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Strategic Culture

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Russell D. Howard
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Top left: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Photo courtesy U.S. Institute of Peace.

Top right: Chinese troops stand in formation during former Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's visit to the Ministry of Defense in Beijing. Armed Forces Press Service photo by Donna Miles.

Bottom left: Masked al-Qaeda sponsored militants conduct training exercises in an ungoverned Pakistan-Afghanistan border area. Photo used by permission of Newscom.

Bottom Right: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un gives a New Year speech January 1, 2013. Photo used by permission of Newscom.

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Foreword

Brigadier General (retired) Russ Howard presents an argument that traditional methods of International Relations Theory, such as realism and liberalism, are not good predictive tools in an effort to forecast the behaviors of state and non-state actors. These theoretical explanations were originated and fostered in an almost exclusively state centric international system. Today's international system is more complex and diverse than could have been envisaged in the 19th and 20th centuries. The complex web of religious ideologies, globally connected information technologies, and the interdependence of a globalized economy are some examples of driving forces that confound traditional International Relations Theory.

General Howard presents a substitute for the traditional theories by asserting that strategic culture analysis of states and non-state actors or groups is a better predictor of behavior. Specifically, General Howard posits that studying and understanding the strategic cultures of threatening states and non-state actors might be a more useful mechanism for analyzing potential adversaries' proclivity to using force to further their strategic security objectives. General Howard applies a definition of strategic culture as referring to a nation's (or group's) traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behavior, symbols, achievements, and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force.

In this monograph, General Howard defines and reviews strategic culture to present a clear and concise frame of reference. The author then delves into the strategic cultures of The United States, China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda before analyzing commonalities among the four. This foundation allows General Howard to then develop and provide actionable policy guidelines to contextualize an end state which strategic cultural analysis can provide. Yet, the author recognizes and advocates for further study on the subject. Identifying the need for expertise in understanding what strategic culture represents is a long way from understanding the strategic cultures of all state and non-state actors.

General Howard's definition of strategic culture and its substitution for International Relations Theory presents a challenge to Special Operations Forces (SOF); but not an insurmountable problem or anathema to the SOF

culture. Rather, General Howard's advocating for strategic culture analysis is quite in line with the SOF emphasis on the human domain. Considerable effort will have to be made to not only hire expertise, but to incorporate the analysis within the SOF community. This strategic culture analysis is not just a realm for the strategic planner; rather, it can be beneficial to all echelons, from the SOF operator in a village who must understand and work within the strategic culture of the operational environment, to the policymakers who must decide National Strategy.

Kenneth H. Poole, Ed.D.
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department

About the Author

Brigadier General (retired) Russ Howard is an Adjunct Professor of Terrorism Studies and Senior Research Fellow at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. He is also a Senior Fellow at JSOU and a Senior Adviser to Singapore's Home Team Academy. Previously, General Howard was the founding Director of The Jebsen Center for Counter-Terrorism Studies at The Fletcher School, Tufts University, the Head of the Department of Social Sciences and the founding director of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.

His previous Army positions include chief of staff fellow at the Center for International Affairs, Harvard University and commander of the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Lewis, Washington. Other recent assignments include assistant to the Special Representative to the Secretary General during United Nations Operations in Somalia II, deputy chief of staff for I Corps, and chief of staff and deputy commander for the Combined Joint Task Force, Haiti/Haitian Advisory Group. Previously, he was commander of 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne) at Fort Bragg. He also served as the administrative assistant to Admiral Stansfield Turner and as a special assistant to the commander of U.S. Southern Command.

As a newly commissioned officer, he served as an "A" team commander in the 7th Special Forces Group from 1970 to 1972. He left the active component and then served in the U.S. Army Reserve from 1972 to 1980. During this period he served as an overseas manager, American International Underwriters, Melbourne, Australia and China tour manager for Canadian Pacific Airlines. He was recalled to active duty in 1980 and served initially in Korea as an infantry company commander. Subsequent assignments included classified project officer, U.S. Army 1st Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, and operations officer and company commander, 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group in Okinawa, Japan.

General Howard has a B.S. in Industrial Management from San Jose State University and B.A. in Asian Studies from the University of Maryland. He

also has an M.A. in International Management from the Monterey Institute of International Studies and a Master of Public Administration from Harvard University. He was an assistant professor of Social Sciences at the U.S. Military Academy and a senior service college fellow at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. His previous JSOU Press publications are *Intelligence in Denied Spaces: New Concepts for a Changing Security Environment* (2007) *and Educating Special Forces Junior Leaders for a Complex Security Environment* (2009)*, and Cultural and Linguistic Skills Acquisition for Special Forces: Necessity, Acceleration, and Potential Alternatives* (2011), and *The Nexus of Extremism and Trafficking: Scourge of the World or So Much Hype?* (2013).

1. Strategic Culture: Introduction

Why Strategic Culture?

The author of this monograph taught the International Relations (IR) core course at West Point for two years and was the head of the department responsible for teaching the IR course for five. A frequent question from students in the course (and professors too) was, "Can IR theory predict conflict?" The answer was, "Not really." At best, the two major IR schools of thought (realism and liberalism) hedge their bets "by offering both a pessimistic and an optimistic variant—a tacit admission that, on the most burning issue of the day, the predictive value of IR theory is close to nil."[1] While some suggest that realism, liberalism, and other IR theories do have some analytical "predictive power," this study posits that examining the strategic cultures of threatening states such as Iran and North Korea, possible peer competitors such as China, and non-state actors such as al-Qaeda might be a more useful mechanism for analyzing potential adversaries' proclivity to using force to further their strategic security objectives.

This monograph is in eight sections. First, the strategic culture concept is defined and reviewed. Next the strategic cultures of the United States, China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda are presented, in that order. Those chapters are followed by an analysis of the main commonalities among the four entities' strategic cultures and derive actionable policy guidelines. Finally, the monograph concludes by summarizing the findings and suggesting more study on the topic.

Defining Strategic Culture

A standard definition of strategic culture has proven elusive[2]—so elusive, in fact, that an enterprising master's degree candidate at the University of Northern British Columbia made defining strategic culture her thesis topic.[3] Canadian Naval Lieutenant Melanie Graham spent more than two years of study and more than a hundred well-researched pages to develop the following definition: "Strategic Culture is the shared, culturally embedded social, economic, and political values and priorities of a society, relevant to

security preferences, as historically shaped by successful interaction with and adaptation to their prevailing bio-physical and strategic environment."[4] Another recent definition derives from a 2006 Monterey, California conference on "Comparative Strategic Culture" sponsored by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. Unfortunately, the conference members did not achieve consensus on a definition, but the following was accepted by the majority: "Strategic Culture is that set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives."[5]

Perhaps a definition penned decades ago, when strategic culture was trumpeted as new analytical approach for national security policy, is most useful for the purposes of this monograph: strategic culture "refers to a nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behavior, habits, symbols, achievements, and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force." According to this definition, strategic culture is derived from a nation's history, geography, and political culture, and represents the aggregate of attitudes and patterns of behavior employed by a nation's most influential political and military elites. Thus, when employing strategic culture, one studies a set of patterns that divulge a nation's behavior on issues of conflict, use of force, and war and peace.[6] All of the definitions presented are useful, but the real point is that similar security variables—geography, history, power, size of military, et cetera—can be applied differently because of a nation's strategic culture—which is the underlying importance of the concept.

First Use of the Strategic Culture Concept

In 1977, RAND Corporation researcher Jack Snyder advanced the strategic culture argument into the realm of modern security studies. His analysis attempted to answer the question, "Can cultural analysis tell us anything significant about strategic outcomes?" He believed strategic culture could be used to interpret Soviet military and nuclear strategy. The preamble to his monograph: "The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications Limited Nuclear Operations," starts with a disclaimer stating that he makes no attempt to

predict Soviet reactions; he wrote that the paper instead "seeks the more modest objectives of providing context for a better understanding of the intellectual, institutional, and strategic cultural determinants that would bound the Soviet decision-making process in a crisis and speculating on the dominant behavioral propensities that would motivate or constraint the Soviet leaders."[7] Specifically, Snyder contended that because of a uniquely Russian socialization process, the Soviets developed a set of general beliefs, attitudes, and behavior patterns with regard to nuclear strategy, which achieved a state of cultural semi-permanence beyond mere policy.[8] Snyder applied strategic culture concepts to interpret the development not only of Soviet but also American nuclear doctrines and decided both were products of different organizational, historical, and political contexts and technological constraints.[9] Following his example, IR scholars have increasingly sought to supplement their historical studies with anthropological and ethnographic research to better understand how strategic culture varies among nations.

While Snyder is generally recognized as the first to advance strategic culture's contemporary value, in truth the notion of strategic culture has a much longer history. Traces of strategic culture thinking are "discerned in the classic works of strategy, including the works of Thucydides and Sun Tzu."[10] Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* shows an understanding of the political and cultural differences between Sparta and Athens before and during the titular conflict.[11] In an interesting article titled "The Use and Abuse of Thucydides in International Relations," Laurie Johnson explains that the national character, including "Spartan reticence and inwardness, and Athenian boldness and lust for glory […] and the individual characters of the leaders (the abrasive personality of the Spartan general Pausanias, the statesmanship of Themistocles and Pericles, the personalities of Alcibiades and Nicias) play an important role in Thucydides' *History*."[12] Johnson concludes that Thucydides' explanation of the Peloponnesian War was more about the differences in national character and individual leaders than the traditional IR explanations, which focus on the distribution of power between Athens and Sparta. In a similar vein, strategic studies theorists such as Sun Tzu, with his emphasis on the wisdom of knowing oneself and the enemy, point to the importance of understanding culture in explaining national security behavior.[13]

More recent examples of strategic culture predating Snyder include Julian Corbett's distinction between the German (continental) and British (maritime) schools of strategic thought, with the former capitalizing on its location in central Europe and focusing on war between land powers, and the latter leveraging conflict between a sea power and a land power.[14] British military historian Basil H. Liddell-Hart "refined Corbett's argument, noting that Britain had historically followed a distinctive approach to war by avoiding large commitments on land and using sea power to bring economic pressure to bear against its adversaries."[15] Other nations' strategic cultures similarly reflect geographic and contextual realities. For example, "Israel's lack of geographic depth, its small but educated population, and technological skill has produced a strategic culture that emphasizes strategic preemption, offensive operations, initiative, and—increasingly—advanced technology."[16]

Not surprisingly, the United States has a perceived strategic culture that includes taking advantage of its productive capacity and technological superiority to attrite an adversary into submission. However, there is much more to American strategic culture than such simplistic generalizations. Thus, a more detailed description—important for understanding adversaries' strategic cultures—is provided in the next section.

Usefulness of Strategic Culture

There is a good deal of debate regarding the usefulness of strategic culture. Some believe the concept is helpful in determining the structure and process of decision-making and has the potential for being a predictive tool in the future.[17] Others see strategic culture as a modern-day enigma, admitting that the concept has utility but ultimately viewing it as difficult to quantify and poorly suited to traditional Western debate or reasoning.[18] Still others contend that strategic culture may produce tendencies or create predispositions, but it cannot determine policy. In other words, they believe strategic culture can be an important factor in developing attitudes and shaping behavior, but cannot by itself fully explain outcomes.[19] They argue that other variables, such as technology, the media, divergent opinions among security elites, and public opinion (particularly in democracies) also affect policy and may be more dominant influences. Another perspective views strategic culture as useful in providing greater awareness of the complex interplay of

influences on strategic decision making and provides greater clarity of past actions while enhancing flexibility for the determination of those in the future.[20] Furthermore, some question the explanations of causality between strategic culture and strategic decisions. Most notable in this area is the prolific debate between strategic culture scholars Colin S. Gray and Alastair Iain Johnston (in the name of what they call first generation and third generation ideas of cultural strategists) over the analysis of cultural context to understand or to explain strategic decisions. Johnston, arguing for more rigorous analytic methodology, seeks to draw causality patterns between the defined dependent variable (strategic behavior) and the isolated independent variables (strategic culture).[21] Gray resists this attempt by warning against the unavoidable oversimplification of this method.[22] Finally, some believe strategic culture is a useful tool for historical and policy analysts but may be most useful as an analytical concept for avoiding mirror imaging.[23]

This study agrees with those who discount strategic culture's predictive qualities and sides with those who contend that it is one of many useful tools to analyze other states' (and in the case of al-Qaeda, other entities') strategic thinking and proclivity for the use of force. Studying strategic culture encourages analysts to examine trends through historical, cultural, and geographical lenses and to avoid mirror imaging. Finally, applying strategic culture analysis to practice makes it possible to understand the many critical aspects of a specific enemy's approach to the use of armed force, not as the actions of some "generic, rational man"[24] but in the light of a distinctive strategic culture, thereby putting, as Bernard Brodie advocated, "good anthropology and sociology" into practice.[25]

What is clear from these debates is that there is seldom a unitary opinion within a nation or institution about strategy. For example, as our understanding of jihadist ideology deepens, we learn through analysts such as Thomas Hedgehammer[26] about the often-rich debate within terrorist circles over strategy and tactics. Past ideas about al-Qaeda and the global jihadist network now seem simplistic and even misleading—something policymakers should consider when formulating courses of action for counterterrorism.

Heretofore, strategic culture has been used to measure the national objectives and policy of state actors,[27] so using strategic culture in an al-Qaeda context requires some explanation. Al-Qaeda, despite its dreams of a reestablished caliphate, is neither a state nor a nation. Instead, it is a transnational non-state actor with international ambitions. So, the question is, would

al-Qaeda be a candidate for strategic culture analysis? The answer, according to strategic culture analyst Jerry Mark Long, is a qualified "yes."[28] Long contends that other factors such as religion account for al-Qaeda's nation and state-like characteristics. According to Long, a nation is a group of people who strongly identify with an overarching, shared cultural narrative—a key focus in strategic culture analysis that has historically applied to state entities. Religion can replicate a state by serving "as a powerful ethnic marker; a critical element constitutive of identity."[29] In the case of Islam, says Long, "the appeal that Salafi jihadists make is that the bond of religion trumps state identification. This replicates the pattern of early Islam, wherein the forefathers claimed that loyalty to the *Ummah*, the Islamic community, superseded any loyalty to a kinship group or notion of a state."[30]

China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda each possess distinct strategic cultures. Commonalities of cultural traits and categories can be found among all four, but the strategic cultural peculiarities of each—if properly understood and addressed—could assist security specialists in achieving more optimal policy decisions.[31]

2. The American Way of War and American Strategic Culture

An oft-cited Sun Tzu quote, "Knowing yourself and knowing your enemy will win you a thousand battles," is an apt introduction to this paper's discussions. In that vein, some basic knowledge of American strategic culture—or cultures—will enable the reader to better understand and assimilate the Chinese, Iranian, North Korean, and al-Qaeda strategic cultures central to this study. At the national and strategic levels, both geography and history have shaped American strategic culture. Historically, North America's insular position bracketed by large oceans and relatively peaceful borders to the north and south combined to provide the United States free security. Add the protection provided by the British Royal Navy, and the U.S. was basically a free rider in an otherwise complex international security environment. As one scholar notes, "American insularity and the existence of free security bred the view that war is a deviation from the norm of peace. American strategic culture was shaped by long periods of peace punctuated by generational conflicts—the War of 1812, the Civil War, World War I, and World War II—defined as a crusade of good versus evil."[32]

Indeed, Americans have tended to cast their wars as crusades against evil; as Samuel Huntington described, "For the American a war is not a war unless it is a crusade."[33] Thus Americans traditionally thought of war in absolute terms in which the enemy was demonized, the fight was to the finish, and absolute victory was the ultimate objective. George W. Bush's post-9/11 speeches are representative of this perspective as he referenced the fight against al-Qaeda as a crusade, proclaimed to both enemies and allies that "you are either with us or against us,"[34] and taunted Osama bin Laden by declaring him, in the words of the old west, "wanted: dead or alive."[35]

The first discussion of a distinct American strategic culture can be linked to Russell Weigley's much-quoted tome, *The American Way of War: A History of U.S. Military Strategy and Policy*. Written in 1973, Weigley's book noted that achieving a "crushing" military victory over an adversary, "either through a strategy of attrition or one of annihilation," was the American way of war.[36] According to Weigley, U.S. military and political leaders typically viewed the total destruction of an opponent's military capability and the

occupation of its capital as marking the end of war and the beginning of postwar negotiations.[37]

The author of this monograph has shared the following view with perhaps a thousand West Point cadets and students in multiple venues around the world: "Tradi-

The ability to maximize all elements of power—military, economic, diplomatic, and communications—has been America's comparative advantage and very much a part of its strategic culture.

tional American strategic culture is easy to understand: we take a straight shot to the chops, pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, mobilize by maximizing all of the elements of national power, deploy and dominate, prevail, celebrate with a parade, and then demobilize—that is America's way of war."[38] The ability to maximize all elements of power—military, economic, diplomatic, and communications—has been America's comparative advantage and very much a part of its strategic culture.

However, many critics disagree. What about "bear any burden and pay any price?" What about strong moral obligations and constraints and the high value placed on human life? Also, while the model described above might be relevant to World War II, some would argue that it does not explain Vietnam, and that it certainly does not explain adventures in Somalia past and present.

The truth is that America's strategic culture entails much more than the so-called American way of war. In fact, the concept of strategic culture is much more refined than the simplistic concept of a cultural "way of war" ascribed to certain nation, ethnic group, or region, as it encompasses a combination of several mostly sociological factors that interact with each other in a complex and dynamic manner. Some seemingly contradictory tenets of American strategic culture, such as the model explained above, do coexist with the idea of a responsibility to liberty and a sense of greater duty to protect a typically American way of life.

Often missing from discussions of a particular nation's strategic culture are the contextual constraints on using force. In this regard, the United States is at a disadvantage when compared to al-Qaeda or the rest of the countries in this study. While U.S. leaders contemplating the use of force are heavily constrained by legal and moral considerations, these are often not applicable to other leaders, who are relatively unconstrained in their own considerations. For example, in his book *Asymmetric Warfare*, Roger W.

Barnett explains in detail what he categorizes as the four major constraints against the American use of military force: operational, organizational, legal, and moral.[39] All create an impediment to waging war, but for the United States, legal and moral constraints are more dominant than in any other entity described in this paper. Thus, in order for the United States to pursue war, the threat must be directly related to the survival of the country or be characterized as "evil incarnate"—as was fascism in World War II, communism in the Cold War, and terrorism during the current war on terror.[40]

Moreover, strategic culture is not unitary. Brian McAllister Linn's work on the respective intellectual traditions of the Army shows that even a single institution can have multiple contrasting perspectives.[41] For example, the recent debate concerning the relevance of counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine to today's security environment is instructive. COIN advocates experienced a renaissance as they updated a COIN doctrine that was applicable—at least in their view—not just to conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also to the types of conflict they envisioned the U.S. facing in the future. Iraq hero and Ph.D. General David Petraeus and COIN guru and Ph.D. Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl were among an impressive cohort of advocates that put COIN theory, as articulated in *Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, into practice.[42] Fast forward a few years, and COIN naysayers published a series of articles declaring COIN obsolete and criticizing *Field Manual 3-24*.[43] Led by West Point history professor and Iraq War veteran Colonel Jian Gentile, the COIN advocates argue that the U.S. military places undue emphasis on counterinsurgency at the expense of preparedness for conventional warfare.[44] Declaring a victor in the COIN debate is not the purpose of this paper. What is important is the notion that there can be differing strategic visions within a nation's security establishment, particularly in a democracy. Likewise, a nation's strategic culture can change over time, and dichotomies can exist within a strategic culture—a theme that will resonate throughout the body of this work.

3. Chinese Strategic Culture

Chinese culture is based on one of the oldest continuing civilizations in the world[45]—one that initiated many political, technological, and military firsts. However, despite its long history, China's complex and multifaceted strategic culture has remained relatively constant and true to its historical roots. As Chinese strategic culture expert Tony Corn explains, "Chinese historical experiences and collective memories such as the Warring States period (475-221 BC) and the Sino-Japanese Wars (1894-95 and 1937-45) define China's strategic cultural thought."[46] In addition to those historical events, literary works such as Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, written in the 6th century BC, and writings on Confucian and Legalist philosophies serve to both contextualize and immortalize historical Chinese strategic culture. Also of importance is the Maoist ideology that created the communist regime in its own specifically Chinese variation. The unique experience of Maoist communism reinforces certain cultural traits that were already present in Chinese society to create a deeply hierarchical, homogeneous, and closed society.[47]

Most agree on several points relative to China's evolving strategic culture. For example, China is a continental power, has a long history of internal alliances based on familial relationships and kinship, is a hierarchical society, bases international alliances purely on self-interest, and uses several different asymmetric warfare tactics to achieve strategic objectives. Indeed, Chinese strategic culture is unambiguously unique. However, there is a debate among China experts about whether China's strategic culture is predicated on defense and deterrence or is more offensive in nature.

The Debate over China's Strategic Culture Contradictions

Like the American strategic culture discussed in this monograph, China's strategic culture has more than one variant; however, in the case of Chinese strategic culture, experts disagree on the number of variants and variant terminology. For example, Australian Justin Arnold believes there are two variants of Chinese strategic culture: one traditional (Confucian) and the other modern (Marxist-Leninist and Mao Zedong-thought). According to Arnold, the traditional variant is defensive and the more recent Maoist variant has militaristic and expansionist aspirations. Arnold further adds that

the two variants are not mutually exclusive, and are debated within China's security elite. He posits that China would be better off internationally if it applied both simultaneously:

> China, if it wants to return to its rightful place as a global power, needs a government that is both willing and able to not only define, but implement a culture of strategy that is both modern and traditional so that its regional neighbors, global economic partners and its own citizens can predict how it will respond to conflict situations both at home and around the Asia Pacific Region.[48]

Christopher Twomey discusses Chinese strategic culture in terms of themes, suggesting that there are six apparent themes in Chinese strategic culture that are not necessarily contradictory. However, in general, the themes are conceived as independent from each other in the forces that they apply on the Chinese strategic culture.[49] They do also range from defensive to expansionist and from domestically focused to internationally ambitious.[50] This chapter will explain some of the dualities and complexities of Chinese strategic culture.

Political Geography

China's political geography has had a major impact on its strategic culture. China acts as, and is, a continental power. Drawing its strength from its large population and land mass, its strength is also its vulnerability; China has traditionally focused on its long borders and protecting the heartland from invasions from the northern steppes.[51] China's formidable land mass has more contiguous neighbors than any other country except Russia. Furthermore, those neighbors "include five countries with which China has fought wars in the past 70 years (India, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and Vietnam) and a number of states ruled by unstable regimes."[52] Understandably, this creates a deeply defensive strategy and has kept the focus historically more on the country's immediate borders rather than far conquests.

Despite having a 9,000-mile coastline bordering the Pacific Ocean,[53] China's leaders did not perceive a seaborne threat until 1840, when China was defeated by the British in the first Opium War:[54]

> Historically, the security threat that preoccupied China's leaders was exposure to raiding or invasion by the steppe nomads of Inner Asia. This threat was always latent and sometimes lethal: More than

one Chinese dynasty succumbed to the horsemen of the north. The strategic culture formed by this history and political geography was therefore a profoundly continentalist one.[55]

With one notable exception, throughout China's long history its leaders have traditionally emphasized land power over sea power. The one exception was a series of voyages undertaken by the Muslim eunuch Admiral Zheng He in the early 15th century (1405–1433):

> Under the patronage of the Ming Emperor Yongle, Admiral He undertook an ambitious program of ship construction and maritime infrastructure development. Zheng commanded seven major ocean-going expeditions, typically consisting of hundreds of ships and tens of thousands of men. These expeditions showed the Ming banner in the Strait of Malacca, the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and even East Africa.[56]

The fleet included warships mounting cannon as well as "treasure ships," of which the largest may have been 440 feet in length and displaced more than 20,000 tons; vessels on this scale dwarfed anything known in the West at that time. Nevertheless, this was a momentary effort—a blip on the Chinese historical radar screen—that was lost on subsequent dynasties, all of which reemphasized continental strategic culture.

An interesting change within the last decade is that, with its increasing export market, China has made stunning advances in global shipbuilding markets and immense inroads in expanding its merchant marine.[57] China has also been rapidly modernizing its navy. These factors together suggest that China is becoming an outward-looking maritime state.[58] In August 2012, China acquired its first aircraft carrier. Although a sign of increased interest in building a blue water navy, the Chinese aircraft carrier, which was originally intended to be the Soviet Union's second main battle carrier, is approximately two-thirds the size of the U.S. Navy's newest aircraft carriers.[59] There may be an increased emphasis on building a maritime force, but two millennia of distinctively continental strategic culture indicate that Chinese land borders will most certainly remain the country's primary concern.

Hierarchy and Patriarchy: The Legacy of Confucianism and Legalism

Hierarchy and political control is deeply ingrained in the main philosophies that have influenced Chinese strategic culture. Both Confucianism and Legalism developed during the China's Warring States period (471-221 BC). While Confucianism is attributed to the scholar bureaucrat Confucius (551-479 BC), it was Mencius (372-289 BC), a Confucian disciple, who is credited for first codifying Confucianism. Han Fei Zi (280-233 BC), a well-connected philosopher and aristocrat, is most recognized in Chinese history for developing the School of Law, or Legalism. Both traditions favored governmental hierarchical bureaucracies and the importance of history. Confucianism advocated ruling benevolently by example and held an optimistic view of human potential. Still, Confucianism emphasized the need for an elite class, emphasizing that "a true civilization is to be achieved under the leadership of an elite educated in its ideals and dedicated to the service of those under them."[60] Conversely, Legalists considered humans to be inherently unreliable. Unlike Confucians, Legalists believed attempts to improve the human situation by noble example, education, and ethical precepts were useless. Instead, their philosophy suggests that people require a strong government and a carefully devised code of law that would stringently and impartially enforce rules and severely punish even the most minor infractions.[61] Legalists believed wealth was derived from agricultural production, a disciplined hierarchy, and strong armies.[62] While it would be convenient to equate a defensive strategic culture to Confucianism and offensive to Legalism, as with most things Chinese, it is not quite that simple. Most importantly, both philosophies emphasize hierarchy and structure, and are focused on internal affairs and social order.

John Fairbank, the prominent American historian of China, argued that despite Mao Zedong's revolution, China did not free itself from its hierarchical Confucian past.[63] Indeed, Mao continued to pursue the rigid hierarchy of society that was familiar to the Chinese. Furthermore, Mao's cult of personality was based on the Chinese popular predisposition to look toward a father-like figure to spearhead the reunification of China and restitute national pride.[64] This notion is based on one of the five relationships presented as most important to the Confucian ideal "duty between ruler and subject," which is the second only to the father-son relationship in Confucian

doctrine.[65] Cultivating these two most important Confucian relationships under the guise of communist revolution, Mao used his cult of personality to instill a national identity among a long suppressed Chinese population that accepted his increasingly rigid dictatorship. His successors have continued to cultivate this rigid hierarchy to support their authoritarian regimes, which allows them to minimize social unrest and possibilities of regime change.

Furthermore, this pyramidal view of human society extends to international relations. Until the 19th century and the Western intervention in Asian affairs, there was a history of rather formal hierarchy between Asian states, with China as the dominant state.[66] Ancient China's tributary system from the 14th to the 19th century (under the Ming and Qing dynasties) was based on the belief of Chinese superiority over potential adversaries.[67] Thus, Chinese strategic culture is ingrained with the desire to return to a time when other states must pay tribute to the dominant China. The perspective of a hierarchy of nations with China at the center is still an important concept in the Chinese psyche. Increased military might, a more adventurist navy, and spearheading regional agreements like the Association of South East Asian Nations free-trade area project could be perceived as a continuation of China's pursuance of regional and global hegemony.[68] Chinese strategic culture is thus based on an important cultural ego resulting from centuries of idealized hegemony.

Collectivism: Inherited from Chinese History and Reinforced by Communism

The 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics will always stay in the mind of its spectators as an unparalleled demonstration of synchronous collective grandiosity. This ceremony was a poignant visual metaphor of both how China views itself and how China wants the world to see it. The 15,000 performers, whose every movement were prescribed and timed for grand general effect,[69] can be seen as a metaphor for the Chinese political ideal. China has been a large and populous country for most of its history, and has therefore developed some unique hierarchical collectivist characteristics to maintain social order. It is easy to trace collectivism back to Confucianism, which emphasizes sacrificing personal interest for the community and placing family above self.[70] In her monograph on "Chinese Strategic Culture," Major Kimberly A. Crider

describes archeological evidence that points to unique collectivist arrangements in China dating back to the Neolithic age.[71] She posits that survival under harsh conditions required family members and neighbors to work closely together, and thus the "agrarian-based family tradition established a strong collective bias in Chinese culture and was also the basis for China's autocratic social structure."[72]

Several events led to Mao's rise to becoming leader of the Republic of China. One cannot discount the importance of Mao's opposition to the Japanese, particularly in light of the ineffectiveness of the Chinese Nationalist Party against the Japanese invasion of 1931 (known as the Mukden or Manchurian incident).[73] However, Mao's opportunistic restructuring of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which he achieved by adapting a Marxist-Leninist thought model to an agrarian-based Chinese model, also contributed to making possible the Chinese communist revolution.[74] In the 1960s and 1970s, it was Mao's followers who further developed the party propaganda based the great leader's themes.[75] Even today, studies about public outcries and rebellions in China (obviously the data is restricted due to the strict governmental censorship) note that most grievances are raised against local governments and still give the central leadership "the benefit of the doubt, assuming that the central government would fix the problem if it knew about it."[76] This decreases the potential of a widespread revolution and increases the country's propensity to fall in line behind the CCP leadership in the belief that it is for the greater good of the kin and of the nation. Thus, the government can act without needing the population's acquiescence, particularly with regards to the use of the military and force.

Nationalism and Global Ambitions

A *Wall Street Journal* analysis of a diplomatic trip former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made to China remarks that it is "worth remembering that China has fanned the flames of nationalism in the past, making de-escalation difficult. The leaders who run the Party's security apparatus are ascendant, and they are using appeals to nationalism as a way to bolster social stability."[77] Indeed, in this election year—which determines the party leader for the next decade—the CCP contenders have increased their nationalist rhetoric and policies in hopes of courting the masses.[78]

China's long history and its many remarkable achievements such as "The Four Great Inventions" (gunpowder, paper, printing, and the compass)[79] reinforce the Chinese notion of cultural superiority. In the last three decades, unprecedented commercial growth in China[80] has renewed nationalist pride. Unlike in the West, where corporations are clearly separate from the government, the CCP and People's Liberation Army (PLA) remain very involved in all aspects of the pseudo-liberalization of the Chinese economy.[81] This monograph will not delve into the intricacies of China's hybrid economy, but it is important to understand that all victories of individual enterprises are seen as national achievements.[82]

Hyper-nationalism and an authoritarian communist regime enable abundant resources to be allocated to a continuing Chinese military build-up to further what most Chinese see as China's rightful place in the international hierarchy. The single most influential thinker in Maoism was Li Dazhao, who managed to combine Chinese nationalist pride with Marxist-Leninism and initiated a voluntary inclination that became a Maoist trademark: anything the Chinese want to do can be achieved through collective will.[83] Indeed, after building up its nuclear arsenal in 1964, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping focused the same energy on China's economy in the 1980s. The "Four Modernizations" (agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national security, in that order of priority) were launched in 1979 and were prioritized as a national effort to stimulate the Chinese economy.[84] However, the first three received the bulk of the attention, [85] and China has only begun to pursue a new round of military modernization since 1999, with China likely to surpass the U.S. in military spending within the next 15 years.[86] In fact, actual military spending might be as much as double the official figure given by the Chinese government.[87] Therefore, although military spending as a symbol of national emphasis is important, the comparison with the United States can be treacherous, as the allocated funds and their direct purpose—as well as the calculations of purchasing power parity—are much less transparent in China than in the U.S. What is certain is that, since 1999, China has emphasized military technological modernization.

The Elaboration of a Complex Defensive Strategy: Sun Tzu, Confucianism, and Mao-Zedong

Chinese and many other analysts contend that Chinese strategic culture has been, is now, and will continue to be defensive in nature. According to them, the country's history strongly suggests that China's past use of force has been largely limited to efforts to keep outsiders from taking Chinese territory, and to maintain social order throughout a large and populous country. General Li Jijun, a noted post-Maoist-era Chinese strategist, supports his view of China as a defensive power by noting that China has never had colonial-power or expansionist aspirations—unlike the United States, which has 761 military bases in 156 countries.[88] The claim that China has never been a colonial power is a bit of an exaggeration; although quickly expelled, China conquered both Vietnam (three times between the second and tenth centuries) and Korea (in the second century).[89] The main difference between those territorial expansions and actual colonies is that China always fought at its borders. Agreeing with the idea that China has traditionally been a defensive state, China experts Andrew Nathan and Robert Ross view China's foreign policy to be based on several key features: "the notion of China as a central place with a self-sufficient civilization [and] a tendency to advise others to resolve disputes peacefully combined with frequent uses of force near or on home ground."[90]

Others see decidedly offensive traits in the Chinese strategic culture. Most notably, Alastair Iain Johnston agrees there is a Confucian ideal of defensive warfare in Chinese strategic culture, but also sees a very self-interested element to China's strategic culture that proscribes the use of force whenever in China's self-interest.[91] Johnston's analysis of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) shows a clear use of what could be defined in international relations theory as "realpolitik" or realism.[92]

Realism is quite evidently a central element of the Chinese strategic culture. Johnston cites the Ming Dynasty as an era of realist military strategy to prevent recurring Mongol attacks. In fact, a century earlier, the writings of Sun Tzu had already laid the ground for a realist war strategy. Perhaps the biggest

Perhaps the biggest influence on Chinese military strategy, Sun Tzu's The Art of War, has been and remains a seminal philosophy underpinning Chinese strategic culture.

influence on Chinese military strategy, Sun Tzu's *The Art of War,* has been and remains a seminal philosophy underpinning Chinese strategic culture. Sun Tzu was an advocate of the indirect, asymmetrical application of warfare. Yet, the link between the realist and the offensive is not obvious. For example, according to Sun Tzu, "the highest form of generalship is to balk the enemy's plans."[93] Much of *The Art of War* describes how to avoid getting into force-on-force battles in which an army's size alone can determine the result. However, Sun Tzu also understood the utility of preemption if the use of force was unavoidable: "whoever is first in the field and awaits the coming of the enemy, will be fresh for the fight; whoever is second in the field and has to hasten to battle will arrive exhausted."[94] Depending on perspective, preemption can be seen as offensive "adventurism."[95] However, this author believes that Sun Tzu would argue what has become a common Chinese belief: that preemption to be part of a winning defensive strategy.[96]

The line between a sound defensive strategy and an offensive one can become blurred in times of peace. It has been over 50 years since China has made new inroads into neighboring countries, and there has been no evidence of its ever having a political stake in countries beyond its direct neighbors. China has always been focused on maintaining its territory and protecting its borders, and they justify any expansionist tendencies in a territorial protection context. However, and make no mistake, China will attack first and will rationalize a surprise attack as a part of an active defense.

Beijing likes to camouflage offense as defense. "The history of modern Chinese warfare provides numerous case studies in which China's leaders have claimed military preemption as a strategically defensive act," the Pentagon said in a 2010 report to Congress. The report cited a long list of examples, including the 1962 war, 1969 (when China provoked border clashes with the Soviet Union), the 1979 invasion of Vietnam, and even 1950, when China intervened in the Korean War. Beijing called its 1962 invasion a "defensive counterattack," a term it subsequently used for the invasion of Vietnam and the seizure of the Paracel Islands, Johnson Reef, and Mischief Reef.[97]

Asymmetric Components of China's Modern-Day Strategic Culture: Unrestricted Warfare, Preemption, Surprise, Deception, Cyber War, and Ambiguity

While China may be increasing its conventional military capability, at its core it still strongly features asymmetric strategy; the way the Chinese seem to use their conventional forces is unconventional. One example is the deeply engrained emphasis on surprise—upon which preemption relies. As explained in a *Wall Street Journal* analysis, "Chinese strategists have always valued the element of surprise … At the start of all major conflicts of the last 60 years—in Korea, Tibet, India and Vietnam—Chinese forces struck without warning."[98]

Although China is a nuclear power possessing ballistic missiles, Beijing maintains a layer of evasiveness about China's true nuclear capability, presumably to retain the advantage of surprise if it were to deploy a military attack and to deter any potential aggressors.

Historically, China has practiced Sun Tzu's advice to "take [the enemy] unaware by surprise attacks where he is unprepared" and to hit "suddenly with shock troops."[99] As in the 2009 case, the PLA navy employs disguised fishing boats in South China Sea conflicts, which makes its moves stealthier and also more difficult to defend without risking civilian casualties.

This makes neighboring nations fear China, since as long as disputes are unresolved, it is impossible to discount the possibility that the PLA will strike. Public statements are not a reliable guide to intentions; when threats and provocations stop, that could be the most dangerous time. The *Wall Street Journal* analysis notes that "China has also taken advantage of periods when the superpowers were drawing down in the region: "The PLA Navy invaded islands held by the Vietnamese in 1974, after the U.S. withdrew from South Vietnam, and in 1984, after the Soviets left Cam Ranh Bay."[100]

China's neighbors remember the Chinese propensity for a surprise first strike. That is why most of China's neighbors mistrust Beijing and request that the U.S. continue to be the guarantor of peace in the region, as it has been in recent decades.[101] In private meetings, Southeast Asian nations urge that the U.S. strengthen its diplomatic and military ties in Asia.[102]

Asymmetric Warfare

When it comes to wars of choice, Chinese have traditionally favored an indirect, asymmetrical approach. Winning by outsmarting, rather than by outfighting, has remained "the acme of skill."[103] Indeed, Sun Tzu wrote that "the highest form of military leadership is to overcome the enemy by strategy"[104] and that "war is mainly a game of deception."[105] The Chinese have thus perfected games of smoke and mirrors, and have never thought about military might and armament in terms of direct arms races; instead, they think in strategically complementary and asymmetric ways. Chinese strategic culture favors guerilla warfare, cyber warfare, nuclear power as an asymmetric bargaining tool, and the overall use of ambiguity.

In 1999, Two PLA colonels, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, wrote a comprehensive manual entitled *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America*, which was systematic outline of how weaker powers can use methods of warfare transcending all limitations and boundaries to defeat stronger powers.[106] In a related *Foreign Policy* article, Georgetown University professor Rosa Brooks emphasizes how the authors' "description of likely changes in warfare was strikingly prescient"[107] mostly because it addressed the rise of terrorist tactics and increase in unconventional warfare. The two colonels write that "the three indispensable 'hardware' elements of any war … soldiers, weapons and a battlefield … have changed so that it is impossible to get a firm grip on them." Instead, they argue, asymmetric warfare tactics should be predominant.[108] They are only two colonels in a powerful, top-down military, but their "prescient" book reflects the fundamental Chinese awareness of asymmetric warfare strategy.

Guerilla Warfare

Mao Zedong's victory against Chiang Kai-shek was partly due to his mastery of asymmetrical warfare techniques. His 1937 pamphlet, *Guerilla Warfare,* explains the manner in which smaller forces can fight and vanquish larger enemies. He denounced the U.S. as a potential enemy for all those in Asia who would take up the fight and reiterated that even the giants can be vanquished.[109] The PLA began as a true guerilla force in the 1930s and 1940s, but Mao transitioned it into a more conventional army.[110] Deng Xiaoping later restructured the PLA to have a more traditional military unit framework.

However, the PLA continues to integrate guerilla warfare culture into its military strategy.[111] The memories of the success of guerrilla warfare techniques used by Mao Zedong remain part of the general strategic culture of Chinese leadership.

Cyber Warfare

In the mind of Chinese strategists, there is no point in entering an arms race with a stronger adversary. Instead, finding and exploiting vulnerabilities—particularly those of the United States—is their strategic focus.[112] Aware of this, U.S. intelligence has been intent on preventing the potential threat of Chinese cyber attacks.[113] In the Chinese cyber attacks launched on Taiwan in June 2006, which suggested that China would employ asymmetric cyber aggression, hackers "were able to electronically send a series of fraudulent press releases that appeared to originate from Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense."[114] In July of the same year, the U.S. State Department was victim of a cyber attack on one of its East Asian offices. The hackers allegedly "stole sensitive information and passwords, and implanted 'back doors' in unclassified computers to allow them to return."[115] This created significant alarm in security circles about the potential Chinese asymmetric attack on cyber information centers.[116] The impacts were primarily economic and psychological—replacement of breached computers and a sense of vulnerability among the nations attacked.[117] The attack illustrated that the Chinese government encourages and maybe even supports teams of young hackers whose goal is to develop "anything and everything against the U.S. government infrastructure."[118] Some have even declared that "many attempts to penetrate the [U.S. national security network] appear to come from China,"[119] prompting the creation of a U.S. Cyber Command in 2009. Such attacks include: the 2004 "Titan Rain" Chinese cyber espionage episode, which apparently accessed "information from military labs, NASA, and the World Bank;"[120] the 2009 "Ghostnet" attacks on organizations supportive of Tibetan independence; and the 2009 break into the Pentagon's $300 billion Joint Strike Fighter project.[121] So far the U.S. has not openly condemned the Chinese government for those attacks, but there is little doubt among experts that, even if not outright supported by the Chinese government, the attacks were at the very least convenient for the Chinese strategic agenda.[122]

Nuclear Power and Deceptive Ambiguity

China's possession of nuclear weapons adds weight to its leadership role in the United Nations (UN) and the world. The country's 1964 nuclear test was its opening salvo on a quest for recognition as an aspiring great power. Although China, as a nuclear weapon-holding state, is a member of the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons—and therefore theoretically agrees to work toward disarmament—Beijing's leadership has retained a significant weapons stockpile as a deterrent safeguard and for reputational purposes.[123] China takes seriously the possession of nuclear weapons, but more as a strategic deterrent option rather than an offensive, first-strike weapon; as a result, Beijing has been content with a modest nuclear capability and has focused more on refining its conventional military capabilities. China believes that deterrence is relatively unaffected by changes in the size, configuration, and readiness of nuclear forces.[124]

Bigger is not necessarily better, but having some nuclear capability is enough of a deterrent to dissuade the U.S. and Russia from nuclear adventurism targeting China. Furthermore, nuclear weapons feed into the game of deceptive ambiguous strategy that was first recommended by Sun Tzu and has since permeated Chinese strategic culture.

A Burgeoning Military Space Strategy

An important facet of Chinese strategic culture is the desire to quickly advance; hence, the country has gone from trailing behind other global powers in technological military capabilities to emphasizing military space strategy. China's January 2007 direct-ascent Anti-Satellite Weapon Test signaled a turning point in Chinese space ambitions, illustrating that Chinese leadership views space as a new and important dimension of future warfare.[125] Many Western countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, quickly condemned this test.[126] Yet, it is important to note that, at the United Nations General Assembly meetings in October and December 2006, the U.S. was the only country voting against a resolution to prevent an arms race in outer space.[127] This enabled a PLA senior colonel to declare, "outer space is going to be weaponized in our lifetime … and if there is a space superpower it will not be alone."[128] This seems to indicate

that China is keen on making sure that the United States will not be the only space superpower.

China's concern about developing military space capabilities is a response to the United States' clear dominance in the sector and the Chinese belief that the U.S. military program is driven by missile defense and may threaten China's nuclear deterrence.[129] Several Chinese military studies point to the belief that using space weapons to attack ballistic targets (nullifying the nuclear threat) is a central goal of military space weapon development.[130]

However, the Chinese military space weapon development rhetoric appears to be softening. PLA air force general Xu Qiliang retracted a brazen 2010 comment that "military weaponization of space was a historical inevitability."[131] Furthermore, former President Hu Jintao was careful to reiterate that cooperation and peaceful exploration of space are China's priorities.[132] The bottom line is that Chinese military space capability is increasing, and most likely will continue to do so.

Conclusion

Just as China's strategic culture does not mirror other strategic cultures, neither do China's national security interests. The United States has friendly neighbors to the north and south and large oceans to the east and west. China's neighbors are a rich and powerful Japan, the rising South Korea and Vietnam, the giants India and Russia, and a host of failed or failing states in Central and Southeast Asia. Some of them are friendly; most of them are not.

China's long history, innovative society, and dominance in the region reinforce its aspirations to be a great power and its desire for prominent status in the world's state hierarchy. China has combined a tradition of a strict patriarchal hierarchy with that of collectivism in a unique, autocratic regime that strives to maintain an internal status quo and to advance the aspiration of regional hegemony. Its military tradition is that of stratagems and indirect approaches; rather than seeking parity with other global military forces, its strategy is to understand and exploit weaknesses in the enemy's defenses. China's

China's strategic culture is predicated on a preference for winning without having to fight, and thus deception, ambiguity, and secretiveness are important components of Chinese strategic culture.

strategic culture is predicated on a preference for winning without having to fight, and thus deception, ambiguity, and secretiveness are important components of Chinese strategic culture. However, history suggests that China will aggressively use military force, including surprise attacks, when it is in its perceived strategic interest. The ability and willingness to do so is made possible by other elements of Chinese strategic culture, which include an autocratic government that can make quick decisions without fear of criticism from it public, a large continental land mass that makes invasions prohibitive, and a centuries old nationalistic pride that can produce public support at the suggestion of one op-ed piece in an efficient, state-run media.

4. Strategic Culture of Iran

Iranian strategic culture is based on the dichotomy of nationalist pride and insecurity. Iranians have a very long and complicated history of alternatively dominating or being dominated. The importance of their 30 centuries of history to the Iranian people cannot be overemphasized. One of the few modern theocracies, Iran is also a brutally repressive authoritarian regime officially called the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). Since the removal of Iran's Shah in 1979, the IRI has become aggressively anti-Western and defies international laws, invests in weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and ostentatiously sponsors terrorist groups. The legacy of Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini's vision for Iran is still omnipresent but the impact of subsequent Ayatollahs and successive presidents as well as the very powerful Revolutionary Guard makes this autocratic regime a complex and elusive political entity. More than 2,500 years of history, the grandiose rhetoric of Iranian leaders, the use of unconventional methods of warfare, and the importance of Shi'a Islamic historical symbols are symptomatic of Iran's complex strategic culture.

Over 2,500 Years of History

Many Iranians still name their sons Cyrus after the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, in reverence to his place in Persian history more than 25 centuries ago. Iranians are immensely proud of their rich political, economic, scientific, and religious history, but this pride also exacerbates a bitterness related to waves of invasions and colonization. On one hand, Iran was at the center of the Silk Road, home of one of the most ancient religions (Zoroastrianism), and host of important holy sites of Shi'a Islam. On the other hand, the ancient Persians were defeated by Alexander the Great and successively conquered by Arabs and Mongols before having to bow down to the British, the ever-encroaching Russians, and eventually the U.S.-British coup that installed Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi. Graham Fuller, former vice chair of the U.S. National Intelligence Council, describes the Iranian culture as "deeply schizophrenic: an ingrained sense of cultural superiority is constantly eroded by feelings of insecurity and inferiority in the Persian state's historic inability to order its own destiny."[133] It is thus of utmost importance

to Iranians to feel that Iran is self-sufficient and independent. Discourse about autarchic pursuits bodes well in a country where self-sufficiency is a central aspect of strategic culture. Hence, when former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared they needed uranium enrichment facilities to cut dependence on the import of enriched uranium, it resonates positively in the Iranian psyche—regardless of the potential ulterior motives of the discourse.

Having a long history also affects Iran's vision for the future. The idea of permanence and continuity is important in Iranian strategic culture. Despite Ahmadinejad's claims that the return of the Hidden Imam (and hence the end of the world) is near,[134] the Iranian leadership has long-term plans for Iran. Hence, Iran's strategy comports a real long-term component that should not be dismissed. Although it is a contested claim, Iran is often credited with the invention of chess or at least the development of the game.[135] In chess, the key to winning is thinking several steps ahead and considering all the pieces on the board. Similarly, Iranian strategy stresses the importance of planning for potential later moves and keeping several key pieces in the game.[136]

The Iranian attitude toward conflict is less goal-oriented than that of Western countries. The struggle itself for a cause is seen as a long-term laudable goal. This emphasis on continuing the struggle against injustice and oppression brings a high tolerance for strategic collective pain.[137] Indeed the term jihad, often translated as "holy war" literally means "struggle." The English expression "the end justifies the means" would be turned on its head in Iran because there the means themselves carry more weight than the end.[138] Long, drawn-out conflicts are a result of Iranian strategic culture that is especially antithetical to U.S. strategic culture, which wants quick solutions to complex security problems.

The Persian ethnic identity—as opposed to identification as an Arab or Turk—is another important feature of the Iranian persona. Although ostensibly bound by Islam, the Arab-Iranian rivalry is rooted in a long history that dates back to the 7th century and the Arab invasion of Persia. In the 13th century, Iran experienced a political and linguistic revitalization[139] that exemplifies the strength and resilience of the Persian identity. The word Iran itself was long used in Farsi by Persians to refer as themselves. (For the sake of this study Iranian will be used to define citizens or former citizens of Iran and Persians will be used to describe the ethnic identity.) The increasingly strong rhetoric of the Iranian regime against Israel can be seen as an attempt

at courting the Arab support against both Israel and the West.[140] However, the Arab-Persian rift remains significant and affects Iran's strategic alliances.

Iran at the Center

Iran's geopolitical situation is crucial to its strategic culture. Protected by mountains in the west and in the north, it has access to the Persian Gulf in the south and to the Caspian Sea in the north; only the eastern borders lack real geological definition. Dr. Shireen Hunter posits that this relative natural enclosure has enhanced "a sense of physical unity, which has enabled it to absorb the ethnic and cultural shocks of recurring foreign incursion and to develop a unique cultural identity."[141] This unique identity also comes at the price of a lack of natural allies in the region. To the west are Arabs that are ethnically different but share a common religion, and to the east the populations that are closer kin, but who differ in much of their religious culture. In 1978, Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini vocally deplored the lack of support that he was getting from other Muslim countries in his revolutionary pursuit. This idea of geographical and ethnical uniqueness has helped to generate the idea of national particularism[142] and comes at the price of relative isolation.[143]

To the north is Russia, with which Iran has a complex and evolving relationship. During the Cold War, Iran's position as a neighbor of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) made it an important partner in U.S. containment policy, thus affecting relations with the USSR. But the fall of the Shah, who was seen as a puppet of the U.S., led way to a regime extremely hostile to the West, which might have opened the door for better relations with the USSR. However, the Ayatollah Khomeini's new regime pursued a policy of non-alignment, and the Revolutionary Guard actively persecuted all communists and communist sympathizers in Iran, who were (correctly) viewed as the most organized internal opposition to Iran's newly established Islamic Republic.

After the fall of the USSR, there was a significant rapprochement between Tehran and Moscow, which culminated in commercial and political alliances. Iran soon began buying weapons from Russia. Presently, with the increase in U.S. and European pressure against Iranian nuclear proliferation,

Iran has been trying to further strengthen its relationship with not only Russia, but China too.[144]

The complexities of Iran-Russian relations are also rooted in history. The 19th century expansion of Russia into territories formerly controlled by Iran as well as its control of the Caspian Sea still embitters Iranians, who remain guarded against Russia's potential expansionist ambitions. The loss of territories settled by the 1828 treaties of Gulistan and Turkmanchai (know in Iranian as "the shameful treaty") after the Persian defeat of the Russo-Persian wars of 1804-1828 still humiliates Iranians. Today, Russia no longer borders Iran. Although sometimes ambiguous, both countries seem to want relative regional stability to enable trade to flourish vice imperialist dominance of those relatively unstable neighboring countries.[145] Iran and Russia have periodically come together for issues such as regional security and keeping U.S. influence out of the region.[146] For example, in 2007, the members of the Caspian Sea summit led by Iran and Russia, which also included Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, made a joint declaration that the participating states hold exclusive rights to the Caspian Sea resources.[147] The Russians have mitigated sympathies for Iran, a regime whose fanatic ideology they have trouble understanding. Additionally, in the last decade, Russia has tried a policy of rapprochement with the West, which led to some cooling in Iranian-Russian relations.

What some call a Russo-Iranian alliance is actually a marriage of convenience for economic and strategic reasons and is made on an issue-by-issue basis.[148] After the collapse of the USSR, Moscow was desperate to find sources of revenue, and the IRI was eager to buy more conventional weapons and develop its nuclear power capacity. Hence in 1992, as part of a larger trade agreement Russia agreed to help Iran build a nuclear reactor, which had been commenced under the Shah in the city of Bushehr.[149] The nuclear reactor was damaged by Iraqi airstrikes in 1988, and in 1995 Russia signed a contract that would commit it to help bring the project to completion. After endless delays, it was finally tested in 2011. Built on mistrust, the relationship has wavered—especially as Russia has tried to balance the international pressure against nuclear proliferation in Iran while continuing to build a project that is lucrative for Russia and strategically important for Iran.[150]

Contracts and cooperation have also taken on a controversial strategic dimension, as many in Moscow try to balance this lucrative relationship with a budding U.S.-Russian relationship.[151] Therefore, the concern regarding

Russian support for Iran must be understood in the context of the economic desperation of the Gorbachev and Yeltsin years[152] and the steadily increasing import-export relationship between Russia and Iran until today. According to the Russian Federal State Statistics Service, Iran is now the single biggest importer of Russian goods, with a record of $3.7 billion of imports in 2008.[153] In 2009, and unlike Western countries' reactions to the Iranian Presidential election, Moscow called shortly after the votes were tallied to congratulate Ahmadinejad on his controversial reelection.[154]

For Iran, the Russian relationship is a convenient way to circumvent Western pressure against Tehran. Russia's rapprochement with the U.S. and its efforts to distance itself from a "strategic relationship" with Iran chilled Iranian-Russian collaboration. Still, Tehran has kept using Russia as a diplomatic shield, enabling Iran to evade the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) warnings.[155] For the Iranian leadership, Russian support of Iran in international organizations minimizes the opportunity for the U.S. to impose international sanctions on Iran.[156] Iran looks at its neighbors with cold pragmatism and mistrust. It is important to understand that it is part of Iranian strategic culture to use neighboring alliances for political purposes without any real emotional investment.

Iran's geographical position between Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan make it an important country in a very volatile neighborhood where the U.S. has been waging war in an attempt to eventually stabilize the region and reduce the terrorist safe havens. Iran's geographical situation increases the pressure on the U.S. to contain the Iranian regime and address its bellicose interests. Since the Iraq war, the U.S. has been particularly careful to reduce the possibility of other states in the region allying with Iran. In 2009, then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates highlighted the importance of containing Iran in a meeting with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) representatives, telling them their "interests are aligned … in the necessity to limit Iranian influence and meddling nationally and regionally, a meddling that has already cost far too many lives."[157]

The World as their Playground

Iran's geography and history placed it at the center of international trade routes and the international relations of the day. Iran's historical self-image

as central international player still shapes its strategic culture. Situated at the frontier between Europe and Asia, Iran has historically been along important trade routes, including the Silk Road connecting Europe and Asia. Now, its position on the Straight of Hormuz, through which an estimated 20 percent of the world's oil is transported, gives Tehran increased power in contemporary affairs. It believes itself to be leader of the Muslim world, superior to Arab and Turkic populations, and a world player.[158] In comparison to U.S. military and economic power, Iran is far from being a world power, yet Tehran's disproportionate belief in its self importance in world affairs shapes its strategic decisions.

Due to its long and prestigious history, Iran has global ambitions in addition to its dreams of regional hegemony. In its confrontation with the U.S. it now seeks to create alliances with all U.S. adversaries. To circumvent sanctions, Iran has sought a policy of rapprochement with South American and African states antagonistic to the U.S. government. Iran also pursues cooperation with states on the geographic and strategic periphery of U.S.-Iranian competition. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) emphasized in its 2012 report about U.S.-Iranian strategic competition:

> In the past decade, Iran has increased its diplomatic missions to states critical of the U.S. like Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador, but also to self-declared non-aligned states like Argentina and Brazil. Iran has built 17 cultural centers in Latin America and it currently maintains ten embassies, up from six in 2005.[159]

In addition to its increased diplomatic efforts in South America and Africa, Iran has courted relations with China, its second-largest trading partner. Iran sees its relationship with China as a counterweight to U.S. pressure. China's interest, on the other hand, is ultimately energy security. Like the Iran-Russia relationship, the Iran-China relationship is not based on sincere mutual amity, and China has been careful to balance U.S. pressures against

... in strategic culture terms, the U.S. can expect Iran to leverage its important geographic position and oil reserves to maximize its pursuit of both local and out of area strategic partnerships to counter U.S. containment policies.

Iran with its own energy interests. China has been able to maintain positive if somewhat strained relationships with both the U.S. and Iran by selectively

supporting each side based on Beijing's strategic interests.[160] This relationship should be viewed as another example of Iranian's interest in seeking alliances beyond its immediate neighborhood. Iran's self-aggrandizing image sees itself as a major power deserving more respect and a substantive role in international affairs. Therefore, in strategic culture terms, the U.S. can expect Iran to leverage its important geographic position and oil reserves to maximize its pursuit of both local and out of area strategic partnerships to counter U.S. containment policies.

Leader of Shi'a Islam

The Shi'a-Sunni rift is well known and dates back to the beginning of the Muslim faith centuries ago. However, in modern terms, the Iran-Iraq war and rise of anti-Shi'a Wahhabism and of pan-Shi'a rhetoric has exposed the severity of the rift.[161] Many Shi'a will self-identify as Muslim before Shi'a, but there is no doubt that the difference between Shi'a and Sunni has been leveraged for political purposes. The distribution of Shi'a and Sunni populations in Iran and neighboring countries has significantly affected alliances, conflicts, and territorial claims. In the 1970s, Khomeini claimed his ambition was Islamic unification.[162] The reality has been drastically different. Iran is a Shi'a theocracy which is populated by 40 percent of the World's Shi'a Muslims.[163] Hence, it considers itself the leader of all other Shi'a populations. This was particularly critical during the Iran-Iraq war when Saddam Hussein claimed to want to help the Sunni populations of southern Iran, and Iran had an eye on two important holy sites of Shi'a Islam located in Iraq.[164] The cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq contain very important Shi'a relics and are considered the holiest sites of Shi'a Islam after Mecca.

Shi'a allegiances play a role in Iran's support of the Alawite regime of Syria and of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Tehran views the Syrian regime as well as the Khomeini-inspired guerilla group in Lebanon as part of its zone of influence in the region. Hezbollah is indicative of Iran's penchant for irregular warfare, which is compatible with Iranian military doctrine and its strategic culture. Indeed, when IRI leadership became aware of Hezbollah's increasing strength, it quickly decided to finance, arm, and train them. For the most part, it was the Revolutionary Guards of the IRI that trained Hezbollah recruits.[165]

Khomeini's Political and Theological Doctrine

Khomeini's interpretation of Islam and his teachings play a central role in the strategic culture of the IRI. Although the IRI was only created in 1979, the strength and stability of this regime for the last 33 years is due in part to the comprehensive nature of Khomeini's ideology. Khomeini was born over a century ago and spent much of his early life studying and teaching the Koran, Sharia law, Islamic Gnosticism (called erfan) and ethics. By the time of the Islamic Revolution, his published works contained very little real direction for the management of a state other than that of following the Sharia laws. It is believed that he solidified and shared his ideas for a new republic during his time teaching in Qom and then in exile.[166] Notably, Khomeini elaborated on three concepts of Islam that would become central the Islamic Republic regime. The study of erfan, the elaboration of Tauhid and the idea of martyrdom became more prominent with the IRI regime.

First, the influence of erfan enabled Khomeini to justify the vanguard and mobilize followers. Erfan, although purely Shi'a, is rather similar in nature to Sufism for its asceticism and its belief in oneness. Erfan also provided "the ideal of an ordinary believer that could rise to become a perfect man, saint or erif."[167] Middle East historian Vanessa Martin compares this notion of erif to Plato's philosopher King. And as in *The Republic*, the ruler is surrounded by guardians with whom he can discuss or consult.

Second, Tauhid (or oneness), is another concept that was aggrandized in the Iranian Revolutionary ideology. One of Khomeini's key disciples, Ayatollah Murtaza Motahhari, was instrumental in elaborating on the concept of Tauhid. This idea of oneness that puts the Ulama before the individual was also used to counter the rising appeal for socialist and Marxist ideologies in pre-revolutionary Iran. His theory was collectivist and emphasized a strong state.[168]

Third is the concept of martyrdom, which can be most easily be traced back in Shi'a Islam to the martyrdom of Hussein Ibn Ali, who was the grandson of Muhammad and the Second Shi'a Imam. Each year the celebration of Ashura reminds the people of this great figure of Shi'a religious history and the importance of his example as a religious martyr. In his speeches, Khomeini strove to make martyrdom for the cause of the revolution and as a cause to aspire to. Leading by example, in his April 1963 speech at Qum in honor of the martyrs killed by the Shah's forces when protesting against

the Shah, he declared: "The ulama of Islam, the religious leaders and pious people of Iran, together with its noble army, are the brothers of the Muslim states … if [the agents of Israel] wish, let the them come and put an end to my life!"[169] Rhetoric like this and his subsequent references to Iran as a "nation of martyrs" reinforced the notion that the good would fight to the end and never fear their own death. There is thus a form of glorification of death in Iranian strategic culture. Those who lose a son at war are honored, and those fighting to the death are heroes.

Fourth, an important concept of the Khomeini ideology is the idea that all citizens of Iran are children that must be taken care of by the leadership.[170] It is based, in theory and in practice, on a Muslim concept known as velayat-e faqih, or "guardianship of the jurist." In its original phrasing, this can mean that the clergy assumes responsibility for orphans, for the insane, and for abandoned or untenanted property.[171] In practice, it gives the government a justification for its role as guardian of the society. This shapes strategic culture by legitimizing the leadership even when ruthless and frees its hands to worry more about foreign policy.

Hyperbole and Ambiguity: Tools of Soft Power

Persian visual art is one of the most complex and rich in world history. It combines architecture, painting, drawing, ceramics, calligraphy, metalworking and, of course, the famous Persian rugs. Persian art has evolved with time but remains focused on intricate patterns, geometrical shapes, and the use of bright colors to grandiose effect. This art form can serve as a metaphor for Iranian rhetoric and foreign policy. Persian prose emphasizes intricate allegories and metaphors and cultivates hyperbole and embellishments. Even under periods of austerity that punctuated the long Iranian history, calligraphy and prose remained of upmost importance. This extravagance of style has sometimes led Iranians to follow their ambitious rhetoric in policy and outrun their capacities.[172] In addition, most often this extravagant and complex rhetoric is a tool of psychological manipulation.

Iranians embrace contradictions and ambiguities better than most nations.[173] Contrasts and contradictions are a means of thickening the fog of war and create doubt as to whether there even is a war. Iranians are experts at exploiting inconsistencies and paradoxes in propaganda and psychological

warfare. It often calibrates violence and concessions to achieve particular psychological effect on the opposition. According to the Washington Institute's director of security studies, Michael Eisenstadt, "policy makers in the IRI consider information activities as their decisive line of operations"[174] and embrace long intervals of times and contradictions that go directly against the U.S. way of war. RAND scholar Fuller describes the Iranian diplomatic negotiating style—an inherent strategic culture component—in which the key elements are "dissimulation, deception, indirection, the partially empowered emissary, the mixed personal and official agenda of the intermediary, and the use of foreign contacts to gain marginal personal advantage."[175] The recent negotiations between Iran and the IAEA on the topic of Iran's unclear nuclear proliferation intentions have reflected most of the above descriptions. Meetings after meetings, empty promises and backtracking have stalled any significant advances on the topic.[176]

A Collection of Irregular Warfare Techniques

Iranian forces' propensity to develop unconventional means to wage war is evident. While Iran has access to the Gulf and to a sea, it lags in developing a navy worthy of "sea power" status, choosing instead to develop and depend on Naval Guerillas who capitalized.[177] Iran has also been one of the leading financiers of terrorist and guerrilla groups and has engaged in development of various types of WMDs.

Historically, most countries with imperialist dreams and sea access have developed robust naval capabilities. Although the Ancient Greeks already called the body of water near Iran the Persian Gulf, history reveals no single country controlled the Gulf until the 20th century, when the British controlled those waters. Traditionally, Iran has not been a naval power, and during the 1987 naval confrontations in the Gulf with the United States, Iran mostly confronted its enemy with "naval guerilas." The lack of sophistication in Iranian naval ships, electronic systems, and radars pushed the Revolutionary Guard to employ deceit and intimidation tactics instead of confronting U.S. warships with naval power. Iran's naval guerilla hit-and-run attacks seldom did much damage, but were meant to terrorize merchant shipping and get the U.S. to withdraw from the Gulf.[178] The most direct harm to the U.S. navy was caused by anti-ship mines, rockets, and missiles. During the

Iran-Iraq war the use of irregular naval warfare tactics pushed the U.S. to rethink its naval strategy in the Gulf. The so-called "Tanker War" started in 1984 and Kuwaiti and Saudi ships were damaged through mining attacks by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy. Initially, when Kuwaitis asked for protection from the U.S., the Pentagon and the U.S. Central Command believed that the presence of a carrier and of a demonstrative escort of the Kuwaiti tankers by U.S. ships would deter the Iranians from further mining attacks. This proved fatally wrong and led to the U.S. to change its tactics to be much closer to land-based counterinsurgency operation than traditional fleet-to-fleet operation.[179] This meant establishing water-borne patrol bases and deploying helicopters to detect and prevent Iranian from laying mines. "Operation Praying Mantis" was the culmination of this naval conflict that confronted and neutralized the irregular means employed by the Iranian forces. For example, 14 April 1988, the frigate USS "Samuel B. Roberts" was almost sunk by Iranian mines. This major attack on a U.S. ship provoked U.S. retaliation on 18 April 1988, which destroyed the Iranian frigates "Joshan" and "Sahand."[180]

The Iranian strategy had been to inflict enough casualties on the U.S. to discourage U.S. warships from staying in the Gulf, but not enough to provoke full-blown retaliation. The strong U.S. retaliation decreased the number of mining attacks and precipitated the end of the Iran-Iraq war. By the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Iranian forces had attacked 190 ships from 31 countries, and killed at least 63 sailors.[181]

Tehran's use of terrorism is an important part of the government's strategic and tactical modus operandi, and can be attributed to Iranian strategic culture. Historically, various Persian and Iranian dynasties have used auxiliary-type terrorist forces to maintain plausible deniability. For example, Herodotus described the presence of a strangler faction in the Persian forces that was using terrorism as a tool of warfare[182] and other Iranian dynasties` use of bandits as instruments of politics.[183]

Today, the U.S. Department of State considers Iran the world's most active state sponsor of terrorism.[184] Iran believes that the more effective way to build up its strategic strength is through irregular warfare. Using terrorism is an effective, inexpensive means of asymmetrical warfare that enables a weaker adversary to confront a major power. Iran exercises its asymmetrical warfare capability through Hezbollah, which is effectively an arm of the Iranian military and is well trained, well financed, and strategically placed in Lebanon

and around the world. Iran finances Hezbollah at the rate of an estimated $100 million U.S. dollars per year, although some analysts estimate this figure to be as low as $60 million and as high as $200 million.[185] The $100 million estimate represents approximately half of Hezbollah's annual budget and therefore ties Hezbollah strongly to Iran.[186] When tensions started escalating between Iran and Israel in late 2011, the Lebanese Hezbollah were told to stand ready to retaliate in case of an attack by Israel on Iran.[187] Reliance on proxies such as Hezbollah for military operations gives Iran plausible deniability and lessens the chance of a U.S. retaliation on Iranian soil.

Other irregular warfare techniques include supplying arms to insurgent groups to undermine the government or U.S. efforts in that country. There is evidence that Iran supports insurgents in neighboring Iraq, thus waging a war of attrition and making sure that Iraq remains unstable.[188] In addition, Iran provides arms to the southern fighters in Afghanistan and thus undermining the U.S. and the Afghan National Army's efforts. There is evidence that the IRI has been involved in shipping arms to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.[189]

Designated in 2007 by the U.S. Congress as terrorist organization,[190] the most powerful entity in Iran is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). A branch of the military, the IRGC is a hybrid between a special operations force and a terrorist group. The IRGC was originally created to counterbalance the power of Iranian the army and reduce the threat of a potential coup but has evolved into an organization involved in most areas of Iranian domestic and foreign affairs. In the same manner as the IRGC naval arm works in parallel with the conventional—and weak—Iranian Navy the IRGC ground force adds unconventional capabilities to other Iranian military forces by specializing in training terrorist insurgent cells all over the Middle East and Southern Europe.

Another way that the IRI is striving to build up its deterrent capability is by increasing its WMD capability. The use of chemical weapons was widespread during the Iran-Iraq war, and Iran now wields the threat of the development of a nuclear bomb as an irregular deterrent capability.[191] While Iran does not yet have a nuclear weapons capability, the IRI benefited from its rapprochement with Russia to procure weapons and build its capacity. It seems that all conventional military efforts are overshadowed by the potential unconventional use of this force. Since its extensive experimentation with chemical weapons at the end of the Iran-Iraq war and in the 1990s,

the Iranian forces have developed capabilities of producing a wide range of chemical weapons, including blood and blister agents, and possibly nerve agents.[192]

Iran has been interested in nuclear power since the era of the Shah. Indeed, the Pahlavi regime signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1960 with a view to developing a civil nuclear capability. Since then, with Russian help, it built the Bushehr nuclear reactor and has been developing more medium size reactors. In November 2011, the IAEA issued a report condemning the enrichment activities in Iran. Building up its nuclear capability keeps the other regional powers on their toes and is a shortcut to becoming a key world player that is a status that the IRI believes it deserves. This also derives from the need for self-reliance and playing up ambiguity as a means of soft power.[193]

Iranian leadership overwhelmingly believes in the psychological power of ambiguity and playing up the hard dilemma of a low chance of a very terrible thing. Iran signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993 and ratified it in 1997, declaring two facilities previously used to produce chemical weapons. The ambiguity and repeated demand for extension in the IRI's process of neutralizing its chemical weapons capability leads many to doubt that chemical weapons are completely eradicated from Iran.[194] Even more ambiguous is Iran's biological weapons capability; unlike chemical weapons, Iran has denied ever possessing biological agents, although different intelligence reports throughout the 1990s have identified the purchase and development of dual use agents. For example, the 2008 analysis from CSIS about Iranian biological weapons concludes that "Iran continued to deny that it had such programs, but its imports continued to raise intelligence concerns."[195] This report provides an extensive list of contradictions about the Iranian biological weapons program. Such misdirection and confusion is another example of how Iran uses ambiguity to prompt Western observers to endlessly debate its intentions.

A Strategic Culture That Predicts the Long Rough Road Ahead

Iran's strategic culture is a predictor of a complex and long-winded effort for U.S. diplomatic policy. Due to its long history based on the duality between

the ideals of a glorious past and frustrations of decline, its savvy for complex and ambiguous strategic moves,[196] and its propensity for making alliances of convenience[197]such as those with Russia and China, it is likely that Iran will continue to try to fight above its weight in world affairs. The present leadership uses a collective ethos and religious proselytism to justify its grandiose rhetoric. Ambiguous and ambitious rhetoric also guides Iran's foreign policy alliances, which should be closely watched. Indeed, central to Iran's strategic culture is a reliance on alliances of convenience, with the idea that "the enemy of my enemy is my ally." This allows the IRI surprising resilience in making new alliances with former foes or geographically remote countries, and makes it more difficult to enact successful sanctions and embargoes against the Tehran regime.[198] Unfortunately, Iran's application of its strategic culture, including ambiguity, irregular warfare, alliances of convenience, and irreverence for international norms, are so antithetical to the U.S. strategic culture and way of war that it is difficult for U.S. policymakers to understand and counter Iran's adventurism. Once before, during the Iran-Iraq war naval conflict, the U.S. underestimated the irregularity of the IRGC tactics and learned from it.[199]

As the Middle East is shaken by the changes stemming from the Arab Spring and the potential exacerbation of sectarian divides, the Iranian regime will doubtless have an ingrained sense of duty Shi'a leaders to retain support for the Syrian Alawi regime and Hezbollah. The extent to which Iran will increase or maintain its arming of minority factions throughout the region remains to be seen. Iran believes it is playing the long game, viewing the whole world as its chessboard. However, in reality, the regime is not playing chess as much as it is playing poker, where the ability to cheat and bluff are winning strategies.

5. North Korean Strategic Culture

Officially called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), North Korea is also known as the Hermit Kingdom, a term once used for the entire Korean peninsula. While North Korea is, in reality, neither democratic nor a republic, the nation's official and unofficial names are meaningful, providing a glimpse into North Korea's "strategic culture."

After surviving the fall of the Soviet Union and its satellite states, and witnessing the opening of China's economy, North Korea has remained a totalitarian, Marxist-Leninist, isolated, bellicose, and extremely secretive state. President George W. Bush named North Korea as one of the three "Axis of Evil" countries, along with Iran and Iraq, because of its aggressive behavior, its atrocious humanitarian record, and its possession of and threat to use WMD. Despite the recent change in North Korea's leadership, the country remains hostile to the West, and particularly toward the United States. Analyzing North Korea's strategic culture is difficult because so many factors come in to play. North Korea's isolationist history and unitary culture are important strategic culture variables, as is its political geography, which positions North Korea in the midst of three strong and ambitious neighbors. Other variables unique to North Korea's strategic culture are Korean nationalism, Chinese-influenced Confucianism, and more than a half-century of hyped ideology influenced by Soviet communism. Finally, perhaps the most important factor affecting North Korean strategic culture is the Kim family dynasty, which has had two remarkably consistent goals: survival of the dynasty and survival of the state.

A Long History of Isolationism: A Fertile Ground for Indoctrination

Korea first became known as the Hermit Kingdom when the Chosun dynasty ruled the peninsula from the 14th to the 19th centuries. Its extreme isolationism surfaced in the 17th century as a defense against nearly simultaneous wars with the Japanese Shogun state and China's Manchus. This defensive and isolationist behavior persists today in what North Korea analyst Merrily Baird describes as a country ruled by a leadership that is "secretive, xenophobic, and convinced that only overwhelming military strength can guarantee

the nation's survival."[200] Furthermore, such policies have fostered a culture of fear and isolationism that is cultivated by the North Korean regime and sold to its propagandized population as a continuation of Korea's unique history and strategic culture.

This isolationism contributes in two additional ways to the DPRK's strategic culture. First, isolation from the international community creates ideal terrain for indoctrination. Second, the secretive nature of the secluded regime renders analysis of the motives and operating background of DPRK leadership difficult at best.[201] North Korea's secretive, hostile and deceptive regime bars foreigners from having a true understanding of Pyongyang's strategic intent and the extent to which the people of North Korea have been indoctrinated.

Kim Il Sung, his son, and now his grandson have kept North Koreans isolated from outside contacts and influence with a degree of success that dictators and autocrats around the world might envy. Accounts from North Korean defectors are the best gauge of the populations' real sentiments toward the Kim regime, and the accounts are striking. For example, in 2002, South Korean social scientists surveyed 163 defectors regarding their views of the North Korean regime. In the survey, only "38 percent of defectors thought North Korea's choice of socialism as an economic system had been a mistake … 48 percent believed that the North Korean economy's trouble could be attributed to government mismanagement and 47 percent blamed the Americans for trying to crush the economy."[202] Almost by definition, this defector population sample should provide perspectives of those most disgruntled with the regime—those dismayed or famished enough to undertake the dangerous escape to South Korea. The lukewarm responses and only mild dissatisfaction with the leadership are surprising, and reflect either the extent of North Korean indoctrination (exemplified by the high percentage blaming the United States for its woes) or the pervasive fear of saying something that could lead to personal or family persecution or death. Thus, pervasive indoctrination and fear factors into the country's strategic culture in that the low level of popular resistance or dissent directed toward the government enables the leadership to pursue whatever foreign and security policy goals it deems desirable without consideration for the opinions of the population at large—and with virtually no chance of resistance. More importantly, unlike other democratic heads of state, Pyongyang's leaders

can commit their military and use force without the scrutiny of the nation's citizenry.

Korean Geopolitical History and the Unitary State

Korea has a long discrete history as a unitary state.[203] In its early history, Korea was divided into three Kingdoms: Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla. However, since the 10th century AD, Korea has been a unified nation-state. Since then, dynasties have come and gone, and Korea's borders with China have changed slightly. Yet a unified, single Korean state existed for nearly a millennium until the end of World War II. Interestingly, even after more than 50 years of a divided (and heavily fortified) border, both North and South Korean governments refer to their territory as part of a nation that will be reunified in the future.[204] Whether in official statements from Seoul or propaganda from Pyongyang, neither leadership acknowledges a permanent division. Interestingly, all North Korean refugees escaping to South Korea are given citizenship and Republic of Korea passports.[205] Similarly, each Korea advocates for an independent and unified Korea under its own terms. The ultimate unification rhetoric, albeit currently unrealistic, influences both countries' strategic decisions.[206] The objective of regaining lost territory in order to make the state whole—not an unusual objective for any state—is very much an important element of North Korea's strategic culture.

Geopolitical History: Powerful Neighbors

The nationalist sentiments and isolationist tendencies expressed throughout North Korea's geopolitical history can be characterized as a reaction to many centuries of being coveted and colonized by China and Japan.[207] In fact, the Korean peninsula is surrounded by three strong and expansionist neighbors: China, Japan, and Russia. These three powers have all played roles in shaping North Korean strategic culture, but for different reasons. China's influence has important strategic culture implications for three reasons: First, Chinese suzerainty over Korea during the Chosun dynasty required Korea to pay tribute to China. Second, Korea's adoption of elements of Chinese Confucianism inculcated the notion of a rigid hierarchical caste system. Third, the Chinese Communist Party supported the formation of the North Korean

Communist Party, and hence influenced North Korean political ideology. The first two factors will be outlined in more detail below.

Under the Chosun dynasty, which spanned the period from 1392 to 1897, Korea was a vassal state of China. As a vassal, Korea had to pay tribute to Chinese emperors, and large delegations of Korean officials traveled to Chinese capitals bearing gifts and swearing allegiance on a regular basis.[208] Reversing the tribute role, Kim Young Il liked to point out that, during his reign, foreign dignitaries brought gifts to the North Korean leader, which were then publicly displayed as a propaganda tool to highlight the superiority of the North Korean state.[209] The memory of being a Chinese vassal state still plays painfully on North Korea's national consciousness, fostering the desire for independence that greatly influences the leadership's strategic decisions.[210] Independence is highly prized, as the prospect of subordination to powerful neighbors recalls the humiliation at the hands of the Chinese and Japanese. Humiliation is an emotion that often inspires some type of retribution to even the score—a behavior that is very much a North Korean strategic culture trait.

China's Confucian influence facilitated the creation of a rigid hierarchical system with the Supreme Leader as metaphorical father.[211] In Confucianism, paternalism is a central concept that is transposed from the family unit to a rigidly hierarchical state system. Korea's Confucian past partially explains why the caste system, present to some degree in all dictatorships, is omnipresent in North Korea.[212] North Korea's particular caste system emerged in the late 1950s, when the regime began dividing the citizens into three groups: core (also known as loyal), wavering, and hostile. Ratings were given to individuals based on their family's history with the regime. This ranking determined access to higher education, jobs, and living quarters. A recent study by author and researcher Robert Collins determined that this system places about a third of the population in a form of slave labor.[213] Well organized and all encompassing, North Korea's caste system permeates society to such a degree that most members of the lower castes are unaware of just how much their family histories determine the possibilities for advancement. Children are raised with the belief that hard work for the country will lead them to a better life; they only slowly discover that social mobility based on hard work is almost nonexistent. Instead, the role of a person's parents and grandparents during the war against the Japanese and the Korean War affects life outcomes more than personal merit.[214] In the last decade, the regime

seems to have loosened some restrictions based on societal predetermination. However, there is still little upward mobility for those whose roots are in South Korea or whose family members have fled to China or elsewhere. Also, demotions for crimes—even petty crimes—are much more widespread for those whose family members have escaped than for others.[215]

The Confucian value of unquestioned submissiveness by family members (or citizens of a nation-state) is just one more limitation to civil protest. The close-knit institutionalized elite—whose status is determined by family standing and proximity to the emperor-like Kim—suppresses all civil discourse, including any discussion of the appropriate use of military force to achieve national security objectives.[216]

Like its history with China, North Korea's relationship with Japan has had a lasting impact on DPRK strategic culture, and has influenced its relationships with other great powers. Japan's occupation of the Korean peninsula from 1910 until the end of World War II shaped two important aspects of the North Korean strategic culture: it destroyed any semblance of civil society through brutal repression[217] and gave an easy basis for the present demonization of Japan as a symbol of all that is evil in capitalist societies. Japan's occupation of Korea was brutal, as was its imposition of its imperial power. Korean response to Japan's brutality was orchestrated by, the underground communist party in North Korea, which garnered much popular support for its efforts to oppose Japanese imperialism. Beginning in the late 1920s and gaining momentum in the 1940s, North Korea's communist party received monetary and ideological support from the Manchurian Communists[218] and Russian Bolsheviks, both of which were expanding their zone of influence in Siberia at the time.[219]

Interestingly, when the Korean Communist Party was formed in the 1920s, it actually had more members than its Manchurian counterpart. However, the Korean communists lacked the bourgeois intellectuals who led the expansion of other communist parties of the same era. Instead, the North Korean communist party gained supporters by resisting the hated Japanese occupiers.[220] Eventually, after World War II, North Korea's communist party became the strongest faction in Korea, and the Soviet liberation of North Korea led to a Leninist-influenced communist regime. The brutal Japanese rule gave way to a country that had a nonexistent civil society, and any remnants of opposition (such as the Christian minority) had fled south during the Korean War.[221] This lack of opposition facilitated the establishment of

an all-encompassing dictatorial regime familiar with, and in some ways beholden to, the communist ideology of its Chinese and Soviet mentors. Presently, there is still no organized civil society in North Korea and certainly no recognizable civil discontent that would challenge or inhibit the North Korean leadership from aggressive foreign policy or warlike behavior—a legacy that stems, at least indirectly, from Japanese involvement in the peninsula.

The former Soviet Union's influence in the creation of the DPRK is another important element contributing to North Korea's unique strategic culture, and the relationship between North Korea and the former USSR has evolved with Russia's changing political climate. The North Korean regime has portrayed its ties to Russia in ways that benefit its leadership. For example, North Korean propaganda asserts that Kim Il Sung was a leader of guerilla warfare against the Japanese and emerged as the uncontested leader of independence.[222] The truth is that until the end of the Korean War there was competition among the top communist leaders in North Korea, including Kim Il Sung, Southern Communist party leader Pak Hongyong, Workers' Party propaganda chief Kim Changman, and novelist and communist intellectual Hong Myonghui all having aspirations of leading the Korean Communists in the 1940s.[223] However, Kim Il Sung emerged as sole leader for two reasons, both of which were related to the former USSR: first, because of his affiliation with the Soviet regime, which supported him in the early days of post-WWII state formation; and second, because of his adroit political maneuvering during the Korean War.[224] Following the Korean War, Kim took advantage of the Sino-Soviet rift by playing China and the USSR against each other to gain independence from both powers and increase domestic support through an increased nationalist rhetoric of self-sufficiency.[225]

Although North Korean distortions of history have attempted to distance the regime from Russian influence, history still plays a role in today's North Korean alliance with Russia. During the Cold War, the 1961 Mutual Defense and Cooperation Treaty defined the relationship between North Korea and the Soviet Union. However, the post-Soviet relationship was tenuous. Even after Russian President Vladimir Putin became the first among the Big Four to make an official visit to North Korea,[226] Kim Jung Il stopped acknowledging the help of the Russians in freeing Korea from the Japanese for the sake of nationalism and self-aggrandizement,[227] and changed the location of his birthplace from Russia, where he was born, to Korea.[228]

Still, the ideological influence of the now-defunct Soviet Union is important to North Korean strategic culture, as the DPRK and the former USSR share many characteristics. North Korea expert Adrian Buzo details at least three strategic culture parallels common to North Korean and Soviet security doctrine: the permeating of political language with military imagery; the pursuit of creating a "new man" (in North Korea it is the *Juche*-type man [described in the next section], while in the USSR it was the New Soviet Man); and the highly centralized, planned economy in which the communist party exercises a monopoly over resource allocation.[229] Despite the discussions about the extent to which North Korea is really allied with present-day Russia, the relationship should still be viewed in the context of the historical similarities between the DPRK and the former USSR. In his analysis of the former USSR's strategic culture, Jack Snyder, USSR strategic culture expert, highlights its difference from the U.S. in its unilateral (vice cooperative for the U.S.) damage limitation strategies. His analysis shows that the Soviets had a preference for unilateral damage prevention through unrestrained counterforce nuclear strikes—or at least the threat of unrestrained counterforce strikes.[230] Soviets liked the idea of major power threats, and this partially explains the Kim Dynasty's emphasis on acquiring nuclear weapons, and forecasts how they might order them used.

An All-Encompassing Ideology: *Juche, Suryong*, and Military First

The possibility for intense indoctrination of the population and totalitarian ruling by the country's leadership are variables rooted in North Korea's isolationist geopolitical history, and to a minor extent its religious history. Based on these variables, the well-established North Korean ideology includes three main ideas central to its propaganda, all of which are and important elements of the strategic culture informing its national security policy and activities.

The most evident of these variables is the Party's self-image and persona. For example, on 7 September 1948, when the DPRK was established, the country declared itself a Marxist-Leninist state, in the same manner as the existing Soviet Union and soon to be Communist-ruled China. Similar to what occurred in China and Russia, the North Koreans adapted the Marxist-Leninist ideology to fit North Korean culture. For example, in 1955

Kim Il Sung first introduced the *Juche* doctrine, which quickly became the official ideology of the DPRK.[231] *Juche* was compatible with Marxist-Leninist doctrine and can most simply be understood as a nationalist application of self-reliant communism. In fact, *Juche* is most often literally translated as "self-reliance," policy, but its application has led some North Korea scholars to translate it to a "Korea First" policy[232] to better convey the nationalism that *Juche* represents. *Juche* was used by Kim Il Sung to differentiate his regime from the two neighboring great communist powers and to establish his cult of personality. In the 1970s, his son Kim Jong Il was said to have further refined *Juche* by introducing the concept of *suryong*, or vanguard party, an idea that he borrowed from (but did not attribute to) Lenin. His *suryong* decree stated that the vanguard party, which the masses are required to unquestionably obey, is necessary in order to organically transform the country into a communist and self-reliant entity.[233]

Doctrinally, combining *Juche* and *suryong* was a way both to enforce Kim Jong Il's and his sycophants' political leadership and to reinforce the idea of unwavering obedience as a precondition for North Korea's success.[234] Moreover, *Juche*'s acceptance by the North Korean population was leveraged to maintain faith in the system when applied communism—most notably in applied economic policy—failed. *Juche* doctrine justified North Korean adaptations to Communist doctrine when the USSR and other European communist states failed. Pyongyang could explain that although communism and socialism had not succeeded everywhere, North Korea's *Juche* adaptation of the Marxist-Leninist thought will still be a winning ideology. Not surprisingly, in 1992, the words Marxist-Leninist were removed from the constitution, and only *Juche* remained.[235] Many would agree that North Korea is not communist in the Marxist sense of the term. However, its early ties to Marxist-Leninist doctrine are still important because they were the basis for its later relationships with China and Russia. Even though Russia's communist days are past, China is now as much capitalist as communist, and both Russia and China have recognized South Korea, remnant alliance behaviors still persist. For example, Russia and China consistently vote against significant condemnation of North Korea by the UN Security Council.[236]

The principle of autarchic nationalism is central to understanding the strategic decisions of North Korea. The ideal of self-reliance is central to Pyongyang's propaganda, but it has been altered for the sake of survival.

The North Korean economy is in a terrible state, and has been for more than 30 years. In 1970, the North and South Korean gross domestic products were almost equivalent. However, by the late 1970s, there was a sharp decline in the North's economy relative to the South.[237] In the 1990s, the great famine, called "the arduous march" by Pyongyang's euphemistic propaganda machine, killed between 1 and 3.5 million North Koreans.[238] Indeed, the economy was so bad that many scholars, international observers, and academics predicted the imminent collapse of the regime.[239] Because of the size of the famine, North Korea relied heavily on international aid. In 1995, North Korea set a pattern for acquiring and distributing international assistance, which greatly favored the image of the regime. After receiving international help, Pyongyang's leaders kept very tight control on how and where the food could be distributed, often favoring the military with preferred food distribution.[240] Because the North Korea's stated policy is *Juche*, or self-reliance, one might expect that the food aid—which came mostly from the U.S., South Korea, and China—might be difficult for Pyongyang to accept and explain.[241] However, Pyongyang, ever masterful of propaganda, has sometimes declared the aid to be loans from other countries, or tribute given by other countries to honor North Korea. Pyongyang also continues to often blame the bad state of the economy on U.S. embargos and points out that lack of U.S. cooperation is just one more reason for people to unite behind *Juche*.[242]

The Kim Jong Il regime's Military First doctrine also has important strategic culture implications. Kim officially launched the policy after he ascended to power, but the idea had actually evolved during the previous decade. The Military First doctrine is a method to enlist the support of North Korean citizens and to ward off internal and external threats to the regime.[243] It is another ideological concept sustaining regime survival.[244] Keeping the population worried about foreign invaders decreases their ambition to overthrow political leaders, who are portrayed as the only ones able to save them. In fact, the Military First doctrine is reinforced in the DPRK constitution as the "supreme duty and honor of citizens to defend the country and serve in the army as required by law."[245] The Military First policy is a strategic necessity

> *The Military First doctrine is a method to enlist the support of North Korean citizens and to ward off internal and external threats to the regime.*

in that it justifies the state maintaining a robust conventional defense capability and developing a WMD capability.

Given North Korea's financial difficulties (which make the cost of maintaining large conventional forces difficult to justify), the absence of the protection earlier provided by the Soviet nuclear umbrella, and a noncommittal Chinese ally, developing a nuclear capability makes sense from both a Military First and strategic culture perspective. Despite a declining conventional capability and the lack of guaranteed military assistance from former close-knit allies, the nuclear capability keeps Military First relevant.[246] Unfortunately for the rest of the world, from a strategic culture perspective and given fewer "use of force" options, the North Koreans may be inclined to use their nuclear capability during a jingoistic, bellicose, and threatening moment. As an extremely paranoid and defensive country with few other options, Pyongyang could tout its nuclear weapons capability not as a deterrent second strike capability (like the USSR and the U.S. during the Cold War), but as a tool of survival.[247]

Openly, Kim Jong Il justified the Military First doctrine as a way to ensure independence from foreign powers in North Korea.[248] The flaunting of WMD and seemingly erratic military behavior were all ploys to keep the international community on its toes. From a game theory perspective, North Korea's unpredictable behavior is a foil to create strategic opacity and hide patterns.[249] Although Kim Jong Il's erratic and dangerous behavior was undeniable, none of the analysts and scholars who studied him thought him to be crazy.[250] His strategy had ambiguous deterrent value, which appears to be accepted by his son Kim Jong Un as well. Within months of being in power, the new leader offered to reenter nuclear negotiations by announcing that he would let the IAEA inspectors verify North Korean enrichment activities, and then proceeded to schedule a rocket launch and make a show of short-range missile tests.[251] This seemingly contradictory behavior continues a strategic culture family tradition of unpredictable security policy behavior.

A Rigid Family Cult

A primary difference between North Korea's strategic culture and that of neighboring Russia and China is the importance of the Kim family cult. The myth of Kim Il Sung has been strongly cultivated, first while he was alive,

and then by his descendants. Certain changes were made to his personal history to make him shine first as a liberator of Korea from the Japanese occupiers, and subsequently a defender of the fatherland against U.S. occupation of the South during the Korean War. Posthumously he was declared "Eternal President" and "Great Leader," and he became deified in North Korean propaganda.[252] The importance of the North Korean family cult, versus the Soviet or Maoist style cults of personality, is twofold. First, the cult of the Kim family has been important in assuring smooth transition of power,[253] from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jung Il, and most recently to Kim Jong Un. In cult of personality regimes, transitions are rarely smooth and there is always the risk of a major upheaval during times of succession. Transforming a dictatorship that is based on what Max Weber called "charismatic authority" into a hereditary dictatorship based on "traditional authority" guarantees easier transitions of power.[254] The calculating foresight of Kim Il Sung in bringing Kim Jung Il to the center of the government almost 20 years before his death assured a smooth transition after his death and set the precedent and conditions for future uncontested transitions—as long as a Kim family member is in the line of succession.

Second, the Kim family cult allowed Kim Jung Il to use the saintly image of his father to justify his rule.[255] Although reverence for Kim Il Sung remains high in surveys of defectors, Kim Jong Il generated less reverent support. Given North Korea's increasingly devastated economy and ravaging famines, Kim Jong Il's lavish lifestyle was completely disconnected from the realities of the population.[256] However, Kim Jong Il's behavior did not end the regime, because the Kim family connection resonated (and still resonates) with North Koreans. North Korean experts Ralph Hassig and Kongdon Oh describe the resilience of the Kim dictatorship like this: "it would be a gross exaggeration to say that the people support Kim Jong-Il; rather it does not occur to them to oppose him."[257] The Kim dynasty's new leader, Kim Jong Un, ascended to power without any resistance. He uses images and legends of his father and grandfather to justify his rule. However, having not had the benefit of a 20-year period of transition like his father, Kim Jong Un has been much less exposed and deified in the eyes of his people. Conveniently, the centennial of Kim Il Sung's birth should give the new leader several occasions to show his filial piety, while also demonstrating that he is in charge.[258] Maintaining the status quo is important during times of transition. From a

U.S. perspective, the third Kim's acceptance of the status quo is an important indicator that North Korea's strategic culture will continue unchanged.

A Strategic Culture Defying Change

The DPRK's rigid strategic culture is rooted in several elements that create an opportune environment for a totalitarian dictatorial regime and predict longevity of this regime, despite its innumerable shortcomings and severe economic challenges. Its history, geopolitical situation, and the custom-made communist ideology adapted by the Kim family and its close advisors to fit the North Korean experience are important components of North Korea's unique strategic culture. First, the regime can distort the reality of international motives and actions due to its isolationist history reinforced by the doctrine of self-reliance. Second, the fear of compromised sovereignty is rooted in its geopolitical history. Many North Koreans thus would rather live in a draconically poor country than lose national independence. Third, there is a complete absence of a robust civil society power center that could counter the Kim family's bellicose behavior and adventurism. North Korea's unique political system, which is based on a rigid, hierarchical, and Confucian model and justified by a glorified but fabricated history of the ruling Kim family, further explains DPRK's strategic decision-making process. In the past several decades there has never been the hint of a contender to the Kim family regime, which has succeeded in remaining isolated, resilient, and unpredictable. Despite economic hardship and terrible human rights violations,[259] but absent any civil discourse, the Kim cult of personality maintains strict control over all elements of power in North Korea and its strategic behavior, particularly when it comes to the use of force.

Consequences for the Future

The North Korean regime has managed to fabricate an ideology based on an interpretation of North Korean history and traditions to justify its rule. Unless there is a change in North Korea which allows civil society to participate in strategic decision making and absent any a significant foreign intervention, the DPRK will remain isolationist, rigidly autocratic, and unresponsive to international legal norms. Without a civil society infused with

some policy-making powers, the leaders of North Korea (particularly the Kim cult) will be able to continue disregarding its neglected society while investing in threatening weaponry for nefarious purposes. In 2010, then Defense Secretary Robert Gates admitted that "the administration's policy of strategic patience on North Korea had failed."[260] Waiting may not play out in our favor when there is such a rigid strategic structure that predicts endurance of this ruthless regime.

President Barack Obama seems to be leaning toward tougher measures on North Korea. The U.S. President's immediate cancellation of the "leap day agreement" to help feed North Koreans after the failed North Korea rocket launch [261] is an indicator of future policy. Furthermore, the "Asia Pivot" and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's emphasis on developing the Asia Pacific Naval presence and revitalizing friendships with the Japanese and other Asian allies may change the equilibrium in East Asia.[262]

6. Strategic Culture of al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda (AQ) is neither a state nor a nation; instead, it is a transnational non-state actor with a relatively recent genesis and loose geographical attachments. However, AQ was founded on deep-rooted and complex beliefs, culture, and history that inform its strategic consciousness and decisions. AQ has existed in name since 1988. It draws its ideology from Islam's rich history and on what former leader Osama bin Laden considered a common perspective of all Muslims. During his life, bin Laden rarely spoke of Arabs, but almost always of the *Ummah*,[263] the Islamic community of faithful that he saw as his people and forming an entity akin to that of a nation with bonds stronger than those of kinship or nationality. Bin Laden's AQ doctrine was built on Sunni Muslim traditions, centuries of perceived humiliation at the hands foreign invaders, memories of past glory, and present political grievances of the Muslim inhabitants of the Middle East. The organization's outlook is supported by a strategic culture that promotes symbolic violence on infidels and dismisses modern national boundaries in favor of attachment to holy sites and strategic historical locations such as the Greater Caliphate, a swath of territory stretching from Spain to Indonesia. AQ's strategic culture is complex in that it has two main variants: one for leadership and another for foot soldiers. However, members share the same fanatical drive that is expressed through what they view as a religious battle to restore a pious earthly society and righteously prepare for afterlife.[264]

Reconciling the Strategic Culture of AQ Leadership and Operatives

AQ's strategic culture is a dichotomy as seen through the eyes of its leadership and its foot soldiers. Drawing on the work of London School of Economics Professor of International Relations Christopher Coker, terrorism expert Jeffrey Cozzens argues that religion, culture, and ideology all shape the violence of AQ and the sympathetic groups that occupy its universe. In other words, for members of AQ and associated movements (AQAM), violence expresses who they are: the *mujahedeen*, slaves to God, seekers of martyrdom. For them, as for many others in history, "even suicide can be life affirming."[265] Cozzens suggests that all members of AQAM share similar

tendencies, including a view of themselves as *mujahedeen* who thirst for martyrdom. A retrospective justification of al-Qaeda's violent jihadism is found in the early days of Islam. The depictions of the battles between Medina and Mecca have led to an immense literature of interpretations of that important time. After being attacked by a strong army of Meccans in Medina, Muhammad retaliated, was victorious and won Mecca in the process. Jerry Long, director of the Middle East Center at the University of Texas, traces the roots of the moral justification to go to war in Islam to the many battles waged during the Abbasid Caliphate.[266] The Abbasid Caliphate era, known as a Golden Age of Islam lasting from 750 CE to 1257 CE, was the third Islamic Caliphate and was remarkable for the significant cultural, scientific, and territorial expansion it achieved—as well as its victorious battles against rival Arab tribes, the Byzantines, and the Persians.[267] The results of the Abbasid battles have been interpreted by bin Laden and others as the hand of God helping Muslims to spread the just cause. The Caliphate was first weakened by the Crusaders in the 11th century and then collapsed when conquered by the Mongols in 1256. The 13th century philosopher Ibn Taymiyyah, who witnessed the end of the Abbasid Caliphate, first introduced the idea returning to a time of theocratic Muslim rule based on the teachings of the Koran. Taymiyyah's nostalgia for the Golden Age of Islam has become part of the Sunni—and AQ—ethos.[268] So much so that in the information found in the bin Laden compound after his death was his idea of changing the name of al-Qaeda to "The Restoration of the Caliphate Group."[269]

The concept of a defensive war for the sake of advancing the cause of Islam is central to the belief of AQ foot soldiers as they strive, through their martyrdom, to recreate the Caliphate. The notion that warfare is necessary to return to the glory days of Islam identifies martyrdom as a component of AQ's strategic culture, in which the suffering of the present is irrelevant from the perspective of the collective glory awaiting pious Muslims.[270]

However, within the ranks of AQ leadership, many have chosen to adopt a more functionalist, instrumentalist, strategic approach to the international struggle to establish the Caliphate. They are known as strategist jihadists.[271] Like their foot soldiers, AQAM's strategists believe they are individually obligated to undertake jihad and they long to attain martyrdom to reap all the heavenly rewards. However, "while they are on earth, they strive to attain victory, which entails uniting the *Ummah* and restoring the Caliphate."[272] These are the leaders and thinkers that produce what Bryngar Lia and

Thomas Hegghammer call "Jihadi Strategic Studies,"[273] the reflections and writings about AQ's mission. They do little actual field fighting and value and justify their lives as important elements for organization and propagation of the jihad. Those producers of "Jihadi Strategic Studies" contend that AQ is an intellectual organization that relies on careful research and reflective discussion before engaging in violence and warfare. An impressive body of literature written or promoted by the AQ leadership further reinforces the organization's common strategic culture promoting martyrdom, transnational attacks, worldwide proselytism, and rejection of the Western way of life while placing a greater emphasis on the importance of their own fight to reinstitute a Sunni-Muslim Caliphate.[274]

Interestingly, AQ's strategic leadership spends much time studying the West to prepare against counterterrorism tactics. For example, in response to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, AQ strategic thinker Abu Musad al Suri argued that the organization would be more resilient if it decentralized both its structure and its attacks.[275] AQ strategists understand they are engaged in both an intelligence and an information war.[276] Therefore, not only have they studied Western history, institutions, management principles, and military doctrine, but also current political trends and counterterrorism tactics. In true Sun Tzu fashion, understanding the enemy is very important to AQ strategic culture.[277]

Religious Ideology as Backbone of AQ's Strategic Culture

AQ strategists and theorists have intensely debated Islam's dictates on violence, death, and suicide and how to justify the organization's tactics. Islam's teachings about violence are ambiguous at best. In the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks, both bin Laden's and President Bush's rhetoric depicted Islam as a violent religion. However, moderate Muslims have opined that Islam is a peaceful religion and that the Koran condemns violence.[278] Moderates most often will point to the command in the Koran that implores, "slay not the life that God has made sacred."[279] However, the Koran also contains commandments that open the door to more violent

Hence, AQ's interpretations of the Koran serve as justification for the organization's goals and objectives and the violent tactics used to achieve them.

interpretations of the religion, such as "whoever killed a human being *except as punishment for murder or other villainy* in the land, shall be deemed as having killed all mankind."[280] Hence, AQ's interpretations of the Koran serve as justification for the organization's goals and objectives and the violent tactics used to achieve them. In his study of AQ, journalist Abdel Bari Atwan notes, "without Islam there would be no al-Qaeda."[281] In the same vein, the Egyptian revolutionary and theorist Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj wrote a pamphlet called "The Neglected Duty" explaining that the defense of Islam should include struggles against political and social injustice. Faraj is one of the first to validate the use of violent jihad against nonbelievers.[282] Although the focus of his particular grievance was local secular states (the near enemy), his justification of the importance of jihad was a stepping-stone for AQ's violent ideology. Thus, violence has become an important tenet of AQ strategic culture. Considering the asymmetric military balance between AQ and its adversaries, al Zawahiri, the organization's post-bin Laden leader, has commented there is now "no solution without jihad."[283]

Suicide Bombing: Rationalized "Personal" Violence

Suicide attacks are a predominant AQ tactic despite the fact that Islam condemns suicide.[284] Also, Gallup Poll analyses suggest that the more religious the country, the lower the suicide rates—and Muslim countries top the lists as being most religious. [285] Yet, suicide operations are an AQ trademark. The reason for this contradiction is what AQ perceives to be a theological differentiation between martyrdom and suicide. Martyrdom is the supreme selfless act that guarantees posthumous respect and an entry into paradise. Unlike egoistic suicide, martyrdom is an altruistic and religious act. Martyrdom is obtained through suicide with a political end. The justification for the distinction between suicide and martyrdom is expressed by Islamist thinker Abdullah Azzam,[286] who greatly influenced bin Laden. More recently, a young Palestinian woman who committed a suicide attack wrote: "The human bomb provides an example of that selflessness […] that no life can be considered more valuable than the future of our people. This is emphatically not the act of someone committing suicide. Suicide is a selfish act."[287] Hence, a suicide attack loses negative connotations for AQ followers, instead becoming the greatest act of martyrdom and selfless service. AQ

followers aspire to die in combat at the hands of the enemy or through a suicide mission. In al Zawahiri's eyes, trying to preserve one's life at the risk of not accomplishing the mission is considered shameful and selfish. Thus, suicide bombing, a martyr's way of ensuring mission accomplishment, is an important AQ strategic culture tactic. This concept is clearly very antithetical to U.S. strategic culture, in which every casualty potentially decreases public support for continued combat. AQ supporters view death as a necessary part of its mission success.

The Roots of bin Laden's Ideology

Bin Laden was greatly influenced by Sunni Scholars Abdullah Azzam and Sayyid Qutb, who were part of a strong movement calling for a defensive jihad. Qutb argued that religious war was the only form of killing that was morally sanctioned.[288] Bin Laden's followers in turn share a view of history that requires a forceful resurrection of Islam's power and prestige. Their long and short-term historical perspectives reflect victimization and humiliation and justify a defensive, asymmetrical strategy in pursuit of their ideal world. This historical perspective recalls the persecution of Muhammad by the Meccans, the decline and loss of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1257, and the loss of the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th century.

To AQ supporters and operatives, 20th century history is characterized by three major events: the Great Betrayal (the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 that divided the Middle East and North Africa among British, French, and to a lesser extent Russian spheres of influence), the Disaster (Israeli statehood), and the other Disaster (the war of 1967 between Israel and the neighboring Arab States).[289] More recently, the radicalization of Saudi Arabia led by the *Wahhabi* sect and the Afghan-Soviet war were formative experiences for bin Laden, convincing him to wage his own war partially inspired by the Afghan *Mujahedeen* and the Saudi *Wahhabis*.[290] More importantly, the first Gulf War, with subsequent U.S. intervention and perceived occupation of the Arabian Peninsula, were described by bin Laden's biographers as the catalyst that cemented his passion for waging religious war. Bin Laden told reporter Abdel Atwan that he was shocked that "the house of Saud could welcome the deployment of 'infidel' forces within close proximity of holy places of Islam."[291] To bin Laden, Saudi Arabia was the home and ideological

foundation for the largest *Salafi* population.[292] *Salafi* Muslims are militant radical Sunni Muslims whose strict interpretation of Islam shaped bin Laden's ideology. While pockets of *Salafi* Muslims exist within the Middle East and North Africa, the center of this creed is in the Arabian Peninsula. For all its strict *Salafist* Muslim rhetoric, bin Laden was surprised—actually horrified—that Saudi Arabia welcomed U.S. troops, triggering betrayal and humiliation, and causing him to further develop his concept of the near enemy. The near enemy is any secular regime not following the strict rules of radical Islam (as defined by bin Laden and his followers) and hence is apostate and deserving of death—and Saudi Arabia and its leadership were quickly identified as a prime example.[293] As a result, antipathy toward secular traitor regimes and the West are important factors defining AQ strategic culture. Bin Laden, al Zawahiri, and their followers viewed the U.S. presence as an extension of past colonial transgressions and humiliation. Remedying these transgressions, and targeting both the near and far transgressors, requires violence in the form of terrorism—another important component of AQ strategic culture.

A Transnational Organization is Not Without Geographical Ties

Classical strategic culture theory likes to relate strategic behavior to territorial constraints or advantages, which one would assume a non-state entity lacks. However, even though AQ lacks territory, its strategic culture and behavior are also influenced by geography. Many of AQ's members come from Saudi Arabia and support bin Laden's condemnation of the Saudi regime[294] because of its support for the U.S. and the West. While virtually all U.S. military personnel withdrew from Saudi Arabia in 2003,[295] AQ and its followers remained indignant because of the regional presence of the U.S. 5th Fleet in the Persian Gulf[296] and other U.S. military bases on the Arabian Peninsula, including in Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Qatar.[297] U.S. military presence in the region makes it easy to justify AQ's declaration of defensive war to liberate Muslims from the West. Therefore, geography is important, not because AQ possesses sovereign territory, but because the organization rejects the 20th century borders of the modern

Middle Eastern and North African states that were imposed by colonial powers.

AQ is a transnational, non-state entity. The organization has sovereignty over no territory and its members come from many countries. However, AQ's strategic culture is affected by several geographical variables. AQ's claims to Sunni Islam's three holiest sites in the Middle East (Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem) attach special importance to that region of the world. Hence, in addition to declaring war on the U.S., bin Laden declared a "Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of Two Holy Places" in 1996[298] and condemned the apostate Saudi Arabian regime for collaborating with the "Zionist-Crusaders alliance."[299] In several subsequent declarations, bin Laden increased his rhetoric about liberating Jerusalem from the Zionists, a rallying cry that stirs the emotional passion of most Muslims in the Middle East.[300] The plight of the Palestinians at the hands of Israelis supported by the Americans also stirs passions in Muslims partly because of Palestinians' proximity to the third holiest site in Islam and partly because of the pan-Arab mentality that still permeates the region.[301] Regardless of the poor treatment heaped on Palestinians by fellow Arabs in Middle-East countries, Palestinians are portrayed as Muslim kin suffering at the hands of infidels who occupy the third most important Muslim holy place.

Geography is an easily explained strategic culture variable for states, but it is clearly also important to AQ, a non-sovereign entity with no proprietary territory, in a strategic culture context. From the organization's perspective, the humiliation of imposed borders on Muslim lands, the occupation of holy sites by infidels, Saudi Arabia's acquiescence to that occupation, and its belief in the Israeli occupation of Palestine are all geography-related phenomena affecting its strategic sensitivities and culture.

Foreign Fighters

Foreign fighters are important to AQ strategic culture and are defined either as foreign nationals or expats going abroad to fight the cause of the global jihad or local nationals who have acquired their fighting skills and experience in foreign conflicts.[302] The idea of foreign fighters has expanded from regional to international proportions. Foreign fighters are not reluctant to travel thousands of miles to fight and consider traveling to be a pilgrimage

to wage a holy war.[303] The concept of *hijra*, or holy pilgrimage, is a central concept of Islam that usually refers to reenacting Muhammad's trip from Mecca to Medina. AQ recruits believe the pilgrimage extends beyond the traditional journey to the holy cities but includes any travel in the quest of fulfilling a higher calling by engaging in holy war.[304]

An important lower-level AQ operative subgroup, the so-called Arab Afghans, were bin Laden supporters during the Soviet-Afghan war.[305] They flocked to Afghanistan from several different Arab countries to fight the Soviets; after they successfully defeated the Soviets, many were unable to return to their home countries, becoming prime examples of foreign fighters because of their dedication to the global jihad.[306] Remaining in Afghanistan, they "established bonds of solidarity that outlived the conflict and they became an international brigade for carrying out the global jihad."[307] These so-called Arab Afghans were marginalized by the pre-9/11 Taliban society in Afghanistan and remain stuck in a sectarian religious logic that made them politically and socially sidelined.[308] The combination of marginalization, disappointment, Muslim passion, and advanced military training made these foreign fighters ideal jihadists to support AQ.

The concept of foreign fighters became ingrained in AQ strategic culture. One of the newer members of AQAM, Somalia-based al-Shabaab, relies greatly on foreign fighters to fill its ranks, not only at the foot-soldier level but also in its leadership. Many of al-Shabaab's foreign fighters were trained abroad before joining the jihad in Somalia.[309] The most hard-line followers of the al-Shabaab movement depend on Saudi sympathizers backing their efforts and seem to see Somalia as a stepping-stone for their participation in the greater global jihad.[310]

Therefore, AQ's penchant for international travel and mobility is an important element of its strategic culture. For leadership, foreign fighters allow flexibility in filling the ranks of regional affiliates and provide important enhancements to AQ's physical presence globally. In return, AQ fighters believe that it is their pious duty to make the journey far from home to fight the infidels and that God will reward them for it.[311]

A New Organization Based on an Old Strategic Culture

AQ's strategic culture is based on several centuries of history, a particular interpretation of religion by a now deceased charismatic leader, and a response to emotional political and geographical grievances of today's Middle East. Bin Laden's message still resonates because he based his organization's ideology on an existing tradition and a trifecta of enemies: the Jews, the West, and the apostate regimes. Bin Laden's charisma, financial resources, political and economic ties in the region, and combat experience in Afghanistan combined to make him the ideal father figure for the creation and sustainment of AQ. Much like the Abbasid Caliphate victories of previous centuries, the 9/11 attacks represented a symbolic success that drew in radical Islamists from all over the Arab world. Presently, and probably because of bin Laden's death, U.S. officials view not AQ Central, but AQAM's franchises and affiliates, as the most prominent clear and present danger. The most prominent and threatening entities within AQAM include al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula,[312] al-Qaeda in Iraq,[313] al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and al-Shabaab (perhaps soon to be renamed al-Qaeda in Somalia). Most of AQ Central's core strategic culture elements are interchangeable with those of the geographic franchises. However, one important difference must be noted: AQ franchises tend to have national or irredentist claims and therefore focus more of their efforts on near enemy (secular states) than the far enemy (the U.S. and the West). Indeed, some of the documents found at bin Laden's compound revealed his real concern for the growing divergences of tactics and ideology between AQ Central and the franchises.[314] However, the main ideas of purging the Middle East of infidels, rebuilding a caliphate or powerful Islamic state through a violent battle, striving for martyrdom, and traveling lengths of the world as a pilgrimage for war remain central to AQ's strategic culture.

7. Common Characteristics of Chinese, Iranian, North Korean, and al-Qaeda's Strategic Cultures

Dreams of Past Glory

China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda all recount histories that run the gamut from periods of glory to ignominy. China and Iran boast of strong empires and rich cultures. Al-Qaeda recalls the glory of the Abbasid Caliphate. North Korea evokes the triumphs of the Chosun dynasty that ruled the Korean peninsula from the 14th to the beginning of the 20th centuries.[315] In all cases, the memories of glorious histories inform ambitious present and future states. For each, hubris derives from a notion of past glory that must be restored—by extreme measures if necessary.

For Iranians, the Persian Empire was a glorious time that separates them from people of other nations. The combination of pride in Iranian culture and a historic sense of victimization have created a fierce sense of independence and a culture of resistance to domination by foreign powers. As explained in more detail in the chapter about Iran, the nation's sense of superiority is based on a perception of a glorious past anchored in the continuity of Iran's cultural identity, the notion that Persia has been a state-like entity for more than 2,500 years, and that the country is the stronghold of Shi'a Islam. According to one analyst, "Most Iranians, be they Islamist or secular, believe that Iran is a great civilization that deserves to be treated as a regional hegemon, if not a great power. For example, Arabs, Afghans, and the Turkic peoples of Central Asia complain that Iranians treat them with disdain and as cultural inferiors. Iran's sense of superiority is a constant irritant between Iran and its neighbors."[316]

Similarly, China also believes that it was the world's first nation-state and empire and points to millennia of history to justify its legacy.[317] Today, China points to its economic success as evidence of its superior culture. Given the current demoralized, divided, and introspective climate of Western nations, some Asian countries, including China's traditional enemies, are turning to the lessons of Beijing's state-directed capitalism instead of

liberal democracy.[318] Hence, China believes that its glorious past can and must be resurrected in its future.

China and Iran share common ambitions: becoming traditional super-powers[319] and regaining their past glories. However, al-Qaeda and North Korea have more ambiguous ambitions based on their interpretations of their own histories.

North Korea sees itself as the surviving half of the Chosun Dynasty kingdom. Its grandiose dreams may be less apparent than those of China and Iran, but North Korea's leadership believes that both its survival and the survival of the North Korean state depend on its being feared—if not respected—by the international community.[320] Indoctrinated by the Kim family's interpretation of Korean history and related propaganda, North Korean citizens have bought in to the imperative of regaining past glory. For example, gifts brought by foreign dignitaries are publically displayed as tribute to the North Korean regime in a propaganda ploy indicating the superiority of the North Korea and a desire for the return to a time when the Korean kingdom was thriving.[321] Al-Qaeda bases its dreams of past glory on the Abbasid Caliphate, which was a time of conquest, great learning, and power. Al-Qaeda leadership often refers to restoring the Caliphate to appeal to Arab Muslims yearning for a return to past glories.

All across the Middle East and North Africa, Sunnis idealize the Abbasid Caliphate, commonly known as the Golden Age of Islam. In view of today's Middle East woes, this deep nostalgia evokes, in its more extreme cases, a passionate desire to do whatever it takes to restore the Golden Age. It is upon this premise that al-Qaeda partially bases its recruitment strategy.[322]

Iran, China, North Korea, and al-Qaeda have clear ideas of what success looks like, and it is based on collective memories of an idealized past. This greatly affects each entity's strategic culture, particularly the notion that a strong military is required to return to past grandeur. Each therefore requires its military capabilities to match its past, rather than being proportionate to what the rest of the world might see as their present security requirements.[323]

Hence, any condescension from the United States or other countries during diplomatic relations strikes a chord at deep seated sentiments of self-worth. What we see today when we superficially look at a country or entity's military, ideological, and commercial influence does not match up to the ideas that the leadership and citizenry have of themselves.

Humiliation

The strategic cultures of the three states and one non-state actor explored in this piece are deeply rooted in their specific historical narratives, but they nonetheless share many similarities, particularly with regard to humiliation.[324] Each entity recalls humiliations suffered at the hands of foreigners, who exploited internal instability to end former empires and times of greatness.

For example, explains Tony Corn in the *Small Wars Journal*, the Opium Wars were a critical experience in the Chinese collective memory, which the Chinese see as the beginning of what they view as a "century of humiliation."[325] "In truth, what must have been particularly humiliating was that China was in essence 'out-Suntzued' by foreign devils that opted for the ultimate indirect approach: the weaponization of opium," says Corn.[326] This irregular warfare technique resulted in the contamination of four million members of the Chinese elite and weakened the country to such a degree that it allowed a subsequent military takeover.[327] Since then, China has reverted to being very wary of all foreign intervention and remains guarded against repeat humiliations. In Chinese terms, previous humiliation justifies a defensive strategic culture and significant investments in deterrent force.[328]

The strategic cultures of the three states and one non-state actor explored in this piece are deeply rooted in their specific historical narratives, but they nonetheless share many similarities, particularly with regard to humiliation.

Iranians also feel they have been oppressed and humiliated by foreign powers throughout their history. They recall that Greeks, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, and most recently Saddam Hussein's forces have all invaded their homeland. According to one analyst, "Iranians also remember that the British and Russian empires exploited them economically, subjugated them politically, and invaded and occupied their country in two World Wars."[329] From the Iranian perspective, the West looked on—in fact, effectively aided– Saddam Hussein as Iraq waged a long and costly war aimed at repressing the Shi'a. This warfare included the use of WMD against Iran in the form of chemical weapons.[330] Ayatollah Khomeini made independence from foreign intervention and influence a significant part of political rhetoric that

increased his popular support. Indeed, this played into Iranians need to feel empowered to control their own destiny.[331] Presently, Iran's ability to defend itself from foreign invasion and untoward influence and its ability to be at least as strong as the other major powers in the region are absolute strategic imperatives and core features of its strategic culture. The leadership sees Iran as both oppressed (religiously and physically) and challenged by the increasing U.S. presence in the Middle East during the second half of the 20th century.[332]

With regard to North Korea, the Japanese invasion of 1910 resulted in the defeat and end of the Chosun Dynasty. This humiliation at the hands of the Japanese remains a lasting memory that fuels the bellicose rhetoric of the North Korean leadership. Having to resist Chinese, Japanese, and Russian advances throughout its history has made North Korea greatly xenophobic and weary of foreign invasions.[333] Therefore, the constant threat of attack permeates North Korea's collective consciousness and is easily manipulated by the country's leadership to advance its Military First policy. Centuries of foreign invasions and humiliation are used by Pyongyang as propaganda fodder to incite retribution rhetoric and to justify bombastic behavior.[334]

Al-Qaeda sees itself as the ultimate avenger of foreign humiliation such as the defeat of Abbasid Caliphate, European colonization, and, as explained in more detail in the al-Qaeda chapter, the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 and Israeli statehood.[335] To al-Qaeda, the most recent humiliation is the American military presence in Saudi Arabia. The writings of al-Suri, touted as al-Qaeda's foremost strategic thinker, emphasize how Islam has weathered centuries of assaults from the West,[336] and the Saudi invitation to the Americans to establish military bases in the country is one of the most egregious of these humiliations. Inviting an infidel army into the Middle East was considered a sacrilegious act in bin Laden's eyes, considering that the Prophet Mohammed reportedly said, "two religions shall not co-exist in the Arabian Peninsula."[337] Furthermore, as explained in the al-Qaeda chapter, bin Laden's rejected offer to help the Saudis during the first Gulf War was considered another humiliation.[338]

The two quests—to reclaim past glory and to protect against future humiliation—are prevalent in the strategic writings of China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda. These changes profoundly influence how they perceive the world and react to the foreign policies of Western states, particularly that of the United States, a country that is perceived by all four as their primary

adversary. National security scholar Samantha Ravich's description of Iran and China is applicable to all four of the entities covered in this monograph:

> each [entity] remembers a time when its empire was vast and its culture widespread. The two quests spawned from these narratives—to reclaim past glory and to guard against future humiliation—are ubiquitous in these countries' strategic writings, and they influence how their current leaderships act in the world and in relation to the United States.[339]

The collective consciousness of past humiliation is important to remember when engaging in diplomatic talks with China, Iran, and North Korea and when making public statements about al-Qaeda. The rhetoric of any U.S. or Western administration should be mindful not to exacerbate that sense of humiliation. Furthermore, due to the ubiquity of worldwide media, including satellite television and the Internet, it is important for officials to remember that statements intended purely for domestic audiences will likely have international impact. Overly belligerent, threatening, or condescending rhetoric will simply feed into popular paranoia and the perception of U.S. intent to be dominant. Word choice is important, too. Using the term crusade to describe America's quest to defeat al-Qaeda may have played well in Peoria, but was perceived very differently by the Muslim world.

Self-Reliance and Distrust of Foreign Powers

Common to all three states and to al-Qaeda is a strategic culture that stresses self-reliance and mistrust of strategic alliances. In the U.S., the choice to enter conflicts has more often been an active decision made by leadership rather than a defensive obligation sparked by direct encroachments on U.S. territory. Hence, U.S. strategic culture is based on the premise that the isolationist debate is about whether to actively take part in foreign conflicts or stay home.[340] This is a unique perspective that does not translate to other countries, where defending against foreign encroachment is usually the clear and present danger. For China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda, the cultural pride that comes from a notion of past grandeur, the fear of invasion, and subsequent humiliation has led to a belief that economic, cultural, and political autarchy and minimum foreign alliances are important in defending independence mechanisms.

In Iran, the present leadership stresses the unreliability of past foreign alliances in order to promote its economic and regional security agenda. The Russian delays in building the Buesher reactor have reconfirmed Iranian fears that the country cannot depend on others for support. Thus, Iran's development of a civil nuclear capability and desire to have uranium enrichment proficiency might be understood as a way to reduce or eliminate dependence on imports and to keep foreign powers on their toes. Seeking civil nuclear capabilities also plays well domestically; it shows an emphasis on self-reliance both in energy creation and in the potential power nuclear arms might afford.[341] Iran's self assessed cultural, ethnic, and religious superiority also reinforces self-reliance policies. Despite entertaining strategic, political, and economic cooperation with other countries, Iran ultimately views itself to be alone and never fully trusts alliances.[342]

Because of its Hermit Kingdom legacy, North Korea is the most conscious proponent of self-reliance of all the states and non-state actors covered in this monograph. It is also the most isolationist. Where China and Iran have regional, if not global, ambitions that force alliances of convenience and a certain degree of economic openness, North Korea strives to be as isolated, secretive, and as self-reliant as possible. As explained in the chapter about North Korea, the *Juche* doctrine, one of the oldest core precepts of the Kim regime, literally means self-reliance, which conveniently reinforces the Korean belief that from abroad can only come intervention and humiliation.[343] Scholar Andrew Scobell defines *Juche* as "the opposite of tributary status,"[344] in that outside powers pay tribute to North Korea because of its greatness. This plays well to the public, particularly during times of famine, when North Korea depends on outside assistance to feed its people. *Juche* also helps to justify why Pyongyang strictly controls aid distribution.[345] North Korea's people and its leadership do not believe that they live in a friendly region or a friendly world; hence, North Korean strategic culture emphasizes self-reliance, military deterrence, and isolation as a defense against outside encroachment and interference.

Al-Qaeda does not retain sovereignty within physical borders, but it does object to foreign encroachment on Middle East and North African territories, particularly in the area of the former Abbasid Caliphate, which stretched from Morocco in the West to the edges of Afghanistan in the East.[346] According to al-Qaeda doctrine, these borders should encompass the new caliphate and center of the Muslim world. This same area, in its

opinion, should thus be rid of infidels. Opposition to foreign invaders and the idea of self-reliance is central to al-Qaeda's ideology. Al-Qaeda distinguishes itself from other Middle Eastern radical Islamic terrorist groups by focusing on the far enemy—the so-called imperialist powers meddling with local affairs—rather than just the near enemy, the corrupt or secular local regimes.[347] Although al-Qaeda has contempt for both near and far enemies, the main focus of its hatred is foreign incursion into local politics and Muslim life. Therefore, al-Qaeda's strategic culture is similar to that of China, Iran, and North Korea in that they all advocate self-reliance, reject foreign incursions and influence, and engage in international alliances only as marriages of convenience that serve their own self-interest, rather than long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships.

Authoritarian Popular Control

The strategic cultures of China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda take for granted the pervasive autocratic control leaders have over their citizens and followers. The top-down structures of each state's government enable leaders to quickly make calculated strategic decisions unhindered by potential popular dissent. Time wise, this is a comparative strategic advantage in that decisions—particularly in committing military power and using force—can be nearly instantaneous, unlike in the U.S., where most strategic decisions must be viewed in the light of their acceptance by citizens.

Because of the increased liberalization of the Chinese economy, it is convenient to forget that China is still an autocracy. There is no room for dissent, and the few that have tried to criticize the regime have paid dearly for it.[348] The U.S. Department of State, upon releasing its 2011 report on human rights abuse, noted a worsening of the Chinese human rights record. The report also stresses the oppressive and controlling nature of Beijing's leadership and the degree to which real power resides with only 25 top Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members. China's president, Xi Jinping, "holds the three most powerful positions as CCP general secretary, president, and chairman of the Central Military Commission."[349] Repression and coercion are ubiquitous in China and ensure that the center of power–including all military strategies and operations—lies with Hu and the CCP Politburo Standing Committee.

Any strategic security decisions can therefore be made without regard to public opinion or dissent.

The Iranian regime has a rather complex political system with unique institutions (the president and the supreme religious leader, for example, are two different distinct authorities).[350] In Iran, professional advancement is tied to a person's relationship to the regime; only through unilateral support of the regime can people prosper and gain power. This creates an all-encompassing, self-sustaining system. Therefore, just as in China, Iran's government has strong repressive tools to ensure that voices of dissent are dealt with quickly and harshly and that the leadership can make quick, independent decisions about the use of the military and application of force.[351]

In North Korea, a key element of the Kim regime is its oppressive control of the North Korean people, which results in submission.[352] Historically, North Korea was a deeply hierarchical, authoritarian society. During the crushing Japanese occupation, authoritarian rule continued to the extent that any semblance of civil society disappeared.[353] Presently, the totalitarian rules of the North Korean regime, reinforced by an omnipresent military and propaganda, have effectively destroyed any potential for opposition to the Kim family regime.[354] Therefore, Kim Jung Un is free to make quick and radical strategic decisions without having to be concerned with popular dissent or even discontent.

Al-Qaeda's doctrine is built on the faith of radical fighters advancing the cause of restoring the golden age of Islam. Unlike a state, in which there is a potential for rebellion or the creation of an opposition, only those who agree with the cause advanced by bin Laden join al-Qaeda. During his life, bin Laden had the final say on all of al-Qaeda central's strategic decisions and, since his death, al Zawahiri has sought to take on this role.[355] In documents found in his Pakistan compound, bin Laden did express concerns for al-Qaeda franchise operations behaving in ways not approved by the leadership.[356] Yet, the actions of possible rogue franchises such as al-Qaeda in Iraq and disputes within al-Qaeda's central leadership can hardly be compared to opposition groups hindering strategic actions of a government. There may be some dissent within the ranks of al-Qaeda and with its franchise operations, but none that significantly affect al-Qaeda's core group's strategic decisions.[357]

High Regard for Martyrs

Iran and al-Qaeda have elevated the status of martyrs and made dying for the cause the mark of ultimate bravery. The ideologies of these three entities include justifications for the ultimate individual sacrifice for the cause, and each posthumously glorifies those who willingly fight to their deaths.[358] In the U.S., while there are numerous monuments for the fallen and the celebration of Memorial Day is respected and celebrated irrespective of political or religious creed, the country's reverence for life makes it difficult for Americans to comprehend intentional suicide for the good of a cause, state, or leader. Other cultures view life as a transitional state prior to attaining paradise. Supporters of al-Qaeda and Iran view giving their lives as their way into paradise. Americans view each and every war casualty with sadness; they see the number of friendly dead as symbols of defeat, not as enviable acts of heroism.

In Iran, however, Khomeini idealized martyrdom in his rhetoric and in his teachings, and the concept became a central tenet of his ideology. In Shi'a Islam, the martyrdom of Hussein Ibn Ali (who was the grandson of Muhammad and the second Shi'a Imam) and the celebration of *Ashura* are well-known and venerated examples of religious martyrdom.[359] Khomeini strove to make martyrdom a tactic of the revolution by using grandiose rhetoric about his willingness to fight to the death.[360] His characterization of Iran as a "nation of martyrs"[361] was as much a prescription as it was a description. This concept resonated with his followers; to be a true supporter of the IRI means to accept to sacrifice oneself for the cause or proudly see one's son die at war.[362]

Suicide operations are a well-known al-Qaeda tactic. Indeed, members of AQAM aspire to conduct suicide operations in order to achieve martyrdom. For them, giving their life for the fight against the infidels is a ticket into heaven.[363] Bin Laden and other al-Qaeda strategists contend that Islamist literature differentiates between forbidden suicide[364] and revered martyrdom.[365] The notion that warfare is necessary to return to the glory days of Islam condones martyrdom as a component of al-Qaeda's strategic culture. For followers, the suffering of the present is irrelevant in perspective of the collective glory awaiting pious Muslims.[366] Hence there should be no attachment to living as an end in itself, only a sustained effort at all costs to defend Islam and to restore the Caliphate.[367] Showing more attachment to one's

life than to the accomplishment of the battle is considered cowardly and shameful. All al-Qaeda operatives aspire to die for the glory of martyrdom.

Lack of Blue Water Naval History

Interestingly, while China, Iran, and North Korea all border major bodies of water, none have a history of being major ocean powers. With the exception of China, during a brief period of its long history, none have had blue water navies. Similarly, al-Qaeda has mostly restricted its operations to land and air. Despite being strong empires at one point, Persia and China had predominantly land-based militaries. North Korea's lack of naval power is interesting in light of the fact that Japan, its primary regional threat, advanced from the sea. At two points in Korean history, the country defeated Japanese armadas with turtle boats—small armored craft resembling the iron-clads of the civil war—using guerilla tactics[368] very much like those tactics used by the Iranians in the Gulf.[369] As for Iran, despite claims to large areas of the Persian Gulf, it has also eschewed building blue water capable ships, depending instead on seaborne guerilla warfare tactics in confronting tankers and laying mines to attempt to discourage commercial craft and American warships from plying the Gulf.[370]

Traditionally, China was a weak sea power, which is one reason the British so easily defeated the Qing Dynasty during the Opium Wars.[371] Until recently, Chinese military doctrine advocated land and asymmetrical warfare to deter foes. Historically, China has used its large land mass to draw adversaries into China until they outdistance their lines of communication and supply. Mao was the master of asymmetric guerilla warfare, and long after his death, doctrinal concepts such as "People's War" and "People's War under Modern Conditions" continued the asymmetric land warfare theme. However, in April 2010, Chinese Rear Admiral Zhang Huachen declared that the country's naval strategy had changed, announcing, "we are going from coastal defense to far sea defense ... With the expansion of the country's economic interests, the navy wants to better protect the country's transportation routes and the safety of our major sea-lanes."[372] This announcement may signal a fundamental change in China's strategic culture.

Notable Differences

While there are many strategic warfare similarities among the three states and one non-state actor addressed in this monograph, there are also many differences. The fact that three of the monograph's subjects are states and one is a non-state actor is an obvious difference. Also, unique ideologies and outlooks contribute to profound differences among the strategic cultures of all four.

Ideological Differences—One Religious, One Not

The strategic cultures of China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda are supported by different ideologies. Interestingly, two ideologies are based on religious doctrine and two are decidedly anti-religious and communist. Iran and al-Qaeda base their ideology on two different sects of Islam, while China and North Korea are based on two different variations of communism. Both Islam and communism seek converts or adherents but are quite different in approach.

Communism is an economic and sociological precept, while Islam is a religion, and there is no commonality between the two. In fact, communism by definition is an atheist doctrine—as Karl Marx famously declared, "religion is the opium of the people"[373]—and the state communist parties of China and North Korea have effectively purged religions of all types from their systems. According to communist doctrine, there is no higher authority than the state, which is an anathema to Muslims as well as to people of other faiths. In 1980, this author attended a secret Catholic mass in Shanghai in a packed warehouse. Since then, much has changed. Thanks to Deng Xiaoping's pragmatism, China began to tolerate religious freedom as long as it was not overdone. In fact, according to a state-run Chinese newspaper survey, 31.4 percent of Chinese adults are religious—a figure which is three times higher than government estimates.[374] However, while China's constitution specifically allows "freedom of religious belief," the CCP is officially atheist. Religious discrimination still exists, and experts contend that Tibetan Buddhists, unregistered Christians, and particularly Uighur Muslims are still persecuted and repressed.[375]

Contrary to those changes in Chinese communism, religious freedom is completely absent in North Korea. The Pyongyang regime severely represses

public and private religious activities and enforces a policy of actively discrimination against religious believers.[376] According to a report prepared by the U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom, the North Korean regime has "arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and sometimes executed North Korean citizens who were found to have ties with overseas Christian evangelical groups operating across the border in China, as well as those who engaged in unauthorized religious activities such as public religious expression and persuasion."[377] In addition, North Korean leadership actively persecutes Christianity because it has the biggest potential of creating a cohesive opposition. Historically, Korean Christians were the strongest opponents to the Japanese occupation[378] and today, South Korea-based Christian groups are among the most successful facilitators of defectors across the border.[379]

Chinese and North Korean communisms differ in implementation as well as in ideology. As explained in more details in the North Korean chapter, the North Korean communist party had aligned itself with the Russian ideology until the fall of the USSR, when it erased all references to Marxist-Leninism and stressed *Juche* instead.[380] Maoist communism created a peasant-based economy since the mid-20th century and quickly parted not only from Marxism but also from the Leninist adaptation of communism.[381] From a Muslim perspective, communism is an alien concept. Recall this monograph's reference to how communists were treated after Khomeini came to power in Iran and how bin Laden organized an international army against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Communism by definition has no afterlife, which is counter to all Islamic teachings. Additionally, communism is completely antireligious and hence a direct threat to Iran's theocracy and al-Qaeda's aspirations. The USSR's attempts to forcefully secularize the Islamic republic of Tajikistan were unsuccessful and exemplified the incompatibility of atheist communism and Islam.[382]

Importantly, from a Muslim perspective, the religious ideologies of Iran and al-Qaeda are not aligned. True, both are viewed by many as following extremist religious ideals. However, Iran is a Shi'a theocracy populated by Persians, while al-Qaeda is a predominantly Sunni organization whose membership is largely Arab.[383] As discussed in detail in the chapter about Iran and, to a lesser extent, in the one about al-Qaeda, there are clear and fundamental antipathies between Persians and Arabs[384] and between Sunnis and Shi'as.[385]

States versus Non-State Actors

Another notable difference is that China, Iran, and North Korea are all states recognized as such by the UN and the international community. Al-Qaeda is not a state, but is instead a transnational non-state actor. While al-Qaeda had some state-like features when it had sanctuary in Afghanistan, it is now very much a decentralized, networked, and cellular organization. Al-Qaeda has no diplomatic corps, no finance minister, and no territorial boundaries. This makes al-Qaeda's strategic culture more difficult to evaluate and counter in that there is no ministry to negotiate with when things get rough.[386]

New Axis of Evil or Alliances of Convenience?

This study by no means supports the idea that there is a multilateral "axis of evil" plus China alliance. Yet evidence suggests several incidences of bilateral and multilateral cooperation between and among China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda. The most flagrant from a U.S. perspective is Chinese-Iranian economic and strategic cooperation. Also, China and North Korea have cooperated on security and economic issues since the founding of North Korea. Iran and North Korea have cooperated, mostly for nefarious nuclear or conventional weapons procurement related reasons. To an extent, there have been significant suspicions that al-Qaeda had or sought weapon trading relationships with North Korea and China and that North Korea was willing to sell its weapons.[387] Additionally, there is an ambiguous relationship between al-Qaeda and Iran in that bin Laden's son and several close associates have been under house arrest in Tehran since shortly after 9/11.[388] Interestingly, the three states known for emphasizing self-reliance have "used" each other in marriages of diplomatic, economic, and security convenience.

China is Iran's second largest trading partner; about 20 percent of Iranian oil goes to China.[389] Iran's relationship with China is important as a counterweight to U.S. economic embargos and sanctions. Without Chinese support, the UN Security Council cannot take serious action against Iranian uranium enrichment, and so far China has used its Security Council vote to resist more drastic sanctions against Iran.[390] China's interests are mainly about energy security, as Iran is China's third largest source of oil; it is estimated that China imports 500,000 barrels per day from Iran.[391] Yet, China has been careful to balance U.S. and European pressures against Iran with

its own energy interests. So far, China has been able to maintain positive, if somewhat strained, relationships with both the U.S. and Iran by selectively supporting each side's positions based on Beijing's strategic interests.[392]

In the last 50 years, China has been North Korea's most consistent ally and trading partner, providing aid,[393] arms, commodities, and political support. The Chinese government dreads a North Korean regime collapse, which would certainly trigger a flood of refugees to cross its border.[394] China has been the North Korean regime's only supporter in international diplomacy, but this support dramatically decreased after the North Korean nuclear test of 2006. Following that nuclear test, China agreed to sign UN Resolution 1718, which imposed sanctions on Pyongyang.[395] However, despite signing the resolution, rumors persist that China has shipped arms to North Korea. For example, in 2009 China failed to stop an arms shipment from North Korea to Iran, thus facilitating the transaction,[396] and reports of direct trading between China and North Korea have surfaced as recently as June 2012.[397] What is certain is that China has long held convictions that the West is hostile to its political values and wants to contain its rise.[398] Therefore, many Chinese newspapers and websites advocate increased Chinese alignment with countries that are antagonistic to the U.S. and Europe, which include North Korea and Iran.[399]

In 2010, a UN report suggested that North Korea had supplied Iran with banned items that could be used in Tehran's nuclear weapons program.[400] Since then there have been increasing suspicions that Iran has indeed turned to North Korea to circumvent international sanctions and that the rogue, isolated and extremely impoverished North Korea would see no qualm at selling Iran forbidden nuclear materials.[401] There is also talk about China willingly turning a blind eye on the North Korean-Iranian trade and even being used as a port for the transfer of the arms from North Korea to Iran.[402]

Al-Qaeda has had few direct engagements with China, Iran, or North Korea. Since it is not a state, al-Qaeda does not have a functioning commerce or diplomatic corps whose actions with other states can easily be analyzed. However, there is a suspected commercial link between al-Qaeda and North Korea, with al-Qaeda possibly purchasing ground-to-air missiles from North Korea. The principal concern for U.S. policy is the willingness with which North Korea sells weapons and possibly nuclear weapons fabrication tools to other state and non-state actors.[403] The threat of a nuclear capable al-Qaeda was a central issue in a recent summit in Seoul, in which North Korea was

identified as a culprit for transferring dual use nuclear equipment.[404]   U.S. President Barack Obama had sought the support of former Chinese President Hu Jintao in increasing the pressure on and control of North Korean arms deals. Other than perhaps turning a blind eye to North Korea's suspected support to al-Qaeda, there is no evidence of an al-Qaeda-China relationship.

The relationship between al-Qaeda and Iran is complex. Both bin Laden and Khomeini preached that unified Muslims should fight against infidel non-Muslims.[405] Nevertheless, the deep divide between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims dominates the allegiances of the foot soldiers and followers of both sects; the al-Qaeda operatives and followers of bin Laden view Shi'as as heretics and Iran as apostate, while Iranian followers of Khomeini see Sunni power as a threat to Shi'a and Persian hegemony.[406] Overall, Iranian leadership has found an interesting way to subtly accommodate al-Qaeda. Seth G. Jones, an expert in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, has done extensive research on the al-Qaeda outpost in Iran and writes, "Iran is in many ways is a safer territory from which al-Qaeda can operate. The U.S. has targeted al-Qaeda in Pakistan, Iraq, [and] Yemen but has limited operational reach in Iran."[407] Discretely, Iran has held key al-Qaeda leaders under house arrest, including the strategist and thinker Yasin al-Suri and the Egyptian head of al-Qaeda's security committee Saif al Adel. By holding them captive but refusing to extradite them to the U.S., Iran has attempted to offer moderate support to al-Qaeda without giving the U.S. cause for war.[408] Furthermore there has been some evidence that, while under house arrest, the al-Qaeda leaders have still been able to communicate with their organization and possibly even travel and fundraise.[409]

Asymmetric Warfare

All three states and al-Qaeda have a propensity for asymmetric warfare, which compensates for their relative military weakness against the U.S. and the West. With regards to international relations and foreign policy, asymmetric warfare capabilities create an illusion of power that

All three states and al-Qaeda have a propensity for asymmetric warfare, which compensates for their relative military weakness against the U.S. and the West.

deters outside foreign involvement and furthers independent clandestine and covert actions.

As a terrorist organization, al-Qaeda by definition wages asymmetric warfare. Using terrorist tactics to achieve strategic objectives epitomizes asymmetric warfare doctrine. Terrorism creates enormous international impact at a relatively low expense—more bang for the buck in military lexicon. Al-Qaeda sees itself in a two-front war against near and the far enemies,[410] and asymmetric attacks work well against both secular state (near) targets and U.S. and other Western (far) targets, where their impact is felt well beyond al-Qaeda's traditional areas of operation.

Most do not consider the threat of nuclear weapons in asymmetric terms. However, China's application of its small nuclear capability can be likened to an asymmetric force. The People's Republic of China's first nuclear test in 1964 was a signal to the international community that Beijing had the ambition to be a force to be reckoned with. This test created intense anxiety in the Western community and precipitated the creation of the international Non-Proliferation Treaty.[411] Since then, China has at times presented a proliferation concern due to its suspected transfer of nuclear arms to Pakistan and its suspected involvement in the nuclear arms trade between Iran and North Korea.[412] According to IAEA reports, China has the least advanced nuclear arsenal of the five declared nuclear weapon states, which also include the U.S., Russia, France, and the United Kingdom.[413] Therefore, in an asymmetric way, China maintains a minimum nuclear deterrent to keep potential adversaries at bay.

Possibly learning from the Chinese example, Iran understands that possessing nuclear weapons, even if just a few, would complement its asymmetric capabilities against the U.S. and the West.[414] Iran's quest for nuclear power and its strategic culture have caused Iranian leadership to overwhelmingly rely on its asymmetric warfare capabilities to make up for a weaker conventional military force. The regime thus depends on terrorism and the development of weapons of mass destruction to counter U.S. military superiority. Center for Security and International Studies CSIS scholars Alexander Wilner and Anthony Cordesman wrote, "Iran's asymmetric capabilities interact with its nuclear weapons development efforts to compensate for the limitations to its conventional forces. Going nuclear provides a level of intimidation that Iran can use as both a form of terrorism and to deter conventional responses to its use of asymmetric warfare."[415] This could be a

serious motivation for Iran to acquire such weapons. Similarly, North Korea is well known today for its possession of nuclear weapons. This not only gives Pyongyang leadership asymmetric capabilities against the West, but also affords a huge conventional advantage against its main regional adversaries, South Korea and Japan. The celebration of guerilla warfare tactics used against the Japanese has led to the regime's elevation of Kim Il Sung's role as a leader of that movement,[416] an important component of party's narrative. North Korea also has one of the world's largest special forces organizations, with more than 600,000 soldiers intent on infiltrating the South in the early stages of any conflict. That North Korea will continue to invest in asymmetric warfare capability is a given; how much they invest in nuclear, special operations, and propaganda efforts might signal their intentions as well as their capabilities.[417]

China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda share common strategic culture elements that should be taken seriously; they present immediate threats to the U.S., and it is important to recognize common behaviors that might affect national security interests. In sum, China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda are unconstrained by public opinion or alternative power centers, which enable them to be faster and more aggressive in their strategic decisions. All place little value on individual freedoms including life, with some even advocating suicide as a weapon. All use asymmetric warfare tactics to achieve their strategic results, with all four including nuclear weapons in their calculus. There are also differences. Structurally, China, Iran, and North Korea are states; al-Qaeda is not. Ideologically, China and North Korea are communist states and Iran and al-Qaeda are Muslim. However, the communist ideologies of China and North Korea are quite different, as are the Islamic ideologies of Iran and al-Qaeda.

8. Conclusions

While this work's approach to strategic culture does not produce a predictive model of behavior, it does clearly suggest which outcomes are more likely than others—and why. It provides historical context and a framework upon which to hang logical and evidentiary support, both of which can be tested and subject to revision. Moreover, the findings from this type of approach can be challenged in the way that stereotypes—even culturally informed ones—cannot.

This study is meant to enlighten and inform U.S. strategists and policy-makers who follow Chinese, Iranian, North Korean, and al-Qaeda security policies and actions. Each of the four entities observed in this monograph has a unique history and strategic culture. However, all four also share common denominators, not least of which is their antipathy toward the U.S., as well as the reciprocal perception by the U.S. that each, in its own way, is evil. In a February 2012 Gallup Poll, Americans most frequently named Iran as the country posing the greatest threat to the U.S.; China was second, and North Korea third.[418] Al-Qaeda wasn't mentioned because the poll focused solely on states, which al-Qaeda is not. However, the Obama administration's National Security Strategy is clear in identifying al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups as the clear and present danger to the United States.[419]

No "Hotline," but Still a Need for International Diplomatic Efforts

The threats emanating from Iran, North Korea, al-Qaeda, and possibly China are nontraditional because of their asymmetric component, but also because of the great power given to rumor, perception, and rhetoric. This is indeed a reason to reinforce multilateral diplomatic pressure on all states—and particularly on those overtly supporting al-Qaeda—to reduce the potential of disastrous conflicts. As observed, none of the four entities studied have the pressures of real civil societies or of a powerful electorate to curb extreme military decisions. Yet all three states and even al-Qaeda operate or trade across national lines. This is where the strength of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the United Nations Security Council must be reemphasized. As the nuclear threat remains a powerful asymmetric warfare risk,

the international community should prioritize strengthening the NPT to control the commerce of know-how, tools, and materials necessary to create nuclear weapons.[420] Additionally, when dealing with countries that have a history of humiliation at the hands of imperial powers, multilateralism can alleviate cultural sentiments of victimization.

U.S. strategic culture recognizes that there are many influence groups and power centers that affect strategic decisions, particularly decisions on the use of military force. However, autocratic regimes—whether they are states or transnational non-state actors—have an advantage when it comes to quick decision-making. Within China, Iran, North Korea, and even al-Qaeda, leaders can make strategic decisions without having to worry about popular discontent, criticism from opposition parties, or other domestic power centers.

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Hence, North Korea's sinking of a South Korean warship on 26 March 2010[421] and shelling of a South Korean Island in November 2010 met with no internal domestic resistance.[422] Similarly, al-Qaeda did not hesitate to attack New York's Twin Towers twice despite the fact that many Muslims were killed in the second strike. Different Beijing administrations were unhampered by public opinion when launching surprise attacks against Korea in 1950, India in 1962, and Vietnam in 1979. Iran's support for Hezbollah, arguably a more dangerous terrorist organization than al-Qaeda or Hamas, does not prompt so much as an unfavorable comment from Iran's press or citizenry.

The intense aspiration for martyrdom in Iran's and al-Qaeda's cultures and the lack of the importance of human life in North Korean culture are important from a mirror-imaging perspective. In the U.S., war casualties are almost inversely proportional to popular support for the war, and this strongly shapes this country's strategic decisions.[423] On the contrary, the casualty count is a sign of accomplished missions in North Korea, Iran, and al-Qaeda; this loss of life often increases popular passions for the conflict. As the U.S. shapes policy toward and monitors military conflict with these states, the number of victims should not automatically be equated to a low morale. In fact, high body counts can carry much greater significance, and even become an effective recruitment tool.

Ideology is one of the fundamental drivers of strategic culture in China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda. However, all four entities are quite different, and their ideologies highlight these core dissimilarities. For example, communist and Islamist ideologies are non-compatible, competitive, and have been a cause of conflict.[424] Second, Iran's and al-Qaeda's Islamist ideologies are based on two different versions of the Muslim faith and have been politically competitive since the rift between Sunni and Shi'a began.[425] Third, China's and North Korea's communist ideologies—once as "close as lips and teeth"—have evolved in starkly different directions over the past three decades.[426] The U.S. should be prepared to take advantage of these ideological cleavages by at least avoiding the prospect of preventing new coalitions of rogue states and actors hostile toward the U.S. and—even better—manipulating the ideological cleavages so the adversaries turn on each other. For example, U.S. pressure on China to condemn North Korean belligerent actions should remind Beijing of recent hostile action against Chinese businesses in North Korea.[427]

Mostly because of past colonial transgressions and U.S. anti-Communist policies, Iranian, Chinese, North Korean, and al-Qaeda's strategic cultures fear incursions by foreign powers and seek alliances, or marriages of convenience, for very specific interests. When cooperating with others, each assumes that the other party has only its own interest in mind and may turn on a promise of cooperation quickly. This leads to a propensity to distrust international alliances and see them as elusive, which creates an additional challenge when trying to leverage international organizations and treaties to contain belligerent ambitions and defenses. The states discussed in this monograph and al-Qaeda would be hard-pressed to believe that, for example, the NPT would offer a real protection against nuclear threats from other countries.

The Propensity for Asymmetrical Warfare Demands a Counter Asymmetrical Warfare Strategy

In this post-Cold War world, the greatest danger to U.S. security does not stem from conventional war, but from those using asymmetrical warfare strategies and tactics. The United States' conventional warfare dominance has led its weaker and more belligerent enemies to seek asymmetric means

to overcome its superiority. Asymmetrical warfare is a key component of the strategic cultures of China, Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaeda, which increases their propensity for use of terrorist and guerrilla tactics as well as seeking nuclear capacity as part of a threatening rhetoric of ambiguity and unpredictability.[428] All four should be expected to use asymmetric warfare against the United States. Therefore, U.S. policymakers must strengthen the country's primary counter-asymmetric warfare forces and organization, which include U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), under the domain of U.S. Special Operations Command.

Four Unique Security Challenges that should be Central to U.S. Foreign Policy Planning and Strategy

China. Despite the short-term nature of confidence-building measures, the United States would do well to increase regional and international pressure on Beijing to remove the opaqueness and uncertainty around Chinese foreign and national security decision-making processes. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) will resist, since Chinese leadership views that opaqueness as a strategic asset. The answer, then, will be to hold civilian leaders responsible for the actions of the PLA.[429]

Of the three states studied for this monograph, China has the best diplomatic relationship with the U.S. but that is of minimal strategic comfort. U.S. diplomatic efforts have pressured China to cease its overt and covert support of both Iran and North Korea. Unfortunately, this strategy has not been very successful in enlisting China as an ally that could pressure Iran or North Korea to cease acrimonious behavior toward the United States. Furthermore, China's position on the UN Security Council puts it in a key position to impose and enforce multilateral sanctions on Iran and North Korea. In fact, the principal reason then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited China in May 2012 was to seek Beijing's support against Iran and North Korea.[430] Unfortunately, the support was not forthcoming.

Clearly, China's geography, economy, and population make it a state worthy of increased U.S. attention. The historical Chinese predilection for asymmetric warfare and surprise attacks warrants watching Beijing closely, lest U.S. analysts fall victim to this overtly defensive national security policy. Mirror imaging is dangerous when looking at the Chinese, because China's

definition of defense is much different than Washington's. Surprise attacks in China's strategic culture are examples of defensive strategy; thus, any perceived threats to China's borders—real, imagined, or contrived—may result in a preemptive attack PLA attack.

Iran. According to a 2012 Gallup Poll, 32 percent of Americans believe that Iran is the United States' greatest enemy.[431] This is caused in part by the increased attention on Iran's budding nuclear capability combined with former President Ahmadinejad's antagonistic rhetoric. Iranian officials' acrimonious rhetoric and military activity must be analyzed in the context of Iranian strategic culture. Also, to avoid inflating discontent, U.S. policymakers, who are mused to being rewarded for making their point clearly and succinctly, must understand the importance of debate, and even grandiose eloquence, in Iranian culture. U.S. diplomats need to take in account the inflated pride derived from an idealized time of Persian hegemony and the sensitivities linked to real and perceived humiliations inflicted by the West and the United States. Furthermore, U.S. military strategists must be cognizant of the Iranian propensity for using several components of irregular warfare, including terrorism, to achieve Tehran's strategic objectives. SOF are the best equipped, trained, and deployed to countering asymmetric warfare—and with a limited U.S. footprint that reduces the opportunity for escalation.

North Korea. The North Korean regime has managed to justify its rule by fabricating an ideology based on an interpretation of the country's history and traditions. Absent any changes in North Korea, such as civil society reforms allowing popular participation in strategic decision making or a successful foreign intervention, the DPRK will remain isolationist, rigidly autocratic, and irreverent of international legal norms. Without a civil society infused with some policymaking powers, the Kim cult will be continue to invest in threatening weaponry and inflated military units for nefarious purposes. In 2010, then U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates admitted that "the administration's policy of strategic patience on North Korea had failed."[432] Waiting may not be in America's favor, because North Korea's strategic culture is entirely focused on keeping the Kim dynasty—one of the most ruthless in the world—in power.

President Obama seems to be considering tougher measures toward North Korea. His immediate cancelation of the "Leap Day agreement" to

help feed North Koreans after a failed North Korea rocket launch[433] may be an indicator of future policy. Furthermore, the "Asia Pivot" and former Secretary Clinton's emphasis on developing the Asia- Pacific Naval presence and revitalizing friendships with the Japanese and other Asian allies may change the equilibrium in East Asia.[434]

Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda's strategic culture as expressed by Osama bin Laden draws on ideas that have roots in historical Islam. Despite bin Laden's death in 2011, the organization retains its principal objectives of restoring the Caliphate, eradicating infidels from the Middle East, destroying the Israeli state, and ending all foreign incursions in the Islamic world. To achieve these objectives, al-Qaeda Central still advocates a far target strategy that includes the U.S. and the West. While successful U.S. drone attacks eliminating al-Qaeda leaders[435] have reduced the organization's direction of its affiliates and franchise groups, in the absence of a strong central headquarters, al-Qaeda's affiliates and franchise operations have become increasingly important. This shift in significance may potentially translate into the affiliates' adopting a near enemy strategy, which yields easier targets and is more lucrative. Bin Laden's death was a significant blow to al-Qaeda, and the concern he expressed about the increasing independence and extreme practices of his affiliates[436] may go unheeded. Since his death, the U.S. has continued to destabilize al-Qaeda through the successful targeted killings of its central leadership, along with increased diplomatic and economic pressure on entities supporting local franchise groups, such as the Somali government, the Iranian government, and individuals linked funding of terrorism.[437] The U.S. should also reemphasize SOF in challenging environments, such as Somalia, as al-Qaeda's affiliates become a greater threat.[438]

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