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Grand Strategy, Strategic Culture, Practice

The Social Roots of Nordic Defence

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HEIKKA

ABSTRACT

The article produces a model for empirical study of the security and defence policies of states, with a starting point in the literature on strategic culture (e.g. Gray, Klein, Johnston) and grand strategy (e.g. Kennedy, Posen, Kier). We identify two key problems with the literature. First, it only superficially touches base with the social sciences grouped around the concept of culture for a century, namely cultural anthropology and, to a lesser degree, sociology. The literature on strategic culture consequently operates with a reified concept of culture that is outdated elsewhere in the social sciences. Second, in sticking to a reified concept of culture, the literature has not (yet) come up with the kind of dynamic and specific framework for empirical analysis that we are looking for. Instead, it is bogged down in the debate begun in the 1950s on whether behaviour should or should not be treated as part of culture. In order to rectify this, we refashion the concept of strategic culture as a dynamic interplay of potential grand strategy, on the one hand, and specific practices such as doctrines, civil–military relations and procurement on the other. The key source of inspiration for this reconceptualization is the so-called ‘practice turn’ in anthropology and sociology (e.g. Bourdieu, Swidler, Schatzki).

Keywords: grand strategy; Nordic security; practice theory; strategic culture

Introduction

Our aim with this project is to produce empirical knowledge about the security and defence policy of the Nordic states as these policies turn away from what they were during the Cold War towards something new. In order to do this, we need a grounded, middle-range theory of social life that allows us to home in on specific shifts in the ways in which strategic matters are handled. The best starting point for such an undertaking is the literature on strategic culture, but there are two key problems.¹ The first is a general



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intellectual one. As demonstrated, for example, in the recent debate between Colin Gray (1999, 2003) and Alastair Iain Johnston (2003), this literature does not touch base with recent work within the social sciences, where work has been done on the concept of culture for a century, i.e. in anthropology and, to a lesser degree, in sociology. For example, Gray (1999: 51) quotes Bernard Brodie to the effect that 'good strategy presumes good anthropology and sociology', but then goes on to draw on anthropological work that is a quarter of a century old. As a consequence, the literature on strategic culture still operates with a reified concept of culture that is outdated elsewhere in the social sciences. The second problem follows from the first, and is a specifically instrumental one. By sticking to a reified concept of culture, the literature on strategic culture does not (yet) give us the kind of dynamic and specific framework for empirical analysis that we need.

The rest of this introduction does four things. First, we introduce the concept of strategic culture as it stands in order to use it as a starting point. Second, having identified some crippling weaknesses in the present use of the term, we refashion the key concept of culture as a dynamic interplay of discourse and practices. Third, in keeping with our aim to produce situated knowledge, we draw up a list of specific practices crucial for Nordic defence and security policies at the present juncture. We stress that this list will need modification if applied in other contemporary cases, or in cases in other historical periods. Fourth, inasmuch as we hold discourse to be an historically emergent phenomenon, we provide a brief sketch of how the cultural interplay between discourse and practice produced traits of contemporary discourse. We stress that this sketch is presented simply as a heuristic tool for the country articles that follow (and, we hope, for future contributions as well).

The Concept of Strategic Culture as It Stands

The literature on strategic culture in its present form can be traced back to American studies of the Soviet Union in the late 1970s (Snyder, 1977; Jacobsen, 1990; Johnston, 1995). The approach focuses on how elites and decision-makers assess and interpret the main characteristics of the international system in which they operate and how these assessments influence their views about security policy, and the use of military force in particular. The approach is therefore concerned with the perceptions, beliefs, ideas and norms that guide national security elites in their task of sorting out strategic priorities for the hard core of a state's foreign and security policy.

The strategic culture approach presumes that individual interests are constructed in the context of temporarily and logically consistent patterns of perceptions about a country's role in international politics and in the use of military force towards achieving political ends. These patterns, strategic culture theorists presume, are rooted in historically unique 'early' or 'formative' experiences of a state (or, as noted below, of its predecessor polity or polities). They are influenced by philosophical, political, cultural and cognitive factors as the state and its elites develop through time. Within the

discipline of International Relations, these concerns have been addressed by a number of so-called constructivists, some of whose work we draw on below.² This literature centres on norms, and on how states are socialized into norms.³ A set of norms may add up to the German concept of *Weltanschauung*, which captures the holistic dimension that the literature on strategic culture attempts to address. While strategic culture is reflected in the belief-systems that guide the making of foreign and security policy, it has its roots in interpretations of world history and the purpose of human collectives in that history. Thus, strategic culture is ultimately tied to fundamental philosophical questions about the meaning of life and the relationship between self and other.

In order to set this literature off from some dominant contemporary competitors in the strategic studies literature, it may be helpful to state explicitly what strategic culture is not. The strategic culture approach does not presume that strategic culture is unchangeable or unrelated to changes in 'objective' factors, such as the development of new military technologies or changes in economic growth rates among states. Rather, it is assumed that core strategic beliefs are so deeply embedded in general and political culture that they tend to change slowly and to constrain the effects that changes in a state's security environment have on that state's security policy. The perspective is not, therefore, technologically or structurally deterministic. This sets it apart from, for example, neo-realism (cp. Glenn et al., 2003; also Booth and Trood, 1999; Hoffmann and Longhurst, 1999). On the other hand, this literature is definitely culturally path-dependent. In this sense the approach differs from, for example, radical post-structuralism, which assumes that national selves are a function of interaction with others, and can therefore change instantaneously.

Analysts of strategic culture have carried on an internal debate about how best to balance the holism needed to take note of the cultural and philosophical dimension of strategic culture, while at the same time maintain a certain scientific rigour (e.g. Johnston, 1995; Gray, 1999). In an important article, Alastair Iain Johnston (1995) divided strategic culture scholars into three 'generations' depending on the approach they have taken on this issue. The first generation identified by Johnston arose from Cold War debates on nuclear strategy during the early 1980s. Jack Snyder's seminal research report on Soviet strategic culture aimed to contribute to the American debate about strategic targeting plans and to raise the question of whether the Soviets would share American assumptions about 'flexible' and 'limited' nuclear options. Snyder's theoretical approach remained ambivalent. According to Johnston (1995), neither he nor the rest of Snyder's cohort (e.g. Gray, 1981; Jones, 1990) explicated the causal relation between strategic culture and strategic choice. According to 'the first generation', strategic cultures are shaped by a number of relatively stable factors, such as historical experiences, national character, and geography, and they consistently lead to certain types of behaviour. To Johnston, the appeal of the first-generation theories lies in their explanatory and predictive power. If strategic cultures change slowly and pervade all levels of security policy from grand strategy to tactics, then strategic culture is a useful

concept for scholars and decision-makers assessing the behaviour of states. The weakness of the first-generation theories, Johnston (1995: 37–9) states, was its mechanical determinism concerning the relation between culture and behaviour, which made it hard to evaluate the causal relevance of strategic culture. Moreover, in order to achieve their logical consistency, the first-generation theories had to resort to sweeping simplifications about national strategic cultures and to rule out the possibility of the existence of multiple strategic cultures within one country.

The 'second generation' of strategic culture theories identified by Johnston made a clear distinction between strategic culture and behaviour, as well as between declaratory and secret doctrine. Bradley Klein (1986, 1989), for example, claimed that the defensive nature of the US nuclear doctrine was merely a declaratory one aimed at providing a culturally acceptable justification for the operational strategy, while the 'real' strategy stressed war-fighting in defence of US hegemonic interests.⁴ While the distinction between declaratory and real doctrine helps in avoiding some of the pitfalls of the first-generation theories, it also raises questions about the nature of the relationship between culture and behaviour, which are left largely unanswered by the studies. To what extent are elites socialized into strategic culture? How conscious are elites about the distinction between the declaratory doctrine and 'the real' doctrine? How can we evaluate the causal relevance of strategic cultures, if the 'real' doctrines are not public?

The third generation of strategic culture theorists, of which Johnston sees himself as a part, has sought to make the concept of strategic culture 'testable' in the positivist sense. This is done by treating 'strategic culture' as an independent variable and 'behaviour' as a dependent variable, and pitting the cultural explanation of behaviour against alternative explanations, such as realist and institutionalist ones. Johnston's own work exemplifies this approach, as does that of Legro (1995) and Kier (1997). He defines strategic culture as an entity that appears in the form of 'a limited, *ranked* set of grand strategic preferences over actions that are consistent across the objects of analysis and persistent across time' (Johnston, 1995: 38). By claiming that culture materializes in the form of preference-ranking and behaviour, Johnston is able to make his definition falsifiable: strategic culture is persistent if preference ranking is persistent; strategic culture matters if there is a high correlation between ranked strategic preferences and actual strategic behaviour.

Johnston (1995) then draws on a positivist epistemology, where theory-testing is seen as the central task of normal empirical science. We note that the positivist-inspired tests suggested by the extant literature on strategic culture are out of synchrony with cultural scholarship elsewhere in the social sciences. A major analytical problem created by importing positivism into the study of strategic culture arises from the distinction between culture and behaviour: How can we interpret the meaning of (strategic) behaviour if not within the context of (strategic) culture? The positivist approach, in which behaviour is used to evaluate the causal relevance of culture, presumes that 'behaviour' (as something 'out there') would not in itself be a constitutive part of culture, and that it can thus be studied sepa-

rately from culture.⁵ This assumption is simply untenable. As Johnston points out elsewhere (2003: 520), we are in need of an approach that will allow us to maintain the holistic intent of cultural analysis, while allowing us to reify concepts to the degree that doing empirical research demands. He has 'no answer' to how this should be done. We think we do.

The Concept of Strategic Culture Refashioned

By employing the metaphor of 'generations' as an ordering device, Johnston lays out a field of scientific knowledge production in a way that allows him to stand on the shoulders of previous generations. This metaphor may also be turned against him, however. It is rare for the grandson to display all of the virtues of his predecessors, and none of their vices. Whereas Johnston's division of scholars seems to be in order inasmuch as it introduces a useful tripartite taxonomy and mirrors the chronology of publication dates, we argue that it obscures the basic epistemological problems that are at stake. Johnston's first and third generations subscribe to a positivist epistemology which fails to take note of the fact that all anthropologists and almost all sociologists employ the concept of culture as a *constitutive* concept, and not as an independent variable. Cultures, James Clifford (1986: 10) points out, 'do not hold still for their portraits'.

In the latest book-length anthropological exegesis of the concept, Adam Kuper (1999: x) argues that culture is a 'hyper-referential' concept that is to be avoided, and that we should instead 'talk more precisely of knowledge, or belief, or art, or technology, or tradition'. Kuper's main point seems to be that catch-all concepts such as 'culture' lead analysts to over-generalize about their data and to tell too grand narratives about it. This view is problematic, but we certainly agree that a dose of disaggregation of this concept is called for. Kuper also offers a helpful reading of the concept of culture in anthropology. He highlights the role of Franz Boas in using the concept in the plural, and the importance in the American tradition of Talcott Parsons' conceptualization of the cultural system as a symbolic realm which forms a link between the privileged realm of the social on the one hand and the realm of psychology on the other. To Parsons (1951: 17): 'A cultural system does not "function" except as part of a concrete action system, it just "is"'. It is a precondition for action — a set of social facts anterior to the action and which makes that action possible — and not the action itself.⁶ Such a concept of culture exposes itself to the same kind of critique as any concept of structure, understood as something that is analytically distinct from agency: if it exists outside the reality of human agency, then how can it be said to have an existence at all? We do not set out to circumvent this problem, for two reasons. First, we need a concept of structure in order to escape methodological individualism, and a concept of agency in order to escape determinism. Second, the whole string of different debates on the tie between agency and structure has yet to produce a model that addresses the two concurrently. Until philosophers of science (who remain, after all, the ones assumed to be in charge of these things within the current division

of academic labour) succeed in producing a model that may reconcile the two, the challenge must be to diminish the reification of social stuff in the highest degree possible with the intellectual tools at hand. Almost all anthropologists who have been active since the 1950s have broken with the idea first advanced by German nineteenth-century ethnographers such as Bastian, then by mid-twentieth-century American anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead and sociologists such as Parsons, that culture is a clearly bounded phenomenon. On the contrary, culture is a phenomenon with notoriously fuzzy boundaries (cp. Johnston, 1998, 2003: 522).

Another problem with the first and third generations' conceptualization of culture follows on from this. Their work has not taken cognizance of the fact that cultures overlap in various ways. In light of this, for a concept of strategic culture to be in synchrony with other social analysis, at a very minimum we need a concept of strategic culture that treats it in a holistic manner, as a fuzzy entity, and thus as an entity that overlaps with other entities of the same kind. Inasmuch as Johnston's treatment of strategic culture does not treat culture in this way, it lays itself open to the full critical thrust of the last half-century of anthropological and sociological scholarship on previous uses of the concept of culture.

The problem with Johnston's second generation is different. Klein, who is Johnston's key example, is a discourse analyst who is primarily interested in long-term political shifts. Klein's approach thus takes care of holism, but it is a problem for the specificity of the analyses. For a concept to be useful as a node in defence and security analysis, it also needs to be employable for more specific purposes than the long-term shifts on which Klein fastened. If we want to do empirical work based on middle-range theory, we need a set of concepts that is more precise than Klein's.

In order to stay clear of the positivism of the first and third generations as well as the lack of specificity of the second generation of previous analysis of strategic culture, we need a concept of culture that allows constitutive analysis of specific problems. Building on previous work (Neumann, 2002), the key conceptual change that we propose for the concept of culture is to follow the lead of practice theory and conceptualize culture as dynamic interplay between discourse and practice. We follow the general turn of anthropology and sociology away from an analysis based on beliefs, ideas, norms, and so on, in favour of a new theoretical bifurcation. The value added is to bring the debate about strategic (and political) culture away from the exhausting and exhausted focus on how ideas and behaviour relate to one another:

Practice theory moves the level of sociological attention 'down' from conscious ideas and values to the physical and the habitual. But this move is complemented by a move 'up', from ideas located in individual consciousness to the impersonal arena of 'discourse'. A focus on discourses, or on 'semiotic codes' permits attention to meaning without having to focus on whether particular actors believe, think, or act on any specific ideas. Like language, discourse is conceived to be the impersonal medium through which (with which) thought occurs (Lévi-Strauss's notion that animals are 'good to think with').

A grand strategy is a political–military, means–ends chain, a state’s theory about how it can best ‘cause’ security for itself. Ideally, it includes an explanation of why the theory is expected to work. A grand strategy must identify likely threats to the state’s security and it must devise political, economic, military, and other remedies for those threats. Priorities must be established among both threats and remedies [. . .] ideally, the grand strategy of a state should account for its effects on other states. (Posen, 1984: 13, 25)

It seems to us, however, that the previous thinking on ‘grand strategy’ is in need of the same kind of disaggregation that we have just performed on the concept of ‘culture’. The points behind performing this disaggregation are two: (a) we are able to identify building blocks that are familiar to students of strategic studies, thus splicing together general social theory with a tradition in the study of security and defence policy; (b) we are better able to specify the concepts of culture, discourse and practice in a strategic setting, and to model the relationships between them. The point is to follow Swidler’s shift of attention ‘down’ from conscious ideas and values — such as the idea of a grand strategy — to the physical and the habitual, and also ‘up’ from ideas located in individual consciousness to the impersonal arena of ‘discourse’.

‘Grand strategy’ is part of a conceptual hierarchy where the subordinate concepts, counted from the most specific level, are tactics, operations and strategy. For Clausewitz, tactics is the art of using troops to win the battle, while strategy is the art of using battles to win the war: ‘Strategy is the employment of the battle to gain the end of the War; it must therefore give an aim to the whole military action . . .’ (Clausewitz, [1832] 1968: 241). Strategy is thus first and foremost a military concept. The development of the concept of ‘grand strategy’ comes as a continuation of Clausewitz’s central insight, i.e. that war is imbricated in general politics. This has temporal validity — war and peace are not necessarily two qualitatively different conditions, it might on the other hand be better to plan for them *in toto* — and it has social validity — political–military and civil–military relations become intertwined to the extent that they must be thought of in continuation. The more intimate this imbrication, the more important it becomes to develop a way of thinking about the nature of the matter, and this is where ‘grand strategy’ can be of use. In the introduction to his classic manual on strategy, Edward Mead Earle pointed out that state and society had become so intertwined since the Napoleonic wars that ‘strategy at this stage must be considered as the art of controlling and utilizing the resources of a nation’ (1943: viii).⁹ Then he immediately added:

The highest type of strategy — sometimes called grand strategy — is that which so integrates the policies and armaments of the nation that the resort to war is either rendered unnecessary or is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory.

A particularly pleasing aspect of such a general approach is that it opens the way for thinking on war as a foreign policy instrument that is not solely

technical. The horizon of planning is extended from the end of the war to societal capacity after the war has ended and peace once more administered. A reasonable consequence is that one can incorporate an ethical perspective that extends beyond when it is ethically just to engage in warfare (*ius ad bellum*) and by what sort of means the war may be waged (*ius in bello*). One must also constantly evaluate whether war is an optimal political instrument in the bigger picture. In another modern classic, Liddell Hart puts this central point as follows: 'if you concentrate exclusively on victory, with no thought for the after-effect, you may be too exhausted to profit by the peace, while it is almost certain that the peace will be a bad one, containing the germs of another war' (1991: 353). One must ensure that a victory in the eventuality of war is a not a Pyrrhic one. First and foremost the goal is to avoid war by drawing on all the *other* resources that are part of a 'grand strategy'. Liddell Hart specifically mentions economic, diplomatic and ethical pressure as such factors, and this is already far-reaching enough to make the case that all available resources can be brought to use. A corollary is that any and every aspect of social life is potentially of relevance for a grand strategy. If one pursues this track further, the overarching strategic aim must be to establish a societal order that can respond to social and political challenges with a minimum of warfare.

Here we have a key point, because it highlights how political initiatives that do not necessarily have any defence components whatsoever may still be parts of a grand strategy. For example, Finland's 1998 programme for the European Union to evolve a 'Northern Dimension', where cooperation with third parties was to play a key role, may be seen as part of an overarching grand strategy. The focus of this grand strategy would then be to tie Russia in with everyday European politics in order to evolve a number of interfaces and practices that could serve to take up the strain in future conflicts. The aim would be to minimize or at least postpone the risk of war emerging as a possible conflict-settling mechanism.

We may now proceed to disaggregate the concept of 'grand strategy' so that it fits the conceptual schema that we have outlined in Figure 1. This is best done, we believe, by reconceptualizing 'grand strategy' from being a coverall term on a par with strategic culture, to being a coverall term for all *preconditions* for action. One could think of it as a snapshot of discourse on strategic matters, taken at a specific time, in a specific place. Such a reification is a double break with extant usage. First, it entails moving grand strategy from the realm of explicitly formulated doctrine ('idea') to the realm of *preconditions for* formulating such doctrines. Second, grand strategy becomes a phenomenon which may or may not be consciously held, inasmuch as a grand strategy is seen as a phenomenon that any polity has, at least *potentially*. As it stands, the 'grand strategy' tradition is centred on the great powers. Paul Kennedy writes about the possibility of applying such a perspective on the foreign policy of a small state that:

No doubt it is theoretically possible for a small nation to develop a grand strategy, but the latter term is generally understood to imply the endeavors of

a power with extensive (i.e. not just local) interests and obligations, to reconcile its means and its ends. (Kennedy, 1991: 186n18 *in extenso*)

We need a concept for the study of the Nordic states, and therefore follow Kennedy's suggestion that the concept be expanded.¹⁰

Grand strategy, then, is seen as a set of preconditions for action, at a specific time and in a specific place, that may exist in more or less explicit and systematized form, and that is actualized in practices. Having substituted 'grand strategy' for 'discourse' in Figure 1, we now return to the concept of practice and to specifying what these practices are. We fasten onto three practices as being particularly important: doctrines, civil–military relations and procurement.

Practice One: Doctrines

Barry Posen singles out the formulation and influence of military doctrines as a particularly important practice, because: 'Within grand strategy, military doctrine sets priorities among various military forces and prescribes how those forces should be structured and employed to achieve the ends in view' (1984: 7). Clearly, doctrines — 'the sub-component of grand strategy that deals explicitly with military means' (Posen, 1984: 13) — are of key importance. It is a covering term for everything to do with strategy and tactics, and may be further broken down to include determining challenges and threats and planning for how to meet them, organizational schemas such as relations between services and branches, standing operational procedures, etc.

With French, German and British inter-war strategies as his cases, Posen has made a classical study of how this plays out in practice. He generalizes his findings thus, on the basis of his interpretation of organizational theory:

In general, organization theory predicts offensive, disintegrated, and stagnant military doctrines. The case studies suggest that this would normally be the result if military organizations were left to their own devices. Organization theory further suggests that military organizations frequently *will* be left to their own devices. The structure of the modern state is characterized by the division of functions among specialist bureaucracies. Different bureaucracies command different types of expertise. According to organization theory, non-soldiers should have difficulty evaluating the state's military needs and should become dependent on professional military organizations for such advice. Organization theory also predicts that these organizations will deliberately try to escape civilian control in the pursuit of their own interests. The militaries of France, Britain, and Germany [between the world wars] did behave in ways consistent with the theory. They were not, however, left entirely on their own, and their respective military doctrines depart in important ways from the theory's predictions. Civilians somehow found ways to overcome the limits of their own military knowledge and get around the bureaucratic shenanigans of their military organizations. (Posen, 1984: 223)

In Posen's view, the military are trapped in an organizational culture that makes them a burden for the politicians and their bureaucracy, which in his perspective are the standard-bearers of rationality. The military organiza-

tional culture can also have adverse normative effects, such as when the military applies pressure to adopt an offensive doctrine. Posen thus concludes that the military are unable to relate actively to their surroundings, and that they are therefore the problem that the politicians try to resolve.

In a more recent work, Elizabeth Kier uses the same empirical data, but reads the relationship between politicians and the military in a very different way. The Posen–Kier debate is state of the art on doctrines, and since it offers insights on which our readings of the Nordic cases may draw, we review it with this end in mind. Kier criticizes Posen for one-sidedly ‘credit[ing] civilian policymakers with formulating military doctrines that are well suited to the state’s strategic environment, yet blam[ing] the armed forces for adopting offensive doctrines tailored to their organizational interest’ (Kier, 1997: 4). She points to two problems. First, one might just as well consider the military organizational logic as a question of doing the right thing, what is fitting and appropriate, rather than assuming a rational, goal-oriented and resource-maximizing strategy. Second, she points out that there are no *a priori* reasons why politicians should not also be subject to organizational limits (of the kind that Posen focuses on, or the kind that she is interested in). Kier focuses on one such question; how norms influence the expectations of politicians:

... civilians’ cultural understanding of the role of the military force in the domestic arena governs their participation in developing doctrine. And because the military plays a pivotal role in building and maintaining the state, the domestic implications of military policy often shape civilian decision. In designing military policy, civilians address their concerns about domestic threats and stability ... (Kier, 1997: 21)

One central example has to do with French and British views on (or representations of) conscription. While the former generally saw it as a practice that ensured a society-wide rally around the republican ideals, and thus ensured France’s cohesion as a polity, the latter tended to see it as a means to a militarization of society. The social democrats in particular feared that conscription might make it easier to indoctrinate and militarize young male workers, such that they might even be used by conservative politicians to thwart the social democrat ambition for power. As long as one had a tradition of professional soldiers in Britain and a tradition of *levée en masse* in France, this has the status of a comparative observation. But as soon as the two victors of the World War bring these domestic perceptions to bear on the political issue of how to treat the vanquished Germany, an immediate problem arises. The British stressed that it would be better to have a small, professional army, i.e. an army that would not contribute to a further militarization of Germany, while the French argued that a conscripted army would reduce the power of the officers. The main point in this context is not that both parties argued on the basis of their own, and not German, cultural conditions, but that politicians on both sides stressed the effects of military politics on what they knew best, namely domestic politics. From this and other examples, Kier concludes that the *civilian side* is the problem, and

that the military should attempt to develop a defence policy to the best of their ability given the inward focus of the politicians:

Civilian policymakers endorse certain military policies that they believe will ensure the maintenance of the preferred *domestic* distribution of power. These civilian choices then constrain a military organization's perception of what is possible. (Kier, 1997: 140)

In our perspective, two central insights can be gleaned from this debate. The first is that *both* civil and military political logics make it unlikely for any concept of 'grand strategy' to be applied in its entirety. The other insight is that any 'grand strategy' worthy of its name must not be allowed to develop in continuation of tactics and strategy, as a purely military pursuit, but must on the other hand be explicated on the basis of general, political goals. Posen's findings can be pushed to the extent that this will be an impossible task for the military — it will in all circumstances be easier for the politicians to engage in such a task. In democratic political systems it will by definition be the duty of the politicians to do this work. Kier's findings indicate that the work will always be subject to limitations, but this does not alter the basic division of roles that can be seen here. The primacy of politicians must be stressed not only on the basis of the organizational theories just mentioned, but because democratic systems by definition entail a minimum of civilian control over the military.

Practice Two: Civil–Military Relations

As will be seen, the point of contention in the Posen–Kier debate is not really military doctrines as such, but the preconditions for their deployment and the kind of rationality that is at stake in those deployments. In terms of our model, these questions may be studied as a question of civil–military practices. The literature on civil–military relations (Fuller, 1945, 1961; Huntington, 1959; Finer, 1962) has particularly focused on the emergence and degree of control that civilian politicians have been able to wield over the military. This is, of course, a key question which has also been studied in the Nordic cases at the present juncture.¹¹ As stated at the outset, however, our focus here is on more mundane stuff. Examples include standard operational procedures for formal and informal relationships between the political and military leaderships (on the state as well as on the supra- and sub-state levels), budgetary practices (including the percentage of the state budget that is allotted to the military), the military's handling of information to society at large (with degree of openness being a particularly interesting factor), and, in open societies such as the Nordic ones, also officer–soldier relations and the gendering of the military.

Practice Three: Procurement

A third set of practices that are particularly important are those that have to do with resource management, covering the existence and status of a

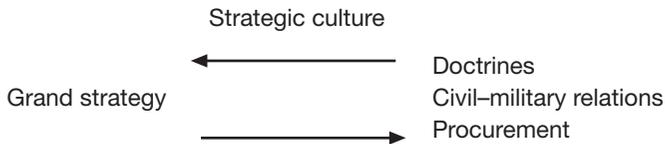
domestic military industry, networks for materiel procurement from abroad and the like. The empirical literature is of relevance here. The question of to what extent a military industry has been considered a motor for the economy at large has been treated at length. There is a body of literature on the fetish value of certain types of weapons, such as dreadnoughts (see, for example, O'Connell, 1991). There is a fast-growing literature on why European procurement patterns change, and what effects this may have on European integration. As may be noticed not least in the changing Finnish procurement practices during the 1990s, procurement seems to be intimately connected with alliance patterns (Dörfer, 1983).

Given that our cases are small states, the question of alliances is of particular salience, and brings us to the last conceptual issue that we think needs treatment here.

Nested Cultures

The discussion so far is summed up in Figure 2 below:

FIGURE 2
Strategic Culture Seen as a Dynamic Interplay between Grand Strategy, Which is Understood as a System for Formation of Statements and the Practices of Doctrines, Civil-Military Relations and Procurement

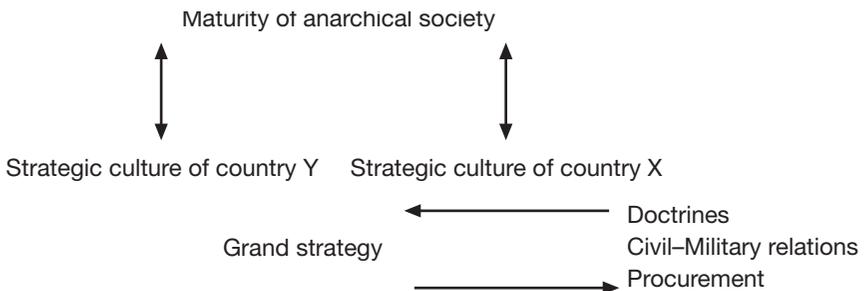


In light of the above discussion, one obvious shortcoming of this model is that it still treats culture as a clearly bounded and homogeneous phenomenon. As also indicated, we agree with the basic thrust of recent anthropological and sociological scholarship, which insists that such a way of treating culture is unwarranted. In order not to be performatively inconsistent, we need to augment our model in such a way that strategic culture emerges not as the stable product of a homogeneous process inside a clearly limited nation-state, but rather as an unstable compromise of a contested process of a transnational type. One key insight of a structuralist kind that we want to keep is that, in a number of specific respects, the states system tosses and turns its members in the direction of adopting certain strategies and practices simply because they are believed to be instrumentally more efficient than others.¹² Rapid diffusion of deployment patterns, weapons technology, etc. between militaries and between states is an empirically observable fact, with the much-touted Revolution in Military Affairs the most recent example. Strategic culture is shaped by the states system to

the extent that the capabilities of other states are read as a challenge that has to be acted on. By extension, it is also shaped by the way state elites think of the state in relation to the idea of an international society, whether they see it as realist, liberal, revolutionary or something else.

When interaction density is sufficiently high, all states and all strategic cultures are subject to these processes. However, inasmuch as processes similar to these are seen as relevant to alliance patterns, and inasmuch as alliances must be said to be a key issue for the survival of a small state, the transnational character of strategic culture is an issue that is particularly ripe for study in the small-state cases we have singled out for analysis. First, just as these pressures may generally be more constraining on small states than on great powers (still presuming that interaction density is roughly similar), there may be different degrees of structural pressures on the same state in different periods, and on different states in the same period. For an implicitly comparative effort such as ours, it is a challenge to be as explicit as possible about these variations. Second, following Wendt (1999), one way of thinking about the relationship between elite readings of the character of the states system on the one hand and the character of strategic culture on the other is in terms of how mature the anarchical society of states may be said to be, and how this impinges on the strategic culture at hand.¹³ For example, in the second half of the nineteenth century, one Scandinavian elite reading of the states system was that it had passed beyond the point where one could reasonably expect conflicts to be settled by war. It often followed that the strategic culture should be cooperative, that the grand strategy of a small state should be neutrality, and that a practice such as arbitration would be more apposite to strategy than was, for example, battleship-building. To sum up, the fully fledged model for this special issue of *Cooperation and Conflict* is the following:

FIGURE 3
Strategic Culture Understood as Transnationally Nested Dynamic
Interplay between Grand Strategy Understood as a System for
Formation of Statements and the Practices of Doctrines, Civil-Military
Relations and Procurement



We now have an outline for analysis where the tasks are set as accounting for transnational strategic pressures on the Nordic countries, specifying

the preconditions for thinking about military and defence policy (grand strategies) as they exist in the Nordic countries, the practices and actual forms of activity (doctrines, civil–military relations, procurement), and the way the dynamic interchange between these two entities works.

Pointing Forward

The concept of strategic culture is a useful conceptual tool with which to focus on the emergent historical and societal context out of which security policies emerge. However, cultures do not stand still for their picture. On the contrary, they can only be grasped in their dynamic interplay with their surroundings. This point has general validity, but it stands out with particular clarity when the concept is applied to the study of small states. Since extant studies of strategic cultures have tended to neglect it, we have a case here of how the study of small states may also potentially enrich our study of great power policies. The case studies that follow this introductory article should thus be seen as answering calls for ‘thick descriptions’ of strategic cultures. They should also serve as reminders of how cultural loans (or perhaps even poaching) by states are key to understanding not only how strategy unfolds within one specific state, but also to understanding change in global thinking on the role of war in social life overall.

Notes

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1. These problems are shared with the literature on political culture as developed by theorists such as Almond and Verba and put to work by, for example, Archie Brown.

2. For a highly instructive discussion of this literature, see Farrell (2002).

3. Legro (1997) is a much-referenced variant of the general argument; for particularly apposite applications, see Farrell (2001) and Finnemore (2003), esp. pp. 52–84. For a sweeping critique, see Laffey and Weldes (1997).

4. In the Nordic context, the difference between official (public) doctrine and unofficial (secret) doctrine has been emphasized by a number of scholars who have not drawn on this literature, e.g. Wilhelm Agrell (1985: 19–24), Pekka Visuri (1989: 411–13) and Ola Tunander (1999).

5. Cultural analysis, as understood within social and cultural anthropology, is holistic, and thus has no place either for ‘the Goldstein–Keohane approach, which neatly assumes, for the purposes of testing, that there are arenas of human activity that are ‘idea-less’ ’ (Johnston, 1999: 518) or indeed for any positivistic testing procedure. Poore’s (2003: 284) conclusion, that ‘the Johnston–Gray debate illustrates the futility of thinking about strategic culture in terms of causal explanations and falsifiable theory, whilst confirming the potential of a contextual or constitutive framework’, simply echoes anthropology’s own track record.

6. It has been an explicit starting point of social science from Durkheim (1982) and onwards that such social facts should be understood as *things*; for a recent application to IR debates, see Neumann (2004).

7. For previous advocacy of the need for such a move to be made in IR, see Laffey and Weldes (1998).

8. This is a general formulation of an insight which can be found in IR, for example in the work of Barry Buzan and associates (e.g. 1998): Security complexes are held together not only by amity, but also by enmity.

9. There are problems related to this conflation of times of war and peace, but one of the advantages is that Master Sun's old theme, that the first priority must be to reach one's goals *without* unsheathing the sword, is brought to the fore.

10. Actually, we follow him rather longer than his invitation warrants.

11. Hansen and Wæver (2002) is a stage-setting for such studies; for specific studies, see e.g. Ulriksen (2002, 2003).

12. We remain sceptical of the way Kenneth Waltz (1979) expands these claims to the process of state-shaping overall, but that is beside the task at hand here. The thrust of our theorizing points in the direction of a less state-centric analysis, but in order to speak to the field as it stands, we think that this thrust should be exerted with extreme caution.

13. Shaw (2003) rightly attacks Gray for not taking this factor into account. Gray's (2003: 286, 290) retort is that the system is basically unchangeable, that 'Thucydides told us most of what we need to know about international relations' and that most of what Clausewitz had to say about war 'is correct for all time'. How Gray can argue that culture is a context for social life, and at the same time that war and other social practices are basically timeless, is simply beyond us.

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