

Strategic Culture and Tailored Deterrence: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice

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Critics charge that American deterrence and counter-proliferation strategies failed to stem the tide of national security threats or hinder the spread of weapons of mass destruction over the past decade. They cite a litany of examples of seeming failures: deterrence did not prevent the terror attacks of September 11; it has not dissuaded the Medvedev–Putin government in Russia from pursuing an aggressive nuclear modernization strategy; Iran and North Korea continue to move forward with their nuclear programmes in spite of western sanctions and threats. A recent Congressional commission report warned that deterrence might not prevent a terrorist group from using weapons of mass destruction against the United States in the near future.¹

These concerns have become so pronounced that policy-makers and academics are debating the very relevance of deterrence in the 21st century.² Even long-term proponents have sought to complexify the theory to renew its place in the contemporary security dialogue. This article speaks to one dimension of recent deterrence debates by surveying innovations in the study of strategic culture. Arguments about cultural influences on strategy are grounded in classic works, including the writings of Clausewitz, who characterized war as a test of ‘moral and physical forces’, and Colin Gray, who argued that distinctive national styles, with ‘deep roots within a particular stream of historical experience’, shaped strategic development of the superpowers during the Cold War.³ Russell Weigley’s *The American Way of War* (1960) further underlined the cultural foundations of strategic dispositions, and Jack Snyder’s innovative work on Soviet nuclear strategy directed analytical attention to the link between political and military culture, and strategic choice.⁴

Academic research on strategic culture has made substantial progress, especially over the past decade, yet these insights have not been well incorporated into doctrinal statements on ‘tailored deterrence’. This is understandable, in part, because some past works on strategic culture claiming to offer sweeping explanatory power were handicapped by a combination of theoretical over-ambition and methodological limitations.⁵ The school has experienced some in-fighting as well; critiques have discouraged efforts to identify *scope conditions*, situations in which understanding culture represents distinct added value to strategic calculations. The unfortunate result has been that while policy-makers are curious, even eager, to learn about the utility of cultural models, a gap remains between academic research and actual deterrence policy and counter-proliferation strategies.

This article describes ways to better incorporate academic research in planning for tailored deterrence. Specifically, it probes links between culture and deterrence and identifies scope conditions that may heighten the potential utility of strategic

cultural models for calculations of military-security policy, including the presence of dominant cultural narratives, determined leadership, and prominent military organizations. In addition, the article identifies new areas where cultural insights may help explain the security policy patterns of non-state actors. The article does note potential limitations of the concepts of strategic culture and tailored deterrence, but maintains there is synergy between recent developments in the literatures. The study concludes with recommendations for new lines of culturally based research that may aid in tailoring deterrence in the Obama administration.

Culture and Deterrence

Links between culture and deterrence have become a pressing concern in today's complicated strategic environment. Traditional security studies characterize deterrence as rational and universal. The earliest iterations of strategic thinking about nuclear weapons, such as Bernard Brodie's *The Absolute Weapon* (1946), were framed in the context of the emerging bipolar nuclear order, and scholars focused on how to use atomic weapons to avert future wars.⁶ Albert Wohlstetter's description of the emergence of strategic deterrence between the Soviet Union and the United States suggested a classic balance of power game where the primary leverage was the threat of the use of force.⁷ Lawrence Freedman, a leading strategist, argued deterrence was 'about the role of threats in international affairs, and in particular threats of force, intended to stop others acting in harmful ways'.⁸ Ultimately, traditional deterrence theory maintained interstate rivalries could be managed – adversaries could be coerced *not* to act.

Early works on strategic culture interpreted deterrence very differently, as a social and psychological phenomenon that involves convincing the rival that one has the capability and intention to inflict unacceptable damages. In this context, it follows that cultural symbols and narratives should play a role in cross-national communication strategies. Snyder first challenged the existentialism of deterrence in the Cold War by exploring the development of Soviet and US nuclear doctrines as products of different organizational, historical, and political contexts, as well as technological constraints.⁹ In the 1980s, sociologists and anthropologists like Ann Swidler, Clifford Geertz, and Talcott Parsons proposed more complex models of the connections between culture and state behaviour, mediated by cultural 'strategies of action'.¹⁰ While not a universal solution to strategic dilemmas of the Cold War, other approaches such as Ken Booth's *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (1979) and Colin Gray's 'National Style in Strategy' (1981) also highlighted the situational nature of deterrence strategy.¹¹

Today there appears to be a convergence of interests between these two schools. Jeffrey Knopf identifies a new fourth wave of deterrence literature as distinct given its asymmetric focus on deterrence relationships between the United States and rogue states or violent non-state actors (VNSAs), and the relaxation of traditional standards of deterrence.¹² At the same time, strategic cultural studies have focused more attention on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) policy in the 21st century. Jeannie Johnson, Kerry Kartchner, and Jeffrey Larsen define strategic culture as a set of

‘shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives’.¹³ Strategic culture is characterized as a discrete force that shapes the security policy decision-making environment. It may be a function of common historical experiences, geo-strategic circumstances, elite articulations of national identity, and even myths and traditions. The legacies of colonialism play a role in modern national identity and strategic culture in African states, for example; Chinese and Russian strategic cultures appear to be steeped in history and regional rivalries (and a combination thereof, lending to historical *insecurity*).¹⁴

In addition, links between deterrence and culture have gained renewed attention as a function of the constructivist turn in international relations theory. According to Peter Katzenstein, Robert Keohane, and Stephen Krasner, constructivism recognizes the importance of ‘inter-subjective structures that give the material world meaning’, including norms, culture, identity and ideas on state behaviour or on international relations more generally.¹⁵ Cultural beliefs and values act as a distinct national lens to shape perceptions of events and even channel possible societal responses. Building on constructivist foundations, Emmanuel Adler argues that the norm of deterrence was an American construct that diffused successfully throughout the international system, even to the Soviet Union, during the Cold War. If each actor’s security is dependent upon the behaviour of their adversaries, proponents argue, there are significant incentives to promote ontological as well as material security.¹⁶

Tailored Deterrence

New scholarly conceptions of tailored deterrence lie at the intersection between the two academic traditions of deterrence and strategic culture. At first glance, this focus appears to be a departure from rational deterrence theory. Herman Kahn’s arguments about the existentialism of deterrence, resting on the bedrock of nuclear superiority, defined a generation of scholarship. Efforts to manage interstate rivalries through deterrence – and the dissonant pairing of a spiralling arms race with arms control treaties – suggest the rational value maximizing calculations underlying much of the Cold War. Optimists argue that this dissonance eventually led to a convergence of expectations regarding deterrent relationships and helped foster Mutual Assured Destruction and promote arms control agreements including SALT I.¹⁷

Yet while early deterrence theory eschewed talk of culture, the literature is rife with discussions of *persuasion* of the adversary. For instance, Thomas Schelling defines deterrence as ‘influencing the choices that another party will make, and doing it by influencing his expectations of how we will behave’.¹⁸ Alexander George and Richard Smoke add a focus on ‘the persuasion of one’s opponent that the costs and/or risks of a given course of action . . . outweigh its benefits’.¹⁹ In other words, theorists of deterrence also implicitly recognize the significance of the target of their policies. Any thoughtful attempt to reflect on coercion dynamics and persuasion generates consideration of value hierarchies and vested national interests, which, in turn, can be the product of elite strategic calculations embedded within

a larger cultural context.²⁰ Freedman takes this even a step further in a recent book, arguing that deterrence can be viewed as a ‘norms-based as much as an interests-based approach’.²¹ He adds, ‘The attraction of a norms-based approach is that it may better reflect how deterrence actually works in practice, through actors internalizing a sense of the appropriate limits on their actions’.²² These and related ideas suggest that a tailored approach to deterrence (by the academy and policy-makers) provides a ready platform for convergence.

What is Tailored Deterrence?

Studies of tailored deterrence are relatively new, yet the theory has generated significant attention from policy-makers and security analysts. One of the first official references to the concept came in a US Strategic Command (STRATCOM) doctrine in early 2004, which stated that deterrence policies should be ‘tailored in character and emphasis to address . . . fundamental differences in the perceptions and resulting decision calculus of specific adversaries in specific circumstances’.²³ This was not a rejection of deterrence *writ large* but rather recognition of the need to craft different deterrence options for different adversaries. Subsequent Joint Operating Concepts have reinforced the goal of establishing a ‘customizable approach to deterrence assessment’. In 2006, the Pentagon’s Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) declared its intention to practise tailored deterrence, defined as ‘context specific and culturally sensitive’ conception of deterrence strategy. It called for ‘developing broader linguistic capability and cultural understanding’ as the key ‘to prevail in the long war and to meet 21st century challenges’.²⁴ This, then, articulated a goal of the Bush administration to revitalize deterrence.²⁵ Policy institutes also have picked up on this research area, including a 2007 report emphasizing the importance of cultural tailoring of deterrence strategies toward Iran due to the idiosyncratic nature of its regime.²⁶

In essence, the theory of tailored deterrence demands bridging the gap between academia and policy-making. For Elaine Bunn, a policy-maker and strategist, this represents, ‘a shift from a one-size-fits-all notion of deterrence toward more adaptable approaches suitable for advanced military competitors, regional weapons of mass destruction states, as well as nonstate terrorist networks’.²⁷ She adds: ‘[D]eterrence is about influencing the perceptions – and ultimately, the decisions and actions – of another party; it is logical that requirements for deterrence will differ with each party that we might try to deter and may well differ in each circumstance or scenario’.²⁸ In these circumstances, analysts need to know more about political and cultural dynamics including values and priorities of the adversary, how they are affected by history and strategic culture, their objectives, factors in the decision-making process, and cost–benefit (risk/gain) calculations by potential adversaries. Payne argues, ‘almost all empirical assessments’ of deterrence now conclude ‘understanding the opponent, its values, motivation, and determination is critical to the success or failure of deterrence policies’.²⁹ In sum, contemporary studies recognize the importance of contextualizing the relationship when it comes to specific settings, or scope conditions within which cultural factors may play a larger role in strategic decisions.

This approach, first examined in the Bush administration, remains relevant for progressive models of deterrence today. Even mainstream studies of strategy seem to have accepted the importance of contextualizing the deterrent relationship. Michael Desch acknowledges, '[t]he new cultural theories in security studies show some promise of supplementing realist theories ... thus there is no doubt that culture matters and that the return to thinking about cultural variables will make some contribution to our understanding of post-Cold War international security issues'.³⁰ In a recent exploration of rationality and deterrence, Janice Gross Stein calls for 'a deeper understanding of the culture which shapes strategic choices', and a recognition 'that the success of deterrence is culturally contingent, as it is contingent on the cognitive styles of leaders'.³¹ In sum, cultural theories appear promising to lend greater cohesion to studies of tailored deterrence, provided we recognize some limits on conditions in which they may be most relevant.

Scope Conditions of Strategic Culture and Tailored Deterrence

Academic research on strategic culture suggests at least three scope conditions in which knowledge of military-security culture may help tailor deterrence. First, studies show that strategic culture may be especially important for tailoring deterrence toward countries that have strongly established national cultural identities. Second, strategic cultural dynamics of deterrence appear significant when leaders ally themselves closely with historical narratives and traditions. Third, consistent with the organizational culture literature, strategic culture may be manifest in dominant military cultures, which in turn shapes strategic choices.³² An additional question at the intersection of culture and deterrence today is how strategic culture may provide useful perspectives for deterrence of violent non-state actors.

Strong National Cultural Identity

Detailed knowledge of strategic culture may be important for tailoring deterrence toward countries that have strong national cultural identities. This is seen readily in states where there is a highly dominant historical narrative. For example, experts often link the government of China with a strong strategic cultural identity. According to John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, China's historical narrative is deeply rooted in experiences such as the Warring States period (475 to 221 BC), and later, the '100 years of humiliation' in which China fought off numerous invaders.³³ In this case, cultural lessons are magnified by a dominant narrative, Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, composed during the time of the Warring States.³⁴ One of the lessons derived from this history appears to be an emphasis on preserving an image of strength, and today analysts draw links to China's contemporary force modernization programmes. Andrew Scobell suggests that the China has a strategic cultural predisposition for the offensive use of force, demonstrating a risk-taking style of coercive diplomacy in crisis situations.³⁵ Similar studies suggest the prominence of strategic cultural narratives in a number of countries.³⁶

Recent literature on strategic culture also focuses on authoritarian states, implying that there are more measurable or identifiable strains manifest in certain types of

political ideology, doctrine, and discourse. Contemporary studies of North Korea and Iran emphasize the power of strategic culture in shaping policy choices. North Korea has developed a highly focused core ideology of self-reliance (*Juche*) which defines a strategic culture appears to prioritize national security over all other policy concerns. This may help to explain that country's seemingly relentless drive for nuclear weapons. The cult of personality of Kim Jong-Il also ensures some measure of continuity in expression of military priorities and other security orientations. Similarly, studies of Iran suggest a definable strategic culture. Iran's strategic culture may be rooted in a nearly 3,000-year history of Persian civilization that lends itself to a combination of feelings of 'cultural superiority', 'manifest destiny', coupled with a 'deep sense of insecurity'.³⁷ Gregory Giles argues that, 'specific attributes of Shi'ism, which was adopted by Persia in the sixteenth century, both reinforce and expand certain traits in Iranian strategic culture'.³⁸ Experts believe that Iran seeks a nuclear capability as a symbol of national pride, as well as a way to deter the United States, gain influence in the Middle East region and achieve status and power internationally. Broadly speaking, strategic cultural models might work best for authoritarian states where there is typically a singular historical narrative.

Ethnic national homogeneity may be another indicator of the strength of strategic culture. Thomas Berger's study of Japanese security policy reticence in the post-Cold War era focuses on its unique, 'anti-militarist' strategic culture, for example. While Japan's economic and technological power placed it in a position to become an economic and even military superpower at the end of the Cold War, the persistent postwar culture of anti-militarism continues to constrain Japanese security policy.³⁹ How does ethnic homogeneity account for strong national security cultures? John Duffield suggests that common ties including ethnicity and historical experience make some societies more 'culturally bound'. Such groups adopt strong narratives and tend to disregard alternative worldviews.⁴⁰ Cultural beliefs and values act as a distinct national lens to shape perceptions of events and even channel possible societal responses. In this sense, Berger argues, 'cultures enjoy a certain degree of autonomy and are not merely subjective reflections of concrete 'objective' reality'.⁴¹ This can be characterized as a group 'psychological phenomenon of consistency seeking', where '[i]nformation that reinforces existing images and beliefs is readily assimilated, while inconsistent data tend to be ignored, rejected, or distorted in order to make them compatible with prevailing cognitive structures'.⁴² One may also see ties between homogeneity and Scandinavian strategic cultural identity. Nina Graeger and Halvard Leira describe the cultural identity of a cohesive Norwegian state during the Cold War, and Henrikki Heikka captures the unique strategic cultural themes of Finland.⁴³

The implications of these factors for tailored deterrence appear significant. For example, it may be possible for American policy-makers to categorize the strength of strategic cultural narratives in relation to adversary behaviour. At a minimum, analytic constructs or contemporary models of deterrence should have within them a dimension of national cultural identity calculations. Adversaries with a fairly cohesive and strong ideological identity should be recognized as such. This may be seen most readily in countries where governments and citizens regularly reference

dominant historical narratives or traditions to define, or legitimize, their view of the strategic situation.

Iran represents a state that has a strong cultural narrative, an authoritarian system, a dominant religious ideology, and control by a single identity group. In this case Reuel Gerecht, a former CIA Middle East analyst, warns of a gap between academic understandings of the importance of religious values in Iran and actual policy-making. He fears that Iranian intentions may be too easily misinterpreted by policy-makers due to mirror-imaging.⁴⁴ Mindful of such concerns, new initiatives by the Obama administration to dissuade the Iranians from pursuing nuclear weapons do appear more tailored. In the spring of 2009, for example, President Obama stated that the United States has 'core national security interests in making sure that Iran doesn't possess a nuclear weapon and it stops exporting terrorism outside of its borders'. At the same time, he reportedly delivered a secret letter to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, calling for improved relations between the two countries. The letter invited negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme as well as promising opportunities for 'cooperation in regional and bilateral relations'.⁴⁵ High-level personal appeals represent one of best ways to tailor messages to leaders of Muslim states who are potential adversaries. In this context, cultural framing of both the message and the medium appears highly significant. Even in the wake of the disputed election and the crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Iran in 2009, the administration held out hope for a negotiated settlement of the nuclear issue. While no guarantee of success, this approach emphasizes the importance of viewing the dynamics of deterrence and communication as mediated through a cultural lens.⁴⁶

Elite Allegiance to Tradition

Strategic culture can aid in tailoring deterrence toward potential adversaries when leaders associate themselves closely with dominant historical narratives or traditions. Constructivists remind us of the utility of viewing the relationship between elite views and strategic cultures as mutually constitutive. Leaders regularly use historical symbols or cultural touchstones to define their own declared views of politics – or even to legitimize their own control within a broader narrative – offer another dimension for framing leadership studies.

Sanjoy Banerjee and Karsten Frey demonstrate how the 'strategic elite' represent the primary keepers of strategic culture or purveyors of the common historical narrative.⁴⁷ Numerous studies of strategic culture suggest the power of elite discourse in perpetuating ideological and cultural struggles throughout the ages. For example, Snyder benefited from past studies of leaders of the Soviet Politburo (such as Nathan Leites' work) in his treatment of the importance of cultural dynamics in shaping Soviet nuclear strategy. This author also identifies the power of leaders as the keepers of strategic culture, or purveyors of the common historical narrative.⁴⁸

Most scholars agree that elites are instrumental in defining foreign policy goals and the scope and direction of policy restructuring in the face of new challenges. Drawing on the political psychology literature, Jacques Hymans contends that identity is as much subjective as inter-subjective and that leaders sometimes adopt

their own specific conceptions of national identity from among a competitive marketplace of ideas.⁴⁹ Hymans suggests that nuclear decisions are rooted in the national identity conceptions (NICs) of leaders that are functions of social context.⁵⁰ Understanding different NICs, Hymans contends, can help predict whether leaders will ultimately decide to take their country nuclear. Furthermore, there is a general consensus in the literature that elites are cognitively predisposed to maintain the status quo. Bruce Jentleson and Christopher Whytock highlight the importance of elites socialized by strategic culture: even dictatorships cannot fully insulate themselves from elites within their own governments and societies. To the extent that elite interests are threatened by compliance with the coercing state's demands, they will act as 'circuit breakers' by blocking the external pressures on the regime. When their interests are better served by policy concessions, elites become 'transmission belts', carrying forward the coercive pressure on the regime to comply.⁵¹

What are the implications of strong leadership for tailored deterrence? Dominant leaders who link themselves to prevailing cultural narratives may have a profound impact on security policy. If, drawing from insights in constructivism, one views the relationship between elites and strategic cultures as mutually constitutive, the leaders themselves become an important target of tailored deterrence initiatives. Elite allegiance to strategic culture also may be understood through the lens of emerging scholarship on identity and strategic choice. George emphasizes, 'the effectiveness of deterrence and coercive diplomacy is highly context dependent'.⁵² Much of the existing literature on strategic culture tends to focus on its role in authoritarian states, implying that there are more measurable strains of strategic culture manifest in certain types of political ideology, doctrine, and discourse. But recent case studies also suggest the power of elites to carry forward and shape strategic culture. Glenn Chafetz, Hillel Abramson, and Suzette Grillot suggest that the leaders of Ukraine and Belarussia demonstrated different attitudes toward acceding to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) after the collapse of the Soviet Union, partly as a function of strategic cultural orientations.⁵³ Rodney Jones' study of Indian strategic culture emphasizes the interplay between leaders and a complex historical foundation. While deeply influenced by history, he argues, 'India's strategic culture is elite-driven and patrician-like rather than democratic in inspiration or style'. Successful leaders tap into a larger common historical narrative, the 'near mystical features of India's strategic culture' in shaping policy decisions.⁵⁴ Murhaf Jouejati's study of Syrian strategic culture suggests that the al-Assad family has identified closely with Ba'athist secular traditions in the region to promote their own interests.⁵⁵

Tailoring deterrence toward potential adversaries involves the identification of political leaders and elites, as well as individuals in the national military command, who should be the targets of important threat (or incentive) messages. American responses to North Korea's nuclear weapon tests in 2006 and 2009 may demonstrate the evolution of deterrence messages. In 2006 President Bush declared that it was in the United States national interests to prevent North Korea from developing nuclear weapons. He added, in no uncertain terms that the United States would 'hold North Korea fully accountable for the consequences' if it provided nuclear

weapons or materials to other countries or non-state actors.⁵⁶ In early 2009 the Obama administration appears to have diversified its instruments of diplomacy – from opening a back-channel to North Korea and pushing a new set of highly targeted sanctions through the UN Security Council focused on individuals and firms doing business with that country. Former President Clinton’s surprise visit and personal meetings with Kim Jong-il in August 2009 seemed to augment policies and messages targeted at select individuals in the leadership structure.

Strong Military Organizational Culture

One of the more promising contributions of strategic culture to the security studies literature has been to spur on examinations of military organizational culture.⁵⁷ As Kartchner suggests, the concept of strategic culture is undergoing a revival in part because it has become essential to better understand the reasons, incentives, and rationales behind WMD policy, but also because it identifies diverse actors who matter for strategic choice.⁵⁸ Both contributions represent advances for traditional deterrence theory.

The organizational culture literature characterizes strategic choice as a function of specific institutional orientations, or prevailing cultures, within the military. Indeed, the organizational culture literature is impressively well developed. Prominent works such as Carl Builder’s *Masks of War* (1989) suggest the prevalence of military organizational culture in the American context. Jeffrey Legro’s *Cooperation under Fire* (1995) explores the motivations and sentiments behind the seemingly ‘irrational’ Anglo-German restraints practised during World War II.⁵⁹ Elizabeth Kier also describes the significance of organizational culture in the development of French military doctrine.⁶⁰ Theo Farrell stresses the importance of locating military actors within a social structure that both constitutes those actors and is constituted by their interactions.⁶¹ Collectively, these works identify cultural foundations of military doctrines and operational patterns.

The contemporary organizational culture literature is clearly influenced by constructivism. For example, Lynn Eden argues that ‘organizational frames’ are highly significant for strategic choice. These frames are developed by institutions to identify problems and find solutions. They include, ‘what counts as a problem, how problems are represented, the strategies used to solve those problems, and the constraints and requirements placed on possible solutions’.⁶² Constructivists remind us of the ability of norm entrepreneurs to interpret events, frame the discourse, and construct a new consensus. Related work on national military and political identities also suggests the potential for construction on ideational foundations.⁶³ For example, Kang argues that organizational cultures in South Korea and Vietnam are influenced by decades of experience operating in the shadow of China in the Asian security sphere.⁶⁴

Military organizational culture may be significant in different states. There are significant strategic and organizational subcultures within the American military that effectively debate policy every day: Weigley’s identification of the American way of warfare appears to hold true in many circumstances; Max Boot’s predictions for American intervention in the periphery also resonate.⁶⁵ In a recent comparison of

Australian and Canadian military postures, Alan Bloomfield and Kim Richard Nossal link the divergent paths in the military organizations and security policies of these two 'strategic cousins' to differences in strategic culture.⁶⁶ At the same time, studies of the Nordic region suggest that issues such as the professionalism of the military, doctrines, civil–military relations and procurement practices also may affect strategic culture.⁶⁷ Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot's study of Ukrainian and Belarussian strategic choices also highlight how distinct military–security cultures may shape policies toward nuclear nonproliferation. While Belarussia has seemed more culturally disposed to accommodation of international nonproliferation pressures, the Ukrainian political and military leadership appeared to see themselves as a great power worthy of nuclear weapons status.⁶⁸

Thus, contemporary studies tell us that military organizational culture has a significant impact on strategic choice, and the implications of these studies for tailored deterrence appear significant. Any programme for tailoring deterrence or dissuasion should have within it a dimension of military organizational considerations. Here, American efforts to dissuade Israel from conducting a military strike on Iran may provide an interesting case in point. If one accepts Obama administration rhetoric in the summer of 2009 at face value – that it was seeking to dissuade the government of Israel from launching a pre-emptive strike on Iran's suspected nuclear facilities – then tailoring messages to leaders of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) would be essential. In a recent study of Israeli military culture, Gil-li Vardi describes it as characterized by a 'stubborn persistence of accepted patterns of thought and action' then the military is likely to pursue past courses of success. 'Recurring instinctive responses', Vardi argues, 'indicate a prolonged stagnation in its military thought'.⁶⁹ Given past success with Israeli airstrikes against nuclear facilities in Iraq and Syria, one might assume that the IDF advocates a similar plan for the new Iranian threat. One lesson for tailoring dissuasion, in this case, would be to convey messages clearly to both civilian and military leaders regarding the preferred policies (negotiation, it seems). This may have occurred during a series of high-level visits by leaders to Israel in 2009.

Strategic Culture and Deterrence of Violent Non-State Actors

The strategic culture literature may also speak to the debate about whether terrorist groups or other transnational actors can be deterred at all. Indeed, cultural approaches seem to offer a common frame of reference for both state and non-state actors, regardless of other differences. This is, of course, hotly debated in the contemporary literature. Some adopt a statist approach, arguing that policies aimed at deterring VNSAs are futile. In the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, prominent strategists such as Richard Betts argued deterrence had 'limited efficacy . . . for modern counterterrorism'.⁷⁰ Because al Qaeda does not mirror the top-down organizational construct that dominates militaries or governments, Marc Sageman warns, deterrence may be very difficult in practice. Other pessimists say that the idea of rationality simply does not apply to VNSAs, who represent radical groups that calculate 'risks and rewards in ideological and religious terms'.⁷¹ One RAND study concludes that faced with the

challenge of modern suicide terror attacks, 'the concept of deterrence is both too limiting and too naïve to be applicable to the war on terrorism'.⁷²

Conversely, other experts contend that VNSAs have identifiable organizational cultures, can be rational, and may be deterred. Robert Trager and Dessislava Zagorchev argue, 'the assertion that terrorists are highly irrational is contradicted by a growing body of literature that shows that terrorist groups (though not necessarily every individual who engages in terrorist activities) usually have a set of hierarchically ordered goals and choose strategies that best advance them'.⁷³ Crenshaw maintains that there is a fundamental 'strategic logic' to terrorism, and that 'the resort to terror tactics itself is a strategic choice of weaker actors with no other means of furthering their cause'. Jerry Long postulates that the study of strategic culture of some non-state actors, especially organized terrorist groups or liberation movements, may actually be *easier* than the study of state strategic cultures.⁷⁴

One of the more promising themes of contemporary strategic cultural studies has been an effort to identify the 'keepers' of strategic culture. Past work tended to describe political and strategic cultures as the, 'property of collectivities rather than simply of the individuals that constitute them'.⁷⁵ However, this author and others have begun to challenge the deep, but vague, cultural foundations of state behaviour found in the literature. Non-state actors ranging from small groups to large transnational organizations may be recognized as having definable strategic cultures and that key actors in these organizations may be identified as keepers of that culture. In this sense they may be no different from states in that strategic culture is a function of the socialization of values and beliefs over time. If historical memory, political institutions, and multilateral commitments shape state strategic culture, then, recent studies observe, it would seem plausible to accept that non-state actors will adopt their own unique perspectives. Thus, modern strategic culture scholarship provides a useful set of tools to examine how and why state and non-state actors take strategic decisions.

Building on distinctions of 'deterrence by punishment' and 'deterrence by denial', David Auerswald argues that it may be possible to both signal threats and carry out punitive actions against VNSAs.⁷⁶ He believes that in the short term the most effective message is to 'convincingly signal that we have the ability to prevent terrorist groups from achieving their goals through violence', but he also emphasizes the 'intrinsic advantages' of deterrence by denial strategies.⁷⁷ Trager and Zagorcheva emphasize that for both strategies to be successful, 'two conditions must hold: the threatened party must understand the (implicit or explicit) threat, and decision-making by the adversary must be sufficiently influenced by calculations of costs and benefits'.⁷⁸ Beyond denial strategies to prevent terrorist organizations from obtaining materials needed to develop WMD, cultural analysis provides us with insights on how best to influence the spiritual, financial, and educational foundations of terrorist movements. For example, Whiteneck contends that the west has a special advantage in 'deterring state sponsorship – with an emphasis on effectively 'communicating what might happen, rather than what will happen'.⁷⁹ He calls for efforts to 'reduce the ideological resonance' of terrorist groups by launching public relations and information campaigns designed to paint alternative pictures of American ties

to the Middle East. Thus, a more comprehensive approach to deterrence of non-state actors that addresses interests, capabilities, threats, and the foundational roots of VNSAs may be the most effective.⁸⁰

Cultural analysis suggests that al Qaeda seems a particularly promising target for tailoring deterrence. There appears to be a strong link between ideological foundations, historical narratives, and beliefs and al Qaeda's drive to obtain WMD for acts of violence.⁸¹ Leaders espouse a fairly consistent set of statements about ideology and beliefs. They operate on a strong historical narrative that includes grievances against the United States and other western powers. The network has enjoyed past sponsorship by governments and safe haven in stateless regions. And because al Qaeda leaders themselves seem less willing to die for the cause that they espouse, their personal interests and assets may be subject to the threat of punishment. At the same time, a general deterrence strategy that lacks accompanying messages of 'respect and recognition', as well as 'positive incentives to address historic grievance' may fail.⁸² Deterring non-state actors (as well as states) effectively means targeting the right audience with the right messages.

It is important to note that the American government has modified its deterrence strategies toward terrorist groups over the years after September 11. According to one analysis, the Bush administration's doctrine of pre-emption and unilateralism did not mean the end of deterrence. Rather, policy-makers focused heavily on deterrence by denial (hardening targets around the world, for example) and then sought new opportunities for deterrence by punishment operating on the basic premise of 'finding possible equivalents of physical territory to hold at risk'.⁸³ The director of strategic plans and policy for the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggests that terrorism by al Qaeda and its supporters can be deterred if they become convinced 'The goal you set won't be achieved, or you will be discredited and lose face with the rest of the Muslim world'.⁸⁴ It appears that the Obama administration is practising a two-pronged strategy, including: (1) creating openings for dialogue on issues of cultural and religious honour – by promoting an image of respect for the Muslim world through public messages, opening new avenues for negotiated settlements of contentious issues such as the Arab–Israeli dispute, and ordering a phased withdrawal from Iraq; and (2) threatening material security and 'virtual territory' of VNSAs – stepping up targeted strikes on leaders through CIA drone attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan and backing Pakistani initiatives to crack down on insurgent groups. This more progressive strategy would seem to have potential to deter or dissuade future terrorist violence.⁸⁵

Conclusion

This article has identified a set of scope conditions that may provide stronger links between academic research on strategic culture and doctrinal development. Specifically, it contends that strong national cultural identities, dominant leaders, and powerful military organizations are important players in strategic development as well as important receptors for strategic targeting. And while some doctrinal statements on tailored deterrence were formulated during the Bush administration, cultural

dimensions continue to be relevant for progressive models of deterrence in the Obama administration and beyond.

Broadly speaking, this study has several implications for policy-making and academic research. First, while the lack of cultural understanding may not be sufficient to cause deterrence failures, defence planners should more openly embrace the theme of variation in instruments and incentive structures associated with deterrence of specific threats. This is not to say that government strategists fail to recognize variation in national interest calculations. Indeed, the actual record of American behaviour in the past four years since the appearance of the concept suggests that both Bush administration and Obama administration strategists are mindful of the need for gradation in deterrence policies. However, there remains a gap between basic doctrinal statements and the kinds of contemporary academic research initiatives that are underway. The extent to which the government reaches out to academics for assistance in refining scope conditions and enhancing cross-national comparative studies of strategic culture will play a role in determining the success of tailoring deterrence in the modern era.

Second, acceptance of this need for variation in deterrence strategies should, whenever possible, incorporate more sophisticated levels of attention to institutions, values, and culture in target countries. As one senior State Department official in the Bush administration, Kerry Kartchner, argued, '[s]trategic culture offers the promise of providing insight into motivations and intentions that are not readily explained by other frameworks, and that may help make sense of forces we might otherwise overlook, misunderstand, or misinterpret'.⁸⁶ Organizational culture can be especially significant in shaping security policy. Jouejati argues that Syria's defeats in aerial combat in the Arab–Israeli wars prompted key military and government officials to embark on a ballistic missile and chemical weapons programme as a means of deterrent.⁸⁷ Framing adversary conceptions of material concerns in a cultural context also may be helpful. Threats communicated by President George H.W. Bush directly to Saddam Hussein to deter the use of chemical and biological weapons in the first Persian Gulf War seem to have effectively conveyed the sense of physical and civilizational/cultural security at risk. Finally, these links are of real interest to policy-makers. A more nuanced approach to tailored deterrence may help overcome what a recent Defense Science Board study called 'problems of strategic communication'.⁸⁸

Third, more cross-national comparisons are needed for systematic attention to cultural determinants of strategy. Studies of strategic culture often apply the theory to a single case or make general comparisons with other like-minded countries. More rigorous cross-national comparison can promote cumulative knowledge in the field. As Stein argues, different strategic cultures may mediate the effectiveness of types of deterrence messages. It is imperative that we set about a more systematic approach to understanding these effects. Tailoring deterrence policies to address the ideational foundations of material national security interests seems an especially promising theme of investigation.

Fourth, it is possible that external threats create a sort of cultural resonance whereby a strong national identity becomes even stronger. States tend to hew close

to primary values and interests when under duress, but the strategic culture literature suggests that cultural and ideational concerns may be nearly as important as material interests in such situations. Some studies focus on geopolitical considerations related to threat such as proximity to great powers. Others focus on crises as catalysts for cultural rallying. In no case does this argument have more resonance than in contemporary studies of American foreign policy responses to the September 11 attacks. Mahnken describes ways that prevailing ideas and traditions have helped shape the Bush Doctrine and the adoption of a strategy of pre-emption.⁸⁹ Faced with material threats to security, the United States embraced a policy programme consistent with both immediate security responses and long-standing cultural values and traditions.⁹⁰ The degree to which the Bush administration characterized the attacks as a fundamental challenge to values such as freedom and liberty underscore the near-parallel importance of ideational factors in foreign policy. Another dimension of the response, a willingness to engage in wars against insurgent groups in far away locales, also appears consistent with American strategic culture.⁹¹

In summary, recent advances in the strategic culture literature offer contributions for application of tailored deterrence. While there are limits to the explanatory power of strategic cultural studies – and much more work needs to be done – there does appear to be a convergence of interest in these two literatures around the theme of contextualizing strategic choice. The scope conditions within the strategic culture literature developed here may help promote more reflective models of deterrence and dissuasion for the 21st century.

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