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CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC ANALYSES

# **Strategic Culture, Domestic Politics, and Foreign Policy**

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**Research Paper No. 17**

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# Strategic Culture, Domestic Politics, and Foreign Policy

A review of “Strategic Culture, Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy: Finland’s Decision to Refrain from Operation Unified Protector” by Doeser

## ABSTRACT

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Beyond Doeser’s concern specifically with the nexus between strategic culture and Finnish foreign policy, vis-à-vis domestic politics as an intervening factor, this article reviews the academic contribution which Doeser’s article makes towards the wider discipline of strategic culture. Doeser’s article *Strategic Culture, Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy*, theorises upon the domestic political conditions under which decision makers might effectuate a change in a country’s strategic culture.

## CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE

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Pondering upon the significance of cultural analysis on strategic outcomes, has served as the epistemological occupation of strategic culture proponents. On the whole, strategic culture proponents argue that strategic outcomes, and indeed foreign policy, are shaped in part by the existence of “a set of general beliefs, attitudes and behaviour patterns”<sup>1</sup> which essentially serves to limit the strategic considerations of decision makers within a society.

Strategic culture was first proposed by Snyder, in his 1977 report titled: “*The Soviet Strategic Culture; Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations.*” However, the obsession with the influence of culture on strategy significantly predates Snyder’s work. The same is also to be found in classical writings of Thucydides<sup>2</sup>, Clausewitz<sup>3</sup> and Sun-Tzu,<sup>4</sup> with Clausewitz expressing slight ambivalence towards the duality inherent in the nature of warfare. In the first place, Clausewitz recognises warfare as a test of physical forces. On the other hand, Clausewitz opines that the ‘test of moral’ forces, significantly effectuates the ultimate goal of strategy – which he believed to be the elimination of an adversary’s morale to wage war. Modern reconceptualizations of this field of inquiry include Hart’s ‘*The British Way in Warfare*’ published in 1932, and Weigley’s ‘*The American Way of Warfare*’ published in 1973. Both publications posit that distinct sanctioned cultures of warfare exist in recognisable form.

The author speculates that the aforementioned scholars may have influenced Snyder’s ontological disposition, prior to his 1977 publication. It must be stressed, that Snyder’s concerns were specific to the examination of factors which could significantly influence Soviet reactions, in the event that the United States embarked on limited nuclear operations against

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Snyder, ‘The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations’ (Rand R-2154-AF, 1977)

<sup>2</sup> Thucydides and Thomas Hobbes, *The Peloponnesian War* (1st edn, University of Michigan Press 1959)

<sup>3</sup> Michael Howard and Peter Paret, *Carl Von Clausewitz on War* (Princeton University Press 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Sun Tzu, Michael Evans and Lionel Giles, *The Art of War* (1st edn, Race Point Publishing 2017).

them. Snyder's contractual obligations were meant to supplement Schlesinger's *Single Integrated Operations Plan* (SIOP), by increasing the flexibility of the United States' strategic targeting plans.<sup>5</sup>

## THE THREE GENERATIONS OF SCHOLARSHIP

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Considering the limited scope of Snyder's work in light of its ontological foundations, the rapid and exponential application of strategic culture as an elucidative framework, applicable upon a plethora of non-nuclear security issues, is hardly surprising. So copious were instances of strategic culture's application, that in hindsight, Johnston's eventual stratification was required.<sup>6</sup>

By classifying strategic culture research on the basis of their conceptual or methodological approaches, Johnston was able to considerably extinguish confusion which plagued scholarly analysis of the subject.<sup>7</sup> Thankfully, Johnston simply labelled these categories as the first, second, and third generations of strategic culture. The author opines that the first generation of scholars such as Jones, Snyder, and Gray, were occupied with identifying synergistic links between culture and policy with regards to weapons of mass destruction, and approaches towards the use of force.<sup>8</sup> The second generation of strategic culture scholars include Klein<sup>9</sup>, Klein<sup>10</sup> and Luckham<sup>11</sup>, who variously propose that strategic culture be viewed as a tool of political elites –wherein the possible instrumentality of strategic culture could be considered. The third generation of strategic culture scholars, argue for a falsifiable and specific theory of strategic culture, which excludes behaviour and self-interest as possible independent variables. Johnston took the liberty to classify himself, and authors such as Legro<sup>12</sup> and Kier<sup>13</sup>, as belonging to the third generation.

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<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War* (1st edn, Routledge 2010). See also: Jack Snyder, 'The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations' ([www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org), 1977) <<http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2005/R2154.pdf>> accessed 15 January 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Thinking About Strategic Culture' (1995) 19 *International Security* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2539119>> accessed 19 November 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Olamide Samuel, 'Understanding the Nigerian Way of National Security: Towards a Theoretical Framework for National Security Strategic Personality' (PhD, University of Buckingham 2017)

<sup>8</sup> See: David Jones, 'Soviet Strategic Culture' *Strategic Power: USA/USSR*, (Palgrave Macmillan 1990) as well as; Colin S. Gray, 'National Styles in Strategy: The American Example' (1981) 6 *International Security*.

<sup>9</sup> Yitzhak Klein, 'A Theory of Strategic Culture' (1991) 10 *Comparative Strategy*.

<sup>10</sup> Bradley S. Klein, 'Hegemony and Strategic Culture: American Power Projection And Alliance Defence Politics' (1988) 14 *Review of International Studies*.

<sup>11</sup> Robin Luckham, 'Armament Culture' (1984) 10 *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint During World War II* (1st edn, Cornell University Press 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (1st edn, Princeton University Press 2017).

## THE CONCILIATORY SCHOOL

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In previous works, the author has identified a fourth school of thought within strategic culture, known as the *conciliatory school of thought*. The author argues that scholars who utilise the concept of strategic culture as a lens in various security-related fields (by way of adapting elements of the three generations of strategic culture), belong in this generation of strategic culture. In applying the strategic culture theoretical framework to their specific areas of research interest, these scholars utilise the conceptual approach from one generation of strategic culture, whilst simultaneously utilising a modified methodological approach to implement strategic culture to their respective lines of inquiry.

*“The constant denominator in this school of thought is that scholars approach Strategic Culture with biased predilections for a particular generation’s school of thought, which usually, is most aligned with their subjective ontological inclinations, and as a result, these scholars promulgate their ideas based on these predilections.”<sup>14</sup>*

As is expected in academia, criticism of one’s intellectual opinion should evoke response from the criticised. Criticism usually enables the emergence of constructive debate around concepts and perspectives of concepts, notwithstanding the passive-aggressive language which shrouds most criticism –especially within strategic culture. Perhaps one of the greatest outcomes of such criticism within strategic culture, is the Gray-Johnston debate. Following Johnston’s criticism of first generation research; wherein Johnston opines that, cultural variables can indeed be isolated from non-cultural variables in the development of a falsifiable theory of strategic culture -Gray’s response reaffirms the position that, strategic culture should be viewed as the context within which explanations for differences in national nuclear strategy, should be in terms of their cultural differences. Doeser, implicitly subscribes to the notion that strategic culture be viewed as the context. A context within which Finland’s decision to refrain from Operation Unified Protector (OUP) should be analysed. By agreeing that “*strategic culture is a ‘shaping context for behaviour’*”,<sup>15</sup> Doeser includes culture as one of the influencing factors which can modify state behaviour -in addition to domestic politics and external factors. By virtue of this, the author deems it necessary to question primarily, Doeser’s inclusion of strategic culture, and its consequence on the overall direction of his publication.

Doeser’s innovative delimitation of strategic culture to four elements namely; *Core task(s) of the armed forces, Operational mandate(s), Willingness to use force, and Organizational frameworks and strategic partners*, whilst viewing strategic culture as context, situates his publication within the conciliatory school of thought. This is because, whilst Doeser’s delimitation of strategic culture elements enhances the applicability of strategic culture to the Finnish case study, it does represent a modification of strategic culture methodology -much like the modifications Johnston suggests in his quest to develop a

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<sup>14</sup> Olamide Samuel, ‘Understanding the Nigerian Way of National Security: Towards a Theoretical Framework for National Security Strategic Personality’ (PhD, University of Buckingham 2017)

<sup>15</sup> Fredrik Doeser, ‘Strategic Culture, Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy: Finland’s Decision to Refrain from Operation Unified Protector’ (2017) 13 *Foreign Policy Analysis*, p.741-759

falsifiable theory out of strategic culture. Secondly, Doeser's perception of strategic culture as context, is in agreement with Gray's conceptualisation of the subject. Based on these considerations, one can reasonably argue that Doeser's work be situated in the conciliatory school, alongside scholars such as Poore, Basrur and Morgan.<sup>16</sup>

## CONCEPT AND METHODOLOGY IN THE FINNISH CASE STUDY

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Doeser's attempt to proffer a strategic culture explanation for Finnish restraint in participating in OUP, is symbolic of scholastic frustration at the simplicity of realist and neo-realist explanations of state behaviour with regards to contemporary foreign policy operationalisation. These scholars are driven by a need to offer alternative justifications for state behaviour in numerous instances, where strategic culture scholars are able to identify relevant non-material modifiers of state behaviour, which seem to be more immediate influencers of state behaviour, than material variables.<sup>17</sup> One might also reasonably suggest that a purely realist approach to strategic matters can only be furnished with insight from cultural interpretations of strategic choice.<sup>18</sup> After all, rationality, being one of the most common examples of strategic judgement, is influenced by the culture within which rationality receives approval. Poore for example, argues that it is insufficient to utilise any theory which assumes that the strategic behaviours of various states can be solely determined by immutable external forces such as international anarchy and the distribution of power in the international system, without understanding the specific social context within which such a state operates, and the values which it grants priority.<sup>19</sup> However, this wealth of insight from strategic culture is still limited by the fact that a central definition of the actual nature of strategic culture is largely absent. Doeser reiterates this point by admitting that;

*"In spite of several contributions, a well-recognized definition of strategic culture does not exist. While some researchers see strategic culture as an independent variable, separable from material and non-cultural factors, which generates a set of ranked preferences to guide behaviour, others see strategic culture as a 'shaping context for behaviour'"<sup>20</sup>*

Regardless of the disagreement as to the nature of strategic culture, Doeser, much like other scholars utilising strategic culture as context, provides innovative insight on the possible

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<sup>16</sup> See: Rajesh M Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security* (1st edn, NUS Press 2009), as well as; Forrest Morgan, *Compellence and the Strategic Culture of Imperial Japan: Implications for Coercive Diplomacy in the Twenty-First Century*, (Praeger 2003), and finally; Stuart Poore, 'Strategic Culture And Non-Nuclear Weapon Outcome: The Cases Of Australia, South Africa And Sweden' (PhD, University of Southampton 2000)

<sup>17</sup> Jonghyun Choi, 'The Evolution Of Strategic Cultures Of Divided Countries: A Case Study On The Continuities And Changes Of Korean Strategic Culture And Strategic Relations On The Peninsula Since 1948' (PhD, University of Reading 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Olamide Samuel, 'Understanding the Nigerian Way of National Security: Towards a Theoretical Framework for National Security Strategic Personality' (PhD, University of Buckingham 2017)

<sup>19</sup> Stuart Poore, 'Strategic Culture And Non-Nuclear Weapon Outcome: The Cases Of Australia, South Africa And Sweden' (PhD, University of Southampton 2000)

<sup>20</sup> Fredrik Doeser, 'Strategic Culture, Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy: Finland's Decision to Refrain from Operation Unified Protector' (2017) 13 *Foreign Policy Analysis*, p.741-759

nexus between culture and strategic behaviour of states. But, the absence of a widely accepted conceptualisation of strategic culture, proves problematic when one attempts to draw connections between the concept and other factors -such as domestic politics and foreign policy. The author argues that Doeser's empirical validation process suffers from this absence of a centralised definition of strategic culture. Firstly, the absence of a precise definition of strategic culture, runs the risk of making strategic culture as a whole, 'practically meaningless'.<sup>21</sup> This point is echoed by Johnston, who notes that various definitions of strategic culture, regard "*technology, geography, organizational culture and traditions, historical strategic practices, political culture, national character, political psychology, ideology, and even international system culture*"<sup>22</sup> as legitimate variables within the scope of strategic culture. The strategic culture theoretical framework seems so far-reaching that it encapsulates almost all possible explanatory variables which could influence strategic choice, to the extent that there is hardly any conceptual space for a non-strategic culture explanation of strategic choice.<sup>23</sup> This is reflected in Doeser's attempt to establish an empirical nexus between culture and the Finnish OUP decision, which relies quite considerably on discourse analysis which is heavily reliant on;

*"Contemporary statements from politicians and retrospective accounts from the respondents [which should] explicitly link Finland's decision to key phrases/words such as 'culture,' 'way of doing things,' 'previous experiences,' 'habits,' 'profile,' and so forth'"*<sup>24</sup>

In attempting to explain what the relevant non-material influencers of state strategy were, Doeser follows the precedent of qualitatively analysing various concepts from cultural studies, such as ideas, emotional responses, behaviour, imitation etc., and utilising these keywords as proof that a suggested nexus exists within his modified strategic cultural framework. Whilst there is absolutely nothing unethical about relying on this kind of qualitative analysis in academia, scholars must be aware of the manner in which their own cultural contexts could influence thinking, especially within strategic culture. Booth reiterates the author's observation that "*an observer cannot completely eradicate his own cultural conditioning, and the structure of ideas and values which passes on to him*"<sup>25</sup> In the same vein, this reliance on qualitative analysis, reduces the empirical quality of the research as Doeser has the unrestricted ability to import inferred information and conclusions as a result of human bias, and subjective experiences. This reliance on qualitative analysis, could also make it difficult for another researcher to successfully replicate his research elsewhere. Notwithstanding, the informed opinions expressed by his respondents, enables us to understand that these respondents believe in a certain existing style to Finnish national strategy. Whether

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<sup>21</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Thinking About Strategic Culture' (1995) 19 *International Security* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2539119>> accessed 19 November 2014.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Fredrik Doeser, 'Strategic Culture, Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy: Finland's Decision to Refrain from Operation Unified Protector' (2017) 13 *Foreign Policy Analysis*, p.741-759

<sup>25</sup> Ken Booth, *Strategy And Ethnocentrism* (1st edn, Taylor and Francis 2014)

this style is consistent and deep-rooted enough throughout Finnish history to reasonably validate the existence of a Finnish strategic culture however, is debatable.

Recalling the absence of a centralised definition of strategic culture, one would expect that Doeser would at least provide a working definition of the concept, for ease of reference. However, Doeser does not necessarily provide a working definition of strategic culture within this article. Instead, he is forced to rely on a functional approach:

*"The concept of strategic culture aims at capturing a country's core beliefs and assumptions in matters of foreign, security and defence policy."<sup>26</sup>*

As a result of Doeser's approach to strategic culture in this manner, he is able to offer some insight with regards to some influence of culture on Finnish foreign policy decision making. However, this approach becomes problematic when one searches for instances of deviation from Finnish strategic culture. Doeser's discussion of change within strategic culture, is limited to how domestic factors can effectuate a change in the strategic culture of a state. But, how do we know Finnish strategic culture (as a dependent variable) has indeed changed, if we do not know for sure, what it looked like in the first place?

## CONCLUSION

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The concept of strategic culture still remains poorly defined, and resident in hyper debated landscape, where inclusive variables (each in their own right, complicated terms) are grossly oversimplified.<sup>27</sup> As we have seen, revised versions of strategic culture (such as Doeser's) are routinely proposed. In most cases these attempts are either; a more sophisticated way of reconceptualising strategic culture, or an innovative means of applying new methodology to unexplored case studies. However, the bane of strategic culture analysis is rooted in the lack of a central concept, which is manifest in the confusion with regards to the very nature of the concept. However, the strategic culture field of inquiry has produced generations of scholarship, each with their respective strengths and weaknesses, serving to proffer innovative understanding of the underlying nexus between culture and the state's strategic behaviour.

But, critical analysis of the strategic culture discourse exposes immense room for refinement of the strategic culture theoretical framework, and the need for a standard definition of strategic culture is ever more apparent -to at least empower resourceful scholars such as Doeser with the freedom to consistently generate empirically valid strategic culture insight. The author agrees with Lantis' identification of the need to interrogate the universality of strategic culture, amongst a host of difficulties plaguing this theoretical framework.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Fredrik Doeser, 'Strategic Culture, Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy: Finland's Decision to Refrain from Operation Unified Protector' (2017) 13 *Foreign Policy Analysis*

<sup>27</sup> Defense Threat Reduction Agency Advanced Systems and Concepts Office, 'Comparative Strategic Cultures Literature Review (Part 1)' (Center for Contemporary Conflict 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey Lantis, 'Strategic Culture: From Clausewitz To Constructivism' (2006) Contract No: DTRA01-03-D-0017, Technical Instruction 18-06-02 Defense Threat Reduction Agency Advanced Systems and Concepts Office Comparative Strategic Cultures Curriculum <<https://fas.org/irp/agency/dod/dtra/stratcult-claus.pdf>> accessed 7 February 2015

Moreover, it is a wise proposition that a careful deconstruction of the strategic culture theoretical framework could assist policymakers and academics alike, to establish more accurate and specific theoretical frameworks which could be utilised to eliminate the uncertainty and ambiguity which persists within the realm of state strategy analysis.<sup>29</sup>

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