The Evolution of Strategic Culture in Counterterrorism Studies

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1. Research Topic Area

International relations scholars increasingly use 'strategic culture' as a construct to explain how political leaders and security communities make strategic decisions and preferences. However, there are multiple definitions and the term is used inconsistently from several different stances. This project examines why this confusion exists and how strategic culture is used in the subfield of counterterrorism studies to understand terrorist individuals and organisations, and reflexively, analysts and the policies that they develop. Two key confusions exist: (1) scholars use 'strategic culture' inconsistently, and (2) counterterrorism studies lacks coherence, rigour and accreditation mechanisms (Stampnitzky 2008). These concerns recapitulate a similar disciplinary debate during and after the Cold War about the status of strategic studies, and its coherence, growth and survival as a sub-field of international security (Bull 1968; Betts 1997; Buzan and Hansen 2009).

Many scholars credit Jack Snyder (1977) with coining strategic culture for a RAND study on Soviet political elites and nuclear weapons. Snyder however built his research program on Columbia's Robert Jervis and others, and this overlooks previous work. Aberystwyth University's Ken Booth developed a second research program that argued much international relations scholarship was ethnocentric and needed a global focus (Booth 2007). Harvard's Alastair Johnston (1995) attempted to consolidate the field in contrasting these two research programs with his Popperian focus on falsifiable theories. Subsequent work (Gray 2007; Porter 2009) debates Johnston's 'three generations' distinction between Synder, Booth, and his own research, which has led to nine further PhD dissertations.

Johnston's definition adopts a Geertzian anthropological framework:

> Strategic culture is an integrated system of symbols (i.e. argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors, etc.) that acts to establish persuasive and long-lasting grand strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious. (Johnston 1995: 36)

The divergence in views from Johnston illustrates how strategic culture is understood as a variable, a mid-range theory, and also a series of overlapping research programs. However, strategic culture is used as an inconsistent construct, due to multiple definitions, stances, and contexts of use. To-date, strategic culture has been applied to national security policy (Lantis 2002), constructivist models of security communities (Lock 2010), historical grand strategy (Lebow, 2009), and to the US military's renewal of counterinsurgency policies under General David Petraeus (Porter 2009). Increasingly, scholars look to anthropological and ethnographic research to better understand what strategic culture is and how it varies across groups (Barnard 2000: 10-12).

This anthropological work represents a departure from Cold War era frameworks that were state-centric and concerned 'balance of power' and deterrence theories. For instance, Cronin (2003 and 2009) notes that in counterterrorism studies, strategic culture has been applied in two dimensions: (1) in national security policies for inter-state alliances; and (2) in targeting 'communities of support' and understanding insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan. The latter has grown in significance despite continued debates between international relations scholars about September 11 and international system structure (Brenner 2006).

As a pragmatic subfield counterterrorism has adopted strategic culture in order to understand new adversaries. However, culturally determinist interpretations of strategic culture also proved limited as Al Qaeda and other groups adapted to local conditions, and proved more resilient than trend-based models suggested (Filkins 2008; Porter 2009). Other countries had their own national security priorities and, in some cases, their own experiences with terrorist groups. Strategic culture is thus a framework that spans the adversary studied, the analyst, and the national security measures used. The inconsistencies in academic scholarship have not prevented strategists and practitioners from using it to understand militia and insurgent forces, and to negotiate inter-state alliances in order to coordinate international counterterrorism policies and programs.

Counterterrorism researchers and strategists have adopted strategic culture in specific ways that appear to differ from the state-centric literature of international relations theorists and international security. Harvard's Jessica Stern experienced 'cognitive dissonance' during early interviews with Kerry Noble of the Covenant, Sword and Arm of the Lord (Stern 2003: xiii-xviii), in which Stern's 'theories-in-use' were incomplete. This 'encounter' narrative has its echoes in other post-September 11 trends such as interest in the 'moral calculus' of political violence (Vollmann 2004: 438-515), patterns of terrorist innovation (Dolnik 2007), and the re-evaluation of 'old terrorism' groups in a deeper historical context (Varon 2004). It also reflects how counterterrorism analysts are adopting autoethnographic and multi-ethnographic techniques for reflexive analysis (Davis and Ellis 2008). As groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah develop quasi-state structures (Krueger 2008) their growth also suggests that the earlier, state-centric models of strategic culture may now be applied to these organisations (Snyder 1977; Johnston 1995; Gray 2007).

This renewed interest in strategic studies occurs during doctrinal flux and institutional adaptiveness around counterinsurgency and war-fighting experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan (Ucko 2009). Civilian perspectives may differ from 'classicist' and 'war college' traditions. Thus, this projects seeks to understand the varied uses of strategic culture in these different contexts, and how has a framework it can be applied to understand both counterterrorism policymakers, and to terrorist individuals and groups. In doing so, the project will provide insights and new understandings on the construct validity of strategic culture, to inform the craft of strategists and decision-makers.

2. Personal Motivation and Interest

This project builds on a personal 'program of research' about theory-building in national security policymaking, investigative journalism and cultural/creative industries. It consolidates experiences over a 17 year period including: (i) early online experiences after the 1993 Waco siege and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing; (ii) anthropological and sociological research into new religious movements; (iii) experiences as the former site editor of the US-based news site Disinformation® including a New York City visit on 20th-25th September 2001; and (iv) past Masters level study in counterterrorism, international security and strategic foresight. Publications to-date have been in other streams of my personal 'program of research'. The project's development goals include building expertise in the comparative analysis of national security cultures (Lantis 2002), multi-method research design (Biddle 2004: 9-11), and foreign policy analysis (Deibel 2007).

3. Fields of Knowledge

This project deals predominantly with counterterrorism studies as a disciplinary subfield of national security policymaking. Counterterrorism is related to other pragmatic subfields such as intelligence studies and strategic studies. Its knowledge base draws more broadly on anthropology, psychology, security studies, and international relations theory.

Strategic culture first arose in Cold War discussions of deterrence theory, great power politics and national security elites (Snyder 1977). Subsequent discussions (Johnston 1995; Gray 2007; Porter 2009; Lock 2010) have occurred in constructivist international relations, strategic studies and international security. The project draws on these areas to understand the variations in how strategic culture is conceptualised.

Counterterrorism studies and strategic studies remain highly contested subfields. Stampnitzky (2008) suggests counterterrorism studies lacks a coherent and stable knowledge base, credible experts, and accreditation mechanisms. Herman and O'Sullivan (1989) and Mueller (2009) suggest counterterrorism is a government-driven market which is susceptible to propaganda and threat escalation. Bull (1968) and Betts (1997) have noted similar Cold War era concerns about strategic studies and devised frameworks to track the subfield's growth and institutional influence. Naftali (2006) and Buzan and Hansen (2009) have each undertaken discipline-level analysis of counterterrorism and international security studies which this project draws on for its approach. Issues of institutional influence, discipline-level development, relationship to parent fields and subfields, and methodological pluralism arise throughout this project and the varied use of strategic culture as an analytical construct.

Field of Research (FoR) codes for this project are 1606 (political science) informed by 1601 (anthropology) and 8101 (defence). RFCD codes are 160604 (defence studies), 160105 (social and cultural anthropology), and 160607 (international relations). SEO codes are 810105 (intelligence), 810107 (national security), and 9599 (other cultural understanding).

4. Project Aims

Project aims include:

• Clarifying strategic culture as an ideational variable in counterterrorism and strategic studies contexts, informed by the sociology of knowledge creation, applied subfields and debates in parent fields such as international relations theory. Mapping out the academic researchers, institutions and theoreticians who are involved in these debates, similar to past work in strategic studies and international security (Buzan and Hansen 2009; Betts 1997; Bull 1968).

• Contributing to a coherent knowledge base in academic counterterrorism studies through testing the rigour of influential frameworks, models and theories that to-date are accepted without in-depth evaluation (Stampnitzky 2008).

• Developing a set of comparative case studies like Cronin (2009) and Martel (2006) that evaluates under what contextual, micro conditions strategic culture can provide relevant insights for foreign policy decision-makers and intelligence analysts. The comparative case studies will identify "pretheories" to re-evaluate the accepted frameworks. Pretheories involve "the process of conceptual exploration that is designed to identify carefully and observe relationships in a field of inquiry, and subsequently to formulate organising principles and testable theories" (Martel 2006: 91). They provide the conceptual groundwork to develop formal theories and models in future projects, once I have gained the necessary methodological training and expertise.

5. Research Methodology and Provisional Timelines

Biddle (2004) and Johnston (1995) note that international relations and security scholars increasingly use mixed methods approaches.

This project uses a mixed methods research approach informed by Biddle (2004), Ucko (2009), Johnston (1995), Martel (2006) and Cronin (2009). This project draws on research methods from anthropology (Barnard 2000), foreign policy analysis (Deibel 2007), historiography (Trachtenberg 2006), thematic review, comparative case study development, and causal inference. It maps out three levels of analysis: (1) strategic culture as a theoretic and analytical construct with different understandings and levels of analysis; (2) disciplinary crises in counterterrorism studies and historical parallels in strategic studies; and (3) comparative case studies of significant, novel individuals and groups that illustrate strategic culture principles, using interpretivist, anthropological and multi-ethnographic data from counterterrorism studies.

Different views exist on strategic culture as a construct: it is used to describe historical grand strategy (Johnston 1995), national security policy (Lantis 2002; Snyder 1977), and decision-making in civil and military organisational cultures (Gray 2007). This project's first step is to review the existing literature for the critical assumptions and argumentation that different authors use, in order to find the inconsistencies. I will map the different levels of analysis, practitioner stances, and contexts of use. This approach is necessary to develop

comparative models that move beyond the accepted view of three generations of strategic culture theorists (Johnston 1995; Lock 2010). It is also necessary to understand why strategic culture is pervasively and yet inconsistently used in the international relations, security and strategic studies literature.

Counterterrorism imposes unstable disciplinary boundaries on strategic culture, similar to variations noted in international security (Buzan and Hansen 2009). Stampnitzky (2008) suggests the field evolves through event-driven growth periods, such as from 1972-78 and 2001-09, after the 1972 Munich Olympics and September 11, respectively. However, the field lacks a coherent body of knowledge, accreditation mechanisms, and academic researchers face competition from 'idea entrepreneurs', journalists and think tanks.

Two major problems are unstructured data and the rapid expansion of data during the event-driven growth periods, comparable to speculative bubbles in financial markets (Shiller 2006). To map these discipline-level crises, I will re-examine Edward S. Herman and Gary O'Sullivan's (1989) propaganda hypothesis, and variants proposed after September 11 by John Mueller (2009), and others. This will enable me to map out different evolutionary pathways, dynamics and trajectories, beyond Stampnitzky's (2008) event-driven and crisis models.

To do so, I will draw on several publicly available datasets, archives and interviews:

> • *Datasets*: These will include the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST) (http://cpost.uchicago.edu/), the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) (http://www.start.umd.edu/start/), and RAND's Voices of Jihad (http://www.rand.org/research_areas/terrorism/database/) databases for event coding and time series data.

> • *Archives*: These will include the Federation of American Scientists (http://www.fas.org), the National Security Archive at George Washington University (http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/), and the Congressional Research Service (http://www.loc.gov/crsinfo/). Database keyword search terms will include: "national security", "strategic culture", "political violence" and "terrorism". Archives are limited by declassification protocols and current limits on Freedom of Information Act disclosure.

> • *Course Sampling*: I will sample a range of university syllabus and reporting, including from the collections of the American Political Science Association and the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations.

> • *Interviews:* I will interview 10-15 researchers, practitioners and theorists using a semi-structured format about their understanding of strategic culture in a counterterrorism studies context.

The project will develop a suite of comparative case studies to examine counterterrorism processes and how terrorist groups "weaponise cultural knowledge" (Porter 2009). Recent studies on strategies to end terrorism (Cronin 2009), and strategic dimensions of victory (Martel 2009) illustrate how the case study method can provide rich insights and contribute to rigorous theory-building and pretheories. This focus on pretheories will enable the project to re-examine some of the accepted frameworks and theories in counterterrorism studies.

The sampling frame to include individuals and groups in the comparative case studies are based on several criteria: (1) They must involve events that discipline narratives, histories and theories cite as significant or novel based on disciplinary understandings and estimative assessments (Trachtenberg 2006; Stampnitzky 2008; Brenner 2006). (2) They must involve units of analysis and variables that are identified in the strategic culture literature (Johnston 1995; Gray 2007; Porter 2009; Lock 2010), and that also meet other relevant 'screening' factors such as models of terrorist innovation (Dolnik 2007) and articulating a 'moral calculus' (Vollmann 2004). (3) In particular, individuals and groups will be prioritised where there is anthropological data from archival, journalistic and media sources (Barnard 2000). This data may also be pre-attack in a 'community of interest' or post-attack in a group that is under intelligence and police investigation. 'Multi-ethnographic' accounts (Davis and Ellis 2008) which combine first-person and second-person interpretivist narratives will be identified in the counterterrorism studies literature, such as Filkins (2008), Stern (2003), and Murakami (2001), who use interviews with a range of stakeholders.

A range of potential variables will be coded and analysed, including specific conditions (the Japanese Red Army), the change in analytical viewpoints over time (Al Qaeda), the limitations of explanatory models (Aum Shinrikyo), and re-evaluation due to archival evidence and new research (the Baader Meinhof Gang, the Weather Underground), such as Varon (2004) demonstrates.

Provisional project timelines subject to further negotiation with the PhD committee:

January-June 2011: Analytical review of sources on strategic culture to develop conceptual models. Negotiate ethics clearance. Write-up of first two chapters on counterterrorism studies as a discipline and the strategic culture debate.

June 2011-December 2011: Interviews of 10-15 academics, journalists and policymakers on strategic culture. Completion of first two chapters.

December 2011: Institutional confirmation of PhD candidature.

December 2012-June 2012: Write-up of methodology chapter. Review of database sources and development of sampling frame for case studies. Write-up of analytical chapter and drafting of case study chapters.

June 2012-June 2013: Finalisation of interviews, fieldwork and review of 'sampling' literature. Revision of case study chapters and drafting of conclusion chapter.

June 2013-December 2013: Revising the final draft for completion; submission after discussion with supervisors; and final revision as required by committee and external reviewers.

This timeline includes frontloading for project buffers. Draft material for the chapters is already in development.

6. Provisional Chapters and Key Questions

The following is a provisional set of research questions that each chapter will address. I will need the PhD Committee's further guidance on the breadth, depth, and type of argumentation. The chapters are designed to be thematically linked yet can also be freestanding. Some of the research questions in each chapter may be developed into separate journal articles for publication.

Chapter 1: Origins and Visions of Counterterrorism Studies

What is the project scope and study significance?

What is the role of counterterrorism studies in national security policymaking?

How does counterterrorism studies as a subfield relate to strategic studies?

Why and how did counterterrorism studies become a 'hot topic' after Al Qaeda's attacks on 11th September 2001?

What are the historical 'self-images' of counterterrorism studies?

What are the internal versus external factors that drive counterterrorism studies as a subfield?

Chapter 2: Counterterrorism Studies and Strategic Culture

Who are the keepers of 'strategic culture' in counterterrorism studies, and how is it culturally transmitted within the discipline?

What are the criteria for establishing that a 'strategic culture' construct is valid? What is the criteria for judgment?

Why have scholars used strategic culture differently? Are these different views reconcilable? How can we increase their utility?

How is the same strategic culture viewed differently by counterterrorism experts across the civil-military spectrum? What role have 'academic entrepreneurs' and 'idea entrepreneurs' played in this process?

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

What are the conceptual models used to explain discipline-level crises in counterterrorism studies? How will they be tested?

How has counterterrorism studies handled the 'multi-ethnographic turn'?

How are the comparative case studies chosen for this project, and what data will be used?

Chapter 4: Evolutionary Pathways

How does strategic culture contribute to orthodox and heterodox views of theory-building in counterterrorism studies?

What different evolutionary models and pathways exist that may explain how strategic culture is used in varied ways within counterterrorism studies? Why have these different evolutionary models and pathways occurred, and under what conditions?

How do different institutional cultures (civilian academic, 'war college' tradition, journalist, intelligence analyst, and terrorist theoretician) differ in their understanding of using strategic culture to identify, analyse and forecast the emergence of individual terrorists and terrorist groups? What patterns of affinity, contestation and difference emerge, and why?

Chapter 5: Weaponising Cultural Knowledge

How do terrorist groups use strategic culture to "weaponise cultural knowledge"?

How have terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, Aum Shinrikyo, the Japanese Red Army, the Baader Meinhof Gang, and the Weather Underground used aspects of strategic culture? How have individuals such as 'Unabomber' Ted Kaczynski and Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh done so? What similarities and differences arise, and why?

What insights does strategic culture provide for a theory of terrorist innovation?

Chapter 6: Conclusions

What are the project's major findings and conclusions?

How can the project inform national security policymaking, in particular analytical and intelligence models, and foreign policy levers? How might these institutions adapt?

What future research emerges from the project?

7. Key Thinkers and Critical Works

The debate in strategic studies about 'strategic culture' attracts diverse scholars including Jack Snyder (Columbia), Peter Katzenstein (Columbia), Ken Booth (Aberystwyth University), Colin S. Gray (University of Reading), Alastair Johnston (Harvard), Patrick Porter (King's College), and their respective doctoral students and 'programs of research'.

This project advances a different set of arguments, and in doing so, it critiques a range of commonly accepted models in strategic studies and counterterrorism studies. Apart from the Gray-Johnston debate mentioned above, these include the explanatory frameworks proposed by Jerrold M. Post (George Washington University), David Rapoport (UCLA), Adam Dolnik (University of Wollongong) and Walter Laqueur (Centre for Strategic and Economic Studies). The contributions of Martha Crenshaw (Stanford), Jessica Stern (Harvard), and others are highlighted in different ways. In particular, the work of anthropologists and investigative journalists is noted—on the US patriot/militia community *prior* to the Oklahoma City bombing (Gibson 1994); Japan's Aum Shinrikyo group (Murakami 2001); and the 2003 Iraq War and its aftermath (Filkins 2008)—as an important contribution that is sometimes minimised by some academic researchers.

The discussion thus spans a range of 'academic entrepreneurs', 'idea entrepreneurs' (Stampnitzky 2008), 'risk entrepreneurs' (Mueller 2009), journalists, and think tanks who have contributed in different ways to the disciplinary foundations of counterterrorism studies.

8. Contributions to Knowledge and New Understanding of Topic

The project will make the following contributions to knowledge:

• A comparative and inductive analysis of the disciplinary crisis in counterterrorism studies (Stampnitzky 2008) and its relationship to other crises in international relations theory (Brenner 2006) and strategic studies (Betts 1997). This will contribute to subfield coherence, similar to recent work for international security studies (Buzan and Hansen 2009).

• Testing and evaluation of assumptions about strategic culture in the subfield's accepted frameworks and theories. These include Walter Laqueur's Kuhnian distinction between 'old' and 'new' terrorism; David Rapoport's waves theory; Lisa Stampnitzky's (2008) 'eventisation' model; terrorist tactical innovation (Dolnik 2007); and Herman and O'Sullivan's (1989) propaganda model. This re-evaluation may lead to new perspectives on these accepted frameworks and theories.

• A new understanding of strategic culture as a construct in a counterterrorism studies context, how it is used as a framework by theorists and policymakers, and the variations that may exist in the civil-military spectrum.

• A new understanding of how terrorist groups including Al Qaeda, Aum Shinrikyo, the Japanese Red Army, the Baader-Meinhof Gang, and the Weather Underground, and individuals such as 'Unabomber' Ted Kaczynski and Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, have used aspects of strategic culture, under what conditions, and why.

9. Research Outcomes

Research findings will be disseminated in Australian and international research networks including the American Political Science Association (www.apsanet.org), the Research Network for a Secure Australia (www.secureaustralia.org), the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (www.shafr.org), the International Studies Association (www.isanet.org) and to members of the US-based National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (www.start.umd.edu).

Scholarly outputs from this project may include a paper on Johnston's 'three generations' framework (1995) and the subsequent scholarly debates involving Colin S. Gray and others; a paper on disciplinary theory-testing in counterterrorism studies; an analyst/journalist comparison paper; a paper on declassification/source evaluation; and a paper on the civil-military spectrum.

'Target' journals for these academic papers will include the *Review of International Studies* (A), *Orbis* (A), *Australian Journal of International Affairs* (A), *Journal of Strategic Studies* (B), *Foresight* (B), *Futures* (B), *Defence Economics* (B), *Intelligence and National Security* (B), and *Terrorism and Political Violence* (B).

'Writing models' for 'target' journal submissions will include *International Security* (A*), *Journal of Political Economy* (A*), *International Political Science Review* (A), *Diplomatic History* (A), *Survival* (A), and the Princeton Studies in International History and Politics series, edited by G. John Ikenberry and Marc Trachtenberg.

Where possible, research resources will be publicly released, modelled on the background and supporting material made available for PBS *Frontline* episodes (http://www.pbs.org/frontline), and with source informed consent and clearance.

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