Realism versus Strategic Culture: Competition and Collaboration?

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This paper takes as its starting point the possibility of empirical and theoretical cross-fertilization between strategic culturalists and realists. Indeed, recent neoclassical realist writings indicate that there is currently a move away from the more abstract theorizing of Waltzian neorealism. In order to conduct detailed foreign policy analysis, these authors have included an increasing array of variables including nonmaterial factors. The paper argues that much can be gained from examination of the alternative explanations of state behavior provided by strategic culture and neoclassical realism. Yet the benefits of competitive collaboration depend upon the particular conception of strategic culture under consideration. The paper identifies four main conceptions of strategic culture and examines the type of collaboration with neoclassical realism that is possible for each one.

For more than a decade now, there has been a resurgence of interest in strategic culture and the potential insights it offers in explaining state behavior.[1] The range of countries, subjects of interest and quality of analyzes have been impressive. Many of these writers are seeking to develop a richer account of the international environment than the one derived from Waltzian neorealism. They seek to accomplish this by emphasizing the domestic cultural context in influencing strategic outcomes. Rather than interpreting behavior solely as a result of constraints and opportunities imposed by the material environment, strategic culture analysts wish to reassert the importance of cultural, ideational and normative influences on the motivations of states and their leaders. At the same time, recent neoclassical realist writings indicate that there is currently a move away from the more abstract theorizing of Waltzian neorealism (Rose 1998). Although the latter provides a parsimonious account of the general pattern of behavior to be expected of states at the international level, it does not attempt to explain the actual policies adopted by states in any particular historical period (Waltz 1996). Neoclassical realists thus seek to include several intervening variables, for example, the efficiency/inefficiency of the state's bureaucratic apparatus, the perception and misperception of policymakers, interest groups and elite consensus

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in order to explain the foreign policies of states (Wohlforth 1993; Rose 1998; Schweller 1998; Zakaria 1998).

Although initially it appeared that the focus of strategic culture research ruled out research collaboration with realism, recent additions to both sides call for a re-evaluation of this assumption (Desch 1998; Duffield et al. 1999). For example, Post-structuralist strategic culturalists have recently argued that their focus on discursive power means that ''the imagery of power politics does not recede at all; it just occurs on a discursive plane.'' As a result, it has been argued that ''this emphasis on power and interest suggests that realists, who emphasize precisely these same concepts though in a material form, may have much to talk about with scholars who conceptualize identity along radical constructivist lines'' (Mattern 2005a:22, 2005b). This paper will argue, however, that significant differences between this group of strategic culturalists and realism remain. Yet, much may be gained from collaboration between two other groups of strategic culturalists (epiphenomenal strategic culturalists and conventional constructivists) and neoclassical realism. If both strategic culture and neoclassical realism were to adopt a common methodology, such as process tracing it might be possible to compare their research results and judge which has the greatest explanatory potential, when, where and why. The interest in detailed foreign policy analysis by neoclassical realists provides an opportunity for both sides to evaluate their differing claims, generalizations and explanations. Such collaboration may yield invaluable insights and new avenues of exploration in practical foreign policy analysis.

It is clear that the research objectives of strategic culture scholars vary considerably. Some view strategic culture as simply an intervening variable while others argue that ''ideas operate 'all the way down' to shape actual actors and action in world politics,'' so that culture is viewed as constitutive of state identity and behavior (Farrell 2002:50–56). At the same time, although many of these scholars (though not all) have adopted process tracing as their methodology, their research objectives vary considerably. Some share realism's objective of establishing generalizations that identify correlations of causal factors either across different cases or different time periods, albeit with the caveat that these are ''contingent generalizations.'' Others, however, place greater emphasis upon deconstructing dominant discourses and therefore do not engage in establishing law-like generalizations that can be applied to other cases. Clearly, then, cooperative research with neoclassical realism will be more fruitful for some strategic culture scholars than others. This paper therefore identifies four conceptions of strategic culture: epiphenomenal strategic culturalists; conventional constructivists; post-structuralists; and interpretivists.[2] In so doing, the paper identifies those conceptions for which competitive collaboration with neoclassical realism would be most productive.

The Neoclassical Turn

The mid-nineties witnessed the emergence of a new school of realists that sought to move beyond the basic insights of Waltzian neorealism by investigating the interaction of systemic pressures and domestic processes in the foreign policy decision making process, thus providing a much richer explanatory account of why states choose certain foreign policies over others. Such has been the success of this approach that one scholar has claimed that it constitutes ''the only game in town for the current and next generation of realists'' (Schweller 2003:347). The early generation of neoclassical realists agreed with Waltz that states will balance against a more powerful state either ''by building up their own capabilities (internal balancing) or by aggregating their capabilities with other states in alliances (external balancing)'' (Brooks and Wohlforth 2005:76–77). But they also

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[2]For a similar division of constructivism into conventional and critical constructivists, refer to Hopf (1998).

sought to include several intervening variables, for example, the efficiency/inefficiency of the state's bureaucratic apparatus, the perception and misperception of policymakers, interest groups and elite consensus. These writers agreed that "the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities…however…the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level" (Rose 1998:146).

For example, Randall Schweller attempts to explain why states sometimes underbalance, that is, why they fail to adequately balance against an accumulation of power. In so doing, Schweller (2004:199) explicitly seeks to develop "a domestic politics model to explain why threatened states often fail to adjust in a prudent way to dangerous changes in their strategic environment." Schweller investigates the gap between the objective international environment and leaders' perceptions of their surroundings in order to explain anomalous state behavior that runs counter to neorealist predictions. Possible misreadings of the political situation may lead to the errors of judgment. It is argued, for example, that one of the reasons that Stalin agreed to the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939 was because he mistakenly viewed the balance of power as tripolar rather than bipolar.[3] The study concludes that underbalancing may be explained by the fact that states are often constrained by a range of domestic political considerations (intervening variables), which include "elite consensus, government or regime vulnerability, social cohesion, and elite cohesion" (Schweller 1998:169). Whether a state balances or underbalances will depend upon the preferences of its decision makers, which at any given time will be influenced by both domestic and international concerns. If the former is given greater priority, then underbalancing is likely to occur.

Other neoclassical realists highlight the differences between national power and state power. They argue that it is often assumed that there exists a smooth transmission process from the former to the latter, yet history they argue shows otherwise. State power depends upon how efficiently the government can translate aspects of its national power, particularly its manufacturing resource base, into capabilities that can be projected at the international level. State power is said to be "that portion of national power the government can extract for its purposes and reflects the ease with which central decision makers can achieve their ends" (Zakaria 1998:9). At the same time as making this distinction, Fareed Zakaria (1998:42) in examining US foreign policy between 1865 and 1908 concludes that contrary to defensive realism, state capabilities shape intentions, in other words, they most often "try to expand their political interests abroad when central decision makers perceive a relative increase in state power."[4]

Thomas Christensen, on the other hand, examines the way in which state leaders, in order to mobilize their populations in favor of further military expenditure, use international crises instrumentally. He thus seeks to draw a causal link "between shifts in the international balance of power, leaders' creation of long-term grand strategies to address those shifts, the domestic political difficulties in mobilizing the public behind those strategies, and the manipulation of ideological crusades and short-term conflicts in order to gain support for long-term grand strategies" (Christensen 1996:7). In later studies focusing on contemporary East Asia, Christensen (1999:51) argues that when assessing the regional security dilemma simply estimating material capabilities is not enough.

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[3]This is because, according to Schweller, Stalin viewed Britain and France as a third pole and as he points out the problem is that this "conflates the distinct concepts of polarity (the number of poles) and polarization (the number of alignments in the system)" (Schweller 1998:39).

[4]Jeffrey Taliaferro (2006) has recently added an important contribution to this literature on state extraction.

One needs to taken into account the ''historical legacies and ethnic hatred'' that are still apparent within the region. Furthermore, he argues that China's behavior toward the United States will not only be influenced by its relative capabilities, but also by its ''perceptual biases'' toward the United States.[5]

Aaron Friedberg's study of the United States' build up of its capabilities during the Cold War bears striking similarities to some of the writings on strategic culture. Friedberg argues that despite the strong international pressures for the United States to develop into a highly centralized and more militaristic state, or ''Garrison State,'' it did not do so. This may be explained by a combination of factors including: the principle of the separation of powers; interest groups (particularly private business); and anti-statist ideas that were prevalent in American society at that time. It is the latter factor that brings Friedberg's analysis (2000:25) very close to that of strategic culturalists, particularly when he argues that those groups that opposed the further centralization of the state possessed an advantage over their opponents because ''American history gives them ready access to evocative slogans and potent symbols that ease the task of rallying support…they easily can, and invariably do, invoke the names and words of the Founders in support of their positions.''

These writers are thus attempting, in one way or another to bring various domestic processes back into realist theory. For Schweller (2003:346), the usefulness of neoclassical realism is that it can be brought to bear to make up for any shortfalls in neorealist explanations of state behavior, such that, ''Only when behavior and outcomes deviate from these structural-systemic theories' expectations should unit-level variables associated with neoclassical realism be added to these theories to explain why.'' Just as Desch sought to relegate strategic culture's role, such a move relegates neoclassical realism to a supplementary role. Even some more recent writers would concur with such a view. For example, in examining American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union and the way in which containment chimed with America's domestic liberal culture, Colin Dueck (2006:20) argues that ''Culture is best understood as a supplement to and not a substitute for, realist theories of strategic choice. Strategic culture can certainly help to explain 'deviations' from balancing behavior, but since the very concept of such deviations presumes some sort of appropriate or expected response to international conditions, it is only within a realist framework that such explanations make any sense.'' Although cultural factors may influence behavioral outcomes, Dueck (2005:204) argues that in the final analysis ''when political-military cultures come under intense international pressure, they adjust and adapt in the end.''

This leaves neoclassical realism open to the charge that the approach is simply an attempt to prop up a degenerative research program; explaining research anomalies by adding an array of intervening variables to explain outcomes that the main theory cannot and thus ''recasting realism in forms that are theoretically less determinate, less coherent, and less distinctive to realism'' (Vasquez 1997; Legro and Moravcsik 1999:6) However, much of this criticism centers on the fact that many of the intervening variables that are introduced call into question the state rationality assumption of neorealism. But as one group of neoclassical realists have correctly pointed out, Waltz does not actually make any assumption that states act rationally.[6] Waltzian neorealism takes a neutral stand

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[5]Christensen (2001) argues that China may believe that the United States lacks ''national willpower'' to suffer high numbers of casualties in conflict and are too dependent on their alliances with others.

[6]I owe a debt of gratitude to one of the reviewers for pointing this literature out. Refer to Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman (Forthcoming:19), In the *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz explicitly states that, ''the theory requires no assumptions of rationality or of constancy of will on the part of all of the actors'' (1979:118) and Waltz (1986:111). There are others that do assume rational behavior, such as refer to Grieco (1996:282, 1997:165), Copeland (2000a:214, 2000b), and Mearsheimer (2001:31).

toward the impact of ideational factors on a state's behavior (Rathbun 2008:309–311). For Waltz, the primary pressure on states arises from the anarchical nature of the international system that results in unrelenting competition between states. Such competition is said to encourage states to emulate the practices of the most successful, that is, most powerful states, in order to accumulate power (as well as aggregate capabilities with other states)—but it does not say that states will in fact inevitably follow such a course of action. What it does say, is that if states do not respond to these systemic pressures efficiently, they will decline relatively and in all likelihood become extinct. In Jennifer Sterling-Folker's (1997:19) felicitous phrase, states are ''free to die, but it is the choices they have made vis-à-vis themselves and others that determine that outcome, not anarchy itself'' (Rathbun 2008:311). In reality, whether states actually respond to these pressures will depend upon many aspects including a host of ideational aspects.

In addition, not all would agree with Schweller's position that Waltzian neorealism remains a foundational baseline for neoclassical realism. One group of scholars has recently raised the possibility that recurring balance of power dynamics may be confined to ''modern Europe and its global successor.'' Their work covers eight case studies spanning different periods and regions, from ancient Greece to the Americas. They conclude that ''both systemic outcomes and state behavior directly contradict the core balance-of-power hypothesis that balancing behavior prevents systemic hegemony.'' As a result of their research, these scholars question the common practice of endeavoring to solve puzzles related to the failure of some states to conform to balance of power behavior, because the ''evidence fatally undermines the widespread belief that balancing is a universal empirical law in multistate systems and the equally pervasive tendency to assign explanatory precedence to balance-of-power theory'' (Wohlforth et al. 2007:156).

Others have argued that during the Cold War, the United States sought a position of power preponderance and the creation of a free trade regime as a result of its leaders' experience of the collapse of free trade and the rise of totalitarianism prior to the Second World War. Its leaders sought to preserve liberalism at home by producing an international environment conducive to its continuance. According to Melvyn Leffler (1992), the United States sought an open international economic order so that a recurrence of such events would not happen and ensure the maintenance of US preponderance thus preventing a move away from liberalism toward a garrison state at home.[7] In addition, some writers question the explanatory potential of the theory in the contemporary era, arguing that unipolarity is a ''deeply embedded material condition of world politics that has the potential to last for many decades'' and that ''Analysts would be wise to invest their talents in investigating the novel dynamics of great-power bargaining in today's unipolar system rather than seeking to stretch old analytical concepts that were created to deal with the bipolar and multipolar systems of the past'' (Wohlforth 1999:37; Brooks and Wohlforth 2002; Brooks and Wohlforth 2005:107).

Other recent work by neoclassical realists is quite explicit that state behavior is not necessarily determined by the international environment. Rather anarchy is viewed as a permissive condition and thus ''Since anarchy and polarity do not determine the actions of states (as acknowledged by structural realists as well), neo- and postclassical realists argue that we need to incorporate other variables as well'' (Wivel 2005:357). Christopher Layne (2006:37), for example, argues that

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[7]William Wohlforth (1993:294) also argues that many of the disputes that arose during the Cold War between the two protagonists were an outcome of both sides misreading their own power capabilities and the balance of power that existed at any given time because, ''Perceptions are always seeking to catch up to what in retrospect seems to have been the 'real' distribution of power.''

the United States' "pursuit of hegemony in regions outside the Western Hemisphere is primarily driven by Open Door—domestic—considerations and is *not* structurally determined." The explanation for the United States' pursuit of extraregional hegemony can be found not at the international, but at the domestic level. Furthermore, a policy of extraregional hegemony stands in sharp contrast to the behavior predicted by defensive realism (no hegemony) and by Mearsheimer's offensive realism (regional hegemony). Both predict that the United States should be engaging in off shore balancing, but Layne argues that the United States has sought to establish extraregional hegemony and actively prevented other states/regions emerging as new autonomous poles of power. Moreover, the force behind such dominance has been the desire to project the liberal political and economic conditions found at home upwards to the international level, endeavoring to create an "'Open Door World'—an international system, or 'world order,' made up of states that are open and subscribe to the United States' liberal values and institutions and that are open to US economic penetration" (Layne 2006:30).

This new generation of writers views neoclassical realism as a distinctive synthesis combining both external and internal factors in order to explain state behavior. Jeffrey Taliaferro (2004a:181), for example, has produced a balance of risk theory incorporating a psychological model of decision making (prospect theory). Based upon experimental evidence, the model posits that "most individuals tend to evaluate choices with respect to an expectation level and pay more attention to losses than to comparable gains. They also tend to overweigh certain outcomes relative to probable ones; value what they already possess over what they seek to acquire; and display risk-acceptant behavior to avoid (or recoup) losses, but risk-averse behavior to secure gains." The theory thus furnishes defensive realism with a strong foundation in human psychological traits, explaining the status-quo bias of states by examining the way in which "leaders process information about the international environment and their position relative to that of other states" (Taliaferro 2000/1, 2004b:5). The theory also explains how state leaders fall victim to entrapment in the periphery and engage in escalating commitment despite previous setbacks and future risks. According to the theory, "Leaders who initially intervened to avert losses in their state's relative power or international status will be quite reluctant to reassess, let alone reverse, strategies that fail to produce desired results….Loss aversion drives central decision makers not only to persist in failing strategies, but also to take additional risks in the hope of recouping their initial investment" (Taliaferro 2004a:203).

Steven Lobell examines the dilemma that confronts a hegemon in decline. The hegemon has to deal with keeping allies (which may include future contenders) on side and at the same time deal with rising regional powers. Lobell (2005:3) therefore investigates "how a declining hegemon selects which states to punish, where to cooperate, and how to allocate its national resources between its productive capacity and military security." Such decision making, he argues, is explained by a second image reversed plus a second image—the foreign policy of the hegemon will not be shaped simply by the number and size of rising contenders. Rather, the political/economic constitutions of these contenders will have an impact upon political coalitions within the hegemon itself which will in turn affect the direction of foreign policy. If it is confronted by "mostly liberal contenders, this will strengthen members of the free-trade faction who will push for cooperation….[I]f the hegemon encounters mostly imperial contenders, this will enable constituents of the economic nationalist coalition who will lobby for punishment" (2005:2). Indeed, Lobell (2005:19) argues that, the strength of this influence is such that "the hegemon's grand strategy is driven less by the concern for relative gains, the reputation for predation, or the strategic value of the

locale, than by its international environment and the domestic coalitional outcomes.''

Norrin Ripsman not only challenges the assumption that all democracies behave the same way at the international level, thus questioning one of the main premises of democratic peace theory, but also challenges neorealist assumptions that policymakers can simply follow their own preferences and that the outcomes of international negotiations will always reflect the distribution of power. Clearly, the historical record indicates that when dealing with international issues, the leaders of democracies have enjoyed varying degrees of freedom and this has largely been dependent upon the internal democratic structure and processes of each state. In a series of empirical studies, Ripsman (2002:16) demonstrates that less constraining domestic environments allow leaders to ''construct foreign security policies that are consistent with their own preferences, even when they face domestic opposition.'' Those leaders that do confront constrictive domestic constraints will find that policy options will be limited by domestic opposition. However, they will be able to play this card when dealing with officials of other states thus strengthening their negotiating hand at the international level and increasing the likelihood that their preferred policy option succeeds. In addition, the level of autonomy a leader possesses will also depend upon the use of deception: when state leaders find domestic constraints too great—they may increase their room to maneuver by being rather economical with the truth when reporting to their domestic assemblies.

This new generation emphasize that, unlike Waltzian neorealism which seeks to explain the constancy in state behavior across millennia, neoclassical realism seeks to explain why states behave differently in similar situations. Rather than identifying core transhistorical and transcultural patterns of behavior, these scholars seek to ''explain variation in the foreign policies of individual states over time or of different states when confronted with similar external constraints'' (Taliaferro 2006:480). In relation to the first generation of neoclassical realism, Stephen Walt (2002:211) has commented that ''it relies almost entirely on theoretical arguments by others and has yet to offer a distinct set of explanatory hypotheses of its own.'' Whether this was indeed true of earlier writings is itself debatable, but it is clear that the new generation of scholars have risen to this challenge developing theories of foreign policy that are clearly different to, and separate from, Waltzian neorealism. They do still emphasize the importance of the international structure and distribution of power, but they locate ''causal properties at both the structural and unit levels, the unit-level factors help to explain state external behavior'' (Taliaferro et al. Forthcoming:19). In addition, most writers have made ''conscious efforts to derive testable hypotheses, specify the predictions or observable implications of those hypotheses, and finally to test the relative explanatory power of neoclassical realist and alternative hypotheses against empirical evidence'' (Taliaferro et al. forthcoming:20).

Most significantly more recent work by these scholars has sought to establish under what conditions their theories are most likely to apply. By using two major aspects of the international system that vary over time (clarity of the international system regarding threats…and the degree of information it provides on how best to respond to these structural conditions), they have clarified the degree of relevancy of their approach in any given situation (Taliaferro et al. forthcoming: final chapter). Their approach is most relevant when two environments pertain. First when threats are clear and the policy responses are self-evident. In this case, neoclassical realism can explain why states did not pursue the most obvious course of action. Second, when threats and opportunities are obvious but the international environment provides little in the way of information on the most appropriate response. In this situation, domestic factors play a far more important role in determining which policies the state ultimately

chooses. As one author has commented, the ''greatest achievement of post- and neoclassical realism is that they enable us to make predictions about specific states and explain why they acted in a particular way'' (Wivel 2005:363). The obvious success of neoclassical realism in applying itself to a range of case studies will ensure that this body of literature will grow both in volume and popularity.

Competing Conceptions of Strategic Culture

Conception	Research Objectives	Research Collaboration
Epiphenomenal	Explaining deviations of state behavior from general patterns predicted by neorealism	High
Conventional constructivist	Generating contingent generalizations of state behavior with norms and culture as alternative explanatory factors	High
Post-structuralist	Explaining each event as a unique concatenation of causal mechanisms eschewing any search for generalized explanations of social behavior	Low (limited to single cases)
Interpretivist	Immersion of researcher in other cultural groups in order to understand their worldviews	Low (generally limited to single cases/impact of cultural diffusion across states)

As was mentioned in the Introduction, some strategic culturalists are now arguing that potential exists for research collaboration between realists and strategic culturalists. But such a proposal may assume greater coherency within the strategic culture school of research than actually exists currently. For example, Alastair Iain Johnston (1995a,b) identified three waves of strategic culture research: the first relating to cultural analysis of United States–Soviet Union relationships in the late 1970s; the second associated with writing on the instrumentality of culture in the 1980s; and the third pertaining to a more eclectic discussion of organizational and societal cultural analysis. Subsequent attempts to chronicle the evolution of strategic culture research have offered variations on Johnston's original thesis.[8] However, rather than adopting a temporal approach, this paper develops four conceptions of strategic culture. This does not imply that these other alternatives are not valid, nor does it imply the existence of only four conceptions. Rather, the division has been adopted in order to highlight the ramifications for those seeking to pursue a strategic culture research program and the possibility of engagement with neoclassical realism. In developing these conceptions, the paper makes a Rawlsian distinction between concept and conceptions. In other words, although interpretations of strategic culture abound, there is an overlap between them (the concept) to the extent that we can identify a core concept.[9] This paper thus takes a general definition that can be applied to all four conceptions. Strategic culture is viewed here as a set of shared beliefs, and assumptions derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which influence the appropriate ends and means chosen for achieving security objectives.[10]

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[8]Desch (1998) identifies three periods: World War II; the Cold War; the post-Cold War period.

[9]John Rawls argues that ''it seems natural to think of the concept of justice as distinct from the various conceptions of justice and as being specified by the role which these different sets of principles, these different conceptions, have in common'' (1972:5). This approach is not, however, uncontroversial. Refer to Connolly (1993:226–227), Mason (1993), and Owen (1995:11).

[10]This is a slightly modified definition from Mahnken (2008:4).

However, the articulation of this definition will vary according to the conception under consideration. For example, the four core conceptions of strategic culture identified are: epiphenomenal strategic culture; a conventional constructivist conception; a post-structuralist conception and an interpretive conception.[11] But for both realism and epiphenomenal strategic culture, the influence of strategic culture is viewed as merely inducing short-term aberrant behavior to that which otherwise would be expected in any given international environment. Constructivists, on the other hand view these shared beliefs and assumptions as constituting various aspects of strategic practices. Interpretivists, along with many constructivists, would argue that these beliefs and assumptions lead to state leaders developing a certain *weltanschauung* of the social environment (of which the international is a subcategory) in which their states reside so that culture has an overriding influence upon their view of all events and how they should respond. Meanwhile, post-structuralists view culture in terms of discourse and, as such, highly malleable to the interjection of social agents. In this case, strategic culture not only influences the appropriate ends and means to be used (as stated in the definition) but may be manipulated in order to achieve the ends desired by social agents in order to achieve a particular foreign policy outcome.

Of these four perspectives, the first two conceptions provide similar methodological grounds for competitive collaboration with neoclassical realism. Both attempt to establish generalizations by identifying repetitive patterns of state behavior and identify causal variables/intervening variables responsible for such regularities. It is therefore possible that a research project could be established with neoclassical realists in which the reasons for their differing explanations for patterns of state behavior could be compared in order to determine which best fits the outcomes examined. However, the latter two conceptions, the post-structuralists and interpretivists, may provide solid empirical information from their rich historical case studies but their research objectives differ considerably from that of realism. These two conceptions do not seek to establish law-like generalizations from their work. Apart from a case by case basis, it is therefore difficult to envisage enough common ground between themselves and neoclassical realists for a collaborative research project to be established.[12]

Epiphenomenal Strategic Culture

These analysts seek to identify the preferred military options that states adopt to achieve particular objectives.[13] To accomplish this, the cultural aspects dealt with are limited to those concerned with strategy rather than encompassing culture in its wider sense. This approach can be seen in the following passage from one of the originators of strategic culture research:

> Differences in Soviet and American strategy probably cannot be explained by broad differences between traditional Russian and Western cultures or between Leninist and liberal political cultures. Culture in this sense did not figure in the author's original argument about Soviet strategic culture...the term ''culture'' was used to suggest that, once a distinctive approach to strategy takes hold, it

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[11]The typology is not supposed to be all inclusive but simply seeks to identify some of the main schools of thought. For example, it does not examine those that take their lead from Max Weber. On Weber's notion of *verstehen*, refer to Neufeld (1995), Adler (1997), and Ruggie (1998).

[12]One difficulty associated with elaborating such a typology is that, by its nature, it excludes those that adopt two approaches. For example, those that are both constructivists and interpretivists (Price and Tannenwald 1996; Price 1999; Tannenwald 2003; Tannewald 2005).

[13]For examples of this approach, refer to Snyder (1977, 1984, 1990) and Van Evera (1984). Other writers have focused on Soviet strategy without necessarily engaging with realism or neorealism. See, for example, the works by Garthoff (1962, 1978, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1990), Arnett (1979), Adomeit (1981), Vigor (1983), and MccGwire (1987, 1991).

> tends to persist despite changes in the circumstances that gave rise to it, through processes of socialization and institutionalization and through the role of strategic concepts in legitimating these social arrangements. (Snyder 1990:4)

Strategy is here taken to mean military strategy, which focuses on ''the ways in which military power may be used to achieve political objectives'' (Garnett 1975:3).

What also distinguishes writers of this conception of strategic culture is that many were not explicitly challenging neorealism or realism (the dominant theory at the time the above passage was written). Rather, these analysts treated strategic culture as an intervening variable only. Neorealism offers a long-term prediction based on the perennial patterns of inter-state behavior. The theory posits that the anarchic structure of the international system conditions inter-state relationships and that conflict is an enduring possibility. In the absence of any supranational authority to ensure peace, states have no option but to adopt self-help strategies. According to the classical formulation presented in the writings of Kenneth Waltz, there are two means available to achieve this.[14] States can seek to attain greater security by either, ''internal efforts (moves to increase economic capability, to increase military strength, to develop clever strategies) and external efforts (moves to strengthen and enlarge one's own alliance or weaken and shrink an opposing one)'' (Waltz 1979:118). This, Waltz argues, is why the balance of power between states is a recurring pattern of their inter-active behavior and that it happens because the international environment generates the conditions for such behavior. As Waltz (1979:129) characterizes it, ''Balance-of-Power politics prevail where ever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive.''

Some writers on strategic culture have sought to provide supplementary explanations of short term behavior that deviate from neorealism's prediction of the long-term competitive behavior of states. Snyder (1990:4), for example, considered culture to be:

> a residual label that is affixed to ''explain'' outcomes that cannot be explained in any more concrete way. Thus, culture, including strategic culture, is an explanation to be used only when all else fails. In principle, differences in military strategy across states might be explained solely in terms of objective differences in the structure of their external or internal circumstances, without regard to subjective cultural differences.

Waltz similarly does not seek to refute the argument that variables such as strategic culture have an impact on international outcomes when theorizing the international arena. An example of this can be found in the following passage where he encapsulates the nature of an environment where power is a cause of international outcomes but not the only one:

> To identify power with control is to assert that only power is needed in order to get one's way. That is obviously false, else what would there be for political and military strategists to do? To use power is to apply one's capabilities in an attempt to change someone else's behavior in certain ways. Whether A, in applying its capabilities, gains the wanted compliance of B depends on A's capabilities and strategy, on B's capabilities and counterstrategy, and on all of these factors as they are affected by the situation in hand. Power is one cause among others, from which it cannot be isolated. (1979:191–192)

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[14]There are several variants of this theme, such as those expressed in the ''defensive'' realist versus the ''offensive'' realist debate: Walt (1987), Mearsheimer (1990, 2001), Schweller (1994), Rosecrance and Chih-Cheng (1996), Brooks (1997), Grieco (1997), and Whiteneck (2001).

Good strategy will thus ensure that objectives are attained while poor strategy will lead to the ineffective execution of a state's power. If a state continues to adopt such strategies, then, like inefficient companies in a free market, their power and influence will diminish. It is also assumed that strategies that fail to attain a state's objectives will, in all probability, evolve or be abandoned. Epiphenomenal strategic culture does not therefore necessarily contradict the assumptions underpinning neorealism. Waltz warns against what he regards as overly simplistic definitions of power and it is apparent from his discussion that in the application of power, strategy will be an important determinant of its effectiveness. Moreover, strategy can be influenced by a variety of factors.

However, epiphenomenal strategic culture does challenge the ahistorical and acultural assumptions of rationality posited in game theory put forward by, among others, Thomas Schelling (1960). The key challenge is directed at the assumption that there is ''a single, universal strategic rationality, which will be adopted by 'any player who had his wits about him''' (Snyder 1977, 1990:6). Some also questioned the Schelling's assumption of common interest by arguing that while the objective of US nuclear policy was to avoid all out nuclear war the Soviet attitude was more pragmatic. Rather than choices depending on expectations of what the other side might do, the Soviet military had consistently favored highly offensive, in contrast to defensive, strategies. This had practical implications as it was said to have created a ''cult of the offensive'' (Vigor 1983; Snyder 1984; Van Evera 1984; Heikka 2000:12). Others argued that instead of attempting to replicate the United States' force posture, the geography of the former Soviet Union meant that the army traditionally constituted the main component of the Soviet military forces. Less emphasis was placed on the role of the Soviet navy, which was viewed as fulfilling a supporting role. Although this situation changed with the advent of the Sea-Launched Ballistic Missile in the 1960s, a system which was seen as providing an assured second-strike nuclear deterrent capability, land based forces did not lose their primary position (Garthoff 1962; Jacobsen 1990). Another challenge stemmed from those who questioned the assumption of a value-maximizing form of behavior by examining the competition for economic resources and the adoption of certain strategies in order to increase the military's budget (Snyder 1977:27). Many of the writings located in this conception might thus be regarded as well suited to demonstrating the way that the strategic culture of a country can produce a sub-optimal outcome when attempting to achieve the objectives identified by Waltz.

The Conventional Constructivists' Conception

These analysts, as well as those above, use empirical cases combined with causal theorizing to produce explanations of particular identifiable behavioral patterns.[15] What distinguishes the second conception from the first is its adoption of a constructivist approach.[16] In contrast to those writers who regard culture and norms as having only an epiphenomenal effect on state behavior, they argue that ''cultural environments affect not only the incentives for different kinds of state behavior but also the basic character of states—what we call state 'identity''' (Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996:33). Equally, constructivism may encompass a variety of epistemological approaches and it may therefore be more

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[15]See: Berger (1993, 1996), Katzenstein and Okawara (1993a,b), Johnston (1995a,b), Barnett (1996), Katzenstein (1996a,b), and Farrell (2002).

[16]Here I refer to what has been labeled the ''moderate'' constructivist approach advocated by Alexander Wendt (1999:1), among others, who identifies two basic tenets of constructivism: ''(1) that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces and (2) that the identities and interest of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature.'' For a critique of his approach, see (Kratochwil 2000).

accurate to refer to the group of writers currently under consideration as adopting a conventional constructivist approach who ''subscribe to a notion of social causality that takes *reasons as causes*'' (Adler 1997:329).[17] It thus embraces those who believe that ''ideas are not merely rules or 'road maps' for action, but rather'' that ''ideas operate 'all the way down' to actually shape actors and action in world politics'' and also attempt to identify regular (albeit contingent) patterns of behavior that arise from these beliefs and ideas (Farrell 2002:50–56). Conventional constructivists thus ''hold the view that the building blocks of international reality are ideational as well as material…at the level of individual actors, constructivism also seeks to map the full array of additional ideational factors that shape actors' outlooks and behavior, ranging from culture and ideology, to aspiration and principled beliefs, on to cause/effect knowledge of specific policy problems'' (Ruggie 1998:33).

Conventional constructivists examining strategic cultural thus combine causal theorizing with empirical validation to produce explanations of particular patterns of behavior.[18] Yet, at the same time, these analysts take the view that:

> identities constitute interests and actions. Neo-realists and neoliberals consciously bracket questions of interest formation, treating preferences as exogenously determined givens that exist prior to social interaction. Constructivists, on the other hand, argue that understanding how interests are constituted is the key to explaining a wide range of international phenomena that rationalists have either misunderstood or ignored. (Price and Reus-Smit 1998:267)

Neorealists assume that states' interests and identities are ''exogenous to interaction'': that is, they are assumed as a priori givens. In contrast, the social constructivist approach considers that, ''identities and interests are endogenous to interaction'' (Wendt 1992:394). By viewing state interactions in this way, constructivism places greater emphasis on the way, for example, processes of cooperation can actually alter the way we perceive others and what we deem to be in our interest (that is, a state's identity and interest can evolve through interaction with other states). Research of this kind raises the possibility that state behavior may change over time and while the anarchic realm of international relations presents a formidable obstacle, it is not viewed as an inescapable straightjacket. Alexander Wendt (1992), for example, argues there is nothing intrinsic within the anarchical structure of the international environment to produce the security dilemma and the self-help behavior exhibited by states. His ''Anarchy is what states make of it'' claim has subsequently generated a wave of alternative theorizing to neorealism. This has sought to understand the way states behave by focusing on the historical processes that have influenced us as subjects.

Wendt considers that our perception of others as potential threats is not part of a naturally given order as all identities, both of others and our own, have been socially constructed. So while there are many valid reasons, from historical experiences such as war and disadvantageous cooperation, for states to have acquired certain identities and for some to act seemingly perennially in a self-help manner, this is not pre-ordained by some unseen force. This has implications not

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[17]The various approaches adopted by constructivism have been previously covered by, among others (Hopf 1998; Price and Reus-Smit 1998; Farrell 2002).

[18]There are those that question such an enterprise. For example, Kratochwil and John Ruggie have argued that ''unlike the initial conditions in positivist explanations, norms can be thought of only with great difficulty as 'causing' occurrences. Norms may 'guide' behavior, they may 'inspire' behavior, they may 'rationalize' or 'justify' behavior, they may express 'mutual expectation' about behavior, or they may be ignored. But they do not effect cause in the sense that a bullet through the heart causes death or an uncontrolled surge in the money supply causes inflations'' (1986:767).

only for our understanding of anarchy, but also for the prospects of cooperation between antagonistic states that are seemingly locked in an enduring security dilemma. As Wendt (1992:402) has classically characterized it:

> Security dilemmas are not given by anarchy or nature. Of course, once institutionalized such a dilemma may be hard to change (…) but the point remains: identities and interests are constituted by collective meanings that are always in process.

According to this view, there is nothing intrinsic within the properties of anarchy to pre-suppose that states will act in a self-help manner by adopting power politics as their main guideline. Rather, the condition we find ourselves in today is due, Wendt (1992:394) says, to ''process, not structure.''

In contrast to those pursuing research within the first conception of strategic culture who hold that ''(N)orms and social structures at most constrain the choices and behavior of self-interested states,'' this conception regards culture as actually constituting ''actor identities and interests and do not simply regulate behavior….Norms are no longer a superstructure on a material base; rather, they help to create and define that base'' (Checkel 1997, 1998:326–328). Whether a state employs military force or threatens it, rather than applying diplomacy or economic incentives to achieve objectives in ''inter-state political affairs'' might thus depend on its strategic preferences.[19] Moreover, those objectives may not necessarily follow the security/power maximization behavior that would accord with the pressures exerted by the international environment. An example of this is Peter Katzenstein and Nobuo Okawara's account of Japan, which highlights the way norms were institutionalized in that state after the Second World War leading to a new foreign policy. The behavior of Japan, they argue, ''Rather than following the logic of realist doctrine'' is best explained by domestic structures which embed ''military security concerns in broader economic and political notions'' (Katzenstein and Okawara 1993a,b:116). According to Katzenstein (1996a,b:207), Japan's leaders have consciously opted for an economic rather than a military option favoring ''influence abroad through markets,'' despite their being capable of pursuing both.

Similarly, John Duffield indicates that the specific political culture within Germany since 1945 has engendered a pre-disposition for multilateral cooperation with its European partners. Despite the end of the Cold War, he argues, Germany continues to seek cooperative alliances and it ''has continued to emphasize the use of nonmilitary means wherever possible, if not exclusively, to promote security'' (Duffield 1999:768; Longhurst 2004). Such writers, rather than interpreting behavior solely as a result of constraints and opportunities imposed by the material environment, a principal assumption of neorealist thought, emphasize the way the interests of states vary depending on the domestic cultural context. As Thomas Berger (1996:329) argues, ''the German and Japanese defense debates of the 1950s revolved around much more fundamental questions of national identity, the definition of the national interest and of the kind of political, economic, and social systems that the two nations should adopt.'' The examples of Germany and Japan therefore give weight to the potential importance of going beyond the regulatory aspects of culture to examine the way culture constitutes identity, but this conception is not confined to these two cases.[20]

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[19]The term ''inter-state political affairs'' is taken from Johnston (1995a,b).

[20]For example, Michael Barnett has examined Arab and Israeli identities and their ramifications for alliance formation in the Middle East (1996).

Post-Structuralists

The post-structuralists and the conventional constructivists both embrace ''the idea that cultures and identities are emergent and constructed (rather than fixed and natural), contested and polymorphic (rather than static and essence-like)'' (Lapid 1996:8). However, this approach is concerned primarily with dominant discourses and social practices have constituted are subjectivities.[21] In contrast to other schools of thought, these writers argue that ''Narrative is thus not simply a re-presentation of some prior event, it is the means by which the status of reality is conferred on events. But historical narratives also perform vital political functions in the present; they can be used as resources in contemporary political struggles'' (Devetak 2005:164). Dominant understandings of historical political events and contemporary views of other states are created by social actors often instrumentally to suit their own purposes. Thus, the process of discursive representation is never a neutral, detached one but is always ''imbued with the power and authority of the namers and makers of reality—it is always knowledge as power'' (George 1994:30).

For example, Cynthia Weber (1995:92, 1998, 2008), investigates how sovereignty and intervention have been discursively represented over time depending on the context and agents involved. In relation to US intervention, she argues that ''No matter where US military action takes place, the United States maintains that its action does not constitute 'intervention' nor violate the sovereignty of the target state because a discursive distinction has been drawn between a repressive government with no legitimate claim to sovereign authority and the people of the target state who are sovereign.'' Roxanne Doty, on the other hand, examines the ways in which the North has represented the South, legitimizing colonialism and relationships of domination by denying the role of agency to the South itself. In so doing, the North represents its interventions as ''civilization, progress, modernization and democracy. Imperial encounters become missions of deliverance and salvation rather than conquests and exploitations'' (1993, 1996:11, 1999; Jabri 2007).

Others emphasize the way in which countries' historical narratives, national myths and symbols, etc. are articulated to develop discourses to serve the foreign policies of states and can thus be seen as representing a post-structuralist school of strategic culture. For example, David Campbell (1996:174) argues that the Yugoslav civil war should be viewed in terms of the use of history to reconstitute subjectivities. As he puts it, ''when a Croatian militiaman stitches an Ustache symbol to his uniform (....) He is reproducing and rearticulating a historical representation and violently deploying it in the present to constitute his (individual and/or collective) subjectivity.'' In other words, the invoking of a nationalistic history served to reconstitute the specific communal subjectivities of the region which were then used in an instrumental fashion by the various leaders for their own political ends.

In order to demonstrate this deployment of cultural resources and the resulting policy outcomes these authors have conducted detailed empirical case studies in order to establish the causes of given political outcomes. David Campbell's earlier work on the Cold War reflects this general approach. Campbell argued that the US articulation of the Soviet Union as a clear and present danger had as much to do with the preservation of order and the suppression of domestic challenges within the United States as it did with the Soviet Union as an actual military threat. Invoking the notion of a Soviet threat helped to constitute the identity of the ''imagined community'' of the American nation by emphasizing

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[21]For a general overview of this approach, refer to Der Derian and Shapiro (1989), *International Studies Quarterly* (1990), Walker (1993), George (1994), and Jahn (1999).

distinctions between ''inside/outside,'' ''domestic/foreign,'' ''us/them'' (Campbell 1992, 1993). His work thus ''involves a deconstruction of conventional political discourse and its self-presentation especially that effected in practice and analysis of both international relations and foreign policy. In reorientating analysis from the concern with the international acts of pregiven subjects to the problematic of subjectivity, this argument proposes that United States foreign policy be understood as a political practice central to the constitution, production, and maintenance of American political identity'' (Campbell 1998:8). Similarly, Iver Neumann (1996) has examined the way in which both positive and negative images of Europe have been used throughout modern history by Russian intellectuals to both define Europe and to define Russianness. One perspective has never quite extinguished the other with the state playing an important role in which view dominates at any one point, depending upon whether the elite have sought to promote further integration or to distance themselves from westernizing influences.

Many of these writings tend to focus on historical watersheds, such as, German reconstruction after the Second World War and the inclusion of the FRG into the Western sphere in 1947/1948; the Suez Crisis; and the Cuban missile crisis (Weldes 1999; Mattern 2005a,b; Jackson 2006). In order to facilitate the integration of the FRG into the Western alliance, it is argued that the United States used the notion of a Western civilization of which Germany was deemed to be historically a member. By deploying such a rhetorical strategy, the FRG came to be seen as a legitimate member of the Western alliance just a few years after it had been its mortal enemy (Jackson 2006). Similarly, the Suez Crisis was viewed as not just a threat to the Special Relationship but as potentially destabilizing the Western alliance by threatening ''a domino effect for the narrative and identity of the West'' (Mattern 2005a,b:194). As a result, it is claimed that immediately following their disagreement over Suez, both the United States and the United Kingdom actively engaged in trying to re-establish the Special Relationship through references to history, common culture and the ties of language. In doing so, they deployed several generic strategies, including: ''fastening'' (re-asserting a shared identity by deploying common rhetorical usages, such as, the Special Relationship); ''terror'' (by forcing a re-definition of common understandings, interpretations, etc.); ''exile'' (to force the opponent to exclude the usage of certain interpretations of events, rhetoric or definitions) (Mattern 2005a:108 & 236).

Strategic culture is viewed as a multifaceted resource with actors deploying various articulations in order to render their actions both intelligible and legitimate both to them selves and to those they seek to influence. Identity is thus seen as being ''*constituted* of power and interests; that is, of language-power and actors' interests.'' Actors are said to deploy certain narratives or rhetoric in order to either reconfirm or change the boundaries of what is deemed to be politically acceptable (Weldes 1999:226). Such a legitimation process ''constructs spheres within which certain actions can be performed, and it cordons off others as falling beyond the pale'' (Jackson 2006:25). However, rather than assuming that this will lead to relatively stable inter-subjective knowledge and understandings, these authors seek to emphasize the way in which actors need to continually confirm these boundaries by deploying the cultural resources at their disposal.

However, the emphasis is not on the permanence of strategic culture but rather its contingent use by state elites, interpreting historical events, national symbols, key strategists, national myths, etc. for instrumental ends according to the situation they find themselves in. As a result of this emphasis on agency and the way in which social actors actively engage in deploying various articulations of what we take to be social givens it also ''rejects modern assumptions of social coherence and notions of causality in favor of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation,

and indeterminacy'' (Best and Kellner 1991:4). Each political event that we seek to study will be constituted from a complex web of interactions that various actors will attempt to control. The critical importance of agency alongside this complex array of social interactions make them highly skeptical of disciplines that seek to develop law-like generalizations across (what they see as) highly varied political events. This was evidenced most clearly in an emphatic statement from Richard Ashley and Rob Walker (1990:265), who replied to Robert Keohane's (1988) appeal for the development of a research programme by replying that when they are asked, ''can they not configure themselves as a theoretical counter-hegemony that could speak a sovereign voice, assume a name, take a position, command a space, secure a home, set down a law, and lay claim to the centre of a discipline? (…) it is characteristic of these exile works of thought (…) that they will answer *no*.''

In engaging in empirical research, these scholars do not view the generation of generalizations—even contingent ones—as viable for their approach. They do engage in solid empirical analysis in order to establish the causes of political outcomes, viewing causality as a ''concatenation of *causal mechanisms*: the contingent coming-together of processes and patterns of social action in such a way as to generate outcomes'' (Jackson 2006:43). However, the emphasis is upon agency and a given actor's instrumental use of certain narratives and rhetoric that resonate with certain elements of his/her culture. As a result, reasons are viewed as ''causes (of social outcomes, not of individual decisions) because they participate in a socially significant process of negotiating and (re)drawing boundaries, simultaneously giving rise to both actions *and* the actors that carry them out'' (Jackson 2006:41). Moreover, these writers seek to avoid essentialist notions of culture emphasizing instead the highly contingent nature of culture and the central and continual role played by individuals in articulating/changing a particular understanding of a culture at any given time. As such, they argue that, ''There is no such thing as a stable social arrangement, *really*. Instead there are patterns of social actions that tend to either sustain or to transform a pre-existing pattern, and do so at *every individual moment*'' (Jackson 2006:252).

These more recent writers have argued that their emphasis on power and interests in the constitution of identity bears some resemblance to realists' emphasis on material power and state behavior.[22] One account would examine how ''power is mediated through material means and impels state action by playing on states' exogenously given physical or material interests, whereas on the post-structuralist account, power is mediated through the language that expresses ideas and impels state action by playing on states' endogenously constituted subjective (Self) interest'' (Mattern 2005a,b:205). However, their epistemology differs greatly to that of realism and even conventional constructivism making any collaboration extremely problematic. These writers concern themselves with contemporary critiques of our mainstream epistemological assumptions because, as they see it, ''to be engaged in a discourse is to be engaged in the making and remaking of meaningful conditions of existence. A discourse, then, is not a way of learning 'about' something out there in the 'real world,' it is rather, a way of producing that something as real, as identifiable, classifiable, knowable, and therefore, meaningful. Discourse creates the conditions of knowing'' (Klein 1987:4; George 1994:30). As a result their objective is to examine the way in which the world has been represented by highlighting ''histories of discursive practices.'' In so doing, they seek to reveal ''the way power is used in all of society's sites'' (Adler 1997:333). Moreover, they ''condemn value neutral theorizing, denying its very possibility, and calling for the development of theories explicitly

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[22]This reflects a recent trend attempting to reconcile these different approaches. Refer to Sterling-Folker (2002, 2005) and Barkin (2003).

committed to the exposure and dissolution of structures of domination'' (Price and Reus-Smit 1998:261).

Although they do regard ideas as influencing policy outcome and they do highlight the deployment of cultural resources, tracing them back to these given outcomes, their emphasis on the contingency of this process leads them to eschew any attempt at generating generalizations and identifying causal variables across different case-studies. In other words, these scholars engage in identifying links between ideational factors and outcomes, but rather than adopt a generalizing strategy they follow ''a *particularizing* one, in which the researcher explains an event by detailing the sequence of happenings leading up to it'' (Dessler 1999:129). Unlike the conventional constructivists who do seek to derive certain generalizations (albeit contingent) from their work, post-structuralists argue that the contingent nature of social arrangements ''means abandoning the conventional, neopositivist definition of causality as a systematic correlation between factors across states'' (Jackson 2006:40). As a result of this emphasis on agency and contingency, the possibilities of establishing a collaborative research project remains highly problematic.

The Interpretive Conception

In contrast to the conceptions identified above, others view culture as being akin to ideas: that is, they operate at many different levels and in a complex, intersecting and overlapping fashion (Price 1999:170). The task is therefore not about:

> making predictions or explaining the role of culture as an independent causal variable for state behavior, but instead address different types of questions based on different ontological assumptions, and for which different methods and answers are appropriate. (Winch 1958:75)

Those advocating an interpretive conception view the search for falsifiable generalized statements as a flawed enterprise because of both the *sui generis* nature of culture and the inappropriateness of causal theorizing when examining the social world. These researchers adopt a hermeneutic or interpretive methodology and submerge themselves within a culture in order to understand the internal order of life forms (Hollis and Smith 1990:82–91). This hermeneutic exercise involves:

> knowing what the agent or agents themselves know, and apply, in the constitution of their activities. It is being able (in principle) to ''go on''—mutual knowledge shared by participants and social-scientific observers. (Giddens 1993:13)

This study of other life forms is said to require us to ''extend our conception of intelligibility as to make it possible for us to see what intelligibility amounts to in the life of the society we are investigating'' (Winch 1964:317).

Clifford Geertz (1993:5), reacting against what he viewed as the inappropriate application of the scientific method to the social world called for research that is ''not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.'' In contrast to the other two conceptions, which seek to develop causal theorizing and produce explanations of particular identifiable behavioral patterns, this conception involves an understanding and reproduction of the ''minds of actors'' and thereby the aim is to engage with another form of life (Hollis and Smith 1990:87).

Some of the early work carried out on the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States was concerned with how the American *weltanschauung* differed from the Soviet view of the world. Such studies argued that

''different political and strategic cultures confront distinctive geostrategic prob-
lems through the prisms of their individual historical circumstances, and with
unique sets of assets and liabilities, will make somewhat individual choices''
(Gray 1997:28). During the Cold War failure to take into account each country's
unique strategic culture might lead to critical mistakes by policymakers, ''many
of the western policy errors of the past 40 years could have been avoided if a
proper respect had been paid both to the uniqueness and to the plain facts of
local Soviet conditions'' (Gray 1986:65; Poore 2004). This work thus involved
developing a deep understanding of how each side viewed the world and how
they saw their relationship with each other.

These writers therefore adopted a somewhat wider definition of strategic cul-
ture, for example, Colin Gray (1981:2) defined American strategic culture as that
''referring to modes of thought and action with respect to force, derives from
perception of the national historical experience, aspiration for self-characteriza-
tion (for example, as an American, what am I?, how should I feel, think, and
behave?), and from all of the many distinctively American experiences (of geog-
raphy, political philosophy, of civic culture, and 'way of life') that characterize
an American citizen.'' Such a broad definition has become the subject of a
rather heated debate between those adopting a more behavioralist approach,
such as Alastair Iain Johnston (1995a,b:37), who criticizes it for ''subsuming pat-
terns of behavior…within a definition of strategic culture,'' thus highlighting the
differences that exist between strategic culturalists.

Indeed, the difference between the interpretive conception and the other two
is encapsulated in the debate between Colin Gray and Johnston (1999) in which
Gray (1999:49) argues that ''strategic culture provides a context for understand-
ing, rather than explanatory causality for behavior.'' As Stuart Poore (2003:294)
has observed, a key difference between the two analysts is that, for Gray, culture
is ''everywhere and within everyone.'' Therefore it does not make sense to treat
it as one causal variable of many—''culture is literally everywhere: it is too perva-
sive, yet elusive, for its influence to be isolated for rigorous assessment.'' Rather,
strategic culture should be, ''conceived as a context out there that surrounds,
and gives meaning to, strategic behavior, as the total warp and woof of matters
strategic that are thoroughly woven together, or as both'' (Gray 1999:51).

Such an interpretive conception is more interested in establishing what Geertz
has called ''thick description,'' which he feels would allow the researcher to
develop a fuller understanding of other cultures. Poore (2003:284) has also com-
mented that, following Gray:

> Strategic culturalists should now be urged to generate more empirical research
> into particular strategic cultural cases through the use of thick description. In
> doing so, many new insights can be gained into cases where previously rationalist
> materialist explanations have exerted an over-bearing dominance.

Potentially, a better label would be ''thick account'' because Geertz (1993:26–
27) accepts that any description will be an interpretation of a culture rather than
an exact replica of how a particular cultural grouping sees the world, leading to
an improved understanding of what meaning certain actions have for the actors
involved. Geertz therefore recognizes what Anthony Giddens (1993:13) has
labeled the double hermeneutic problem associated with such social research. In
endeavoring to understand ''what the agent or agents themselves know, and
apply, in the constitution of their activities'' the social observer is also involved
in the ''active constitution and reconstitution of frames of meaning whereby they
organize their experience.'' Thus, for Geertz, when researching another culture
the observer's mind does not resemble a *tabula rasa*, rather the observer begins
their research laden with various ideas and theories of the social world. This has

parallels with Gray's (2003:294) qualified support for Poore's treatment of strategic culture as ''context all the way down'' when he writes that what is required are, ''empirically thick studies of societies of interest, always remembering that we must filter what we learn through the distorting lens of our own culture.'' From this perspective, ''thick accounts'' of other cultures can never be fully objective: we cannot jump out of our cultural clothing when attempting to understand other cultural groups.

Given their emphasis on the *sui generis* nature of culture the generation of nomothetic generalizations (even of a contingent nature) concerning the behavioral patterns of the cultures under study is not an objective of this group of culturalists. However, these scholars have examined the different ways in which cultures have adapted to common external pressures. For example, the diffusion of a dominant culture across several states will not produce identical outcomes; instead each culture will adopt, reject and alter different beliefs and practices of this dominant culture. It is thus possible for these scholars to attempt to understand ''a country's historical particularity with its participation in a general movement of history'' (Bendix 1978:4; Adcock 2006:63). One can identify similar attempts by interpretive strategic culturalists in their examination of how different states adopted various strategies in response to the advent of the nuclear age.

Consequently, detailed interpretive studies may not only be useful for our understanding of other cultures they also offer support to other forms of case study and to those involved in comparative analysis. At the same time, one caveat this conception raises is that in seeking to identify causal relationships we run the risk of over-simplifying the social world. Worse, categories from one case may be applied inappropriately to others. An inadequate knowledge of a given culture may lead to the misinterpretation of the various attributes of value laden words, such as pride, honor, duty; but also security, safety and stability (Macintyre et al. 1973).

Variation in Research Objectives

The variety within strategic culture is not necessarily limited to the above four conceptions. However, this classification does serve to demonstrate that, just as in the case of realism, strategic culture is best regarded as ''a general approach to international politics, not a single theory,'' general approach to international politics rather than single theory.[23] The first two conceptions broadly agree epistemologically and methodologically each seeks to infer causal relations between a given strategic culture and behavior and to develop generalizations that can then be tested. However, the first views strategic culture as epiphenomenal whereas the second conception does not. Epiphenomenal strategic culture would therefore appear best suited to the task, *a la* Desch, of supplementing neorealism. Rather than supplanting realism, epiphenomenal strategic culture shows, ''some promise of supplementing realist theories by explaining lags between structural change and state behavior, accounting for deviant state behavior, and explaining behavior in structurally indeterminate environments'' (Desch 1998:169). In other words, ideational factors would still be regarded as epiphenomenal, whereas structural constraints should be deemed the primary cause of state behavior.

On the other hand, the last three conceptions of strategic culture agree that strategic cultures ''are not epiphenomena of unitary states acting under anarchy

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[23]A general approach in the sense that there are a variety of contending theories within this school of thought. Refer to Lynn-Jones and Miller (1995). Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik similarly argue that realism ''is not a single theory but a family of theories—a 'paradigm''' (1999:9).

and constrained by material power structures.'' However, each of the last three conceptions differs both epistemologically and in their research objectives (Johnston 1999:529). The conventional constructivists seek to identify regular patterns of behavior, the possible causal mechanisms behind such patterns and ''contingent'' generalizations about these patterns of behavior. The post-structuralist school, on the other hand, engages in identifying links between ideational factors and outcomes but view these links as discrete cases. Finally, the interpretive conception treats each culture in a *sui generis* manner, opting for what they see as a deeper understanding obtained through immersing themselves in the particular culture under investigation.

For the epiphenomenal conception, one may wish to conduct a cross-national study of states that have adopted suboptimum strategies and in doing so assess how influential strategic culture was in these cases and why it led to critical failures (that is, a decline in relative power) in some cases but not others. The second conception could engage in two separate tasks. First, it could offer an explanation that is on par or better than the neorealist account of events. Second, it could offer a comparative account (either across cases or across time) of the similarities and differences between the strategic cultures under study and the similarities and differences in behavioral outcomes that arise as a result. Jeffrey Legro's (1997:42) work on identifying macro-correlations between the adoption of a norm (in this case against chemical warfare, strategic bombing and submarine warfare) and a state's preference for a particular use of force is a good example of the use of small n comparisons using historically well informed cases.

One method that is common among the first three conceptions of strategic culture and could be pursued by neoclassical realists is process tracing, involving ''theoretically informed historical research to reconstruct the sequence of events leading to an outcome'' (Farrell 2002:61–62). This methodology is not atheoretical, but recognizes that the complexity of the social world requires the researcher to examine a combination of several causal factors to explain any particular outcome. In so doing, the researcher traces the decision-making process leading to a particular outcome, but such a method can deal with complex forms of causality that identifies the outcome as flowing from ''the *convergence* of several conditions, independent variables or causal chains'' (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994:226–227; George and Bennett 2005:214).

At the same time, researchers adopting such an approach do not assume ''a political universe characterized by the regularities which might render possible a predictive (albeit probabilistic) science of the political'' (Hay 2002:48). Rather than endeavor to emulate Waltzian neorealism in seeking to formulate a theory that can be applied universally, these researchers point ''to the inherent complexity and contingency (or open-endedness) of processes of change in which human subjects are involved'' (Hay 2002:48). Yet, there is a clear distinction here between conventional constructivists and post-structuralists. As pointed out earlier, the latter do not view the generation of generalizations—even contingent ones—as viable for their approach. They could engage in empirical case studies using trace processing in order to establish links between ideational factors and political outcomes. However, they view agency and the individual role of each actor in any given event in such a way that each ''concatenation of causal mechanisms'' is rarely if ever repeated.

On the other hand, the conventional constructivists do seek to establish contingent generalizations concerning patterns of behavior by adopting a method that:

> specifies independent variables, delineates them into the categories for which the researcher will measure the cases and their outcomes, and provides not only hypotheses on how these variables operate individually, but also contingent

generalizations on how and under what circumstances they behave in specified conjunctions or configurations to produce effects on specified dependent variables. (George and Bennett 2005:235)

This "allows for cross-case comparisons/studies which can be integrated with within-case methods to allow structured iterations between theories and cases" (George and Bennett 2005:235).

For example, Richard Price and Christian Reus-Smit (1998) investigate the cultural context in which actors operate and thereby gain insights in to what they call "contingent generalizations." Such generalizations are not necessarily "timeless determinants of human social and political life," they aim "not to obscure…cultural and historical particularities" and the "factors they focus upon are not treated as context-free independent variables that may be transferred unproblematically to any and all situations to produce a necessary outcome" (Price and Reus-Smit 1998:274). Those that wish to limit themselves to making "contingent generalizations" can still consistently claim that "ideas, norms, and culture generate structures"—one can establish causality and generate certain generalizations about such causality without necessarily claiming that culture is immutable.[24]

One criticism of the comparative approach is that, in endeavoring to identify commonalities across cases we run the danger of over-simplifying our social world, or worse, applying categories from one case that either do not apply or have a completely different meaning in another case. An inadequate knowledge of a given culture may lead to the misinterpretation of the meaning of language, symbols, actions, etc. through comparison with one's own culture (Macintyre et al. 1973). In addition, further explanation is needed as to how to deal with the thorny question of nondecisions and other non-observables (Bachrach and Baratz 1963; Lukes 1974). As Andrew Cortell and James Davis (2000:71) have pointed out, "When certain behaviors are ruled out of the range of acceptable alternatives, owing to internalized normative constraints, there may be no outward or observable behavioral traces on which to base empirical analysis." What is left unsaid may be as important as what has been said and nondiscursive gestures may be as important as written evidence. For many, such aspects can only be understood through immersing oneself in a culture to the extent that the meanings of both discursive and nondiscursive expressions are understood. It was these sorts of questions that initially led writers such as Winch and Geertz to attempt to understand rather than explain various cultures, to try to understand what actors meant by their actions (Winch 1958). In doing so, they sought to locate such action within the cultural "form of life" that the actor was immersed in (Hollis and Smith 1990:70). It may well be that the fourth conception can therefore enrich the research of those adopting the first two conceptions on a case by case basis.

Conclusion

This article began by pointing out that some post-structuralist scholars have recently argued that discussion with realists may be useful to both sides generating "theoretic cross-fertilization between" the two groups (Mattern 2005a,b:250). This paper has explored this possibility arguing that the proposal is not as straightforward as it first seems because the research objectives of strategic

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[24]Johnston (1996:265). Jeffrey Legro, although distancing himself from writers such as Katzentstein, also agrees that "identities and basic interests can remain constant for long periods" and offers "a domestic-level cultural explanation of preferences that contrasts to the common view that state desires are functionally determined or definitively constrained by the international system" (Legro 1996:118 & 133).

culture vary according to the conception under consideration. Four conceptions were therefore identified and the possibilities of competitive collaboration with neoclassical realism explored. Many strategic culturalists acknowledge that material factors have a role to play in influencing international outcomes. But this does depend on which approach is adopted. For example, one strand of constructivism (labeled here as conventional) views material forces as having ''some intrinsic causal powers.''[25] Others argue that constructivists are ''ontological realists'' viewing the material world as producing enabling/constraining conditions to the extent that some constructivists see an opportunity to ''seize the middle ground'' and understand ''how the *material*, subjective and inter-subjective worlds interact in the social construction of reality'' (Adler 1997:330; Sterling-Folker 2002:91). However, post-structuralists concentrate their research on discourses and how power is wielded through these discursive representations of the world; while others seek to immerse themselves in different cultures to gain an understanding of different worldviews. There are thus possibilities for competitive collaboration between strategic culturalists and neoclassical realists, but this will depend upon the particular school of strategic culturalists under consideration.

It was found that the first conception is best suited, *a la* Desch's proposal, to explaining time lags in a state's behavior to changes in the international configuration of power and/or suboptimal policies when compared to realist predictions. Collaborative work with neoclassical realists could provide interesting insights for both types of researcher. The second conception also seeks to explore causal explanations for regular patterns of state behavior and to generate contingent generalizations from their work, however, culture is viewed as a causal factor in its own right and not simply an intervening variable. It is therefore possible for the conventional constructivists to establish comparative explanatory models either across cases or across time. This conception of strategic culture could therefore establish various models that could then engage in ''competitive hypothesis testing'' with neoclassical realism (Johnston 1996:227–228). In contrast, the post-structuralists eschew such generalizations for a strategy of focusing on particular case studies and the manner in which actors deploy cultural resources to establish the boundaries of what is deemed legitimate and acceptable and thereby influence political outcomes. Although this group also uses process tracing identifying links between ideational factors and outcomes, they focus upon investigating events leading up to one particular event, rather that endeavoring to establish variables that can be used across cases. Moreover the aim is to unmask ''histories of discursive practices'' through which power has been wielded (Adler 1997:333). In so doing, they abandon ''the conventional, neopositivist definition of causality as a systematic correlation between factors across states'' (Jackson 2006:40). The final conception is best suited to individual rich historical case studies which would be informative in their own right but would also serve to counter any tendencies in the first three conceptions toward over generalization.

At the same time, neoclassical realists have sought to further develop realism by including other variables in their analyses. It is not unusual, therefore, to see references to state bureaucracies, the perception/misperception of policymakers, interest groups, elite cohesion, perceptual biases and even ideas. Some have even suggested that realist theories can only be made determinate in ''ex post explanation rather than ex ante prediction'' and that there is a need to ''trace the process through which the posited cause produced (or influenced) the outcome'' (Wohlforth 1994/5:93; Friedberg 2000:5). The shift by neoclassical realists

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[25]Wendt (1999:110) where Wendt argues for a rump materialism that includes: the distribution of capabilities; the technical composition of material capabilities; and geography and natural resources. It should be noted that Wendt is not altogether clear how his approach can include such factors (Smith 2000).

toward richer historical accounts of state behavior using process tracing thus echoes part of the methodological approach adopted by several strategic culturalists.

Both realism and strategic culture have therefore further developed their research interests. What is noteworthy for this paper is that this ''neoclassical turn'' has revealed that some of these writers have acknowledged that other theories may offer equally valid explanations of state behavior and that it may even be possible that neoclassical realism could offer ''an explanation that may compete with or complement those of other theoretical traditions'' (Wohlforth 1999:34). Meanwhile those from the strategic cultural approach have argued that ''few cultural scholars believe that this really is an 'either-or' theoretical debate'' (Lantis 2002:104).

Both neoclassical realism and strategic culture should therefore be perceived as competing approaches but with some overlaps existing between them. It may therefore be possible that the neoclassical realists and the so-called ''epiphenomenal'' strategic culturalists have enough in common to consider the possibility of future competitive collaboration. A debate between neoclassical realists and the conventional constructivists may yield valuable insights into how much importance should be given to structure, intervening and even other independent variables in the contemporary world. The assessment of these competing models would thus help further our understanding of international relations. It may even be possible for both sides to engage in a collaborative research project in which the two sides present their best explanatory models for a particular set of cases. The post-structuralists could provide alternative explanations of events, but this would be limited to a case by case basis. Explanations based on the deployment of nonmaterial resources could be directly compared to those based more upon material factors thus providing a richer account of international events. Similarly, the interpretivist school could provide rich cultural accounts that could inform neoclassical realist research.

Yet, it should be clear from the above analysis that the most fruitful collaboration will be between neoclassical realists and epiphenomeal/constructivist accounts of strategic culture. Many of these scholars have adopted a methodology that emphasizes retrodiction rather prediction, contingent generalizations as opposed to covering laws, and rich historical case studies using process tracing. Such an approach may also therefore appeal to those of a neoclassical realist persuasion that seek to produce policy relevant theories that improve our understanding of the contemporary world in which we now live.

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