

On strategic culture

The decision making process in matters of defence is not an abstract construct based purely in the present moment but is, rather, steeped in the beliefs, biases, traditions and cultural identity of the individual country – all of which feeds into its strategic culture.¹

[R]ather than obedience or disobedience to an abstract set of stipulative requirements, in times of war what really makes the difference is how a nation state, as a collective identity, ‘behaves’ is the structure of that nation’s history and experience – its strategic culture, if you will.²

Key issues and developments in German security policy since 1989 form the overall focus of this book, while the more specific question to be dealt with relates to the evolution of German perspectives on the use of military force in international politics in the post-Cold War period, using the concept of strategic culture to interpret the subject matter. As argued in the Introduction, that concept is useful in yielding insights on both theoretical and empirical issues relating to developments in German security policy since 1989. The aim of this chapter, consequently, is to consider the concept of strategic culture in greater detail and to locate it within the field of security studies.

Contending approaches

Neo-realism and German normalisation

As the Cold War came to a close, a frenzy of analysis on the future of German security policy emerged. Consideration of how German post-Cold War security policy might develop reflected a far broader and fundamental discussion, within the discipline of international

relations (IR) and the subdiscipline of security studies, about the utility of existing theoretical paradigms and assumptions. At the crux of reflections on Germany lay the debate about how the ending of the Cold War and national unification would affect German foreign and security policy; more specifically, disputes arose as to whether the recent past would serve as a source of continuity or a force for change in the new Germany's post-Cold War foreign and security policy behaviour.

The first take on this debate drew its logic from the traditional neo-realist camp in IR. This view tends to see military behaviour as quite separate from the milieu in which it is formed;³ in other words, neo-realism is based on a belief that there is a 'universal science that explains the generation of military power in all countries, without regard to their internal societies'.⁴ Drawing from this assumption, a number of scholars posed a 'normalisation' thesis, the essence of which was that in the context of multipolarity, German foreign and security policy would develop a far less restrained and benign character. Throwing off the constraints laid down by the Cold War, German policy would accrue a more assertive national flavour, focused on strategic interests and backed by the threat of the use of force. A number of scholars produced commentary on Germany from such a perspective: Philip Gordon, John Mearsheimer, Volker Rittberger and Geoffrey van Orden have, in various ways, sought to draw out neo-realism's assumptions to explain and predict Germany's post-1989 foreign and security policy behaviour. Underlying such analysis was the assumption that Germany would seize advantage of the new balance of power in Europe and would inevitably develop a greater ability and willingness to wield its power, including military power. Furthermore, Germany would be actively compelled to elucidate its interests – which might come to differ considerably from those of its allies – more assertively.

Characteristic of such reasoning in the early 1990s was John Mearsheimer's prediction of the 'Balkanisation' of Europe and the central problem of containing German power. The problems of creating a counterbalance to Germany would be similar to those experienced in the 1930s, when Germany, surrounded by weaker East European states, experienced a resurgence of nationalism.⁵ Similarly, writing in 1992 the German historian Michael Stürmer argued that the profound changes brought to Germany's geostrategic location would signify abrupt changes in German policy and perspectives on the use of force. For Stürmer, like Mearsheimer, the ending of the Cold War would herald a further break in German history, obligating Germany to 'embrace

realism', 'clarity of goals' and a 'predictability of means'.⁶ Sustaining such arguments, others stressed the point that since the Bundeswehr owed its creation, rationale and role to contingent forces and factors quite exogenous to Germany, with the ending of the Cold War and the acquisition of full sovereignty, German security policy was now set to develop a more normal relationship to the use of military power. In this vein, in 1991, Geoffrey van Orden asserted that German defence policy, having been 'unnaturally constrained for 40 years', can now 'aspire to a normal level of great power activity, pursuing national interests which may differ from those of its allies and demanding a voice commensurate with its economic and political standing'.⁷ Subsequently, Philip Gordon identified a normalisation of German security policy, which would involve 'the gradual attenuation of the particular restrictions that have influenced and constrained Germany's international actions since, and because of, World War Two'.⁸

Certainly, German security policy has travelled great distances since reunification and perspectives on the use of force have, in many ways, changed in a revolutionary way. The changes seen in the role of the German armed forces, especially after 1994 through the reinterpretation of the Basic Law, have lessened the extent to which German security policy can be described as 'singular' or indeed reminiscent of a 'civilian power' in the classical sense. Such transformations notwithstanding, the power of neo-realism as a theoretical tool with which to understand these changes remains rather weak, principally because it side-steps the complex and arguably more interesting constitutive factors of policy such as the domestic context and other less tangible sources of interest formation. Neo-realism takes its cue from changes in the international system, focuses on observable capabilities and material potential, and consequently makes a *rational* assessment or prediction of Germany's past, present or future policy behaviour. An appraisal of German security policy more than a decade after the end of the Cold War shows the serious deficiencies in neo-realist prognoses, especially regarding the ability and actual desire of German elites to pursue a more assertive nationally focussed 'normal' security policy as Mearsheimer, Van Orden and others have proposed.

Neo-realism's negation of the historical and domestic constitutive factors essentially delivers an inadequate analysis, whereas reinstating and bringing to centre stage the *milieu* in which German thinking about security and the use of force is produced, as an alternative, promises a far richer understanding. Importantly, here, analysis of German

security using such an approach would question one of the chief assumptions of neo-realist analysis, namely the inevitability of Germany's 'emancipation' from history as a by-product of the end of bipolarity.

How might such an approach to Germany be configured? What follows is a survey of the various attempts within the field of security studies to understand national security policies by adopting a *cultural* variable. This survey will then provide the basis on which an approach to understanding German security policy through the prism of strategic culture will be synthesised.

Strategic culture and security studies

Strategic culture was first introduced to the field of security studies in the 1970s.⁹ Born of a concern with the 'skewing' effects of ethnocentrism prevalent within US strategic thinking, Jack Snyder, writing for the RAND Corporation, warned of the dangers of assuming that the Soviets would have the same set of values and beliefs as the US strategic community. Crucially, Snyder challenged the view that the Soviets would play the same nuclear war 'game' as the US, as existing 'generic rational actor paradigms' and game theoretical modelling suggested.¹⁰ As part of his critique, Snyder promoted a form of analysis of Soviet behaviour and strategic thinking which could take more fully into account the particular Soviet historical experiences of war which, he argued, shaped Moscow's perspectives on contemporary security issues. Subsequently, he saw that a unique Soviet strategic culture had developed through a particular historical process, forming a perceptual prism through which strategic issues were viewed by Soviet decision-makers. This Soviet strategic culture, Snyder maintained, was passed on to subsequent generations of policy-makers through a socialisation process. It affected policy by setting the parameters of national debates and consequently guided and shaped policy choices. Snyder defined Soviet strategic culture as the sum total of 'ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy'.¹¹

Snyder's notion of strategic culture prompted other scholars to build on his assumptions and ideas, and that has led to the emergence of a not insubstantial body of literature on strategic culture. Subsequent waves and phases of thinking about strategic culture, while clearly

advancing the concept and bringing it into the mainstream of security studies, has resulted in a rather atomised research agenda. Strategic culture analysis advanced in the 1970s and 1980s, driven primarily by a concern with misunderstandings and misrepresentation in super-power relations and especially in connection with nuclear strategy. Writing in 1979 Ken Booth sought to alert strategists to the ‘fog of culture’ and its distorting effects on the making and study of strategy. Echoing Snyder’s words, Booth argued in *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* that better strategies would result only if assumptions based on ‘rational’ strategic man were supplanted by those based on ‘national’ strategic man. In a similar vein, Colin S. Gray equated strategic culture with the notion of ‘national style’ in a comparison of the US and Soviet Union.¹² Gray defined strategic culture as ‘referring to modes of thought and action with respect to force, which derive from perceptions of the national historical experience, from aspirations for responsible behaviour in national terms ... the civic culture and way of life’.¹³ For Gray, strategic culture was the milieu within which strategy is debated; it provided a ‘semi-permanent influence upon policy behaviour’ and, in the absence of a ‘new historical experience’ that challenged existing modes of thought and action, national style would be an enduring explanation of state behaviour. While being one of the strongest advocates of strategic culture and its explanatory potential at this time, Gray was also sensitive to the problems and weaknesses of the concept. He saw that strategic cultures produced tendencies but did not totally determine behaviour and that if seen as too deterministic, strategic culture could be overused to explain anything and everything, and so become analytically useless in its tautology. Gray posed a further set of questions and continued to call for the refinement of the concept, especially in terms of how to address the issue of change or fragmentation within a strategic culture. With such fundamental questions surrounding strategic culture at this time, the concept remained highly vulnerable.

The introduction of strategic culture into the parlance of security studies in the 1970s undoubtedly created a momentum which in no small way informed the wave of culture-inspired challenges to prevailing modes of analysis that transpired after the end of the Cold War. In this primordial period the concept of strategic culture was very much in gestation, with analysts tending to overemphasise the utility of the concept without sufficient accompanying thoughts on methodology and the actual functioning of the nexus between policy behaviour and

strategic culture. Writers also tended to make sweeping statements about time periods rather than pinpointing specific formative periods and the sources of a strategic culture. Nevertheless, this first wave of strategic culture analysis was important in that it began to question dominant modes of analysis and to raise some crucial questions about the sources of a state's behaviour in the security realm. What followed after 1989–90 was the advent of strategic culture literature, which, while drawing on the work of the 1970s and 1980s, sought to address many of the problems associated with the concept.

Conceptual developments in the 1990s

As noted earlier, at the core of the re-examination of theories within the discipline of IR after 1989 lay a fundamental reassessment of the utility of neo-realism as the dominant paradigm in security studies. Out of this reappraisal emerged a resurgence of interest in culture in security studies, inspired to a large extent by the rise of constructivism, with its emphasis on *identity* and *interests* as being socially constructed.¹⁴ On the back of these developments came a new generation of literature applying to various regions and case studies the concept of 'strategic culture', as well as cognate notions of security culture, political–military culture and national security culture.

Perhaps the most noteworthy major study on strategic culture to have emerged in this period was Alistair Iain Johnston's *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, which attempted to deal with a number of the key altercations within the strategic culture school. Johnston pointed to the pros and cons of various existing strategic culture studies, and sought to formulate an entirely new approach. Essentially his aim was to construct a notion of strategic culture that was falsifiable; Johnston therefore sought to separate strategic culture from strategic behaviour in order to assess the impact of the former on the latter.¹⁵ A host of other authors writing in the 1990s sought to further the study of strategic culture by applying it to national or regional case studies, as a means of investigating continuities and change in national security policies or of finding more authentic answers as to why certain policy options and not others were pursued. In 1992 George Tanham wrote an article on Indian strategic culture, which, although not particularly strong conceptually, raised interesting ideas about the connection between certain cultural beliefs and Indian security policy.¹⁶ Alan Macmillan

also advanced the idea of a distinctively British strategic culture as a tool with which to understand significant choices in British strategic history.¹⁷ A further piece worthy of note is Desmond Ball's 1993 study of the strategic culture of the Asia-Pacific region. Ball noted that strategic culture analysis had given too much attention to the strategic cultures of *states* and especially to studies of the US and the Soviet Union. To address this, Ball posited that while national differences did certainly exist between the states of the Asia-Pacific region a broad study of the area as a whole would be more useful.¹⁸

Peter J. Katzenstein's edited collection of 1996 made a further important contribution to the development of strategic culture and related concepts. *The Culture of National Security* brought together many of the concerns and preferences for sociological issues of identity and its nexus with security by developing the notion of 'political–military culture'. Through the contributions of some notable scholars, the volume sought to explicitly tackle what were seen as the deficiencies of constructivism by adding greater empirical content. The thrust of the investigation was to illustrate how 'social factors' could often shape policies in ways contradictory of those which other theories would normally suggest.¹⁹ In this pursuit Katzenstein *et al.* identified two determinants of national security policy-making: the 'cultural–institutional' and the broader 'national identity' aspect. The volume made a welcome contribution to thinking on culture and security, and also went some way towards developing a convincing and workable methodology with which to overcome the imprecision of earlier strategic culture works without relying on the overly positivistic approach of some of the later ones.

The 'cultural' sources of German security policy

Within this broader revival of cultural explanations of national security policies and the critique of neo-realism, a substantial body of literature focusing on German security policy has emerged. The fact that Germany provided the inspiration for such approaches comes as no surprise given that for many scholars Germany's behaviour in the realm of foreign and security policy after 1990 had largely confounded the expectations of the neo-realists and, in particular, the emphasis on the resurgence of German military power and unilateralism. Thus, seeking an alternative and more authentic form of explanation, scholars

have capitalised on the growing body of culture-inspired theories and concepts.

In 1998 Thomas U. Berger considered national security policies in both Germany and Japan through a culturalist perspective in a major volume entitled *Cultures of Amilitarism*.²⁰ Rather than use strategic culture – which Berger rejected because, he argued, it did not pay enough attention to broader societal and cultural shifts and their impacts on national defence – the concept of ‘political-military culture’ is mobilised, being defined as a subset of a broader culture dealing with those elements that shape defence and security policy formation. Berger attempts to track and explain the emergence and longevity of the profound antimilitarism in (West) German security policies both before and after the ending of the Cold War. Berger rejects monocausal explanations of German antimilitarism such as those based on the notion that the damage inflicted by Nazi atrocities runs so deep in its psyche that German society is now unwilling to sanction the use of force, or that it is the Federal Republic’s entanglement in multilateral frameworks that stymies its ability or desire to develop a more independent defence capacity. Nor does Berger accept reasoning based on the features of Germany’s geostrategic position and role as a trading state or the notion that US tutelage in security matters precludes the perceived need in Germany to develop a more active security policy. Crucially, Berger sees that these forms of explanation are all important ‘structural determinants’ of German approaches to national security, and that they have, at different points, helped facilitate the conditions for it to emerge and be sustained, but they do not fully explain the strength of Germany’s aversion to the use of force. Moreover, Berger holds, there *were* events and periods when it would have been possible to pursue more independent and active military policies, but Germany (and Japan) chose instead to enact only incremental changes that did not serve to question the underlying antimilitarism. Explanation of this phenomenon is best sought by invoking the idea of a ‘culture of antimilitarism’, the existence and functioning of which, Berger sees, has been confirmed by the ending of the Cold War which opened opportunities for Germany to expand and break from its restrained security policies, opportunities that have not been pursued.

Taking this further, Berger saw that what best accounts for Germany’s antimilitarism is its ‘struggle to draw lessons from its troubled past’. These lessons, he holds, were shaped by the political debates of

the early post-war period, which ultimately flavoured the antimilitary sentiments prevalent in West Germany. Central to this antimilitarism was a fundamental reappraisal of German identity, as a result of the nation's confrontation with the atrocities of Nazism and dealing with collective guilt. These factors then compelled the political leaders of the new Federal Republic to approach rearmament in a way that would clearly limit the size and remit of the Bundeswehr. Berger's mobilisation of political–military culture is accompanied by an elaborate conceptualisation of how this culture impacts on behaviour. He seeks to avoid the problems of tautology and to this end sees that a political–military culture influences policy in a number of ways: by supplying the goals and norms of political actors; by determining how actors perceive the domestic political environment; by influencing actor's assessments of the international environment; and by conditioning their ability to garner national resources for military purposes. These propositions are then conflated in to a 'culturally bound actor model', in which he positions socioculturally defined norms and perceptions (the political culture) as integral to the process through which national interests are defined. The culture acts as the milieu through which objective domestic conditions and capabilities, as well as pressures in the international system, are mediated, prior to policy execution by actors engaged in the policy process. Seen in this way, Berger's notion of the national interest is not taken as a given, but rather as a 'construct emerging out of contingent historical, social, and rational processes that can vary considerably across different states at different points in time'.²¹

On the issue of change Berger sees that transformations in the international system may lead to change in the culture, in the sense of 'change in the normative and interpretative schemes of its political actors', though this will most probably be neither quick nor easy, and cultures may therefore represent a force of inertia. Change will occur as the 'cultural core' responds to 'historical pressures', and it will be incremental in nature with new institutions not being created *de novo* but being 'likely to follow previously established patterns'. Lastly, Berger sees that only in very traumatic situations will change in the core values and beliefs of a given culture be abrupt, and then only in instances of total discreditation and when society is under great strain. At the crux of Berger's reasoning is the hypothesis that if new policy initiatives are proposed which violate 'existing cultural values' then resistance to them will become evident in the form of

demonstrations and party-political altercation. If, on the other hand, major changes occur without generating any resistance, Berger holds that the relationship between political–military culture and defence policy can then be seen to have been falsified or at least weakened.²² In his conclusions, Berger sees that Germany’s behaviour in the security realm is testimony to the existence and functioning of a political–military culture. This has been further confirmed after the ending of the Cold War, when during the Gulf War the ‘antimilitary animus’ ‘continued to pose potent barriers to increased activism in the area of national security’.

John S. Duffield’s *World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions, and German Security Policy After Unification*, also published in 1998, made a further valid contribution to understanding the cultural sources of German security policy.²³ Duffield’s exposition attempts to explain the profound continuities and restraint prevalent in German security policy after the Cold War by way of a framework of analysis that combines influences from Germany’s external environment as well as its domestic political setting. At the international level Duffield identifies a dense web of institutions which have both actively constrained German security policy while also providing channels through which Germany could pursue its interests in ‘predictable, non-threatening directions’. These influences at the international level are bolstered, Duffield holds, through the effects of Germany’s ‘distinct post-war national security culture, which was little changed by unification and the end of the Cold War’. This culture comprises a discernible set of beliefs and values relating to scepticism about the use of military force, a preference for multilateralism, a desire to be perceived as a reliable partner and an aversion to leadership in security matters, values which are widely shared by elites and society at large. The combination of these international institutional and domestic cultural factors, Duffield argues, determines the continuities and the restraint in Germany’s security policy since 1989.

On the back of this hypothesis Duffield’s study proceeds with the construction of a framework of analysis to explain national security policy. Within this survey, Duffield details a number of categories under the main headings of ‘the international setting’ and ‘the domestic setting’. Under the latter the notion of ‘national pre-dispositions’ is posited, in which he incorporates the important role played by political culture. Duffield’s conceptualisation revolves chiefly around the notion that political culture is the property of a collective rather than

of the sum of the individuals comprising it; that it is distinctive *vis à vis* other political cultures; and, finally, that it is highly stable in comparison to 'material conditions'. From this outline of the general nature of a political culture Duffield draws out the specific components that are relevant to national security policy. These consist of worldviews, issues of loyalty and attachment, conceptions of the national interest and the effectiveness of the use of force and appropriate political behaviour.

Subsequently Duffield, like Berger, constructs a detailed model of how he sees the relationship between culture and behaviour. Firstly, the existence of a given culture delineates the scope of what it is that policy actually focuses on by highlighting certain issues and marginalising others. Secondly, a culture affects the perception and interpretation of the external environment, thus shaping the design of security issues. Thirdly, by shaping conceptions of the national interest, the functioning of a culture helps to determine policy objectives. Fourthly, a culture delineates and limits the range of legitimate policy options open to policy-makers. From this understanding of the nexus between culture and behaviour Duffield concludes: "The overall effect of national security culture is to predispose societies in general and political elites in particular toward certain actions and policies over others."²⁴ Sometimes culture will not determine policy options so tightly, but will narrow the range of policies that are likely to be adopted, because the conditions of a culture's influence will depend on the external context; in instances when the international environment is characterised by complexities and uncertainties or when a policy issue involves a large group of actors the influence of culture may be high.

In his final analysis Duffield attributes many of the continuities and forms of restraint prevalent in German security policy since 1989 as determined, in large part, by 'peculiar national pre-dispositions'. Some of these, he suggests, reside in the constitution, especially in its pre-1994 reading regarding out-of-area Bundeswehr deployments, while others are institutionalised in the armed forces' limited capacities or in German public opinion. However, he regards Germany's post-war political culture, especially in the form of elite attitudes, as a far more fundamental and comprehensive source of the national predispositions shaping security policy. Duffield's reasoning is grounded in his assertions that German society and elites hold a very distinctive set of beliefs and values of relevance to national security issues and that the actuality

of this specific political culture has constrained Germany's potential for unilateral and aggressive security policies, instead facilitating the continuation of a security policy characterised by restraint. The particular elements of this culture that have been so influential are viewed by Duffield as the widespread antimilitarism and a rejection of unilateralism, and an attendant preference for multilateral solutions. These elements, Duffield holds, certainly reinforced one another during the Cold War period, and largely after 1989 as well. However, on the issue of Bundeswehr out-of-area deployments after 1989–90 these elements offered contradictory prescriptions, as different sectors of society and elites came to interpret and apply them in different ways.

German strategic culture: a framework for analysis

This brief overview of some of the key studies that have attempted to mobilise the concept of strategic culture and related ideas over the past three decades confirms the highly stimulating yet rather disparate research agenda that persists. The survey demonstrates the variety of ways in which strategic culture has been interpreted and employed as a tool with which to understand national or regional security policies and policy behaviour. It also brings into focus just how vibrant and appealing the key assumptions of the strategic culture approach are for further conceptual development and refinement, and for empirical exploration, in the case of Germany. Clearly the devising of an analytical framework with which to examine contemporary German security policy using strategic culture must take into account the strengths of existing studies, while at the same time engage with some of the questions they raise.

Questions and controversies persist within the literature on issues relating to the referent group for strategic culture, namely whether the focus should be on states, societies, elites or, perhaps, the armed forces. A second contestation relates to the origins and roots of a strategic culture: where do they lie, what are the most important sources and how might these be traced and profiled? A third concern revolves around the question of how to establish the existence of the core beliefs and attitudes relating to the use of force that lie at the centre of a strategic culture. A fourth unresolved issue relates to the relationship which strategic culture has to actual policy behaviour, or to the influence of the former on the latter, including the thorny issue of whether that

influence is falsifiable or not. A final, enduring, question is that of change in a strategic culture, specifically how and under what conditions change might come about. Such questions are far from arbitrary. As Alistair Johnston noted:

Done well, the careful analysis of strategic culture could help policy makers establish more accurate and empathetic understandings of how different actors perceive the game being played ... Done badly [it] could reinforce stereotypes about the predispositions of other states and close off policy alternatives deemed inappropriate for dealing with local strategic cultures.²⁵

What follows is the basis of an analytical framework with which to explore German security policy through the prism of strategic culture, one on which the remainder of the book proceeds.

Defining strategic culture and its composition

A strategic culture is a distinctive body of beliefs, attitudes and practices regarding the use of force, held by a collective and arising gradually over time through a unique protracted historical process. A strategic culture is persistent over time, tending to outlast the era of its inception, although it is not a permanent or static feature. It is shaped and influenced by formative periods and can alter, either fundamentally or piecemeal, at critical junctures in that collective's experiences.

A strategic culture comprises three elements. Firstly, there are the deeper, basal, qualities that have their origins in the primordial or formative phases of a given strategic culture; these are here called *foundational elements*. Foundational elements comprise basic beliefs regarding the use of force that give a strategic culture its core characteristics. Importantly, foundational elements are highly resistant to change. Extending out of these foundational elements are the observable manifestations of the strategic culture: the longstanding policies and practices that actively relate and apply the substance of the strategic culture's core to the external environment, essentially by providing channels of meaning and application. These aspects of strategic culture – here called *regulatory practices* – are less resilient to change. Midway between the foundational elements and regulatory practices are the *security policy standpoints*, the contemporary, widely accepted, interpretations as to how best core values are to be promoted through policy channels, in the sense that they set the preferences for policy choices.

Change in a strategic culture

The existence and functioning of the three components mean that a strategic culture is in a continual state of self-evaluation *vis à vis* external realities, as well as changes within society. Naturally in times of continuity and stability this evaluation will be muted and less evident, whereas in times of great turmoil or rupture, evaluation, through elite debate and other forms of contention, may be highly visible as the strategic culture goes through a phase of adjustment, renewal or even collapse, depending on how valid existing core values are.

Change in a strategic culture comes in two principal forms: *fine-tuning* and *fundamental*, with the former variant being the more frequent. Change in the form of fine-tuning may occur when issues have arisen, from either domestic or international sources, that have challenged or at best sat uneasily with the established foundational elements of the strategic culture. Challenges which pressure the existing strategic culture and policy modes will be interpreted, or 'read', by elites in differing ways, especially at times of great uncertainty. Whereas during periods of certainty and stability a dominant 'reading' of the meanings of foundational elements and preferred policy modes prevails and is largely uncontested, at times of ambiguity a number of opposing readings emerge, all vying for dominance. In this context a strategic culture is finely tuned, or adjusted, to match existing core values to new situations through reworked security policy standpoints as seen through observable changes in security policies and practices.

Fundamental change of a strategic culture is a far less common phenomenon. It is more abrupt in nature, occurring when trauma is sufficiently severe as to nullify the existing strategic culture, giving rise to the establishment of new core beliefs, leading subsequently to new policies and practices. This fundamental change to or collapse of a strategic culture is best described as a situation of 'collective infancy'.²⁶ Related to this theme of change is the issue of *policy inertia*: even in the event of a foundational element being challenged, certain practices or policies may resist change or adjustment. The normal functioning relationship between foundational elements and regulatory practices may be disturbed if a certain policy practice has become so ingrained that it can be a force for inertia, appearing as a lag or even an ill-suited policy to pursue.

This conceptualisation of change begs the question as to how a strategic culture is actually transmitted among its agents and through time

to new generations. Arising out of the past a strategic culture can be seen as a part of what sociologist Maurice Halbwachs called 'historical memory' and which he regarded as part of the collective memory. A strategic culture as the embodiment of past collective experiences, tied to war and the use of force, 'is stored and interpreted by social institutions'.²⁷ Hence the substance of a strategic culture reaches the actor both through written records as well as through commemorations that serve to reinforce memory. This means that subsequent generations, who had not lived through the initial or formative experiences that gave rise to a strategic culture, are nevertheless subjects of it.

This way of thinking about the transmission of strategic culture is in line with the notion that institutional practices shape and sustain *knowledge*. So long as a strategic culture is deemed viable, its material manifestations will be sustained and thus serve to shape the content and structure of knowledge, this will permit only certain new possibilities to be considered by decision-makers since they inherit an existing form of knowledge which will serve to frame their options and dispose them to act in a certain role.²⁸ However, subsequent generations are not irretrievably tied to the existing strategic culture. By assessing the relevance and utility of their strategic culture they may seek to restructure the institutions that provide them with the knowledge to think about and design security policies; as Halbwachs posits, new generations are engaged in a process of 'counterposing its present to its own constructed past'.²⁹

The functioning of strategic culture

What the relationship between strategic culture and behaviour might be is a perennial issue which revolves around the question of whether or not strategic culture is regarded as a falsifiable concept. Two lines of discord run on this issue: there are those who seek a falsifiable notion of strategic culture which leaves room in analysis for non-strategic cultural variables and their influence on behaviour, thereby attempting to break the nexus between strategic culture and behaviour. Conversely there are those who see strategic culture as a non-falsifiable concept: the link between it and behaviour cannot be severed because strategic culture is the all-encompassing milieu through which behaviour is mediated – in other words, all behaviour is culture-dependent. On the important issue of falsifiability this book complies more with the latter position, regarding strategic culture as a concept that defies falsification.

In adopting this stance, the study will not attempt to pit strategic culture against other explanatory factors, variables or theories.

In their attempts to construct a falsifiable concept of strategic culture, some authors have suggested that policy behaviour *can* occur outside of the milieu of strategic culture. Such behaviour, outside of familiar patterns, which contradicts the existing strategic culture will, it has been argued, prompt dissension and opposition; if this does not occur, then strategic culture can be seen to be falsified or at least weakened. However, it is argued here that even when policy behaviour appears to be at odds with the values and norms of a strategic culture, this does not entail the debasement of that strategic culture; moreover the existence of altercation and protest against new policies does not necessarily imply a weakening or falsification of strategic culture. The relationship between strategic culture and behaviour is much more nuanced, and the key to understanding this is the relationship between the foundational elements, the security policy standpoints and the regulatory practices.

The three types of component that make up a strategic culture are in a dynamic relationship, which means that a strategic culture can and will alter. Change occurs most commonly in the form of fine-tuning as policies mutate to address any desynchronisation of the strategic culture and to reaffirm the connection between the external environment and the foundational elements. The foundational elements of a strategic culture therefore set the outermost parameters of a state's realm of possible behaviour, a sphere of legitimacy, in short, determining what is 'normal' for it to do. In this sense the foundational elements, through the security policy standpoints, define interests and priorities, which in turn determine certain policy preferences and choices above others by setting an agenda excluding some options while including others. This provides a framework of reference for policy actors that ultimately shapes their conception of a situation and provides them with a bounded repertoire of goals and tools. If the policies they pursue are to be successful, policy-makers must act within the constraints of the strategic culture.

Policy-actors, then, are neither cultural dupes nor prisoners but are fully aware of their strategic cultural context. They cannot contradict foundational elements, but they can try to modify regulatory practices to meet the way in which *they* interpret, or read, the foundational elements in a new context. Hence the idea that behaviour can exist outside of the strategic cultural context is false, unless a complete collapse

of a given strategic culture occurs. Seen in this way a strategic culture will not only constrain behaviour by precluding certain options but will facilitate behaviour in various intensities, which may, on first inspection, seem at odds with the existing strategic culture.

The context in which a state finds itself is also crucial in determining how a strategic culture affects behaviour. At times of stability and certainty the influence of strategic culture on behaviour may not be visible at all, since the culture is in synchronisation with the external environment. At times of flux, however, when the strategic culture itself is under pressure, the nexus between strategic culture and behaviour may become more direct, and may be seen in the way policy-makers seek to maintain a clear and familiar policy path to follow, often through recourse to historical precedence, former successful policies and lines of argumentation imbued with lessons of the past. This idea that context matters is similar to Anne Swidler's ideas on the relationship between a general culture and behaviour. Swidler posits that in 'settled times', when there is no tension between a culture and the external environment, cultures independently influence action from a distance, whereas in 'unsettled' times, periods of shock or trauma, when that culture is dislocated from the broader environment, it will exert a direct influence, guiding behaviour, almost as an ideology.³⁰ This idea can be transposed quite successfully to West Germany during the Cold War – the 'settled period' – and the united Germany after the Cold War – the 'unsettled period'.

Who is the referent of a strategic culture?

Who or what is the appropriate referent or focus of analysis in the study of strategic culture is again a contested issue, for essentially whose strategic culture are we are talking about? Should one consider purely the views of elites in either the security and/or military spheres? Or should broader public opinion also be brought under analysis? Most strategic culture analysis focuses on elites, whether they be purely the military or those in the broader political–military decision-making sphere. In the existing literature there is in general little discussion about mass beliefs or opinion, and where it does exist it is generally conflated with elite opinion. The position taken here on the question of the referent of a strategic culture is that political–military elite voices within the 'national strategic community'³¹ are of greatest relevance, while the broader public sphere is seen rather as the general contextual milieu.

Elites, or 'strategic cultural agents' as they are called here, are reflective of broader societal moods and act as 'gatekeepers' of a strategic culture, since they are at the forefront of decision-making. Holding a more detailed awareness and knowledge of security issues, they are agenda-setters and thereby push and pull the national discourse in certain ways. Furthermore, in terms of the debate elucidated earlier on the most appropriate level of analysis, elites blend and mediate between the international, domestic and individual levels. This elite preference is bolstered here because it is believed that public opinion is not only problematical to conceptualise but, more importantly that it is of little importance in connection with security policy-making. It is also posited here that elite and broader public opinion may not correspond totally, especially at times of great change when elites respond instantly and subsequently will attempt to shore up public support, which may have lagged, in line with their position.

Conclusion

Strategic culture clearly provides a rich conceptual foundation with which to consider German security policy and perspectives on the use of force. With an emphasis on how historical experience and collective memory shapes policy behaviour, strategic culture as a concept has great resonance in the case of contemporary Germany. From its initial articulation in the 1970s, strategic culture has undergone conceptual refinement and empirical development to an extent that it now offers a viable alternative to the more traditional *rationalist* approaches in the field of security studies. Despite this, the chapter demonstrated that strategic culture is a contested concept, its explanatory power questioned and research agenda rather disparate. To address these issues, this chapter has built on a number of existing studies that mobilised strategic culture or related concepts to create a viable conceptual framework which can be applied to the case of Germany in understanding changing perspectives on the use of force, and also to further the conceptual development of the notion of strategic culture. This subsequent framework for analysis establishes a number of factors, the most important of which are how a strategic culture and its constituent parts may be identified, how a strategic culture might change in different contexts and how it links with policy behaviour and affects choices.

This framework forms the basis for the remainder of the book, beginning with the identification of the origins of West Germany's strategic culture, before looking at the issue of change and the effects on policy behaviour.

Notes

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- 4 Stephen Peter Rosen (1995) 'Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters', *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 4 (spring), p. 5.
- 5 John Mearsheimer (1990) 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Affairs*, vol. 15, no. 1 (summer), pp. 5–56.
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- 12 Colin S. Gray (1981) 'National Style in Strategy: The American Example', *International Security*, vol. 6, no. 2 (fall).
- 13 Colin S. Gray (1986) *Nuclear Strategy and National Style* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Press), pp. 36–7.
- 14 See Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil (eds) (1996) *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner).
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- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 22 *Ibid.*, pp. 20–1.
- 23 John S. Duffield (1998) *World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions, and German Security Policy After Unification* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 25 Johnston (1995) pp. 63–4.
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- 28 Anne Swidler and J. Ardit (1994) 'The New Sociology of Knowledge', *Annual Review of Sociology*, pp. 305–29.
- 29 Halbwachs (1992), p. 24.
- 30 Anne Swidler (1986) 'Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 51, no. 2, pp. 273–86.
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