**Introduction**

The challenges in assessing the strategic culture of a civilization such as China’s are many and varied. The Chinese civilization is one of the oldest on the planet—close to four millennia. Its long history has involved foreign invasions, some of which involved non-Chinese peoples occupying the seats of power in China and then subsequently taking military action against other peoples. It has also had multiple cultural influences: Confucianism, Legalism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Its long history has seen China through many different strategic and military situations. It is a difficult task to generalize across thousands of years of military conflict to arrive at a small set of common cultural factors defining Chinese thinking on strategy.

China has an additional complication when it comes to examining its strategic culture. In addition to its long and varied history, it also had the significant experience of Communism. The Communist experience was so radically different from anything Chinese civilization had experienced before that it can be argued the military thinking and strategies formulated during the Chinese Civil War (1927–37, 1945–49), the Anti-Japanese
War (a.k.a. the Second Sino-Japanese War, 1937–45), and the Cold War should be considered the new foundation for China’s strategic culture. During the late nineteenth century, Chinese thinkers, strategists, and government officials found themselves in a hostile, predatory world illustrated by the imperialist powers carving China up into colonial spheres of control. The Chinese civilization was unalterably marked by such a searing experience that some observers argue that if Chinese strategic culture was not realist before, then it certainly became hyperrealist thereafter.¹ This is not to say that pre-Communist strategic thought was necessarily less realist than Communist strategic thought—only that Communist realpolitik behavior is clearly the result of a predatory environment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ancient Chinese strategic thought had many influences, including warlike and unstable interstate conditions. In any case, sinologists have found too many examples of ancient culture having an effect on the way Chinese today think about governance and strategy outside of pure power considerations, and it is safe to say that the characterization of China as a pure realist state is overstated. Thus, it may be that China indeed has a strategic culture, but its historical experiences are so complex that its strategic culture is difficult to identify.

Strategic culture became the subject of study in the late 1990s, with different well-known intellectuals debating complex cases of strategic culture, including China’s. For some international relations scholars, such as Colin S. Gray, culture provides a context for understanding decision making instead of identifiable, testable factors. As Gray has written, it is folly

¹ In international relations theory, realism refers to the concept that countries are power maximizers. They are therefore fixated on measures of power in relation to other nation-states and persistently act to build up their power. This includes the formation of alliances, constant procurement of military equipment, and efforts to threaten and sometimes weaken adversaries or competitors.
to view strategic culture as a means to predict policy behavior or to determine the likely operational or tactical actions of a particular state. Gray notes that there are many factors involved when a country makes strategic and military decisions. Consequently, it becomes conceptually unwieldy for strategic culture as a model for understanding specific strategic decisions to work. At the same time, Gray also correctly observes that strategic culture may help in building a context for us to understand the rationale for strategic and military decisions made by a specific state at a particular time.

Similarly, although Alastair Iain Johnston sparred with Gray for years about the strategic culture issue, he comes to some similar conclusions about the general treatment of strategic culture and what it teaches us about a target country’s policy options. He notes that a strategic culture can tell us about the assumptions a country may make about the role of war in human affairs, and it may inform us about that country’s view of what strategies have proven effective, given a specific strategic environment. The former emphasizes context and the difficulty of operationalizing the concept of strategic culture; the latter emphasizes the likelihood or probability that a certain type of strategic choice may be preferable to the Chinese under given circumstances. It is probably counterproductive, at least in the case of China, to identify a specific historical incident in China’s past and declare it as singularly significant enough to directly lead to subsequent specific strategic decisions. Instead, a civilization’s past—in this case China’s—can create a background for us to understand how its current leadership may view a variety of specific strategic choices. For this chapter, the complexity of this issue strongly suggests that a different approach is needed to enlighten us on how to think

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2 Gray, Out of the Wilderness.
3 Gray, Out of the Wilderness.
further about China and how we can apply strategic culture to different societies.

This chapter will take a decidedly different approach to examining this issue. It will first start with strategic issues confronting the modern-day Western strategist and policy maker regarding China, categorize these strategic issues into themes, and then work backward to see if the strategic question involved can be framed and examined in terms of strategic culture. In this way, we can better understand the context in which today’s Chinese leadership evaluates their strategic options. By examining several themes in this chapter, it will demonstrate how policy makers and leaders in China prefer to operate as they have within their cultural milieu while adapting to external forces and current strategic challenges. Therefore, at times, it is important to discuss Western ideas on strategy to see how China alternates between its historical preferences and adaptations made to meet these modern, external demands. The goal here is not to provide all-inclusive examples of this tendency but to give readers a better model for understanding Chinese policy behavior.

Confucian, Realist, or Something Else?
The Chinese military and Chinese scholars are fond of the argument that their nation’s strategic culture is defensive. As Andrew Scobell notes in his work on this subject, the Chinese are not only inclined to have this view, they are close to fanatical about it. He gives current Chinese strategic thinking the unflattering label of “a cult of the defensive.” Scobell notes that the Chinese line of argument is that the foundation of Chinese civilization is Confucian thought. Ideas ascribed to Confucius shaped Chinese views on governance, justice, security, use of

force, bureaucracy, the role of government in promoting societal harmony, and commercial policy.

Because Confucius argued that the best policy to preserve peace and harmony, both within China and in territories outside of China, is to treat citizens and neighboring countries justly and to focus on economic prosperity of the society; the Chinese argue that their inclination is to pursue security through policies that are inherently defensive and that pose no threat to anyone. This philosophical line is more than mere academic musing. It has policy implications for the real world. When the U.S. military observes Chinese military modernization, which was based on a 10 percent growth in the Chinese defense budget for close to two decades and the acquisition of very modern weapons systems and platforms, American leaders are inclined to become concerned that China is pursuing a military policy that will ultimately threaten the United States and its national security interests. The Chinese point out that, because their strategic culture is inherently defensive, this is an unfair characterization of China’s intentions.

Scobell notes that the Chinese exhibit a curious pattern of fervently believing that their actions and policies are inherently defensive and pose no threat to anyone, yet their actions seem contradictory, reflecting a realist mind-set. Advocates of China as a realist state point to periods in history in which the Chinese authorities acted in un-Confucian ways. The earliest evidence of this behavior can be found in the formative years of Chinese civilization. At the end of the Warring States period (403–221 BCE), a single state, Qin, had accumulated enough power to unify the territories that we now recognize as a substantial

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5 Scobell, *China and Strategic Culture.*
6 Scobell, *China and Strategic Culture.*
part of Eastern China. The arguments that the advisors to the Qin ruler gave for unification would be largely familiar to a realist: Qin has the power to unify; the other states have been weakened through years of warfare and are therefore ripe for conquest; and governance of these territories would be much more efficient, just, and effective under unified leadership than under a system of splintered and divided states. Additional historical evidence of realist behavior can be found in battlefield statistics. Some of China’s wars cost millions of lives. The Qing military conquest of the Ming in the seventeenth century CE, for example, cost 25 million lives; the Taiping Rebellion of the mid-nineteenth century cost more than 20 million lives; and An Lushan’s rebellion during the Tang dynasty in the eighth century CE cost more than 13 million lives. These results suggest that, while Confucian ideas may have had an impact on how the Chinese view themselves and their security as defensive in nature, there is historical evidence that the Chinese in the past have not necessarily adhered to those ideals.

Alastair Iain Johnston’s work on Chinese strategic culture is also enlightening. Following a detailed survey of Ming dynasty foreign policy behavior as well as an examination of Chinese Communist military actions during the Chinese Civil War and the Anti-Japanese War, Johnston concludes that China has displayed an unusual reliance on the use of force to settle political disputes. Statistically, Johnston concludes that the modern Communist Chinese use of force exceeds the norm

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8 de Bary and Bloom, Sources of Chinese Tradition.
9 Kyle Mizokami, “Asia’s 5 Most Lethal Wars of All Time,” National Interest, 1 August 2015.
displayed by other major powers. His label for the observed Chinese behavior, a *parabellum strategic culture*, would seem to confirm the views of those analysts who conclude that China is a realist state.\(^\text{11}\) Scobell adds in his seminal work on the Chinese use of force that there is a tendency in Chinese culture to decry pacifistic philosophies, and at the same time, to criticize warlike and extremely violent tendencies.\(^\text{12}\) He notes that the Chinese philosophical inclination is that force has its place in the world and can be used to bring about just and effective results.\(^\text{13}\)

It is here that China’s long and complex history becomes instructive. John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, both historians of China, observe that as early as the Song dynasty, China has had extensive contact through trade with the peoples of Southeast, South, and Middle Asia and was knowledgeable of Mediterranean Europe. They note that China’s nautical technology was superior to all of these peoples and had the power to invade and colonize Western Europe from Asia—yet chose not to.\(^\text{14}\) The Chinese also correctly note that if China was a realist state, why then did it not continue its expansion? During the Ming dynasty, the Chinese launched seven expeditions throughout Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and parts of the Middle East.\(^\text{15}\) Ming-era Chinese military and seafar-

\(^{11}\) A *parabellum strategic culture* is defined by Johnston as a culture that has an unusual reliance or willingness to use military force to settle political disputes. The country or civilization involved may engage in negotiation and diplomacy as well, however, it also displays throughout its history a tendency to rely on force to resolve major disputes. Johnston, “Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China.”


\(^{13}\) Scobell, *China’s Use of Military Force*.


ing technology were far superior to any other competitors at that time. China could easily have begun the colonization of the territories ringing the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. There is some dispute about exactly how peaceful these maritime expeditions were, but following the seventh expedition, Zheng He was ordered by the emperor to cease his expeditions, and with the emperor’s direction, the nation turned its attention to internal Chinese matters.16

China’s surprising entry into the modern world in the mid-nineteenth century might have shook Chinese culture to its core. This experience made China prone to realist, power-seeking behavior, at least in the modern era. The Opium Wars, the Sino-Japanese Wars, and later military occupation by Japan left Chinese scholars and government officials seeking solutions to very difficult questions. In the so-called Opium Wars, Western imperial powers forced the opening up of China to trade and colonization, which was eventually followed by the occupation by Japan of the eastern part of mainland China (1937–45). Significantly, Japan had traditionally been seen by the Chinese elite to be China’s inferior. These events rocked Chinese perceptions of its historical strength, autonomy, and cultural superiority in Asia.

Out of this context, Mao Zedong emerged as one of those seeking to resolve China’s many strategic and political problems. He found his answers in Marxism-Leninism, but his writings also reveal that he found answers in the writings of such military thinkers as Carl von Clausewitz and Antoine-Henri Jomini.17 This realist narrative goes far in explaining Chinese military and strategic behavior during the Chinese Civil War (1927–37, 1945–49), in its War of Resistance against Japan (1937–45), and in China’s strategic behavior during the Cold

16 Hucker, China's Imperial Past, 291.
War against not just the United States in Korea but also against the Indians in 1962, the Soviet Union in 1969, and Vietnam in 1979. Following the death of Mao, however, this clean narrative was essentially undercut when Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1979, informed the military that it was to receive little funding for defense modernization, was to be considered the lowest priority for the foreseeable future, and placed the Chinese Communist Party’s focus almost entirely on economic growth and enhancing the quality of life of its citizens—a very Confucian notion.18

The bottom line is that China is both Confucian and realist in outlook, depending on the specific strategic situation that it finds itself in; China throughout its history has used military force ruthlessly to defeat opponents threatening China’s borders and its dynastic rule, but China has also negotiated with nomadic foes living outside of Chinese civilization. Chinese rulers have recognized the utility and necessity of developing military capabilities, particularly new types of weapons; however, at the same time, the Chinese have at the height of their power turned their back on potential conquests outside of the homeland. China has engaged in ruthless wars of annihilation leading to the deaths of millions of combatants, but it has also been involved in multiple conflicts in which lethality and destruction were not what marked the conflict but stratagem and wars of maneuver leading to negotiated outcomes. Chinese strategic culture as described here appears to reflect both a reliance on habits of thought, shared beliefs, and modes of behavior derived from common experiences and narratives during a long period of time, while at the same time reflecting particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force.

A Continentalist or Maritime State?

When American strategists look at Chinese military modernization during the past two decades, they worry that China is following directly in the American path toward hegemony. With China’s island reclamation activities and its militarization of features in the South China Sea, as well as the apparent emergence of an antiaccess/area denial and counterintervention strategy apparently designed to keep the American military out of the region or, at best, to reduce the U.S. military’s room for operational maneuver, they see the emergence of a Chinese version of the Monroe Doctrine against colonialism and designed to ultimately push the United States out of Asia. When American strategists look at the steady development of Chinese naval power projection capabilities, coupled with forays into commercial port facility development in the Indian Ocean and in Africa, they remember the competition the U.S. Navy engaged in with the British Royal Navy in the nineteenth century with the development of American global maritime power. Recent American scholarship backs up this strategic inclination by observing that the father of the modern Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, Admiral Liu Huaqing, initially had in mind plans that were based on the ideas of Alfred Thayer Mahan, America’s best-known advocate of early American naval power.19

The counterargument is that it is a distortion to use the American model of global power trajectory to assess China’s strategic trajectory because, simply put, the United States is not China; the United States attained its hegemonic status in the aftermath of two world wars and the collapse of European colonial powers. More important, while it is evident that Chi-

na recognizes the importance of developing a power projection navy and a military capability to protect its interests abroad, China defines its strategic global interests narrowly and does not see the need to militarize its foreign policy so broadly that it ends up being a military competitor with the United States on a global scale. And why does China define its global interests so narrowly? It does so, advocates argue, because China is naturally a continentalist state; views its security and political interests as rooted in what is going on in China proper; and is hyper fixated on security issues that directly affect the legitimacy, survivability, and viability of the government in power.20 Insofar as international security issues have an impact on those narrow issues, the Chinese government will apply resources and formulate strategies to address them.

The first bit of evidence in favor of one side or the other is historical. For most of China’s existence as a polity, its focus has been on the eastern Asian continent and not on the maritime space abutting the Chinese mainland. Chinese history is filled with episodes of dynasties having to wrestle strategically with Turkic, Manchurian, and Mongolian peoples who resided in the steppes, on the periphery of what was considered China proper.21 Occasionally these nomadic peoples conquered the Chinese state, either through a new military technology (e.g., the crossbow and mounted archery) or because the Chinese state had become corrupt and collapsed from within. These peoples, inevitably convinced that Chinese culture was more refined and superior to their own, were eventually co-opted by the Chinese bureaucracy and absorbed into Chinese culture. These were the experiences of the Mongols and the Manchurians, who became the Yuan and Qing dynasties, respectively.

Fairbank and Goldman, furthermore, have advanced the thesis that Sinic civilization merged with nomadic peoples to create a polity unique to China.\textsuperscript{22} They write:

\begin{quote}
(1) . . . [E]arly China created a politicized state organized for purposes of central control both by bureaucratic methods of philosophic persuasion and by the imperial autocrat’s use of violence; (2) . . . non-Chinese invaders from Inner Asia became integral participants in the Chinese polity by their military prowess and administrative skill; and (3) . . . the resulting Sino-nomadic imperial power continued to maintain the primacy of central political control.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Additionally, even setting aside the persistent tug of war between Chinese civilization and its nomadic neighbors, the history of the birth, maturation, and collapse of Chinese dynasties resides in the challenges of administering such a vast landmass that the Chinese state encompassed. Mark Elvin, in his classic work, \textit{The Pattern of the Chinese Past}, notes that “the critical factor [in the rise and fall of empires], particularly evident in the . . . early Chinese empires, is usually the heavy cost, relative to total output of food and goods, of maintaining the administrative superstructure, and of providing the soldiers and supplies necessary for imperial security.”\textsuperscript{24} Inevitably, there is harsh taxation and this in turn tends to induce social and political changes that undermine the fiscal soundness of the state.\textsuperscript{25} Fairbank and Goldman describe a similar dynamic:

\textit{In each dynasty the progressive withdrawal of land from taxation to benefit the ruling class led to a dangerous}

\textsuperscript{22} For the purposes of this discussion, Sinic refers to the cultures of China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.


\textsuperscript{24} Elvin, \textit{The Pattern of the Chinese Past}, 19.

\textsuperscript{25} Elvin, \textit{The Pattern of the Chinese Past}, 19.
reduction of imperial revenues. . . . As time went on there ensued a struggle between the interests of the imperial government and of the great families who lived under it.26

Wealthy aristocratic families were, over time, able to withdraw land holdings from the reach of imperial power for the purposes of taxation. Additionally, they were also able to convince an increasing number of peasant and middle-income families to stop paying imperial taxes and to come under their protection. “This,” according to Elvin, “created a vicious spiral in which a greater burden was placed upon the still-taxable land of the peasantry, at a time when the demands of the government for revenue were probably increasing. . . . [and] a progressively smaller proportion of the land was expected to pay a progressively larger amount of revenue. Peasant disorders would eventually result.”27 These internal issues seem to provide convincing evidence to interpret the Chinese as unvarnished continentalists.

If this pattern of government preoccupation with its internal troubles was the primary concern of those in power throughout Chinese history, it is easy to understand why Chinese rulers may have been inclined to not worry about the maritime domain. The advocates of China as a renewed maritime state point to history as well. They note that perhaps a continentalist perspective dominated Chinese security perspectives in the dynasties previous to that of the Qing dynasty in the nineteenth century; however, by the middle of the century China was confronted with a new kind of adversary—one that came from the sea. The British arrived with modern warships and, unlike previous invasions, did not consider Chinese cul-

26 Fairbank and Goldman, China, 48–49.
27 Fairbank and Goldman, China, 48–49.
The British set about forcing the Qing emperor to open China to British trade, to allow British and later other imperial powers to settle in China, and ultimately to proselytize Christianity in China. This century and a half of humiliation that the Chinese readily point to as a primary rationale for a strong navy is evidence that Chinese strategic interests have expanded to include recognition of the importance of a strong navy, as the maritime state advocates argue.

Continentalists claim, however, that history still supports the view that China is culturally more inclined to fixate on continental security issues than maritime ones. They note that the Chinese concern about the sea serving as the domain in which the Western powers invaded mainland China is translated into a naval force structure designed to erect defensive zones to keep outside powers at bay. Antiaccess/area denial as a strategic concept can be interpreted this way; similarly, so can island reclamation and the militarization of island features in the South China Sea. Continentalists also observe that Chinese power projection outside of the Asia-Pacific appears to be, in practice, exactly as they have argued in theory—that is, designed to address narrow security interests that are heavily focused on meeting the direct security needs of the Chinese mainland. China does not build large-scale military bases abroad; rather, it relies on “dual use logistics facilities” that involve a small number of military personnel, do not have the full characteristics of a military base, and cannot be used to fully prepare China for a conventional conflict abroad.

28 Fairbank and Goldman, China, 196.
29 Fairbank and Goldman, China, 196.
military activities abroad have been strictly limited to counterpiracy operations, United Nations peacekeeping operations, noncombatant evacuation operations, and select joint military exercises. Were China a maritime-focused state, it is arguable that these activities would be reflective of actions designed to robustly protect China’s expansive maritime policies; instead, they appear to narrowly address specific security interests abroad that are meant to support China’s continued economic growth and its internal stability.\(^\text{31}\) Again, this brief discussion on China as either continentally focused or maritime focused sheds additional light on the concept of strategic culture. As discussed in the opening chapter of this book, strategic culture is the combination of internal and external influences and experiences—geographic, historical, cultural, economic, political, and military—which shape the way a country understands its relationship to the rest of the world and how that country will behave in the international community.

**The “Three Knockheads” of the Tributary System**

At the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum in 2010, Yang Jiechi, the then-Chinese foreign minister, following an effort by 12 of the ASEAN states to raise the South China Sea territorial dispute as a topic of discussion, turned his ire toward the Singaporean foreign minister, and angrily announced: “China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that is just a fact!”\(^\text{32}\) The angry diatribe reminded many sinologists of the ancient tributary system in which China was so dominant in Asia that the emperor expected smaller kingdoms that were well within China’s political

\(^{31}\) Yung and Rustici, “Not an Idea We Have to Shun.”

\(^{32}\) Ian Storey, “China’s Missteps in Southeast Asia: Less Charm, More Offensive,” *China Brief* 10, no. 25 (December 2010).
sphere of influence to make an annual visit to the capital to pay homage.\textsuperscript{33} At the beginning of the audience with the emperor, the envoy from the kingdom in question was expected to kneel before the emperor and lower their face to the floor, knocking their forehead three times in supplication. In Chinese, the term is \textit{san ketou} or “three knockheads,” hence the phrase in English “kowtow.”

The possibility that a long-term goal of China’s is to recreate a modern-day tributary system is no laughing matter for scholars who think about foreign policy. If China’s political and strategic cultures inherently offer its political leaders the option of demanding an international order that eventually involves Chinese domination with lesser states in constant positions of inferiority, then this is in direct tension with the international order that the United States has created since the Second World War. Even if China’s leadership was to press for such an order in the Asia-Pacific region alone, such a structure would be at odds with fundamental American conceptions of its interests in the region. U.S. national security interests have centered on countering the rise of hegemons attempting to dominate their respective regions. In the case of the Asia-Pacific, the United States has a very real interest in maintaining its presence there and to counter an order in which the Chinese leadership expected the surrounding countries of the region to kowtow to Beijing.

Some scholars have observed that the tributary system, when operating under a philosophy of Confucian universal

\textsuperscript{33} Fairbank and Goldman, \textit{China}, 112, 113, 201.
harmony, led to peace.34 David C. Kang, in his 2010 book, observed that between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries China did not engage in war with Japan, Korea, or Vietnam—at the time, the major kingdoms of the East Asian Confucian order.35 Because states peripheral to China adopted—in one form or another—ideas of the Confucian ethic, which involved a concept of Confucian universal harmony, it is arguable that all of these peoples adhere to a universal or Asian value system.36 Kang notes that there was no conflict because the four states shared common values in an international system based on a hierarchical structure with China at the top and these countries below.37

In contrast to a Westphalian world order in which the ideal is represented by sovereign nation-states in a balance of power with other major states in the system, the Chinese order was hierarchical with the Chinese emperor clearly at the top and with the other nations below. Other scholars have argued that Kang’s depiction of East Asian international relations is a distortion of history that cherry-picks supporting facts. Wontack Hong argues that the tributary system was a “glorified pro-

34 The Confucian concept of universal harmony posits that order, peace, and stability are assured when all parties to a political situation, whether they be ruler-subject, a group of civilizations or nation-states, a collection of citizens, etc., have a common set of values and arrive at a common set of governing concepts. Ultimately, this means that peace and order is assured when all parties to a political situation know their place in a hierarchy of political relationships established by a number of different political processes: king-subject, parent-child, merchant-customer, lord-subject, or prosperous state-developing state.
36 There is no single definition of an Asian value system. However, common elements of it involve: (1) respect for tradition; (2) a hierarchical view of order and stability, or more specifically acceptance of one’s place in a given pecking order; (3) respect for elders and ancestors; (4) a high value placed on education; (5) the prioritization of the welfare of the group or collective over individual interests and rights; and (6) in some Asian societies, an emphasis on stability and order over individual freedoms.
37 Kang, *East Asia before the West*. 
tection racket” in which China shook down those kingdoms weaker than itself while China paid off nomadic peoples along China’s steppes, depending on the nature and level of threat these peoples posed to China.\textsuperscript{38} A bridge between these two interpretations of the Chinese ancient world order is whether it is the pursuit of harmony or the Chinese inclination to pay off potential threats that provided the motivation for this type of system. The Chinese conception of strategic order comes down to four aspects: (1) a hierarchy of states, each with a clear understanding of their position within the system; (2) a strong sense of values, manifest in ritual behavior to signify compliance with the established order; (3) material exchange as a means to address tension in the system; and (4) the absence of the need to resort to force to maintain order in the system if all of the major players recognize their position in the hierarchy and have well-developed channels to resolve disputes absent the use of force.

Chinese scholars have vigorously argued that China has no desire to return to a tributary system and commentary that suggests otherwise is inaccurate. These scholars, including Yongjin Zhang and Shu Changhe, argue that instead of focusing on the ancient Chinese system demanding tribute, that Western scholars look at the Chinese concept of \textit{universal harmony}, which is really at the heart of how the Chinese tributary system worked.\textsuperscript{39} A Chinese notion of harmony as opposed to the Western ideal of balance, Chinese scholars argue, is a more

\textsuperscript{38} Wontack Hong, \textit{East Asian History: A Tripolar Approach} (Seoul: Kudara International Press, 2010).

durable formula for peace. Harmony is based on shared values, while balance, at least in an international relations sense, connotes stasis arising from two opposing forces unable to overcome each other. These scholars observe that the Chinese focus on harmony is pervasive in modern Chinese foreign and defense policy concepts.

The early foreign policy of the People’s Republic of China had aspects of the universal harmony theme. Zhou Enlai, China’s then-foreign minister, announced in the mid-1950s that the guideline for Chinese foreign policy was the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, known as the Panchsheel Treaty, which came out of the Bandung Conference of 1955. It called for countries to respect the sovereignty of all other nation-states, to not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, to treat other countries with mutual respect, to not invade and act aggressively toward other nation-states, and to not act like a bullying hegemon.40

A recent example of Chinese policy associated with a theme of universal harmony is the larger policy to manage its relationship with the United States, described as a new type of great power relationship.41 The concept, which originated in 2011, argues that the structural situation China and the United States find themselves in—that is, a rising power, an established hegemon, and an eventual overtaking in global influence of the latter by the former—will likely lead to major power conflict unless something creative is done to manage the relationship. The Chinese concept of a new type of great power relationship is supposed to be that creative solution. In it, the Chinese argue that the United States and China pursue the following path toward an improved relationship: (1) a policy of “no conflict, and


no confrontation”; (2) mutual respect for each other’s “core interests”; and (3) win-win cooperation. American interlocutors engaged in strategic dialogues with their Chinese counterparts wryly observe that the new type of great power relationship is easy to comprehend: all the United States needs to do is respect China’s vitally important interests, while China ignores all of America’s important interests.

So, does China want to return to a tributary system in the Asia-Pacific or not? If stated another way, does China want to dominate the Asia-Pacific region with China hierarchically on top and other nations of the region below? If this is the question, then the answer is probably “yes.” The evidence for this argument can be pieced together through a number of different examples: China’s push for an East Asia for Asians to the exclusion of the United States; China’s refusal to negotiate or discuss the South China Sea disputes with ASEAN as a unified, coequal body; China’s continuing enmity with its most robust regional rival, Japan, even though it would make strategic sense for China to make common cause with the Japanese, if only to ease the United States out of the region; and China’s downplaying of South Korea’s actual defense needs regarding South Korea’s request that the United States deploy a missile defense, known as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), in South Korea against North Korean missile threats, while China decries the perceived negative effect such a system would have on China’s own security needs. The discussion on China’s desire to return to a tributary system reinforces some of the conceptual definitions of strategic culture laid out in the opening chapter of this book. In this case, it illustrates how strategic culture refers to the social ordering of the system (either internal to a country, or externally among a number of countries) that individuals rely on to tell them how the world works, which norms and values should be upheld internationally, and which rules should govern state interactions.
Deterrence and Coercion: Two Sides of the Same Coin?

The use of force is an important aspect of strategy, but the associated concepts of deterrence and coercion are understood differently by the Chinese. Westerners, Americans especially, see these concepts as two separate constructs, each with different sets of norms, legal restrictions, accepted actions, and safeguards associated with them. But for China, these two constructs are not considered so distinctly, which causes confusion from those on the outside looking in at Chinese use of deterrence or coercion. To better understand the Chinese point of view, it is first helpful to understand their conceptualizations about power, which are part historical and part linguistic, and equally helpful is a good understanding of China’s historical foundations regarding sovereignty.

Essentially, Chinese concepts of sovereignty did not involve the religious, legal, and governmental checks and balances that Western societies accepted or imposed on their rulers. Although developed over centuries, the European system of governance involved kings having to share power over time with religious institutions, such as the Roman Catholic Church, ruling over societies with well-developed systems of law and legal jurisprudence. The Western calculus to use force, then, has traditionally taken into account significant religious and legal factors that invariably demanded a legal and religious justification, and which ultimately involved making a distinction between force designed to defend or retaliate and force designed to compel. By contrast, Chinese emperors did not suffer from similar restrictions on their power and came to develop well-thought-out ideas on how to use military power—either to prevent adversaries or citizens from doing something by deterrence or compelling these same parties to do something through coercive measures.

Arthur Waldron, a keen observer of the connection be-
between Chinese culture and concepts of security, has stated that in China there are different ways to say the word “power.” There is *li*, or the attributes associated with power—size of a population; number of men at arms that a ruler has access to; number of ships, weapons, etc.; and the size of the economy. There is *shi*, the skillful use of *li*, and *xing* (the strategic situation or net assessment) to bring about a desired political objective. And then there is *wei*; that is, the appearance of power or awesomeness, which by itself can generate political outcomes because adversaries and friends alike will behave differently around you depending on the degree of *wei* you possess. Of course, the skillful strategist uses *wei* through stratagems to coerce or negotiate a better political outcome for the state. Therefore, in China the ruler was not overly preoccupied with the justification of the use of military power and force, but instead was particularly concerned with the effectiveness of the use of force.

Another distinctive feature of Chinese strategic culture related to deterrence and coercion is the Chinese strategic and philosophic tendency to see political objectives intimately related to the military instrument; notwithstanding Clausewitz’s famous dictum, the West does not. When Clausewitz claimed that “war is the continuation of policy by other means,” the rejoinder to that phrase was that militaries were to be used to eliminate the armies of one’s adversary so that the state can impose its will on the adversary. Clausewitz described militaries as two wrestlers in a ring attempting to gain leverage.

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42 These concepts were presented during lectures at the U.S. Naval War College in the 1990s. However, the author heard Arthur Waldron make these remarks at conferences on Chinese strategic thinking in the latter part of the 1990s, in particular, a director of the Office of Naval Intelligence-sponsored conference at Lansdowne Conference Center, Leesburg, VA, in June 1996.

over the other, the goal of which is to throw and pin the other down.\textsuperscript{44} Despite Clausewitz’s claim that one was the extension of the other, giving the impression that war and policy making occupied the same conceptual sphere, he commented that ultimately the means through which the military serves the political objective is through combat, so warfighting must be the primary focus of the military. He writes:

\textit{If a decision by fighting is the basis of all plans and operations, it follows that the enemy can frustrate everything through a successful battle. This occurs not only when the encounter affects an essential factor in our plans but when any victory that is won is of sufficient scope. For every important victory—that is, destruction of opposing forces—reacts on all other possibilities. . . . Thus it is evident that destruction of the enemy forces is always the superior, more effective means, with which others cannot compete.}\textsuperscript{45}

Military historian Antulio J. Echevarria II notes that beyond Clausewitzian theory, in practice, the Western strategic tradition is to not view war as a continuation of policy by other means and instead sees it as an alternative to politics. That is, “politics brought war into being, but war existed as a violent alternative to politics, rather than its logical extension.”\textsuperscript{46} He observes that German, English, French, and American strategists, practitioners, and theorists have tended to use the Napoleonic wars and later Helmuth Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke’s campaigns as the ideal for thinking about wars. For these Western strategic thinkers, “winning wars meant winning battles, and

\textsuperscript{44} Clausewitz, \textit{On War}, 77, 87.
\textsuperscript{45} Clausewitz, \textit{On War}, 97.
that doing so would accomplish most, if not all, war time ob-
jectives.”47

This tradition lives on today in the way that Western politi-
cians talk about the use of force. American presidents have
said on a wide range of occasions that everything is on the table
(i.e., the use of force) but only after we have exhausted every
possible solution. The existence of this tradition of the phil-
osophical separation of the political and military spheres was
why Americans were so uncomfortable thinking about nuclear
weapons. Nuclear weapons are the ultimate political weapon.
Their absolute destructiveness limits their utility on the bat-
tlefield, and their actual use in the case of a full-scale nuclear
exchange would ultimately mean the end of the viability of the
states employing them; nuclear weapons are ultimately useless
as military weapons but quite as useful as a political weapon to
either deter adversaries or to coerce them.

If the Western intellectual tradition tended to separate the
political and military spheres, the advent of nuclear weapons
forced Western strategic thinkers into fully contemplating the
political use of these weapons. Deterrence was suddenly thrust
into the policy realm as a central and important guiding de-
fense concept. Preventing aggressive states from violating inter-
national law or attacking other weaker states conformed with
Western ideas of just war theory and the relationship of force
to political order. Coercion at that time was a much less pop-
ular idea among Western strategists, and it can be argued that
it would not have been politically sustainable in Western-style
democracies. Certainly, a policy by which the United States
forces other countries into compliance (even its former super-
power competitor, the Soviet Union) through the threat of a
nuclear attack would neither have been conducive to strategic
stability, nor would it have been a good fit for an internation-

al order the United States was trying to build following the Second World War. This international order was based on international law, human rights, equality of nations, and an international economic system that allowed any state to succeed or fail based on individual national effort. Since the early years of the Cold War, deterrence—either conventional or nuclear—has taken up a central position in Western defense policy. Coercion occupies a second-rung position and is often seen as a last resort, if at all, when other nonkinetic options have failed.

From the Western perspective, then, the primary political use of the military is to either defeat the enemy adversary (a military objective that supports a political one) or to deter aggression. Philosophically, the West has problems justifying that an important purpose for the use of force by a country is to coerce other countries into compliance, or at least to do so and remain consistent with the Western theory of just war. Examples where the United States has used force coercively (e.g., Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom) have taken place under conditions in which the United States has been attacked first, or in which the target country was perceived to pose an extraordinary threat to the national security of the country.

Returning to the Chinese concept of power and its uses, the Chinese have no similar scruples about the purpose of the military. If it can be argued that Clausewitz served as the philosophical underpinning for how the West thinks about strategy and the military, we must now turn to Sun Tzu to obtain a corresponding Eastern view. Scholars of Sun Tzu observe that he made a similar statement to that of Clausewitz regarding the purpose of military. In contrast to Clausewitz, Sun Tzu never claimed that the purpose of the military is to annihilate the ad-

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versary’s military for the purpose of imposing one’s will on the other side.\textsuperscript{49} Sun Tzu argued that the military is part of a more comprehensive policy of security that ultimately serves the political objective of the state. “The acme of skill,” Sun Tzu writes in \textit{The Art of War}, “is not for the General to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles.” He continues, “To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”\textsuperscript{50} This can be accomplished through the skillful combination of a comprehensive strategy: a mix of diplomacy, economic statecraft, alliance formation, and the use of the military instrument. If the military can best aid in this endeavor by maneuvering itself into a position to then threaten something that the king of an adversary state loves (e.g., a city or a specific territory), then the general has made proper use of the military instrument.\textsuperscript{51} If in doing so the strategist uses the military instrument to coerce the adversary into taking a course of action in line with one’s own strategic objectives, then the strategist has done well.

Culturally, the Chinese have a much wider acceptance of the different uses of the military. The military can be built up to the extent that its \textit{wei} (awesomeness) deters potential adversaries from attacking or coercing China (e.g., counter deterrence against the United States). The military can be used to attack adversaries on China’s periphery for the purposes of coaxing (or coercing) them into acceptance of Chinese dominance and punishing them for acting independent of Chinese interests (e.g., the Vietnam border clash of 1979). The military can seize territory of an adversary for the purposes of forcing them to negotiate a larger treaty defining the peace between China and the nation involved (e.g., the Sino-Indian border clash of 1962). The military can be used to bully, harass, and

\textsuperscript{50} Sun Tzu, \textit{The Art of War}, 77.
\textsuperscript{51} Sun Tzu, \textit{The Art of War}, 77.
wear down smaller countries to force them into accepting Chinese negotiated terms for maritime territorial disputes (e.g., the South China Sea territorial disputes from the mid-1970s to the present). Finally, the military can ultimately be used to annihilate the army of the adversary so that the state can impose its will on the enemy—for example, the PLA during the Chinese Civil War. This discussion, as with the previous sections of this chapter, again illuminates an element of the strategic culture debate. In this case, the unique Chinese view of deterrence and coercion is supportive of the definition presented in the opening chapter of this book, in that a strategic culture is a distinctive body of beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding the use of force, which are held by a collective and arise gradually over time through a unique, protracted historical process.

**Stratagem: A Chinese Way of War?**

As many scholars have described, Americans indeed have a peculiar way of war that contrasts distinctly with the way the Chinese have pursued war during their multimillennia history. To start with an American point of reference, historian Russell F. Weigley, in his well-known book on the American way of war, describes American warfighting throughout U.S. history as a combination of strategies focusing on attrition and wearing down one’s opponents through battle. This emphasis, Weigley noted, led to ever-increasing lethality and firepower to resolve military problems, and the ability to arrive at ingenious engineering and technological solutions. This observation might even be extended to a Western way of war, championed by such scholars as Victor Davis Hanson, in which the history of militaries in the West are characterized by the arrival of new

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53 Weigley, *The American Way of War*. Gen Ulysses S. Grant’s campaigns during the latter part of the Civil War immediately come to mind.
technologies, a mastery of logistics, and a period of adaptation. As a result, strategists and military officers learn to apply new technologies to military problems and develop new military doctrine, and then strategists and heads of state apply the new military capabilities to strategy.\footnote{Victor Davis Hanson, \textit{Carnage and Culture: Battles in the Rise to Western Power} (New York: Random House, 2002).} The history of warfare in the Western world can be described as a dynamic pattern dominated either by offensive weapons technology or defensive weapons technology.\footnote{William H. McNeill, \textit{The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force and Society Since A.D. 1000} (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).}

Arthur Waldron, the aforementioned scholar, notes that Chinese strategy and military endeavors, in contrast, have neither emphasized lethality and firepower nor engineering solutions. Moreover, he notes that Chinese military history is filled with examples where the contestants outmaneuvered forces, outwitted opponents, forced negotiations on their adversaries, or forced an adversaries’ allies to switch sides, which dramatically changed the strategic situation. China has had its share of technological breakthroughs, and certainly the arrival of new technologies did have an effect on the battlefield and dictated outcomes. It is telling that China invented gunpowder in the ninth century CE, yet this new technological invention was not harnessed against China’s Mongol enemies at the time—ironically, the Mongols overthrew the Chinese dynasty only one century thereafter.\footnote{Fairbank and Goldman, \textit{China}, 115.} Ultimately, the Chinese prefer maneuver over attrition to bring about a negotiated settlement instead of annihilation of the enemy through the introduction of some new weapon or technology.\footnote{Arthur Waldron, “China’s Military Classics: A Book Essay,” \textit{Joint Force Quarterly}, no. 4 (Spring 1994): 114–17.}

As opposed to the West, the most famous Chinese stories involving the military and warfare, Waldron notes, always
entailed stratagem and outwitting their opponent. The most famous such story, Luo Guanzhong’s *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, involves the hero, Zhuge Liang (181–234 CE), frequently outwitting his opponents on and off the battlefield. Even in the most famous foundational story in the West, Homer’s *The Iliad*, in which the eventual outcome of the Trojan War is determined by stratagem and trickery, it needs to be recalled that the use of a Trojan horse still involved engineering a solution (the creation of the Trojan horse itself) and that the Greeks resorted to this stratagem after every other military option had been exhausted, including a direct assault on Troy.

We can also see the differences between West and East in how the heroes are represented in these stories. In Chinese civilization the quintessential hero, Zhuge Liang, is most noted for his quick wit and ability to derive stratagems. In Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, although Odysseus ultimately comes up with the stratagem to defeat Troy (e.g., Trojan horse), the true hero is Achilles, famous for his attributes of strength and skill in killing his enemies on the battlefield. In the end, Western militaries to this day strategically or tactically depend on attrition, while the Chinese are interested in stratagem—including pressuring enemies to negotiate.58

Waldron observes that it is logical that Chinese civilization should prize stratagem and the ability to generate negotiated solutions to strategic problems. China encompassed territory far too vast, involving too large a population, and including too many powerful states or provinces for the central power to resolve all of its political problems through greater lethality. Chinese strategists had to come up with political-military solutions; they could not bully their way to controlling such a vast landmass and such a large population.59 For most of its history,

58 Waldron, “China’s Military Classics.”
the Chinese central authorities had to govern an area of territory exceeding 1 million square miles. Therefore, logistical, attrition-based warfare made little sense. As military professionals know, the overextension of lines of communication and supply lines leads to loss of power—not a position of strength.

A de-emphasis on technological change as the driver for strategy also makes sense from a geostrategic point of view. If one simply looks at a map of China, where would the Chinese state be confronted with relentless pressure from a peer competitor? China’s geography makes China relatively isolated from Middle East rivals, particularly Iran and other major empires coming out of that region. Slavic empires did not emerge until much later along China’s historical time lines. China dominated littoral Asia, with no threats coming from Japan, the Korean peninsula, or the Southeast Asian kingdoms. As mentioned before, the single most significant and persistent type of external threat to Chinese states were nomadic peoples, some of whom did develop military technologies—the mounted archer, the crossbow—to which China had to eventually confront and adapt. However, it was more often the case that Chinese statesmen ended up using political stratagems to neutralize threats. These stratagems included paying off invading tribes; forming alliances with one nomadic group of peoples against another; merging the children, especially the daughters of tribal chieftains, into noble Chinese families; and, if all else failed, absorbing a conquering nomadic enemy into Chinese culture itself (e.g., the Yuan and Qing dynasties were invading peoples who ended up becoming sinicized). In essence, Chinese heads of state and strategists are adept at formulating stratagems to manage a wide range of strategic problems; they are not prone to immediately go to an engineering solution or a strategy of attrition to solve security dilemmas.

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This preference for stratagem over engineering and technological solutions may explain, at least partially, how an advanced civilization such as China’s could, in the nineteenth century, fall technologically behind compared to the West. Some Chinese historians have observed that the Chinese state was so large that its energies were focused on managing a large and significant bureaucracy; some historians blame Confucianism, with its emphasis on hierarchical relationships as leading to the dulling of the Chinese drive to innovate. Moreover, scholars of Chinese philosophy have pointed out that the philosophical worldview in China made it less inclined to the scientific method. That is, in Chinese philosophy and cosmology, the Chinese did not differentiate between a subjective world in which we live now and an objective “other” world where truth resides. The Son of Heaven (tianzi) was sovereign of both the natural world and the supernatural world. In the West, by contrast, the American Judeo-Christian ethic is dominated by the idea of a monotheistic God who shall reveal universal truth at a time of their choosing. The Ancient Greeks also had a notion of a subjective world, and an objective world of truth as evidenced by Plato’s story of the cave in which humans live in ignorance of universal truth, and it is the philosopher’s calling to reveal truths to them through philosophical inquiry. These Western philosophical reference points contrast so deeply with Chinese thought that it is important to mark the points of departure.

Interestingly, the single most significant technological surprise confronting the Chinese state was the arrival of the Western imperialist powers by the sea in the nineteenth century that

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forced the Chinese to reconsider its continentalist approach. The Chinese had no answer to superior seapower and a military capability marrying control of the sea with the ability to sustain expeditionary armies ashore for long periods of time. China’s efforts to defeat this new type of threat through political stratagem proved fruitless. In the soul-searching that came out of the late nineteenth century to early- and mid-twentieth century humiliation of China, Chinese thinkers were convinced that mastering new technologies were central to meeting future threats to China, along with trying out new philosophies of governance—including Marxism-Leninism.

Consequently, it is the modern Chinese strategist’s common historical and cultural experience that technology is vitally important, it needs to be developed indigenously, and if necessary it needs to be borrowed, bought, or stolen if only to ensure the survival of Chinese civilization. These technologies that are appropriated from the West must be carefully introduced into China, for today’s Chinese, like their counterparts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, recognized that absorbing wholesale new technologies from foreign countries posed risks to the Chinese order. It is this balance of seeing the need to absorb advanced technology and new innovations while at the same time carefully screening the absorption of these new ideas that the Chinese frequently add the label “with Chinese characteristics” to imported foreign ideas or concepts to reflect this reality (e.g., “socialism with Chinese characteristics”).

A strategic culture that stresses stratagem combined with a judicious pursuit of advanced technologies has manifested in interesting ways in China. First, the Chinese have spared no expense or effort to borrow, buy, or steal military technology
The history of China’s defense modernization is filled with this type of behavior. The Chengdu J-20 stealth fighter is essentially a platform entirely lifted from the American Lockheed Martin F-22 Raptor. The Chinese have learned how to mass produce surface combatants and arm them with longer ranges and more lethal surface-to-surface missiles. Additionally, they have for the past six years been experimenting with and learning how to operate off of an aircraft carrier acquired from Ukraine and have just recently introduced an indigenously produced carrier. The Chinese are said to soon produce a large deck amphibious ship, similar to a U.S. Navy landing helicopter dock (LHD). Notwithstanding the Chinese effort to pursue advanced technology through the concerted efforts of numerous special programs and offices, these efforts appear to be part of a larger Chinese strategy to gradually nudge the United States out of the Asia-Pacific; the pursuit of advanced technologies is conducted in conjunction with a number of coercive activities aimed at the countries of the region but designed to erode American credibility. Significantly, the American strategic response to China’s defense modernization and its rise is to refocus efforts on widening the technology gap with China through a Third Offset Strategy and to enhance America’s ability to operate in a heightened threat environment caused by Chinese technological advances through an Air-Sea Battle Concept.64

It is evident that China marries defense modernization and the incorporation of advanced technology with its military

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to accomplish political and strategic objectives through stratagem. If China’s intention is to ultimately dominate the region and it intends to do so through a gradual erosion of American military effectiveness, then China’s force-structure development will be designed to do just that. Through a steady and persistent development of Chinese military capabilities, coupled with the closing of the technology gap with the United States, the Chinese are sending a strong signal to the United States, its allies, and other countries of the region that they are here to stay, U.S. military technology superiority is waning, China will soon be in a position to keep the United States from intervening in the region, and the region will be left with a dominant Chinese military. The message China is sending is that it is better to align with China now before it is too late. Finally, this discussion on stratagem as representative of Chinese strategic culture highlights one of the definitions presented at the beginning of this book. That is, this case in particular defines strategic culture as a state or nonstate actor’s shared beliefs and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and narratives, which shapes the ends and means for achieving national security objectives.

**Conclusion**

This survey of Chinese strategic and cultural history illustrates that China’s long and complicated history does not lend itself easily to broad generalizations about Chinese strategic behavior. In fact, China’s extensive and lengthy experience with military and strategic issues provides opportunities for analysts on either side of a debate about China’s future strategic trajectory to pick and choose what they want from history. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that the Chinese political leadership is unalterably marked by the fact that they live in a Leninist authoritarian system, and their most recent experience with war and conflict came about as a Communist polity. It
cannot be denied that the Communist experience and the historical experiences associated with fighting the Chinese Civil War, the War of Resistance against Japan, the Korean conflict, and the Cold War had an indelible impact on Chinese strategic thinking. Beyond this observation, it is safe to say, however, that watching China’s strategic behavior throughout its history has revealed a few patterns. First, the Chinese fervently believe that their strategic culture is defensive, even though Chinese history does not consistently support this view. The Chinese are not shy to use force if the use of force is designed to defend the state, or even to shape conditions enhancing the defense of the state. Second, the use of force within China has not always remained controlled and limited; sometimes the number of battlefield deaths in China’s wars has numbered in the millions.

This tendency to see their actions as defensive, while being oblivious to the fact that others see their actions as aggressive, is illustrated by some of the actions recently undertaken by the Chinese in the South China Sea. Chinese island reclamation, militarizing the islets China controls in the area through the construction of airfields and ports, emplacing radar and surface-to-air missiles on these islets, harassing foreign fishermen, and increasing patrols in the area are but a few select examples of this dynamic.

There is also a geographic component to how the Chinese view strategy. For most of its history, China has had to worry more about security threats emanating from within the Asian continent, and not from the Asian littorals. This created a continentalist mind-set that had Chinese emperors fixated on the problem of managing threats from along China’s steppes, which downplayed the significance of threats from the maritime domain. This strongly suggests that despite the Communist experience, the Chinese historical experience with its geography has made a significant impression on the Chinese perspective about how they think about security. Such a continentalist at-
atitude only required changing when the British appeared from the sea and initiated a century and a half of humiliation for China. In adjusting to the shock of that threat coming from the sea, it can certainly be argued that the Chinese response, including the development of a modern navy and the pursuit of modern technology to ensure China's military would never be outgunned again by any foreign invader, reflects the beginning of a departure from a continentalist mentality.

While it is probably unlikely that China wants a formal tributary system requiring that modern vassal states pay homage to China, a good argument can be made that China does desire a hierarchical international relations structure in the Asia-Pacific. That hierarchy, of course, would involve China on the top with the other countries of the region below. China most likely aspires to dominate the region so convincingly that the leaders of the countries in the region dare not make decisions that would draw Beijing's ire. It goes without saying that, in this vision, the United States would have little influence or presence in the region.

One need only look at Chinese nuclear doctrine to conclude that China has a different perspective with regard to certain strategic concepts, such as deterrence. Its “no first use” declaratory doctrine as well as its reliance on a secure second strike with intercontinental ballistic missiles numbered only in the hundreds (as compared with the thousands of missiles possessed by the United States and Russia) suggest a strategic calculus quite different than that of either the United States or Russia during the Cold War. Additionally, China's employment of its conventional forces—part shows of force to elicit a deterrent effect, part coercive to prompt rivals to the negotiating table—strongly suggests that the Chinese have much wider latitude than many other countries on the state’s use of the military as an instrument of policy.

Finally, Chinese force structure development and PLA
modernization appear to reflect a strategic outlook that combines both the pursuit of advanced technology (either through acquisitions from abroad or through indigenous efforts) with stratagems designed to generate substantial political effects favoring Chinese political objectives. Accordingly, we can conclude that the modernization efforts of the last two decades are designed to close the technological and capability gap between the two powers. The ultimate objective is to nudge the strategic environment toward a gradual departure of the United States from the region to a China dominating the region politically, economically, and militarily.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, strategic culture cannot be used as a predictor of precise strategic and military decisions of a state. As Gray noted, there are too many factors going into a specific decision to be able to generalize that a certain historical event in a civilization’s past is the exact cause of that decision. Strategic culture, however, can provide useful context in which we can understand the perception of decision makers as they review a variety of strategic options. Therefore, the fact that for most of China’s history its leaders have had much more to worry about from continental threats than maritime ones does not preclude China from developing a blue water navy and a power projection capability; at the same time, a continentalist mind-set would help explain China’s behavior over the past few decades. Why no full-fledged overseas military bases? Why the peculiar name of People’s Liberation Army Navy? Why has China’s military organization, until now, been structured on geographical internal defense and not on missions abroad, despite its increasing interests abroad? Strategic culture will not predict what China’s leaders will choose on their menu of strategic options; however, it will help us to understand what their preferences have been in the past, and why, and those preferences could shape the choices they pick in the future.
CHAPTER 3

DOES AFGHANISTAN HAVE A “STRATEGIC CULTURE”?  

by Vern Liebl

Pull out your swords and slay anyone that says Pashtun and Afghan are not one! Arabs know this and so do Romans; Afghans are Pashtuns, Pashtuns are Afghans!¹

In a recent publication, Ashley J. Tellis wrote, “All states arguably have unique strategic cultures, which invariably shape their political behaviors. The accumulation and use of national power, including material military capabilities, are constantly shaped by historical and social context.”² This is a fairly clear-cut statement, yet one has to wonder if the author ever really looked at Afghanistan. However, the purpose of this chapter

¹ Pashtun warrior poet and scholar, chief of the Khattaks, who died in 1698. Extract from Khushal Khan Khattak, “Passion of the Afghan,” in Afghan Poetry of the 17th Century: Selections from the Poems of Khushal Khan Khattak, trans. C. E. Biddulph (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1890). Today, the Khattak tribe, with nearly 3 million members, spans the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. They are part of the larger Kakai Karlanri confederacy.

is not to address the academic definition of strategic culture, as one can refer to Stuart Poore’s 2003 article exploring the debate between Colin S. Gray and Alastair Iain Johnston.³ This is more about how a people—in particular, those who we refer to as Afghans, and who are certainly not a homogeneous ethnic or linguistic grouping of people—view themselves through the nation-state context or through the strategic culture lens. Indeed, the Afghans do not consider themselves as a homogenous ethnic or linguistic group, but by taking this into account as we compare their experience with what we expect of nation-states, we can gain a better understanding of a country that has defied Western categorizations for most of its history, as Khushal Khan Khattak indicated above.⁴

**Is Afghanistan a State?**

Before exploring whether Afghanistan has a strategic culture—and if it does, what it may look like—there needs to be at least a brief exploration of whether Afghanistan can be considered a state, a nation, or possibly neither. Clearly, if the definition of state is explained as an entity that concerns all institutions and laws that organizes the public life of a group of people within a given territorial boundary (however elastic and temporary it may be in a political and historical sense), then it is a state in that meaning. Therefore, the next query concerns nationhood.

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Is Afghanistan a nation? Usually *nation* and *state* are used synonymously, as *nation-state* describing a single cohesive entity. In reality, the term *nation* can actually be described as something similar to an ethnic group that gives political meaning to their aggregate identity. Still, the very definition of the word *nation* does not actually clarify the situation. Nation, from the Latin *natio*—people, tribe, kin, genus, class, flock—is a social concept most commonly used to designate larger groups or collections of people with common characteristics attributed to them, including language, traditions, customs, habits, and ethnicity. With this definition, a community of people with a similar language, habits, and ethnicity can be a nation. In other words, Afghanistan clearly has several different nations—Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazara, Uzbeks, and more. So, Afghanistan may be termed a *nation of nations*.

As a pragmatic principle, when examining Kosovo, China, and Brazil in the other chapters of this book, they tend to possess one national identity and one language despite ethnic diversity. However, in reality, there are exceptions, such as the ethnic divisions within the same linguistic grouping like the Serbo-Croats, as a contrarian example. Unlike in some other countries with significant minorities or increasing numbers of immigrants, the overwhelming majority of the people in the three named countries are ethnically and/or culturally alike with a reasonably uniform cultural narrative. It is therefore relatively easy to examine what is or may be the strategic culture of such states.

**Ethnicity and Identity as Factors**

Afghanistan, despite Western presumptions, is not dominated by one ethnic group.\(^5\) In fact, just looking at the current

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\(^5\) For a recent exploration of this topic, see Whitney Azoy, “Post-Buffer Afghanistan: A Nation-State Here to Stay?,” in *Afghanistan, 1979–2009: In the Grip of Conflict* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 2009), 14–16.
Afghan national anthem is quite illustrative as to the ethnic complexities of Afghanistan:

This land is Afghanistan—It is the pride of every Afghan
The land of peace, the land of the sword—Its sons are all brave

This is the country of every tribe—Land of Baluch, and Uzbeks
Pashtoons, and Hazaras—Turkman and Tajiks with them,
Arabs and Gojars, Pamirian, Nooristanis
Barahawi, and Qizilbash—Also Aimaq, and Pashaye
This Land will shine for ever—Like the sun in the blue sky
In the chest of Asia—It will remain as the heart for ever
We will follow the one God
We all say, Allah is great, we all say, Allah is great

And they all claim to be Afghans. So it can be described as a nation, even if the 14 ethnicities identified in the national anthem, and the other even smaller groups not mentioned, maintain their own specific cultural narratives. This suggests that some form of strategic culture exists in that it remains one state despite its multitude of identities and 38 years of conflict. The nearly four decades of fighting began in December 1979 when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. The 10-year-long Soviet intervention (it clearly was not an occupation as Soviet troops did not physically occupy most of the country but did devastate large portions by air attacks) ended in 1989. It gave way to the Warlord Era (1989–96), followed by the Afghan Civil War/Taliban era (1996–2001), and then the U.S. intervention/Kabul government period (2001–present).

Adopted in 2006, the anthem is called the “Surud-e Milli” in Dari and “Milli Surood” in Pashro.
Despite possessing numerous potential catalysts for division and secession, there has been no major separatist movement to remove one or more ethnic groups from Afghanistan to join with any of the surrounding states, namely Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan (map 1).\footnote{In 2004, the author was told a story while in Afghanistan that, when Afghans were polled in late 2003 about the future of Afghanistan, not one of the 300 responses advocated breaking it up by ethnicity or language. There is no “reliable source” for this information, but it was frequently repeated within the Combined Joint Task Force 180 headquarters in Bagram as well as in the subsequent Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan headquarters, specifically among civil affairs and intelligence personnel.}

MAP 1
U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, adapted by MCU Press
Unhelpful as Neighbors

Two groups provide some support to separatist movements in other countries, one comprised of a small number of Pamiris in Badakhshan (mainly in the Wakhan Corridor area), who support the majority Pamiris of Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous oblast, a mountainous region in eastern Tajikistan. The other ethnic group are the Baloch of southern Afghanistan, some of whom support their ethnic relatives in Pakistan and Iran in their conflict with those respective governments. In the 1930s, there was an expatriate group of Turkmen and Uzbeks who supported the Basmachi Revolt in Central Asia against the Soviets, but that essentially died out due to thorough defeat in Central Asia, with most of the expatriates moving on to Turkey in the 1940s and 1950s. In none of the above instances was there any effort to divide Afghanistan; rather, their goals tended to involve attempts to fragment neighboring countries.

However, there are the Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group within Afghanistan (see map 1), some of whom could be described as irredentists. This means that they would like to see portions of modern Pakistan inhabited by Pashtuns restored to Afghanistan. There are some problems with this.

The Pashtuns of Afghanistan supposedly number around 13 million, although the last census was conducted in 1979 when a total of 15.5 million inhabitants of all ethnicities were counted. Today, the number of inhabitants in Afghanistan is

8 The majority of Pamiris in the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous oblast are Ismaili Muslims (or Nizari Sevener Shia) and are being supported in their very low-level insurgency by the Aga Khan Foundation, a charity not known for links to any insurgencies.

9 In Iran, this support is often given to Jaish al-Adl (or Army of Justice) and/or Harakat Ansar Iran (or Partisan Movement of Iran). In Pakistan, this Afghan Baloch support is given to multiple organizations; the Baloch National Front (a political umbrella organization) and/or the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), based both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Interestingly, Pakistan and the United Kingdom have declared the BLA a terrorist organization, but the European Union, India, and the United States have not declared it as such.
estimated at between 29 and 36 million, which allows for the
ingcrease in Afghan Pashtuns. Or, if one estimates the propor-
tion of Pashtuns at approximately 42 percent, extrapolating
from the 1979 census and applying that to 2017 population
figures, that gives the current estimate of 13 million Pashtuns.\textsuperscript{10} The irredentist theme results from the many Afghan Pashtuns
who would like to reincorporate their Pakistani Pashtun breth-
ren into Afghanistan. Pashtuns in Pakistan comprise almost
16 percent of the population, or approximately 31 million
Pashtuns.\textsuperscript{11} To date, there has been no groundswell of support
among Pashtuns in Pakistan for joining with their Afghan
brethren to form “Pashtunistan”—an old concept that includes
vast areas where Pashtuns have not historically lived, such as all
of Balochistan, much of the Hazarajat, and extensive Tajik-in-
habited areas. Basically, this is an advocacy by Afghan Pashtuns
to enlarge Afghanistan at the expense of Pakistan.

\textbf{The Near-Abroad Pashtuns}\textsuperscript{12}

Some “Pakistani Pashtuns” provide support to Afghanistan-
based insurgent groups, such as the Taliban, and some Pakistan-
based Pashtun tribes are trying to supplant Afghanistan-based
Pashtun (or Baloch) tribes by physically displacing them. The
primary example would be the Kakar tribe of the Gurghusht
tribal confederation. The Gurghusht, who occupy Pakistan’s
western border region of the Balochistan Province, have
worked to physically and violently replace the Alikozai tribe
of the Durrani tribal confederation, out of Sangin District in

\textsuperscript{10} Although, the 2015 \textit{CIA World Factbook} holds the Afghanistan Pashtun popula-
tion at 10.75 million.

\textsuperscript{11} This number comes from the 2012 \textit{CIA World Factbook}; accurately counting
Pashtuns in either country is difficult at best.

\textsuperscript{12} Pashtuns living in Pakistan refer to themselves as Afghans. It is the rare Pashtun
who identifies as a Pakistani, which for almost all Pashtuns indicates a \textit{Punjabi},
which is an insulting term.
Afghanistan’s Helmand Province. This entire effort is camouflaged by the Taliban conflict in southern Afghanistan, abetted by the struggle to control the opium trafficking network. However, the Kakar-Alikozai struggle cannot be classified as an irredentist movement or a separatist movement, as it is an intraethnic or intranational tribal war.

If the surrounding neighbors of Afghanistan are examined (even including the Pashtun tribes in Pakistan), one would find little, if any, evidence of irredentist desire to divide Afghanistan by either ethnic division or absorption of “kindred” ethnicities. Pakistan loudly declaims it wants no territory or peoples of Afghanistan. Apparently the thought of more Pashtuns is unpalatable at best, and Pakistan wants to formalize the Durand Line as a permanent border versus a frontier. For the peoples of western India, the Pashtuns represented the diabolical “other” and were the nightmares of many Hindu and Sikh Punjabi children for centuries—on the Hindu Kush mountains of Afghanistan, the name is believed to be Persian for “killer of Hindus.”

The people of Iran do not want to recover any part of Afghanistan lost to the Pashtuns. Despite some cultural affinity with the Farsiwan (or Persian speakers) of western Afghanistan,
Iran has no desire to fight over Herat, as it has been ruled largely by Pashtuns since the early 1700s. Linguistically linked to both the Aimaq, the Tajiks, and even the Hazara, the Persians are ethnically distinct from all three groups. Even the near-war of 1998 between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and Iran was provoked by the Taliban murder of Iranian diplomatic personnel, not over issues of land or ethnic irredentism.

Afghanistan’s northern neighbors—Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan—have no designs or desires for any Afghan territory. Those ethnic minorities in Afghanistan show no interest at all in seceding from Afghanistan and joining with those countries. For example, Uzbekistan has shown a willingness to host, in small numbers over the past few decades, Afghan Uzbek refugees, but they also have displayed an equal willingness to encourage the return of those refugees back to Afghanistan as soon as possible. Most of the Uzbek in Afghanistan are descended from refugees who fled Soviet forces in the 1920s and 1930s, having drifted apart from the remaining Uzbeks who survived the ministrations of Sovietization. All three named countries are far more concerned with their own internal security, meaning insurgent and separatist groups, than with Afghanistan.

In sum, to all five of the above countries, there are no irredentist claims on Afghanistan and there are no ethnic rebellions to be fomented, the Kakar tribal invasion notwith-

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16 All three ethnic groups speak closely related varieties of modern Persian, which is Farsi. The Tajiks of Afghanistan number approximately 11 million, the Hazara number approximately 6 million, and the Aimaq number approximately 1 million. The Persians of Iran openly discriminate against all three groups if they reside in Iran, especially the Hazara and the Aimaq, who often look Mongolic.


18 For a good examination of the relations between Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics, see Christian Bleuer and S. Reza Kazemi, Between Co-operation and Insulation: Afghanistan’s Relations with the Central Asian Republics (Kabul, Afghanistan: Afghanistan Analysts Networks, 2014).
standing. Additionally, none of the surrounding countries see any economic or strategic payoff even if they had designs to invade, occupy, or partition Afghanistan (map 2).

Looking at Afghanistan, there is opportunity for division, or to find support to weaken or divide the country into fragments. Pakistan is not at all shy in trying to manipulate Pashtun tribal factions to target an ethnicity or even incite sectarian strife in an effort to keep Afghanistan weak and divided. Pakistan uses these techniques to mitigate the historical threat of Afghan invasion and incursion eastward across the Indus River. Pakistan is trying to manage what it sees as not a military threat but more of a tribal (divisiveness) and social stability (crimi-
nality) security issue, and it is also engaged in a proxy conflict against India within Afghanistan. India supports Afghanistan precisely as a counterweight to Pakistan, diplomatically and economically where possible, and covertly via intelligence and support to anti-Pakistani insurgent organizations (e.g., the Baloch Liberation Army or BLA).

Yet, Afghanistan, as a case study for strategic culture, does provide insight into the concept and how to apply it to a place or places that seem unlikely to have strategic culture. By looking at Afghanistan’s history, there are historical and cultural patterns that can aid military advisors, analysts, and civilian scholars to better understand those places that do not seem to fit the definitive categories of strategic culture.

**Afghanistan’s Historical and Cultural Context**

The region that is now Afghanistan has been a part of the history of kingdoms and empires, very often divided among several. Due to its location, it has often been a crossroads as well, seeing conquering or defeated foreign armies usually moving east or west, usually committing widespread depredations in passing. But by the middle of the seventeenth century, something was achieved that marked the beginning of what we might call the modern world system, leading inadvertently to conditions that would help create an identifiable state of Afghanistan. This would also allow for an unexpected and disproportionate role for Afghans on the world stage.

**Mercantile-based Imperial Era**

This modern world system of the mid-seventeenth century was marked specifically by the creation of economic networks. The Dutch Republic (Republic of the United Netherlands), headquartered out of Amsterdam and building on the earlier efforts of the Spanish and Portuguese, managed to incorporate local and regional trade linkages into what history has come
to recognize as the first global hegemonic power of the “capitalist” world economy. This was a prodigious and rare feat in world history subsequently achieved later only by Great Britain and the United States. The Dutch traded through a series of corporations, via outposts and factories in such places as Recife, Brazil, in New Amsterdam (which became New York), and dozens of other locations. The largest corporation was the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, or the Dutch East Indies Company, normally identified as the VOC. The VOC controlled the most profitable portion of this new global economic entity, and a huge portion of that profit came out of trade with the Safavid Empire in Persia, which traded for, or more usually bought European goods, paying in silver. The Safavid Empire forces occupied as colonial territory most of what today would be referred to as southern and eastern Afghanistan, an area populated by Pashtuns.

In 1721, the Hotaki Pashtuns in that Safavid-ruled region rose in rebellion. By 1722, the Hotakis had not only freed themselves but had essentially driven the Safavid Empire out of existence except for some dynastic fragments who never re-

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19 It was neither truly a free market à la Adam Smith nor was it truly mercantilist, but it demonstrated characteristics that presaged modern capitalism.
21 A factory, from the Latin “to do,” was an establishment for factors (Latin—“doer”) engaged in the selling and receiving of goods on commission, usually transacting business without disclosing their principal. Typically located for safety and access, these could be called trading posts and were, in South Asia, often precursors to colonial expansion. In South Asia, the initial factories were established by the Portuguese (feitoria) in the fifteenth century, ultimately being displaced by the Dutch (factorij), the French (factorerie), and mostly by the English, except around Goa. Factories served simultaneously as market, warehouse, customs post, defense, support to navigation or exploration, and as the de facto headquarters or government of local communities. For more, see James D. Tracy, ed., *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350–1750* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511665288.
gained significant power or stature before being swept from history a few years later. This explosion of “Afghans” from the region of Kandahar, completely unforeseen, destroyed the economy of Safavid Persia, which immediately stopped trade with the VOC. The unforeseen loss of silver income sent a severe shock through the company. By 1725, the VOC was forced to retrench its economic and political networks, withdrawing from the Persian Gulf. It reconsolidated in a much-reduced structure in what would become known as the Dutch Nederlands Oost-Indie, or the Netherlands East Indies, basically ceding the western Indian Ocean to a new and upcoming trading power, the British joint-stock East India Company (or EIC).

By the early 1760s, the EIC was making astounding economic and political inroads into the Indian subcontinent territory. The EIC was freed from any serious competition from the Dutch, and the EIC was not seriously hindered by the French in the Indian Ocean during the global Seven Years’ War of 1756–63. The major limiting factors for the EIC at this time were the Moghul Empire, a declining but still powerful entity, as well as the rising Maratha Empire.

Yet, the impact of Afghans again changed everything. The Hotaki Afghans had been defeated by the Persian Afsharid Empire in 1738. The Afshari, with the death of Nader Shah in 1747, were then subsumed by a new Pashtun “explosion,” this time called the Abdali, who renamed themselves the Durrani.23 By 1750, Persia was conquered by the Durrani, who then repeatedly invaded India. By 1767, the Durrani forces had essentially destroyed the declining Moghul Empire, whose rem-

23 The 1747 Pashtun revolt against Nader Shah was led by an Abdali tribal leader, who was the captain of Nader Shah’s bodyguard, Abdul Khan. He assumed power as the emir of the Abdali, which he achieved by stealing the now dead Nader Shah’s mobile treasury and spreading it among the other Abdali tribal leaders. He then changed his name to Padshah durr-I durran, meaning “King, pearl of the age.” The Abdali tribal confederacy was thus renamed the Durrani.
nants would later be completely swept away by Britain in the wake of the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny. The rising Maratha Empire was brutally cudged into impotence with its remnants to be protected by the British Raj after 1818, for British economic and imperial benefit. These Durrani-led Afghan invasions and extensive destruction gave the EIC, and also the rising British imperial forces, a much stronger hand to act against greatly weakened regional powers throughout South Asia and ultimately drove others, such as the Sikhs, Rajputs, Punjabis, Baloch, and Sindhis, into the arms of the British as imperial volunteers or as allied princely state military forces.

The Durrani Afghans, through a series of vicious and self-destructive dynastic succession struggles, greatly weakened the western geographic part of the Indian subcontinent, allowing for extensive EIC and British imperial penetration. This British expansion also attracted imperial Russian interest vis-à-vis British interests in Afghanistan, especially security from Pashtun invasion or raiding and as an imperial buffer zone, as well as resurgent Persian Qajar interest in the Herat region.

By the early 1800s, the area today called Afghanistan was vital to the British as an area that no one else controlled to better secure the British Raj of the Indian subcontinent.

24 The Marathas were a Hindu warrior group originally from the Deccan Plateau, who in the mid-seventeenth century revolted from the Muslim Mughal Empire. They managed to establish a Hindavi Swarajya (an area of Hindu self-governance) in former Mughal lands. It was the Mughal-Maratha Wars of 1680–1707 that, in conjunction with the religious excesses of Mughal emperor Aurengzeb (ruled 1659–1707), was the main cause for the decline of the Mughals. The Durrani victory in 1761 over the Marathas at the Third Battle of Panipat (approximately 95,000 Maratha dead) checked forever Maratha expansion.

25 The Qajars were a Persian dynasty of Turkic origin who reclaimed eastern Persia from the Durrani Afghans and united it with western Persian (being ruled by the Lurish Zand dynasty from 1751–96). They ruled Persia from 1789 to 1925. It was the Qajars who provoked the Anglo-Persian War of 1856 over Herat, the British preventing Qajar repossessing of Herat and making it a permanent part of Afghanistan. For more, see Abbas Amanat, The Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831–1896, rev. ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008).
Imperial Competition

This series of events initiated what became known as the “Great Game.” It can best be described as an imperial geopolitical contest primarily between Britain and Russia, but with other minor players, such as the previously mentioned Qajar and on occasion the French, Ottomans, and Chinese. Afghanistan was the main locus of this long rivalry, initiated by competition in Central Asia bringing expansion of the Russian Empire and the concomitant destruction of the Khiva and Bukhara Emirates by the Russians. This Russian expansion and British failure to succor the emirates brought the Russians to the inchoate frontiers of the British protectorate of Afghanistan. This presence, along with Russian diplomatic ventures into British India and suggested hints at support of the Afghan emir, induced Britain to adopt a forward defense posture in Afghanistan. Subsequent British and Russian machinations in the Persian Gulf, involving the Persian Qajars over the issue of Herat, ultimately led to further British intrusion into the littoral areas of the Persian Gulf. Likewise, Russian, French, and Ottoman competition in Jerusalem provided flammable tender for the Crimean War of 1853–56 in the distant Black Sea, where Britain felt obligated to aid the Ottomans and French specifically because of the Russian-British rivalry over Afghanistan. Completely

aside from the political machinations, and from a personal level, Afghanistan was accepted by Britain as the place where an Englishman could prove his manhood in the Victorian era of Rudyard Kipling. Afghanistan became a locus of romantic danger, not a “state” feared as an invader.

Following the First World War, Afghanistan temporarily slipped from the global stage, although Turkish efforts to create a regional ally provided a stabilizing influence to the kingdom as it roiled with Soviet jockeying along its northern frontier (the previously mentioned Basmachi Revolt, the flight of refugee Uzbeks into Afghanistan, and the occasional Soviet “hot pursuit”) and several internal Pashtun rebellions (antimodernization uprisings). The era of imperial powers jockeying for control over present-day Afghanistan ended in the early 1920s, when the newly ascendant Soviets drove the British (and French) from the Caucasus, of which one side effect was to finally delineate the northern borders of the kingdom of Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, a Tajik briefly supplanted the Barakzai Durrani Pashtuns in 1929, but Pashtun political dominance

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27 Rudyard Kipling’s poem “Arithmetic on the Frontier” is a good literary example of this. That it was fully reciprocated by Pashtuns can best be seen in T. L. Pennell, *Among the Wild Tribes of the Afghan Frontier: A Record of Sixteen Years’ Close Intercourse with the Natives of the Indian Marches* (London: Seeley, 1909).

28 Afghanistan invaded British India in May 1919, quickly being repelled by a depleted Indian Army, primarily via the use of British airpower. This is known as the Third Anglo-Afghan War. Stalemated, Afghanistan and Britain signed the Treaty of Rawalpindi in 1919, which recognized the independence of the Emirate of Afghanistan and removed British subsidies. In 1926, the emir, Amanullah Khan, declared himself king and Afghanistan a kingdom. Additionally, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union had a minor military clash over the island of Urta-Tugai in the Amu Darya. It was initially occupied by Soviet troops; Afghan forces attacked them and ultimately a treaty was signed that specifically delineated the northern frontier. See Sergei Borisovich Panin, “Soviet-Afghan Conflict of 1925–26 over the Island of Urta-Tugai,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 12, no. 3 (1999): 122–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518049908430405.
was quickly reimposed. As the Second World War neared, Japanese and German engineers began the long effort to tame the Helmand River, an ongoing effort today. The Afghan government, led by King Mohammad Zahir Shah, while favoring the Axis, remained one of the few countries in the world that managed to sit out the war. Despite being neutral during the Second World War, Afghanistan was rife with foreign agents, primarily Italian for the Axis and British for the Allies, and occasionally prominent in Axis plans aimed at disrupting the British in India or, less often, aimed at disrupting the Allied position in Persia.

**Soviet Intervention and Aftermath**

Post–Second World War Afghanistan under King Zahir Shah began an intensive program aimed at modernizing the country, an effort that grew increasingly unpopular among much of the populace. The king’s prime minister, Muhammad Daoud Khan, who was also his cousin, became the prime motivating agent behind the modernization efforts. It was Daoud who requested assistance from both the United States and the Soviet Union, beginning a foreign aid race over Afghanistan by both powers. Daoud overthrew his cousin, the king, in 1973, dissatisfied with the slow pace of modernization the king wanted and invited greater Soviet influence in Afghanistan. It was the

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29 Habibullah Kalakani, an ethnic Persian from a small village north of Kabul. In 1929, with the Afghan Army distracted by Pashtun discontent in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces, Kalakani led a minor antimodernization revolt and attacked Kabul from the north. Aided by a serendipitous attack against southern Kabul by Waziri tribesmen from Paktia, he pressured the king into abdicating to him. Assuming the kingship in January 1929, he ruled for nine months, working to erase all traces of modernization, sometimes brutally. He was overthrown by Muhammad Nadir Shah, who reasserted the Barakzai dynastic line. Hanged two weeks after being deposed, he was buried in an unmarked grave. In September 2016, his reburial by the Ghani administration became political, ultimately resulting in one death and four injured. The Pashtuns refer to him by his pejorative nickname, which is Bacha-i-Saqao, or “water carrier’s son.”
increased influence of the Soviets in the 1960s and 1970s, the Saur Revolution in 1978, and then a regime change in 1979 that led to Soviet assistance to Afghanistan with the intervention of the Soviet 40th Combined Arms Army.

Lasting almost a decade, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, later called the Limited Contingent of Soviet Force-Afghanistan (LCSF-A), witnessed the deaths of approximately 2 million Afghans as well as forcing approximately 7 million into refugee status (with more than 4 million flooding into Pakistan). The Soviets lost 14,500 military personnel and 55,000 wounded before withdrawing. As imperial wars go historically, this was not a conflict that would seem to have been an existential threat to the Soviet Union, but it was. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was vastly overcommitted globally, with more than 5.5 million servicemembers under arms. The Soviets had to deploy multiple military components, such as ground forces, navy, air force, Air Defense Forces, Strategic Rocket Forces, KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti or “Committee for State Security”) military units, and Ministry of Internal Affairs internal police forces—many deployed in Europe as part of Warsaw Pact forces or along the Chinese border in the Far East. While the approximately 115,000 soldiers of the LCSF-A do not appear to be a large draw on Soviet manpower requirements, this was the first significant loss suffered by the Soviet Union, one inflicted by lightly armed religious guerrillas. That this was combined with casualty numbers made the losses a critical fact worth noting at the time as well as in the present. Indeed, historians have referred to Afghanistan as the Soviet’s equivalent to the American intervention in Vietnam; invasion and occupation drained the Soviet economy and

has been cited as an internal weakness leading to the fall of the USSR.32 The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, portrayed as voluntary in 1989, was followed by the rejection of the USSR’s rule by Soviet Bloc nations. Between 1989 and 1990, nationalist movements in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania, and the refusal of the Soviet leadership to commit military force to crush those movements, led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in July 1991.

Soviet involvement in Afghanistan was the last in a string of internal and external pressures that strained the Soviet Union and led to its collapse. That does not mean things suddenly became delightful for the people of Afghanistan. Withdrawal of a superpower also meant a loss of resources desperately needed to rebuild a completely devastated region, to reestablish a state structure, and to provide a safe future for Afghans of all ethnic groups. Pakistan extensively manipulated the internal situation of Afghanistan and exploited instability, ably funded by Islamist organizations from the Arabian Peninsula. Civil war exploded, adding further death and destruction. The dire situation created the conditions for the rise of a religious group, the Taliban, who by 1998 had assumed the status of a state called the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. It ultimately controlled almost 90 percent of Afghanistan by 2001.

At this juncture, Afghanistan again forcibly inserted itself onto the world stage. It was in Afghanistan that the terrorist organization al-Qaeda coordinated, funded, and selected the individuals who participated in the hijacked airliner attacks on U.S. targets on 11 September 2001. Initially stunned, the United States invaded Afghanistan, conflating the Afghan Taliban with the primarily Arab internationalist al-Qaeda. The Taliban were driven from Afghanistan by December 2001,

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32 A combined total of roughly 50,000 (15,000 dead and 35,000 wounded). Not included in the total are approximately 2 million Afghans dead, mostly civilian.
with most of the survivors initially fleeing to largely Pashtun areas of Pakistan. Since then, U.S. and other foreign military forces have maintained a presence in Afghanistan to suppress the Taliban and al-Qaeda and assure the survival of a “sort of democratic” Kabul-based government. As of 2019, this effort does not seem to be prospering with a resurgence of Taliban, al-Qaeda, and the creation of an even more violently extreme organization called Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP).

The point of reviewing the previous roughly 300 years of history associated with the area we call Afghanistan today is to show that any assumption that this geographically isolated, backwater area is of little importance is a gross mistake. Afghanistan and its inhabitants should be ignored at one’s peril, as they have shown a propensity to reach beyond their borders—however that can be achieved—to bring death, destruction, and vast global restructurings.

**Opium as a Transformative Agent**

One of the major reasons for the recent prolonged resistance of Afghan insurgent groups and supporting foreign Islamic fighters and a major cause of the failure of the Kabul-based government is the rapid growth of opium planting, harvesting, and trafficking. Opium has been grown in Afghanistan for centuries, but it was a localized product, with most commercially marketed opium originating in India or elsewhere. During the Soviet occupation, Afghanistan state control diminished and insurgents began growing opium to finance insurgent acquisition of weapons and support—combined, these two consequences of occupation inspired a significant uptick in opium growth. Moreover, during civil war, with the prominence of local warlords and few tangible resources to barter with, opium growth skyrocketed. By 2000, despite an advertised Taliban anti-opium campaign, opium trafficking out of Afghanistan went global.
Today, opium farming has taken root in Afghanistan as the primary cash crop, and trafficking with its concurrent corruption and erosion of effective governance is an existential threat to the current Afghan government and possibly its tenuous status as a state. Moreover, these problems exacerbate threats to the religious and moral integrity of the Taliban. If research coming out of organizations such as the United Nations is correct, as of 2019, approximately 80 percent of all opium grown globally is sourced from Afghanistan, from which almost 90 percent of heroin production is drawn from. To provide greater context, 40 percent of opium worldwide comes from Helmand Province alone.\textsuperscript{33} The result is millions of opium addicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Iran, Russia, and beyond. These hard facts are driving Russia and Iran to negotiate with the Taliban, who do not tolerate opium addicts within their ranks and have shown a marked ability to control the flow of opium. These actions simultaneously withdraw legitimacy from the Kabul-based Afghan government and provide the Taliban with political legitimacy. With a politically and militarily stronger Taliban, the United States decided to raise U.S. force levels in Afghanistan from 8,500 to possibly 14,000 or more.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{Religious versus Ethnic Narrative}

Within the context discussed to this point, it only gets more complicated, because if the question is asked (and it is), What is the strategic culture of Afghanistan today?—this author would have to respond by asking: Which one? While the historical review, combined with the ethnicity puzzle has been depict-


ed by this chapter, one needs to add to this brew another key variable—religion. The primary religion of Afghanistan is Islam, with approximately 85 percent of the population being Sunni Muslim. The Shia minority is almost completely Hazara (see map 1), with a tiny slice of Pashtuns located in eastern Afghanistan (a handful of Turi tribesmen mostly in extreme eastern Paktia and Khost provinces). In addition, there are approximately 200,000 Nuristanis in Nuristan Province, approximately 10,000 Zoroastrians (followers of a pre-Islamic religion) in far western Afghanistan, and minute pockets of Hindus (about 1,000) and an unknown number of Baloch Zikri Muslims (a.k.a. Mahdavia). It is therefore clear that, while Afghanistan has a main religion, most Afghans practice Islam in different ways and there are further conflicts with those who are considered outside of the mainstream religion.

The Pashtuns of Afghanistan (and Pakistan) follow an unwritten moral and ethical code that provides extensive rules and guidance for their behavior(s) and lifestyle(s). It has existed since at least the 1st millennium BCE. This system of law and governance emphasizes the personal responsibility of Pashtuns to continually explore its essence and meaning. It is interpreted as the way of the Pashtun. It is practiced widely among rural Pashtuns, which are the majority, and less so among those in urban areas. It has also been adopted among some non-Pashtuns, generally those who live among or near Pashtuns. As it has been present for so long, it has and does pose a direct challenge to Islam, which is a complete religious ideology on

35 Mainly of Dardic descent, they follow a variety of localized Indo-Iranian polytheistic practices and have been the subject of numerous Sunni jihads for the last 250 years or so. The author conducted several negotiations with the Nuristanis and learned of the Sunni Pashtun jihadi practices in person.

how to live one’s life. When Islam was introduced by way of war (jihad) in the late 600s, it was resisted fiercely by Pashtuns, who rallied around the Pashtunwali (unwritten ethical code). It was not until the 1100s that Islam became the major faith of many Pashtuns, and Islam was the single major remaining religion in Afghanistan only once the Mongols in the 1220s and then the armies of Tamerlane in the 1380s managed to exterminate Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism. Still, the struggle to convert continues in northeastern Afghanistan even today, aimed at the non-Pashtun Nuristani peoples who live adjacent to the Pashtuns.

Today, Islam is the overwhelming religious faith of most Afghans, yet it conflicts in many ways with the Pashtunwali. Other ethnic groups have similar or related “codes” such as the Balochmayar and the Turkmenchiliki, yet almost all Afghans, even those not Pashtun, are familiar with much of the Pashtunwali. The treatment of Afghans versus the treatment of Muslims in the case of killing is one conflict (revenge versus no harm to fellow Muslims), as is the treatment and status of women (with Islam being the much more tolerant “system”). There are enough significant differences between the Pashtunwali and the religion of Islam to create cultural confusion, which can be exploited and calls into question which strategic culture (or narrative) one should consider when operating in Afghanistan.

These religious differences have noticeable impact, depending on what the individual Afghan chooses to identify with. If an Afghan wants to identify with a specific ethnicity, that would presuppose an increasing awareness of the Pashtun plurality working hard for “Pashtunization” of all Afghans, something underway since Emir Abdur Rahman Khan’s rule in 1880–1901, which saw the slaughter of more than 50 percent of the Hazara population then. Despite an acceptance by all ethnic groups within Afghanistan, the Pashtunization effort
has not been notably successful when separate from genocidal methods of rule (something the Taliban would like to bring back) as the language of governance is still Dari (a close variant of Farsi spoken mainly by Tajiks).

If an Afghan chooses an identity based on religion, that presents several options as most Afghans are illiterate and depend on illiterate or semiliterate mullahs (religious leaders) for their guidance. There are essentially two options for a religious Sunni Afghan: one is Salafism, which can lead to the preoccupation with preventing taghut so as not to upset religious leaders or rulers, dissatisfaction with the government, and a trend toward the Taliban (or more recently toward IS-KP). Alternatively, Sunni Afghans can also pursue the influence and moderation that is espoused by Sufism and its practices. All of this is a gross simplification, but it needs to be noted.37

**Informal Security-based Institutions**

Considering several factors to this point—Afghanistan’s long history, the role of opium, and religious and ethnic differences—it is clear that Afghanistan might be a state but not a unified state. Therefore, an Afghan as an individual is a composite of several identities based on ethnicity, tribal affiliation, religion or sect membership, and region. Afghanistan, or the region we recognize as Afghanistan today, has traditionally not been under centralized control but under extremely devolved, or decentralized, rule.

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37 *Taghut* is an Arabic term for the following: the three-letter Arabic verbal root of ت-غ-ط, which means to “cross the limits, overstep boundaries” or “to rebel.” From this, taghut denotes one who exceeds their limits. This notion is associated with the three stages of disbelief in the Islamic context. The first stage of error is *fisq* (i.e., disobeying God without denying that one should obey), the second is *kufr* (i.e., rejection of the very idea that one should obey God). The last stage would be not only to rebel against God but also impose their rebellion against the will of God upon others. Those who reach this stage are considered as taghut. Taghut can be associated with Salafism, which is all about preventing *taghut.*
When looking for a strategic culture in Afghanistan, it is fairly accurate to say that any definition would have to take into account security institutions (tribal, dynastic, invading) that typify a significant emphasis on militarized culture at the lowest levels and intimate knowledge with the utility (both positively and negatively) of force. The two major competing ideologies—Islam and the Pashtunwali—are constantly competing with how to resolve disputes at all levels, peacefully or not, which creates confusion in identifying such a strategic culture. Regional order has always been important to those who reside within Afghanistan, with an apparent preference of organized forces to enforce peace. Additionally, that same preference for security through the use of force is influenced by the massive instabilities created by Persian, British, and Russian imperial intervention, Soviet invasion, U.S./Coalition intervention, and the pervasively corrupting glut of opium.

**Kin Networks**

Still, Afghans have developed an institutional device that might be at least the outline for a strategic culture, or perhaps something less than strategic culture—a strategic narrative. As amply depicted above, Afghans self-divide and do so even more granularly than discussed to this point. At the foundation of this division is not the tribe or ethnicity but the family, all of whom live in extended kinship networks. Expansion and growth of such networks leads to the development of clans and ultimately tribes (or for Tajiks, regionally based identities, such as Panjshiris, Badakhshi, or Andarabi). Afghans can and often do unite, however. Despite ethnic, tribal, or religious differences, Afghans will, when a threat arises that threatens all, come together employing a social-cultural device called the “manteqa.”

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The Manteqa

In addition to tribe or place or region where a person comes from or lives, the manteqa is another element shaping identity in Afghanistan. While other factors seem to divide Afghans, the manteqa builds solidarity into society and provides a foundation for considering how Afghanistan, as a nation-state, pursues its strategic culture. The manteqa is possibly the actual social and territorial unit of rural Afghanistan, but it is not reflected in formal governance structures such as districts or provinces. Commonly, a manteqa is composed of several villages or a cluster of villages where solidarity is shaped among the local population; higher- and national-level identities are only used in the advent of real or potential overwhelming threat. These manteqa do not have any administrative recognition, although traditional structures and committees exist at the manteqa level (i.e., shura-e manteqa, rish safedan-e manteqa, nomayendagan-e manteqa, or shura-e mahali). The manteqa and their committees are the missing interactive links between the federal, provincial, or district administration and the kin-

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39 The definition of community is complicated in an Afghan context. There are various terms in regards to the loci of rural community life, in addition to the term manteqa, which approximately means “area.” These other terms can be used or included under manteqa, those being qarya (usually translated as village) and qishlaq (settlement). None of these concepts have a standard administrative definition within the current local unit of government in Afghanistan, the district (woluswali). A district contains many qarya, qishlaq, and manteqa, yet none are formally associated with the district council or municipal administrative center. However, despite not having any formal administrative designation, the traditional institutional structures of manteqa, qishlaq, and qarya, normally called shuras (e.g., shura-e manteqa, shura-e qishlaq, or shura-e qarya, all of which are informal governing structures versus having any religious connotation), typically resolve conflicts over rangeland and agricultural land rights (village chakbashi, mirab, and zamindar can play key roles here, often with a respected mullah or sufi pir playing the mediator) within a given manteqa. For more on this, see Raphy Favre, Interface between State and Society in Afghanistan: Discussion on Key Social Features Affecting Governance, Reconciliation and Reconstruction (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: AIZON, 2005).
based village. The manteqa committees, part of an informal governance system and based on the Pashtunwali, are called jirgas. Jirgas, literally meaning circle to emphasize the complete equality of all Pashtun men, are normally used for resolving major tribal or interclan issues, such as conflict, land disputes, or serious crimes. As such, it is secular in nature and not based on religion, making it ideal for the manteqa.

Examples of how manteqa are used are numerous and encompass a wide range of threats from environmental to geopolitical. Security-wise, if Afghanistan is invaded by powerful outsiders (say, the Soviet Union) and most or all Afghans recognize that threat, divisive routines are dispensed with and most unite to fight the invader. If there is a natural disaster, such as a massive flood on the Helmand-Arghandab river system, everybody unites or they die. It is also used in peacetime, primarily to address water resource issues, which are an ongoing general threat to health and survival. For example, almost all water issues in Afghanistan are handled via this device and not by the government, aside from a few major projects. Coincidentally, when Afghanistan has attempted major projects through the government instead of the manteqa, such as the Helmand and Arghandab Valley Authority, they have been well-meaning and ambitious but not done well. Here are several examples of successfully using manteqa for water management at various levels:

Wakil and mirab-bashi (interprovincial manteqa)— for overall management, conflict resolution, scheduling annual maintenance, coordinating hashar (communal unpaid labor), collection of annual contributions, coordinating emergency response, and external coordination

Mirab and chakbashi (drainage basin manteqa)— management of branch water allocation and rotation, coordinating annual maintenance, and conflict resolution

Mirab and chakbashi (inter- and intradistrict man-
—managing system operation, supervising annual maintenance, supervising construction works, and collection of annual contributions

Zamindar/Mirab Canal Committee (village-level manteqa)—management of water allocation and provision of hashar labor for maintenance

It should be noted that, within all the above examples of water management using the manteqa device, security concerns (e.g., conflict resolution, communal labor, and collecting contributions) dominate. These instruments and resulting institutions are the foundation of the strategic culture of Afghanistan but exist outside of established governance structures. Any entity, however, that desires to exert political control and security over the area of Afghanistan depends upon this non-governmental structure, often unwittingly.

As a side note, there has been an extensive amount of publishing done on Afghanistan, writings that refer to the region as an “ungoverned space,” either in part or in whole. The above outline should put that tendentious view to rest. In some ways, it could be said that Afghanistan has an overabundance of governance at the village level.40

**Conclusion**

Depending on who is asking and who is answering, describing what the current strategic culture of Afghanistan is can bring various and often conflicting responses. Clearly, there is an emphasis on security, be it the Kabul government, Taliban, IS-KP, or outsiders such as Russia, Iran, Pakistan, or the United States, who also want security and control to prevent crossborder drug flow, insurgency actions, refugee migration, instability, etc. While Afghanistan could be a near-failed state, the historical

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40 Keister, “The Illusion of Chaos.”
record suggests that it directly influences not only surrounding countries but also many countries across the globe. Afghanistan is important, given its location and terrain, even though perhaps it should not be. Maybe it is—as Milton Bearden called it in 2001—a “graveyard of empires.” Or one might even argue that Afghanistan can be called the “destroyer of empires.”

In fact, an argument can be made that Afghanistan should not even be a state, because it was not much more than a buffer space between established states maintained to keep empires from clashing during the era of the Great Game. Yet, Afghanistan has been and remains a state with a national identity, even though it can be depicted, with apologies to Samuel P. Huntington, as a clash of minicivilizations. While Afghanistan might not fit into the traditional categories that Western thinkers use, and on which foreign policy analysts rely, viewing the nation through the lens of strategic culture has value. Asking questions about Afghanistan’s strategic culture answers some questions and raises others but, in the end, the questions themselves demonstrate how differently Americans think about problems of security and responses to them as compared to Afghans. Moreover, Americans need to be aware, when trying to find commonalities among Afghans, how diverse Afghans are themselves. Considering the endurance of Afghanistan despite invasion, intervention, occupation, and even genocide, it has continued to defy Western solutions to security. It seems clear that asking more questions about Afghanistan, as we have done here, may be more important than what the current answers are.


Brazil maintains a long history of partnership with the United States that started in 1826 and became more significant after World War II.¹ This chapter will explore some aspects of Brazilian strategic culture that are relevant to understanding how Brazil perceives threats and their major security concerns, especially in relation to the Amazon region. This understanding is particularly important for U.S. policy makers, government officials, and military personnel who regularly engage in diplomatic or security cooperation activities with Brazilians.

After a brief discussion of Brazilian strategic culture themes, this chapter will outline the two main institutional players in Brazil that have historically helped create, shape, and maintain strategic culture: the diplomatic corps and the military. The analysis will focus on the case study of the Amazon region that is center stage in Brazilian strategic culture. It will also present the processes by which these key players, and in particular the armed forces, have interwoven their long-lasting security

sensitivities—or strategic culture elements—into the national defense strategy. Once incorporated into the national defense strategy, these strategic culture elements trickled down to military doctrine and into military organizational culture. This process allowed for the strengthening of these themes promoted by the military, as these achieved a permanent status into a defense strategy that was broadly vetted by civil society. This magnified their reach and their scope, but it also consolidated their permanence into Brazil's policy making and institutions.

When writing about nations that may present a clear threat or danger to the United States, authors frequently focus on strategic culture themes that will give a broader understanding of a nation's motivations for action, its cultural peculiarities on security, or may even attempt to predict that country's future behavior in certain situations. Therefore, the strategic culture definitions used for these studies are often broad, thorough, and as all-encompassing as possible. Other authors have included an additional layer, expanding the study's scope from international relations into other social sciences, such as psychology and anthropology. Colin S. Gray endorsed Jack L. Snyder's 1977 definition of strategic culture, which illustrates this conceptual broadening:

*the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to [nuclear] strategy.*

This definition is central to this study, as well as Nayef al-Rodhan's, who contributes to an expanded view of strategic culture, one that encompasses "the emotionality of states (national pride and prestige) and the egoism of states (the pursuit

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of national interests).”3 Both definitions highlight the relevance of emotionality as a key element of strategic culture and both provide insights for understanding Brazilian strategic culture, particularly regarding the Amazon region.4

The emotionality of states approach, seemingly irrational to an outside observer, may illuminate the internal thinking of key governmental institutions and agencies, which are reflected in their organizational culture. Organizational culture is a topic that has been studied by various disciplines and through many approaches, and therefore it has no single widely accepted definition. For this study, organizational culture will be understood as “the taken-for-granted values, underlying assumptions, expectations, collective memories, and definitions present in an organization.”5 Organizational culture, in this context, will be used to shed light on the behavior of key institutional players—in this case, the Brazilian military. The analysis will include the processes that have resulted in the implementation of emotional elements of strategic culture into the organizational culture of the armed forces. Once consolidated in the national strategy, these elements upgraded doctrine and were thus incorporated into the military’s organizational culture. As the military continued to execute guidelines set forth by the new doctrine, these new patterns of behaviors were consolidated and strengthened in “conditioned emotional responses,” as described by Gray.6

Therefore, observing these processes can ultimately help

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U.S. government institutions and agencies that regularly engage with Brazilian military and civilian institutions to better understand the Brazilian armed forces’ organizational culture. In short, this case study will provide an additional layer for the understanding of certain emotional, unexpected, or seemingly irrational responses on the part of key decision-making Brazilian institutions that influence strategy, especially concerning the Amazon region. Specifically, this case study will shed light on two main issues. The first issue will address how the Brazilian military, and to a lesser extent the diplomatic corps, inserted certain themes and elements of strategic culture that shaped Brazilian national defense policies. These elements of strategic culture promoted by the military refer primarily to the strategic relevance of the Amazon. These views reflect a strong nationalism in relation to the Amazon as well as the consolidation of geopolitical views that combine nationalism, modernization, and development of the Amazon. These themes and others will be detailed in the sections below. The second issue addressed is how these ideas have guided military doctrine and influenced the organizational culture of the armed forces once they were incorporated into policy.

Why would this be relevant to U.S. policy makers or to government officials and military personnel engaged with their Brazilian counterparts? Many of the political, religious, and cultural differences between the United States and Iran, or the United States and North Korea, are evident due to polarized and antagonistic worldviews. The differences are so marked that it is expected that cultural sensitivities could trigger emotional responses from these states. These cultural sensitivities could also be triggered by certain topics or elements of strategic culture. However, when dealing with friendly, partner nations such as Brazil, which is a democratic nation that shares many similar cultural values, these cultural sensitivities that could trigger the emotionality of the state are not as easily under-
stood and may be more subtle. Nevertheless, there are topics or elements of strategic culture that could trigger the emotionality of these states as well. These potentially hot-button issues are embedded as an intrinsic part of the elements of strategic culture of all states. This case study shows how these elements of strategic culture make their way into the organizational cultures of the primary shapers of strategic culture in Brazil. Strategic culture may provide American policy makers or military personnel additional insights into how a partner nation might react when dealing with sensitive topics related to strategic culture or to its elements. This kind of insight could help them avoid unnecessary strains in relations resulting from miscommunication or misunderstanding.

The Primary Shapers of Brazilian Strategic Culture

Historically, the armed forces and the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministério das Relações Exteriores)—also known as Itamaraty—have been the most influential and stable institutions in Brazil, and because of this they have the most influence on strategic culture. The Brazilian military is one of the few governmental organizations in Brazil that is highly trusted by the public; according to one study, the military have a 68.1 percent approval rating, with similar or higher averages by other polls. Consequently, their actions and perceptions with regard to strategic culture reverberate throughout Brazilian society. A high rate of approval by civil society contrasts sharply with low trust in political institutions, a trend that continues to

spiral down as multiple corruption scandals undermine public trust in politicians and state institutions.\(^9\)

The Brazilian diplomatic corps, along with the military, also enjoy a high rate of public approval. Since the late nineteenth century, when the Brazilian borders were consolidated through peaceful negotiations, Itamaraty enjoyed the reputation of a world-class diplomatic corps and is a respected institution among Brazilians. Therefore, while in other countries, where leaders of religious groups, political parties, castes, ethnicities, or social classes are key to creating the strategic culture of their nations, the military and diplomatic leadership are central to the formation of Brazilian strategic culture. As in most nations, neither the culture nor the creators of it exist in a vacuum, and Brazilian history explains how these two groups became the primary influencers of Brazilian strategic culture.\(^10\)

*The Origins of Diplomatic Identity*

José Maria da Silva Paranhos, known as the Baron of Rio Branco (1845–1912), was the most renowned diplomat in Brazilian history and the patron of Brazilian diplomatic corps.\(^11\) As a diplomat and a historian, the baron masterfully settled Brazilian border disputes—many times resorting to international arbitration—but without the need to engage in military confrontation or all-out war. However, the baron still supported the existence of a strong deterrence, as he once proclaimed: “No State can be peaceful without being strong. It is very good

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to discuss treaties while having behind you a credible fleet.”

The baron’s successful negotiation skills benefited Brazil on numerous occasions and earned him the accolade of “father” of Itamaraty. His successful negotiations solidified the reputation of Itamaraty, both nationally and internationally. Therefore, Brazilian foreign policy has historically promoted Brazil’s identity as a peaceful nation. This identity has manifested itself throughout Brazilian diplomatic and military culture. For example, there is a strong belief that peace should always be pursued first, prizing negotiation and accommodation to avoid conflict. Over time, this cultural trait consolidated into an identifiable trait in Brazilian diplomacy, as Brazil always supports international multilateralism, favoring pacifist dispute resolutions, respect for principles of sovereign equality, non-interventionism, international legal frameworks, and human rights. These themes have evolved and became a part of the zeitgeist of national culture. In his inaugural class to students at the Brazilian diplomatic academy, the former defense minister, Raul Jungmann (2016–18), said that Brazil lives by the “mantra of soft power” and that “the nation represents a powerhouse of peace.” Additionally, he claimed that Brazil suffers “no threats” and presently has “no enemies.” From the baron to Jungmann, Brazilian diplomats have pursued a century of peace that suits the nation’s cultural and social values.

Other elements of this peaceful identity can be traced back to colonial times (1500–1822). Brazilian colonial history contrasts with the history of colonial Spanish America in four crucial ways. First, unlike the Spanish conquistadors, the Por-

tuguese colonizers were neither warriors nor Christian noblemen. Moreover, the Portuguese colonizers, as opposed to their Spanish counterparts, did not have to fight advanced civilizations, such as the Incas and Aztecs. Second, at the time of the Portuguese exploration of South America in 1500, there was no organized widespread indigenous society in the land that became Brazil; there were only scattered tribes of hunters and gatherers, such as the Tupí Guarani and Tapuias, living on a foraging existence. In sharp contrast with the experience of the Spanish in the Americas, there was no gold or silver found in Brazil for the first hundred years, making Brazil less profitable than the Spanish American colonies. Third, Portugal did not possess the same financial and military power as the Spanish, which made it more difficult to keep a tight grip on its American colony as had the Spanish. Fourth, the Brazilian independence from Portugal was relatively bloodless and nonviolent. This historical narrative of peaceful nation building formed a key feature of Brazil’s enduring strategic culture.

The Brazilian path to independence contrasts sharply from Spanish America’s violent wars of independence from Spain. When the Portuguese court fled from Napoleon’s forces that invaded Iberia in 1807, the British Royal Navy escorted the Portuguese court to Rio de Janeiro. The court settled in Rio de Janeiro from 1808 to 1821, and its presence brought unprecedented progress to the colony. Portuguese Prince Regent João VI (1769–1826) and more than 10,000 officials moved to Rio de Janeiro, which became the capital of the Portuguese empire for the next 13 years. The son of the king of Portugal, Dom Pedro I, declared Brazilian independence from Portugal in 1822, which was achieved in a relatively simple and easy manner. Moreover, it did not encounter

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much significant opposition from the Portuguese crown or from the Portuguese merchants who benefited economically from the status quo. While the opposing sides engaged in some scattered guerrilla confrontations, occasional demonstrations occurred, and plenty of political maneuvering took place, both sides avoided outright conflict.16

The Brazilian Military
Brazil’s history also explains why its military plays a key role in shaping strategic culture. After independence, Brazil spent the next 67 years as a peaceful empire. The first emperor, Dom Pedro I, was forced to leave for Portugal, for dynastic reasons. His son, Pedro II, enjoyed a long reign, which was only interrupted by the Paraguayan War (1864–70), until being deposed in 1889, which to this day was Brazil’s largest war. The Paraguayan War, also known as the War of the Triple Alliance, gave the Brazilian Army its main battle experience, and its only war in the nineteenth century.17 While some countries deemphasize the military after war, in the case of Brazil, the war helped bring the military into important political and cultural roles.

The war provided the Brazilian Army with iconic military heroes, allowed for the rapid expansion from 17,000 personnel to 100,000, cemented close relations with Argentina, and fixed the main operations on the southern borders for decades to come. The war also had a deep and lasting effect on politics within Brazil, with officers becoming important actors in Brazilian politics, which led to the creation of the Republican movement in Brazil in the 1870s. The Republicans were abolitionists and were behind the political effort that culminated

16 Hudson, “The Kingdom of Portugal and Brazil, 1815–21,” in Brazil; and Hudson, “The Second Empire, 1840–89,” in Brazil.
with eliminating slavery in Brazil. On 13 May 1888, Princess Isabel Cristina de Bragança e Bourbon d’Orléans (daughter of Dom Pedro II) signed the Golden Law, which by a strike of her plume literally abolished slavery in Brazil. With the military’s support, the Republican party led a political movement that also put an end to the monarchy in 1889.18 Amid a political crisis, Field Marshal Manuel Deodoro da Fonseca proclaimed the republic. Since then, the Brazilian military has been part of the country’s ruling elite and is deeply involved in the shaping of Brazilian strategic culture.

Another important event that shaped Brazil’s military strategic culture occurred during the interwar and World War II era. Brazil faced a series of political crises in the 1930s and 1940s that included Communist insurgency, revolutionary uprisings, and military interventions. The period was particularly marked by the presidency and the dictatorship of Getulio Vargas (1930–45 and 1951–54), a period known as Estado Novo (“The New State”). Vargas led Brazil during the polarization between Communism and fascism, a historical period that closely resembled fascism in Brazil.19 But it was a representative of the diplomatic corps—Brazil’s former foreign minister and former ambassador to the United States and a close friend to Vargas, Oswaldo Aranha (1894–1960)—who convinced Vargas to join the Allies in the war. Even though Vargas eventually followed Oswaldo Aranha’s advice, Brazil was late but joined the Allies in the fight against Germany and Italy in 1944.20

Even though Brazil joined the Allied forces late in the war,

18 Hudson, “The Second Empire,” Brazil; and Skidmore et al., Modern Latin America, 149–50.
the country did provide essential raw materials to Allied air and naval bases. In 1944, Brazil sent a combat division of 25,000 troops to Italy that fought alongside the U.S. Fifth Army during the Allied invasion. Vargas negotiated for some benefits with the United States in exchange for providing raw materials and bases. He also raised the Amazon’s strategic wartime importance, which resulted in successful exchange of economic and technical assistance from the U.S. government to advance long-term development goals in the Amazon region. Vargas’s regime laid the groundwork for the government’s public policies in the Amazon for decades to come, especially during the military rule, from 1964 to 1985.21

During the Cold War, an era when the world was characterized by two antagonistic regimes, the Brazilian military sided ideologically with the United States. However, in 1964, Brazilian democracy began to disintegrate. The country was engulfed in the political chaos posed by the threat of a Cuban Revolution–inspired Communist insurrection. As historian Thomas Skidmore described,

*The populist policies of Getulio Vargas constructed a hierarchical order through which the state created and controlled institutions for organizing urban workers. This posed a significant, but ultimately unacceptable challenge to the upper and middle classes, the latter largely represented by the military.*22

The urban guerrillas’ goal was to install a Communist state in Brazil, a proposal that clashed with the military. The military seized power and controlled the country for 21 years, leading

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the country through a progressive, bureaucratic-authoritarian regime.23

**The Concept of Grandeza**

During the 1970s and 1980s, the military forged an ideology that combined nationalism, modernization, and development that has continued to influence civilians and politicians alike. The centerpiece of their ideology was based on the concept of *grandeza* (greatness), which is the enduring belief that Brazil is destined to be great and that it has everything it needs to become a great power. This geopolitical deterministic belief was well developed by General Golbery do Couto e Silva (1911–87) in his 1967 book titled *Geopolítica do Brasil* (Brazil’s Geopolitics). His ideas as expressed in the book heavily influenced the army during the military regime.24 The Amazon’s strategic relevance was central to his geopolitical thinking. As previously mentioned, the Amazon’s importance was boosted by the Vargas regime during WWII, which resulted in economic and technical assistance from the U.S. government to advance long-term development goals in the Amazon region.

General Carlos de Meira Mattos was another author who also influenced military thinking in that time, especially regarding the Amazon. Like General Golbery, General Mattos also highlighted the importance of integrating the vast Amazon rainforest and basin with the rest of the country. Together, they made an imprint regarding the geopolitical component of grandeza, focusing on the certainty that Brazil was destined to be a superpower because of its immense and largely untapped natural resources.

In 1979, the military regime responded to political pressures for democratization by allowing for the creation of multiple

24 Golbery do Couto e Silva, *Geopolítica do Brasil* (Brazil: José Olympio, 1967).
opposition parties.\textsuperscript{25} These opposition parties gained momentum in the late 1980s, coinciding with the broader, worldwide movements for the end of Cold War, which prepared the way for the military to allow for the return of democracy to Brazil in 1985. In the early 1990s, after democracy was reinstated, the military’s direct political influence diminished, and though they were castigated by sharp budget cuts, their capacity to shape strategic culture did not subside. Nevertheless, after a 21-year military rule, the role of the armed forces dramatically changed in Brazil. After the redemocratization process began, the armed forces peacefully handed power back to civilians. Since then, the Brazilian military has been under the authority of an antimilitary, populist, socialist-oriented executive branch, a period that ended in 2018 with the election of Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a conservative former army captain who is highly supportive of the military. Notwithstanding, the prior two decades also coincided with one of the most severe economic crises that engulfed Latin America.

The crisis affected many countries in the region, especially Brazil, and included hyperinflation, the erosion of income, the decline of the middle class, and a sharp reduction in savings for all citizens. During the same period, the new congress deeply cut military expenditures and military pay. The military withdrawal from power coincided with an economic downturn, resulting in deeper budget cuts for the military. Because Brazil was already among the countries with the lowest levels of military expenditures, those cuts sharply affected military readiness and morale.\textsuperscript{26} Nevertheless, despite the military’s declining political influence and drastic cuts to its budget, it retained many prerogatives and remained a major actor on many issues,

\textsuperscript{25} “Governos Militares no Brasil (continuação),” Sohistoria, accessed 5 September 2017.
including being one of the major strategic culture players in the nation.  

**The Search for a New Role and Mission for the Armed Forces**

In 1999, the new civilian administration created the Ministry of Defense (MOD), combining the army, the air force, and the navy under civilian command. As the administration and the Brazilian armed forces searched for new missions and a redefined role in society, it became clear that Brazil needed a new national defense strategy. During the reshaping of national defense priorities, resuming deployment of Brazilian troops to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions was something that the Brazilian armed forces welcomed wholeheartedly. The 2005 UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti, called the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (Mission des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Haïti [MINUSTAH]), offered the Brazilian military the perfect opportunity to modernize its outdated equipment, boost salaries, acquire training, and align the military with the civilian government’s strategy.  

This new direction, in the form of a UN peacekeeping mission strategy, improved the country’s international standing and paid off in multiple areas. MINUSTAH provided the Brazilian military with much-needed training for their troops. Brazilian battalions conducted regular patrols and raids to pacify the most violent neighborhoods in Haiti, such as Cité Soleil. Upon their return to Brazil, the military used this training to launch similar cleanup operations in the crime-ridden neighborhoods.

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