fall of Saddam Hussein was a great boon to Iran. Then, just a few years after the U.S. withdrawal, Daesh emerged as an existential threat to the Shia population as well as to the Iraqi state. These events are opportunity structures that afford Iran inroads to organize resistance mobilization just as they used the opportunity structures that emerged with the Lebanese Civil War and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

These opportunity structures are what the IRGC and its Special Forces wing, the Quds Force, prefer for their recruiting, training, and operating missions. Among the Shia, there was a mixture of fear and potential triumph, but a strong desire for becoming masters of their own destiny. So began the Shia resistance in Iraq. And with it came the various anti-Coalition insurgent groups, including Kata'ib Hezbollah, the Jaysh al-Mahdi, and the Badr Organization of Reconstruction and Development, among others. Much of this was expressed in religious, quasi-messianic terms; for example, revenge for the murder of Hussein, the son of the fourth Caliph Ali, a martyr to the Shia was a common theme. The Shia Revival had come to Iraq, and the IRGC and Quds Force were leading the charge, just as they had done in Lebanon with Hezbollah. However, the connection between Hezbollah and Iraq is not merely metaphorical but actual as well. On 17 June of 2014, in response to Grand Marja al-Sistani's fatwa to defend the Shia holy sites of Iraq against Daesh, Hezbollah commander Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah said, "We are ready to sacrifice martyrs in Iraq five times more than what we sacrificed in Syria to protect shrines."[42]

Hezbollah, of course, has had some presence in Iraq since the anti-Coalition insurgency in the early 2000s when they established Unit 3800.

> Hizb'allah created Unit 3800, whose sole purpose was to support Iraqi Shiite militant groups targeting multinational forces there. According to U.S. intelligence, Unit 3800 sent a small number of personnel to Iraq to train hundreds of fighters in-country, while others were brought to Lebanon for more advanced training.[43]

Then-Quds commander Soleimani credited Nasrallah for being a major factor in the PMF's success; he "praised Lebanese Hizb'allah for 'transferring experience to' the PMF: 'I should kiss the hand of the great sayyid Hassan Nasrallah'."[44] Just as in Lebanon in the late to mid-1980s, the IRGC and Quds Force were busy funding local and national politicians, militias, clerics, businessmen, and others. They funded Christian militias, Sunni groups, and competing Shia groups. They funded new groups and groups that had been resisting since the rule of Saddam Hussein.[45] Many of these groups changed names, leaders, some resisted arming themselves, and some grew more powerful through training against U.S. and Coalition forces. The IRGC supplied the resistance fighters with relatively cheap but fairly sophisticated weapons with which to harass and kill "occupying" forces.

There are two other points that should be noted. Like in Lebanon, the Shia movement now had another Arab face. Iran's Persian heritage, often a handicap in the Arab-dominated Middle East, could be overcome through having strong Arab allies. In the early days of the resistance in Iraq, there was reluctance by some in Iraq to fight alongside Iranians. Hezbollah was brought in to work alongside their Arab, Shia brothers. But Iraq is significantly different from Lebanon, offering a greater opportunity. Unlike Lebanon, Iraq is an Arab state with a large Shia majority. Secondly, the formal alliance, or deep influence model that Iran seems to be pursuing in Iraq indicates a potential domination of the northern Persian Gulf, a threatening posture to Kuwait and the other smaller Gulf states, and also a key building block to extending a direct supply line to allies in Syria and Lebanon.

For the IRGC/Quds Force, the Lebanese Civil War, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the rise of Daesh are opportunity structures. They present opportunities to deploy strategic influence lines of effort such as 1) narratives of oppression, resistance, and triumph; 2) identity activation, where the narratives recall a shared history of suffering and oppression as Shia, memories of the martyrs, etc.; 3) mobilization where the masses receive social services, health care, even such mundane but important factors as garbage removal; and 4) disorientation, as the United States and its allies continue to see these social movements strictly through an anti-terror lens and Iran as a state sponsor of terror rather than through the lens of strategic culture and strategic influence. Understanding strategic culture and the mechanisms of opportunity structures can also help analysts, planners, and scholars understand where Iran's strategic influence campaigns have failed.

Although time and space restrictions preclude a deep dive into these two examples, they are important to note. In the early 1980s, Iran's IRGC attempted to establish a resistance movement in Bahrain but failed. A potential explanation lies in the nature of the difference in the opportunity structures in Lebanon and Bahrain. According to Sidney Tarrow, there are five key features of a political opportunity structure that enable social movements to emerge: "1) the opening of access to participation for new actors; 2) the evidence of political realignment within the polity; 3) the appearance of influential allies; 4) emerging splits within the elite; and 5) a decline in the state's capacity or will to repress dissent."[46] Each of these five features were present in Lebanon but not in Bahrain. Because there were no splits within the elite and no decline in the state's capacity or will to repress dissent, Quds Force attempts to erect a resistance movement failed. The Bahraini elite held firm with Saudi support.

A more recent example is the failure of Iran to achieve significant influence over the Kurds in northern Iraq. While it is true that there have been many instances of cooperation, particularly in fighting Daesh, the Kurds remain steadfast allies of the United States and deeply suspicious of Iranian motives and behavior in Iraq. Part of the explanation for the cooperation between these actors lies in the fact that the Kurds and the Iranians shared animosity to both

Saddam Hussein and Daesh, enabling cooperation. However, the Kurdish Regional Government does not share Iran's animosity to the United States; rather, they consider the United States allies. This implies, in part, that U.S. work with the Kurds created a buttress against Iranian influence. It also implies, in part, that identity, rooted in strategic culture, is an important factor in strategic influence. Calls to keep alive the long-suffering and oppression of Shia at the hands of Sunnis are not effective to Sunni audiences. For Kurds, who have suffered oppression at the hands of the Turkish, Iraqi, and Iranian governments, calls to resist against the West, especially the United States, are also less effective. To be clear, then, the strategic culture of a state or people must align for strategic influence to be most effective in exploiting opportunity structures.

Conclusion

This article concludes with a few observations that have been made and supported throughout this work. To bolster allies and weaken and defeat adversaries requires a deep understanding of their strategic culture. One must first know oneself. Then one must know, deeply and thoroughly, one's adversaries. Past attempts to grapple with culture have brought great insights and some disappointments. While strategic culture is not the only discipline one must master, it is indispensable to security studies. Strategic influence, in turn, is the way strategic culture is operationalized. This is so in two significant ways. First, strategic culture gives context and meaning, sets limits to, and helps determine appropriate goals and choices for decision makers, including those designing strategic influence strategies or campaigns. Second, culture in general and strategic culture in particular provide content for strategic influence campaigns. That is, strategic culture provides context to condition strategic influence strategy and content to inform campaigns.

For the Islamic Republic of Iran, a country born in revolution and committed to revising the regional and international order, a strategic culture of resistance provides context and content to its strategic influence campaigns. The IRI maintains aggressive cultural outreach programs; funds, trains, and equips various militia groups; and rhetorically and materially supports religious and political actors in the name of resistance and in the service of eroding the will of the enemy, the objective of strategic influence. By turning local populations against the United States, Iran seeks to make the cost of U.S. operations, in terms of lives and resources, too costly to continue. They seek to erode the will of the United States to continue operating in the region so that they could take what they see as their rightful place as regional hegemon. To do so they activate identities; deploy narratives of oppression, resistance, and triumph; disorient their rivals; and mobilize populations and proxy groups.

Iran has been fairly successful in Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. The United States must be very careful not to think of Iran's inroads in these states in strictly counterterror terms. Defeating armed militants ought not be the desired end state. Iran is expending more time and effort in creating social movements of

resistance than they are funding and arming militants. In Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria militias and their social movement partners are building infrastructure, protecting religious institutions, serving as bodyguards to clerics, providing social services, disseminating information and propaganda, and otherwise empowering social movements. Defeats on the battlefield and economic pain will not erode Iran's will. It has not after 40 years; there is no reason to think it will do so now. Eroding the will of an adversary whose strategic culture is characterized by resistance to U.S. presence and hegemony in the region requires a strategic influence response.

A vital lesson we can learn from Iran's strategic influence campaigns, successful or otherwise, is to rely heavily on understanding the strategic culture of its targets. Resistance as a theme does not resonate well with every target audience, and Iran is careful to calibrate its messaging accordingly. Resistance is useful in what is sometimes referred to as the Global South or what was once called the Third World. That is, in states whose wealth and status does not reach the level of the West. The consistent theme that these states are not achieving their full potential, often despite vast natural resources, is because of Western neocolonialism. This narrative gains relative traction depending on other strategic culture factors such as a direct history of colonialism, exploitative economic relations, support for oppressive regimes by the West, and the like. That this is the contemporary history of Iran's near abroad has enabled them to mobilize as soon as opportunity structures emerge.

Being able to understand, recognize, and, ideally, predict opportunity structures is another lesson we should learn well. As noted above, Tarrow identified five features of an opportunity structure, but much work has been done since then to solidify this approach. One important consideration for future research would be tying the strategic culture literature to the social mobilization literature, especially around opportunity structures, but not exclusively. For those seeking to disrupt Iranian strategic influence campaigns, or those of other rivals, it is important to understand where strategic culture factors are causing division among the elite, for example. Iran is adept at seeing these, often creating or exacerbating them in order to gain more influence.

And what may be the most important lesson we can learn from Iran's strategic influence is the relationship between force and narrative. The use of force, whether kinetic (targeted strikes) or economic (sanctions), has proved to be insufficient to erode Iran's will. What is more, not enough effort is put into crafting narratives geared at dividing the Iranian elite or furthering the divide between the Iranian people and their government. Iran uses force in support of its influence. The United States often uses information and influence campaigns in support of its kinetic strikes and sometimes unartfully. Take, for example, the killing of Major General Qassem Soleimani. The messaging prior to and post kinetic action failed to gain traction or make an impact over the countermessaging by rivals. Their narratives of U.S. hegemony, violence, violation of Iraqi sovereignty, vengeance, etc. rang out loud and clear. U.S. messaging was con-

fused, relying on claims of intelligence on something he was planning, claims of him being a terrorist mastermind, and other narratives. Whether killing of Soleimani was justified is not the point. The point here is that the payoff in influence terms was lost. This is too often the case with the United States' use of influence campaigns. The United States cannot defeat Iran if it is not fighting the same fight as Iran.

Conceptualizing strategic influence as the operationalization of strategic culture provides analysts, planners, and scholars a useful lens for understanding how states like Iran build and exert influence. Creating and/or exploiting opportunity structures like the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, or framing the rise of Daesh as a U.S. plot to continue dominating Iraq are what Iran does well. They use these opportunity structures to find allies who share strategic culture values and provide them adequate resources to achieve desired end states. These are not just armed militias—they can be religious leaders, political actors, and social service providers. But even their use of armed militias is far more nuanced than just kinetic action. For Iran to achieve its strategic goal of regional hegemony it must get the United States to quit the field. That is, it must erode the will of the United States to continue committing resources to the region. This is the ultimate goal of strategic influence and highlights the importance of strategic influence as an analytical lens for understanding the behavior of states like Iran, Russia, and China.

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Moscow's Strategic Culture
Russian Militarism in an Era of Great Power Competition

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Abstract: Shifting balances in power realities increase uncertainty and tensions among states. During those times of rising powers and changing alliances, it is imperative to understand how states determine adversaries and how they choose to engage threats. However, biases in decision making at the state level obscure a conceptualization of state action and intent. This article argues that the study of strategic culture helps bridge the gap between state-level biases and actions at the structural level. Furthermore, the understanding of militarism as Russia's strategic culture helps contextualize certain Kremlin policy choices that seem to fall outside conventional international relations frameworks. A better understanding of Russia's strategic lens brings insights into Moscow's actions, particularly within the near abroad.

Keywords: strategic culture, Russia, militarism, realism, near abroad

Introduction

A multifaceted approach is necessary to understand state policy choice as state-level beliefs influence how states perceive the world. Kenneth N. Waltz describes three images of international relations: (1) human nature, (2) the structures of the state, and (3) the international system.[1] However, these images are not necessarily mutually exclusive to understanding international conflict. Instead, structures found within the state influence how the state interacts within the international system. The structural realist approaches of international relations theory, which focus on power as the central feature of international relations, treat state-level variables as inconsequential differences.

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The prominent realist scholar John J. Mearsheimer argues that for realists there are no "good or bad" states, but "in essence, great powers are like billiard balls that vary only in size."[2] While this conceptualization of the state services the grand generalities of structural theorists, many nuances of state action remain unanswered. Absent from a closed understanding of the state are issues of biases and beliefs of regimes that influence how they perceive international events. Biases and beliefs of the state become particularly important when analyzing the security dilemma phenomena, as state fear drives a self-defeating increase in security measures. Although state survival is the paramount concern in the system, how states delineate allies from adversaries and perceive the actions of others often come down to state-level variables.

At the state decision-making level, these biases and beliefs manifest into a strategic culture, or how the regime perceives and engages threats to state security. Realist theories rely on the assumption of the state as rational actors but struggles to define rationalism. Returning to Mearsheimer, he writes of the rational state actor, "They are aware of their external environment and they think strategically about how to survive in it." He continues, "In particular, they consider the preferences of other states and how their own behavior is likely to affect the behavior of those other states, and how the behavior of those other states is likely to affect their own strategy for survival."[3] Unfortunately for realism, this complex notion of state rationalism necessitates an understanding of how states determine these perceptions of the other and establish their own preferences.

Strategic culture enables understanding state response to international events by allowing scholars to engage in a dialogue on state biases and beliefs. Jack L. Snyder's seminal piece on *strategic culture* defines the term as "the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other."[4] More recent works define strategic culture as "a product of a country's geography, history, and shared narratives that shape the prevailing worldview of its national security establishment, which in turn guides its responses to challenges and threats."[5] Strategic culture offers a view into the second image and, importantly, insight into the biases of state decision makers. Although Professor John Glenn argues that neorealism and strategic culture are "competing approaches," strategic culture should be viewed as complementary to the understanding of state perception.[6] However, Glenn writes that an "epiphenomenal" approach to strategic culture considers the concept as an intervening variable and offers a potential point of collaboration and overlap.[7] Within this vein, strategic culture becomes a mechanism that influences how states perceive threats and respond to external events.

For the purposes of this study, the concept of strategic culture is presented, not as an organizational structure, but in the Snyder construct of ideas, emotional responses, and patterns of behavior. In totality, this concept is the outwardly expressed bias of the state that drives decision making. This construct

is within Elizabeth Kier's understanding of strategic culture that "screens out some parts of reality while magnifying others" and that we understand it as a way to make sense of the choices of the state.[8] This conceptualization remains within a realist understanding of the world. Despite Kenneth Waltz's attempts to distance the theory from foreign policy choice, many realist scholars argue this is inconsistent with realism.[9] In Russia's case, the theories of militarism, or the glorification of force in state decision making, foster an understanding of how the Kremlin perceives the world and determines a state response. This article argues that Russian militarism formulates a specific characteristic of Russian strategic culture, which helps bridge the gap between structural theories on the balance of power and states' biases and beliefs in determining threats. In short, Russian militarism shapes the strategic lens through which the Kremlin perceives the world.

A purely structural theory approach falls short of understanding Russian actions in the near abroad. Moscow is particularly sensitive to external influence within its self-declared sphere of influence, and the Kremlin responds aggressively when challenged. While realists argue states pay close attention to an adversary's relative gains, it fails to explain how states first determine an adversary. Arguably, Moscow's assertive policies against external influence in the near abroad emerge more from national pride and the search for international respect, or fear, than concern over a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) invasion. Militarism, or the "glorification of war as a good in itself, rather than simply as a means to an end," plays a crucial role in Russian strategic culture by serving as the source of state biases and beliefs.[10] This contextualization is not to imply Russia is not a rational actor; it certainly is. Instead, Moscow's rationality, and that of any state, filters through state biases and sets of belief about the international system.

Graham Allison's Rational Actor Model (RAM) is beneficial on this point. For RAM, states seek value-maximizing choices but are limited in bounded rationality or simply by the information available. Additionally, this understanding of the world and subsequent value-maximizing decisions stem from state beliefs. For Allison and Philip Zelikow, "Rather than labeling actors who misperceive a situation as 'irrational,' the model accepts the values, beliefs, and stereotypes of the decision-maker, irrespective of the accuracy of his views."[11] Therefore, the RAM allows for incorporating bias and belief into state understanding while maintaining state decision-making rationality within bounded rationality.

A new era of global competition brings changes to existing relationships, which may seem unpredictable. Failing to account for the strategic culture of others leads to a fundamental misunderstanding in state action. This failure is evident in the Intelligence and Security Committee of the United Kingdom's Parliament's 2020 report calling Moscow "fundamentally nihilistic."[12] Perceiving an adversary as irrational or, in the British case, destructive for the sake of being destructive, is a failure in understanding what "rational" is for the Krem-

lin. Take, for instance, the seeming surprise at Russian interference during the 2013–14 Ukraine crisis. For the West, how could an economic agreement between Ukraine and the European Union (EU) result in the type of clandestine efforts by Moscow to provoke a Ukrainian uprising? Namely, Moscow's fabrication of a secessionist movement in Crimea and ultimately placing Russians on the battlefield in Donetsk and Luhansk.

The questions posed by this article are: (1) in what ways does a multilayered approach improve the understanding of state action, and (2) how does militarism, as the Russian strategic culture, explain Russian actions and perceptions in a way that structural realism does not? The author argues that it is necessary to incorporate a second and third image approach to understand the role of strategic culture. Particularly in Russia's case, militarism plays a significant role in how Moscow understands the world and engages perceived adversaries. Understanding the Kremlin and influence of the *siloviki*, or former members of the security services, throughout Russia's state decision-making institutions is paramount to understanding the European security environment. The following sections break down into two parts. The first part explores the literature of militarism and how it can be understood as a strategic culture. The second part of the article addresses Russian militarism as the source of Russian strategic culture, providing the lens through which Moscow perceives the global environment. This section concludes by exploring how this lens perceives a changing global structure.

Militarism as Strategic Culture

The Ukraine crisis of 2014 became the defining moment of the post-Soviet Russo-Western relationship to date. Western governments, particularly the European Union, were taken aback by Moscow's seemingly unprovoked act of aggression. The West could not understand how a potential economic agreement with Ukraine could result in Russian force. The pending EU Association Agreement, opposed by the Kremlin, brought no NATO tanks to the Russian border, nor did the eventual collapse of the pro-Russian government in Kyiv bring NATO security forces into Ukraine. Eugene Rumer and Richard Sokolsky write that Russian actions in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea "were a shock to the politics and security of Europe as a whole."[13] However, the authors argue, "when examined in the context of Russia strategic culture, they should not have come as a surprise."[14]

Elias Götz argues for a complex approach to understanding Russia, writing "decision-maker influences, domestic political conditions, ideas, and geopolitical imperatives all matter, to some extent, but they play different roles and carry different weight in the various approaches."[15] For Moscow, the interplay between structural balance of power struggles and the perception of adversaries is best understood through the lens of militarism and the militarization of Russian foreign policy within the near abroad. While many Russian scholars place great weight on the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, these writers tend to ad-

dress the head of state in isolation from the greater Russian society.[16] However, this runs counter to the "large residual degree of continuity" strategic culture provides.[17] Instead, the Kremlin is better understood as a symptom of Russian strategic culture than simply acting at the behest of a charismatic leader. In this sense, Putin is more a product of Russia than Russia is a product of Putin.

Additionally, the structural origins of realist international relations theory fail to address the nuances of Russian policy within the near abroad. Was the 2008 Russo-Georgian War the result of an existential threat to Russian security? Was Georgia really on the brink of NATO accession? If John Mearsheimer's offensive realism accurately describes Moscow's actions, always pursuing regional hegemony and an edge over rivals, why did the Kremlin withdraw from Georgia?[18] After such a sound defeat over Tbilisi, notwithstanding several identified equipment failures, why settle for merely the autonomous zones of Abkhazia and South Ossetia? Was the West, fully committed to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, actually prepared to challenge Moscow from turning Tbilisi into a puppet state? The answers to these questions are not found in either understanding of a personality-driven Kremlin by Putin scholars or structural balance of power theories.[19] Instead, the understanding of the Kremlin's lens is found within Russian militarism. The argument here is not that balance of power realities or Putin's choice between policies "A" or "B" is somehow not an essential means of understanding Russian policy. Instead, as Götz contends, they all play a role in the ultimate outcome. However, militarism helps place these choices into the context of a specific Russian strategic culture. Militarism serves as the guiding mechanism for how Russian strategic culture, in the writing of Elizabeth Kier, "screens out some parts of reality while magnifying others."[20] It is the understanding of how Russia perceives the world and looks to engage specific threats. Importantly, this construct helps in the understanding of what is essential to Russia in terms of national security interests.

Structural realism focuses on the interaction between states and the powers that influence state action. However, state perception is left to an understanding of the rational actor, operating within bounded rationalism. This concept, of course, begs the question of what is rational to the actor? Perception of one state may appear irrational to the other, a common theme of Western and Russian policy makers. This concept is evident within the defensive realist notion of a security dilemma, generally understood as a misperception by one state about the intent of another, which leads to military buildups and an increased potential for war. Of this phenomena, Barry R. Posen writes of states, "The nature of their situation compels them to take the steps they do."[21] But the situation "compelling" a state to act is not entirely accurate. As previously discussed, perception is, in part, a function of state bias and belief systems. There is no certainty of action based on an external phenomenon. Instead, the action or policy choice results from how the state perceives the event.

Militarism, as a bias manifested from strategic culture, serves as a bridge between the third and the second image and offers insight into state biases and

beliefs that influence how states perceive the world. While the essence of a security dilemma forms from a fundamental misunderstanding of an adversary's intentions, defensive realism offers little in how these beliefs manifest. Instead, Robert Jervis' "spiral model" of the security dilemma depicts status quo powers in fear of each other.[22] Within this model there is a tragic escalation of tensions as states perceive others as revisionist powers, but in actuality they are absent any nefarious intent. As each state takes measures to increase their security, their actions decrease the security of the other state, locking each into a cycle of self-defeating self-protection. The condition, it seems, is a by-product of the system, and therefore the state is practically powerless to prevent it. However, perception is far from universal across states as strategic cultures influence how states perceive events.

In general terms, Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby define militarism as "the social and international relations of the preparation for, and conduct of, organized political violence" and "is an abiding and defining characteristic of world politics."[23] While scholars engage militarism through several lenses, militarism is understood as an institutionalization of war and conflict for this article's purposes. For Moscow, it is conceptualized as the development of a strategic culture within the Kremlin, which creates a bias toward the offense, particularly toward the near abroad. Nick Megoran writes militarism is "the glorification of war as a good in itself, rather than simply as a means to an end."[24] It is vital for the purposes of this study on Russian militarism not to hold the term *war* in the literal sense. Instead, in the Russian context, war is understood as both military force and political dominance. This conceptualization is particularly crucial in discussions of Moscow's so-called hybrid warfare within the near abroad as an instrument of regional fear and respect. As discussed in further detail in the next section, the Kremlin's desire to dominate the near abroad drives Russian policy more than any singular strategic objective. In this sense, war becomes an end unto itself and not simply a means of achieving strategic goals.

Institutional militarism is the study of the "relations between military and political institutions, and particularly on situations where the former are deemed to exert excessive influence over the latter."[25] Recent events in Myanmar, with the military junta's return, represent the extreme case where the military also serves as the political regime. However, in many instances, the civil-military relationship and the power of military or security elites are more nuanced. Stavrianakis and Selby explain that in nonliberal democracies, particularly in authoritarian systems, "there may be no clear distinction between civilian and military elites, and where the norm of an apolitical military may not apply."[26] Furthermore, many post-Communist states failed to transition away from these influences, and the close relationships between security and political elites remain. Moscow faced a similar occurrence when the chaos of the 1990s ended under Vladimir Putin's rise to power and subsequent turn away from democratization in favor of a regime more reminiscent of the Soviet past.

The question remains: How does militarism influence state decision mak-

ing? In other words, how does this phenomenon at the second image affect state actions at the third? To address this question, the institutionalization of militarism and military buildups, or militarization, are perhaps the most quantifiable components of militarism. For the latter, possessing superior military capabilities over those you wish to impose power leads states to rely more heavily on strength than diplomacy. An overpowering force reduces the risk of conflict to the stronger state, thereby removing the use of force from a means of last resort and elevating it to a primary diplomatic tool. Institutional militarism becomes evident when states emplace security elites at the top echelons of state decision making. These individuals' suspicious mindset influences the collective perception of the state on the international system and threats to state security. In this perception, the world is filled with revisionist powers seeking to gain an advantage within a zero-sum game. As a result of the institutionalized role of militarism in the system and the glorification of the security apparatus, the state relies heavily on the use of force.

David Kinsella writes, "The term 'militarism' is commonly used to describe a disposition or proclivity to behave in a particular way, namely, to employ military over non-military means of conflict resolution."[27] Militarism induces a bias toward military engagement, or coercive threats, over diplomatic means of conflict resolution. This phenomenon occurs by cultivating a suspicious mindset into state decision making and a proclivity toward the use of force in responding to international disputes. To these states, war, or the use of force, is a first option rather than means of last resort. Importantly, this returns this discussion to the third image, or state action, as militarism results in a bias toward the offense.

Militarism's role in the state's perception leads decision makers to rely on force as the primary means of diplomacy. From a realist paradigm, this perception of state capabilities alters the construct of the offense-defense balance. Stephen van Evera's concept of offense-defense theory possesses two variants: the true capabilities of the state and the perceived capabilities.[28] When states possess or perceive an offensive advantage, they are less likely to negotiate terms to avoid conflict, resulting in an increase in the potential for war.[29] Here, militarism's influence as a source of bias in state decision making directly influences how states engage the international system. In this case, perception of the other is no longer entirely abstract or based on state subconscious or a collective belief of threats. Instead, militarism emerges as a strategic culture of power glorification through the institutionalization of security elites into state decisions. In Putin's Russia, the *siloviki*'s influence acts as both a symptom and a cause of this phenomenon.

This section explored how militarism offers a mechanism for the study of bias and belief in how these forces influence a state's global perception. Furthermore, militarism can be understood as a form of strategic culture, operating as a set of beliefs that drive state decision making at the highest levels. The institutionalization of militarism, through the standing of security elites, coupled

with a cultural glorification of power, creates a bias toward the use of force. In Russia, this emerges as a desire to dominate the near abroad and post-Soviet space. The following section explores how Russian militarism helps explain why the Kremlin is quick to use force and coercion in the region. Moscow's strategic culture promotes the narrative of a nation surrounded by hostile powers seeking to destroy the state. This concept is best articulated in John Mearsheimer's 2014 *Foreign Affairs* article describing a Russia under siege by the West.[30] However, this third image interpretation of Russia falls short in explaining why the Kremlin perceives itself encircled by hostile powers. Moscow's development of hybrid warfare, clandestine political operations, coercive diplomacy, and the use of economic pressures all point to the influence of militarism as Russian strategic culture.

Russian Strategic Culture

Following the Ukraine crisis in 2014, Russian academic Fyodor Lukyanov, the chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy and research director at the Kremlin-supported Valdai Discussion Club, gave testimony before the United Kingdom's House of Lords. He stated "that there is a deep belief in Russian political culture that Russia can achieve anything geopolitically only through military means—through being very offensive."[31] Lukyanov's statement reflects the tenets of militarism, a bias toward the offense and a preference for military conflict over diplomatic alternatives. This section aims to establish an understanding of the Russian strategic culture through three primary questions. First, how did Russian militarism emerge within the context of the Putin regime, and how does this conceptualization influence Moscow's perception of the international environment? Second, in what ways has Russian militarism influenced how the Kremlin perceives an adversary's action? Once the article addresses these questions, the author can then focus on how this strategic culture perceives the changing global environment and, importantly, its role in a multipolar world.

In addressing the first question defining Russian militarism, three aspects of the current regime emerge. First, the regime that developed under Putin's leadership, while genially tied to the charismatic Russian leader, reflects more a return to normalcy than a stark shift in Russian governance. Instead, attempts at democratization following the collapse of the Soviet Union were an anomaly. Second, Putin's regime brought forth a rise in the *siloviki*, or former members of Russian and Soviet security forces, into the Kremlin's political decision making. A former KGB officer, Putin looked to fill positions with those loyal to him and, in doing so, stoked the suspicious perceptions and biases of the security elites. Third, the emergence of a strong centralized state with significant influences from the security forces led to a greater militaristic mindset, which fosters deep skepticism of rival powers.

Russian Militarism

From the chaotic post-Soviet Russian era came Vladimir Putin and the return of stability. Karen Dawisha writes, "His inaugural ceremony as the second president of the Russian Federation was designed to underscore his main theme: the centrality for Russian history of a strong state located inside the Kremlin."[32] The robust and centralized regime Putin established reflects the type of Russian governments dating back to the czars. So instead of seeing Putin as a maverick, he is in actuality simply a traditional Russian leader. This traditional approach is supported throughout the country, but Putin is not an all-powerful dictator. Some scholars argue Putin's "policy outputs have in theory tended to be closer to the majority public preferences than to a regime that relies primarily on blanket repression."[33] His style of leadership and cultivated hypermasculine public image is popular within Russia. Furthermore, the president's rejection of the West as a matter of national pride would arguably exist without Putin.[34] Putin's popularity as a "traditional" powerful Russian leader shows him to be a product of Russian societal preferences.

Putin's consolidation of power within the Kremlin operates through rings of influence around the president. Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy describe the Kremlin in terms of Putin as a "CEO," balancing the powerful oligarchs and the power of the state.[35] In their conceptualization of the regime, the Russian bureaucracy operates outside of Putin's "inner circle," limiting its influence on decision making.[36] Russia's powerful oligarchs may hold the majority of the nation's wealth, but they do so at the expense of political power. Ian Bremmer writes of a "bargain" between Putin and the powerful oligarchs in which they retain their wealth for political loyalty.[37] Breaking this bargain comes with severe consequences, as Bremmer points to the high-profile downfall of both Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky. In this type of closed system, it is crucial to understand those influencing Kremlin decision making.

Putin began an effort to surround himself with friends and former colleagues. As an effort to solidify control of Moscow, Putin brought in those from his time in St. Petersburg and began the "KGB-ization of the government."[38] This effort to insulate Putin from the bureaucracy and centralize power around the office of the president further institutionalized Russian militarism. According to Julie Anderson, these "chekists," or *siloviki*, began leading Russia's political-economic offices, bringing about closer ties with organized crime and actively working against democratic reforms.[39] The Federal Security Service (FSB), the successor of the Soviet-era KGB, was used to secure the Public Prosecutor's office and effetely remake the State Duma into a single-party institution.[40] In a relatively short time, Putin successfully returned Russia to a strong, centralized power and reduced the impact of Western efforts to democratize the nation.

With the rise of the *siloviki* came a greater commitment to restore Russia's international power and a cultural preference for the offense. Since the Soviet-

Afghan War (1979–89), the Soviet and subsequent Russian military lost their formerly vaunted status. After returning from Afghanistan, Soviet leaders used force to suppress domestic disturbances in 1988, and for Russian society, the force "no longer represented the ideals of honor, duty, and socialist equality."[41] Instead of being a source of national pride, the institution became a symbol of how far the former superpower fell. These issues were on display during NATO's 1999 Kosovo mission. According to former U.S. defense attaché Robert Bannon, "The situation in the Balkans was a particular flashpoint because it accentuated Russia's weakness and inability to defend its interests in the region."[42] In addition to NATO's mission expanding, the enlargement of the organization into the post-Soviet space created a resentment that seemed to catch Western powers off guard. Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer write of this resentment: "Putin would later tap and mobilize to develop his brand of red-blooded nationalism, was discounted, even dismissed, by Western proponents of expansion, who at best seemed puzzled by Russian anxieties."[43] This movement helped reignite the Russian mindset, as Kosovo harbingered a new era of Kremlin aggression. Lost to the Western perspective was an understanding of Moscow's loss from a strategic culture perspective. For the Kremlin, the West possessed revisionist objectives that aimed to destroy Russia.

The West became free to operate throughout the former Soviet space with little resistance from Moscow. Following the disastrous *Kursk* submarine tragedy in 2000, which further exposed the Russian military's decline and a striking lack of honesty within the Kremlin, Putin began an overhaul of Russian forces.[44] This reconstruction of the Russian military began in 2001 with the appointment of Sergei Ivanov, Putin's friend and former KGB colleague.[45] Ivanov began the task of modernizing the Russian military from the Soviet rot. A critical component of the institutionalized Russian militarism is the idea that force is an end unto itself. For Moscow, this end comes through a respected military force capable of instilling fear within a perceived Russian sphere of influence. Keir Giles of Chatham House writes, "Russia equates respect with fear, and expression of respect by other nations with ensuring that Russia is consulted— and deferred to—on all major aspects of international affairs."[46] Since Moscow cannot replicate Western alliances, such as NATO or the European Union, the Kremlin must resort to fear across the near abroad to generate compliance. The fear Moscow cultivates throughout the near abroad emerges as a primary objective of the state, or in other words, strength becomes a good unto itself.

In the 1990s, Russia's military was unable to produce the fear, and therefore respect, across Eurasia in the way of the old Soviet military. Restoring the Russian military to greatness became a driving policy choice under Putin. The Kremlin embarked on a military modernization program titled the "New Look." It is at this point where militarism becomes solidified within Putin's Russia. This and subsequent programs aimed to transition the Russian military from the old Soviet era of peer-to-peer conflict to a streamlined service, more agile and responsive to current Russian threats. These kinds of changes to military doc-

trine and spending may lead states to pursue military over nonmilitary means of conflict resolution.[47] Additionally, a perception of an offensive advantage increases the probability of war.[48] In the Russian case, the changes to doctrine and the force aimed to reimpose respect within the near abroad.

Moscow's strategic documents point to NATO buildups along the Russian border as the Kremlin's top security concern.[49] Arguably, the ability of NATO and the EU to attract new members among the former Soviet Union is unmatched by Moscow. The Eurasian Economic Union failed to attract the larger economies of Eurasia, falling short in its goal as a counterweight to the EU. When NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit ended with a pathway for Ukrainian and Georgian membership, it became a reminder of this lack of fear. The Kremlin perceives the near abroad not as allies but as potential Western pawns. The sentiment is evident years later in Russian minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov's comments, "In my opinion, this played a significant role in Mr. [Mikheil] Saakashvili 'flipping his lid' and deciding that he could do anything he liked."[50] In Lavrov's comments, it is apparent that Western influence over the Georgian government "forced" Moscow's hand.

The five-day war successfully deterred Georgia's pro-Western government from joining NATO, but it also served to reassert Moscow as the predominant power in the post-Soviet space. Unlike the West, Moscow was forced to resort to military means within the near abroad to achieve a diplomatic objective. Although former U.S. ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, laments the lack of Western response to the incursion, and some analysts refer to the war as a watershed moment for Russian aggression, there remains a pervasive question.[51] Why, after little Western resistance, did Moscow remove its military from Georgia? If the goal were to end Georgia's Western dreams, why not go further and forcibly remove President Saakashvili? Instead, for Russian militarism, the goal was to reassert the fear in Russian capabilities and dominance, while the strategic goal of stopping Georgia's NATO membership was almost secondary. Arguably, Moscow achieved this by taking a poorly equipped army, virtually unimpeded, to Tbilisi. The incident showed the Kremlin that conflict was easy and is a further indication that Moscow is quick to use force within the near abroad.

Moscow's "New Look" program reduced the officer corps and sought to modernize military equipment through a 1.1 trillion ruble, 10-year spending plan.[52] Modernizing the Russian military included changes to the way Moscow perceived war and conflict and led directly to the introduction in the near abroad to so-called hybrid warfare. Dmitry Adamsky describes the concept as without formal declaration, but as an " 'informational-psychological struggle'," that attacks an adversary's decision making through "moral-psychological-cognitive-information suppression."[53] At its foundation, hybrid war confuses an adversary as to what is occurring while enabling Moscow's plausible deniability. Arguably this tactic serves to strike fear, not necessarily in other great powers, but within the near abroad. Moscow's implementation

of hybrid warfare reveals it to be a method of diplomatic intimidation and shows the Kremlin's preference for force over diplomacy. This change to Russian warfare was evident in the lead-up to the 2014 Ukraine crisis. Russian "snap-exercises" near the Ukraine border were dismissed by Russia's representative to NATO, Alexander Grushko, as simply maintaining readiness.[54] In reality, these "exercises" masked Russian intelligence and material support to Ukrainian separatists in Eastern Ukraine.

The military modernization program brought about a foundational shift in the Russian perspective. A 2015 study by the Moscow-based Levada Center "recorded a phenomenon never seen before in Russia: her citizens dreaming of war, believing it will solve all existing problems. An overwhelming majority believes that Russia is surrounded by enemies and that their patriotic military will heroically defend them."[55] A belief that Russia is under constant threat of war is nothing new. Throughout Russian history, rulers perpetuated an ideology "on the idea of the country as a military camp, a fortress under siege."[56] This belief helped to solidify the understanding of the near abroad as comprised merely of pawns in a global game between Moscow and the great global powers.

Russia's perception of the world as a system filled with enemies emerges from a deep-seated historical belief in Russian greatness. Early in Putin's term, he echoed this understanding by arguing Russia is a great power. In a 2005 speech, Putin declared, "Above all else Russia was, is, and will, of course, be a major European power."[57] The source of Russia's claim to be a great power stems from its continued control over the near abroad, or *derzhavnost*. Alexandra Roberts of the Aspen Security Forum defines *derzhavnost* as "great-powerness" or an "unquestionable sphere of influence."[58] This belief is an understanding that its influence over others through a sphere of influence grants the nation its "right" to be among the great world powers. Arguably, the West's support of Kosovo's independence from Serbia over Russia's objectives were seen as a violation of the sphere of influence.[59] Stephen Kotkin argues, "The real challenge today boils down to Moscow's desire for Western recognition of a Russian sphere of influence in the former Soviet space (with the exception of the Baltic states)."[60] This deep-seated belief in Russian greatness resulting from the dominance of the near abroad is foundational to Russian strategic culture and institutionalized within the Putin regime.

The Kremlin's Perception

After establishing how militarism manifests within the Kremlin, it is necessary to turn attention to Russian militarism's influence on state threat perceptions. In other words, in what ways does Russian strategic culture, as militarism, influence how the Kremlin perceives an adversary? What emerges from Moscow's strategic culture is a deep suspicion of external influences within its self-declared sphere of influence. Rumer and Sokolsky argue that Russian strategic culture was the cause of Moscow's "blunders in Ukraine."[61] As stated previously, this article argues that it is this bias toward the offense that drives the Kremlin

to become overly aggressive, to the detriment of Russia's strategic objectives. Moscow perceives its primary great power threat coming from the West. Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov told Sputnik in 2015, "I see no threat from China. In general I see no threats from the east except one, US global missile defence, which is being created on US territory."[62] For structural realism and the balance of power, a hypersensitivity toward changes to Russian influence in Eurasia emerges. To the Kremlin, the near abroad is a zero-sum game and at stake is Russia's "right" to be a great power.

According to Mitchell Orenstein, Moscow perceives the European Union "as a competitor for influence in its" near abroad, as no Central and Eastern European nation has "joined the EU without joining NATO first."[63] This concern is twofold: while NATO is a straightforward military alliance, the EU promotes democracy and economic integration by adhering to political and economic norms. Moscow views the Western efforts of democratization within the post-Soviet space as undermining Russian power and influence. Attempts by states to Westernize fuels the Kremlin's fundamental belief that these actions are anti-Russian and part of a Western conspiracy. Ukraine's 2004 election provides an example of this paranoia. Former Kremlin official Gleb Pavlovsky stated that Putin assumed Western influence in support of Viktor Yushchenko over the Kremlin-backed candidate, Viktor Yanukovych.[64] This belief is largely due to Moscow's efforts to sway the election in the Kremlin's favor. Putin sent political operatives to Kyiv to stoke Eastern Ukraine and Western Ukraine divisions, even sending people with Nazi flags to a Yushchenko rally to give the appearance of extremist support.[65] This effort was ultimately a disaster for Moscow, as Yanukovych's contested victory brought about a "seismic shift Westward" by igniting the Orange Revolution.[66]

Moscow's perception of Ukraine stems from the institutionalized belief in *derzhavnost*, and the Kremlin's militaristic strategic culture. Ukraine, in particular, is not seen by the Kremlin as an independent nation, only a pawn in efforts by foreign powers to harm Russia. Putin has stated he does "not believe that Ukraine is really a separate state," which is a legacy understanding that emerges from the ancient Kievan Rus civilization (862–1242 CE).[67] The perception of being a foreign pawn dates back well before the current regime to the belief in conspiracies of the Swedish in 1709, Austrians during World War I, Nazi Germany, Israeli intelligence during the Cold War, and more recently, the European Union and NATO.[68] The Western conspiracies returned to prominence for the Kremlin during the 2014 Ukraine crisis. Victoria Nuland, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, became a symbol of the Russian belief in Western meddling in the near abroad. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs even published a report entitled *White Book on Violations of Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Ukraine* to justify its actions in Ukraine. Regarding Nuland, it states, "Whenever she came, she edified opposition leaders, exercising public gestures like the distribution of cookies among the activists, which was intended to show that Washington was supporting the lawlessness

that reigned in Ukraine."[69] While perhaps almost comical to point to cookie distribution's nefarious intent, the message is clear: the West is interfering in Moscow's rightful sphere of influence.

As events unfolded in Kyiv throughout the fall of 2013, Russia's militaristic strategic culture began to take shape. The *siloviki* and "patriotic businessmen" began plotting ways to regain control of Crimea should events in the capital continue to decline.[70] These musings were eventually operationalized by Russia's changing military tactics and doctrine. In February 2014, former deputy prime minister Vladislav Surkov, Putin's "grey cardinal," arrived as a special emissary to Crimea.[71] Surkov, a prominent *siloviki*, championed "sovereign democracy," or the notion that Russia requires a "unique" form of democracy as it is forever besieged by external enemies.[72] The idea of "sovereign democracy" from such a high-ranking *siloviki* reveals the extent of Russian militarism's institutionalization within the Kremlin. Surkov's arrival in Crimea foreshadowed the Kremlin's hard-line policy to come. Shortly after his appearance, Moscow rapidly increased military special forces and clandestine agents from both the GRU (*Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravlenie*, or Chief Intelligence Office) and FSB in Crimea.[73] Within days, demonstrations in Crimea grew more violent as Russia's hybrid war had already begun. For the Kremlin, Ukraine is an internal Russian affair. A critical secondary state to Russia within the near abroad, for Russian militarism, the potential loss of Kyiv to the West is a significant blow to *derzhavnost*, its very claim to be a great power.

Paranoia is not limited to the international sphere, as unrest within Russia is routinely blamed on external influences. More recently, the Kremlin points to Western support of opposition leader Alexei Navalny as another example of external meddling in Russian affairs. Putin claims, "Our opponents or our potential opponents . . . have always relied on—and used—ambitious, power-hungry people."[74] During the same interview with Russian media, Putin returned to the idea of Russia under siege by arguing, "The stronger we become, the stronger this containment policy."[75] The Kremlin dismisses any opposition to the central government as only possible with help from external influences. In this sense, securing Russia internally and externally begins with challenging the international powers.

Russian Militarism and Great Power Competition

This article's final question asks: How does Russian militarism perceive a changing global power structure? First and foremost, the Kremlin sees the changing international structure as an opportunity to increase its global influence. The 2015 *Russian National Security Strategy* argues, "The role of force as a factor in international relations is not declining" and that "militarization and arms-race processes are developing in regions adjacent to Russia."[76] These statements reveal how the Kremlin interprets the international system as surrounding and challenging Russian power. The document touts the rise of a multipolar world where Russia plays a central role. According to the document, "The process of

shaping a new polycentric model of the world order is being accompanied by an increase in global and regional instability."[77] The security strategy also names Russia's long-term strategic interest as "consolidating the Russian Federation's status as a leading world power, whose actions are aimed at maintaining strategic stability and mutually beneficial partnerships in a polycentric world."[78] Whether this view reflects a revisionist intent of the Kremlin falls outside this article's scope; however, the statement is telling of a power displeased with its current global position and that feels it is under assault.

China's rise may also become a source of angst for the Kremlin, especially as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) expands Beijing's influence throughout the post-Soviet space. Although the Kremlin enjoys touting its importance to the BRI, in actuality, Moscow plays a secondary role in Chinese objectives.[79] For now, the West remains the most urgent threat to Russian militarism's desire for respect through fear. As Lavrov's 2015 remarks to Sputnik reflect, the West poses the greatest threat to Moscow, despite Beijing's growing influence in Central Asia as a result of the BRI. Former U.S. ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, argues of Putin, "In his view, he is at war with the United States, its allies, and the multilateral institutions that Washington created and currently anchors. Putin no longer desires cooperation with the West or even a respected place within the liberal international order."[80] Instead, the West serves as the great and pending threat prevalent within Russian strategic culture. Unlike other threats, the one from the West challenges Russia's *derzhavnost*. This challenge to Russian influence in the near abroad impacts the source of Russian power. For the Kremlin's strategic culture, Russian power is dependent upon fear and respect in the region.

This section addressed three questions: How did militarism emerge in Russia, how does Russia militarism perceive adversaries, and finally, how does militarism influence Moscow's perception of great power competition? While Putin alone is not the source of Russian militarism, the return of a centralized state fostered an environment in which a bias toward the use of force could flourish. The rise of the *siloviki* into the regime further institutionalized the militarization of Russian foreign policy. A staunch belief in an "unquestionable sphere of influence," *derzhavnost* drives the Kremlin's policies within the near abroad.[81] As the region becomes the source of Russia's claim to greatness, actions by foreign powers that could jeopardize this asymmetric relationship are perceived as a direct threat to Russian security. In this vein of understanding, the threat is less about state survival and more about preserving a structural relationship where Moscow dominates the post-Soviet space. Fear of Moscow becomes the goal, as fear equates respect of Russian power. As the West remains the largest challenger to this Russian relationship, through the EU and democratization efforts, China is still perceived as a secondary concern. However, as Beijing's influence grows in Eurasia, Russia may see China as a threat to its influence and domination of the region and, therefore, a threat to its source of power.

Conclusion

This article posed two questions: (1) in what ways does a multilayered approach improve the understanding of state action, and (2) how does militarism, as the Russian strategic culture, explain Russian actions and perceptions in a way that structural realism does not? The study of strategic culture as a construct that bridges the gap between Waltz's second (state level) and third (systemic level) image offers greater depth to the study of state action. While acknowledging the influence of state bias and belief, structural realism offers little insight into why a state perceives certain threats to its security. As the RAM shows, states acting within bounded rationality still act rationally, just in accordance with how they perceive the world. Militarism, or the institutionalized glorification of force and power, offers insight into the development of Russian strategic culture during the Putin regime. The resulting bias toward the offense helps explain actions that seem to fall outside structural realism. When seen through this lens, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and subsequent withdrawal of troops illustrates how the Kremlin uses armed conflict as a means to instill fear and compliance. Russian doctrinal changes to hybrid warfare reveal its sensitivity to foreign influence within the near abroad and its "right" to a sphere of influence. Understanding Russian strategic culture through the institutionalization of militarism is necessary to contextualize Russian action.

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"We Must Protect This Peace with Our Hands"

Strategic Culture and Japan's Use of Force in International Disputes as Depicted in Ministry of Defense Manga Promotional Materials

Matthew Brummer, PhD; and Eitan Oren, PhD

Abstract: Japan's national security identity and its elite strategic culture are at odds with each other, with the former moored to deep-rooted historical legacies and the latter yearning to adapt to contemporary imperatives, including the need to more actively cooperate with the United States in maintaining peace and stability in Asia. How can this tension be overcome? How do defense planners attempt to shape public perceptions of the military's changing roles in society? And what might their efforts to do so teach us about how they view the desired identity, norms, and values of Japan's military in relation to the use of force in international disputes?

Keywords: Japan, culture, military, propaganda, manga, militarism, pacifism, identity, security

In the postwar period, Japan's Self-Defense Force (JSDF) has never engaged in combat operations or been used in coercive dispute settlement abroad, despite the ability and frequent opportunities to do so, and as some argue, the need to. JSDF personnel have therefore never been asked to fight in defense of their country or in the aid of an ally, nor has the Japanese public's tolerance of combat costs and casualties been tested. Indeed, the Japanese public likes it so and has remained stubbornly opposed to the development of a more "normalized" military characterized by offensive capabilities and the projection of hard power beyond its borders.

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At the same time, however, defense planners in Tokyo perceive an increasingly severe security environment facing the nation, with rising regional threats on the one hand and strained strategic alliances on the other.[1] In turn, JSDF official missions and mandates have evolved considerably since the end of the Cold War, and most prominently since the Shinzo Abe administration's doctrine of "proactive peace" beginning in 2012. Yet, the pace of change is slow, especially considering the many attributes enjoyed by Abe that are ostensibly conducive to the rapid development of new security policies.[2]

Thus, what the Japanese public wants of its defense is not necessarily what the defense establishment thinks is needed in the current security environment. That is, Japan's national security identity and its elite strategic culture are at odds with each other, with the former moored to deep-rooted historical legacies and the latter yearning to adapt to contemporary imperatives, including the need to more actively cooperate with the United States in maintaining peace and stability in Asia.

How can this tension be overcome? How do defense planners attempt to shape public perceptions of the military's changing roles in society? And what might their efforts to do so teach us about how they view the desired identity, norms, and values of the JSDF in relation to the use of force?

In this article, we borrow from Jeannie L. Johnson and Matthew T. Berrett's Cultural Topography Framework to provide insight into the enduring and complex relationship between Japan's national and strategic cultures. In particular, we analyze how the Ministry of Defense (MOD) uses cultural production in public promotion of the JSDF's most important yet most elusive task: the use of force in military contingencies.[3] These propaganda materials are the marketing performances, practices, and techniques that governments employ in a "one-way monologue" with domestic and international audiences.[4] As Johnson and Berrett suggest, such "state propaganda illuminates the identity, norms, and values that the state hopes to achieve, as well as the narrative it hopes will dominate popular perception."[5]

In Japan, such materials have been used since the 1990s to communicate to the Japanese public across socioeconomic groups the culture of their military, imbuing the citizenry's mind with what Sabine Frühstück describes as "a series of civilianizing, familiarizing, trivializing, and spectacularizing messages about the military's capabilities, roles, and character."[6] And while these promotional materials may at first view appear contradictory, naive, and even childish or *kawaii*, the stories they tell are serious ones about power, security, and enemies that threaten the Japanese way of life. As such, a great deal about Japan's national and strategic cultures can be gleaned from examination of such materials, which are culturally and historically specific.

We focus our study on the government's strategic deployment of manga (graphic novels) in the public representation of JSDF's identity, norms, values, and perceptual lens as they relate to the use of military force. To do so, we draw on the Cultural Topography Framework in illustrating how the MOD frames

the use of military force through the deployment of popular culture cartoons, a medium of communication deeply familiar to the Japanese public. The authors do so through a systematic review of official propaganda materials published by the MOD between 2006 and 2019. The authors choose this period of analysis because it enables them to explore cultural material as produced by the MOD under different government coalitions (the Democratic Party of Japan, 2009–12; Liberal Democratic Party plus Komeito before and thereafter), and under different legal interpretations about Japan's use of force, as the cabinet made a momentous decision in 2014 to officially reinterpret the constitution to allow Japan to participate in limited collective self-defense such as aiding U.S. forces in combat.[7]

This article begins with a brief review of the international relations scholarship on Japan's national security identity and strategic culture, as well as how popular culture has been used in the past as an instrument to communicate narratives about Japan's military. The third section describes the data and methods and the fourth presents the results of the analysis. The fifth and final section discusses the implications of the results and suggests directions for future avenues of research.

Literature Review

As an economic juggernaut without commensurate defense capabilities, Japan's postwar security behavior has long puzzled international relations theorists and military scholars.[8] The Realist tradition has had a difficult time explaining Japan's unwillingness to use its military abroad despite intense regional and global security concerns.[9] Liberalism, too, has struggled to explain the glacial pace of change in Japan's security behavior despite considerable change to its political and economic institutions and policies.[10] While power and institutions fail to provide sufficient understanding of Japanese postwar security behavior, Constructivist scholars have shed a great deal of light on the topic through examining ideational and cultural forces that imbue and shape Japanese society.[11]

These forces have been studied primarily at two levels of analysis: the general public's national security identity and the elites' strategic culture. Andrew L. Oros describes the difference succinctly within the literature on Japan: while strategic culture seeks to explain the beliefs and behaviors of political leaders, government bureaucrats, and military officers, a national culture or "security identity" is "not limited to strategy developed by political elites but rather is a resilient identity that is politically negotiated and comprises a widely accepted set of principles on the acceptable scope of state practices in the realm of national security."[12] Thus, a security identity enjoys broad legitimacy at the level of the general public while strategic culture is shaped by societal elites.

It is difficult if not impossible to understand strategic culture without considering the national culture in which it is embedded, and post–World War II Japan is perhaps the quintessential example of such a case, with large sections of Japanese society staunchly averse to the use of force as a tool of statecraft, while

certain segments of elites have long yearned for a more active and powerful military. Some scholars highlight the process by which security identity is interpreted by policy elites, informing and constraining it in democratic societies; this article focuses on the process by which defense planners and government public relations experts seek to catalyze change in Japan's national identity through the strategic deployment of culture.[13] In this formulation, one must bear in mind the broad contours of the state's security identity in order to understand its strategic culture and how the government goes about negotiating equivalence between the two.

Japan's Security Identity

Thomas U. Berger has argued that Japan's choice not to pursue military power despite its ability to do so is due to the nation's culture of "anti-militarism" after World War II.[14] Peter J. Katzenstein has shown how Japan's normative context and comprehensive definitions of security provide important insight into why the country refuses its right to use force in dispute settlement, while Stephanie Lawson and Seiko Tannaka have pointed to Japan's historical memory of its violent past to explain why the country does not return to a normal military posture, characterized by offensive capabilities and the projection of hard power beyond its borders.[15] In *Normalizing Japan*, Andrew Oros provides a compelling explanation for why Japanese security policy has evolved—or not evolved—due to its "reluctant" security identity, delving into the critical cases of the ban on arms exports, the militarization of outer space, and missile defense cooperation with the United States.[16] And, a long list of scholars have argued that Japan's identity as a "peace state" or "civilian power" describes well the subdued nature and particular formulations of its security policies and military practice, from the Gulf War to international humanitarian assistance and beyond.[17] Bhubhindar Singh notes that Japan's security identity as a peace state has been transitioning to one of an "international state." This transition is a contested one and is the "ideational battleground" between Japan's broad public security identity and narrow, elite strategic culture.[18]

Japan's Strategic Culture

Oros has argued that Japan has had three distinct strategic cultures in the modern era: *isolationist* (mid-nineteenth century to the late-nineteenth century), imperialist (late-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century) and a post–World War II nonmilitarist strategic culture characterized by reluctance to use military power abroad, even in collective self-defense.[19] In this third period, Japanese planners developed a "comprehensive" approach to security (*sōgō anzen hoshō*) that wed defense imperatives with access to resources and markets, but in an entirely different formulation to the strategic culture that had led Japan to acquire such resources through military imperialism.[20] It is this most modern iteration of Japan's strategic culture that is facing pressure to adapt to changing international security realities and domestic political environments.

These pressures have been mounting since the end of the Cold War and have expanded significantly during the past decade. What began as piecemeal changes in response to particular security events in the 1990s, such as the dispatch of minesweepers to the Persian Gulf in 1991 and the deployment to aid the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission in Cambodia in 1992, has grown to a much grander debate in Japan about its future security strategy and policies in the twenty-first century.[21] This debate has coincided with considerable shifts in the institutions, policies, mission, and mandates of the JSDF. For example, the deployment of approximately 600 JSDF personnel to southern Iraq from 2004 to 2006 was by far the largest and most risky overseas mission for the JSDF in the postwar era, even though the soldiers were in nonconflict zones and under the protection of Dutch and Australian armies.[22] Since the Iraq mission, there have been an increasing number of international ventures, including deployment of naval vessels to participate in antipiracy convoy duties off the coast of Somalia beginning in 2009. The adoption of a formal national security strategy in 2013, establishment of a National Security Council (NSC) in 2014, and adoption of new alliance guidelines with the United States in 2015 under the newly established legal right to collective self-defense, all under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, have intensified interest in the future direction of Japan's security policy and whether these recent changes indicate a shift in Japan's strategic culture.[23]

During the Cold War era, many believed that the actual use of the JSDF for defense purposes was unlikely.[24] And although Japan's security culture will likely continue to show a reluctance to use or develop military power beyond very limited scenarios, as Sado Akihiro has argued, "The JSDF today is at a major turning point . . . undergoing a conversion from an organization founded on the premise that it would not be used to an organization operating on the assumption that it will actually be used."[25] That is, Japan may well be in the midst of a transition from *nonmilitarism* to a "fourth modern incarnation" of Japan's strategic culture.[26]

Popular Culture Deployment as Strategy

To mediate the tension between a nonthreatening yet highly capable and more proactive JSDF, important both in terms of domestic politics and international diplomacy, the Japanese government has and will continue to use a web of affective cultural and entertainment resources—the Creative Industrial Complex (CIC)—to influence public perceptions of Japan's military establishment.[27] The CIC has produced a stunning amount of film, anime, theater, literature, fashion, and other expressive media designed to generate affinity toward the nation's growing hard power identity and burgeoning military industrial base. Manga, perhaps chief among them and a multibillion-dollar publishing marvel, is an artistic iconography developed in Japan during the nineteenth century and long used by Japan's political and government establishments as a potent marketing and communication tool.[28]

Beginning in the early 1970s, state agencies, recognizing the strong commercial success of manga both at home and abroad, collaborated with private firms to produce manga that communicated political, business, literary, and educational information to the public. With this move toward culturally specific communication came a correlative change in how the Japanese citizenry digested their official information. By the mid-1980s, the use of manga as an official communication medium had thoroughly permeated nearly all state-sponsored institutions in Japan, save one—the Self-Defense Forces.[29]

Long shy of engaging with a critical citizenry and suffering from a negative international public image, Japan's military had preferred to remained isolated, purposefully slow in employing modern and nontraditional communication techniques. However, as economic hardship in the 1990s reduced Japan's relative power and influence, and a host of emergent international threats reduced Japan's sense of security, it became clear to elites in the JSDF and MOD that answers to many important questions facing the nation would need to be answered with a more proactive defense establishment.[30]

Thus, and as the Cold War theater came to an end, the JSDF and MOD sought to employ private sector creative industries to build avenues of information and knowledge flow to, from, and between the Japanese people and international community toward what Takayoshi Yamamura has described as a strategy to entice "consumption of the military."[31] With the launch of Prince Pickles in 2007, a cartoon and comic series that sought to describe the ideal "journey to peace," and an MOD initiative to publish official defense white papers in manga format for general consumption, Japan's military has slowly moved from a position of self-imposed isolation to one of active public engagement. Strategically using the then well-established and normalized popular culture of manga in government propaganda, the JSDF and MOD began to incorporate these cartoons in its recruiting and public relations campaigns in what Sabine Frühstück has described as a two-track effort to pacify and negate its violent war-waging past and potential while also selling its role as a competent protector of Japan.[32]

While most academic studies have focused on Japan's popular culture as a strategic instrument of statecraft in relation to soft power, such as initiatives of "Japan Cool," and on private sector popular culture depictions of the JSDF, relatively little research has been done focusing specifically on government-produced propaganda.[33] A valuable exception has been Frühstück's research program, which has described in great detail manga material in MOD and JSDF promotional campaigns. She observes that these manga constitute "a set of recurring images that dominate public relations material and attempts at self-valorization" and collectively imply that the JSDF is "necessary for everybody's safety and security; that they are ordinary men and women capable of extraordinary acts; that they are both powerful and carefully tamed; and that they can militarily defend Japan if they absolutely must."[34] She also contends that the trend of an increasingly intimate relationship between the JSDF and pop-

ular culture constitutes a type of militarization, but "it is a militarization that already has internalized the multifaceted character of the military as a group capable of caring, rescuing, and building," in addition to the more ephemeral possibility of one that would use force in dispute settlement or go to war.[35]

To conclude, then, since the end of the Cold War, the MOD and SDF have used public relations materials in ways that symbolically "disarmed" themselves and shown their military prowess and capability to protect; individuated and personalized servicemembers as ordinary people capable of extraordinary acts; and glamorized their image and sought to align themselves with other state-run agencies (e.g., the police and post office) and globally active armed forces.[36]

Data and Methodology

This article follows Jeannie L. Johnson's iteration of the Cultural Topography Framework as a tool for examining what MOD's use of popular culture propaganda in mediating contestation between the national security identity and elite strategic culture tells us about the government's changing perceptions of the military's identity, norms, values, and perceptual lens.[37] The scope of analysis is narrowed to a critical issue of strategic interest to policy makers in Japan, the United States, and around the world: Japan's use of military force in international affairs. The article's aim is not to offer predictions about how Japan is likely to behave in various contingencies, but instead to better understand how Japanese defense planners seek to portray Japan's use of force to current and future generations at home and abroad.

Based on the Cultural Topography Framework, the following four analytical categories are used as a starting point for analysis of Japan's use of military force in MOD-produced manga:

1. **Identity:** the character traits the group assigns to itself and the reputation it pursues.
2. **Norms:** expected, accepted, and preferred modes of behavior and shared understanding concerning taboos.
3. **Values:** material or ideational goods that are honored and confer increased status to members (within the group).
4. **Perceptual lens:** the filter through which this group views the world; the default assumptions that inform its opinion and ideas about specific others.

Importantly, while these four categories represent core features of a particular group, they are not necessarily mutually exhaustive. Indeed, as Johnson points out, "it is the overlap between categories—a cultural trait manifesting itself in multiple ways, as both an aspect of identity and an attendant norm, for instance—that acts as a signal of robustness and helps the researcher narrow down the most salient traits for examination."[38]

This article collects and analyzes the MOD official promotional material published on an annual basis since 2006.[39] These publications accompany the

annual security white paper *Defense of Japan (bōei hakusho)*.[40] The official manga covers a breadth of themes, including concrete missions (e.g., protecting Japan from ballistic missiles) and mandates (e.g., peacekeeping operations in Haiti) to policies (e.g., new Japan–U.S. guidelines) and bureaucratic reforms (e.g., the 2016 establishment of the Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Agency). Common to all the themes identified in the manga is their strong relevance to contemporary developments, either in the security environment or in Japan's security apparatus. Thus, for example, the 2007 edition focused on Japan's ballistic missile defense (BMD) system in the aftermath of North Korea's 2006 missile launches, and the 2015 edition focused on the revision of the U.S.–Japan guidelines and Japan's role in collective self-defense.[41]

To address the authors' research question, a two-step mixed-methods research design is used in analyzing the data. First, the authors used Nvivo's cluster analysis tool to calculate text similarity by year. The analysis based on the level of textual similarity—the Pearson correlation coefficient—is used to gauge how similar the annual publications are, thus revealing patterns of continuity and change across annual editions. Since all manga publications were roughly similar in length (about 65 pages each), the corpora size variation is controlled. The authors also employ Nvivo's word frequency query of official manga publications to identify the most frequent words used in the entire text corpora. This enables for the identification of key terms that MOD communicates to the public. The authors then follow with word frequency analysis for selected key words by annual publication in order to identify whether certain words were emphasized while others were not, and if so, when.

Second, because cluster analysis and word frequency do not provide context of usage or content description, the authors draw on the Cultural Topography Model in performing document analysis of each publication so as to gain an understanding of how the MOD frames the use of force, as well as the identity, norms, values, and perceptual lens of the JSDF as they relate to the use of force.

Below is a list of 12 questions that guided the authors' analysis. In choosing the relevant questions from Johnson and Berrett's extensive list, the authors selected those that can shed light on the use of force, defined as using physical strength or capabilities to solve a problem, as well as on the JSDF organizational culture. The authors have revised some of the questions to reflect these points and to cater to the specific Japanese cultural and historical context. For each annual manga publication, the authors considered these 12 questions and recorded the answers in a database for meta-analysis.

Use of Force:
1. Do the JSDF contemplate or use force in the story?
2. If the answer to the previous question was "yes," what kind of force is contemplated/used?
3. Under what scenarios/against whom does the JSDF contemplate/use military force?

Identity:

4. What character traits are assigned to the JSDF in relation to the use of force?
5. What reputation is assigned to the JSDF in relation to the use of force?

Norms:

6. What are the accepted and expected modes of organizational behavior/societal behavior in relation to the use of force?
7. What defines victory for this group in a potential or actual conflict or problem?
8. Are allies viewed as reliable or treacherous or in some other fashion?

Values:

9. What is considered honorable behavior in the context of the JSDF's use of force?
10. What organizational and societal values in relation to the use of force are rewarded as character traits or are considered naive, juvenile, and possibly dangerous? Which character qualities are consistently praised?

Perceptual Lens:

11. How is the threat environment Japan faces depicted?
12. How is the potential or actual enemy's character depicted?

Findings

Step 1: Cluster Analysis and Word Frequency

Clear patterns of similarity were found between the annual publication of *Manga-Style Defense of Japan*, with strong correlations (above 0.70) obtained for editions published during the period between 2012 and 2017. Simply put, editions between 2012 and 2017 had a high degree of similarity, yet not so with pre-2012 editions.[42] This suggests that between 2012 and 2017 ("Abe years"), the content of manga editions was relatively consistent and differed considerably from content in the 2006–11 years.

Using Nvivo's word frequency query, the authors first sampled the entire text corpora. The most frequently mentioned word in the text was "defense" (防衛, boei) with its associated terms (protect, guard, defend, and so on), with a weighted percentage of 0.76. The second most frequently mentioned word in the text was "JSDF" with a weighted percentage of 0.52. The third and fourth words were "to conduct" (行う, okonau) and "activities" (活動, katsudou), with weighted percentages of 0.41 for both categories. Other frequently mentioned terms were "air" (航空, 0.31), "support" (支援, 0.28), "duty" (任務, 0.25), and "security" (安全, 0.23).

The authors then follow with word frequency analysis for selected key terms by annual publication. While words closely related to the use of force such as "war," "attack," "fight," and "battle" are relatively infrequent in the corpora, there is an identifiable increasing trend in words associated with the use of force during the Abe administration (2012–19), including reference terms for "fighting" and "attacking." At the same time, certain constellations of terms

Figure 1. Support and fighting term frequency—the Abe years

show a decreasing trend during the same period, such as those associated with "support" (figure 1). This suggests a shift in the function of the JSDF in society: away from a support organization and toward a fighting force.

With the exception of 2011, the year of the great east Japan earthquake, all the editions emphasized "defense" related words over "support" related words (figure 2).[43] Interestingly, all the editions published during the Abe years saw especially strong emphasis on defense.

Step 2: Document Analysis

Use of Force

The use of force featured in all of the manga editions except for three: 2008, 2010, and 2011. Most prominently, references to the use of force can be characterized in line with *individual s*elf-defense: intercepting or thwarting an armed attack against Japan (e.g., a ballistic missile attack) or Japanese assets overseas (pirates attacking a Japanese merchant ship sailing through the Gulf of Aden, for example). While scenarios in which the JSDF participate in or even contemplate the collective use of force (aiding another country under armed attack) are rare, they are mentioned in the 2015 version as detailed below.

Most often, the use of force for individual self-defense purposes is not directly contemplated or undertaken by the JSDF as part of the story line, but it is framed instead as new knowledge, as when characters learn from other

Figure 2. Defense and support term frequency
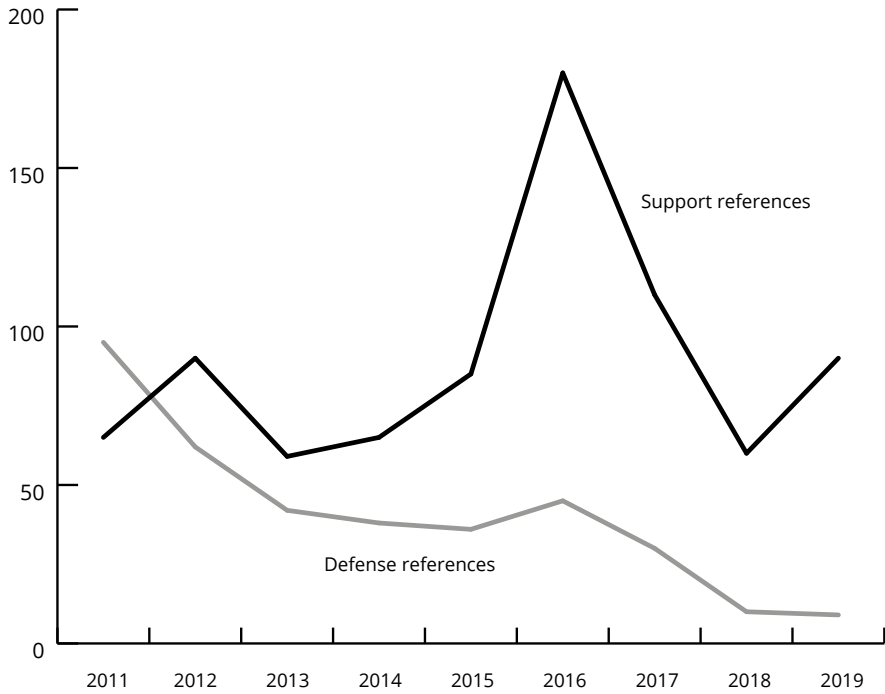
Source: courtesy of the authors, adapted by MCUP.

characters in the story about the JSDF capability to intercept incoming ballistic missiles or about the JSDF duty to protect Japan's small islands or territorial waters from foreign intrusion.[44] At other times, the use of force directly features as part of the story line but is framed through an analogy, as when the protagonist's soccer team overcomes the challenge of intercepting "long kicks" from the rival team by implementing JSDF-led BMD activities to win the match.[45]

In the 2015 edition, the use of force takes on a *collective* self-defense character for the first time. In reporting about the new U.S.–Japan guidelines, this edition mentions the possibility that the JSDF will engage in concert operations (作戦, sakusen) with the United States in responding to attacks against third-party countries in situations that threaten Japan's "continued existence" (figure 3).[46] Here, too, the scenario is framed as new knowledge to be obtained by the main characters rather than part of the story line.

Identity
In terms of character traits, consecutive editions portray the JSDF as *protective* and *reliable* (*disciplined*, *vigilant*, and *professional*). The 2009 edition, for example, ascribes the JSDF with a *protective character*. The JSDF protects both Japanese and foreign ships against "scary" pirate attacks against the shipping lanes.[47] The presence of the JSDF in the Gulf of Aden and its ability to cope

Figure 3. Japan and the United States engage in concert operations against a mutual adversary
Source: Manga-Style Defense of Japan *(2015), 35.*

with the danger means, in practice, that the protagonist of the story "needn't worry" about their father's boat being targeted by pirates.

Closely linked to the protectiveness trait of the organization itself is the theme of civilians realizing that the JSDF is protecting them. Thus, for example, having learned about the JSDF BMD system, a young character in the 2018 edition proclaims that "the SDF is protecting us!"[48] Having returned from an open day at JSDF base with their family, the character's father similarly says, "I came here today and realized what they do for us. The reason we can live peacefully is because the SDF protects us every day."[49]

Members of the JSDF are also reliable in the sense that they are disciplined, professional, and vigilant: despite the many looming threats, the public can thus rest assured, comforted in knowing that the military is dependable. For example, in the 2009 edition, the character of Hatsushima—a member of the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF)—is described at the outset as one of a "reliable" senior (*tayoreru oonisan*), or somebody you can count on.[50] Later in the story, members of other JSDF branches are engaged in antipiracy operations near Somalia. The crew of the reconnaissance aircraft Lockheed P-3C Orion first detect an unidentified vessel: they immediately report to the MSDF destroyer, who then sends a helicopter and operates long-range acoustic device (LRAD), only to see that the unidentified vessel continues its rapid approach toward the Japanese merchant vessel on which the protagonist's dad is deployed. As the helicopter approaches the boat, the five people on the small, unidentified vessel begin throwing some articles into the sea: an MSDF personnel announces that "there is no risk of attack against our party" and the helicopter returns to the ship. The scene ends as the destroyer's commander orders their crew "do not lose focus!" Although the danger of attack had subsided as a result of its professional conduct, members of the JSDF remain vigilant, clear-eyed, and reliable under pressure.

In addition to organizational traits, certain character traits of Japanese youth are rewarded and others are looked at as juvenile. Across the years, manga

reward youth that are curious, have a strong sense of justice, and are willing to protect others. On the other hand, ignorance and lack of love for one's family or nation are considered to be juvenile traits and are present in many of the editions. For example, when asked by a JSDF member how much they knew about the Japan–U.S. relationship, Japanese protagonist Kento confesses that "actually . . . I do not know anything."[51] Through the stories and their encounter with knowledge and experiences, the young characters leave the juvenile traits behind as they move to take on positive traits in their stead. That is, the protagonist and the reader mature together with the manga.

In terms of organizational reputation, the JSDF is depicted as defense-oriented, high-tech, and as a desirable organization. For example, the 2007 comic imputes Japan's security apparatus with a reputation that is defensive in nature (with 28 references to "defense" [*bōei*]) and one that uses advanced technology (13 references for *gijutsu*): its weapon systems are aligned with this reputation, and Mr. Groovy, the teacher-like character in the story, repeatedly emphasizes these reputational elements. Mr. Groovy asserts that the BMD system is not an offensive weapon system and is only designed to intercept incoming missiles, adding, "That's why Japan imported it."[52] Later, when he explains in detail about how the different components of the BMD system work, Mr. Groovy asserts that AEGIS enjoys high-tech capabilities, which makes it an "invincible shield" (*muteki no tate sa*) that can protect most of Japan with only 2–3 vessels.[53] Therefore, the manga imputes the JSDF with a reputation that is both defensive and technologically advanced.

Consecutive mangas also depict the JSDF as a desirable organization. In the 2018 edition, young characters tell one another that they would like to join it in the future, either because they were once "saved" by it during a natural disaster, or because they like video games with weapons. In addition to the desirability of the JSDF as a workplace, the JSDF servicemembers and weapon systems are often described as desirable. Thus, JSDF servicemember Yoshida is "cool" and "big" in the 2015 edition and the 2017 edition features young characters who wish to become JSDF members like their friend's dad.[54] The 2018 edition features a destroyer described by the civilians in the story as "awesome," "huge," "powerful," and "very impressive," an MSDF captain that is "so cool," and the Japan Air Self Defense Force (JASDF) Blue Impulse Team that is depicted as "incredible" and "amazing."[55]

Norms

In terms of *expected behavior* in relation to the use of force, there is strong emphasis on cooperating with the United States and in an increasingly wider geographical scope. In 2007, the expected cooperation was in protection of Japan and the Far East. Later in 2015, the expected cooperation with the United States was described as crucial not only in securing Japan but also in maintaining the peace of "Asia as a whole."[56] In addition to the enhanced geographical scope of cooperation with the United States, the relationship between the two

countries is described in increasingly positive terms. The United States, for example, is described in 2015 as Japan's most reliable ally, a "friend with which one can talk about anything."[57]

The manga included reference to terms of *accepted behavior* in relation to the use of force. For example, Oosumi-san, a female MSDF member, explains to the protagonist of the 2009 edition that depending on the circumstance, the JSDF might determine to resort to the use of weapons to thwart pirates attacks.[58] Yet, while the story line involves a band of pirates approaching a Japanese merchant ship, the JSDF does not resort to the use violence; indeed, there is no need to do so, as the pirates simply appear to be discarding goods into the ocean instead of attempting an attack on the merchant ship. In this situation, the application of violence is avoided, while the narrative of use of force as acceptable behavior is delivered.

In terms of what defines victory (or preferred outcome) for MOD planners in a potential or actual conflict or problem, it becomes clear that protecting the lives of Japanese and preventing harm are defined as preferred outcomes. The inability to intercept an incoming ballistic missile, for example, is considered unacceptable.

Finally, regarding societal norms—what defense planners would like to see in the broader society—there are at least two key messages: willingness to defend and appreciation. The first societal norm consecutive editions emphasized is that of the willingness to defend Japan: "We must protect this [Japan's] peace with our hands." The second societal norm highlighted in consecutive editions is for civilians to show appreciation to JSDF members for protecting them.

Values

In terms of values, the authors found that the participation in JSDF activities, whether at home or abroad, some of which involve the use of force, is often framed as ideationally good and leading to enhanced social status, because by participating in these activities, JSDF members contribute to the peace and security of Japan and the world. For example, the core value in the 2009 edition is that of contributing to international society in tackling an important global challenge of increased piracy. Because Japan is a member of international society and piracy is a crucial global threat and directly impacts the peace and security of Japan, the JSDF must engage with antipiracy missions. As such, the JSDF participation in these activities is deemed as essential and the act of contributing to international society is considered as honorable behavior.

When it comes to rewarded traits of Japanese youth, resilience comes high. For instance, having overcome the challenge in the story, the protagonist's father encourages them to "stand-up strong to the crisis!" and "be of use to world peace . . . be a man!"[59] Moreover, manga editions reward youth who are curious, have a strong sense of justice, and are willing to protect others. On the other hand, in terms of naive or juvenile traits, ignorance and lack of love for one's family or nation are discouraged. For instance, the 2007 protagonist's father

Figure 4. "The threat looming over Japan is becoming more and more serious." *Source:* Manga-Style Defense of Japan *(2016), 45.*

helps sharpen the message: "And this is what it means to be a grown up: protecting what you love: loved ones, family, work, region, nation. And the world."[60]

Through the stories and their encounters with knowledge and experiences, the young characters leave the juvenile traits behind as they move to take on positive traits of willingness to defend Japan and love of their country.

Perceptual Lens

Throughout the period of analysis, Japan's threat environment is depicted as increasingly diverse, complex, and hostile.[61] As figure 4 taken from the 2016 edition demonstrates, the military threat to Japan is real and significant. Fighter jets, missiles, ships, and submarines appear to be attacking Japan, while the JSDF member asserts that "the threat looming over Japan is becoming more and more serious."[62]

In consecutive editions, the JSDF/Japan's security apparatus protects the nation against violations of airspace and territorial waters, ballistic missiles, piracy, natural disasters, international terrorism, cyberattacks, conflict in space, conflicts in the Middle East, attacks on remote islands, protection and transportation of Japanese residents abroad, and electromagnetic wave attacks, or any combination of the above.

Usually, references to national security threats will not be associated directly with *foreign countries*—either verbally or visually—and the actor performing the attack often remains unidentified. Thus, for example, the 2007 edition begins with a missile attack against Japan, but the source is unclear.[63] It is only after reading the remainder of the manga that one can deduce that North Korea might be behind such an attack, as the reader learns that countries such as North Korea are engaged in missile development and export.[64] The rendering

Figure 5. "The threat of cyber-attacks grows by the year."
Source: Manga-Style Defense of Japan *(2017), 43.*

Figure 6. "Ah! You mean Chinese boats intruding?!"
Source: Manga-Style Defense of Japan *(2016), 43.*

of nonstate actors such as pirates and hackers is visually clearer, as figure 5, taken from the 2017 edition, demonstrates. Here are ballistic missiles launching (source unclear) and a hacker implementing a cyberattack. The MSDF member asserts that "nuclear development, ballistic missile problem, and the problem of the Senkakus. [And] the threat of cyber-attacks grows by the year."[65]

There are, however, exceptions to this trend: several editions do associate dangerous scenarios with state actors, including the firing of a ballistic missile by North Korea (2012, 2013), the intrusion of Chinese nuclear submarines (2006), and the intrusion of Chinese ships on the territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture (2016).[66] This trend is especially prevalent between the years 2015–17. For example, taken from the 2016 edition, figure 6 was the only time in the entire corpora in which Chinese boats carrying red flags appear visually as a threat-actor intruding on Japan's territorial waters

around the Senkaku Islands. The protagonist recalls hearing about these incidents in the news.

As for references to the adversary's character, these are relatively rare. North Korea is described as difficult to understand (2006), and as playing "rough" and "unfair" (2007), while China is cast as a "big country" that is not "observing the rules" (2017).[67]

Discussion

This article sought to better understand what Japanese defense planners' efforts to align national and strategic cultures through *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2006–19) tell us about Japan's use of military force, as advocated by the MOD. The findings of the two-step research design yield at least six conclusions.

First, defense planners seek to close the gap between national and strategic cultures using various means and methods, including the deployment of public relations propaganda in the form of familiarized manga. If in the past these efforts portrayed the JSDF as an organization that can, if it *absolutely must*, militarily defend Japan, this article's analysis has shown that today the JSDF *must absolutely* defend Japan against a plethora of regional and global threats, some of which are only growing more severe by the year.[68]

While the JSDF must protect Japan against a wide range of security threats and must resort to the use of force to do so, the actual use of weapons by the JSDF is not featured as part of the story line in consecutive mangas and instead is often framed as new knowledge that the main characters come to acquire or via analogies such as competitive sporting matches.[69] While the use of force is ubiquitous in the stories, the actual application of violence remains in the realm of the possible, not the actual.

Second, this article identified a high degree of similarity between 2012 and 2017, suggesting that content of manga-style editions during this period were relatively consistent. This finding is consistent with previous research about Japan's official threat assessment as manifested across government documents, which have registered increased similarity during this period.[70] Moreover, an increased emphasis on combat scenarios and activities in a wider geographical scope during the Abe years (since 2012) was identified, as was an important first reference to collective self-defense in the 2015 manga edition. This suggests that while they avoid incorporating the actual use of violence into the narrative of JSDF missions and mandates, defense planners have recently begun priming the Japanese public for scenarios that require the use of force, not only against armed attacks directed at Japan but also against other countries as well, especially Japan's most important strategic ally, the United States.

Third, the analysis based on the cultural topography model indicates several cultural traits manifesting themselves in multiple ways. Across the model's four categories, the JSDF is framed as a protective/defensive force that makes crucial contributions to the security and peace of Japan, the region, and the world as a reliable/professional organization and as a benign/desirable entity. One aspect

of identity that is most certainly being overemphasized in the manga, presumably because it is being threatened or diminished: the desirability of the JSDF as a place of work. While the JSDF enjoys high levels of trust from the Japanese public, it has struggled for decades to fill its recruitment quotas. The problem has become more acute in recent years, as birth rates in the early 2000s were especially low, leading to a narrow pool of potential young recruits today, and because some of the more recent threats—such as cyber—require the JSDF to attract well-educated personnel. In the most recent editions (2018 and 2019), MOD planners have therefore emphasized the desirability of the JSDF as a workplace in the context of cyber defense, trying to appeal to youth who are interested in and capable with "IT-related stuff" and foreign languages.[71]

Fourth, while earlier manga editions tend to avoid clearly associating foreign countries with threatening scenarios—such as missile attacks and territorial violations—later editions do so. Such a trend is especially prevalent during the second Abe administration years but is *not* linear: while some manga editions (e.g., 2016) single out Chinese vessels as threatening, others (e.g., 2018) do not.[72] This suggests that while public relations experts are less hesitant to communicate Japan's security threats that had been the case in the past, they are still somewhat cautious about securitizing foreign countries.

Fifth, manga produced by the MOD can teach us not only about the JSDF's identity, norms, and values but also about the MOD's ideal image of Japanese society in relation to the use of force. Manga editions have sought to instill in the Japanese youth certain norms and values, including the willingness to defend their country, love for the motherland, and resilience in the face of threats to their way of life. While the first two patriotic themes are by no means new, as government-produced manga have been emphasizing the need to defend Japan with Japanese hands since the early 1990s, the third theme of resilience is. The introduction of resilience to the repertoire of JSDF's character and conduct again indicates that responding to combat and crisis are indeed high on the communication agenda. This stands in contrast to previous research that has argued JSDF public relations efforts up to 2007 characterized the possibility of the organization fighting a war to be only "remote."[73]

Sixth, just as important as what made it into the manga is what did not. Missing from the manga editions are references to Japan's pre-1945 imperial armed forces: these militaristic legacies are nonexistent in the text. The most important historical reference to the pre-1945 period was made in the 2015 manga edition in which the historical background of Japan's relationship with the United States is explained to the young characters at length. Both the Japanese and American protagonists, Kento and Lucy, were surprised to learn that Japan and the United States had once fought a war (figure 7).[74] On learning of their children's ignorance, Lucy's father—a U.S. citizen working for the Department of Defense and deployed to Japan and a friend of Kento's dad—asserts that, "More than 70 years ago, unfortunately, the US and Japan were mutual enemies." Like Japan and the United States, both fathers became friends after they

Figure 7. "Japan and the US fought a war?!"
Source: Manga-Style Defense of Japan *(2015), 9.*

were rivals: they first met one another having competed in a wrestling match to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. Commenting on their friendship, Lucy's dad described his friendship with Kento's dad as "his pride."[75] Later on, the two kids learn more about Japan's history during a visit to MOD, including that it surrendered unconditionally and how it decided to become a "peace state" by adopting its constitution, that both countries signed the security alliance in 1951, and that the rationale behind it was to help Japan protect itself in case it was attacked.[76] That is, while the manga educates the readers about the history of the relationship between Japan and the United States, going back to 1941, the narrative is a simple one, lacking explanation of Japan's military expansion in Asia and of the history of Japan's Imperial Army and Navy. Indeed, the lack of historical references in MOD-sanctioned manga contradicts the efforts of some leading members of the MSDF to connect imperial naval traditions to contemporary public relations campaigns.[77]

Conclusion

In their attempt to align Japan's national and strategic culture and educate youth about national security and defense issues, MOD planners and government public relations experts reveal much about their approach to Japan's use of military force, with its growing geographical scope and close cooperation with the United States.[78] The use of force is framed by public relations experts in consecutive manga editions in a subtle yet permeating manner. Conversely, the use of force is ubiquitous across most annual publications of *Manga-Style Defense of Japan*, as the characters in the stories learn about the various ways with which the JSDF must defend Japan against the many security threats the country faces and how soldiers train to fulfill this duty. The actual application of violence in

the stories is avoided and remains out of sight, however. For example, instead of reading and seeing the JSDF using their weapons to thwart pirates or incoming North Korean missiles in the graphic novels, young readers only learn about the potential use of violence through the knowledge imparted to them by various teacher-like characters and through the use of analogies. By using these techniques, MOD planners reverse the old adage of "show, don't tell": while telling the readers that violence is indeed possible, they do not show it to them.

One possible reason for this choice is the very nature of the manga. Since manga-style editions accompany the official defense white papers published annually by MOD, these stories are likely to be scrutinized by both domestic and foreign audiences as political documents.[79] Had they featured JSDF personnel applying violence against Chinese boats, for example, manga editions could generate considerable negative publicity and alienate those sections of the public still largely resistant to the use of military force in international disputes. How do MOD planners seek to close the gap between strategic and national cultures then? By using subtle messaging techniques and avoiding the show of violence.

While this article has focused on the MOD's use of manga, future studies may examine other mediums of strategic cultural communication, including film and anime as well as other government and military agencies' use of such materials in bridging the gap between national and strategic cultures. Likewise, the various mediums by which these materials are presented to domestic and international audiences should also be carefully considered, especially the use of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.[80]

Future studies should also focus on the JSDF's military culture, as it may well be distinct in important ways than what the MOD would like it to be as represented in government propaganda materials. Additionally, the JSDF may not have a unitary culture, but rather several, perhaps competing strategic subcultures, both between military agencies and among them.[81] As Japanese pacifism continues to come under reconsideration by policy elites, what identifiable differences in identity, norms, and values can be found across Japan's ground, maritime, and air forces? These important questions remain unanswered, offering promising future directions for research.

Endnotes

1. For an analysis of Japan's changing security threats and alliance relations in the postwar period, see Nicholas D. Anderson, "Anarchic Threats and Hegemonic Assurances: Japan's Security Production in the Postwar Era," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 17, no. 1 (January 2017): 101–35, https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcw005. For analyses of Japan's changing threat perceptions in the postwar period, see Eitan Oren, "Japan's Evolving Threat Perception: Data from Diet Deliberations, 1946–2017," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 20, no. 3 (September 2020): 477–510, https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcz016; and Eitan Oren and Matthew Brummer, "Reexamining Threat Perception in Early Cold War Japan," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 22, no. 4 (Fall 2020): 71–112, https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_00948.

2. Including a strongly conservative and internationalist foreign policy ideology, generally high popular opinion ratings, majority control of both houses of parliament, a more assertive Chinese rival under President Xi Jinping, and a less reliable American ally under President Donald J. Trump.

3. As opposed to "public contests," which concern the struggle between domestic political actors in shaping public policy. See Jan Melissen., ed., *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), https://doi .org/10.1057/9780230554931.

4. For a recent empirical example on Japan, see Wrenn Yennie Lindgren, "WIN-WIN! with ODA-Man: Legitimizing Development Assistance Policy in Japan," *Pacific Review* 34, no. 4 (2021): 633–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2020.1727552.

5. Jeannie L Johnson and Matthew T. Berrett, "Cultural Topography: A New Research Tool for Intelligence Analysis," *Studies in Intelligence* 55, no. 2 (2011): 11–12, https:// doi.org/10.1037/e741172011-002.

6. Sabine Frühstück, *Uneasy Warriors: Gender, Memory, and Popular Culture in the Japanese Army* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 146.

7. For analysis of this reinterpretation, see Adam P. Liff, "Policy by Other Means: Collective Self-Defense and the Politics of Japan's Postwar Constitutional Reinterpretations," *Asia Policy*, no. 24 (July 2017): 139–72. For historical context, see Akihiko Tanaka, *Japan in Asia: Post-Cold-War Diplomacy* (Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, 2017); Matthew Brummer, "Bridges over Troubled History: Japan's Foreign Policy in Asia," *International Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (March 2019): 172–74, https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viy058; and Andrea Pressello, "Japanese Peace Diplomacy on Cambodia and the Okinawa Reversion Issue, 1970," *Japan Forum* (2021): https:// doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2020.1863446.

8. For example, Japan possesses no nuclear weapons, strategic bombers, ballistic missiles, or ships purposely built as aircraft carriers. Yet, it has the resources to develop all of these capabilities.

9. For example, see scholarship on Japan as a "buck-passing": Jennifer Lind, "Pacifism or Passing the Buck?: Testing Theories of Japanese Security Policy," *International Security* 29, no. 1 (Summer 2004): 92–121; "reluctant," Michael J. Green, *Japan's Reluctant Realism: Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), https://doi.org/10.1057/9780312299804; "post-classical," Tsuyoshi Kawasaki, "Postclassical Realism and Japanese Security Policy," *Pacific Review* 14, no. 2 (2001): 221–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/09512740110037361; or "mercantile," Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, "Mercantile Realism and Japanese Foreign Policy," *International Security* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1998):171–203, https://doi.org /10.2307/2539243.

10. For example, see scholarship on Japan's constitution in Wada Shuichi, "Article Nine of the Japanese Constitution and Security Policy: Realism versus Idealism in Japan since the Second World War," *Japan Forum* 22, nos. 3–4 (2019): 405–31, https://doi.org /10.1080/09555803.2010.533477; for the electoral system, see Tomohito Shinoda, "Japan's Parliamentary Confrontation on the Post–Cold War National Security Policies," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 10, no. 3 (December 2009): 267–87, https:// doi.org/10.1017/S146810990999003X; and for role of the prime minister, see Christopher W. Hughes and Ellis S. Krauss, "Japan's New Security Agenda," *Survival* 49, no. 2 (2007): 157–76, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396330701437850.

11. Wrenn Yennie Lindgren and Petter Y. Lindgren, "Identity Politics and the East China Sea: China as Japan's 'Other'," *Asian Politics & Policy* 9, no. 3 (2017): 378–401, https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12332.

12. Andrew L. Oros, "Japan's Strategic Culture: Security Identity in a Fourth Modern Incarnation?," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 2 (2014): 229, https://doi.org/10 .1080/13523260.2014.928070. In this article, and in line with the authors' goal to shed light on the specific issue of use of force, the authors opt for a narrow definition of Japan's strategic culture as the "beliefs and values related to the use of its military power." See Oros, "Japan's Strategic Culture," 229.

13. Oros, "Japan's Strategic Culture."

14. Thomas U. Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-militarism," *International Security* 17, no. 4 (Spring 1993): 119–50, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539024.

15. Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Post-war Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); and Stephanie Lawson and Seiko Tannaka, "War Memories and Japan's 'Normalization' as an International Ac-tor: A Critical Analysis," *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 3 (2011): 405–28, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066110365972.

16. Andrew L. Oros, *Normalizing Japan: Politics, Identity, and the Evolution of Security Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

17. Amy Catalinac, "Identity Theory and Foreign Policy: Explaining Japan's Responses to the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 U.S. War in Iraq," *Politics & Policy* 35, no. 1 (March 2007): 58–100, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2007.00049.x; Glenn D. Hook and Key-Young Son, "Transposition in Japanese State Identities: Overseas Troop Dis-patches and the Emergence of a Humanitarian Power?," *Australian Journal of Interna-tional Affairs* 67, no.1 (2013): 35–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2013.7482 74; and Linus Hagström and Karl Gustafsson, "Japan and Identity Change: Why It Matters in International Relations," *Pacific Review* 28, no. 1 (2015): 1–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2014.969298.

18. Bhubhindar Singh, *Japan's Security Identity: From a Peace-State to an International-State* (London: Routledge, 2013).

19. Oros, "Japan's Strategic Culture," 231–32.

20. Oros, "Japan's Strategic Culture," 232.

21. Sheila A. Smith, *Japan Rearmed: The Politics of Military Power* (Cambridge, MA: Har-vard University Press, 2019).

22. Jeffrey J. Hall, "Towards an Unrestrained Military: Manga Narratives of the Self-De-fense Forces," in *The Representation of Japanese Politics in Manga: The Visual Literacy of Statecraft*, ed. Roman Rosenbaum (London: Routledge, 2020), 123–24.

23. Oros, "Japan's Strategic Culture," 228.

24. Takako Hikotani, "Japan's Changing Civil-Military Relations: From Containment to Re-engagement?," *Global Asia* 4, no. 1 (March 2009): 20–24.

25. Sado Akihiro, *The Self-Defense Forces and Postwar Politics in Japan*, trans. Noda Makito (Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, 2017), 101.

26. Oros, "Japan's Strategic Culture," 243.

27. Matthew Brummer, "Japan: The Manga Military," *Diplomat*, 19 January 2016.

28. Patrick Galbraith, *The Moe Manifesto: An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime, and Gaming* (Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2014).

29. Brummer, "Japan."

30. Brummer, "Japan."

31. Takayoshi Yamamura, "Cooperation Between Anime Producers and the Japan Self-Defense Force: Creating Fantasy and/or Propaganda?," *Journal of War & Culture Stud-ies* 12, no. 1 (2019): 8–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2017.1396077.

32. Frühstück, *Uneasy Warriors*.

33. For example, see Koichi Iwabuchi, "Pop-Culture Diplomacy in Japan: Soft power, Na-tion Branding and the Question of 'International Cultural Exchange'," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21, no. 4 (2015): 419–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/102866 32.2015.1042469; and Akos Kopper, "Pirates, Justice and Global Order in the Anime '*One Piece*'," *Global Affairs* 6, nos. 4–5 (2020): 503–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/2334 0460.2020.1797521. For example, see Hall, "Towards an Unrestrained Military"; and Jeffrey J. Hall, "Japan's Anti-Kaiju Fighting Force: Normalizing Japan's Self-Defense Forces through Postwar Monster Films," *Giant Creatures in Our World: Essays on Kaiju and American Popular Culture*, ed. Camille D. G. Mustachio and Jason Barr (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017): 138–60.

34. Frühstück, *Uneasy Warriors*, 2–3.

35. Frühstück, *Uneasy Warriors*, 148.

36. Frühstück, *Uneasy Warriors, 2.*
37. Jeannie L. Johnson, *Strategic Culture: Refining the Theoretical Construct* (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Threat Reduction Agency Advanced Systems and Concepts Office, 2006), 17; and Jeannie L. Johnson, *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture: Lessons Learned and Lost in America's Wars* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), chap. 1.
38. Johnson, *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture*, 7.
39. All the official manga can be accessed at the Japanese MOD website: www.mod.go.jp /j/kids/comic/index.html.
40. The *Defense of Japan* is an annual white paper published since 1970 by the Japan Defense Agency within the Ministry of Defense (MOD). The publication consists of a detailed overview of developments in Japan's defense policy within the context of the U.S.–Japan alliance, as well as analysis of the defense policies of other key players in the security environment surrounding Japan. See Eitan Oren and Matthew Brummer, "Threat Perception, Government Centralization, and Political Instrumentality in Abe Shinzo's Japan," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 74, no. 6 (2020): 25, https:// doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2020.1782345.
41. See *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (Tokyo: Ministry of Defense, 2006); *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2007); and *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2015).
42. The highest correlation between any two editions was obtained for the years 2012 and 2013, with a 0.83 Pearson correlation coefficient, followed by 2013/2014 (0.77), 2014/2017 (0.76), 2013/2016 (0.76), 2012/2014 (0.76), 2014/2015 (0.75), 2016/2017 (0.73), and 2012/2016 (0.71). The lowest correlations between any two editions were obtained for the years 2009 and 2010 (0.07), 2007/2009 (0.12), and 2007/2010 (0.15).
43. Japanese words related to "support" query: サポート, 助ける, 味方, 増援, 手助け, 掩護, 援助, 支える, 支援, 救助, 救援, 用途, 補佐, 補助, 資す. For "defense":ディフェンス, 備え, 守り, 守る, 守備, 掩護, 監視, 見る, 見守る, 見張る, 視る, 警備, 警戒, 警護, 護衛, 避難, 防ぐ, 防備, 防御, 防衛, 防護.
44. See, for example, *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2006), 12, 19–20; *Manga-Style Defense of Japan (*2012), 9; and *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2016), 43.
45. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2007).
46. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2015), 34–35.
47. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2009), 26, 28.
48. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2018), 13.
49. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2018), 15.
50. Similarly, having learned that in addition to the MSDF activities in missile defense, the service also patrols Japan's oceans 24/7, a young character in the 2018 edition exclaims: "The SDF sounds so reliable!" See *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2018), 13.
51. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2015), 14.
52. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2007), 36.
53. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2007), 44.
54. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2015), 13; and *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2017), 32.
55. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2018), 5, 6, 24.
56. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2015), 16.
57. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2015), 31.
58. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2009), 31.
59. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2009), 61.
60. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2009), 60.
61. The only time a document acknowledged that a certain threat is diminishing was the 2006 edition, when the threat of a full-scale land invasion of Japan was deemed less likely. See *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2006), 22.
62. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2016), 45.
63. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2007), 2.
64. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2007), 26.

65. Since the late 2000s, cyberattacks have become the most frequently mentioned threat in the Japanese Diet. See Oren, "Japan's Evolving Threat Perception," 25.

66. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2006). See *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2012–13); and *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2016).

67. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2007); *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2006); and *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2017).

68. Sabine Frühstück, " 'To Protect Japan's Peace We Need Guns and Rockets': The Military Uses of Popular Culture in Current-day Japan," *Asia Pacific Journal* 7, no. 34 (2009): 3.

69. As distinct from the use of force. To recall, this article defined the use of force as using physical strength or capabilities to solve a *military* problem.

70. Oren and Brummer, "Threat Perception, Government Centralization, and Political Instrumentality in Abe Shinzo's Japan," 721–45.

71. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2019), 25, 27.

72. See *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2016); and *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2018).

73. Frühstück, *Uneasy Warriors*, 148.

74. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2015), 9.

75. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2015), 10.

76. *Manga-Style Defense of Japan* (2015), 19.

77. Alessio Patalano, *Post-war Japan as a Sea Power: Imperial Legacy, Wartime Experience and the Making of a Navy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 84–87.

78. For historical description of Japan's changing foreign and security policy, see Tanaka, *Japan in Asia*; and Brummer, "Bridges over Troubled History," 172–74.

79. Eitan Oren and Matthew Brummer, "How Japan Talks About Security Threats," *Diplomat*, 14 August 2020.

80. The mediums themselves may be an important part of the message. See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Penguin, 1964).

81. For strategic subcultures, see for example, Alan Bloomfield, "Time to Move On: Reconceptualizing the Strategic Culture Debate," *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 3 (2012): 437–61, https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2012.727679; and Oros, "Japan's Strategic Culture."

The United Arab Emirates
as a Case Study in Assessing
Over-the-Horizon Nuclear Proliferation

Katie C. Finlinson

Abstract: This article uses a comprehensive examination of Emirati strategic culture and its national role conception to examine the likelihood that the United Arab Emirates would pursue the possession of a nuclear weapons program. The article concludes that the UAE is predisposed to reject the pursuit and possession of nuclear weapons due to its dominant national role as a regional and global collaborator; the high value it places in its conventional military capabilities and alliance with the United States; Emirati identity as a regional leader in social and technological innovation with the intent to elevate the country beyond regional stereotypes of violence, repudiation of progress, and political Islam; and its unique perceptual lens on productive strategies for operating within Iran's sphere of influence. Continued rejection of a nuclear weapons program hinges on U.S. engagement in the region, where the United States has a willing and like-minded ally.

Keywords: strategic culture, perceptual lens, identity, national role conception, United Arab Emirates, UAE

Introduction

In August 2020, the Barakah Nuclear Energy Plant went online, making the United Arab Emirates (UAE) the first Arab nation to construct and operate a nuclear power plant. The UAE is aggressively preparing for a post-carbon world and Barakah is expected to provide 25 percent of the nation's power as

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the state transitions away from fossil fuels. The UAE's nascent nuclear energy program has raised fears that it may represent a gateway to greater nuclear proliferation throughout the Arab Gulf region. No Gulf state, outside of the UAE, has had the expertise to develop its own nuclear (civil or military) programs, but that is changing. The UAE is determined to develop an entire industry of native nuclear experts and has already begun to export its expertise to Saudi Arabia.[1] If this trend continues, and there is nothing to suggest that it will not, the region will experience a surge in nuclear expertise, infrastructure, and raw material, lowering the breakout time for procurement of a nuclear weapon.

Current concerns are exacerbated by the UAE's past as a hub for the AQ (Abdul Qadeer) Khan network, a black market proliferation organization believed to have sold Iran and North Korea centrifuges and blueprints for centrifuges, the hardware necessary to enrich uranium to the degree required for nuclear weapons, significantly advancing each states' weapons program.[2] Some claim this makes the UAE particularly unsuitable to be a guardian of sensitive nuclear technology, and it is with these concerns in mind that Emirati leadership, under the strict diktat of Mohamed bin Zayed, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi and acting head of state, has gone to great lengths to assure the international community—through profuse statements and concrete commitments—that it will act to safeguard nuclear nonproliferation.[3] For example, the Emirati state is freely forgoing its right to domestic uranium enrichment and to reprocessing spent fuel, two processes necessary to create the fissile material for a nuclear weapon, as a demonstration of good faith in building a bulwark against regional proliferation.[4]

This article engages in a multifaceted examination of the strategic culture shared by the intimate collective of individuals that holds power within the UAE to better assess the sincerity of their nonproliferation intent and thereby gauge the likelihood that the Emirati state would pursue the possession of nuclear weapons or enable its pursuit by others. These moves would create a potentially disastrous chain reaction throughout a region already rife with volatility. Ultimately this article argues that the Emirati nuclear energy program is likely to remain a civilian energy program and will not trigger a wave of nuclear weapons acquisition as long as certain conditions are met. These conditions are reflective of influential elements within Emirati strategic culture and include robust U.S. engagement in the region, particularly through strong conventional military cooperation; upholding the Emirati-set nuclear energy "gold standard"; and strong security guarantees to the UAE and its neighbors.

Research and Analytical Methodologies

The research findings within this article were produced through a merger of two methodologies that weigh the effects of cultural factors in the arena of international security and executive decision making in foreign affairs: national role conception and the Cultural Topography Framework.

National Role Conception

The author's research employed a method for assessing national role conception (NRC) to examine how the internally constructed identity role of a state manifests externally. Advocates of the national role conception approach argue that states identify with particular roles and tend to behave consistently within them. NRC impacts nuclear decision making because actors making foreign policy decisions do so based on their perceptions of their own intended international role and the behaviors associated with that role.[5] NRC is especially useful in the examination of proliferation trends, because international roles, reflective of internal culture, do not typically change rapidly and drastically, and therefore provide a relatively stable and predictable method of forecasting nuclear strategy.

For this article, the author followed the adaptation of Glenn Chafetz, Hillel Abramson, and Suzette Grillot using 13 national role conceptions (table 1) tailored specifically to the subject of nuclear proliferation. In doing so, they assigned each role to one of three categories: roles that tend to move a state toward proliferation, roles that tend to move a state away from proliferation, and roles that move neither toward nor away from proliferation.

Cultural Topography Framework

The Cultural Topography Framework engages in a thorough dissection of an actor's identity, values, norms, and perceptual lens to better understand the actor's perspective, motivation, and likely behavior on a specified intelligence issue—insights that allow policy makers to effectively tailor U.S. policy to address a specific threat. The majority of the findings produced for this article focus on identity: how a state perceives and portrays itself, what traits it designates as primary to its identity, and the reputation that it pursues.[6] The exploration of identity offered through the Cultural Topography Framework expands on that provided by national role conception and adds further nuance and context. Of the four cultural factors associated with the Cultural Topography Framework, identity tends to be the anchor, influencing key values, the impetus for norms, and how the outside world is perceived. The values category within this framework examines material goods or ideational factors that confer enhanced status within the group; norms are expected and accepted behaviors and defined taboos; and perceptual lens is how the actor perceives "facts" in the universe of available data and how it shapes perceptions of others. All of these domains will be discussed in greater depth throughout this article.

Actors and Source Material

The research that informs the designation of national role conceptions in this article categorized nearly 100 public remarks and statements from three influential Emirati leaders into the role types adopted from the work of Glenn Chaffetz, Hillel Abramson, and Suzette Grillot.[7] National role conceptions are determined by identifying role statements denoting a vision of status and ac-

Table 1. National roles and their major functions

Role type	Function	Tendency toward nuclear status (Y/N)
Regional leader	Provides leadership to limited geographical or functional area	Yes
Global system leader	Lead states in maintaining global order	Yes
Regional protector	Provide protection in the region	Yes
Anti-imperialist	Act as agent of struggle against imperial threat	Yes
Mediator-integrator	Undertake special tasks to reconcile conflicts between other states or groups of states	No
Example	Promote prestige and influence by domestic or international policies	No
Protectee	Affirm the responsibility of other states to defend it	No
Regional subsystem collaborator	Undertake far-reaching commitments to cooperate with other states to build wider communities	No
Global system collaborator	Undertake far-reaching commitments to cooperate with other states to support the emerging global order	No
Bridge	Convey messages between peoples and states	No
Internal developer	Direct efforts of own and other government to internal problems	No
Active independent	Shun permanent commitments; cultivate good relations with as many states as possible	No
Independent	Act for one's own narrowly defined interests	No

Source: adapted from Chaffetz, Abrahmson, and Grillot, Culture and Foreign Policy.

tion. The author's evaluation of UAE role conception included statements from Mohamed bin Zayed, crown prince of Abu Dhabi, deputy supreme commander of the armed forces, and de facto head of state; Abdullah bin Zayed, Mohamed's brother, and minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation; and Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba. Each were selected as subjects due either to their authority or their close proximity to authority. Mohamed bin Zayed holds decision-making authority almost exclusively. The two additional figures are individuals he trusts to act as his mouthpiece; they enable and explain Mohamed bin Zayed's vision and authority. The policy remarks collected and evaluated spanned a range of subjects and catered to diverse audiences including the Emirati general population, the American public and its policy makers, and forums across international institutions. Role conception findings are more ro-

bust when found to be largely consistent across speakers, audience, and subject matter in conveying strongly constructed national role conceptions.

In addition to official remarks from the three Emirati officials, which were used to determine the state's national role conceptions, the author also engaged secondary sources to provide context and further analysis of both national role conceptions and the Cultural Topography Framework. These secondary sources comprised of published works from regional and military experts, individuals with personal relationships with Emirati leadership featured in this article, and local publications.

Clear patterns emerged from the data set indicating one dominant and two auxiliary role conceptions for the UAE. The dominant national role that emerged for the UAE is that of regional and global collaborator, with the secondary roles of example and protectee. These, according to Chaffetz, Abramson, and Grillot's NRC categories, indicate that the Emirati state is predisposed to reject the pursuit of a nuclear weapons program

One national role conception emerged from the data set that, according to Chaffetz, Abramson, and Grillot, could prompt a state to pursue nuclear weapons. Regional leader and global system leader role types include great power aspirations and defiance against subordinate roles, and while a number of Emirati statements indicated aspirations of leadership, they did so in narrow corridors in fields related to advanced innovation, renewable energy, and human rights. Overall, Emirati leadership is careful and constrained in assuming a leadership mantle and in making role statements that would confer an identity of leadership, especially in the realm of international security.

Were the UAE to embrace a regional leadership role, competing with its Arab neighbors for influence and power, concerns of Emirati disregard for international norms, including the pursuit of nuclear weapons, would be well-founded. If the Emirati state continues instead to embrace a collaborator role, as this research has found, then it is more likely that strong bilateral and multilateral pressure to refrain from weapons pursuits will remain a salient disincentive to pursue proliferation or enable it anywhere in the region.

The combined findings from cultural research conducted through the Cultural Topography Framework and an evaluation of national role conception delivered four primary takeaways that reinforce the UAE's likely commitment to nuclear nonproliferation: an identity rooted in regional and global collaboration; the profound value Emirati leadership places in its conventional military forces and partnership with the United States; Emirati identity as a leader in innovative policies; and UAE's unique perceptual lens regarding the threat Iran embodies.

UAE as a Regional and Global Collaborator in Chief

Several Emirati national role conceptions were reflected in the data set; the strongest, overwhelmingly so, was that of regional and international collaborator. As defined by K. J. Holsti, the original architect of NRC, states with a col-

laborator role conception undertake wide-ranging commitments to collaborate with regional and international states and contribute to stronger communities and international order. Collaborators see themselves as responsible stewards of their region; they seek arbitration for disputes and conflicts in regional and international institutions, comply with international norms and rules, and generally seek to be good neighbors.[8] Chaffetz, Abramson, and Grillot add that states with robust collaborative national roles are concerned with being good neighbors and global citizens and comply with internationally established rules, including nonproliferation statutes. Emirati role statements that indicate strong tendencies to collaborate include direct reference to its regional and global community, its partnerships with many nations, and a desire for international cooperation in the face of challenges.[9]

Collaboration is more than just a role; it is a behavioral norm and a cultural variable that assists in forecasting a state's willingness to engage with partners and allies. The UAE's strong narrative of collaboration was reinforced by action early on in its nuclear journey. In 2008, well before any agreements had been signed, Emirati leadership sought out widespread collaborations on its nuclear designs. Acutely attuned to the realities of its position in a volatile region, the UAE solicited input from a wide variety of actors to stem the flow of spreading concern. Collaboration included the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United States, the United Kingdom, France, South Korea, Germany, Japan, China, and Russia.[10] In a state where authority remains in exclusive hands, this was a notably diffuse and inclusive process.

The UAE continued its path to nuclear energy through an overtly collaborative approach. The Arab Gulf region is reaching a watershed moment. Production and consumption of fossil fuels is becoming less acceptable as the damaging effects on the climate become increasingly severe. States reliant on oil production for survival, like the Arab Gulf states, face a harsh ultimatum: adapt or fail. The UAE is adapting, and its path to nuclear energy was relatively painless due in large part to its overt signaling of collaborative intent.

The UAE has gone to extended lengths to display an ironclad commitment to nonproliferation. Before even signing the 123 Agreement with the United States, which facilitates bilateral cooperation between the United States and signatories in developing peaceful nuclear energy programs, the UAE waived its right to domestic uranium enrichment and the reprocessing of spent fuel, which provide fuel and fissile material for nuclear weapons production.[11] Instead, the UAE committed to purchasing its fuel from commercial partners and sending its spent fuel to a current nuclear power to be reprocessed. These obligations were self-imposed and went beyond the strict measures of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and U.S. laws.[12] The agreement explicitly states that

> The United Arab Emirates shall not possess sensitive nuclear facilities within its territory or otherwise engage in activities within its territory for, or relating to, the enrichment or repro-

> cessing of material, or alteration in form or content (except by
> irradiation or further irradiation or, if agreed to by the parties,
> post-irradiation examination) of plutonium, uranium 233,
> high enriched uranium, or, if agreed to by the parties, irradiat-
> ed source or special fissionable material.[13]

Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE minister of foreign affairs and in-
ternational cooperation, has stated that "the UAE's interest in nuclear energy
stems exclusively from a desire to meet growing domestic energy demands in a
commercially and environmentally responsible manner."[14] The voluntary relin-
quishment of enrichment and reprocessing rights was an international first—no
state before, or since, has agreed to give up these rights. Following the signing of
the 123 Agreement in 2009, the UAE promptly signed the Additional Protocol,
granting the IAEA wider inspection authority, as well as the IAEA Convention
on Nuclear Safety and all other required and optional protocols aimed at en-
hancing transparency and security.[15]

Both American and Emirati officials have referred to the UAE agreement
as a "gold standard" for treaties going forward, establishing new norms for
future bilateral nuclear pursuits. The UAE has stated that this is by Emirati
design, expressing hope that the Emirati program will be a "model" for fellow
non-nuclear states interested in pursuing peaceful nuclear energy.[16] The UAE,
however, intends for its nuclear program to go beyond soft-power modeling.
By agreeing to such stringent measures, it is hitching its nuclear agreement to
its strategy of containing future nuclear deals with Iran. The UAE agreement
with the United States benefits from a "favored nation" clause, guaranteeing
that the United States will not enter a peaceful nuclear energy agreement with
another state in the region with terms more favorable than those in the U.S.–
UAE agreement.[17]

Other states in the region have seen the Emirati "model" succeed in de-
veloping an alternative energy source and will likely follow suit if they wish to
remain a viable state in a post-oil world. If collaboration is essentially a commit-
ment to create strong communities and international order, the UAE's absten-
tion of uranium enrichment is a convincing commitment to ensuring stability
and order in a region that could very well see itself inundated with nuclear
know-how.

The UAE's main regional adversary is Iran, a neighbor whom it perceives
to be determined to obtain nuclear weapons to elevate its bargaining leverage.
In the face of that security threat, the UAE has opted for a strategy of contain-
ment and collaboration—by voluntarily restraining its own enrichment and re-
processing abilities and seeking widespread international consensus it hopes to
strengthen regional norms in a similar direction. The UAE recognizes that if it
were to now demand and act on the enrichment rights allowed within the NPT
it would set a dangerously destabilizing precedent in the region that could see
highly enriched uranium become a common commodity. As a state consumed

with concerns about domestic and regional stability, the UAE would produce the ironic counter-effect of an unacceptably unstable environment.[18] Instead, the UAE has opted for a collaborator role alongside the United States and many other nations in the development of its nuclear program, flipping the "if they can do it, we can do it" argument on its head. Their hope is that this effort will result in collective entitlement being replaced by collective prohibition.

By agreeing to such stringent nonproliferation commitments and achieving the favored nation clause, the UAE hopes that it has succeeded in placing restraints against any future Iranian nuclear agreement and holding the United States to its commitments. Ambassador Al Otaiba stated that Emirati voluntary commitments exceeded commitments secured from Iran in the JCPOA, and that if Iran is serious about its non-nuclear intentions, as its leadership has declared on multiple occasions, then "signing onto the same voluntary commitments as the UAE" would be the clearest signal of its intentions.[19] The likelihood of an Iran nuclear agreement unfolding in this manner is slim, but the UAE does retain the right to renegotiate its deal if the United States strikes a better one with another state. It is in the United States' best interest to honor its commitments to the UAE, or risk opening a Pandora's box of pushing nuclear boundaries. The UAE was not just benevolent in its disavowal of enrichment and reprocessing rights but also shrewd.

Since signing these nuclear agreements, Emirati leadership has continued to pursue behavioral norms consistent with its image as a collaborator. For instance, it has regularly called on international institutions as an arbiter in resolving conflicts and disputes. At the 2014 Nuclear Security Summit, Mohamed bin Zayed stated that international institutions must be empowered by the international community to reduce the number of nuclear weapons. He called for "international cooperation on nuclear security" to "develop the required infrastructure and human resources so as to guarantee the highest nuclear security in all countries."[20] The UAE sees itself as an active member of a regional and larger global community and declared that the country must not "exclude ourselves from the rest of the world with its concerns and issues but rather we must interact with it, share its concerns and help develop solutions and strategies."[21]

The UAE considers itself a dynamic regional and international collaborator and has sought outside council and approval of its nuclear energy program from the very early stages. Committed to regional security, the UAE is aware that its program is setting a regional and international precedent, and in so doing it has sought to normalize the intentional omission of a weapons component to future nuclear energy programs, enhancing the security and stability in the region.

UAE and the United States: Conventional Military Collaboration and Interoperation

In the Cultural Topography Framework, value is defined as something that elevates the status of group members. Valued items can be ideational or material.

In this section, we will focus on ideational value that the Emirati state places on its conventional military forces and the ability of the Emirati military to interoperate with the U.S. military. The particular domain of the Cultural Topography Framework—the high value placed on conventional military capabilities—is especially visible though the Emirati national role of collaborator.

The value the UAE places in its conventional military forces and in its military partnership with the United States serves as a fundamental pillar of its security and foreign policy. The UAE's proficient conventional military forces enhance its security status globally and aid in displacing the perceived need for a nuclear weapons program. Emirati leadership employs full confidence in its armed forces to secure the state, absent the supplement of nuclear weapons, and its standing has been enhanced worldwide due to its potent proficiency. Mohamed bin Zayed has boasted "limitless" faith and confidence in UAE's armed forces, describing them as the "cornerstone" in his strategic vision for the next 50 years, and referring to them as "the shield of our nation and source of its pride."[22] U.S. military officials and policy analysts have echoed this esteem: U.S. Marine Corps general and former U.S. secretary of defense James N. Mattis dubbed them "Little Sparta" and regional military expert Kenneth M. Pollack described them as the "most capable in the Arab world."[23] One study from 2020 claimed that the amphibious landing and subsequent counterinsurgency operations conducted by UAE forces in Yemen exhibited aptitude surpassing many North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nations.[24] The high esteem for the UAE military is the result of collaborative combat operations in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen. In Syria, UAE pilots were second only to the United States in the number of sorties flown against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) targets and in Afghanistan it flew close air support for U.S. ground units—one of only two non-NATO forces trusted to do so.[25]

The UAE armed forces would not have achieved the current level of battlefield success without substantive interoperational experiences with more advanced militaries. As the UAE pursues the reputation of an undeniable military power, it has regularly sought opportunities to interoperate with key partners, filling critical roles in NATO missions in Afghanistan and against ISIS in Syria. UAE armed forces have been party to six military operations alongside the United States, with members of bin Zayed's Presidential Guards—its most elite fighting force built on the model of the Marine Corps—deployed for 12 years on the ground and in the skies over Afghanistan.[26] Interoperation is further facilitated by the presence of U.S. military forces on Emirati soil. Al Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi has been home to more than 5,000 U.S. military personnel, and Jebel Ali free trade zone in Dubai is the most frequently called on port for U.S. Navy forces outside of the United States.[27] The two countries take part in joint military exercises annually and further formalized cooperation under the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in 2017, designed to enhance military interoperability and security in the region. A founding pillar of the DCA is to deter Iranian aggression and nuclear proliferation.[28] The linchpin to UAE

interoperation with the U.S. military is achieving proficiency on the most advanced military hardware in the U.S. military kit. Technological superiority is a principle that the Emirati armed forces were built on and remains necessary for the efficient projection of force outside Emirati borders.[29] In 2021, the UAE inked an arms deal for 50 Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II fighter jets and 18 General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper drones, worth $23 billion USD.[30] Possession of advanced weaponry is insufficient to deter aggression and secure stability. Emirati armed forces train and master proficiency on this equipment to such an extent that would allow confident interoperation in combat operations.

The UAE perceives an engaged United States as essential for regional stability and considers itself a guardian of that sustained engagement.[31] The U.S.–UAE military cooperation has acted as the vehicle for further collaboration. Strong military ties are not the by-product of close collaboration but the impetus for it. This collaboration reflects three elements of Emirati strategic culture that deter it from nuclear acquisition or proliferation, two of which have been discussed: the value of conventional military forces that offsets perceived needs of a nuclear weapon and the valuing of interoperability with U.S. military forces as an enhancement to Emirati status globally and a deterrent in its own right. The third is UAE's perception of its inclusion within U.S. extended deterrence, neutralizing the need to pursue its own weapon. The United States has not issued the UAE specific security guarantees in the form of official treaties, and it has not conferred on the UAE the status of major non-NATO ally, which grants exclusive military considerations for states outside of NATO. But it has called the Emirati state a "major security partner" and gone lengths to both reassure the UAE and dissuade potential adversaries through extended deterrence, specifically an enduring local military presence, significant military sales, and joint military operations.[32]

U.S. extended deterrence conveys to an adversarial country that the costs of striking a U.S. ally would be untenably high and elicit a severe response. Extended deterrence encompasses a spectrum of arrangements, from declarations of protection to the placement of nuclear weapons within the borders of an allied country.[33] Conventional forces do not in and of themselves carry the same weight as a nuclear deterrent, but the caliber of the U.S.-UAE military alliance acts as a deterring force in the region. The confluence of U.S. military presence, substantial military sales, the UAE's demonstrated skill in operating and deploying purchased weaponry, regular joint military exercises, and formal military agreements falls on the deterrence spectrum. Ambassador Al Otaiba expressed these sentiments when he stated that the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter sale went beyond an arms deal, that at its core it was a "deterrent against aggression" and would enhance U.S. and Emirati interoperation.[34]

A highly skilled, battle-tested, well-armed American ally on the Arabian Peninsula is a redoubtable counterweight to Iran. General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., Marine Corps commander of U.S. Central Command, stated as much in testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, testifying that providing

our allies with "the best capability we can afford to give them" is a key tenant in the deterrence of Iran.[35] The sweeping commitments the UAE has made to regional stability would be irrelevant if the Emirati state calculated it necessary to pursue a nuclear weapon as a means of defending itself. Coverage under an iteration of extended U.S. deterrence goes a long way in safeguarding this calculus.

Emirati Leadership: Innovation, Not Proliferation

The UAE considers itself a regional and even global leader in technological innovation and social progress.[36] According to NRC theory, national leader roles, both regional and global, have a tendency to gravitate toward nuclear proliferation because "most states perceive nuclear weapons to be a symbol of leadership based on the model of legal nuclear weapons states," and regional and global leaders may also believe nuclear weapons are necessary to protect their region.[37] In the UAE's case, however, pursuit of a military component to its civil energy program would create regional instability and would undermine the progress and stability Emiratis are aiming for in seeking regional leadership.

The UAE has achieved several Arab firsts, the latest of which was sending a space probe to Mars. Addressing the successful entrance of the *Hope* probe into the Martian atmosphere, Mohamed bin Zayed said, "the UAE of the future will lead the region's scientific and knowledge development. Our institutions are open for youth across the Arab world to be part of this journey."[38] The mission to Mars was more than 10 years in the making and intended as a mechanism to empower Emirati people and establish indigenous capabilities to succeed in leading the Arab state to the most elevated levels of scientific and technical achievement.[39]

The UAE also prides itself on being the regional leader in tolerance, declaring 2019 as the "Year of Tolerance," which saw the first visit of a Vatican pope to an Arab state. In hosting Pope Francis, the UAE intended to showcase its impressive diversity credentials, signaling to the world that the UAE is a safe destination for peoples of all races and religions. This was more than a gesture of goodwill to the Christians in the region and the globe; it was also a bold rebuttal to extremism.[40] Emirati leadership takes pride in promoting a moderate version of Islam that champions the inclusion of women, promotes innovation, encourages engagement, and respects all faiths.[41]

As noted at the beginning of this article, identity within the Cultural Topography Framework is self-ascribed, celebrating traits that the group assigns itself. The UAE's self conception of being inclusive to people of diverse backgrounds is relative to the region in which it resides and illustrates the Emirati narrative of self, exhibiting some genuine reforms, while also falling well below Western standards of tolerance and inclusion of minority groups. While efforts have been made to accommodate members of a wider spread of religions, only 10 percent of the population of the Emirati state holds citizenship and its associated privileges. Migrant workers, who make up roughly 90 percent of the Emirati population, cannot quit or change positions without the permission of

their employer, are not allowed to join labor unions, and are not guaranteed a minimum pay rate.[42]

An Emirati norm that is crucial to its own stability, as well as regional stability, is providing an alternative Islamic vision for and investment in its youth population. This new vision of Islam revises Islamic teachings in schools, retrains imams (Islamic leader), and updates Quranic commentaries to reflect a modern, future-oriented religion. The UAE goes so far as to license its imams, comparing the practice to a mechanism for safety, similar to the licensing of pilots. The UAE has established professional institutions that combat extremist recruitment and propaganda, providing communities with the tools to counter radicalization. Illustrating its commitments to enhancing regional stability, the UAE has exported these skill sets throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to include Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria.[43]

The UAE considers itself a leader in the field of gender equality, embracing norms that reinforce this image. Emirati women are granted equal rights under the law, access to education, claim to titles, and the right to inheritances. In the UAE, women hold two-thirds of government jobs, 36 percent of the Emirati cabinet, own 10 percent of the private wealth, and account for 70 percent of university graduates.[44] Women serve in the armed forces, and the first Emirati military strikes on ISIS targets were led by Major Mariam al Mansouri, the first female to join the Emirati Air Force.[45]

Emirati leadership hails these leading innovations as "road maps," "beacons of stability," "hope," and a bridge to other regions.[46] These leadership identity markers in innovation and social progress act as additional deterrents rather than accelerants of potential nuclear proliferation. Stability, not turbulence, will allow the United Arab Emirates to continue to make strides in its innovative efforts. The nonproliferation lengths the UAE has taken will cultivate an environment that will facilitate its technological progress and attract collaboration from influential partners. If the UAE were to be the state to introduce proliferation as a norm in the Gulf region, it is unlikely that it would continue to attract the alliances and dynamic collaborations that have allowed it to flex its regional leadership credentials. The areas in which the UAE exerts regional leadership—in the science and technology sectors and the promotion of religious tolerance—sync with its ambition to become a leader in nuclear energy, but not in nuclear proliferation.

The UAE and Iran: Collaborate to Deescalate

The perceptual lens through which Emirati leadership assesses the threat posed by Iran leads it to value both collaborative and conventional strategies to contain Iranian ambitions, rather than a strategy that might involve nuclear weapons acquisition. A crucial distinction to be made in analyzing Emirati threat perception of Iran is its view that Iran's destabilizing conduct and swelling hegemonic status throughout the Arab world, is of much greater threat to the Emirati state and Gulf region than its nuclear weapons program.[47] The rise of

Iranian influence throughout the region has typically drawn a harsh rebuke from the UAE, which perceives Iran and its brand of Shia Islam as an existential threat to the security of the state.[48]

The UAE has decried Iran's "flagrant meddling," "blatant interference," and intent to sow sedition and malcontent throughout the Arabian Peninsula as a means of expanding its revolutionary brand of Shia Islam beyond its borders.[49] Ambassador Al Otaiba lamented, "In Palestine, in Iraq, and in almost every country in the region, Iran is funding, arming, and enabling radical, violent, and subversive cells."[50] The UAE was a vocal critic of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—the nuclear agreement aimed at dismantling Iran's nuclear weapons program—declaring itself overall disappointed with the agreement, and described Iran as "hostile, expansionist, violent . . . and as dangerous as ever" one year after its signing. It was only one of four countries to support the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, calling President Donald J. Trump's decision "the correct one" and urging the international community to support the American president in his efforts to enhance the security of the Middle East.[51]

Tehran's practice of backing minority Shia uprisings throughout the region is especially alarming to the UAE, which is home to roughly 600,000 Iranians, more than 6 percent of the entire population of the Emirati state.[52] UAE leadership has raised concerns that adherents of Shia Islam are more loyal to Iran than their home states due to Shia "veneration of religious figures."[53]

Geographical proximity, U.S. military presence on Emirati soil, along with the substantial Shia population prompts Emirati leadership to consider itself the "most vulnerable" state to an Iranian threat. Ambassador Al Otaiba expanded on this sentiment:

> Our military, who has existed for the past 40 years, wake up, dream, breathe, eat, sleep the Iranian threat. It's the only conventional military threat our military plans for, trains for, equips for, that's it, there's no other threat, there's no country in the region that is a threat to the U.A.E., it's only Iran.[54]

Despite these serious accusations and seemingly fundamental differences in acceptable behaviors, the UAE has flexed it credentials as a collaborator, even with Iran.

The Emirati approach to countering Iran is typically a measured one. Public remarks illustrate the Emirati preference to collaborate when confronting Iran.[55] This is reflective of a realistic reading of the region; Iran is not an enemy to defeat but a rival state that must somehow fill a role and function within the region, and international consensus and pressure aids in enhancing the chances of Iranian receptivity to abiding by international norms. While the UAE has employed a historically hard-line approach on Iran and has demonstrated its willingness to engage in armed conflict against Iranian proxies, it has never called for military strikes against Iran on Iranian soil, despite Iranian occupation of three Emirati islands during the past 50 years. In fact, it has cau-

Map 1. Map of the Persian Gulf region, illustrating the geographic proximity between the UAE and Iran, as well as the three disputed islands: Lesser Tunb, Greater Tunb, and Abu Musa
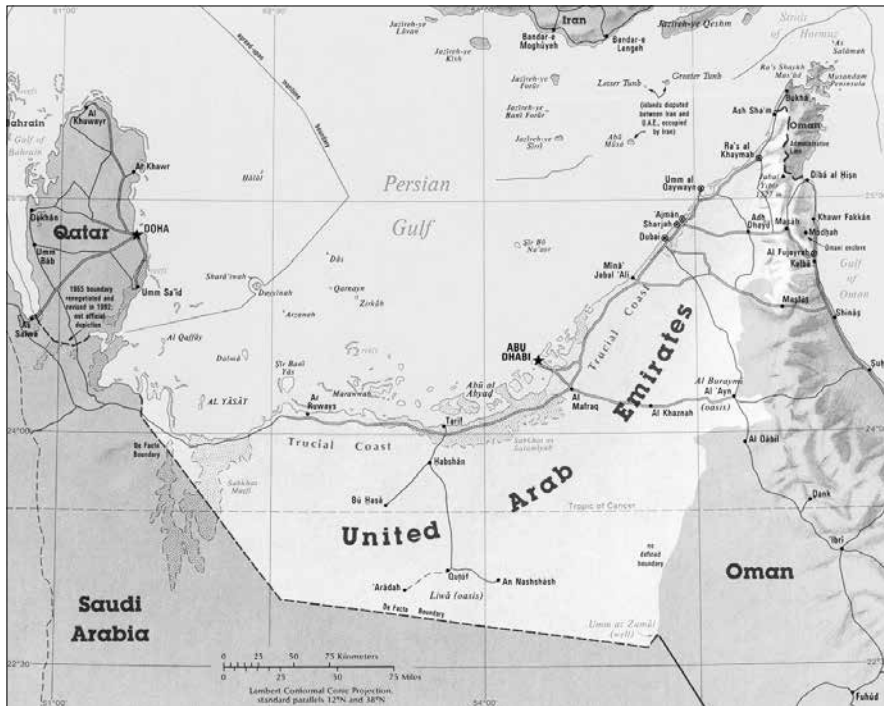
Source: courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP.

tioned against military strikes, instead defaulting to influence and collaboration through and with allies and institutions. In 2019, when the Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Aramco) facilities in Abqaiq was the target of a sophisticated drone attack, ultimately attributed to Iran, the UAE collaborated with three European nations, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, in lowering tensions and preventing further military escalation in the region, stating that "at every turn the UAE has avoided conflict with Iran."[56]

During the last year and a half, the UAE has perceived the coronavirus climate as a way to balance its aggressive approach with a more pragmatic one. The UAE delivered 56 tons of medical supplies to Iran, as well as chartering flights for medical personnel to assist in Iran's coronavirus crisis when Iran was recording the seventh highest number of cases globally. The UAE called the cooperation between the two countries "a privilege."[57] UAE foreign minister Abdullah bin Zayed and his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif met by video conference to discuss effective responses to the coronavirus—a rare display of normalized bilateral discussions. The leaders vowed to continue discussions on "tough challenges and tougher choices ahead," possibly referring to the breakdown of the JCPOA and Iran's uranium enrichment program.[58] Emirati efforts

to engage with Iran on coronavirus assistance were received well by Iran and went beyond the strict parameters of humanitarian aid, with Zarif admitting that the UAE and Iran's relationship had developed "more reason and logic."[59]

The coronavirus pandemic prompted the UAE to collaborate directly with Iran in assisting the state as it struggled to meet the needs of its population. The only action the UAE has taken to address the half-century occupation of three of its islands—Abu Musa and the Greater and Less Tunbs—has been to call on the United Nations (UN) to facilitate dialogue. When U.S. airstrikes led to the death of Quds Force commander General Qassem Soleimani, Emirati officials called for de-escalation, urging each side to exercise wisdom and political solutions rather than military confrontation.[60] Emirati statements and behavior indicate that its perception of Iran and the best means for managing it as a threat is pragmatic and flexible. While the UAE considers Iran's interference in sovereign affairs throughout the region as a major threat to regional and Emirati security, a rigid and singular approach is weighted with just as much risk.

Instead, the UAE has endeavored to maintain a functional relationship with Iran, such as the cooperation they have exhibited during the Covid-19 pandemic, advocating for reasoned responses to Iranian aggression, while still maintaining close ties with the United States and displaying its conventional military capabilities through interoperation with the U.S. military. This multi-pronged approach to countering Iranian hegemony, coupled with heavy U.S. engagement, currently satisfies Emirati security needs in terms of its ability to deter Iranian aggression, in lieu of nuclear weapons. Essential to maintaining this precariously balanced status quo is an engaged U.S. government and military. Disengaging with this particular ally and failing to hold subsequent nuclear agreements to the same standards could shift the security paradigm to the extent that conventional military means and measured responses to Iranian aggression are not satisfactory security guarantees.

Conclusion

Matthew Berrett, a former assistant director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and one of the architects of the Cultural Topography Framework method, points out that U.S. policy makers rarely ask a critical question: whether U.S. foreign policy successes would require fundamental cultural change in a partner or adversarial nation, and if that answer is yes—as it so often is—what resources, if any, would be sufficient to spur the cultural transformation. This article concludes that in terms of containing nuclear proliferation, U.S. non-proliferation goals in the region would not require cultural conversion within the UAE. The national role conception and strategic culture of the UAE steer it away from nuclear acquisition for its own reasons. That said, continuing U.S. engagement with the UAE and the Middle East region is key to the Emirati strategic calculus. Emirati leadership has stressed the importance of U.S. collaboration in a multitude of interviews, discussions, and speeches. It considers U.S. engagement as a necessary powerful pillar of stability. In the UAE, the

United States has a willing and culturally aligned partner. The United Arab Emirates considers itself an effective collaborator, committed to creating strong communities that reject extremist ideologies, regional interference, and nuclear proliferation. Through intentional and culturally informed engagement, the United States can channel these Emirati cultural markers into effective policy for security; disengagement risks alienating one of its most stable partners in the region and upsetting a calculus that currently acts to inhibit proliferation.

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The Foundations
of Pakistan's Strategic Culture
Fears of an Irredentist India, Muslim Identity, Martial Race, and Political Realism

Mark Briskey, PhD

Abstract: This article examines the early foundations of the strategic culture of the Pakistan Army. By exploring the impact of the partition of British India in 1947 and the First Kashmir War of 1947–48, the article identifies the pivotal factors in the development of strategic culture of Pakistan. In also examining Pakistani fears of a "vengeful" Hindu India and a persistence in the belief of discredited martial race theories as well as the idea of a Muslim military exceptionalism, the article concludes that the foundation of this culture remains evident while it is also malleable to contemporaneous events.

Keywords: Pakistan Army, martial race, Kashmir, partition, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Mohammed Ayub Khan, British Indian Army, Punjabi, Pakhtun/Pashtun, Islamic martial myths, irredentist, Islam in danger, India, Afghanistan

> The professional soldier in a Muslim army, pursuing the goals of a Muslim state, CANNOT become "professional" if in all his activities he does not take on "the color of Allah."
>
> ~ General Mohammed Zia ul-Haq[1]

Introduction

This article examines the causational factors that contributed to the early establishment of a Pakistani strategic culture. Given that Pakistan is a new postcolonial nation-state not yet 75 years old, the focus of this ar-

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ticle is on the important formative period of Pakistan in which the contours of this strategic culture were established. The focus is on the Pakistan Army as it has been arguably the preeminent military and political actor since the state's formation in 1947. The article argues that this strategic culture arose out of three initial pivotal influences in 1947–48, followed by other key events that include significantly the "strategic shock" suffered by Pakistan in 1971 when the state was divided into two, and followed soon after by the impact of Islamization of the military.[2]

The foundational influences of a Pakistani strategic culture were first the traumatic impact of partition, second the perpetuation of beliefs in an Islamic military exceptionalism drawing on discredited theories of martial race, and third the impact of the 1947–48 First Kashmir War and the notion of "Islam in danger."[3] The convergence of these three elements were the foundations of a Pakistan strategic culture with the Pakistan Army Officer Corps, its primary initiator.

Closely aligned to this and a key pillar of the strategic culture of Pakistan is the idea of a vengeful and irredentist India, the need for strategic depth and its concomitant need for a pliant Afghanistan, and an agile adoption of political realism from the state's very beginning. This realism in seeking any leverage or advantage over its existential rival, India, which saw Pakistan's early alliance to the United States during the Cold War, its courting of China even when Pakistan was a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) pact, and the strategic shock of the loss of East Pakistan and the significant cultural change it inspired in the army.

It is important to note that the Pakistan Army from its outset has consistently conflated notions of the discredited martial race theory, which posits that certain races such as the Punjabi Muslim and Pashtun Muslim and other designated ethnicities and groups are more effective in the military than others. The Pakistan Army have consistently drawn from admixtures of martial race and Islam as the basis of the army's superiority in comparison to other armies—most notably the Indian Army. Apart from the relationship between martial race and Islam, the article also draws links between Islam and several other significant influences on the army.

Strategic culture is an appropriate prism in which to understand the security features of Pakistan. Strategic culture theory highlights the relevance of an organization's history, myths, and development and therefore this article's focus looks to the beginnings of the postcolonial state and the formative influences and inheritances that had an impact on the dominant institution of that state—the army. Together these are of importance in the establishment and evolution of the strategic culture of Pakistan, where the tumultuous nature of its establishment and formation in 1947 left a pivotal and enduring legacy on Pakistan. Strategic culture theory argues the importance of major strategic shocks and disasters on an organization. In this way, the article argues that the trials and tribulations of partition and the First Kashmir War, the Second Kashmir War

of 1965, and above all the strategic shock suffered in the Pakistan Army's humiliating defeat to India in 1971 to the present post–Global War on Terrorism age were influential in shaping an army strategic culture with specific attributes, some static and others evolving.

What Is Strategic Culture?

Strategic culture has experienced several developments since its first iteration. A strategic culture can be defined as a theory that argues that there are distinctive national styles in security and military affairs. There have been studies on a number of strategic cultures, for example, Israel, Iran, and France.[4] The provenance of strategic culture effectively begins in the 1930s with B. H. Liddell-Hart's theorizing of a traditional British way of warfare, while Ken Booth appealed in the late 1970s for strategists to be more conscious of their cultural context in their thinking.[5] The term *strategic culture* dates back to the 1970s in Jack Snyder's explanation of Soviet strategy.[6] Strategic styles are rooted in historical experience and influenced by the nature of the nation or organization's history, which has been involved in the state's defense and are influenced by major disruptions or disasters that occur to the state, society, or organization.[7] Booth's definition of strategic culture is helpful:

> A nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, habits, customs, achievement and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force.[8]

The article considers these elements in how the army's strategic culture is rooted in historical experience in a state with even a relatively short modern history. This article will illustrate how events such as the formation of the army from the Muslim elements of the British Indian Army, the First Kashmir War, the Second Kashmir War, the Indo-Pakistani War, and the formation of Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan), as well as other major events such as the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and the impact of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States have influenced the role of Islam in the Pakistan Army. The contours of Pakistani strategic culture have been described previously by Feroz Hasan Khan and Peter R. Lavoy, though these scholars' purpose was not to provide a sustained analysis of Islam or its role in Pakistan's strategic culture over the course of its history as this article seeks to perform, while Hasan Askari Rizvi importantly recognizes the impact of realism.[9]

> Historical experiences, perceptions of the adversary and a conception of self—the determinants of strategic culture—are relatively permanent, but each crisis may be totally or partly different . . . at times, the strategic cultural perspective and the dictates of realism may lead to the same or similar policy measures.[10]

The dictates of realism have been a pivotal influence on a Pakistani strategic culture that has embraced entities such as the Taliban to pursue their interest and then putatively rejected them to fulfill new directions with the United States and the West. Lawrence Sondhaus argued that the role of supranational forces, such as Islamic fundamentalism, had influenced Arab and other Muslim states such as Pakistan and Iran. Sondhaus believes Islamic fundamentalism to have influenced these countries to behave in a manner contrary to their national interest, and in this he sees the influence of culture.[11] This article also notes the influence of Islam on the army and its influence in seemingly irrational operations such as Operation Gibraltar, which inexorably led to the 1965 war with India as well as other flawed and outwardly counterintuitive operations such as the conflict that occurred in Kargil and clear evidence of support for terrorist entities.

National identities are forged out of adversity and the impact of the events of partition and the First Kashmir War acted powerfully on Pakistan in this way to establish an identity and strategic culture attached to Islam. The tragedies during this period established national myths and creation stories in which the army as a defender of Islam featured prominently.[12] This was the case with Pakistan where the varied threats both real and imagined to the new nation's existence were buried deep in the psyche of the first generation of Pakistan Army officers. These beliefs were transmitted to succeeding generations of officers.

Pakistan: Traumatic Beginnings and an Irredentist India?

Pakistan was created by Muhammed Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League's efforts against the Indian National Congress and British opposition to create a Muslim homeland in the subcontinent. Pakistan consisted of two wings separated by more than a thousand miles of Indian territory and 356 million Indians.[13] The new country of approximately 75 million people established its capital in Karachi in the western wing of the country.[14] East Pakistan, the numerically greater of the two wings, consisted of 42 million people with a distinct cultural, linguistic, and demographic outlook that included a much larger percentage of non-Muslims than the Western wing.[15] The new country with no authentic claims to a past history was immediately beset with internal and external problems ranging from the tensions inherent in its disparate ethnic, religious, and geographical divides to the geostrategic conundrums of being faced by a hostile India in the east, a hostile Afghanistan in the west, and an army initially still under the control of British commanders.

Though the Muslim League's objective for Pakistan was achieved against significant obstacles, paradoxically on its achievement many Pakistanis believed their objective had not been fully realized. Many believed Pakistan to be partially fulfilled and that they had received far less than a Muslim homeland for the subcontinent's Muslims with many Muslims still situated in what would be the new dominion of India. Pakistani's referred to this as having received a "moth

eaten" version of Pakistan. Pakistan, they believed, had been spoiled by alleged Indian recalcitrance, interference, and the failure to provide Pakistan its full territorial inheritance, which included parts of the Punjab, Kashmir, and some other areas.[16] Because of this, an irredentist Hindu India bent on extinguishing the new state and its reabsorption into mother India was established as truth, at least in the beliefs of the political and military elite of Pakistan.[17] The army believed India to be the core threat to the new Muslim state's existence. This belief continues up to this third decade of the new millennium.

In this manner, the story and legends of the new army from its beginning focused on its Muslim character and its heroic achievements in overcoming the tribulations believed by the Pakistanis to have been thrust on it in these early years by a hostile, irredentist Hindu India. The exhilaration of Pakistan's independence was further tempered by its tenuous claims to existence as a nation both contemporaneously and historically with its claims to be South Asia's Muslim homeland belied by the fact that 35 million Muslims had remained in India. Indian diplomats astutely made it a point to remind others of India's own Muslim heritage.[18] The army, the most organized state entity with its claims to have defended the Muslim homeland against alleged Indian aggression in Kashmir, quickly established itself as the paramount institution of the new state and author of the context of its strategic culture.

This first generation of officers were trained and indoctrinated by the British within the multiethnic and religiously diverse British Indian Army. The Pakistan Army shed this diversity almost from its very beginning, despite Jinnah's early desire for Pakistan's national institutions to be representative of its minorities. The communal fears involved in partition acted on those Hindu officers in the army to seek their careers and security in India.[19] The army quickly became an army of Muslims assured of their heritage as the "sword arm" of the Raj consisting largely of Muslim martial race soldiers from the Punjab and the at that time North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). The martial races thought of themselves as the "sword arm" of the Raj as they constituted nearly the entirety of the post-1857 British Indian Army, whereas many other Indian ethnicities, especially those from the south of India and East Pakistan, were considered by martial race theorists as not fit for military service.

Pakistan had become independent on 14 August 1947 amid tumultuous violence, territorial dispute, and recrimination with India about possession of capital assets and supplies left by the British.[20] Born out of the exhaustion of Britain after World War II, which had at various times cajoled, threatened, and made promises of independence to India during the war, the two new states of Pakistan and India were born in an era of decolonization, nationalism, and the burgeoning Cold War environment. The success of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Muslim League in prevailing and obtaining independence on the basis of the two-nation theory of a homeland for the subcontinent's Muslims was soured by disputes with India about the accession of a number of the princely states who were required to devolve their power to either Pakistan or India. The accession

Figure 1. Architect of Pakistan's strategic culture Ayub Khan (center) with founder of Pakistan Mohammed Ali Jinnah (left) decorating a soldier (1948, Dhaka)
Source: Dr. Ghulam Nabi Kazi

of Kashmir to India was met with outrage in Pakistan, which had expected to receive the territory of this Muslim majority state and Pakistan refused to recognize Kashmir's accession and remains a lightning rod of grievance and a pillar of Pakistan's strategic culture interests manipulated by military and political actors since this time.[21]

The invasion of Kashmir by tribal invaders that India alleged was orchestrated by the Pakistan Army was eventually repulsed in early November 1947 with India effectively gaining control of Jammu and Kashmir while Pakistan gained control of those areas it would describe as free or Azad Kashmir.[22] Continued Pakistani protests at the United Nations (UN) resulted in a UN Security Council plan to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir in March 1948, which was never held, while it took until July 1949 for India and Pakistan to agree on a cease-fire line for Jammu and Kashmir. The UN mediator, Sir Owen Dixon, announced on 22 July 1950 his failure to bring India and Pakistan together to solve the Kashmir dispute.

The nebulous sense of identity for the new multiethnic state in which two wings of the country were separated by India was made apparent in March 1948 when Jinnah made a speech at Dacca University. Jinnah announced to an East Pakistani audience proud of their Bengali language and identity that Urdu, a language native to neither West nor East Pakistan, would be the national language for Pakistan. Later that same year, there were communal riots in Karachi involving many of the Muhajirs or Muslim settlers from India who

had emigrated during partition, resulting in a state of emergency.[23] To complicate the already tenuous existence of the new country, Jinnah—the architect of Pakistan—died in September 1948. Pakistan, already indignant at the loss of Kashmir, also protested to the United Nations concerning India's invasion of Hyderabad, a Hindu majority state ruled by a Muslim, in August 1948.

Internationally, with a view to establishing its Muslim credentials, Pakistan hosted the first international Islamic conference in Karachi in December 1949. The leader of the Pakistan Muslim League, Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman, had also suggested a pan-Islamic unity of countries to be known as *Islamistan*.[24] Pakistan and India also engaged in bilateral talks in 1949 concerning a host of disputes including Kashmir, evacuee property, and the Punjab water dispute concerning India stemming the flow of water into Pakistan.[25]

The disputes and enmities begun at independence continued into 1951 with Pakistan blaming India for inciting Afghan hostility against Pakistan. Belying Pakistan's efforts with pan-Islamism unity was Muslim Afghanistan, which had not recognized Pakistan's independence and held specific irredentist claims on Pakistani territory that Britain had taken from Afghanistan. This further amplified Pakistan's concerns of two rapacious neighbors and their territorial claims on the new sovereign state. India had also, to Pakistan's mind, provocatively hosted the all-India Pashtun jirga in Delhi, as well as allowing the Afghan ambassador to use All India Radio to deliver an anti-Pakistan speech in May 1951. Pakistan's woes continued with the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan in October 1951. After Jinnah, Khan was perhaps Pakistan's most able politician capable of articulating a coherent vision and identity for Pakistan.

Pakistan's formation and identity were loosely tied to the idea of a Muslim homeland by a secular elite that had largely not been supported by the ulema of the day while a Pakistan identity was still being negotiated.[26] Those interested in pursuing a more Islamic basis to the state moved toward this objective almost from independence. Many ulema, including Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi, the founder of *Jama'at-e-Islami*, had been opposed to Jinnah and felt that he aimed to secularize the Muslims of India, while nationalist Muslims were opposed to the idea of Pakistan as proposed by the Muslim League.[27] Some Muslims felt even more strongly and described Jinnah in hostile terms as the great *Kafir-e-Azam* ("the greatest of infidels"). Despite this opposition, many north Indian ulema, including Maududi, joined the mass migration to Pakistan during partition and some ulema who had become members of the league pushed for the adoption of an Islamic constitution.[28]

Betrayal and Conspiracy: Developmental Histories and Myths of Pakistani Strategic Culture

It is to the next section of this article that the partition of British India into the dominions of Pakistan and India shall now be considered and why this process provoked strong sentiments of distrust and betrayal in many Pakistan Army officers and the importance of this in the foundation of a Pakistani strategic

culture. Officers who would constitute the new Pakistan Army did not trust Viceroy Louis Mountbatten and believed him to be biased against Pakistan in considering the partition, while Vicereine Edwina Mountbatten's allegedly improper relationship with Jawaharlal Nehru were believed by Pakistanis to be another example of the improper Hindu influence on the viceroy.[29]

Similarly, the departure (before his due date) of the supreme commander of the British Indian Army Claude Auchinleck at Mountbatten's urging, because of allegations of Auchinleck's bias toward Pakistan, infuriated the Pakistanis, who saw themselves as outmaneuvered by the Indians due to their special relationship with Mountbatten.[30] Mountbatten had also taken advantage of Auchinleck's offer to resign in response to his alleged bias toward Pakistan.[31] Pakistanis believed the early departure of Auchinleck left Pakistan at the mercy of India, who held most of the government and military stores, and believed India would not honor the agreed division. This belief was shared by Auchinleck, who thought Indian intentions were

> too strongly imbued with the implacable determination to remove anything which is likely to prevent their gaining their own ends, which are to prevent Pakistan receiving her just share, or indeed anything. If we are removed there is no hope at all of any just division of assets in the shape of movable assets belonging to the former Indian Army.[32]

Auchinleck's beliefs were supported by those officers who formed the new Pakistan Army, who were outraged by Mountbatten's actions, as well as the violence during the process of partition. The process of partition poisoned what trust had existed between Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim communities in the Punjab. Pakistani, Indian, and British officers who had served together in the British Indian Army were witness to a carnage and brutality that fundamentally polarized communal perceptions between Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu communities. The brutalities were not one-sided, but many caught in the maelstrom of violence could see it only as evidence of hate perpetrated on their coreligionists. The personal and communal experiences of violence experienced by Muslim officers invoked an epiphany in many officers, which separated them from their past perspectives on relations with other communities during service with Sikh and Hindu officers. The shared experiences of these officers who were mainly Punjabi and Pashtun officers amplified their sense of Muslim identity and the threat posed by the Hindus and Sikhs and fulfilled the Muslim League's prepartition fears of being dominated by a Hindu India.[33]

Major Mohammad Musa, a senior staff officer in Lahore between September and December 1947 and later commander in chief of the army, recalled his trauma of having witnessed a train full of slaughtered Muslim refugees and the influence this had on his perceptions of the Indian state and its political objectives.[34] Similarly, Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, the later commander in chief and dictator, had related how the vision of his exhausted mother crossing the

border into Pakistan carrying their worldly possessions produced an indelible impact on him.[35]

It is important to note that there had originally been a concerted effort to prevent the division of the British Indian Army. Many British believed a single army could have served both dominions for a time. It is this topic that the article now examines.

Conspiracy Theories and a Muslim Pakistan Army

The uncompleted nature of the division was due in part to this resistance to divide the army by the British and some Indian officers, with some British officers believing that the majority of Indian officers were even against independence.[36] The division was resisted by Mountbatten, the last viceroy; Auchinleck, the supreme commander in chief; as well as senior officers of the new Indian Army.[37] Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay, who had served in the British Indian Army and who was Mountbatten's chief of staff, stated,

> The problem which caused many of us the greatest grief was the decision to divide the Indian Army on communal lines before partition took place . . . I did my utmost to persuade Mr. Jinnah to reconsider his decision . . . but Jinnah was adamant. He said that he would refuse to take over power on 15 August unless he had an army of appropriate strength and predominantly Muslim composition under his control.[38]

Auchinleck had opposed an early plan for the division of the forces in April 1947 by the first prime minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan. The Pakistanis resented this and saw the reluctance as contributing to the failure of Pakistan receiving its share of military stores.[39] Other Pakistanis saw the reluctance in more sinister terms with the save the united army campaign as a Hindu plot to sabotage the partition of India and deny the creation of Pakistan.[40] The "Hindu plot" to deny the formation of the Pakistan Army became an established army myth held by the officers of the new Pakistan Army.

> To sabotage partition, a campaign to save the Army was stepped up. Senior Hindu Officers went around persuading the Muslim personnel not to accept the division . . . at the back of their minds was the hope that without an Army of its own Pakistan would not be able to last very long.[41]

Other Pakistanis saw the hand of British strategic expediency with Britain trying to maintain a united army in terms of its strategic value to the Commonwealth.[42] The issue had actually been the subject of British cabinet considerations regarding potential contingency planning against the Soviets.[43] The fact that Britain did want to retain influence in the future dominion's defense relationships was evident in that the May 1947 India Burma committee recommended that Britain should insist that Pakistan and India should not lease bases

to any power outside the Commonwealth other than in pursuance of regional defense approved by the UN.[44]

Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, a member of the armed forces reconstitution steering committee chaired by Auchinleck, claimed that the attachment to the undivided army by British officers and many Indian officers was so great that many could not emotionally reconcile themselves to the army's division.[45] The profound impact of even using the term "division" was felt to be psychologically harmful by Auchinleck.[46]

Officers of the new Pakistan Army were distinctly against retaining a single army and stated their preferences to the British in terms of the religious chasm between Muslim and Hindu. The commanding officer of the 7th Battalion of the 10th Baluch Regiment stated to General Sir Frank Walter Messervy, the first commander in chief of the Pakistan Army, the Islamic nature of the proposed new army, which was in contradiction with the Indian Army:

> Sir, my grandfather, my father and I have fought for your em-
> pire. I have no wish that my sons and grandsons fight for the
> Hindus.[47]

Later commander and dictator of Pakistan Ayub Khan wrote that he was approached by General Kodandera Cariappa, the first commander in chief of the Indian Army, in a bid to seek Ayub's support in not dividing the army.[48] Muslim officers, though, were increasingly influenced by the impact of the communal violence during partition. Furthermore, there were instances of the army's unity unraveling with episodes involving Muslim units engaging in fatal skirmishes with Sikh and Hindu units.[49] Other instances such as the Indian Navy mutiny as well as communal troubles on board troopships returning with Muslim and Hindu troops from overseas were also reported.[50] The British also began to suffer casualties involved in the escort of refugees between India and Pakistan.[51]

The rapidity of partition and the division of the army was confusing to the few senior officers who would constitute the Pakistan Army. Brigadier Akbar Khan, in his response to an armed forces committee question, responded,

> I don't even know whether there will be one or two Indias. It
> will depend on whether there will be internal troubles or war.[52]

This confusion was something familiar to junior Muslim officers, who had no idea as late as March and April 1947 that the army would be divided.[53]

The resistance to divide the army was perhaps amplified by the fact that several senior British officials were critical of Jinnah, with Ismay sharing confidential notes of his discussions with Jinnah to Nehru.[54] Jinnah was likewise critical of some British officials. Jinnah informed Ismay that a number of British officials were dangerously susceptible to providing concessions to the Indians due to their inability to understand the wiles of the Hindu mind and the Hindu determination to prevent the creation of Pakistan.[55] Jinnah's distinctly religious

rhetoric in describing the Hindu mind was incongruent with a number of his notable addresses on the nature of Pakistan's inclusiveness.

Despite the resistance by the British, the army was divided. Pakistan became a nation on 14 August 1947, and the army it inherited was constituted from the Muslim elements of the former regiments of the British Indian Army. For a very short time before the violence of partition escalated, in keeping with Jinnah's vision, there were Hindu officers who had opted to serve in the Pakistan Army.[56]

The Pakistani officers forming the new army, though nearly all Muslim and nearly all originating from the Punjab or the NWFP, came from a complex sociological mélange of tribes, clans, and religions. Most officers came from families with traditions of military service to the British.

The first two commanders in chief of the Pakistan Army were British, and upon independence in 1947 there were 120 British officers serving in the Pakistan Army in senior positions.[57] Most of the Muslim officers who constituted the army were junior in rank and experience. The loss of officers during partition due to combat in Kashmir and accidents meant that many were rapidly promoted to fill gaps in the new army.[58] Ayub Khan, for instance, advanced within six years from colonel to be the army's first commander in chief. This was a familiar experience to many of the new Pakistani Army officers with, for example, an artillery officer commissioned in 1946 receiving an accelerated promotion to major due to the shortage of qualified officers.[59]

While the division of army personnel was confused, the division of the military weapons, stores, and assets of the British Indian Army between the two new dominion's armies was fraught with ill will and subterfuge. The division of assets involved countless claims and counter claims between Pakistani and Indian sources as to the dastardly acts performed by each other. Complaints alleged nearly every conceivable crime and act from plain theft of stores to fraud and the alleged sabotage of equipment. In keeping with the Hindu myth, many Pakistani officers believed the Indians premeditatively starved them of supplies to prevent the establishment of the Pakistan Army.[60]

Brigadier Mohammad Ansari, commissioned in 1943, oversaw the emergence of the Pakistan Army Ordnance Corps at partition and claimed that India had disarmed repatriated troops bound for Pakistan.[61] Ansari's perspective as an officer who formed the first generation of the new Pakistan Army is consistent with others of this generation who believed in the hostile disposition of an irredentist India. These beliefs were linked ideologically to a vengeful Hindu India engaged on a deliberate initiative to ruin Muslim Pakistan that have incrementally become an important element of a Pakistani strategic culture since partition.

Despite Indian complaints of their own problems, the Pakistanis viewed their problems as continuing elements of a sinister and premeditated Indian attempt to extinguish the Pakistan Army at birth.[62] The sabotage of equipment left behind in Pakistan—such as the rendering of the Poona Horse's few tanks

in operation by fouling their fuel tanks—were seen as warlike in their intention, especially so when it had prevented these tanks' subsequent deployment in the 1948 border hostilities.[63]

The Pakistanis, of course, were not ready to concede the arguably inescapable reality that during the Second World War army depots had been situated near the main supply routes for the war in Southeast Asia. The location of most of these depots had absolutely nothing to do with Indian intentions at partition and everything to do with the pragmatism of such centers being close to operational theaters during the war.

Pakistani claims were countered by Indian arguments that the division of assets was impossible given the immensity of trying to sort out records from 1857 onward within the limited time frame thrust on them by the British decision.[64] Pakistani officers argued they were not assisted by Indian or British officers in their tasks and had to leave New Delhi prematurely without achieving their tasks due to the mounting violence against Muslims.[65] A Pakistani officer noted they had to cobble together units made up of a patchwork of individuals, platoons, and oddly constituted companies that had trickled into Pakistan.[66]

Though officers of the British Indian Army generation still perceived India as an existential threat, it is apparent this early generation still held many of these former colleagues in warm regard, a phenomenon the officers commissioned after 1947 did not experience and that served to further polarize their view of India.[67] A number also had relatives in Indian military service as well as matrimonial agreements with communal connections in India.[68]

Many of the first generation of officers at the new officer training school at the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) were convinced of the hostile intentions of India. This newer generation of officers derived these beliefs from the tribulations experienced during partition and were convinced India did not want Pakistan to exist.[69] Significantly, this new generation of officers were being nurtured on the same notions of their inherent martial race superiority by those remaining British officers as their ancestors had. Their martial race identities were being conflated with the Muslim nature of the new state and contributed to a martial race Muslim exceptionalism.

The dominant narrative remained outrage at India's alleged perfidy in not honoring the division of the force's agreement. Many of the new Pakistani officers may have been aware that their British commander had also bitterly complained about India's alleged failure to honor agreements. General Sir Douglas D. Gracey, the army's second commander in chief, had complained directly to the Commonwealth Relations Office that India was "continuing to do its best to sabotage Pakistan" with this complaint possibly not lost on the Pakistani officers who worked closely with him, such as his aide-de-camp Lieutenant Wajahat Hussain.[70] Other British officers in the Pakistan Army also noted their misgivings, with one believing the Indians maliciously turned trains around east of Lahore back to their points of departure.[71]

The British, Martial Race, and
Its Influence on Pakistani Strategic Culture

This section now examines how General Sir Douglas Gracey and some other British Officers in the Pakistan Army had pronounced preferences for martial race units obtained during their service with the British Indian Army before, during, and after World War II. These preferences were significant in their influence on the Punjabi and the Pashtun bulk of the newly formed officer corps.

Class composition limiting army recruitment to Punjabis and Pashtuns, while identified as not appropriate in a new national army, was still evident in the newly formed Pakistan Army. The foreword written by General Gracey in 1950 in the centenary publication of the Punjab Field Force Regiment noted recruitment had of necessity changed because Sikhs, Dogras, and Gurkhas could no longer be recruited:

> Since partition the class composition has been changed to 50%
> each of Punjabi Mussulmans and Pathans and the recruitment
> of only special areas and tribes has been done away with.[72]

The changes, though, only concerned a matter of choice between classes of Punjabi and Pashtuns. There is, for instance, no mention of Pakistan's majority population of Bengalis or that of the other Pakistani ethnic populations.

The matter of martial race and "class" composition was an issue of some importance to British officers in deciding whether to stay on in Pakistan. It is perhaps not difficult to believe that these British officers so immersed in favorable views of martial race would not continue to utter and promote these beliefs to those same martial race officers now being groomed to assume leadership of the army. As late as 1945, Colonel Christopher Bromhead Birdwood argued for the immutable logic of martial race, despite protests of its racially discriminatory presumptions.[73] The Punjabi and Pashtun officers arguably provided a receptive audience to these senior British officers so enamored with martial race. The positive views of these British officers would have probably gone some way in confirming these beliefs of exceptionalism in the older generation of Pakistani officers, as well as indoctrinating the newer generations being trained at the PMA. In so doing, these British Indian officers ensured the continuation of these beliefs in the army:

> The thought of commanding a regiment composed of Punjabi
> Mussulmans and one to be regarded as the equivalent of an
> R.H.A [Royal Horse Artillery] regiment in the British Service
> was a choice I could not resist.[74]

That British officers continued to hold such beliefs even after the expansion of recruitment to nonmartial groups during World War II is not surprising, given the preeminent place of martial race in the British Indian Army from the late nineteenth century onward. This identification by British officers with the servicemembers of the Pakistan Army was not unusual and was an element

of the two-way process of glorification and identification with the martial race unit that had occurred in the British Indian Army.[75]

The British officers in Pakistan from 1947 to 1951 continued to believe in the veracity of martial race and transmitted this to their largely Punjabi and Pashtun audience in the now independent Pakistan Army. The Punjabi and Pashtun officers who formed the bulk of the Pakistan Army were indoctrinated by the British to define themselves by religion and ethnicity and believed this to be accepted wisdom. They took up wholeheartedly their territorial and ideological mantle as Islamic Ghazis and soldier saviors of the newly created Muslim homeland from the Hindu enemy. Though Pakistan had never been a nation in the past and had inauthentic and tenuous links to the Mughal Empire, the influence of British martial race rhetoric glorified and confirmed their perceptions of identity as glorious Islamic warriors. The accession of Kashmir to India invoked the call of an Islam in danger and the official and unofficial involvement of the army. Elements of the army supported and were involved with eclectic bands of mujahideen and tribal *Lashkars* bent on taking Kashmir from India.

Kashmir: The Bedrock of Pakistani Strategic Culture

Kashmir provided the grounds for further mythmaking in the tale of a battle in which the former British Indian officers, newly commissioned officers, and officers in training became thoroughly immersed in a war in which "Islam in danger" was the rallying cry and cast all into a conflict overlaid with religious themes.

The hardships of partition had amplified the divide between Muslim and Hindu due to the entire premise of the two-nation theory for which Pakistan had been created. The signing of the instrument of accession by the maharajah of Kashmir confirmed the new Pakistani officers' views of the abject treachery on India's part in securing the Muslim majority state for the Indian Union. The accession was bitterly argued by the Pakistanis who denounced India's perfidy and Mountbatten and his Hindu clique's bias. All these factors contributed to a narrative of Hindu oppression, perfidy, and lost opportunities in which Pakistan should have acquired Kashmir. It also served as a useful motif for defining and consolidating the army's identity with the treachery of the Hindu enemy "other" defining the Muslim nature of the Pakistan Army.

Islam in Danger and the Vengeful, Irredentist India Narrative Impact on the Foundations of Pakistani Strategic Culture

What this section of the article will briefly make evident is that irrespective of the ultimate argument concerning the accession of Kashmir to India is the enduring influence that the accession had on this first and succeeding generations of Pakistani officers. The manner that India obtained Kashmir as well as the alleged subjection of a Muslim majority area to Hindu India from this point became a core element of Pakistan Army strategic culture in which Islam was

pitted against Hinduism. An enduring narrative by army officers maintains that a vengeful Hindu India—thwarted by its designs of a unified subcontinent by the creation of Pakistan—undertook to dismantle, diminish, and delegitimize Pakistan's existence until it was absorbed back into the fold of India. The Kashmir issue was from that time until today a point of friction as well as a tinderbox to war in 1948 and 1965 as well as undeclared war and insurgencies by Pakistani proxies from *Lashkar-e-Taiba* to the use of disguised Pakistani infantry in the Kargil crisis as well as other hostile and shallowly deniable attacks against Indian interests.

Significantly, in religious terms, Pakistani Army officers understood the situation of the original Kashmir conflict explicitly as one of Hindu Indians being a danger to Islam.[76] "Islam in danger" in Kashmir became a rallying cry acquired by the Pakistan Army. This notion was familiar in its tribal context to many of the officers from Pashtun backgrounds. The powerful unifying aspects of the jihad on this basis drew from a tradition of Southwest Asian Muslim resistance where "religion was used to define the enemy."[77]

Many Pakistani officers of this generation note how they participated, or knew of others who had participated, with tribal *Lashkars* in the invasion of Kashmir. Officers justified their break from professional training and involvement in the jihad specifically in terms of "Islam in danger." The response to "Islam in danger" entailed a religious obligation of jihad against a Hindu aggressor believed to be guilty of atrocities on the Muslim population.[78] Tribal jirgas of the Afridi and Mohmand's had initially and unsuccessfully sought the permission of Sir George Cunningham, the governor of the NWFP in late October 1947, to go to the assistance of their brethren in Kashmir.[79]

> Their leaders, both religious and secular, were unanimous in their belief that it was their duty to go to the help of their brethren in the Punjab and Kashmir *Jihad* or holy war was being discussed in every *hujra* and *Jirga*.[80]

The first generation of officers being trained at the PMA, which was not officially opened until November 1948, were also alert to the call of "Islam in danger" and were eager to participate in the jihad in Kashmir.[81] Some went to Kashmir without the knowledge of the PMA staff and led tribal *Lashkars*.[82] One notes that he and other officers volunteered when it became apparent that the commitment of regular forces would not cause the Indians to spread the conflict into the Punjab.[83] Others went because they recognized that the jihad of the tribes would not succeed without their skilled assistance.

> Soon after the tribesmen invaded Kashmir it became imperative to have some control over them to defend Azad Kashmir effectively. To that end Pakistani officer volunteers were inducted immediately to take care of these Lashkar's. This number kept increasing.[84]

Islamic martial myths were important to the army officers who joined this jihad and heroic tales of Islamic military prowess are popular reference points in the military history taught to Pakistani Army officers. Religious and martial imagery are evident in accounts of the fighting in Kashmir during 1947–48. Akbar Khan's account of leading tribal *Lashkars* under the nom de guerre General Tariq, the famous Moorish invader, were evidence of the importance of connecting such heroic Islamic figures to the exploits of the new Muslim officers of the Pakistan Army. Hafeez Jalandhri, who was to become the national poet of Pakistan during this period, was also wounded in Kashmir and would write the heroic lyrics to the Pakistan National Anthem. Religious and martial symbolisms in this first generation of Pakistani officers are imbued with the myth of Muslim exceptionalism as Ghazis defending and overcoming the enemies of the faith.

> The spectacle before us was like a page out of old history. Memory flashed back many centuries. This is what it might have been like when our forefathers had poured in through the mountain passes of the Frontier . . . men of all ages, grey beards to teenagers good to look at and awe inspiring . . . these men had come to fight, in their blood ran the memory of centuries of invasions and adventure . . . above the rumble and din could be heard a chorus of war songs . . . ahead lay glory.[85]

The significance of Akbar's account as well as the less florid accounts of others is important in their emphasis on the joint tribulations and camaraderie experienced by these fellow Muslim officers in the new army of a new country with no historical antecedents.

It was a formative experience at the very beginning of many officers' army careers, and it encouraged many young Pakistani men such as Hakeem Qureshi, who had assisted the Mujahideen, to join the army and continue the fight against India.[86] Veteran officers such as Akbar and officer cadets alike engaged in a jihad against the perceived threat of a Hindu India bent on denying Pakistan its birthright. The excitement apparent at the beginning of many conflicts played a part, but equally the experiences of the jihad in Kashmir made lasting impressions on these officers' individual and group identity. This was especially so for those officer cadets and newly commissioned officers whose first experience of combat would be against India in a conflict infused with religious overtones. The jihad in Kashmir tied with the communal and religious violence that had occurred during partition became infused with powerful elements of religion, historical experience, and myth that contributed to the creation of an identity for the Pakistan Army and the foundation of the army's strategic culture.

Defending Pakistan for the army became significantly synonymous not with any concept of a constitution or political ideology but explicitly in terms of defending Islam, and the injustice at the loss of Kashmir tempered by the

heroism of the jihadi tribes and their Pakistan Army members was established as the key element of the fledgling army's strategic culture.

The cries of the danger presented to Islam called on the new army officers to respond in a manner inimical to their previously inherited traditions and training received in the British Indian Army, with the psychological impact of combat tied with the religious aspects of combat profoundly influencing this generation of officers.[87] The fears of the loss of Kashmir to India galvanized officers such as the Sandhurst-trained Akbar as well as others to join and lead tribal *Lashkars* in an unconventional, religiously inspired war against India.

There was also a strategic territorial imperative in wishing to obtain Kashmir by any means necessary, but it was the religious call of Islam in danger that motivated many Muslims. The call to jihad saw serving Pakistani officers act jointly with disgraced Indian National Army officers, deserters, entire units of princely state forces—such as the 300 soldiers of the Wali of Swat's Army—and even adventurers sympathetic to Pakistan's cause, such as the case of a former American servicemember who allegedly led a *Lashkar* of 8,000 tribals.[88]

A British officer was also arrested in Rawalpindi and suspected by the British of leading Pakistani troops in Kashmir.[89] The arrested officer had threatened to reveal the alleged involvement of other British officers in Kashmir, including the bombardment of Indian positions on behalf of Azad Kashmir forces by a British officer.[90]

The 1971 War: Strategic Shock, Moral Turpitude, and Islam

As Pakistan approached war with India in 1971, the Americans were surprised at the arrogance and naiveté of the Pakistani Army generals' belief in their martial race identity and Islamic exceptionalism to rescue them from their developing debacle.

> When I asked as tactfully as I could about the Indian advantage in numbers and equipment, Yahya [Khan] and his colleagues answered with bravado about the historic superiority of Moslem fighters.[91]

The impact of the loss of the war was a strategic shock for the army that caused it to question both its leadership and culture. A strategic shock or a strategic surprise may be explained as

> those . . . events that, if they occur, would make a big difference to the future, force decision makers to challenge their own assumptions of how the world works, and require hard choices today.[92]

In particular, the loss ignited a belief that attributed blame to a great degree on the moral turpitude of the senior officer corps. These officers came to be thought of as irreligious and slavish followers of the inherited culture from the

British Indian Army. In rowdy scenes after the war, younger officers distinctly saw the irreligiosity of their officers as a major factor in the humiliating loss to India.

Conclusion

This article examined the formative years of the Pakistan Army from its inception in 1947. The article explored and analyzed the impact of the partition of British India on the newly independent dominion of Pakistan's army officers and argued the significance of this in the establishment of a Pakistani strategic culture that reflected on a history of treachery, a fear of an irredentist Hindu India hostile to a Muslim Pakistan, and a belief that the identity for the new state should be wedded to its formation as a homeland for Muslims. This article illustrated how the searing impact of partition created these beliefs in the new Pakistani army officers. Many of these who had served with Sikhs and Hindus experienced epiphany-like situations arising out of the horrors of partition that reinvigorated their sense of Islamic identity.

The article also argued those British officers who undertook service in the Pakistan Army, including their commanders, were thoroughly imbued with beliefs in martial race. The article asserted that these senior and influential officers' views on martial race would have received a receptive audience in an officer corps consisting of Punjabi and Pashtun officers who had been generationally feted as superior soldiers. The impact of partition, together with the perpetuation of beliefs in martial race, were then joined by the impact of the First Kashmir War (1947–48). The mythology of the potential danger that a Hindu India presented to Islam was noted in the article as a cry to the faithful to join the battle against the Indians in Kashmir. The convergence of these three elements established the foundations of strategic culture derived from shared hardships, disasters, and the unitary call to Islam. The strategic culture founded during the tumultuous period of independence in 1947 has since added new dimensions and nuances to the contours in its regional and geostrategic relationships. This strategic culture is agile and attuned to political realism to ensure the survival of the Pakistani state or at least how the military perceives its interests and survival. As illustrated above, the foundational contours of the strategic culture of Pakistan endure with absolutely no indication of any shift in its outlook in the near future, especially in its perception of India, which remains essentially as belligerent as it did 74 years ago when both nations became independent. Looking back from 1947 to the current day, these foundational influences are still apparent with the Indian threat remaining centric to Pakistan's strategic culture and security interests, whether it was the series of wars from 1948 to 1971 and later incidents such as Kargil or the enduring impact of the Global War on Terrorism and continuing claims that India is attempting to destabilize Pakistan, either through their alleged support of militants such as the Balochistan Liberation Army or their historic support for an Afghanistan hostile to Pakistani interests.

Endnotes

1. As quoted in the foreword of Brig S. K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War* (New Delhi, India: Himalayan Books, [1976] 1986). Emphasis in original.

2. A strategic shock may also be explained as an event that has an important impact on the country and/or stretches conventional wisdom with fundamental implications, or as Nathan Freier explains more informally, "a game changing event that changes the nature of the game." Nathan Freier, *Known Unknowns: Unconventional "Strategic Shocks" in Defense Strategy Development* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), 4–5.

3. "The belief that Islam is under threat politically and/or religiously is shared by different Islamic movements and scholars across various Muslim countries." Joas Wagemakers, "Framing the 'Threat to Islam': Al-Wala'Wa Al-Bara' in Salafi Discourse," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 4. Some scholars have placed the concept of "Islam in danger" as central to the formation of Pakistan. Sayeed argued in 1963 that even Jinnah with all his brilliance could not have achieved Pakistan without the two cries, "Islam in danger!" and "Pakistan an Islamic State!" Khalid Bin Sayeed, "Islam and National Integration in Pakistan," in *South Asian Politics and Religion,* ed. Donald Eugene Smith (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 412, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400879083.

4. Gregory F. Giles, *Continuity and Change in Israel's Strategic Culture* (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Threat Reduction Agency, 2002); Jennifer Knepper, "Nuclear Weapons and Iranian Strategic Culture," *Comparative Strategy* 27, no. 5 (2008): https://doi.org/10.1080/01495930802430080; and Elizabeth Kier, "Culture and Military Doctrine: France between the Wars," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (Spring 1995): https://doi.org/10.2307/2539120.

5. Lawrence Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War* (London: Routledge, 2006), 3.

6. Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture*, 1.

7. Jeffrey S. Lantis and Darryle Howlett, "Strategic Culture," in *Strategy in the Contemporary World*, ed. John Bayliss, James J. Wirtz, and Colin S. Gray, 4th ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 76–95.

8. Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War*, 5.

9. Hasan Askari Rizvi, "Pakistan's Strategic Culture," in *South Asia in 2020: Future Strategic Balances and Alliances*, ed. Michael R. Chambers (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002), 305–29; Feroz Hassan Khan, "Comparative Strategic Culture: The Case of Pakistan," *Strategic Insights* 4, no. 10 (October 2005); and Peter R. Lavoy, *Pakistan's Strategic Culture* (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Threat Reduction Agency 2006).

10. Rizvi, "Pakistan's Strategic Culture," 307.

11. Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War,* 78, 86–88.

12. According to Anthony Smith, emeritus professor of nationalism and ethnicity at the London School of Economics, ethno-symbolism and nationalism theory emphasizes the importance of conflict in creating myths of battle and heroism that later generations may emulate, a theme that is prevalent in Pakistan. Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2009), 47. The term *myth* is also usefully considered from the sense described by Marwick of a "myth" being a version of the past containing an element of truth in that it distorts what actually happened in support of a vested interest. See Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 292.

13. Population estimates derived from estimates of 1951. Joseph E Schwartzberg, ed., *A Historical Atlas of South Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 77.

14. Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia,* 77.

15. One in 5 of East Pakistan's population was non-Muslim compared to 1 in 30 of West Pakistan. Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History* (London: Hurst, 2012), 16.

16. MajGen S. Shahid Hamid, *Early Years of Pakistan: Including the Period from August 1947 to 1949* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ferozsons, 1993), 26, 41–53.

17. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, *Pakistan's Defence Policy, 1947–58* (Lahore, Pakistan: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1998), 67, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-20942-2.

18. Aparna Pande, *Explaining Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Escaping India* (London: Routledge, 2011), 47.

19. Hamid, *Early Years of Pakistan*, 37.

20. For literature on the violence of partition, see *Partition: Surgery Without Anesthesia* (Islamabad, Pakistan: Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, 1998); Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511613173; Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006).

21. Hamid, *Early Years of Pakistan,* 41–53.

22. MajGen S. K. Sinha, *Operation Rescue: Military Operations in Jammu & Kashmir, 1947–49* (New Delhi, India: Vision Books, [1955] 1977), 21.

23. Verinder Grover and Ranjana Arora, eds., *Pakistan: 50 Years of Independence* (New Delhi, India: Deep & Deep Publications, 1997), 23.

24. Anas Malik, *Political Survival in Pakistan: Beyond Ideology* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 42.

25. Aaron T. Wolf and Joshua T. Newton, *Case Study of Transboundary Dispute Resolution: The Indus Water Treaty* (Corvallis: Institute for Water and Watersheds, Oregon State University, 2013).

26. There was significant opposition to the idea of Pakistan among religious groups with figures in the Deoband school believing that Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan would be incapable of building an Islamic state in Pakistan. See Ziya-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan* (Calcutta, India: Navana, 1963), 118–21.

27. Mohamed Nawab bin Mohammed Osman, "The Ulama in Pakistani Politics," *South Asia—Journal of South Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (2009): 232; and Safir Akhtar, "Pakistan Since Independence: The Political Role of the Ulama" (PhD diss., University of York, May 1989), 236.

28. Safir, "Pakistan Since Independence," 234.

29. The poor view of Mountbatten by Pakistani Army writers is prolific, including an almost de rigueur reference in regimental histories; for example, in MajGen Rafiuddin Ahmed, *History of the Baloch Regiment, 1939–1956* (East Sussex, UK: Naval & Military Press, 2005), 189, 197; and Col M. Y. Effendi, *Punjab Cavalry: Evolution, Role, Organisation and Tactical Doctrine 11 Cavalry (Frontier Force), 1849–1971* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 147.

30. General the Lord Ismay Papers, 3/7/67/38, Letter from Viceroy Mountbatten to Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, 26 September 1947 at Government House to Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA).

31. General the Lord Ismay Papers, 3/7/67/38, 4.

32. John Connell, *Auchinleck: A Critical Biography of Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck* (London: Cassell, 1959), 920–21; and Auchinleck's private secretary MajGen Shahid Hamid, *Disastrous Twilight: A Personal Record of the Partition of India* (London: Leo Cooper, 1986), 260–61. Auchinleck's papers in the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester, document 1262, 28 September 1947, refer to this quote.

33. Wajahat Hussain's Indian commander attempted to persuade him to remain in India, but Hussain, who had served on the Punjab Boundary Force, was convinced by witnessing the carnage brought on Muslims in the East Punjab to opt for Pakistan, in Hussain, "Remembering Our Warriors." MajGen S. Wajahat Hussain, "Remembering Our Warriors—Interview of Major General (Retd) S. Wajahat Husain," *Defence Journal* (August 2002).

34.   Gen Mohammad Musa, *From Jawan to Genera* (Karachi, Pakistan: East & West Publishing, 1984), 77.

35.   Quoted in Shahid Javed Burki, "Pakistan under Zia, 1977–1988," *Asian Survey* 28, no. 10 (October 1988): 1084, https://doi.org/10.2307/2644708.

36.   Fraser claims this from his time with Indian officer cadets at an officer cadet training school after World War II. George MacDonald Fraser, *Quartered Safe Out Here: A Recollection of the War in Burma* (London: Harvill, 1992), 133.

37.   Ayub Khan notes that he was approached by Gen Kodandera M. Cariappa, the first commander in chief of the Indian Army, in a bid to seek Ayub's support in not dividing the army, in Ayub Khan, *Friends Not Masters: A Political Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 19. Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, a member of the armed forces reconstitution steering committee during partition also makes this claim; see Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 187.

38.   Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay, *The Memoirs of the General the Lord Ismay* (London: Heinemann, 1960), 425–28; and Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (London: Robert Hale, 1951), 137. Johnson was Mountbatten's aide-de-camp and wrote that Mountbatten thought the partition of the armed forces to be "the biggest crime and the biggest headache."

39.   Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, 187.

40.   MajGen Fazal Muqeem Khan, *The Story of the Pakistan Army* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1961), 17–18.

41.   Brig S. Haider Abbas Rizvi, *Veteran Campaigners: A History of the Punjab Regiment, 1759–1981* (Lahore, Pakistan: Wajidalis, 1984), 105.

42.   MajGen Shaukat Riza, *The Pakistan Army, 1947–1949* (Lahore, Pakistan: Services Books Club, 1989), 118–19. See also Brig D. H. Cole, *Imperial Military Geography: The Geographical Background of the Defence Problems of the British Commonwealth* (London: Sifton Praed, 1953), 159–82. Cole writes of the importance of India as a potential base for Britain and the particular problems of Pakistan, 172–76.

43.   National Archives of the United Kingdom—Public Record Office (PRO) CAB 128/7—Confidential Annex to reference CM (46) 55, India Constitutional Problem, 23.

44.   Anita Inder Singh, "Imperial Defence and the Transfer of Power in India, 1946–1947," *International History Review* 4, no. 4. (November 1982): 568–88; and Riza, *The Pakistan Army, 1947–1949*, 125.

45.   Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, 186–87.

46.   Field Marshal Auchinleck to chiefs of staff and British Cabinet, in Connell, *Auchinleck*, 889.

47.   Ahmed, *History of the Baloch Regiment*, 187–88.

48.   Khan, *Friends Not Masters*, 19. The future defense minister and prime minister of Pakistan, Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, also makes this claim in his book, Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*,187.

49.   An officer of the 2d Battalion of the Black Watch witnessed a fatal skirmish between the Muslim troops of the 3d Battalion of the 8th Punjab Regiment and the Sikhs and Hindus of the 19th Lancers on 7 September 1947, in Roy Humphries, *To Stop a Rising Sun: Reminiscences of Wartime in India and Burma* (Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1996), 203.

50.   Boyle—Reports and Messages re: tensions between Muslim and Hindu troops on board H.M. Troopship "Empire Pride," Suez-Bombay, October 1947, LHCMA. Boyle reports via "Marconigrams" of his and fellow British officers' (Maj Walker and Maj Mitchell) belief in imminent violence on board the vessel between the Muslim majority and Hindu minority if the vessel did not dock at Karachi before Bombay.

51.   The commander of the 33 Field Squadron Engineers reported the death of two British officers escorting Muslim refugees in Amritsar, India, in Humphries, *To Stop a Rising Sun*, 201–2.

52.   National Army Museum (NAM.1982-04-797-1), Brig Akbar Khan's response as a wit-

ness to the Armed Forces Naturalisation Committee (AFNC) (from minutes of AFNC at 14th meeting on Wednesday, 9 April 1947).

53. MajGen Tajammal Hussain Malik, *The Story of My Struggle* (Lahore, Pakistan: Jang Publishers, 1991), 7.

54. Ismay and Montgomery were critical of Jinnah and even Montgomery with his contemporary lack of familiarity with India pronounced that Jinnah had a deadly hatred of Hindus. Field Marshal Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein* (London: Collins, 1958), 457; and Ismay blamed the troubles of partition on Jinnah, in British Library sound recording, C940/19 General Lord Ismay (1887–1965), interviewed by Henry Vincent Hodson, General the Lord Ismay Papers, 3/7/68/45, LHCMA.

55. General the Lord Ismay Papers, 3/7/68/45.

56. Jinnah's inaugural address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11 August 1947, in his capacity as its first president, in G. Allana, ed., *Pakistan Movement: Historic Documents* (Karachi, Pakistan: University of Karachi, 1967), 407–11; Hamid, *Early Years of Pakistan*, 37; and Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, 186.

57. Oriental and India Office Collections (OIOC) L/WS/1/1673—Appointments held by British Officers in Pakistan and List of Colonels and above—Pakistan Army.

58. For instance, one serious loss was MajGen Iftikhar Khan, who some believed would be the first Pakistani army chief, who together with Brig Sher Khan, another experienced officer, was killed in an air crash on 13 November 1949.

59. Brig Syed Shah Abul Qasim, *Life Story of an Ex-Soldier* (Karachi, Pakistan: Publicity Panel Publishers, 2003), 73.

60. Hussain, "Remembering Our Warriors."

61. Brig M. A. H. Ansari, Brig M. H. Hydri, and Col Mahboob Elahi, *History of the Pakistan Army Ordnance Corps, 1947–1992* (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Ordnance History Cell & Ferozsons, 1993), 89–90.

62. Ansari, Hydri, and Elahi, *History of the Pakistan Army Ordnance Corps, 1947–1992,* 90.

63. Brig Z. A. Khan, *The Way It Was: Inside the Pakistan Army* (Karachi, Pakistan: Ahbab Printers, 1998), 44.

64. MajGen S. K. Sinha, *Operation Rescue—Military Operations in Jammu & Kashmir, 1947–49* (New Delhi, India: Vision Books, [1955] 1977), 4. Sinha notes how he and a Pakistani officer ended up destroying several files due to their impossible task.

65. Riza, *The Pakistan Army, 1947–1949*, 145–46.

66. LtGen Faiz Ali Chisti, *Betrayals of Another Kind: Islam, Democracy, and the Army in Pakistan* (Lahore, Pakistan: Jang Publishers, 1996), 399.

67. Rahman fondly recalled visiting India and meeting old British Indian Army colleagues such as Sam Manekshaw, an Indian Army officer. M. Attiqur Rahman, *Back to the Pavilion* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2005), 81.

68. Qasim notes despite the tense atmosphere between Pakistan and India when he returned to Bangalore in 1953 to be married. Qasim, *Life Story of an Ex-Soldier*, 73; and LtGen Rahman's brother was in the Indian government, in Rahman, *Back to the Pavilion*, 156.

69. LtGen Jahan Dad Khan, *Pakistan Leadership Challenges* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.

70. From General Sir Douglas Gracey to General Sir Geoffrey Scoones, Commonwealth Relations Office, London, OIOC L/WS/1/1652 (7); and Hussain, "Remembering Our Warriors."

71. Devereux Papers ACC.197, "My tour with the Pakistan Army," LHCMA, 1–2. Devereux commanded 3 SP Regiment Royal Pakistan Artillery.

72. MajGen M. Hayaud Din, *One Hundred Glorious Years: A History of the Punjab Frontier Force, 1849–1949* (Lahore, Pakistan: Civil and Military Gazette, 1950), 9.

73. LtCol the Hon C. B. Birdwood, M.V.O., *A Continent Experiments* (London: Skeffington & Son, 1945), 112–13.

74. LHCMA—Devereux Papers ACC.197, "My tour with the Pakistan Army," 1.

75. MajGen Sher Ali Pataudi, *The Story of Soldiering and Politics in India and Pakistan* (Lahore, Pakistan: Syed Mobin Mahmud, 1988), 36.

76. Khan, *The Story of the Pakistan Army*, 96. In regard to the notion of "Islam in danger," several chapters discuss Pathan tribal custom on rebellion in the name of Islam, in Alan Warren, *Waziristan, the Faqir of Ipi, and the Indian Army: The North West Frontier Revolt of 1936–37* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2000), chaps. 3–4.

77. Warren, *Waziristan, the Faqir of Ipi, and the Indian Army,* 120.

78. "The belief that Islam is under threat politically and/or religiously is shared by different Islamic movements and scholars across various Muslim countries." Joas Wagemakers, "Framing the 'Threat to Islam': Al-Wala'Wa Al-Bara' in Salafi Discourse," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 4, https://doi.org/10.2307/41858559. Some scholars have placed the concept of "Islam in danger" as central to the formation of Pakistan. Sayeed argued in 1963 that even Jinnah with all his brilliance could not have achieved Pakistan without the two cries: "Islam in danger!" and "Pakistan an Islamic State!" Khalid Bin Sayeed, "Islam and National Integration in Pakistan," in *South Asian Politics and Religion*, ed. Donald Eugene Smith (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 412, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400879083-019.

79. OIOC IOR L/WS/1/747—British High Commission, Political Movements within the State, dated 28 November 1947.

80. Khan, *The Story of the Pakistan Army*, 88.

81. Khan, *Pakistan Leadership Challenges*, 11.

82. Interview of MajGen Naseerullah Khan Babar, in "Remembering Our Warriors—Babar the Great," *Defence Journal* 4, no. 9 (April 2001): 9.

83. Brig S. Haider Abbas Rizvi, *Veteran Campaigners: A History of the Punjab Regiment, 1759–1981* (Lahore, Pakistan: Wajidalis, 1984), 121.

84. Hussain, "Remembering Our Warriors."

85. MajGen Akbar Khan, *Raiders in Kashmir* (Islamabad, Pakistan: National Book Foundation, 1970), 34–36, corroborated in part by Wajahat Hussain upon Akbar adopting the nom de guerre of the Muslim conqueror of Spain, "Tariq." Hussain, "Remembering Our Warriors."

86. MajGen Hakeen Arshad Qureshi, *The 1971 Indo-Pak War: A Soldier's Narrative* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2002), 246.

87. On the existential transformation from experiencing combat, see Rune Henriksen, "Warriors in Combat—What Makes People Actively Fight in Combat?," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30 no. 2 (April 2007): 188–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390701248707.

88. Khan, *Raiders in Kashmir*, 58, 72; Howard B. Schaffer, *The Limits of Influence: America's Role in Kashmir* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009), 21; and a photograph of Haight appearing in uniform wearing a '*Pagri* in *Life Magazine* 24, no. 7, 16 February 1948, 42.

89. OIOC IOR L/PJ/7/13851—Capt Skellon I.E.M.E. Arrest at Rawalpindi and the Matter of Col Milne Pakistan Artillery.

90. OIOC IOR L/PJ/7/13851—Capt Skellon.

91. Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), 861.

92. A strategic shock may also be explained as an event that has an important impact on the country and/or stretches conventional wisdom with fundamental implications, or as Freier explains more informally, "a game changing event that changes the nature of the game." Freier, *Known Unknowns*, 4–5.

Structuring Cultural Analyses
Applying the Holistic Will-to-Fight Models

Ben Connable, PhD

Abstract: Will to fight is the most important factor in war. This article describes two models designed to help analysts understand, describe, and forecast the will to fight of military forces and national leaders. Both models are designed to be modified by the Joint Force for tailored uses around the world.

Keywords: cultural intelligence, will to fight, modeling and simulation, cultural analysis, military analysis, human behavior

This article describes two analytic models and tools to help structure the integration of cultural information into holistic, all-source analyses. It also addresses some of the challenges that must be overcome to help decision makers and military leaders accept and integrate culture into their impressionistic decision making.

Political and military decision makers broadly accept the importance of culture, encourage others to study it, and yet far too often ignore it in practice. As a result, their decisions are also, far too often, inadequate. In some major battles in the World Wars, in the Vietnam War, and in the Iraq War, failure

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to successfully integrate cultural considerations into decision making has been disastrous.

Blame can and should be widely cast. Decision makers and military leaders deserve blame for paying lip service to something they openly describe as critically important. Analysts deserve blame for failing to put the necessary effort into understanding and describing culture, and in many cases falling into reductionist and mechanistic analytic traps. In some cases, analysts' interpretations of cultural factors are spot-on, but the lack of transparent structure behind their analyses renders their arguments unconvincing.

There is no perfect solution to the substantial challenges involved with integrating cultural considerations into analysis and policy. But it is incumbent on everyone involved in the policy process—from analyst to decision maker—to continually pursue the better in the absence of the perfect. Analysis of will to fight offers a pathway to improved integration of culture.

Will to Fight and Cultural Analysis

The U.S. military embraces human will as the most important factor in warfare.[1] War is, first and foremost, a contest of opposing, independent, and irreconcilable wills. But capstone Marine Corps doctrine cites British military analyst B. H. Liddell Hart, referring to the human will as the "chief incalculable" of war.[2] In other words, will to fight is critically important and also difficult to analyze.

In pursuit of the better, Rand developed two models of will to fight: one for military units and one for national leaders. Both models are empirically derived, structured analytic tools to help integrate cultural factors into holistic analyses of combat effectiveness.

Rand defines *military will to fight* as the disposition and decision to fight, act, or persevere when needed.[3] *National will to fight* is the determination of a national government to conduct sustained military and other operations for some objective even when the expectation of success decreases or the need for significant political, economic, and military sacrifices increases.[4] Culture is central to both of these structured analytic models.

Culture Matters (Most?)
for Influence, Competition, and War

In the late 1980s, something astounding happened in the U.S. Marine Corps. A raw, radical series of doctrinal books were allowed to be written without being staffed and edited into a state of beige uselessness. The Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) series continues to offer terrific and often blunt insights into the nature of warfare. *Intelligence* (MCDP 2) arguably makes the best standing case for the importance of cultural intelligence. It ties together the U.S. military's long-standing Clausewitzian understanding of the nature of war with directions to analysts:

> War is ultimately a human conflict. . . . Developing sound intelligence requires an understanding of the institutions, pref-

erences, and habits of a different culture. Commanders must appreciate the values, goals, and past experiences which motivate the enemy. We must gain insight into why he fights. To know what motivates an enemy to action requires an identification and appreciation of what the enemy holds dear.[5]

The Marines go on to describe culture as a nonquantifiable value that, despite its seemingly ephemeral nature, must be analyzed. Language in *Intelligence* is straightforward. Analysts must "understand what factors shape an enemy's behavior in order to describe or explain that behavior."[6] For many students of warfare and human behavior, these passages read with some forehead-slapping obviousness. But despite the commonsense nature of these instructions, they were generally ignored in practice.[7]

It is beyond the scope of this article to assess why the community of professional intelligence analysts failed so miserably to effectively incorporate culture into all-source analyses. The words of former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Paul J. Selva aptly summarize the state of cultural analysis in the 2016 *Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations*:

> Recent failure to translate military gains into strategic success reflects, to some extent, the Joint Force's tendency to focus primarily on affecting the material capabilities—including hardware and personnel—of adversaries and friends, rather than their will to develop and employ those capabilities.[8]

Human will to fight, and also to act and simply persevere in the face of hardship, is heavily influenced by culture. The Joint Staff recognized this fact, arguing that cultural analysis was essential to understanding not only conventional war but also influence operations and competition.[9] But there is little evidence this advice was heeded.[10]

In 2020, the Marines revisited cultural analysis in *Competing*, a companion doctrinal book to *Intelligence*. While *Intelligence* focused solely on conventional warfighting, *Competing* argues that cultural analysis is central to conducting successful influence operations short of war.[11] It analogizes culture with a computer operating system for humans.[12] This is a clunky but basically effective way to explain the centrality of culture to *all* military operations, from training to exercises to irregular war to conventional war. Actualizing this collective advice requires working definitions and structured analytic techniques.

Analyzing Culture: Disposition, Agentic Choice, and Approaches

For the purposes of this article, *culture* refers to collective influence on the dispositions and agentic behavioral choices of people.[13] For individuals, it translates less as a computer operating system and more as a dynamic menu for behavior. For analysts, dispositions should be equated with likelihoods: Is an individual

or group more or less likely to choose a certain behavior, and why? Thinking about culture in terms of dispositions helps align cultural analysis with the practicalities of intelligence analysis.[14] Sherman Kent's language of estimative probability is well suited to cultural analysis and analyses of dispositions.[15]

Agentic choice is a term of recognition: culture influences behavior, but it does not dictate behavior. Individual interpretations and articulations of cultural influence are unique and dynamic. In practice, this means that cultural analysis is an excellent forecasting tool, but it is never predictive.[16]

There are many possible ways to analyze culture to forecast human behavior. Two general approaches have emerged in this limited field of intelligence practice: (1) reductionism; and (2) holism. Reductionist analyses seek to identify the most important, or dominant factors, in a culture to simplify analysis. Holistic analyses take the complexity of culture head-on, often breaking down culture into widely recognized factors like beliefs, norms, and values, and in some cases providing thick description.[17]

When it comes to cultural analysis, reductionism is absurd. Boiling down the complexity of human behavior into a handful of useful factors generates precision without accuracy. It may be easy to explain culture in a few words and by considering a few overall factors. But this approach assumes away the actual complexity of human behavior. It shifts the value proposition of the analysis from the evidence to the subjective interpretation of the analyst. Inaccurate but precise analyses can—and often do—influence decision makers toward bad decisions.[18]

Holism is an objectively more accurate approach to cultural analysis, but it is also more time-consuming and harder to translate for decision makers. In the era of two-page or one-slide reports, a 100-page cultural analysis has little chance of reaching a decision-maker's desk. Current tools for holistic analysis—including the widely used ASCOPE and PMESII guides—are inadequate, insufficiently grounded in historical and scientific literature, and often poorly understood.[19]

Reductionism is ineffective and misleading, and holism is time-consuming and difficult. Historically, the inability to find a practical approach to cultural analysis has led to a worse default. In the absence of good and useful cultural analysis, loosely informed personal impressions dominate policy choices. Poorly informed impressionistic decisions are often disastrous.[20]

Examples: Failures and a (Near) Success of Cultural Analysis

Failure to apply structured analysis to adversary culture is commonplace. In the cases reviewed for the will-to-fight research effort, intelligence professionals and decision makers have struggled to understand culture and human will.[21] Every case of human conflict offers lessons for cultural analysis. These three examples highlight key challenges: (1) German assessments of French will to fight at the Battle of Verdun in World War I; (2) assessments of the

18th Division of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) from the late 1960s through 1972; and (3) assessments of North Vietnamese will to fight from 1954 through 1974.

Verdun 1916

In 1916, Chief of the German General Staff Erich von Falkenhayn made an impressionistic assessment of the will to fight of the French 2d Army and of the French nation. Based on reports from his intelligence officers, he determined that a single, rapid tactical defeat would trigger a strategic French collapse.[22] He targeted a 2d Army salient at Verdun along the Meuse River for a massive assault. But von Falkenhayn's intelligence analysts misunderstood the information their forces had collected on French will to fight. French troop rotations from the front lines looked to them like desertions. French prisoners in German hands were unsurprisingly demoralized. Based on his own writings, von Falkenhayn was personally dismissive of French will. The French did not break. The Battle of Verdun lasted 10 months, cost the Germans more than 300,000 dead, and contributed to their eventual defeat.

18th ARVN Division Late 1960s–1975

Throughout the Vietnam War, American assessments of South Vietnamese (Republic of Vietnam) will to fight were generally negative.[23] Some criticism was well deserved, some less so. Too often, senior U.S. military leaders extrapolated their personal observations and applied them to the whole partner force. Deluges of raw data combined with a lack of structured analyses forced general officers to make primarily intuitive assessments of ARVN performance and potential. In 1968, General Creighton W. Abrams, Army commander of all forces in Vietnam, described the performance of the 18th ARVN Division as "miserable."[24] Two years later, his deputy, a three-star general, called the 18th Division mediocre and second rate. But in 1975, as the ARVN was collapsing in the face of an existential North Vietnamese attack, the 18th Division fought ferociously at a crossroads near Xuan Loc. With some support, the 18th Division held off a force three times its size, even as strategic defeat appeared imminent. American generals in charge of developing the ARVN might have changed their approaches and strategic estimates of partner potential with a more structured assessment.

CIA Assessments of North Vietnamese Will to Fight, 1954–1974

From 1954 through 1974, analysts at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) accurately assessed and described the national will to fight of the leaders of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV or North Vietnam).[25] In 1954, CIA analysts wrote, "the Communists will not give up their objective of securing control of all Indochina." In 1964, they wrote, "We believe that the North Vietnamese leaders look at Communist prospects with considerable confidence." In 1968, they wrote, "North Vietnam, with [Communist] Bloc aid, has the

will and the resources to continue fighting for a long time." In 1974, one year before the final defeat of the Republic of Vietnam, CIA analysts wrote, "There has been no apparent curtailment in Hanoi's support for the war." Yet, these accurate assessments were subsumed by U.S. policy maker impressions that allowed them to believe they could break DRV national will to fight. Arguably, lack of empirical analytic structure behind the CIA's analyses undermined their effectiveness.[26]

Holism for Decision Making

In each of these cases, and in the many other cases examined for the will-to-fight research effort, lack of holism, lack of analytic structure, opaque analytic methods, and in many cases the almost total absence of cultural analysis contributed to both tactical and strategic failure. The Rand will-to-fight models are specifically designed to add empirically derived holism to culture-heavy analyses of both adversary and partner will. The military model applies a five-level factor-by-factor assessment model to describe the will to fight of any military unit or organization, from squad to Service level. The national model applies contexts, factors, and mechanisms to help analyze the will to fight of national leaders. Both models can be applied to understand the will to act in competition short of war.

Applying the Rand Military Will-to-Fight Model

Rand's military will-to-fight model consists of 29 major factors and 61 subfactors at the individual, unit, organizational, state, and societal levels. Applying the model shows how factors at all levels influence the will to fight of a military unit or, alternatively, a military organization (e.g., the ARVN or the Russian Army). Factors and subfactors were derived from a seven-part multimethod research effort conducted for the U.S. Army from 2015 through 2018. The model is designed to be explanatory, exploratory, and portable.

Analyses derived from the model can explain but cannot quantitatively measure the culturally influenced will to fight of a military force. Explanation often takes the form of qualitative description in narrative format. While will-to-fight analysis incorporates quantitative data, will to fight is generally expressed in writing, not in numbers. Unfortunately, American decision makers tend to equate qualitative analyses with subjectivity.[27] Given this perspective, they often scorn even the most compelling, evidence-driven narratives, treating them as dismissible opinions.

Changing this perspective requires adding structure to the process behind narrative analytic explanations. Effective explanation of will to fight requires ingesting all types of information—quantitative and qualitative—and describing the resulting evidence-driven analysis in a way that is both compelling and credible. Starting from an empirically derived model like the will-to-fight model adds structure to explanation.

Exploratory, portable models are designed to be modified as needed. Both

Table 1. Military will-to-fight factors and subfactors

LEVEL	CATEGORY	FACTORS	SUBFACTORS
Individual	Individual motivations	Desperation Revenge Ideology Economics	
		Individual identity	Personal, social, unit, state, organization, society
	Individual capabilities	Quality	Fitness, resilience, education, adaptability, social skills, psychological traits
		Individual competence	Skills, relevance, sufficiency, sustainability
Unit	Unit culture	Unit Cohesion	Social vertical, social horizontal, and task
		Expectation	
		Unit Control	Coercion, persuasion, discipline
		Unit esprit de corps	
	Unit capabilities	Unit competence	Performance, skills, training
		Unit support	Sufficiency and timeliness
		Unit leadership	Competence and character
Organization	Organizational culture	Organizational control	Coercion, persuasion, discipline
		Organizational esprit de corps	
		Organizational integrity	Corruption and trust
	Organizational capabilities	Organizational training	Capabilities, relevance, sufficiency, sustainment
		Organizational support	Sufficiency and timeliness
		Doctrine	Appropriateness and effectiveness
		Organizational leadership	Competence and character
State	State culture	Civil-military relations	Appropriateness and functionality
		State integrity	Corruption and trust
	State capabilities	State support	Sufficiency and timeliness
		State strategy	Clarity and effectiveness
		State leadership	Competence and character
Society	Societal culture	Societal identity	Ideology, ethnicity, history
		Societal integrity	Corruption and trust
	Societal capabilities	Societal support	Consistency and efficiency

Source: modified from Ben Connable et al., Military Will to Fight*, xvii–xviii, table S.1, Factors and Subfactors Constituting Will to Fight.*

the military and national models should be adjusted and added to in order to fit specific needs. For example, our team modified both models to analyze the will to fight of the Islamic State and Russian private military companies, two types of organizations not envisioned in the original process.

Table 1 lists the factors and subfactors of the Rand military will-to-fight

model. Each factor can have more or less influence on the unit's or organization's disposition to fight. The left-hand column shows the five levels of will-to-fight analysis from individual to societal. The center column shows the major factors. These are highlighted because they represent the core of the model. The next column shows the subfactors associated with each factor. Subfactors are used to help focus intelligence collection to provide evidence in support of factor-by-factor analysis.

Durability, listed on the far right, describes the likelihood that a factor might change during the course of a single battle. High durability ratings mean the factor is slow to change, while low durability ratings mean the factor is subject to more rapid change. Analysts can use durability ratings to pace their work. Higher durability factors like state culture can be analyzed periodically, while low durability factors like unit support to soldiers (e.g., availability of medical evacuation, sufficient food, ammunition, etc.) require more frequent data collection and analysis.

Culture either influences or is central to every major factor in this model. Culture influences individual beliefs and motivations and even the ways in which individuals develop qualities like physical fitness or mental resilience.

There are two ways analysts can apply the model. A general analysis presents military disposition to fight—or act, see below—in a range of circumstances. Contextual analysis focuses on a specific circumstance, like a pending military campaign or battle. For contextual analyses, an additional nine factors can be added:

1. Climate and weather
2. Terrain
3. Fatigue
4. Mission
5. Adversary reputation
6. Adversary performance
7. Adversary equipment
8. Adversary messaging
9. Allies

Applying the model is a process of factor-by-factor data gathering, analysis, and explanation. No individual factor is necessarily more important than another. The best approach to assess will to fight, or act in competition, is to assess all factors to identify those that are more or less relevant, vulnerable to influence, and likely to affect disposition to fight in differing circumstances.

Rand developed assessment tools in both Adobe PDF and Microsoft Excel. These restricted forms are available to U.S. government personnel. But there is no magic formula needed to assess will to fight using the model. Analytic teams can create their own forms in Microsoft Word or Excel, Adobe PDF, or any other form or text program, with the following basic components:

Figure 1. Notional example of factor-by-factor assessment
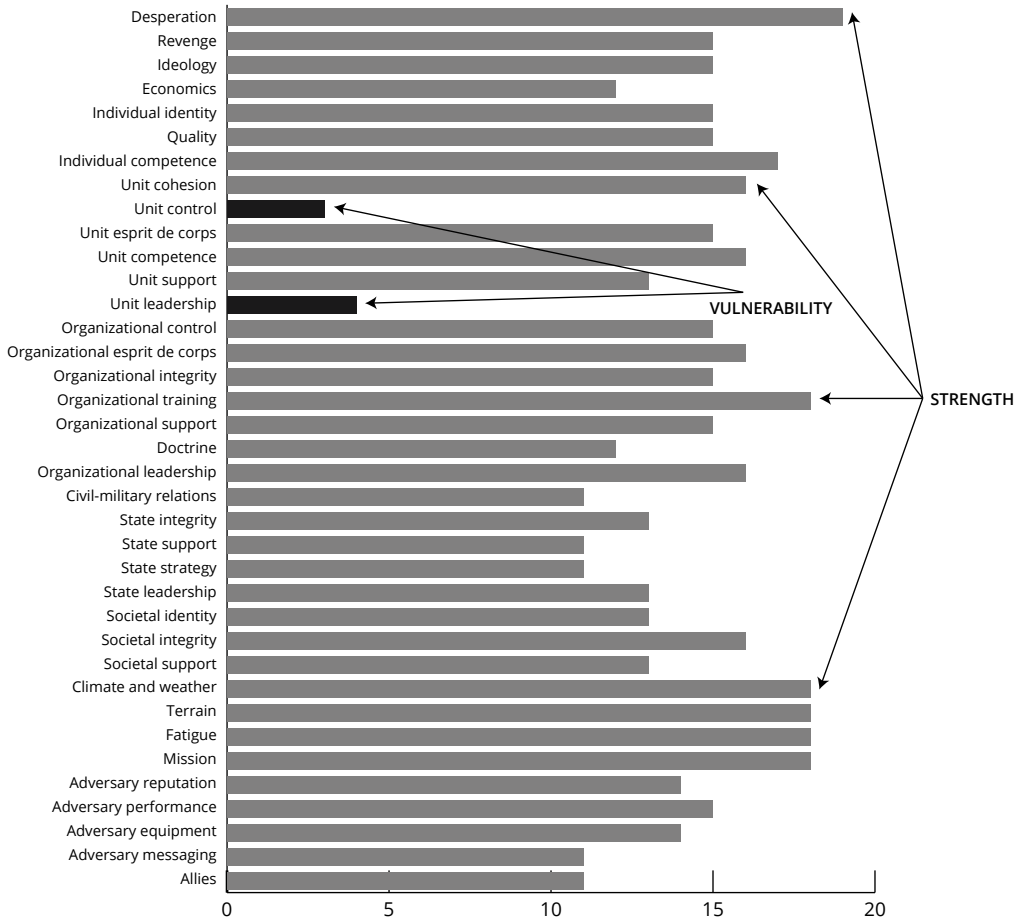
Source: courtesy of the author, modified by MCUP.

- Factor-by-factor ratio-scale ratings (helpful for visualization of findings)
- Text entry for evidence and citation
- Text entry for an explanation of the factor-level analysis
- Text entry for recommendations to influence the factor, if any
- Text entry to identify data or knowledge gaps for future collection

In this notional example in figure 1, each factor is presented on a ratio scale of 1–20.[28] Lower scores indicate more negative influence on disposition to fight, and perhaps more vulnerability to influence, and higher scores indicate more positive influence on disposition to fight, and perhaps less vulnerability to influence. The chart would accompany a narrative analytic report.

This chart helps to visualize the complex will-to-fight analysis in a way that makes high and low factors jump out. In turn, this kind of visualization can help decision makers understand and find ways to actualize the analysis. In this notional example, the factors of unit control (cultural and practiced approach to discipline) and unit leadership are both very low. A military staff or decision maker might use this analysis to divert efforts away from trying to influence high-strength factors like organizational training and toward these two weaker, more vulnerable factors. This approach can be applied for influence operations and kinetic attacks that might shape adversary disposition.

Applying the Rand National Will-to-Fight Model

The military model describes the influence of national factors on units and organizations. The national will-to-fight model describes the influence of military, economic, political, and societal factors on the dispositions of state leaders. State leaders include individuals like presidents, prime ministers, and kings and also officials and informal power brokers who can influence policy.

Building from the robust literature on political decision making in conflict and on deterrence, as well as from historical case analysis, the national model helps analysts to apply factors, contexts, and mechanisms to forecast leaders' dispositions. Political, military, and economic considerations are applied to each. Table 2 shows the national model's factors, contexts, and mechanisms aligned with political, military, and economic considerations.

Factors are similar to those described in the military model. Factors like civil-military relations can have a mostly indirect effect on a military unit's will to fight but a more direct effect on national will to fight. Degraded trust between President Lyndon B. Johnson and his military leaders may have indirectly contributed to a soldier's general sense of unease in 1968, while that same degradation of trust had a direct influence on Johnson's decision making and also support for the Vietnam War in the U.S. Congress.[29]

Contexts help to guide analysis of factors. For example, civil-military relations can often play an important role in the will to fight of a democratic government but have less impact on the will to fight of a dictatorial government. During the late stages of the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam Hussein took effective control of the whole Iraqi armed forces, merging civil-military relations in his person. Economic resilience can help governments weather extensive wartime expenditures, while conflict duration has varying effects on different government leaders.[30]

Mechanisms are the tools that national leaders have at their disposal to shore up their own will to fight (or that of allies and partners) and to degrade the will to fight of adversaries.[31] Messaging can be used to influence populations to support or reject a war. Economic pressures like embargoes and blockades can be used to disrupt an adversary's economy, thereby perhaps weakening its will to fight. Inflicting casualties in war is one of the most common ways to break adversary will to fight, but it is often one of the most poorly understood

Table 2. National will-to-fight factors, contexts, and mechanisms

	Political	**Economic**	**Military**
Factors shaping will-to-fight policy decisions	Stakes Cohesion Civil-military relation Popular support Allies	Leverage	Capabilities
Contexts for understanding factors	Government type National identity	Resilience	Conflict duration
Mechanisms for influencing national will	Engagement Indoctrination and messaging	Pressures	Casualties

Source: Michael J. McNerney et al., National Will to Fight, *xii, table S.1 Simplified National Will to Fight Explanatory Model.*

mechanisms. National resilience to casualties is difficult to forecast and even to understand in retrospect.

Rand developed both a PDF and Excel will-to-fight tool to help analyze national will to fight. These are also available to U.S. government personnel. However, analytic teams can use the same approach recommended to build military will-to-fight forms to build a national will-to-fight form.

Will to Act in Competition

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) reoriented the entire Joint Force away from nearly two decades of counterinsurgency and counterterror missions toward great power competition.[32] This was a more dramatic shift than it may have first appeared. It was not a reorientation toward traditional conventional warfare missions. Instead, it pushed the whole force into new strategic territory. While the U.S. military has been actively competing short of war since its inception, it has never embraced competition as its central purpose. As of mid-2021, the DOD and all military Services are still struggling to define and operationalize competition.

The Marine Corps' *Competing* publication provides a good starting point. It describes competition as having many of the same attributes as conventional war. For the Marines, competition—a spectrum of engagement that includes fighting—is a fundamentally human endeavor. Understanding culture is central to understanding and succeeding in competition.

Therefore, both of the will-to-fight models can be applied to understand adversary, partner, and ally will to act in competition. Will to act might be defined as the disposition and decision to conduct activities or apply hostile measures in competition against an adversary group or state.[33]

While will-to-fight analysis helps to forecast combat-related behavior like attacking, persisting in combat, or surrendering, will-to-act analysis can help forecast positive risk taking, resilience, hesitation to act, risk aversion, avoidance, the effects of deterrence, and vulnerability to influence, distraction, and deception. Structured will-to-act forecasting is needed to help U.S. decision makers manage the tremendous complexity inherent in daily global great power competition.

Analysis for the Impressionistic Decision Maker

In 2005, then-Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld described his approach to consuming and applying data, analyses, and operations assessment. When asked if there was a single quantifiable metric that helped him understand the course of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, he replied:

> No one number is determinative, and the answer is no. We probably look at 50, 60, 70 different types of metrics and come away [with] an impression. It's impressionistic more than determinative.[34]

The author's research on decision-maker consumption of conflict data and analyses suggests that this is a common approach.[35] Key leaders like Rumsfeld consume vast amounts of raw data and finished analyses, and then make decisions based on the impressions they come away with.

Credible sources of information are, generally, more likely to have a more powerful and positive impression than less credible sources of information.[36] Credibility derives in great part from the structure behind the analysis and the transparency of sources and methods.[37] Therefore, structured analytic techniques backed by empirical research are, generally, more likely to effectively influence decision makers than less structured techniques.

This general conclusion is particularly applicable to the analysis of culture. While it may be easier to distill its many complexities into a few key factors, or to filter cultural analysis through a generic military analysis filter like ASCOPE or PMESII, the easier approach is more likely to generate dismissible results. Worse, distillation can lead to the production of analytic reports that are precise but inaccurate, and therefore dangerously misleading.

Conclusion

Rand's will-to-fight analytic models are intended as a starting point for what should be a community-wide effort to add structure to cultural analysis. The models should be thoughtfully modified using the best available literature and lessons from emerging cases and applied in novel ways to support the Joint Force's understanding of competition. There is nothing sacrosanct about the two Rand models: both represent starting points for what should be more tailored analytic efforts. Joint Force analysts should add factors to the existing models, improve on existing definitions, change rating scales, and modify out-

puts to best meet the demands of their consumers. Analysts should also seek to generate new models, build new structured forms, and experiment with new types of analytic products that can help to close the present gap between the U.S. conceptualization of war and competition and the generally unrealistic and too-often indefensible analytic applications currently in use.

Endnotes

1. *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, Joint Publication (JP) 1 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013).
2. *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997).
3. Ben Connable et al., *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2018), https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2341.
4. Michael J. McNerney et al., *National Will to Fight: Why Some States Keep Fighting and Others Don't* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2018), https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2477.
5. *Intelligence*, MCDP 2 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997), 34–35.
6. *Warfighting*, 35.
7. For more on these shortcomings, see Kerry B. Fosher and Lauren MacKenzie, eds., *The Rise and Decline of U.S. Military Culture Programs, 2004–2020* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2021); and Connable et al., *Will to Fight*.
8. *Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations (JC-HAMO)* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2016), hereafter *JC-HAMO*.
9. *JC-HAMO*. Section 7.4 addresses analyses of human will.
10. *JC-HAMO* was removed from circulation, replaced by the more anodyne *Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE)*, which also recognizes past failures to incorporate culture into all-source analyses. *Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE)* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018).
11. *Competing*, MCDP 2 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2020), chaps. 1 and 4.
12. *Competing*, 4–6.
13. There are many active definitions of culture. None are perfect or universally applicable, but the most widely cited definitions are informative. For example, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books,1973); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Melvin E. Spiro, Benjamin Kilborne, and L. L. Lagness, *Culture and Human Nature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1994); and, for a wider perspective, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *What Is Anthropology?* 2d ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
14. People influence each other by example, through speech and imagery, and through reward and punishment. Behavioral disposition and agentic choice are also influenced by geography; by the availability of food, water, shelter, and economic opportunity; and other factors.
15. Sherman Kent, *Words of Estimative Probability*, declassified intelligence document (Langley, VA: Central Intelligence Agency, 1993).
16. See Kent, *Words of Estimative Probability*, for more on the differences between forecasting and prediction. In short, forecasting is a practice of facts-based estimated projection while prediction is a statement of future certainty. Accepting the existence of human agency means accepting the impossibility of prediction of human behavior.
17. *Thick description* is a term used by anthropologists to describe detailed and often voluminous accounting and analysis of a given topic. Various military analysis tools take this approach. For example, see *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment*, JP 2-01.3 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014).
18. For example, see Connable et al., *Will to Fight*; and Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog*

of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2012).

19. ASCOPE and PMESII are acronyms describing a list of factors for holistic analysis. ASCOPE: areas, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, events; PMESII: political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure. These are simply lists of things that might be assessed. They are derived from a number of sources including civil affairs assessment manuals, general intelligence requirements handbooks (GIRHs), and influence assessment targeting charts. ASCOPE and PMESII intersect in table guides for analysts. The author observed both applied in many training, exercise, and operational situations. The author applied a GIRH to a city-level intelligence preparation of the environment (IPE) in ar-Ramadi, Iraq, in 2006. Running through a list of potentially relevant information does not provide analysts with any insight into the nature of the information, how it might be understood, how to prioritize data collection, etc. The author observed mostly pro forma applications of these types of tools and found them time-consuming, distracting, and ultimately unhelpful.

20. Impressionistic decisions are discussed further below. For more information on impressionistic decisions, see chapter 1 of Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War.*

21. These cases include, but are not limited to: France, Italy, and Germany in World War I and World War II; both sides of the Vietnam War; Russia in Afghanistan; Russia in Chechnya; Russia in Syria; the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) against a prospective Russian attack; the Iraqi Army; the Islamic State; Syrian militia forces; both sides of the Korean War; both sides of the India-Pakistan War; India in the Kargil War; and the Yemeni government in the Yemeni civil war post-2011. See Connable et al., *Will to Fight*; and McNerney et al., *National Will to Fight.*

22. For analysis of this case and full citation, see Connable et al., *Will to Fight*, 15–18.

23. For example, U.S. Department of State, *ARVN Morale Study* (Saigon, RVN: U.S. Embassy, 1974); and Lewis Sorley, ed., *Vietnam Chronicles: The Abrams Tapes, 1968–1972* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2004). The 18th Division commander's comments are cited in George J. Veith and Merle L. Pribbenow II, " 'Fighting Is an Art': The Army of the Republic of Vietnam's Defense of Xuan Loc, 9–21 April, 1975," *Journal of Military History* 68, no. 1 (January 2004): 213. Also see James H. Wilbanks, "Xuan Loc: The Final Battle Vietnam, 1975" (conference paper, Popular Culture Association, New Orleans, LA, 2000); *The Thieu Regime Put to the Test: 1973–1975* (Hanoi, DRV: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1975); and Anthony James Joes, *The War for South Vietnam: 1954–1975*, rev. ed. (Westport, CT.: Praeger Publishers, 2001).

24. Sorley, *The Abrams Tapes.* Abrams and his staff question the fighting spirit of the ARVN throughout these transcripts.

25. For full citation and further explanation, see Connable et al., *Will to Fight*, 20–21.

26. This argument is made in chapter 1 of Connable et al., *Will to Fight.*

27. For more analysis on decisionmaker perspectives of qualitative and quantitative information, see Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War*; and Connable et al., *Will to Fight.*

28. Any scale could be used. It is generally better to avoid odd (e.g., 1–3 or 1–5) rating systems because these unintentionally encourage satisficing to the center. Using a 1–4, 1–6, 1–10, 1–20, or similar even-numbered scale forces analysts to make evidence-informed value judgments.

29. For more on the impact of degraded trust during the Vietnam War assessment process, see Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War*, chap. 7.

30. See McNerney et al., *National Will to Fight*, for further explanation of contexts and the ways in which they can be used to support analysis of factors.

31. See McNerney et al., *National Will to Fight*, for further explanation of mechanisms and for examples.

32. *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018).

33. This is a proposed definition. For more on the concept of hostile measures, see Ben Connable et al., *Russia's Hostile Measures: Combating Russian Gray Zone Aggression Against NATO in the Contact, Blunt, and Surge Layers of Competition* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2020), https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2539.

34. Donald H. Rumsfeld, interview with Steve Inskeep, *Morning Edition*, National Public Radio, 29 March 2005.

35. Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War.*

36. Many other factors influence decision-maker consumption of analysis, including individual biases, relative consumer knowledge of the subject matter, personal interactions with analysts and advisors, staff filtering of data and analysis to the decision maker, et al.

37. Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War.*

Unrecognized Republic, Recognizable Consequences
Russian Troops in "Frozen" Transnistria

Benjamin Potter

Abstract: Since 1993 the Republic of Moldova has been challenged by separatist pressure from the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR), known as Transnistria, a parastate within its borders.[1] An uneasy status quo has developed. Russian troops stationed illegally inside Transnistria embolden the dissident government to resist meaningful reintegration with Moldova. Current Moldovan leadership seeks membership within the European Union (EU) and have again called for the removal of unauthorized Russian troops. Coverage of the situation in Transnistria tends to focus on the policies of Russia, the United Nations (UN), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as sole deciding factors, overshadowing the significance of local culture in determining the future stability of the region. An examination of Transnistrian local culture, including an assessment of narratives that have surfaced across local and regional media, offers insights on the pressures surrounding the removal of Russian troops and foreshadows hurdles to reintegration with the Republic of Moldova.
Keywords: Transnistria, Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic, PMR, Pridnestrovie, Tiraspol, Moldova, Russia

Introduction

On 1 September 2020, a crowd gathered in the central square of Tiraspol, the second-largest city in Moldova, celebrating 30 years of independence. Above the street hung red and green banners boasting a

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bold white "30." Nearby, a group posed with a massive sign depicting a white dove over a stylized number 30. Some attendees even wore commemorative "30 years" T-shirts.[2] The day was filled with an elaborate military parade, a festival of performances and activities, and a night of fireworks.[3] Revelers were not, however, celebrating Moldova's own independence day; they were gathered to recognize a country that does not exist. The day represents the 30th anniversary of the formation of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR), a parastate within Moldovan borders better known to the world as Transnistria.[4] In 1990, residents of the easternmost portion of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic declared and sought international recognition as a new republic. Territorial claims were ambiguous following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and war broke out in 1992 between the new Republic of Moldova and Transnistria in cities along the Dniester River. Shooting ended when portions of the Russian 14th Army mobilized in support of Transnistria. Through intimidation and overwhelming military superiority, Russia brokered a cease-fire. Owing to the support and presence of the Russian military, the PMR has been able to maintain de facto autonomy for the past three decades while continuing to exist within internationally recognized Moldovan borders.[5]

Geographically, Transnistria is a narrow strip of land between Moldova and Ukraine. Politically, this sliver of land has the potential to play an outsized role in determining regional stability and the legitimacy of international border law. With only half a million residents (475,000 in 2015), Transnistria lacks the size to register on most Western intelligence and policy communities, rarely garnering more than cursory remarks.[6] Despite its small population, however, the circumstances surrounding its creation and continued existence position it to become a focal point for relationships between Russia and the EU, NATO, and the UN.[7]

As an unrecognized parastate, Transnistria maintains many expected characteristics of a state, including a centralized government, a separate monetary system, and its own standing military. Transnistria strives to maintain autonomy and refutes any Moldovan authority within its borders, meaning laws are made and administered by a de facto government with no international legitimacy. The nature of this contested zone provides some interesting insights to Western policy makers concerning Russian strategy in the post-Soviet space, and the limits of European coalitions such as NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to project influence outside their own borders.

Today, approximately 1,500 Russian soldiers are stationed in Moldova and fall under two units: The Peacekeeping Force (MC) and Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF).[8] The smaller contingent, the Peacekeeping Force, exists under a 1992 agreement and is tasked with patrolling the security zone established between Transnistria and the rest of Moldova [9] The larger OGRF is stationed without any agreement from Moldova and are primarily tasked with monitoring a massive depot that houses approximately 20,000 tons of muni-

tions. Located in the small village of Colbasna, it served as a storage depot for the Western Military District of the Soviet Union and accumulated substantial stores of munitions in the 1990s as Soviet troops were removed from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.[10] This stockpile worries Moldovan officials and residents alike for the potential to be used in either future military or terrorist action. Decades-old explosives further exceed their shelf life and become increasingly less stable, posing a threat to the environment as harmful chemicals seep into the soil and water, and increase the risk of a catastrophic explosion comparable in size to atomic detonation.[11]

The OGRF is criticized for frequently conducting unauthorized training exercises in the security zone in clear violation of standing agreements.[12] Joint exercises between the OGRF and Transnistria are meant to bolster the Transnistrian military, an approximately 5,000-strong force, with nearly 15,000 in reserves, equipped and trained exclusively by Russia.[13] Since 2015, Russian soldiers are refused entry to travel through Ukraine, and Moldova and does not allow OGRF soldiers to fly into the Chisinau International Airport.[14] These transportation complications lead the soldiers stationed in Transnistria stay for long periods, sometimes years rotating between the OGRF and the internationally approved MC peacekeeping force, often multiple times during their service.[15] This arrangement is unorthodox for peacekeeping forces, as the soldiers meant to be protecting and cooperating with Moldovan military observers in the MC may have been training to subvert and fight them with the OGRF only months prior.[16]

The official position of Moldova is for the removal of the unauthorized Russian OGRF, joint removal or disposal of armaments at Colbasna, and for the implementation of a multinational peacekeeping force administered by the OSCE.[17] These demands, the reasons they have not been met, and the potential reactions of Transnistria should external powers attempt to enforce them, are the subjects to which the article will now turn.

Why Is Transnistria Important to the West?

The presence of Russian troops in Transnistria provides Moscow with an instrument to exert pressure on the sovereign state of Moldova and a means to prevent the expansion of the European Union and NATO within the perceived Russian sphere of influence. Russian actions flout the authority of international law and represent a destabilizing force in the region.[18] In addition, the frozen conflict plagues Moldova, weakening its statehood, preventing border control, and costing, by some estimates, billions of dollars in lost economic development.

Requests and treaties, even those signed by the Kremlin, have been unable to remove Russian troops or armaments, which now stand as a hurdle to Moldova's Western ambitions.[19] Without border and territorial control, Moldova cannot fully join the EU or NATO.[20] A score of UN states have voiced their support of Moldovan territorial integrity, and the UN General Assembly has adopted measures calling for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops.[21]

Despite external support for Moldova's positions, the Russian troop count has stayed mostly consistent and Moscow has not indicated any serious intent for changing it.

Though Transnistria is a perennial topic for intelligence analysts, most available analysis of the situation tends to focus on the policies of Russia, the UN, and NATO as the primary deciding factors, entirely overlooking the significance of local culture in forecasting how this frozen conflict will eventually play out. Research conducted using the Cultural Topography Framework as a structured analytic tool identifies components within Transnistrian culture that are likely to shape its behavior in response to any external efforts to remove Russian forces from the region.[22] Armed with these insights, the international community is better positioned to craft effective negotiating strategies and avoid cultural trip wires that are likely to detonate into conflict.

Transnistria is not the only Kremlin-backed parastate in Russia's near abroad. Under the guise of peacekeeping or foreign aid, Russia stations military contingents around its borders to rouse local aggression and subtly sanction separatist hostility to Western-leaning governments. Should the need for violence arise, these contingents provide a bridge to illicitly support mercenary groups at arm's length, preserving deniability. Comparable parastates include Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics in Ukraine.[23] In each of these cases, Russian military presence has led to a latent tension that challenges the sovereignty of the host state and the ability of the international community to intervene. When activated, combat-ready troops in hot spots can quickly destabilize a region in Russia's favor. Over the past several years, Russian president Vladimir Putin has demonstrated Russia's willingness and capability to activate combat troops or mobilize local insurgent groups in these parastate regions. Continued fighting in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine is a frightening case in point, demonstrating how even low-intensity fighting can bring about prolonged international crisis.

Why Now?: The Growing Divide between Transnistria and Moldova

After 30 years of frozen conflict and complacency by the international community, regional trends are bringing Transnistria back into the spotlight. The dynamic of Eastern Europe is shifting as more territories adjust their economic, political, and cultural leanings from Russia to the West. Former Soviet republics have joined NATO and the EU and are diminishing their cultural and linguistic ties to Russia, threatening what Russia perceives as a necessary buffer zone of weak satellite states between its borders and Europe. Transnistria's neighbors in particular, Ukraine and Moldova, seek further distance from the Russian sphere of influence, made clear by two heavily EU-leaning leaders, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine and President Maia Sandu of Moldova. While Russia's soft power (language, culture, and economic ties) among the post-

Soviet republics decreases, motivation for the Kremlin to keep a tangible military presence increases.

While Transnistria's neighbors embrace the West, the pivotal dilemma of Russian presence grows more consequential for regional stability. In 2018, Moldova's foreign minister introduced a resolution to the UN on the "complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova."[24] This resolution was to remind the body that Russia had committed to this move 20 years prior (for a smooth process similar to the removal of troops from the Baltic states).[25] Since then, anti-Russian sentiment has only strengthened among Moldovan voters. The Moldovan Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), which controls the presidency and, as of 2021, a majority of the Moldovan parliament, has repeatedly emphasized a platform of distancing Moldova from Russia economically, linguistically, and politically.[26]

Historical and Cultural Roots of Transnistria

The fundamental divide between Transnistria and the rest of Moldova begins in the name.[27] As mentioned, the *-nistr-* portion of the word derives from the Dniester River whose significance as a cultural and historic border cannot be overstated. For much of the past millennium, the Dniester River marked the eastern border of the Principality of Moldavia, a Latin-based language speaking civilization from which Moldova and Romania derive much of their heritage.[28] This was at its peak under the Moldovan hero Stefan cel Mare, when the territory of Moldavia included modern-day Romania to the west, and nearly all of modern-day Moldova extending east to the Dniester River.[29] Today, the Republic of Moldova commemorates Stefan cel Mare with statues, street names, and by printing his likeness on every piece of Moldovan currency. The easternmost region of Moldavia, named Bessarabia (roughly the territory of the modern Moldovan state) would become severed from its roots and grafted into Russian influence.[30]

Across the river was the Slavic world. Though the territory of the left bank changed hands several times between the Crimean Khanate, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Poland, and the Russian Empire, vitally it was always contained in administrative regions with other portions of Ukraine. Thus, the trade, language, and cultural ties of the residents of the left bank were akin to Ukraine. Today, physical manifestations of Transnistrian culture commemorate the cultural hero Russian field marshal Aleksandr V. Suvorov, who founded the capital city, Tiraspol, and established Transnistria as the westernmost frontier of the Russian empire.[31] The central square that hosted the independence day parades is named Suvorov Square, in the center of which stands a massive statue of Suvorov. The first versions of the Transnistrian Ruble had the face of Suvorov printed on every note. In the 2007 series of banknotes, Suvorov is only on six of the eight notes as the additional notes added two more cultural heroes: Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, after whom the local university is also named, and Moldavian statesman Dmitry Kantemir, who joined Russia to

fight the Turks, then lost and was exiled to Russia where he became a prince.[32] Though Transnistria's cultural heroes represent the republic's three major ethnic groups, all are celebrated for emphasizing the region's connection to the Russian world and Russian heritage.

The two banks of the Dniester developed independently, not coming under common rule until 1812 when the Moldavian Bessarabia region was annexed to the Russian Empire. Despite annexation, the province maintained strong cultural ties to Romania and quickly moved to reunite with Romania following the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1918. Thus, in 1924 when the Bolsheviks wanted to strengthen support in Bessarabia, the region of Transnistria was deliberately carved out of Ukraine to become the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). It served as a bridgehead for propaganda and expansion into Romania in a ploy to engender Communist support to eventually reclaim all of Bessarabia under Soviet rule. The opposite banks of the Dniester did not become a common administrative district until 1940 when the German-Soviet nonaggression pact ceded Bessarabia to the Soviet Union. At that point, the Moldovan ASSR (approximately modern-day Transnistria) was combined with Bessarabia and the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) was formed. [33] The MSSR remained a part of the Soviet Union for 50 years, and the industrialized Transnistrian region was known especially for its industrial development and high standard of living, while the Bessarabia region remained more rural.[34]

Tensions arose during the final years of the Soviet Union. In 1989, the MSSR was split by a controversial language law: the Moldovan language written in Latin script would be the sole official state language.[35] This law upset the majority Russophone population of Transnistria, who viewed it as discriminatory. It upset the status of the Russian language, as well as reasserted Moldovan-Romanian linguistic identity. In Transnistria, the law led to strikes, civil unrest, and fueled rumors that the Supreme Soviet of the MSSR intended to become part of Romania. From June 1990 to December 1991, the Moldovan Parliament declared the independence of Moldova from the Soviet Union and declared that the initial formation of the MSSR was illegal. From September 1990 to August 1991, the residents of the Transnistria region declared their own independence as the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic shortly thereafter, abandoning socialism to become the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR).

Authority and borders were still ambiguous in 1992 when Moldova and Transnistria both attempted to assert control of the region surrounding the Dniester. The exact incident that sparked violence is, of course, a point of contention.[36] Transnistrians hold that violence began with Moldavian police, and Moldova holds that violence began with Transnistrian protesters. Regardless, within months, military conflict in urban areas had led to countless civilian casualties and property destruction. In the height of the fighting, Alexander Lebed, in command of the Russian 14th Army, joined the PMR combatants, fighting alongside and equipping them.[37] The vast military superiority of the

Russian military led the new Moldovan Republic to quickly capitulate. Overnight, General Lebed became Transnistria's modern cultural hero; to this day, the Transnistrian military academy is named in his honor.[38] A peace deal was brokered, and an uneasy status quo has since been maintained.

Cultural Topography

Cultural analysis reveals Transnistrians are not merely an exclave trying to become Russia, but a republic that considers itself an ally of Russia. Transnistrian culture and its de facto autonomy from Moldova is guaranteed by the constant presence of Russian troops. Thus, the demands for removal of said troops are deeply unpopular. Transnistria's paranoid foreign policy is quick to perceive actions as pro-Western provocation and equate any attempt to alter the status quo as Moldovan aggression, whether or not this is the case. Transnistrian rhetoric treats Moldova, Romania, the United States, and Western Europe as one big conspiring group of aggressors with Russia as its sole guarantor. Should external powers attempt to enforce Russian troop removal, it would be perceived as a threat to Transnistrian sovereignty and way of life. Should any actor attempt to intervene, even in Transnistria's favor, their authority is unlikely to be recognized. Moldova's demands to replace Russian peacekeepers with OSCE peacekeepers have not been met. Hopes of soft reintegration are similarly unrealized, as economic and linguistic preferences across the river differ wildly. Though linguistic diversity is proclaimed, daily life is heavily Russified and the Russian language is not diminishing as it is in Moldova or Ukraine. Reintegration with Moldova would reignite the tensions of the 1990s, as a dominantly Russian-speaking population is presented with a Romanian-speaking society. Beyond the removal of Russian troops, the cultural hurdles of reintegration are significant to Transnistrians and Moldovans alike.

Transnistrian Identity: The Russkiy Mir

Knowing the historical context, it should come as no surprise that the most pronounced cultural factor at play is the Transnistrian identity as part of the "Russkiy Mir" or Russian World, with strong historical precedent. Transnistria does not aspire to become Russia; it considers itself already inseparably tied to Russia and merely seeking recognition. According to a 2017 law, the Russian flag is flown with the PMR flag in all official settings to emphasize their partnership (or dependence).[39] As mentioned, most Western literature on the region mistakenly calls Transnistria "separatist," belying the fact that Transnistrians view themselves and their land as being and having been constantly under Russian influence, and the rest of Moldova as separatists abandoning that world. Transnistrian as a Russian identity is much deeper than a linguistic or even ethnic exclave.[40] Transnistrians consider themselves and their land a component of the Slavic world as legitimate as Moscow or St. Petersburg.

Transnistria has also been characterized by the West as a holdout of the Soviet Union—a group of nostalgists unwilling to integrate with the world. While

it is true that, in contrast to its neighbors, Transnistria embraces its identity as a post-Soviet country, the Cultural Topography Framework encourages a look below the surface of a cultural trait to test its robustness. The wave of de-Communization that swept Ukraine and Moldova, demolishing statues of Lenin and removing the hammer and sickle from public use did not reach Transnistria, and these Soviet-era symbols are still displayed proudly. The official flag and crest are identical to those of the former MSSR, featuring a bold sickle and hammer. Political structures such as the "High Soviet" have maintained their names from the time of Communist rule. However, it is critical to realize that to Transnistrians, these symbols have detached from Soviet political meaning and now represent only worker solidarity and national pride. Expanded official use of Soviet symbology ended and is used only in preestablished limited capacity in favor of flag colors without the sickle and hammer as seen on military uniforms, license plates, export products, banknotes and coinage, as well as adorning official buildings. The fact that Soviet symbols are not perpetuated in new forms corroborates statements from Pridnestrovian officials insisting the sickle and hammer has lost its Communist, totalitarian meaning and is valued solely as a portion of heritage.

This difference in cultural perception already led to conflict in 2012, when Moldova outlawed the display of the sickle and hammer. This was met with outrage in Transnistria, calling it "thoughtless" and an "absurd situation," saying "if [Moldova] is negotiating with us while we act under our flag, and at the same time considers this flag to be criminal . . . according to this logic, should our President also be fined?"[41] Transnistrians also considered this move disrespectful of veterans of the Soviet Army, who could no longer, by those laws, wear their awards. Admittedly, this cultural difference is difficult to reconcile as Moldovans view their time in the Soviet Union as foreign occupation and annexation. In contrast, an entire section of Transnistria's 30th-anniversary parade was dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the Great Patriotic War, complete with iconic Russian tanks rolling down Suvorov Street, followed by graduates of the Russian-funded Lebed military academy wearing reproduction uniforms of the Red Army.[42]

Today's problems, however, concern today's soldiers. Transnistrian foreign minister Vitaly Ignatyev echoed an oft-repeated sentiment, "It is very important that Russia also accepts Transnistria as a part of the Russian world."[43] In the context of removing Russian troops, Transnistria's cultural identity serves to halt their removal despite external criticism.[44] Strong Russian identity legitimizes and even normalizes the perpetual presence of Russian troops and strong cooperation, even reliance on, the Russian government. The president of Transnistria called the question of removing Russian forces an "artificial problem," indicating that not only is it not seen as a problem, but rather as the preferable arrangement.[45] Should these Russian troops be replaced with a multinational OSCE force, the OSCE would be seen as a foreign occupying force, and potentially an enemy to the PMR.

Transnistria Perceptual Lens:
Russian Guarantor, Moldovan Aggressor

> The thing is that in fact the peacekeeping mission on the banks of the Dniester began not 27 years ago, as is commonly believed, but still from 1792, when Generalissimo Suvorov founded the city of Tiraspol. And since then, since 1792, a Russian soldier has been protecting peace and quiet on the banks of the Dniester. Therefore, today's peacemakers have inherited the simply glorious mission of their great-grandfathers, great-great-grandfathers, grandfathers and fathers. And they continue this mission.
>
> ~ President Vadim Krasnoselsky, PMR[46]

Cultural self-identification with Russia and the derivative distrust of Moldova has led to an enormous barrier in cooperation. Simply put, Transnistria perceives Russian military presence as the single guarantor of security for their way of life and regard Moldova (whether represented by peacekeepers in the Joint Control Commission [JCC], politicians in peace discussions, or demonstrators advocating for change) as agitators with ulterior political motives. While the world views Moldova as having full sovereignty within its borders, Transnistria views themselves as Moldova's peer—not its territorial ward. Therefore, unilateral actions by the Moldovan government are considered by Transnistria as an escalation of conflict.[47] Serious distrust of Moldova hinders cooperation between the three members of the JCC tasked with controlling the Transnistrian security zone.

In late June and early July 2021, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) a radical, right-wing nationalist group participating in Moldovan elections, organized demonstrations on the Pridnestrovian border.[48] The AUR is far from a mainstream party (receiving less than half a percent of the parliamentary vote) and presently does not have widespread support in Moldova or endorsement by the Moldovan government. As such, the demonstrations received little coverage in the Moldovan press. However, to Transnistria it was another story entirely; there, the press asserted that the AUR were provocateurs carefully planned and sent specially by Moldovan authorities.[49] In Transnistrian media it was framed as an instance of Moldovan agitators specially and deliberately harassing peaceful Transnistrians, who were, thankfully, protected by Russian forces.[50]

The following quote from the United Council of Labor Collectives of Transnistria summarizes the response:

> We draw the attention of international observers to the fact that Moldova once again demonstrates the absence of peaceful cooperation and peaceful coexistence with Transnistria in its plans. The authorities of the Republic of Moldova com-

mitted a deliberately planned provocative act . . . we see no other alternative to a peaceful existence, except for the [Russian] Peacekeeping Mission in the Security Zone. We consider unacceptable any provocative acts on the part of pro-Western structures aimed at fighting the Russian world.[51]

Commenting on a brief confrontation between the demonstrators and border guards, Transnistria's official news source made sure to note that "the Unionists provoked the PMR border guards and tried to overpower one. Russian peacekeepers intervened in the scuffle, who stood between the sides to extinguish the conflict."[52]

To Transnistrians, it is unimportant that these demonstrations were performed by a fringe radical group, as their perceptual lens is tinted to see any action from across the river as pro-Western provocation, which justifies Russian peacekeepers to protect their sovereignty. The Transnistrian government actively skews events to promote this perception. In the last 18 months, news source *Novosti PMR* published 28 articles in the security column, most often based on statements by the president or secretary of defense.[53] Thirteen explicitly advocated for sustained or expanded Russian involvement in the security zone and PMR, while 20 blame Moldova for uncooperative or aggressive barriers in the JCC.[54]

The distrust Transnistria has for Moldova is severely underplayed by the multinational organizations overseeing the ongoing negotiations. For instance, after a visit to Moldova this January, the chairman of the OSCE reported the positive measures being made, saying he was pleased by the results. While the very same week, commenting on the same events, Transnistrian secretary of defense and JCC cochair Oleg Belyakov reported in an interview that the process had not made any positive measures and had been stalled and politicized by Moldova.[55]

Support for Transnistrian sovereignty and support for Russian troops are culturally inextricable. Transnistrian patriotism implies support for Russian troops at home and abroad. Defense Secretary Belyakov is very vocal and recorded in several interviews enthusiastically crediting Russian troops for peace, naming Russia a "guarantor of safety" and advocating for Russian involvement in other conflicts.[56] Further indicators of pro-Russian military sentiments in Transnistria are prevalent. Internal celebrations reflect the perception of Russian troops as defenders, including monuments, anniversaries, and the national holiday "Day of the Russian Peacekeeper."[57] This holiday celebrates what Transnistria's internal newspaper referred to as "what is recognized as the most successful peacekeeping operation in history."[58] Even the language choice in internal media reflects this cultural factor, as the Russian military is referred to as peacekeepers or defenders rather than troops or soldiers, words in Russian that more directly connote war.[59] To Transnistrians, giving up Russian protection

signifies abandoning a major portion of culture. It is presently unlikely any other peacekeeping force will be seen by the residents as credible and unbiased, but rather as another aggression from the Moldovan side.

Transnistrian Norms: Russian Language Funnel to Russian Work/Study to Cultural Isolation

Language is doubtless a pronounced cultural factor in Transnistria. Recall the first fight for independence in the early 1990s was in part reactionary to the adoption of Moldovan in place of Russian as Moldova's official language after the fall of the Soviet Union. The dominance of the Russian language in Transnistria orients the culture eastward and converges with migration trends to limit the opportunities of young professionals. The Transnistrian government boasts its multilingual standards, recognizing three official government languages: Russian, Ukrainian, and Moldovan (although an obsolete modification of the Romanian language in a Cyrillic alphabet, a language that is only preserved in PMR). Yet, it is undeniable that Russian is the primary language for official and social exchange.

In contrast with the rest of Moldova, usage of the Russian language in Transnistria continues to increase due to its role as the main educational language. A study of elementary schools found that 83 percent of children attend Russian-only schools, while only 72 percent of the population report speaking Russian as their native tongue. Another 7 percent attend combined Russian and Moldovan or Ukrainian schools.[60] Higher education follows the same trend and is heavily Russophone: a faculty analysis of Transnistria's largest university shows a staggering preference for Russian internet services. Only 3.2 percent of the listed professors used a Gmail account, while the remainder overwhelmingly favored Yandex.ru and mail.ru—the search engine market share in Moldova is 95 percent Google, 3.4 percent Yandex, and 0.58 percent mail.ru, the polar opposite.[61]

Young adults experiencing economic stagnation from Transnistria are following Moldovan trends to seek work abroad, a demographic decline that some call "existential."[62] Demographic decline in Moldova is the worst of any European country.[63] Romanian-speaking Moldovans often travel to work in Europe, speaking Romanian or picking up a similar Romance language. For the Russian-speaking Transnistrians, opportunities are more limited and lead a substantial number to work inside the Russian Federation. The continued cycle of Transnistrians being educated in Russia, working in Russia, and then returning to Transnistria on a Russian pension, weakens the ties of the residents across the Dniester's two banks.

While Russian is still common in Moldova, the prestige it once held is lost. Government functions are moving away from Russian and implementing Romanian as the younger population comes of age. This cultural factor is critical to keep in mind in anticipating how Transnistrians would react should they be forced to reassimilate with Moldova.

Transnistrian Values: Autonomy over Economy

Economic reintegration is a hallmark of soft conflict resolution, and such economic indicators have been a part of goal setting in the OSCE and Moldova. In the past, Moldovan politicians have focused on strengthening economic motivations for Transnistria to reintegrate, hoping that economic development and opportunities would draw Transnistrians into Moldova, such that a soft solution for reassimilation would naturally be reached. This assumption is misguided, as the economic culture within Transnistria tells a different story: current culture indicates that Transnistrian autonomy from Moldova is more valued. Transnistrians immensely value their autonomy and will cling to it even if it means weaker economics and fewer opportunities.

During the time of the Soviet Union, Transnistria enjoyed a standard of living twice the average of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic and produced 40 percent of the republic's gross domestic product. Economic prosperity did not last long after declaring independence and by the mid-1990s Transnistria was faring poorly.[64] Today, average incomes in Tiraspol are nearly 40 percent lower than the Moldovan average. Not only has average income decreased, but internal Transnistrian bureaucracy makes it difficult for residents to do business outside its narrow borders.

Transnistria insists on using its internal currency, in which it differs from comparable parastates. South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and the Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk use the Russian Ruble. Nagorno-Karabakh issues an internal currency, but its use is very limited in preference for the local Armenian Dram. Transnistria's Pridnestrovian Ruble lacks international recognition, meaning external financial transactions of any size must be made at Moldovan or Russian banks. Pragmatically, it is an inconvenience, requiring resources to print, eliminating digital or credit card payments, and making business more difficult; yet, it signals a desire for isolation from external economies and a strong claim to autonomy that Transnistrians value.

Any discussion of modern Transnistria is incomplete without mention of Sheriff, a business conglomerate super monopoly with enormous power in Transnistria. Economic stagnation and lack of competition have allowed Sheriff to take control of many industries, branching into nearly every profitable business sector: gas stations, a TV channel, a phone network, supermarkets, printing/publishing, construction, bread baking, a hotel, a football team, car dealerships, advertising, and a distillery.[65] The Transnistrian desire to remain autonomous has prevented any international companies from establishing external competition to Sheriff's monopolies, and the mammoth resources of Sheriff discourage small business domestically.[66] Due to economic isolation, the conglomerate Sheriff monopolized most of the trade in the region, and its influence has bled into politics.

A Russian newspaper reported that Sheriff contributed more than 50 percent of the country's tax budget and is involved in 60 percent of trade.[67] The majority political party, Obnovlenie or "Renewal" has close ties to Sherriff, and

thus Sheriff's agenda will almost certainly be reflected in PMR's government.[68] If the status quo is beneficial for Sheriff, there will be significant resistance to resolution or reintegration. Sheriff benefits from the current status quo and uses its political power to maintain it, likely meaning Transnistria will not be drawn closer to resolution by economic motivators if it requires a sacrifice of autonomy.

Findings and Policy Suggestions

Ultimately the purpose of the Cultural Topography Framework is to provide relevant guidance to potential policy directives. A look at Transnistria's history and culture has offered many valuable insights: Russian preference permeates every aspect of culture as Transnistria considers itself fundamentally a part of the Russian world and views Russia as an infallible guarantor of peace. Negotiations by the OSCE and JCC will continue to stall so long as culturally informed distrust of Moldova and the West is sufficient to distort perception and equate actions of unrelated groups to Moldova. Furthermore, economic soft resolution does not appear persuasive and market reintegration unlikely. In short, cultural barriers are plentiful.

Nonetheless, progress is being made; slow but meaningful confidence-building measures genuinely make a difference. The OSCE and EU Border Assistance and Mission to Moldova (EUBAM) already oversee a number of confidence-building measures.[69] Measures are aimed at overcoming the cultural divide through policy and humanitarian initiatives, such as establishing Latin-script Romanian schools in Transnistria, fostering a linguistic similarity across the riverbanks, to open doors for Transnistrian youth to work and study in Europe. These efforts are slowly chipping away at Russian cultural dominance and focus on such programs should be renewed to combat Russia in the social and cultural sphere and continue even while pursuing more aggressive diplomatic action.

Another policy orientation would suggest cutting off Transnistria from Moldova entirely. However, this tempting option strengthens, not counters, the problematic cultural factors that have kept the banks from reuniting. Transnistrian isolationism allows for Russian supremacy, therefore any policy should aim at facilitating partnership (or at least communication) across the banks.

Scenarios

The most optimistic scenario is the removal of the Russian OGRF from Moldova. Imagining that the Kremlin fulfills this commitment, there would still be barriers. Likely even after the removal of Russian troops and functional government reassimilation, the internal culture will retain a strong degree of Russian preference and may take generations before full cultural assimilation is achieved. Thus, looking ahead it should not be surprising to see a counterintuitive rise in pro-Russian sentiment in Moldovan politics when former Transnistrians participate in Moldovan democracy.

In another likely scenario, the frozen conflict stays frozen for years to come. Certainly, the current status quo is not ideal for reasons outlined earlier, but it is not yet broken. Transnistria strives only for international recognition; no part of their cultural narrative or political rhetoric suggests expansionism or territorial aspirations beyond the Dniester. The benefits of Russia maintaining Transnistria diminish as the bill for Transnistrian energy subsidies increase, and the present military units become further isolated. Russian support in Transnistria has already peaked. Until and unless Moldova is formally and fully accepted into the EU or NATO, there is little urgency for Chisinau or Tiraspol to disrupt the current state of affairs.

This is not to say war will not again erupt. While there are significant motives on the Moldovan, Transnistrian, and Russian sides to prevent violence, the likelihood of regional conflict in Transnistria seems not much more outlandish than the war in Donbas did prior to 2014. However, before intervening in an Eastern European civil war, NATO should be well informed not only of adversarial military capabilities but also combatant cultural factors at play. The cultural topography outlined offers insight into the salient threats to regional stability and forecasts what challenges may be met if kinetic action is undertaken.

From a conventional military standpoint, Moldova already stands at a significant disadvantage. Compare Moldova's limited standing army of 6,000 to the PMR armed forces of more than 10,000 strong. Add to that the Russian OGRF, Russian armor, artillery, and air support. Furthermore, more than 100 joint training exercises in the security zone make Russia and Transnistria ready for conflict.[70] Moldova has neither the military strength nor relevant training to maintain a strong defense. In the event of conflict, Chisinau will likely turn immediately to NATO and U.S. forces stationed in Romania.

Transnistrian culture doubtlessly frame any reignition of conflict as external provocation, and Transnistrians will look to Russia to stop it. The situation will therefore quickly devolve into a proxy war, and a means for Russia to flaunt the willingness of NATO and U.S. forces to make good on their commitments to Moldovan sovereignty. If Chisinau ever took the extreme move to reassert control over all of Moldova, it would be built on the same unresolved tensions of 30 years prior.

Should future conflict be an unconventional or low-intensity engagement, Transnistria is also at an advantage. Though not internationally legitimate, PMR border crossings are already set up to halt and inspect vehicles, restricting entrance to arms or explosives entering the area. The opposite is not true on the way back to Moldova. Transnistrian provocateurs could conceivably carry out several attacks on Moldovan population centers. It would take Moldova some time to react and ensure security, while Transnistrians can follow the tactic of the first war and retreat to the river, fortifying on a natural barrier and preventing ground forces from crossing. Some have even speculated the tactic of seizing or destroying the Dubossary dam to cause Moldova a drinking water crisis.[71]

United States' Perspective

Some American policy makers see Transnistria as an opportunity to counter Moscow's military meddling and call out the Kremlin for clear violation of international norms. Former national security advisor John R. Bolton, in an article published on 13 May 2021, suggested that President Joseph R. Biden's administration take a more aggressive stance against Russia's unauthorized presence:

> Moldova, tucked between Ukraine and Romania, is a frozen conflict ready for melting. Purportedly independent Transnistria, a Russian invention, exists separately from Moldova only through Moscow's continued military presence. Simply raising international attention to this post–Cold War anomaly would startle the Kremlin, and a determined new government in Chisinau now provides the opportunity for Washington to step up.[72]

Transnistrian media immediately had a response. The following is abridged from a publication on 17 May 2021 in PMR's English edition of the state-owned news *Novosti PMR*:

> As we can see, the well-known "super-hawk" of American foreign policy extremely focuses on stereotypes, believing that the proclamation of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic was exclusively a combination of Moscow. In terms of his level of thinking, he is pretty close to the nationalists of Chisinau [who] even 31 years later are unable to understand that the cave nationalism encouraged by the USA . . . causes absolute rejection of our republic's inhabitants. . . . What is behind this blatant provocation? [Americans] are expansionists, and often open aggressors . . . we can conclude: de facto allied relations between the PMR and Russia should only be strengthened. This is the only guarantee of maintaining stability and peace on the Dniester.[73]

Though this response does not equate to a threat, it illustrates clearly that Transnistrian culture distorts American intent before any real action begins. As backward as it sounds, American actions, no matter the intention, will be conflated to pro-Romania/western Moldovan nationalism, and any opposition to Russian regional authority will be equated to regional expansionism. While complicating cultural factors do not negate a just cause to engage in the future, U.S. authorities should not expect in a hypothetical engagement to liberate a grateful population from Russian occupation. To the United States, it may seem Russia's lack of cooperation is the only thing preventing a resolution to this conflict—but at least for now, Transnistrians see Russia's (albeit illegal) presence as the only thing preventing civil war.

To the extent that the United States has interests in the region, it would be wise to use diplomatic and economic power to counter Russian influence while working to introduce nuance into the Transnistrian cultural narrative. Reinforcing Moldova economically could slow the population crisis as well as put Transnistrian exports in European markets. This would expand the job base at home in Moldova to encourage Transnistrians to stay and discourage isolation with market opportunities. Additionally, a less isolationist Transnistria may encourage Ukraine to provide easier access to school and work opportunities by entering the bordering Odeska oblast. Odeska is a sufficiently Russophone region to eliminate the language barrier, but with growing Western sentiment that could over time influence the Transnistrian population.

Perhaps the most interesting opportunity is to erode Transnistrian cultural barriers indirectly while developing Moldova. Corruption in Moldova has been a major obstacle to development and a focus of improving the country; the desire to counter Russia should not distract or cover up corruption. One proposal is withholding support until certain anticorruption cases are tried or terms are met. Applying resources to anticorruption rather than military measures may seem backward for a state with Russia on their doorstep. However, Transnistrian media would doubtless jump on the story of Moldova being penalized by the West for endemic corruption and capitalize heavily on the opportunity to paint their rivals in a bad light. At first accepted as a victory in the Transnistrian public conscious, this would establish a distinction between U.S. and Moldovan interests and allow more room for action with lessened danger of being misinterpreted.

Policy makers face a choice: the temptation to stand up for the underdog and directly confront Russia in Moldova is tempting but would only confirm Transnistrian cultural bias standing in the way of reassimilation. The best course of action would be adopting policy decisions to counter the difficult narratives in Transnistrian culture indirectly, bringing cultures closer and building bridges for future generations. In so doing, the Kremlin-backed frozen conflict would become less satisfactory to Transnistrians and Moldovans alike, perhaps being the final straw to prompt a voluntary Russian removal.

APPENDIX

The articles from *Novosti PMR* used for analysis in note 54 are as follows:

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Lord's Resistance Army Culture Provides Opening to Prevent Attacks and Advance Humanitarian Efforts

Emilee Matheson

Abstract: A recent increase in defections from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)—a Central Africa-based religious militia—has resulted in a rise in violent, survival-motivated lootings of local villages and nongovernmental organization (NGO) outposts perpetrated by former LRA members who are deterred from rejoining their home communities by perceived resentment and hostility among local community members. These ongoing hostilities have compounded an existing humanitarian crisis in Central Africa and intensified regional instability. Cultural data show that if NGOs partnered with local leaders, reintegrated LRA defectors, and tailored their reintegration narratives to appeal to LRA cultural biases, they are more likely to preserve NGO resources through a sustainable decrease in attacks and an increase in successful reintegration efforts.
Keywords: Lord's Resistance Army, LRA, humanitarian aid, Central Africa, terrorism, reintegration, culture

Introduction

For the past several decades, Central Africa has been characterized by violent conflict, poverty, and social unrest. This is in no small part due to the abhorrent actions of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a religious terrorist group operating in Uganda, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Central African Republic. The LRA was established in 1987 by self-proclaimed prophet Joseph Kony for the purpose of overthrowing the Ugandan government and replacing it with a spiritually oriented system governed by the Ten Commandments of Christianity.[1]

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As the momentum of the LRA has slowed during the past few years, the religious militia has seen a substantial outflow of mid-to-low-level members. Many of these defectors, however, have chosen to live apart from society and are attacking NGO outposts and nearby villages to obtain food and resources rather than return to their home communities—effectively obstructing the flow of essential aid to an impoverished and unstable region. However, an analysis of the cultural biases—identity, perceptual lens, values, and norms—of defecting mid-to-low-level LRA members provides three clear openings for the prevention of attacks and the successful reintegration of these individuals into local communities. Following an analysis of LRA cultural biases and the opportunities they provide is a discussion of the scenarios that are likely to result from the pursual or dismissal of these opportunities.

This assessment and the associated recommendations were produced using the Cultural Topography Framework, a structured analytic technique employed within the U.S. intelligence community to facilitate the inclusion of critical cultural data into strategic assessments and decisions.[2] The cultural data used in this discussion were largely compiled through content analysis of publicly accessible online video interviews and first-person accounts of interactions and experiences with the Lord's Resistance Army. Cultural data were also drawn from reports from humanitarian NGOs operating in Central Africa and news from local communities and villages in the surrounding areas.

The Crippling Effect of the LRA

For more than 30 years, Kony and his followers have employed vicious, violent intimidation tactics to further their crusade—terrorizing local communities, intensifying preexisting humanitarian crises and regional instability, and presenting significant obstacles to the distribution of humanitarian aid. The LRA is notorious for brutally attacking communities and abducting local children to serve as soldiers or sex slaves after mutilating, raping, or killing other villagers. Even today, local community members live in constant fear that they or their relatives will be killed or kidnapped by LRA forces, and their fears are not unfounded. The United Nations National Security Council estimates that more than 100,000 people have been killed by LRA forces, and between 60,000 and 100,000 children have been abducted and forced to commit atrocities for Kony's crusade since the group's emergence in 1987.[3] Additional estimates from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) show that more than 2.5 million people have been displaced internally or across borders as a result of LRA conflicts.[4]

The terror felt by these communities is compounded by the extreme poverty that much of the region already experiences. The countries in which the LRA operates—Uganda, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the Central African Republic (CAR)—are some of the poorest in the world. The DRC and the CAR are ranked among the bottom five nations on the United Nations' global Multidimensional Poverty Index and the CAR

is listed on the Global Hunger Index as the only nation in the world with extremely alarming hunger levels—the DRC and South Sudan are listed as experiencing hunger levels of significant concern.[5] Many individuals in Central Africa are in dire need of essential aid, such as food, clean water, or medical services, but are blocked from accessing the programs that could provide these resources due to LRA-related violence.

The attacks perpetrated by LRA members and the ensuing regional instability have made Central Africa one of the most dangerous regions in the world for foreigners and forced Western NGOs to halt much-needed humanitarian operations in the region.[6] Ty Erickson, a recognized surgeon and philanthropist who serves as an advisor to medically oriented humanitarian organizations, noted that although the need is decidedly greatest in Central Africa, he often advises NGOs to choose a more stable region in which to set up their operations.[7]

During the past few years, reports show that Joseph Kony's influence is decreasing and the LRA is losing momentum. Data from Invisible Children, an NGO dedicated to tracking the LRA, show an increase in LRA defections since 2016 and a decrease in the number of combatants per faction since 2012.[8] Additionally, analysis of the data collected by the organization show a significant expansion and diffusion in the geographic distribution of LRA-associated attacks from 2009 to 2020—indicating a separation of LRA forces and a decrease in group coordination.[9]

Even though the LRA organization is weakening, its crippling impact on the region continues unabated. As LRA members separate from the militant group, many are choosing to live as refugees rather than rejoin their communities and are attacking local villages to obtain resources. As LRA defections increase, NGOs are also seeing an increase in violent lootings of their outposts and offices—resulting in the loss of valued humanitarian resources and an increase in regional instability.[10]

LRA Defectors: Mostly Refugees Motivated by Survival

An analysis of cultural data concerning mid-to-low level members of the LRA reveals the potential motivation of these attacks and an avenue for prevention. Defecting LRA members have experienced a shift in their identity. Many now consider themselves mistreated refugees rather than crusaders—providing an opportunity for humanitarian NGOs to prevent survival-motivated attacks by clearly including the perpetrators as potential recipients of NGO aid. LRA efforts to recruit members and establish dominance in the region have intensified an existing humanitarian crisis in Central Africa and complicated efforts to assist displaced populations. The impact of the organization is most pronounced for individuals who were forcibly abducted as youths and have suffered a conflation of their previous identity and the one imposed on them by the LRA.

Throughout the history of the LRA, Joseph Kony and his followers have largely supplemented their forces by abducting youth from local communities

and coercing them into fighting for the group. Some experts believe that up to 80 percent of LRA forces were abducted as children.[11] These soldiers were manipulated through violent intimidation and forced to dissociate themselves from their former lives. Shortly after arriving at LRA camps, most abductees were forced to participate in "registration," which consisted of a three-day beating intended "to remove the civilian life and school ideology from [abductees] and transition [them] to the military."[12] Additionally, many escapees recall that on the night of their capture, LRA commanders intimidated new recruits into compliance by selecting one abductee to be killed, flogged, or mutilated in front of the others and promising that the same punishment would befall any who disobeyed an order or attempted to escape. In many cases, the recruits were forced to perform the punishment.[13]

In addition to this violent manipulation, LRA leaders attempted to emotionally separate new soldiers from their previous identity by placing strict taboos around anything that connected LRA members to their former communities—such as playing the calabash, which is used as musical accompaniment for important cultural ceremonies throughout the region, or using slang words and phrases popular in local communities.[14] Many abductees were even called by a different name while in the LRA in an effort to separate their LRA identity from their familial identity. One former LRA member who was abducted as a child alongside their brother was told to forget their family name because they had left the old family for their "LRA brothers" and the name no longer applied.[15]

Not only has the LRA attempted to strip recruits of their previous identities, but group leaders have also endeavored to foist new ones on them by replacing community roots with well-established roles in the LRA society and synthetic family relationships. The LRA is consistently referred to by group leaders as a big family. When new members are abducted, they are placed under the command of a mid-level LRA lieutenant or sergeant and referred to as the "child" of that leader.[16] Soldiers are also encouraged to establish family units by selecting a wife from the young women who were abducted as sex slaves and brought to the camp as rewards for bravery in battle.[17] Subsequently, having a wife (or multiple wives) and children is seen as a status enhancer within the LRA community. For example, group leader Joseph Kony is estimated to have fathered more than 50 children with abducted girls and was known to frequently comment on the value of family bonds during his weekly sermons.[18] The idea of an LRA family is used as the underlying structure for much of the terrorist organization, and commanders have often defended their actions with statements such as "we are not kidnapping anyone. We are uniting our brothers and sisters."[19] As a result of this mental and physical manipulation, most abductees formed strong bonds with other LRA members and often grew to consider LRA camps their new, if unloved, homes. In interviews, several LRA defectors commented that although they did not agree with the actions they were forced to commit while fighting with the group, they felt accepted within the LRA

family and believed that other forcibly recruited LRA members were their "dear and true friends."[20]

Although the experiences of each LRA member vary greatly, almost all are traumatic and transformative. The life story of Moses Rubangangeyo, a former LRA child soldier who shared his story with journalist Michael Shapiro, serves as a great example of this.

> Moses was 16 years old when he and 40 of his classmates were abducted from his school in northern Uganda. Tied together at the waist and forced to walk past the bodies of the men who had guarded their school, they were led to an LRA camp deep in the bush. They were greeted by an LRA commander who welcomed them to their new family by holding them at gunpoint while other soldiers began a three-day long beating, which not all of Moses's friends survived.

> Two months after his abduction, Moses "earned" his first gun by killing a Ugandan soldier during a battle with government forces. The following month, he participated in his first abduction, violently kidnapping 139 young girls from the Catholic school down the street from his old school. While returning from that trip, Moses perpetrated his first attack against a villager—following an order to cut off a man's legs with a dull hatchet as punishment for riding a bicycle near an LRA camp, something that Kony had declared a sin. Around the same time, he watched a boy from his induction group punish an attempted defector by skinning him alive. Moses recalls this experience as the moment when he realized the futility of escape attempts and the imperative to embrace life as an LRA soldier.

> When Moses was 20 years old, he was promoted to the rank of sergeant and given a 16-year-old wife as a reward for his "faith and loyalty." The next year, he was given a second wife and entrusted with the command of 36 new recruits. He welcomed his "children" to the brigade by abusing them as he had been. Several years later, Moses saw his father for the first time in nearly seven years and learned that his teenage girlfriend had given birth to his daughter—a six-year-old girl who believed her father was dead. Moses's father implored him to return home, but Moses, fearing retribution from the families of village members that he had personally killed, chose to remain with the militia. A week later, Moses learned his father had committed suicide, dispirited by his son's refusal to rejoin his family.

> After being severely beaten by his superiors for failing to prevent the escape of several child soldiers, he finally decided

to abandon his home of nine years. Since the night he was awakened by his LRA captors in his school dormitory, Moses says he has not felt as though he belonged anywhere and worries that he may never feel accepted by his peers again.[21]

Moses's experience mirrors the stories of other LRA soldiers and demonstrates the disruptive power that the group has on the identities of its members.

Although group members were subject to constant manipulation techniques intended to turn them into LRA crusaders, most have not been permanently persuaded to align with Kony's cause. As international efforts to capture Kony and other militia leaders continue, LRA forces have fractured and members have transitioned to fighting for survival rather than for the sake of the group. Subsequently, the number of mid- to low-level members who have deserted the core group has increased, and group members have experienced yet another shift in their identity. After leaving the group, many of these individuals have expressed that they do not feel responsible for LRA actions and that their time within the LRA is not reflective of their personal values. A number of returned LRA members, ranging from mid-level officers to rebel brides and child soldiers have stated in interviews that they do not feel guilty for anything that they did during their time with the LRA or for any atrocities committed by other members because they were simply following Kony's orders and not acting of their own volition.[22] Even Dominic Ongwen, a high-level LRA commander recently tried for war crimes by the International Criminal Court, stated in his trial that he did not have to ask those he has hurt for forgiveness because he had not intended to hurt them and was only following orders.[23]

Additionally, many former members have indicated that although they no longer align with Kony's cause, they do not feel as though they belong with their previous communities either and now consider themselves individuals without a home. When talking about her escape experience, Stella, a Ugandan woman who spent eight years as wife to an LRA commander before fleeing in 2019 said, "I felt like a stranger, like an outsider. I had no one to talk to . . . I had no family left."[24] Stella's comments reflect similar feelings expressed by other LRA defectors. In video interviews with journalists and other individuals, most interviewees referred to their previous communities as well as LRA leaders with terms such as "they" or "those people" rather than "we" or "us," even when discussing events in which they were also a participant—indicating that they do not align themselves with either group.[25]

This new identity as refugees has even been reinforced by Joseph Kony. A former LRA member interviewed at the time of their departure from the group claimed that in the last large address given by Joseph Kony to LRA forces, he stated that his "LRA children" were now on their own and were to live as refugees while following the path of God.[26] This directive built on preexisting feelings of displacement and encouraged some group members to live apart from local communities and attack NGOs or nearby citizens for food and other re-

sources rather than accept those offered by their home villages.[27] Data from In-visible Children—which records incidences of LRA-associated attacks—show that although the number of abductions, mutilations, and killings has steadily decreased during the past three years, the number of lootings has remained high. The same data show that more than 80 percent of all attacks perpetrat-ed by LRA drifters or unidentified armed groups suspected to be former LRA members have included a looting element, signaling that these individuals are acting out of survival instincts rather than a desire to obtain recruits or further the cause of the LRA.[28]

Because of these factors, attacks perpetrated against NGOs and villagers can be partially attributable to defectors' self-assigned identity as refugees. This line of motivation provides an opening for NGOs to decrease the frequency and destruction of attacks by communicating to disaffected LRA members, poten-tially through printed flyers or radio campaigns, that the resources and services they offer are available to help LRA "refugees" in addition to local villagers, and that resources can be obtained without resorting to violent measures.

Fear of Resentment Blocks Reintegration

In addition to dramatically dissociating forcibly recruited LRA soldiers from their previous identity, LRA leadership has attempted to drive a wedge between recruits and the outside world by forcing them to brutally attack village mem-bers. These actions have influenced the perceptual lens of low-level members by fostering a strong sense of perceived resentment from local communities. The LRA was notorious for forcing its low-level soldiers to mutilate local villagers by cutting off their lips, nose, and ears. Returning members have expressed that the violent acts or biting remarks made by villagers during these encounters initially deterred them from rejoining the community due to fear of retaliation.[29] After completing a qualitative study involving interviews conducted with both child soldiers and former commanders, trauma psychologist Angela Veale asserted that this practice instilled fear in both the victims and the unwilling perpetra-tors.[30] Several former LRA members shared that they were not willing to ask their victims for forgiveness because they believed the victims would likely at-tack them in retaliation if they approached them.[31] LRA leaders repeatedly told forcibly recruited militia members that their families would kill them if they returned home because the atrocities they had committed were unforgivable.[32] This manipulation as well as previous violent encounters with local community members have led potential returnees to believe that their return will not be well received by their former communities. In several cases, female former LRA members shared that they were forced to rejoin local communities ahead of their husbands to ensure that it was safe to return—indicating that a significant number of defecting LRA members fear retaliatory action.[33]

LRA members are also discouraged from reintegrating with local commu-nities due to anticipated cultural differences. Many worry that they will not fit in with their former community after spending so much time apart. Former

rebel brides who have escaped from the LRA with their children have shared that they did not feel they would fit in with their patriarchal childhood communities because their children do not have a socially accepted father or family name.[34] These worries stem from a range of factors including economic and social concerns. Several reintegrated LRA members have shared that they were initially wary of returning to the community because they did not know how they would fit into the community or find a job because they had not completed their education and did not have any occupational skills.[35]

A number of returned LRA members have faced persecution and stigmatization after returning to their communities. Many of these individuals have shared in interviews that they have never felt fully accepted after returning from the militia and were initially referred to by their neighbors as "killers" or were socially ostracized.[36] Evelyn Amony, former wife to Joseph Kony and mother to three of his children, has described her initial experience as a reintegrated member of the community as extremely difficult: "My children are not welcome in my village. Community members say to me: 'Our children were abducted by the LRA. They were killed by the LRA. And now you bring LRA children here—Kony's kids here and we have to take care of his kids when he killed our own.' They do not understand." Her statements mirror much of what has been said by other women who have returned with their children.[37]

Several communities have even forced returning members to undergo ritual cleansings to dispel the demons of the people they had killed or murdered as part of the LRA.[38] According to the Grassroots Reconciliation Group, an NGO focused on reintegration efforts, many individuals who experienced these rituals described them as emotionally painful, humiliating, or demoralizing and consider the practice a sign that their return was not welcomed by the community.[39] In some cases, escapees have rejoined their home communities only to return to the LRA or an LRA faction after experiencing persecution. Other defecting members have shared that when these individuals returned to the brigade, their stories were retold—and probably exaggerated on—in large group meetings to dissuade others from leaving the militia.[40] These accounts have exacerbated preexisting fears associated with returning to local communities and deterred reintegration.

Although the worries associated with returning to LRA communities stem partially from true accounts and genuine reactions of community members, the majority of individuals who have reintegrated with their communities had positive experiences and express gratitude for their improved circumstances. Through quotes and stories shared by reintegrated members and collected by NGOs such as the Grassroots Reconciliation Group, many reintegrated members express contentment with the roles they now hold in their community and an appreciation for the individuals who helped them rejoin normal life.[41] Similarly, a returnee named Alice shared the following: "I belong to a community who talks to me and respects me. [The community] has relieved me from stress and helped me to put clothes on my baby's back and food in my baby's

mouth." In the same interview series, others shared that although they initially felt judged by their community, they came to feel loved and accepted by those around them.[42]

Because disaffected LRA members are choosing to remain isolated from society in part because they view local community members as unwelcoming and resentful, they may be more likely to reintegrate into their pre-LRA communities if an invitation to return is extended by a former LRA member who can share a positive reintegration story and convey the willingness of fellow community members to warmly receive returnees. If NGOs partner with well-adjusted defectors to establish programs such as peer support groups or radio message campaigns voiced by reintegrated members as part of their efforts to reintegrate LRA defectors into society, the attacks on NGO outposts could decrease and vital resources could be protected and more efficiently distributed.

Lingering Spiritual Values and Norms Represent a Bridge to Reintegration

Additionally, former LRA members who have yet to rejoin society have remained highly religious and are more likely to halt their attacks against villagers and NGOs and reintegrate with local communities if the invitation to return is extended by spiritual leaders. During their time as soldiers with the LRA, mid-to-low-level members were indoctrinated with the spiritual ideology of LRA leader Joseph Kony and forced to fight for his crusade. Even after deserting the terrorist group, many of these individuals demonstrate that they still value spirituality and respect a spiritually centered social structure.

After abducting recruits, LRA commanders used a combination of spiritual rituals and religious reeducation to control group members and justify their actions. Former members of the LRA shared that they were forced to participate in important spiritual ceremonies, such as baptism, under fear of being beaten or killed.[43] These rituals were supported by weekly religious education classes and the frequent use of spiritual metaphor and scripture in daily conversation and instruction.[44] Before leaving for battle, LRA members were instructed by leaders to coat their chests in shea butter as divine protection in combat. If the shea butter did not protect them from bullets, they were told that this was a result of exercising insufficient faith during the ritual.[45] This ritual is just one example of many used to influence soldiers throughout daily life in an LRA camp. Because the majority of militia members were forcibly recruited into the group at a young age, the spiritually centered lifestyle they experienced with the LRA was highly influential and may be the only one they fully remember.

This indoctrination expanded on or replaced the cultures that existed in the local communities the soldiers were abducted from, leaving them with a code of behavior strongly influenced by religious practices. While living with the LRA, members were frequently told by group leaders that resources, health, and laughter were provided as a result of their faith.[46] Similarly, if an individual was wounded or killed in battle, it was considered a punishment for weak faith.

Former LRA members have expressed that they still believe this to be true.[47] In video interviews, former LRA members expressed that they felt a holy spirit with them during their time with the rebel group and that even though they no longer approve of Kony's agenda, they continue to center their lives around the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Christianity.[48] Additionally, individuals who have separated themselves from Joseph Kony demonstrate that they maintain a strong belief in the divine. For example, several NGOs that operate halfway houses for returning LRA members have noted that occupants still make references to spiritual beliefs and LRA rituals.[49]

The spiritual values and norms of the LRA were reinforced by a spiritually structured society. To cement his leadership status and control group members, Joseph Kony established a spiritual hierarchy, declared himself a prophet, and claimed that LRA actions were directed by the spirits who possessed him. Former LRA members recall that when instructing followers, Kony claimed to be channeling one of the 13 different spirits that possessed him, each of which filled him with different spiritual, military, or strategic wisdom.[50] Although this leadership tactic may not have inspired lasting commitment from mid-to-low-level members, it did instill a strong belief in the divine. Several defectors shared that although they do not wish to fight in Kony's crusade, they do believe that he is led by powerful spirits who selected him for leadership.[51] Kony solidified this spiritual hierarchy by advancing soldiers to leadership positions as a result of perceived spiritual devotion, leaving members with an understanding that social status is a direct result of an individual's spirituality. In an interview, several LRA commanders asserted that the spirits had selected them for their leadership roles because of their faith. Other members were told that they had not been promoted because they did not have enough faith in the spirits that led their prophet.[52] This spiritual hierarchy left a strong impression on many group members. Although not all returned LRA members attend local worship services, many have shared that they view the local pastors and other spiritual leaders as individuals deserving great respect, indicating that they still consider leadership and social status to be closely linked to spirituality.[53]

Because defecting LRA "refugees" still value spirituality, hold on to religious practices, and respect spiritual leaders, they may return to local communities if an invitation is extended from any spiritual leader who can convey that the community also values spirituality and can reassure them that they will be able to continue leading a spiritually centered life once they rejoin the community. If NGOs partner with local spiritual leaders to extend these invitations, they may be able to persuade LRA drifters to rejoin community life and drastically decrease the number of attacks perpetrated against NGO bases and village members.

Mitigation of Attacks Will Require a Shift in Approach

The cultural biases of mid-to-low-level defecting LRA members provide three

clear openings for the prevention of attacks on NGO outposts and villages and the successful reintegration of former LRA members.

1. Convey to defecting LRA members that they are eligible for NGO aid

2. Partner with reintegrated former LRA members to convey the willingness of local communities to welcome home defecting LRA soldiers

3. Partner with local spiritual leaders to extend reintegration invitations

Although there are a number of groups, such as military or government actors, that could pursue these opportunities, NGOs are best suited in this case for several reasons. Most importantly, NGOs are the most likely to successfully form positive relationships with LRA members, who are unlikely to trust military or government personnel due to the antigovernment rhetoric, which abounds among group leaders. Additionally, most NGOs operating in Central Africa, even those who have had to close or modify programs as a result of violence, employ or partner with local community members who can better connect with and enlist the help of reintegrated LRA members and spiritual leaders. Logistically, there is also a strong argument for NGOs to spearhead this effort. Because NGOs are the organizations that will be distributing aid to these individuals if the endeavor is successful, having them coordinate this effort will eliminate the need for a middleman and enable them to develop strong relationships with both the community members and former LRA members that they serve. Finally, these organizations have already been managing reintegration and attack-prevention efforts and are highly motivated to continue these efforts and improve on them to protect their resources and personnel currently under attack.

Through the dismissal, partial acceptance, or full acceptance of these opportunities, three potential scenarios are likely to emerge. First, if these opportunities are ignored and there is no shift in the current methods used to prevent LRA-associated attacks and encourage the reintegration of former members into local communities, NGOs are unlikely to experience any decrease in violent lootings and may even experience a surge in attacks, which will result in the loss of valued resources and an inability to elevate the welfare of impoverished communities in Central Africa. Second, if NGOs on their own shift their approach to account for LRA cultural biases, they could potentially prevent these attacks from occurring. However, NGOs are likely to achieve the strongest and longest-lasting results in the third scenario by partnering with local leaders and reintegrated members to encourage not only an acceptance of NGO aid and cessation of attacks but the reintegration of former LRA members into local communities.

Scenario #1: No Action

If NGOs and their partners do not adjust their attack-prevention and community-reintegration efforts to account for LRA members' identity as refugees and fears of resentment and retribution, survival-motivated attacks are likely to remain constant or increase over time—leading to the continued loss of limited NGO resources and the growth of obstacles for the effective distribution of much-needed humanitarian aid.

The current attack-prevention methods have not proved significantly successful. NGOs continue to suffer violent, LRA-associated lootings despite implementing early warning systems provided through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Invisible Children—indicating that the current methods of attack prevention are insufficient.[54] Qualitative, cultural data demonstrates that defecting LRA members fear retribution for previous offenses if they return to their former communities. If reintegration efforts do not attempt to assuage this fear, it will continue to push LRA defectors to the outskirts of local communities—solidifying both their identity as refugees and their justification for survival-motivated attacks on NGO outposts and villagers.

Scenario #2: Action by NGOs Alone

If a partial shift in approach is adopted or a full shift is executed without meaningful cooperation from local community members, NGOs are likely to experience a decrease in defector-perpetrated attacks but are unlikely to see an increase in successful community reintegration rates. This scenario is likely to occur if NGOs can successfully convey that they are interested in helping returning LRA members but are unable to assuage fears of community-perpetrated retribution. A decrease in survival-motivated attacks on NGO outposts is likely to be preceded by an increased receipt among the NGO community of inquiries into available services and aid. Further signs that LRA defectors are interested in peacefully accepting NGO aid could include increased enrollment in NGO-led occupational workshops, participation in peer support groups, or applications for available micro loans.

Additional indicators that this scenario is evolving may include the establishment of new communities composed of former LRA members and their wives and children. An early sign of the development of such communities may be the selection of a group leader. Due to this group's lingering spiritual values and norms, this leader is likely to be a highly spiritual individual and may be entrusted with the responsibility of negotiating on behalf of the group. Additional signs that these communities are being established could include the construction of permanent or semipermanent dwellings, the introduction of early agricultural practices such as preparing fields for crops, and the development of trade-based practices such as sewing clothes or collecting wild produce to sell or exchange with other communities.

Scenario #3: Action by NGOs with Cooperation from Local Communities

If NGOs are successful in both conveying their willingness to support LRA defectors in their refugee state and coordinating their efforts with local spiritual leaders and well-adjusted, reintegrated LRA members to assuage fears of resentment and retribution, the region is likely to experience a significant decrease in survival-motivated attacks and an increase in the rate of successful and lasting reintegration of former LRA soldiers.

This scenario will probably manifest through increased involvement of reintegrated LRA members in the social, economic, and spiritual aspects of their communities. As former LRA members transition out of their refugee identity and feel as though they belong in the local communities as well as experience a shift in their perceptual lens and no longer view community members as resentful or retaliatory, they would be more likely to engage with other members of the community in social situations. This may manifest in actions such as asking individuals whom they have harmed for forgiveness, relationships between single LRA members and non-LRA community members, or a variety of improvements in other social interactions. Because of their strong, lingering religious values, increased involvement in the spiritual aspects of the community is also a probable manifestation of successful reintegration. Early indicators of increased engagement may include attending spiritual services, appealing to religious leaders for repentance or counseling, and willingly participating in ritual cleansing ceremonies.

Successfully leveraging the cultural biases of LRA-associated attackers is likely to result in a sustainable decrease in violent lootings perpetrated against NGO outposts and a significant increase in reintegration rates, leading to the long-term preservation and advancement of NGO humanitarian efforts. By partnering with local leaders and reintegrated defectors to account for the self-appointed refugee status, perceived resentment from local communities, and lingering spiritual values and norms of disaffected LRA members, NGOs will be better equipped to efficiently distribute much-needed humanitarian aid among the highest-need communities of Central Africa.

Conclusion

Throughout the years, different governments and organizations have tried a variety of approaches to eradicate the LRA. Although some have shown moderate results, none have been truly successful. In the 1990s, the Ugandan government conducted counterinsurgency operations against the LRA, but the size and influence of Joseph Kony's group continued to grow. In 2008, the Uganda People's Defence Force, with cooperation from Congolese and Southern Sudanese authorities and significant monetary backing from the United States, operated a yearlong military operation known as Operation Lightning Thunder.[55] The effort failed and ultimately caused an increase in violent attacks and reprisals

against local communities. Several years later, President Barack H. Obama sent 100 special forces and intelligence officers to Central Africa with the purpose of locating and apprehending Joseph Kony, who is still at large today.[56] In addition to these military-focused efforts, diplomatic approaches have also been unsuccessfully implemented. In 2006, the International Criminal Court issued warrants for the group's top leaders—only one has been captured and faced trial.[57] Similarly, the Ugandan government engaged in peace talks with the LRA in 2006, which broke down in 2008 when Joseph Kony refused to sign a final agreement.[58]

These military and diplomatic efforts, which have absorbed massive amounts of resources and required a large number of personnel, have fruitlessly applied one-size-fits-all approaches and failed to account for the critical role that culture plays in the conflict. In contrast, simple, culture-based efforts such as "come home" messaging campaigns have helped disaffected LRA fighters rejoin their communities.[59] Expanding these cultural efforts using the recommendations outlined in this article can significantly increase their efficacy and curb the devastating impact of the LRA.

Even though these actions have the potential to end the LRA-led conflict in Central Africa, they are specific to that conflict and are not intended as guidelines for reintegration efforts across all groups. These recommendations result from an analysis of the unique norms, values, identity, and perceptual lens of the LRA and do not account for the culture of other militant groups. It would be inefficient and dangerous to blindly apply them as a whole to conflict resolution efforts involving other cultures or organizations.

For example, the cultural biases of mid-to-low level LRA members have been strongly influenced by the religious focus of the LRA organization and associated indoctrination practices. As a result of this, reintegration invitations from local religious leaders have the potential to drastically improve successful reintegration rates. However, members of other militant groups, even those with strong religious elements such as Boko Haram or al-Qaeda, are unlikely to hold the same levels of deep spiritual faith or respect for outside religious leaders and would not be as impacted by these invitations.

Similarly, Joseph Kony's directive that LRA soldiers live as refugees compounded preexisting feelings of displacement among group members and led many low-level members to consider themselves to be without a home. Because most individuals in other terrorist organizations have probably not received similar direction from group leaders, even individuals who were forcibly recruited into terrorist organizations as children or have suffered similar identity disruptions, are unlikely to value offers of NGO aid in the same manner that LRA members will.

Because many LRA members are also wary of returning to their pre-LRA communities due to perceived threats of retribution, a key recommendation of this article is for reintegration efforts to focus on conveying local community members' support for reintegration. This recommendation may seem as though

it can be applied across all conflicts. However, successful reintegration efforts must account for the culture and perceptions of the communities into which the individuals are reintegrating as well as the specific circumstances under which the group members left, or were extracted, from the community and the interactions that have taken place between the two groups.

Although the recommendations provided in this article are specific to the LRA, they highlight the value of understanding the cultural intricacies of any terrorist organization before hastily and ineffectually applying a standard diplomatic or military approach. For conflict-resolution and reintegration efforts to be truly successful, they must address the unique cultural biases that shape group member behavior. Instead of vainly attempting to forcefully end a brutal conflict, these tailored culture-based approaches have the potential to persuade combatants to abandon the fight and end the conflict themselves.

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Deterring Russian Nuclear Threats with Low-Yield Nukes May Encourage Limited Nuclear War

Jeffrey Taylor

Abstract: Tensions between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia have sustained a precarious security environment in Eastern Europe that could quickly escalate to nuclear war. To deter possible Russian nuclear aggression, the United States recently published nuclear policies that called for the deployment of new submarine-launched, low-yield nuclear weapons around Europe. This article highlights how these new U.S. nuclear policies may be reinforcing Russian perceptions and fears of Western aggression. The article suggests that common U.S. characterizations of Russian low-yield nuclear doctrine miss important escalation considerations prominent in Russian military discourse. The article also argues that misalignment between U.S. and Russian officials regarding nuclear intent may increase the likelihood that a miscalculation would escalate to nuclear war.

Keywords: strategic culture, deterrence, low-yield nuclear weapons, Russia, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, escalation, U.S. nuclear policy

Introduction

Amid increasing tensions between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia in Eastern Europe, recent U.S. nuclear policy changes aimed at curbing Russian nuclear aggression with low-yield nuclear weapons may be unintentionally contributing to a deteriorating securi-

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ty environment and increasing the risk of nuclear escalation. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has felt increasingly threatened by the westward expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe. In recent years, tensions have flared over Russia's annexation of Crimea and advance into Eastern Ukraine, the installation of NATO troops in the Baltic states, and many additional ongoing political and national security challenges between Russia and the West. The breakdown of arms control agreements between the United States and Russia in recent years has challenged U.S./Russian strategic communication, increasing fears of a potential renewed build up of nuclear weapons in Europe and a heightened possibility of nuclear escalation. In 2016, former Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov warned that "the risk of confrontation with the use of nuclear weapons in Europe is higher than in the 1980s."[1] A similar assessment was made the same year by former U.S. secretary of defense William J. Perry.[2]

In response to these fears, in 2018, the United States modified its nuclear doctrine and called for the renewed development of flexible, low-yield nuclear weapons to deter the possibility of Russian nuclear aggression. While this policy change may have merit from the U.S. perspective, it appears that it may also be prompting serious concern in Moscow. This article details the ways in which current American nuclear policies intended to deter Russian nuclear aggression may be introducing new threats that increase the likelihood that a conventional conflict, caused either by aggression or miscalculation, may escalate to limited nuclear war. The article outlines some of the threat perceptions, military debates, nuclear policies, and potential misunderstandings in both Russia and the United States that may be fueling these threats. The article concludes by identifying several opportunities to build resilience in U.S. deterrence policies and nuclear strategy vis-à-vis Russia to prevent escalation to nuclear war.

In assessing how U.S. deterrence efforts are interpreted in Russia, it is critical to understand the cultural factors that may affect Russia's worldview and decision-making processes. As noted by Colin S. Gray, the choice to be deterred rests solely on the party to be deterred and is subject to that party's thought processes.[3] Therefore, this article draws from the body of literature focused on Russian strategic culture—or the "set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and models of behavior derived from common experiences and accepted narratives" that "determine appropriate ends and means of achieving national security objectives."[4] Particular emphasis is given to the cultural factors that shape Russia's perceptual lens, or the lens through which Russian officials view and interpret U.S. policies and actions.[5] Observations are drawn from both Western and Russian scholars and commentators, including Fritz W. Ermarth, Dima Adamsky, Olga Oliker, and Alexei G. Arbatov among others.[6]

This article focuses on Russian attitudes and perceptions of low-yield nuclear weapons. However, as Russia scholar Dima Adamsky notes, Russia appears to lack any coherent stance on the role and threats posed by low-yield nuclear weapons in official doctrine or political discourse.[7] Therefore, this article often relies on nonofficial sources, primarily from military literature, to highlight sa-

lient concepts that may influence official decision making. It should be noted, however, that military literature does not always reflect official attitudes. Still, some concepts introduced in military literature have, at various times, played a considerable role in influencing official Russian policy. Where possible, this article connects concepts from military literature with elements of official doctrine to give some indication of their alignment with, or potential bearing on, official policy. At the very least, the analysis presented in this article reveals important differences between Russian and U.S. military thinking.

As a final note, this article uses the term *low yield* generally to describe nuclear weapons with yields in the tens of kilotons or fewer, well below 100 kilotons. The reason for using the term low yield over tactical or nonstrategic is twofold: one, because the terms tactical and nonstrategic are often used interchangeably in Russian nuclear discourse to refer to short- or intermediate-range weapons with relatively low yield, and two, because, in the context of deterrence, low-yield nuclear weapons—sometimes referred to as tactical or nonstrategic—play a clear strategic role. Therefore, this article favors the use of low yield over tactical or nonstrategic.[8]

Mutually Reinforcing U.S./Russian Threat Perceptions Exacerbate the Security Dilemma in Eastern Europe

The developing security dilemma in Eastern Europe is, in part, being fueled by actions that provoke several long-standing Russian and U.S. threat perceptions that mutually reinforce the fear of adversarial aggression. Moscow's worldview is often characterized as a "siege mentality," which Russia scholar Dima Adamsky notes combines a sense of Russian superiority with an acute perception of vulnerability and oppression.[9] Russian officials view recent expansions of NATO and the European Union as unlawful and specifically targeted at Russia, with the intent of containing Russian interests.[10] Contributing to Russia's sense of vulnerability is a history of costly foreign invasions, especially from the West.[11] As a buffer against Western aggression, Russia has sought to maintain influence, sometimes by force, over its western neighbors, as evidenced by the annexation of Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine in 2014.[12]

The 2014 Ukraine incident prompted the United States and NATO to reconsider Russia as a serious aggressive threat and strengthen their force posture in Eastern Europe. Recent U.S. defense and foreign policy documents name Russia as a top priority and warn that Russia seeks to divide NATO, undermine global stability, and challenge American interests.[13] In an effort to address new Russian threats and deter future aggression, NATO agreed in 2016 to deploy a small number of troops to the Baltic states as an enhanced forward presence (EFP) in Eastern Europe.[14]

However effective EFP may be at deterring aggression, it appears to have sparked serious concerns of a sort that may prove counterproductive in Russia. In 2014, long before EFP was agreed on, Russian military doctrine listed the "build-up of the power potential" of NATO, and "military infrastructure of

NATO member countries near the borders of the Russian Federation" as the first external risk to Russia.[15] Russian political scientist Alexei Arbatov notes that even modest NATO troop deployments in the Baltic states are likely seen as a precursor of more broad NATO military efforts to contain Russia.[16] In response, Russia has fortified Kaliningrad (an exclave of Russia), strengthened its force posture along its western border, and engaged in actions that test NATO resolve, including regular Russian incursions in NATO airspace and increased nuclear signaling.[17] Both NATO and Russia have engaged in military exercises near the Russian border that are seen as provocative, including the recent Russian military buildup near the Ukrainian border in April 2021.[18]

Meanwhile, concerns over the possibility of nuclear escalation are growing in both Russia and the United States, and both countries are upgrading their nuclear arsenals.[19] A belief that any armed conflict with the United States or NATO will inevitably escalate to nuclear war appears to be common among Russian military analysts and commentators.[20] Whereas previous Russian doctrinal publications mentioned nuclear concerns in the West, Asia, and the Middle East, the most recent 2020 document on Russian state policy in the nuclear sphere appears to be exclusively focused on the United States and NATO.[21] As evidenced in regular remarks by Russian president Vladimir Putin, and in both the 2014 *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation* and the 2015 *On the Russian Federation's National Security Strategy*, officials seem to believe that the United States is actively working to undermine strategic stability by threatening the survivability of Russia's nuclear arsenal and reducing barriers to nuclear first use with missile defense, strategic precision-guided conventional munitions, and space weapons.[22] U.S. withdrawals from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019, along with recent U.S. calls for new nuclear delivery platforms and yield capabilities, have only strengthened this belief.

For many U.S. defense planners and policy makers, ongoing tensions and increased nuclear signaling from Russia have reinforced fears of possible Russian nuclear aggression. In particular, U.S. officials have grown increasingly concerned about the United States' ability to deter a Russian low-yield nuclear strike, which presumably is more likely than a full-scale nuclear attack. To prevent the possibility of Russian nuclear aggression, the United States recently made a call for the development and deployment of new, low-yield nuclear weapons near Europe. The following three sections describe the reasoning behind the United States' proposed new weapons and their accompanying policies, aspects of Russian nuclear doctrine surrounding low-yield nuclear weapons that the policies appear to miss, and possible ways in which misalignment in U.S. deterrence efforts and Russian perceptions may unintentionally increase the likelihood of limited nuclear escalation.

United States Intends Low-Yield Nukes to Deter Russian Nuclear Aggression

New American nuclear policies calling for additional low-yield nuclear weapons are primarily intended to fill a perceived gap in the United States' ability to deter a Russian attempt to escalate out of a failed conflict using the threat of a limited nuclear strike. This concept, colloquially known as *escalate to de-escalate*, holds that early in a regional conflict, Russia would threaten a limited nuclear strike to coerce the United States or NATO to either surrender or risk uncontrolled nuclear escalation.[23] This characterization of Russian doctrine appears in the Department of Defense's 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR), and it has been accepted by many Western analysts, policy makers, and defense planners.[24]

The extent to which the escalate to de-escalate concept has or has not been accepted in official Russian strategy remains unclear. Russia scholar Kristin ven Bruusgaard notes that, to compensate for conventional inferiority, Russian military strategists devised ideas similar to escalate to de-escalate that were prominent in Russian military literature around 2000 and were supported by open-ended wording in the 2000 Russian military doctrine.[25] However, at the time, Russian analysts stressed that such provisions should be temporary.[26] Some analysts have since argued that Russia's recent military modernization has rendered escalate to de-escalate obsolete.[27] However, Arbatov argues that the concept may still be under debate.[28] Although Russian officials deny that escalate to de-escalate exists in Russian nuclear policy, Russia's most recent nuclear doctrine remains strategically ambiguous, leaving open the possibility for nuclear strategies to "prevent the escalation of military actions and end them under conditions acceptable" to Russia and/or its allies.[29]

Whatever this means for the escalate to de-escalate concept, U.S. defense planners and policy makers, who tend to see capability as the driver of policy, perceive that Russia seeks to leverage a supposed gap in low-yield capability in the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Russia is estimated to have more than 2,000 nonstrategic nuclear warheads, many of which are thought to be stationed in western Russia within range of critical NATO targets.[30] The United States has only around 200 low-yield nuclear weapons in Europe. The majority of these are gravity bombs that must be carried to their targets by air platforms that are susceptible to Russia's sophisticated air defense systems.[31] From a purely capability-based standpoint, this appears to leave the United States without a credible proportionate response option to a Russian low-yield nuclear threat. U.S. officials and defense planners worry that Russia may seek to leverage this asymmetry in capability to gain a nuclear advantage.[32]

These fears are exacerbated by concerns that NATO's collective defense structure and policy of unanimous consent may challenge the organization's ability to adequately respond to an imminent Russian nuclear threat or possible limited nuclear strike. After a 2016 series of war games involving military and civilian experts, Rand Corporation reported that in the absence of EFP troops,

a Russian offensive in the Baltics could reach any Baltic capital in less than 60 hours.[33] After such a rapid advance, Russia could attempt a fait accompli by threatening or precipitating a limited nuclear strike before NATO could organize a coordinated response. This scenario often appears in Western literature in connection with discussions around possible nuclear escalation.[34] Based on Article 5 of its founding treaty, NATO would presumably be forced to either respond with nuclear weapons and risk nuclear escalation, respond with conventional forces and risk unacceptable losses, or surrender and lose the Baltics.[35] Considering the diversity in member states' views on nuclear issues, obtaining unanimous consent for a coordinated response may meet significant barriers or introduce delays that could deal a fatal blow to the alliance's credibility.

The United States' new W76-2 variable-yield submarine-launched warhead is tailored to meet these perceived challenges and fill the call in the 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review* for a variety of new nuclear weapons with diverse yields and delivery methods to deter the possibility of Russian aggression with nuclear or non-nuclear strategic weapons.[36] Dr. Kerry Kartchner, a State Department veteran with more than 30 years' experience advising U.S. government agencies on nuclear proliferation and escalation, calls the W76-2 a "token deterrent" against Russian low-yield nuclear threats in Europe.[37] It fills the gap in U.S. low-yield nuclear weapons with a highly survivable and flexible option to deter Russian limited nuclear aggression.[38] Because it is deployed on U.S. submarines, the W76-2 is not subject to NATO approval and therefore sidesteps cumbersome NATO decision making and many of the political challenges associated with nuclear weapons buildup on the European continent.[39]

Escalate to De-Escalate Characterization of Russian Nuclear Doctrine Neglects Important Escalation Considerations

An analysis of current Russian military and nuclear doctrine suggests that the Western idea of escalate to de-escalate, against which U.S. policies are targeted, is, at best, an incomplete representation of Russian low-yield nuclear strategy that misses important considerations likely to influence escalation. Because official Russian doctrine appears to lack clear, codified strategies for low-yield nuclear weapons, this section reviews salient, concepts from discussions in Russian military literature surrounding low-yield nuclear weapons to highlight some key factors that may influence Russia's strategies for limited nuclear use and escalation.[40]

Russian Strategic Deterrence

Most discussions on low-yield nuclear weapons in Russian military literature consider their value for strategic deterrence—or *sderzhivanie*—which encompasses both prevention and containment of conventional and nuclear aggression. In fact, the root of *sderzhivanie* means to hold back or to contain.[41] Consistent with Russia's military tradition of holistic strategy, Russian doctrine describes

strategic deterrence as a task involving a variety of military and nonmilitary means.[42] Deterrence in the military sphere is achieved through a combination of informational, conventional, and nuclear means.[43] Therefore, nuclear weapons are just one of many measures meant for deterrence. The use of nuclear weapons for deterrence purposes is generally reserved exclusively for regional or global wars.[44] Low-yield nuclear weapons specifically are most often described in Russian military literature as operating in a regional deterrence role.[45]

In keeping with the Russian Ministry of Defense's definition of military power—or the ability to influence other states indirectly through demonstration and directly through force—nuclear strategies discussed in Russian military literature involve both deterrence by fear inducement and deterrence by limited use of force.[46] Deterrence by fear inducement is envisioned as a continual process, taking place in peacetime and war, while deterrence by limited use of force is primarily meant for military conflict scenarios. Adamsky notes that low-yield nuclear weapons are seen in Russia both as a "peacetime deterrent and as a wartime operational countermeasure."[47]

Deterrence by fear inducement involves extensive nuclear signaling to dissuade an enemy from pursuing conflict with Russia.[48] Russian nuclear signaling frequently involves indirect threats, large-scale nuclear exercises, and nuclear weapons development. Moscow often uses nuclear threats to project global power and influence, which has led many Western observers to perceive Russian nuclear thinking as reckless and aggressive, even when official nuclear doctrine often portrays a far more conservative strategy than rhetoric suggests.[49]

Deterrence by limited use of force involves the threat of progressive levels of damage during a regional or large-scale conflict to convince an opponent that the costs of continued conflict will outweigh any perceived benefits. The goal is to achieve a level of "deterrent damage"—or the minimum level of damage required to deter further aggression—by targeting critical enemy infrastructure. This may be what is meant by the phrase "deterrence of a forceful nature" found in Russian military doctrine.[50]

Escalation Management

In addition to preventing conflict, Russian deterrence strategies seek to manage escalation should conflict occur through the threat and infliction of tailored and dosed damage to critical enemy targets. The goal is to contain the spread or scope of an existing conflict, provide opportunities for de-escalation, and leverage an asymmetry of stakes to alter an enemy's cost-benefit analysis.[51] This could be accomplished using conventional or limited nuclear strikes, depending on the scale and stage of the conflict. Deterrence is achieved by leveraging a difference in resolve between Russia, presumably acting in self-defense, and an opponent, presumably acting in aggression. The idea is that a foreign aggressor faced with a Russian limited nuclear strike would consider the cost of continuing nuclear engagement with Russia to be much greater than any possible

benefit that could be achieved by additional aggression, regardless of their own nuclear capabilities.[52]

The fundamental assumption of escalation management is that by inflicting tailored damage in a dosed manner, the risk of uncontrolled escalation can be reduced. To avoid escalation, strikes should target critical civil and military infrastructure and minimize civilian casualties. Potential targets could include power infrastructure, intelligence and command and control infrastructure, and possible space assets.[53] In local wars, or at early phases of regional wars, strikes are to be carried out using precision-guided conventional weapons. This strategy is supported by the 2014 Russian military doctrine, which calls for the use of conventional, high-precision weapons for forceful deterrence.[54] Conventional weapons add rungs on the escalation ladder below the nuclear threshold, which some Russian military analysts claim gives deterrence measures added flexibility.[55] However, conventional strikes are not a replacement for limited nuclear strikes. In fact, some Russian military writers suggest that conventional strikes should be used to increase the credibility of nuclear threats and convey a final warning before nuclear use.[56] Many also emphasize that conventional weapons will not replace nuclear weapons for regional and global deterrence.[57]

The concept of escalation management makes the Russian idea of deterrence by limited use of force different from Western theories of escalation and the escalate to de-escalate concept. The primary elements of escalate to de-escalate, as described in U.S. doctrine, align well with Western concepts of escalation. For example, the idea that Russia would threaten to use low-yield nuclear weapons to escalate out of failed military aggression or secure military victory is an example of instrumental escalation, which seeks to improve a state's military position in a war or avoid defeat using an increase in violence.[58] The idea that the threat of a low-yield nuclear strike would force the West to choose between surrender and uncontrolled escalation is an example of coercive escalation, which is meant to prevent further action or force a change in strategy by convincing an opponent that the costs of potential escalation outweigh any benefits from continued action.[59] This more closely resembles Russian discussions on nuclear strategy. However, the primary feature of coercive escalation is the risk of uncontrolled escalation. This idea was presumably the foundation for the United States' Cold War flexible response strategy, which relied on the threat of tactical nuclear strikes to deter Soviet aggression. However, the Russian concept of deterrence by limited use of force does not rely on the risk of uncontrolled escalation. Instead, through escalation management, Russia seeks to impact the adversary's cost-benefit analysis while actively working to reduce the risk of uncontrolled escalation. Thus, it is not risk, but cost, that deters the enemy.

Through the lens of escalation management, if officially adopted, Russian officials may be more willing to engage in deliberate nuclear escalation than their Western counterparts in the face of a perceived imminent threat. Western analysts note that the risk of uncontrolled escalation to deter a would-be opponent may also be a powerful deterrent for the initiating state.[60] However,

Russian escalation management fundamentally challenges this idea and arguably reduces the barrier to escalation. This does not necessarily mean, however, that Russian political and military leaders believe that nuclear war can be won.[61] Instead, if employed, the goal of escalation management would be to prevent the spread of a conflict, provide opportunities for an opponent to de-escalate, and reestablish deterrence.

Escalation Thresholds

Although Russia's precise threshold for nuclear use is not known and is likely to shift during a military conflict, Russian doctrine and military writings reveal several important considerations that may influence Russia's decision to escalate in a conventional conflict or transition to nuclear use. In general, Russia has little incentive to start a nuclear war in peacetime.[62] However, shifting threat perceptions during a conflict may quickly create an incentive.

In addition to responding to the use of a nuclear weapon or other weapon of mass destruction against Russia, it seems that the two scenarios most likely to trigger escalation, including nuclear escalation, are a large-scale conventional military threat and a massed aerospace attack.[63] Russian military experts and government officials have, with some justification, expressed the fear that, early in a conflict, the United States would seek to weaken Russia's deterrence capabilities with strikes on nuclear command and control and weapons infrastructure using long-range, precision-guided weapons and massed aerospace attacks.[64] According to Russian doctrine, such an attack would entail a high probability of nuclear response.[65] Some Russian military experts have suggested that, rather than attempt a difficult defense against a technologically superior adversary, Russia could both deter aerospace attacks and prevent escalation by operationalizing a limited nuclear deterrence strategy, which during a regional conflict, could include destruction of aerospace assets.[66]

Russia's tendency to favor preemption over defense is firmly rooted in Russian strategic culture and is likely to influence how it responds to a perceived threat scenario.[67] Whereas American doctrine gives significant attention to defensive measures to deny the benefits of aggression and thereby deter an adversary, Russian doctrine tends to focus on deterrence by the threat or infliction of damage to prevent aggression. As noted in the CNA report *Russian Strategy for Escalation Management*, Russian discourse on denial typically involves the preemptive elimination of, rather than defense against, an emerging threat.[68] To be clear, Russian president Vladimir Putin has firmly denied the existence of preemptive nuclear strategies in Russian doctrine.[69] However, Russia's attention to preemption may lend itself to mirror imaging. Russia has long feared that the United States would be the first to attempt a nuclear strike and has sought ways to prevent it, including possible conventional preemptive strikes. A landmark 1963 Rand analysis of Soviet nuclear strategy suggested a Soviet belief that whoever initiates a nuclear war will dictate the course of the ensuing conflict.[70] According to Kartchner, this attitude is still held among Russian officials.[71] In a

March 2019 address, Valery Gerasimov, the Russian chief of the General Staff echoed this idea, saying "we must preempt the adversary" for "the *capture and the continued possession of strategic initiative*."[72] Through the lens of preemption, Russia may either be willing to execute a preemptive strike to avoid a perceived imminent threat or interpret U.S. action as preparation for a preemptive counterforce strike, which would likely elicit an escalatory, and possibly nuclear, response.

Russian military exercises also appear to indicate that their military's organizational culture is heavily influenced by an acceptance of nuclear escalation, which could increase Russia's willingness to engage in nuclear war. Although it appears that no first nuclear strike has been fully simulated in a Russian military exercise since 1999, preparation and mobilization for limited nuclear strikes in Russian military exercises simulating conventional war seem to be common.[73] Between 2011 and 2014, some form of nuclear escalation appears to have been simulated in at least eight military exercises.[74] The most recent large-scale nuclear exercise, Grom-2019, simulated escalation from a conventional war following an enemy first nuclear strike. As noted by Jeffrey W. Legro, a military's organizational culture—honed through practice and training in peacetime—often has a larger bearing than a country's capability or situation in driving a country to violate even robust international norms, including the norm of nuclear nonuse.[75] The prevalence of nuclear scenarios in Russian military exercises suggests a high degree of acceptance of nuclear escalation in the military's organizational culture.

Recent U.S. efforts to fill a perceived low-yield capability gap by matching Russian yield capabilities may effectively reduce Russia's nuclear-use threshold by reducing the risk that a Russian limited nuclear strike will lead to uncontrolled escalation. Russia has very little incentive to begin a nuclear war in Europe, especially considering that such a war would likely be conducted on or very near Russian territory. Therefore, it seems unlikely that Russia would consider nuclear use for anything other than a perceived existential threat. However, in the case that such a threat is perceived, the presence of new U.S. low-yield nuclear weapons near Europe are unlikely to prevent Russian escalation. In fact, some analysts argue that new U.S. nuclear policies involving low-yield nuclear weapons may actually stabilize Russian strategies for limited nuclear use by presenting a credible response option to a Russian limited strike short of high-yield nuclear weapons, thereby reducing the risk of high-level nuclear escalation.[76] Therefore, in scenarios most likely to elicit Russian nuclear use, deterrence using low-yield nuclear weapons is unlikely to prevent, and may encourage, limited nuclear conflict.

New U.S. Nuclear Policies Reinforce Russian Fears and Increase the Likelihood of Unintended Escalation

New U.S. nuclear policies meant to deter Russian nuclear aggression appear to be reinforcing Russia's siege mentality and may be pushing Russia closer to its

escalation threshold. The absence of regular strategic discussions between the United States and Russia has led to significant misalignment between the two countries regarding nuclear intent and nuclear threat perceptions. This, against the backdrop of ongoing political and military tensions, may increase the likelihood that an accident or miscalculation could trigger escalation leading to nuclear war.

Russia's Response

For Russian officials, who tend to view policy rather than force posture as the main indicator of impending conflict, doctrinal changes surrounding low-yield nuclear options in the 2018 NPR, have raised concerns that the United States is seeking to lower the nuclear-use threshold.[77] Despite the United States' insistence that new low-yield nuclear weapons are intended only for deterrence, a recent article from Russian news agency Inforos claims that the deployment of new low-yield nuclear weapons "fits into the military doctrine of the United States, which provides for a preventive nuclear strike" to impose "lightning-fast damage to the enemy's decision-making and control centers."[78] In combination with ongoing U.S. development of precision-guided weapons, which could support a massed aerospace attack, and the installment of NATO EFP troops in the Baltics, which are backed by NATO's strong conventional military, new U.S. low-yield nuclear weapons that are seen as lowering the threshold for nuclear warfare appear to dangerously approach Russia's thresholds for escalation. A recent Rand analysis warns that, when taken together, a series of seemingly reasonable deterrence measures such as these may be perceived by Russia as crossing a redline and trigger an aggressive response.[79]

Moscow has also expressed concern that the United States' new submarine-launched, low-yield warheads are a precursor to the deployment of additional U.S. and NATO nuclear weapons on the European continent.[80] Russian officials fear the possibility that NATO expansion would put nuclear weapons close to its borders and expose Russia to a no-warning strike.[81] Therefore, since the end of the INF treaty, Russia has grown concerned about a possible return to Europe of intermediate-range missiles, which could once again expose Russia to no-warning nuclear attacks from the West. In a 2019 meeting with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Putin raised concerns that new U.S. low-yield nuclear weapons would be mounted on intermediate-range missiles, which he alleged were already in production.[82] According to Putin, a return of intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe would exacerbate the risk of nuclear confrontation and lead to uncontrolled escalation.[83]

These concerns parallel an apparent shift in Russia's launch-on-warning nuclear policy, which is included in the 2020 nuclear doctrine.[84] In a 2018 speech, President Putin suggested that any nuclear response to an incoming missile attack on Russia would require confirmation that the attack involved nuclear weapons. However, the Kremlin's 2020 document on state policy in the nuclear sphere does not specify that an incoming missile must be identified as

nuclear to warrant a nuclear response.[85] According to Russian military political scientist Alexander Predzhivev, this means that in the event of an attack, Russia would not attempt to determine whether or not a missile is nuclear before deciding to retaliate.[86] A similar view was voiced by Russian defense ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, who, in response to the U.S. development of the W76-2, stated that "any attack involving a U.S. [submarine launched ballistic missile], regardless of its specifications, will be perceived as a nuclear aggression. . . . Under the Russian military doctrine such actions are seen as warranting retaliatory use of nuclear weapons by Russia."[87]

Pathways to Nuclear Escalation

With nuclear threat perceptions high, an accident or miscalculation leading to conventional conflict could escalate quickly to the nuclear-use threshold. As noted by Arbatov, most nuclear-related crises are not based on aggression but misunderstandings that spiral out of control.[88] The reduction in strategic communication that has accompanied recent breakdowns in arms control agreements has left American and Russian defense planners and policy makers to interpret opposing nuclear doctrines from their own perspective. As shown in this article, this has led both countries to perceive each other's nuclear policies as aggressive and threatening. Former NATO deputy supreme allied commander Sir Richard Shirreff recently warned that, in the current geopolitical climate, a miscalculation between NATO or Russia would likely lead to nuclear conflict.[89]

A possible catalyst for military conflict between Russia and the United States/NATO could be an accident caused by a military drill or a misinterpretation of a military exercise. Both NATO and Russia regularly engage in large-scale military drills near the Russian border in Eastern Europe.[90] Russia has characterized NATO drills as provocative.[91] Citing concerns about NATO expansion, Russia recently declined to modernize the 2011 *Vienna Document*, which mandates confidence-building measures designed to prevent accidental or inadvertent escalation of military exercises.[92] The close proximity of recent NATO and Russian military exercises has raised concerns among analysts that an accident or inadvertent collision could occur and lead to escalation.[93] A military exercise could also be perceived as preparation for an impending attack, as was the case for Russia's 2008 Kavkaz exercise, which preceded Russia's invasion of Georgia, or Russia's recent troop buildup on the Ukrainian border, which Russia claimed was a military exercise but was viewed in the West as a possible precursor to military aggression.[94] The potential danger of misreading military drills is highlighted by the Able Archer incident in 1983, when Soviet intelligence misinterpreted a NATO command post exercise as preparation for a nuclear strike, and Soviet nuclear forces were placed on high alert.[95]

The risk of inadvertent escalation is complicated by the growing prevalence of weapons, air platforms, and command and control infrastructure that can serve in both nuclear and conventional roles. These dual-capable systems

increase the risk that a conventional attack may be perceived as nuclear.[96] The Russian nuclear arsenal includes many weapons platforms that can be armed with both conventional and nuclear warheads. These weapons are often stored at the same facilities that house strategic and tactical nuclear weapons. Moreover, the United States increasingly relies on dual-capable command and control infrastructure, including targeting satellites and early-warning satellites for both conventional and nuclear operations.

Should a conflict occur, this weapon and infrastructure ambiguity, combined with heightened nuclear threat perceptions and mutual launch on warning nuclear postures, provides a variety of potential pathways to escalation. For example, during early phases of a conflict, the United States may employ precision-guided munitions or aerospace assets to conduct strikes on Russian dual-use missile facilities to challenge Russia's conventional capability or command and control infrastructure to complicate military operations. To Russian officials, who fear that the United States is preparing for nuclear warfighting, such an attack may be perceived as a counterforce strike targeting nuclear assets, prompting a nuclear response, as provided by Russian doctrine. Alternatively, fearing an aerospace attack or large-scale military incursion backed by nuclear weapons, Russia may choose to operationalize escalation management principles with conventional strikes on critical infrastructure using dual-capable weapons. In such a scenario, the United States may misinterpret the incoming missile as nuclear and respond with a nuclear strike, or, if the strikes targeted command and control infrastructure, the United States may respond with nuclear weapons, as provided by American nuclear doctrine. Due to heightened threat perceptions and challenges due to entanglement, nearly any missile attack on U.S. or Russian infrastructure could be misinterpreted and trigger a nuclear response.

Each of the pathways to escalation described above involves a misunderstanding or miscalculation that could be alleviated by implementing proper resilience measures to strengthen the material and human governance systems involved in preserving nuclear deterrence between the United States and Russia. The remaining sections discuss a few specific areas in which action can be taken to enhance the resilience of the U.S./Russia deterrence framework to prevent and manage escalation to nuclear war.

Effective Resilience Measures Address Both Nuclear Aggression and Inadvertent Escalation

A resilient American approach to deterrence vis-à-vis Russia requires a balance in capabilities and doctrines to prevent nuclear aggression and measures that mitigate the threat of inadvertent escalation. The main resilience goal of deterrence is to achieve *resistance*—or prevent the threat of nuclear war altogether. As discussed previously, the current U.S. approach to achieving resistance is primarily focused on deterring Russian nuclear aggression by deploying new low-yield nuclear weapons in Europe. While this tactic has a high probability

for success in deterring Russian aggression, it also comes with high risk and cost.[97] Some of this risk is tied to the growing danger of unintended escalation. To mitigate these risks, deterrence policies must include measures to prevent misunderstandings and misinterpretations by the United States or Russia that could lead to inadvertent escalation while maintaining capabilities and policies that deter Russian aggression.

The following sections present a series of measures aimed at improving resilience in the U.S./Russia deterrence framework by promoting alignment between the human governance systems charged with developing and executing American and Russian nuclear policies while increasing redundancy and diversity in material systems that are critical for accurate detection and characterization of nuclear threats. Because declaratory policy generally changes very little year to year, and nuclear weapons typically require heavy investments of time and money, the considerations presented in these sections largely focus on alternative, and arguably more accessible, avenues to build resilience in the deterrence framework and complement official U.S. doctrine and weapons capability.[98]

Prevention of Inadvertent Escalation Requires Effective Communication and Understanding of Intent

Because deterrence, by definition, is primarily a psychological state, effective and resilient deterrence requires that intent be clearly communicated, understood, and acknowledged by the party to which deterrence measures are intended.[99] As indicated previously, it appears many of the factors contributing to the current threat of nuclear escalation between the United States and Russia are based on misalignment in threat perceptions and interpretations of intent. As geopolitical situations continue to evolve, it is likely that this misalignment, along with the associated threat of nuclear escalation, will continue to increase unless a consistent and reliable system of strategic communication between the two nations can be established.

In recent years, many of the primary communication channels between Russian and U.S. strategic communities have been strained or broken. In the absence of communication with Russia, American officials and defense planners are unlikely to correctly interpret Russian intent or effectively communicate U.S. intent in all scenarios. As Gray notes, "A theory of deterrence may score a 'perfect 10' for elegance and persuasiveness to us. But, if it rests upon false assumptions about intended deterrees, the theory will be worse than useless."[100] Establishing regular opportunities for communication could provide U.S. officials with a forum to both communicate intent and better understand Russian intent to inform the development of tailored deterrence policies that anticipate and address unintended consequences that may lead to escalation. Because miscommunication is likely to lead to miscalculation and unintended escalation, both sides in such a forum would have significant incentive to communicate accurately and clearly. Reliable channels of communication can also add redun-

dancy and diversity within the deterrence framework by facilitating the establishment of diplomatic channels for conflict resolution and crisis management. Because the threat of nuclear escalation between the United States and Russia is most acute in Europe, it is prudent for the United States to engage additional NATO members in these communications with Russia.

One possible opportunity to rebuild communication avenues with Russia is to resurrect arms-control discussions. Since the Soviet era, arms-control agreements have been the backbone of efforts to reduce nuclear risk between the United States, NATO, and Russia. Arms-control discussions provided regular opportunities for realignment on issues regarding nuclear posture and strategy. However, recent breakdowns in arms-control agreements have challenged this line of communication. Currently, only the New START treaty remains in effect. As a result, Western policy makers and defense planners appear to have lost a significant amount of understanding of Russian intentions.[101] Although efforts to resurrect formal arms-control agreements are likely to be initially met with resistance in both Russia and the United States, these efforts at least will signal American resolve to address the growing risk of nuclear escalation. Moreover, in the absence of formal arms-control discussions, the president could attempt to establish informal talks for the same purpose.

Another possible opportunity for strategic communication could come from joint conferences and fora to discuss modern strategic challenges facing both Russia and the United States/NATO. Although these venues would likely not permit in-depth talks about specific tenets of nuclear doctrine, they could provide both countries greater insight into the other's strategic and cultural thought processes and threat perceptions to facilitate the creation of defense policies that are better tailored to avoid miscalculation. Opening these meetings to both military and civilian participants could strengthen informal ties between each country's strategic communities. This model could also be expanded to include additional nuclear states.

It is possible that efforts to establish strategic communication may be met with some functional limitations. One of the primary challenges is that the idea of resurrecting arms-control agreements does not appear to be very popular in Russia today. Arbatov notes that arms-control agreements are seen by the current Russian political elite as "unilateral concessions to the West."[102] In the past, efforts to resurrect arms control have also been challenged by unacceptable demands and an unwillingness to compromise. Moreover, in today's political environment, some within the United States may see efforts at establishing strategic communication channels with Russia as weakness and put domestic pressures on the president to take a tougher stance toward its government.

Even the most robust lines of communication will not enhance resilience if U.S. policy makers are not willing to come to terms with an accurate accounting of the Russian perspective. Because Russian threat perceptions are often inconsistent, sometimes contradictory, or seem unduly paranoid, many American policy makers discount them or reject them altogether.[103] However,

as Adamsky notes, "Representing reality as it is seen from Moscow is essential in order to explain the perceptions driving Russian strategic behavior, even if this analytical disposition and Russian perception may sound counterintuitive, confusing, and contradictory."[104]

Redundancy and Diversity in Command and Control Infrastructure Mitigates Risks of Miscalculation

A reliable system for mitigating the risk of inadvertent escalation also requires redundant infrastructure and protocols for detecting, identifying, and responding to potential nuclear threats. The United States is currently working to improve its space-based infrastructure for detecting and tracking missiles. However, the current system for detecting missile launches currently includes only five satellites, each of which carries a large suite of critical sensors.[105] The relatively large size and relatively small number of these satellites could make them vulnerable to attempts by Russia or other adversarial powers to disable U.S. command and control infrastructure in a conventional or nuclear conflict. This risk could be mitigated by distributing some of the sensors and functions of these systems on a larger number of smaller satellites. By distributing the function among several satellites, the loss of one satellite is less likely to cripple the entire system, and it could be more easily replaced than the existing satellites in the array. It may also preserve a sufficient level of critical nuclear command and control functions, the loss of which could trigger a nuclear response.

In addition to technical redundancy and diversity, maintaining a robust command and control infrastructure requires sustained support from policy makers. A recent study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies indicates that funding for the U.S. command and control system lacks adequate political advocacy and support.[106] Because it is relatively expensive and tied to other nuclear-related policies, the command and control system is often politicized, subjecting it to intense debate and sometimes fierce opposition. Maintaining adequate support to sustain functionality and ongoing upgrades of command and control infrastructure will therefore require greater alignment among policy makers and agreement as to its criticality in preventing inadvertent nuclear escalation.

Exercises Simulating Nuclear Escalation Could Enhance Efforts to Prevent Escalation and Restore Deterrence

U.S. and NATO war games and military exercises can also be leveraged to enhance resilience against inadvertent escalation. The purpose of deterrence is to prevent nuclear war and therefore must account for any number of ways in which it might start. Current American deterrence policies toward Russia are largely focused on putting barriers in place to prevent the onset of nuclear escalation by aggression. Such escalation would almost certainly have a catastrophic

global impact. However, Russia has very little incentive to start a nuclear war through aggression, making the probability of this scenario relatively low. An arguably more likely scenario is that the security situation in Eastern Europe would precipitate a conventional conflict in which U.S./NATO military actions, strategic misperception, or an accident caused by an operational error could create a crisis that provokes a nuclear response by Russia. Planning for this type of scenario is complicated by the fact that Russia's already uncertain operational threshold for nuclear use is likely to shift in a conflict. However, by building scenarios—based on an accurate assessment of Russian doctrine and threat perceptions—that simulate these types of challenges and uncertainties in military exercises, Western military and political decision makers can gain insights into what events Russia or the United States might most easily misinterpret and what actions are most likely to prompt a nuclear response. From these insights, policy makers and defense planners can craft resilient operational deterrence policies that better anticipate and mitigate the risks of unintended escalation.

In this way, military exercises and simulations can present unique opportunities to strengthen operational resistance against accidental or inadvertent escalation and to identify methods for reestablishing operational deterrence should initial deterrence fail. By regularly practicing operational procedures, nuclear support forces maintain a high level of readiness and institutional proficiency, which reduces the risk of accidents caused by human error. Moreover, regular exercises provide an opportunity to safely stress test U.S.–NATO deterrence and operational and declaratory policies against difficult scenarios that reflect the realities of current geopolitical conditions. Measures to strengthen adaptability could be easily incorporated into such exercises by changing scenarios dynamically to reflect evolving global challenges. By thinking through these scenarios and practicing them in a controlled environment, U.S. and NATO military and political decision makers can better identify weaknesses in current nuclear policy and outline opportunities for restoring deterrence and managing nuclear escalation should it begin.

In planning and conducting any nuclear-related exercises, it is important that the United States and NATO carefully work to avoid inadvertently communicating an escalatory message. Beatrice Heuser, Tormod Heier, and Guillaume Lasconjarias note that military exercises, including nuclear exercises, are often an important method of political communication. However, their intended message may easily be misinterpreted by an opponent.[107] Therefore, to avoid unintended messaging, it is important that the United States and NATO continually seek to improve their understanding of how Russia perceives U.S./NATO nuclear exercises. When carried out, nuclear-related exercises should adhere strictly to nonescalatory political aims and always be accompanied by clear communication and ongoing discussions between the United States/NATO and Russia. Moreover, as suggested by James A. Blackwell, careful planning of nuclear exercises to focus on broad and general nuclear training rather than

specific scenarios or specific messaging can also help to prevent or mitigate the negative effects of misinterpreted messaging.[108]

For example, exercise planning could be coupled with analyses of how proposed exercise scenarios and operations may be interpreted by adversaries to identify particular exercise details that are likely to be viewed as escalatory or provocative. This information would allow exercise planners to tailor exercise scenarios to avoid provocative elements while preserving operational training value. This information could also inform the creation of nuclear operational doctrine by highlighting nuclear operations that may be misinterpreted by Russia and help U.S. officials focus strategic communications on critical areas of misalignment. Although these measures will not fully eliminate the possibility of misinterpretation, they may reduce the risk that a military exercise will lead to inadvertent escalation.

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Irregular Warfare, Insurgencies, and Counterinsurgencies
Culture Matters

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> *The Culture of Military Organizations.* Edited by Peter R. Mansoor and William Murray. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. 482. $99.99 (hardcover); $32.99 (paperback); $26.00 (ebook). https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108622752.
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> *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures.* Edited by Beatrice Heuser and Eitan Shamir. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. 396. $89.99 (hardcover); $33.99 (paperback); $27.99 (ebook). https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316471364.
>
> *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture: Lessons Learned and Lost in America's Wars.* Jeannie L. Johnson. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018. Pp. 324. $110.95 (hardcover); $36.95 (paperback and ebook).

The three books under review examine how culture, here broadly defined, influence an organization's operational functioning, strategy development, operations, and tactics. As Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray state, "of all the factors involved in military effectiveness, culture is perhaps the most important."[1] In fact, as John A. Nagl, in his seminal work, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, points out, "the

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organizational culture of the British army allowed it to learn how to conduct a counterinsurgency campaign during the Malayan Emergency, whereas the organizational culture of the U.S. Army prevented a similar organizational learning process during and after the Vietnam War."[2] As conflicts in the twenty-first century continue to escalate in all corners of the globe, we are witnessing cultural values, traditions, and customs becoming a key ingredient of the sources of war. U.S. Air Force major general Robert H. Latiff, in his book *Future War: Preparing for the New Global Battlefield* asserts that "the modern milieu is a toxic brew of global instability, economic upheaval, political polarization, and rapid technological change on a scale not seen in several generations, perhaps ever. . . . Today's wars are more about cultural and religious hatreds, using violence as a means to change the hearts and minds of people, among whom the killing occurs with more frequency."[3]

Samuel P. Huntington and Lawrence E. Harrison in their book *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* argued that culture is a very subjective term, yet it is the glue that holds society together. The two scholars define *culture* as "the values, attitudes, beliefs, and orientations, and underlying assumptions prevalent among people in a society."[4] Cultural values and attributes are a function of many things, including a country's history and its resources. According to Brigadier General Todd R. Wasmund, "How countries perceive themselves and their role in global affairs reflects their history and their experiences. Their resources determine their relative capabilities. Countries who view themselves as global leaders, and who have more resources to generate more capable militaries are more assertive globally."[5] How a nation-state views the world is not only partially reflected on its resource capabilities but also viewed from its own cultural lens. Mansoor and Murray argue that "culture has an enormous influence on military organizations and their success or failure in war."[6] The negative consequences or failure of a military organization due to its cultural attributes results when an organization fails to adapt to its new milieu or continues to operate with outdated or inappropriate standard operating procedures (SOPs).

Mansoor and Murray in their book *The Culture of Military Organizations* see culture as a double-edged sword operating within the military milieu as both a centripetal and centrifugal force. Mansoor is a retired U.S. Army colonel and the General Raymond E. Mason Jr. Chair of Military History at Ohio State University, and William Murray is a Professor Emeritus of History at Ohio State University. As a centripetal force, culture brings nations and people together to achieve a common objective. It also provides "assumptions, ideas, and norms, and beliefs, expressed or reflected in symbols, rituals, myths, and practices, that shape how an organization functions and adapts to external stimuli and that give meaning to its members."[7] As a centrifugal force, culture can act as "a catalyst to increase the brutality of war, and in other cases to decrease it."[8] Mansoor and Murray's objective with their book is to help military leaders understand how organizational culture forms; the influence culture has on orga-

nizational functioning and the development of strategy, operations, and tactics; and how culture changes.[9] Both scholars see culture as a force multiplier. In fact, they contend that of all the factors involved in military effectiveness, culture is perhaps the most important.

Mansoor and Murray see culture as having two major impacts on an organization. First, culture creates organizational identity, that is, the distinctive attributes that make an organization different from others. Those distinctive attributes are passed on to new generations and carried on in terms of rituals, traditions, and remembrance. The distinctive attributes are a contributing factor for how the U.S. Army fights on the battlefield. For example, the Army has a tradition of fighting with overwhelming firepower and mass, using fires to shape or attrite the enemy in the deep area before the maneuver fight in the close area. The second major cultural impact on an organization, according to Mansoor and Murray, is the establishment of expectations: how the group members will act in each situation. From the author's perspective, culture is clearly a crucial determinant to the effectiveness of military organizations.

Mansoor and Murray organize their book into four parts. The first part sets up the methodological approach used throughout the book. The book is composed of 16 chapters divided into four parts. The chapters examine the organizational culture of 11 armies, two navies, a marine corps, and two air forces. While most of the cast are Western militaries, the authors also examine Indian, Imperial Japanese, and the Iraqi armies. Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras introduced the nine attributes of organizational culture developed by the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Research Program and apply them to military organizations. The nine attributes are: performance orientation, future orientation, assertiveness, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, power distance, humane orientation, uncertainty avoidance, and gender egalitarianism. In the sequent chapter, David Kilcullen from the University of New South Wales, introduces the concept of strategic culture, a closely related concept to organizational culture.

According to Kilcullen, strategic culture denotes "something different from, and more contested than, military organizational culture. The notion of strategic culture typically refers to nationally or ethnically defined, rather than institutionally modulated, cultural norms."[10] Kilcullen further explains that "strategic culture . . . is distinct from military institutional and organizational culture per se, though influencing it and tending to supersede and precede it."[11] In other words, strategic culture precedes and supersedes organizational culture. As Kilcullen illustrates, Australian strategic culture "values expeditionary power projection, ideally in cooperation with allies. This strategic culture values engagement with culturally compatible, like-minded worldwide powers, coalitions, or multilateral institutions."[12] Another contribution by Kilcullen to the discussion of culture as an important element involved in military effectiveness is the notion of subnational strategic culture. The notion of subnational strategic culture is largely absent from the literature on comparative strategic

culture, according to Kilcullen. Subnational strategic culture places a high value on loyalty and group solidarity. This sense of loyalty and group solidarity impacts "strategic culture at the national level, as well as influencing military organizational culture by helping shape self-identity."[13]

Mansoor and Murray also discuss how external factors can impact a military's organizational culture. The three most important external factors are geography, history, and the environmental milieu in which navies, armies, and air forces exist.[14] Geography, as argued by Mansoor and Murray, forms the basic context within which the past has influenced and determined the framework within which armed forces and their leaders view the world.[15] Geography, as Richard Haass argues in his book *The World: A Brief Introduction*, creates constraint. But, more importantly, "a country cannot pick up and move to another region; it is either blessed or cursed by the one it is in."[16] History is another important external factor. As Mansoor and Murray point out, "historical experience has given the Russians a strategic culture driven by fear and suspicion of the outsider and an expansionist mentality aiming to incorporate buffer states that lay along its borders, along with a deep suspicion of its neighbors that verges on the paranoiac."[17] The third of the great influences on the culture of military organizations has to do with the environment within which they operate.[18] For example, Russian president Vladimir Putin constantly speaks about Russia seeking its rightful place among the superpowers of the post–Cold War international system and the right to pursue its sovereign interests without interference in its own sphere of influence.[19] Another example that clearly illustrates the importance of the environment milieu and its impacts on a nation's cultural military organizations is India, the second-most populous country in the world and the largest democracy. The Indian Army's culture "rested on a firm foundation of its history and ethos, but it was also adaptable enough to deal with the challenging environment that occurred outside its domains."[20]

The development of Russia's army also illustrates how the three external factors contributed to its development and shaped the military organizational culture. The first Five-Year Plan (1928–32) implemented by Joseph Stalin was instrumental in transforming the Soviet Union from an agrarian society into a modern state, which needed a "modern army on a par with its European neighbors. Industrialization of the country would allow for the production of modern tools of war, especially tanks and aircraft."[21] Three important aspects of Russian culture have contributed to the Red Army's military culture. First, the importance of "geographic space to provide buffer zones and the option of trading space for time, an emphasis on mass, and an ambiguous attitude to military professionalism."[22] In the final analysis, the Red Army, rather than being a professional military organization with an established esprit de corps, was a political institution first and an army second. The Red Army was "a political army in which the Communist Party's values became so intertwined with those of the military that the two became virtually indistinguishable." Moreover, the

result "was a union of party and army what was never seriously challenged by the army, even when it impaired military effectiveness."[23]

While external factors such as geography, history, and the environmental milieu are important for the establishment and development of a military organizational culture from infancy to maturity, other factors also contribute to the creation and maintenance of a military organizational culture. For example, leadership matters. Leadership matters not only during periods of peace and stability but, most importantly, during times of crisis. Leadership is crucial to instilling organizational culture. However, the importance of leadership comes with a caveat. As Mansoor and Murray point out, "leaders . . . must be discriminating when establishing the initial culture of an organization, for once embedded, that culture will prove extraordinarily difficult to change."[24] Another important aspect of military organizational culture is its flexibility to adapt to unexpected circumstances. This ability to adapt to the state of flux with a military organizational culture is called cultural evolution. This cultural evolution, while a slow and cumulative process, is unavoidable. Military organizational culture either adapts and adopts to new circumstances or perishes with it.

As Mansoor and Murray argue, "organizations must change, or they will die; probably not in peacetime, when the penalties for failure to innovate are absent, but most certainly in war, when faced with existential crises."[25] The military organizational culture of any society should reflect its societal composition. Nevertheless, military service, especially in the United States with its all-voluntary professional army, is becoming an unfamiliar endeavor to most Americans. Mansoor and Murray in their conclusion assert that "American military culture is becoming a culture apart, with sense of common values and shared sacrifice with the country at large."[26]

Similar to Mansoor and Murray's book, Beatrice Heuser and Eitan Shamir's *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures* is a study of the extent to which national mentalities, or "ways of war," are responsible for national styles of insurgency and counterinsurgency. Beatrice Heuser is the Chair in International Relations at the University of Reading and Eitan Shamir and is a senior research fellow with the Begin Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA) in Bar-Ilan University, Israel. Their book is organized into three parts. Part 1 examines counterintelligence (COIN) strategies. Part 2 focuses on insurgency strategies. Part 3 looks at the interaction between COIN strategies and insurgency strategies. As Èlie Tenenbaum proposes, "there are supremely important trans-boundary transfers of ideas, tactics, strategies and other approaches."[27] The main research question put forward by Heuser and Shamir is: Do national mentalities, martial preferences, or strictures born of climate and geography compel a level of persistence in national styles despite acknowledgment of lessons learned from others' experiences in countering insurgents?[28] Heuser and Shamir are seeking an understanding of what is peculiar about individual insurgencies or COIN campaigns and what is generalizable.[29] In other words, Heuser and Shamir are interested in discovering whether there

are cultural or geographic boundaries on the degree to which national war-making institutions may learn from one another.[30]

Heuser and Shamir also contend that while a country or an organization may adopt a certain strategic culture, it is not static. For the authors, strategic culture "can rarely be referenced in the singular for any particular regime. There is not, typically, one internal variety."[31] Not only is there not a singular strategic culture, but all strategic culture is established by and through negotiation with competing interests and players. In other words, strategic culture is simply "the influence of organizations and other cultures on strategy."[32] Within this context of negotiation, this give and take to establish an organizational strategic culture, states "generally tend to contain several strategic cultures, but they co-exist with a common framework of reference, often in fierce debate with one another."[33] Therefore, a national style is not eternal, but it is in a constant state of flux and transformation.

An important question asked by Heuser and Shamir is whether there is a toolbox for insurgents and counterinsurgents. Obviously, the answer is yes. This toolbox contains elements of brutal, large-scale repression, indiscriminate killing, and terror as well as elements that compose the so-called hearts and minds approach. While insurgents and counterinsurgents may draw from the same toolbox, there are some exceptions that policy makers and military strategists should keep in mind. For example, both insurgents and counterinsurgents may be constrained by geography.

The United States may have the most powerful military in the world, but of what value is it if conflicts in the twenty-first century will be mostly a "war amongst the people," as argued by General Rupert Smith in *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*.[34] Another major exception may be some cultural factors or values. Hence, insurgents and counterinsurgents use the same tools in their operations. Heuser and Shamir maintain that "there is not a single national tradition of carrying out insurgencies and COIN. Instead, each country or groups of insurgents has drawn on a mix of instruments."[35] A similar argument has been put forward by Stephen Biddle regarding state and non-state entities. According to Biddle, "to treat state and nonstate military methods using categorical distinctions of kind is an oversimplification with potentially serious consequences for policy and scholarship."[36]

Jeannie L. Johnson is an assistant professor at Utah State University. She was previously an intelligence officer with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and government consultant before pursuing her PhD in political science. Johnson is also the coeditor of *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction*. In *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture: Lessons Learned and Lost in America's Wars*, Johnson examines the phenomenon of strategic culture and how the concept forces scholars and practitioners to reexamine assumptions about rational learning and come to terms with the identities, norms, values, and perceptions that shape preparation for warfare.[37] Johnson, in this seminal work, examines "aspects of Marine identity, norms, values, and perception lens

as part of a larger cultural context that helps explain the Corps' counterinsurgency footprint: the lessons it has learned and incorporated, those it has lost, and those to which it remains blind."[38]

Johnson's research simultaneously engages in three distinct veins of scholarship. First, Johnson applies a Cultural Topography Framework in her study. As she explains, "the Cultural Topography Framework is grounded in an interpretive approach that requires deep immersion in multiple sources of data in order to identify patterns in identity, norms, values, and perceptual lens for the group under study."[39] Second, Johnson's study contributes to the scholarship examining counterinsurgency history, principles, and practice.[40] And, finally, her study of the U.S. Marine Corps' "First to Fight" ethos seeks to understand the compelling and vibrant brotherhood of America's Spartans.[41] The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 provides the readers with an insight into the various cultural layers that affect Marine behavior while part 2 applies the cultural data amassed in part 1 to the question of counterinsurgency practice.[42]

Sun Tzu in his masterpiece *The Art of War* stated, "Thus it is said that one who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements. One who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes be victorious, sometimes meet defeat. One who knows neither the enemy nor himself will invariably be defeated in every engagement."[43] While this warning has been known for centuries, most insurgency and counterinsurgency theorists have a propensity to think of the former (know thy enemy) and ignore the latter (know thyself). Obviously, this approach to insurgency and counterinsurgency creates blind spots. According to Johnson, cultural blind spots can be either positive or negative. Negative blind spots "are those malpractices or misperceptions that persisted unaddressed across episodes for lack of recognition as a problem."[44] Conversely, positive blind spots "represent opportunities lost."[45]

An important concept discussed in the three books reviewed here is strategic culture. Johnson's operational definition of strategic culture is based on Jack L. Snyder's original definition first proposed in 1977. In his book *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations*, Snyder defines strategic culture as "the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation with each other with regard to nuclear strategy."[46] In other words, strategic culture is "characterized as a package of robust variables, burned out of national circumstances and experience that tend to shape the state response to security threats."[47] It is important to keep in mind that a strong organizational culture or robust variables can not only shape a state response, but it may also hinder it. For example, as Johnson explains, "Americans are also prone to believe that the generosity of their intentions will supersede any potential cultural missteps."[48]

Obviously, that is not always the case. There are several examples in the annals of insurgency and counterinsurgency where potential cultural missteps

have led to serious problems for the United States' armed forces and its mission success. The Banana Wars is just one such example. The Banana Wars involved Haiti (1915–34), the Dominican Republic (1916–24), and Nicaragua (1927–33). Johnson maintains, "Marine ambitions to remake the cultures of the Caribbean nations they oversaw were made more problematic by the ethnocentric attitudes they brought with them."[49] The Marines' behavior toward local residents in the Caribbean nations "produced a number of negative strategic consequences . . . Marine abuses produced enemies sometimes faster than they could defeat them."[50] Johnson further explains that "cultural insensitivity has repercussions beyond treatment of locals in counterinsurgency theaters—it affects relations with allies and inhibits a proper evaluation of oneself."[51] In other words, ordinary citizens became the "accidental guerrilla."

The Marine Corps COIN practices have been characterized by both continuities and changes. The Marine Corps' operational cultural narratives have been shaped by the Marine Corps' own organizational lens but also by its internal identity as the "First to Fight" culture, norms, values, and aspects of perceptual lens that continued to evolve within the Corps.[52] Some of the lessons learned involve the acquisition of intelligence. During the Banana Wars, intelligence was relatively weak, if not useless. However, that changed during the Vietnam War and further improved during the Iraq War.[53] Another important lesson learned is the value of cultural sensitivity or cultural awareness. This interest in culture emerged during the Vietnam War era. As Johnson points out, "today's Marines operate in an era in which cultural education and training has been grown across more than a decade of time and institutionalized to a much higher degree."[54] As the national security advisor to President Donald J. Trump, H. R. McMaster argued in his book *Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World*, that "education inoculates society against efforts to foment hatred and incite violence on the basis of race, religion, politics, sexual orientation or any other sub-identity."[55] While lessons have been learned, others have fallen through the strategic cultural blind spots. One such example, as Johnson points out, is the "American hubris regarding nation-building as a product of a perceptual lens that regards humans as problem-solving agents and the American nation as a possessor of exceptional keys to success."[56] In regard to the Banana Wars, the exceptional keys to success were proper economics. The improvement of a nation's economy would miraculously solve all other problems such as the low quality of life, poor education, sanitation, etc.

In conclusion, the three books reviewed here illustrate the importance of strategic culture as a unit of analysis often ignored by scholars and political leaders. Johnson suggests "the lessons lost and perennial blind spots that continue to plague American counterinsurgency efforts abroad are those born out of fundamentally misplaced notions regarding what one nation can do on behalf of another."[57] Nadia Schadlow, in her book *War and the Art of Governance: Consolidating Combat Success into Political Victory*, contends that "despite the central truth of Clausewitz's observation that war is an extension of politics by other

means, he did not draw out the operational steps taken by military forces to consolidate strategic victory as combat ends."[58] The three books reviewed offer a good starting point. The author recommends these three books to anyone interested in security studies or military history, but especially our future military leaders at the Marine Corps.

Endnotes

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