Strategic Culture and the English School: Conceptualising Strategic Adjustment in the Nordic Region

A paper to be presented at the Nordic Network for Security Studies seminar in Oslo April 12 2002.

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1. Introduction[1]

The Nordic region seems to be in the midst of a thorough transformation-process, involving all of the countries in the region as well as the key institutional players. The aim of this paper is to define some of the key concepts needed for understanding and explaining this process. In particular, the paper focuses on sketching a method for differentiating between *structural* and *cultural* sources of strategic adjustment. The concept of structure connects the discussion to structural realism, while the concept of culture is linked to the theoretical debates within IR about strategic culture and international society. The method outlined in the paper borrows from Max Weber's use of ideal types and scientific realists' use of iconic modeling. The paper argues for ontological clarity in dealing with causal mechanisms (at the level of the *real*) that are used to explain grand strategies (at the level of the *actual*) and their *empirical* referents such a military doctrine or alliance choices. Three ideal types of strategic culture – realist, liberal, and revolutionary – are suggested as a hermeneutical tool for evaluating the potential *effects* of causal powers of strategic cultures *within* strategic thinking.

2. Structure

States coexist in an anarchic world with no central authority to mitigate their conflicts. The existence of military organizations within states is, according to structural realism, an imperative arising from the need to survive in a self-help system: states either take care of their security or suffer the consequences of being defenceless against external threats. The tragedy inherent in international relations, according to this line of reasoning, is that policies meant to increase the security of one state often end up being perceived as threatening by

[1] The discussion in this paper is related to the author's dissertation "Beyond the Nordic Balance", which analyses changes in the Russian-Finnish security dilemma during the last couple of decades through the method outlined in the following, and interprets the meaning of the findings through a systematic comparison with previous structural and cultural transformations in the Finnish-Russian security dilemma over the centuries. The following discussion is adapted from chapter 1, itself last updated almost a year ago, and very much in need of rewriting. All comments are more than welcome.

other states, forcing them to follow similar policies and leaving everybody worse off than before. Thus, structural realists claim, it does not *necessarily* take bad states to produce bad outcomes in international relations. The structural situations in which states find themselves vis-a-vis other states are often enough to explain the origins of mutual fear and distrust.

The structure of the international system, according to structural realism, is under constant pressure for change because of the differential growth rates of states. Just as anarchy makes states worried about the capabilities of other states, it makes states highly attentive to changes in the overall distribution of capabilities. An increase in the relative capabilities of one great power, according to structural realists, decreases the security and the range of strategic payoffs of other powers, thus creating an incentive for them to balance against the strongest power. For structural realists, "benign hegemony" is a contradiction in terms, since in an anarchic system other powers have no way to ensure the continuity of the hegemon's benign intentions. Structural realists thus see balancing as a systemic imperative, which leads states to correct the skewed balance of power in the system in order to ensure the survival of the system.[2]

How does the logic of anarchy influence the policies that states adopt in the sphere of security policy? Since states create military organizations primarily in order to survive in an anarchic world, military organizations tend to emulate their rivals. In structural realist theory, this is called the "sameness effect": competition causes states to adopt the military strategies, tactics, weapons systems and administrative techniques that have proven out to be successful.[3] Anarchy ensures that the failure to do so can mean the disappearance of the state.

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[2] It is worth stressing that the neorealist understanding of the imperative of balancing leading to counter-hegemonic policies is only one possibility for understanding the empirical results of balance of power policies. Michael Doyle has divided other aims of balancing into the following categories: counterpoise balancing (which takes into consideration proximity, not only power); equipoise (formation of two or more balanced coalitions); equality (equipoise which takes into consideration internal forms of balancing, such as devoting more resources to security); great power stability (survival of the major states); system stability (survival of all states); peace. Doyle, op. cit., pp. 163-167.

[3] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 127; Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), 15-39.

There are important qualifications that structural realists add to this argument.[4] First, it applies only to states, which occupy a roughly similar position in the international system. Great powers tend to emulate each other, because to be a great power one has to possess all major capabilities of a great power – or risk being vulnerable to others who have such capabilities. In the present international system, the minimum requirements for being a great power from the structural realist perspective seem to be a reasonably invulnerable nuclear second strike capability, a capability of projecting power beyond one's own borders, and the economic and technological base for sustaining these.[5] Likewise, small states emulate each other rather than great powers. Small states do not need power projection capabilities to survive, nor do they have much use for large nuclear arsenals. Instead, they maximize their survival by developing defensive capabilities or alliances that makes aggression more costly than the strategic payoff (sometimes called conventional deterrence strategies).

Second, the way in which states seek to ensure their survival is dependent on geography. States in the middle of the Eurasian landmass can be great powers even without possessing significant maritime power projection capabilities as long as they can project power on land (as was the case with the Soviet Union for most of the cold war), and mobile land-based missiles can compensate for the lack of a sea-based second-strike capability, if the territory of the state is large enough (as is increasingly the case with Russia). Geography also affects military policy through providing (or failing to provide) barriers to movement, cover from attackers, and distance for defensive depth.[6]

Third, technological innovations affect the way states seek to ensure their survival. At times when technological developments have led to a perceived increase in the mobility of forces (historically e.g. through the invention of chariots, horse cavalry, tanks, motor trucks, aircraft, bridging equipment), states with little defensive depth and no natural barriers have

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[4] William Wohlforth has called these "structural modifiers". William Wohlforth, "The Russian-Soviet Empire: a Test for Neorealism," *International Security*, vol. 27, (December 2001), p. 216.

[5] See e.g. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 71-74.

[6] See e.g. Glaser & Kaufmann, "What is the Offense-Defense Balance…", pp. 64-66.

found it hard to maximise their security solely through non-offensive ways. The consequence of such situations, according to structural realists, is an increase in the likehood of conflict, because of an increase in the advantages of striking first and because distinguishing between the motives of the potential adversaries (security-seeking or expansionist?) becomes harder. Nuclear weapons are usually considered to have the opposite effect, since the damage done by even a small number of strategic nuclear warheads is large enough to constitute unacceptable damage, thus raising the price of aggression and making nuclear wars practically impossible to win.[7]

3. Strategic Culture

At the level of theory, the development of grand strategy, military doctrine and war plans can be merely seen as an optimisation-process reflecting the distribution of capabilities across the system and the technological and geostrategic factors contributing to the offence-defence balance. In reality, of course, this is not the case - the military policies of states have been guided by fantasies of national missions, tragic misperceptions of balances of power or the intentions of other states, exaggerated beliefs in both offensive and defensive strategies, and by domestic considerations. Likewise, states have many times followed cooperative "other-help" policies, which have been explicitly aimed at defending international law and justice, even when that has resulted in imbalances of power.

One theoretical approach, which can be used to explain the origins of suboptimal and/or cooperative security policies, is the "strategic culture" paradigm, which was originally developed for analysing Soviet security policy.[8] The paradigm focuses on how elites and

[7] See e.g. John Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 19-20. The exception is the period when a state is in the process of acquiring nuclear weapons or possesses only a small number of them. Such a situation can increase the payoff of a pre-emptive strike by other powers, though the risks involved would still be considerable.

[8] A useful collection of articles utilizing the concept is Carl G. Jacobsen (ed.) *Strategic Power: USA/USSR* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990). The study of strategic culture and grand strategy is a growing industry. For references to recent works, see Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Spring 1995), pp. 32-44; Colin S. Gray, "Strategic culture as context: the first generation of theory strikes back," *Review of International Studies* Vol. 25, No. (January 1999), pp. 49-69;

decision makers assess and interpret the main characteristics of the international system in which they operate and how these assessments influence their views about security policy, and the use of military force in particular. In other words, the paradigm is concerned with the perceptions, beliefs, ideas, and norms that guide national security elites in their task of setting strategic priorities for the hard core of a state's foreign and security policy.

In contrast to studies assuming non-temporal optimisation and rationality, the strategic culture approach presumes that individual interests are constructed in the context of temporarily and logically consistent patterns of perceptions about a country's role in international politics and the use of military force to achieve political ends. These patterns, strategic culture theorists presume, are rooted in historically unique "early" or "formative" experiences of a state or its predecessor polity, and are influenced by philosophical, political, cultural, and cognitive factors as the state and its elites develop through time.[9] The German word *Weltanschauung* captures well the holistic dimension of strategic culture: while strategic culture it is reflected in the belief-systems that guide the making of foreign and security policy, it has its roots in interpretations of world history and the purpose of human collectives in world history. Thus, strategic culture is ultimately tied to fundamental philosophical questions about the meaning of life and the relationship between self and other.[10] It is worth noting that the strategic culture paradigm does not presume that strategic culture would be unchangeable or unrelated to changes in "objective" factors - such as the development of new military technologies or changes in economic growth rates among states - but rather that core strategic beliefs are so deeply embedded in political culture (and culture in general) that they tend to change slowly and to constrain the effects that changes in a state's security environment have on the state's security policy.[11]

Arthur Hoffmann and Kelly Longhurst, "German Strategic Culture in Action," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (August 1999), pp. 31-32.

[9] Johnston, op. cit., p. 1.

[10] Henrikki Heikka, "Beyond Neorealism and Constructivism: Desire, Identity and Russian Foreign Policy," in Ted Hopf (ed.) *Understandings of Russian Foreign Policy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 57-107.

[11] The presumed consistency has also a methodological dimension: to have any analytical meaning at all, strategic culture should be presumed to be reasonably persistent throughout historical periods. It is worth noting

The nature of strategic culture poses a major conceptual challenge to the researcher. In order to study strategic culture we need a definition that is broad enough to capture the cultural and philosophical dimension of strategic culture, while being at the same time limited enough to make possible the operationalisation and evaluation of the concept's causal relevance. In an influential article, Alastair Ian Johnston has divided strategic culture scholars into three "generations" according to the approach they have taken to tackle these conceptual challenges.[12]

The "first generation" identified by Johnston arose from Cold War debates on nuclear strategy during the early 1980's. Jack Snyder's classic research report on Soviet strategic culture aimed to contribute to the American debate about strategic targeting plans and to raise the question of whether the Soviets would share American assumptions about "flexibile" and "limited" nuclear options.[13] While Snyder's theoretical approach remained ambivalent – he did not explicate the causal relation between strategic culture and strategic choice - the work of Colin Gray and David Jones on US and Soviet strategic culture reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the first generation.[14] According to Gray and Jones, strategic cultures are shaped by a number of relatively stable factors, such as historical experiences, national character, and geography and they lead consistently to certain type of behaviour. The appeal of the first generation theories is in their explanatory and predictive power: if strategic cultures change slowly and pervade practically all levels of security policy from grand strategy to tactics, then strategic culture is a very useful concept indeed for scholars and decision makers when they assess the behaviour of states. The weakness of the first

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that in this sense the paradigm differs from constructivism, which presumes that national self-images are a function of interaction and can therefore change rapidly and be relatively easily influenced from outside.

[12] Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 36-43.

[13] Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Options* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, R-2154-AF, 1977).

[14] David R. Jones, "Soviet Strategic Culture," in Carl G. Jacobsen (ed.) *Strategic Power: USA/USSR* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), pp. 35-49; Colin S. Gray, "National Styles in Strategy: The American Example," *International Security*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (Fall 1981); See also Colin S. Gray, "Strategic culture as context: the first generation of theory strikes back," *Review of International Studies* Vol. 25, No. (January 1999), pp. 49-69.

generation theories, as pointed out by Johnston, was their mechanical determinism concerning the relation between culture and behaviour, which made it hard to evaluate the causal relevance of strategic culture. Moreover, in order to achieve their logical consistency, the first generation theories had to resort to sweeping simplifications about national strategic cultures and to rule out the possibility of the existence of multiple strategic cultures within one country.[15]

The "second generation" of strategic culture theories identified by Johnston, made a clear distinction between strategic culture and behaviour, as well as between declaratory and secret doctrine. Bradley Klein, for example, claimed that the defensive nature of US nuclear doctrine was merely a declaratory one, aimed at providing a culturally acceptable justification for operational strategy, while the "real" strategy stressed war-fighting in defence of US hegemonic interests.[16] In the Nordic context, the difference between official (public) doctrine and unofficial (secret) doctrine has been emphasised, among others, by Wilhelm Agrell and Pekka Visuri.[17] While the distinction between declaratory and real doctrine helps avoid some of the pitfalls of the first generation theories, it also raises questions about the nature of the relationship between culture and behaviour, which are left largely unanswered by the studies. To what extent are elites socialised into strategic culture? How conscious are elites about the distinction between the declaratory doctrine and "the real" doctrine? How can we evaluate the causal relevance of strategic cultures, if the "real" doctrines are not public?

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[15] Johnston, op. cit., pp. 37-39; Exactly the same problems can be found in a more recent Finnish study of Soviet military policy by Markku Salomaa, see Salomaa, *Teräksenkovaa politiikkaa: läntisiä arvioita Venäjän sotilaspolitiikan suunnasta* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 1995).

[16] Bradley S. Klein, "Hegemony and Strategic Culture: American Power Projection and Alliance Defence Politics," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (April 1986); Bradley S. Klein, "The Textual Strategies of the Military: Or, Have You Read Any Good Defence Manuals Lately," in James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (eds.) *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989).

[17] Wilhelm Agrell, *Alliansfrihet och atombomber: Kontinuitet och förändring i den svenska försvarsdoktrinen 1945-1982* (Liber: Stockholm 1985), esp. pp. 19-24. See also Pekka Visuri, *Turvallisuuspolitiikka ja strategia* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1997), pp. 411-413; Pekka Visuri, *Totaalisesta sodasta kriisinhallintaan: puolustusperiaatteiden kehitys läntisessä Keski-Euroopassa ja Suomessa vuosina 1945-1985* (Helsinki: Otava, 1989), pp. 15-21.

The third generation of strategic culture theorists, which Johnston identifies himself with, has sought to make the concept of strategic culture "testable" in the positivist sense. This is done by treating "strategic culture" as an independent variable and "behaviour" as a dependent variable, and pitting the cultural explanation of behaviour against alternative explanations, such as realist and institutionalist ones. Johnston's own work exemplifies this approach.[18] He defines strategic culture as an entity that appears in the form of "a limited, *ranked* set of grand strategic preferences over actions that are consistent across the objects of analysis and persistent across time".[19] By claiming that culture materialises in the form of preference ranking and behaviour, Johnston is able to make his definition falsifiable: strategic culture is persistent if preference ranking is persistent; strategic culture matters if there is a high correlation between ranked strategic preferences and actual strategic behaviour. Since Johnston's approach shares the same positivist epistemology as most theory-testing attempts within the neorealist research program, let me point out its weaknesses in some detail in the following.

4. Explaining strategic choices

Constructing and evaluating causal explanations of the behaviour of polities brings up some of the most fundamental questions of social sciences.[20] Arguably the most popular epistemological position taken by IR scholars in the debate over causality is the empiricist-positivist approach, which is based on the Humean notion of causality as a matter of empirical regularities. Causal explanations, according to this approach, are based on observations about how a certain event or state of affairs is followed by certain other events over and over again. The approach does not require an understanding of the generative

[18] Other key works include Jeffrey W. Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint during World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[19] Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, p. 38.

[20] The following discussion draws mainly on ideas developed by Ekström, Hedström, and Swedberg. See Mats Ekström, "Causal Explanation of Social Action: The Contribution of Max Weber and of Critical Realism to a Generative View of Causal Explanation in Social Science," *Acta Sociologica*, no. 2, vol. 35 (1992), pp. 107-122; Peter Hedström & Richard Swedberg, "Social Mechanisms," *Acta Sociologica*, no. 3, vol. 39 (1996), pp. 281-308.

properties or causal mechanisms at work – cause and effect are treated as separate categories that do not depend on each other for their constitution. Instead, causal explanations are built on explaining events by one or more law-like formulations, which are presumed to express universal empirical correlations.

Much of the debate around structural realism is based on an empiricist-positivist epistemology, with advocates of structural realism seeking to show how balances recurrently form in international systems and how great powers emulate the organisational and technological innovations of other great powers,[21] while their critics seek to show that the empirical record suggests otherwise.[22] As mentioned above, the debate about strategic culture seems also to be moving into the field of positivist epistemology.

There are several fundamental problems in evaluating the causal relevance of structural realism and strategic culture from an empiricist-positivist angle. Most importantly, structural realism does *not* claim that there would exist a causal link between international structure and foreign policy behaviour, which could be tested in the positivist sense. Structures, according to Waltz, do not determine state behaviour, they merely "encourage states to do some things and refrain from doing others".[23] Waltz has explicitly denied that a "positivist standard" of searching for a correspondence between empirical observations and a theory's predictions could be used to evaluate structural realism. According to Waltz, state behaviour inconsistent with structural pressures does not necessarily falsify a structural theory, since the behaviour might be a result of misperceptions of structural factors, or of some kind of domestic pathologies. In a recent article, Waltz uses Mussolini's unfortunate decision to bandwagon with, rather than balance against, Hitler as an example: the fact that Mussolini made a mistake does not falsify the structural claim that he *should* have balanced against power, as

[21] E.g. Layne, "Unipolar Illusion"…

[22] E.g. Schroeder, Vasquez., op. cit.

[23] Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 91, no . 4., p. 915.

he later found out.[24] Waltz's position thus suggests that *interpretation* of the motives of states is crucial to the evaluation of structural theories.

The problems raised by positivist–inspired tests of strategic culture are quite similar. A major analytical problem created by importing positivism into the study of strategic culture arises from the distinction between culture and behaviour: How can we interpret the meaning of (strategic) behaviour if not within the context of (strategic) culture? The positivist approach, in which behaviour is used to evaluate the causal relevance of culture, presumes that "behaviour" (as something "out there") would not in itself be a constitutive part of culture, and that it can thus be studied separately from culture.[25] In essence, the weakness of positivist strategic culture theory echoes the above-mentioned problems in positivist versions of structural realism. In both cases causal analysis is based on treating state behaviour as something separate (or separable) from the temporally, culturally and spatially contingent processes, which give *meaning* to deeds. The Humean view of causality underlying both approaches implies that we cannot gain knowledge of the causal relation between structure and behaviour or culture and behaviour as such – all we can gain scientific knowledge of in the Humean sense are the empirical regularities between the independent and the dependent variables.

At first sight, remaining faithful to Waltz's view of causality seems to leads us away from Hume and closer to the Weberian notion of causal explanation as *interpretive understanding* (*Verstehen*). The Weberian approach leads the researcher to study the social and cultural *meaning* of what is being causally explained. Interpretive understanding thus becomes a crucial component of causal explanation: from the Weberian perspective one cannot explain the link between cause and effect in social life without understanding the meaning that the activity under study has for the subject. Such an understanding, in turn, can only be gained by studying social activity in the context of the culture in which it is embedded. While quantitative correlations can lead Weberian scholars to focus on certain research puzzles, the

[24] Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," p. 915.

[25] On this point see also Colin Gray's critique of Johnston's positivist theory of strategic culture. Colin S. Gray, "Strategic culture as context," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 25, no.1, (January 1999), p. 53.

idea of general laws is rejected by them, because universal concepts are, by definition, not rooted in the concrete cultural reality of social life.

Methodologically, the Weberian approach implies that causal explanations of action are to be based on reconstructions of the intentions of actors within the specific cultural context in which the action takes place. Here the concept of *ideal type* is central to the method. The ideal type refers to "an expression of how persons would act if they would act rationally in relation to a certain goal in a certain situation".[26] It is thus a social construction of a presumed element in social reality in its logically precise form. This means that Weberian ideal types are "unhistorical" in the sense that they represent forms of behaviour in greater logical consistency and unity than what we can find in actual empirical reality.[27] The concept serves in part as a heuristic devise focusing attention on behaviour deviating from the ideal type, thus making possible the articulation of the distinctive cultural characteristics of observed behaviour.

A Weberian method for evaluating structural realism and strategic culture theory would lead one to look at the implications of strategic culture by contrasting it with an ideal type of explanation for strategic optimisation based on rationality.[28] There is however, a problem in such a comparative method: the emphasis on cultural contextuality usually leads Weberians to reject the idea of science as an endeavour of uncovering non-observable, ontologically existing, structures and processes behind observable events, while for example Waltz's conceptualisation of structure as a really existing social mechanism with generative powers seems to imply the ontological existence of precisely such entities. This, in turn, implies that while strategic optimisation (based on instrumental rationality) is closely related to behaviour such as balancing and the emulation of organisational and technological instruments of

[26] Ekström, op. cit., 112.

[27] See e.g. Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Translated, Edited and with an Introduction by H.H. Gert and C. Wright Mills) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948), p. 294.

[28] Charles Kupchan's method comes rather close to this approach. Kupchan, op. cit., 24-32; See also Henrikki Heikka, Culture and Strategic Optimisation, *UPI Working Papers* 27/2000.

survival, it does not enjoy the same status in Waltzian neorealism as a really existing social mechanism with causal powers, as does the concept of structure.

How then, would it be possible to assess the importance of culture while remaining true to the epistemology and ontology of structural realism? It seems that the conceptualisation of causal explanation found in scientific realism seems to offer some help. The essence of scientific realism is "elucidation of the processes that *generate* the objects, events, and actions, we seek to explain".[29] Structures as well as mental processes are taken to have causal powers – causality is thus seen as an ontologically existing property.[30]

Central to scientific realism is the idea of reality as stratified. The abstract realm of causal mechanisms and properties (the *real*), the effects that they produce (the *actual*), and observable reality (the *empirical*) and are treated as related, but not reducible to each other. In short, causal analysis according to scientific realism seeks to uncover properties and mechanisms that exist relatively independent of their effects, but which become empirically observable only in historically contingent, culturally specific circumstances. This means that when analysing causal mechanisms in social reality we are dealing with *open systems*, where generative mechanisms (structures, processes etc.) are always in complex interaction with other generative mechanisms. This is, of course, the case with the natural world as well, but nature, unlike social reality, provides (at least in theory) the possibility of *closure* – the procedure of isolating the effects of one generative mechanism from the effects of others. In social reality, we can never observe causal powers in their purity because closure cannot be attained. Social phenomena emerge from causal complexes, where various generative mechanisms operate to reinforce, modify, or neutralise each other. Because of this, decisive

[29] Ekström, op. cit., p. 115.

[30] In Roy Bhaskar's words: "Things have powers that they do because of their structures, then, and we can investigate the structures that generate the powers, and to an extent predict the powers from the structures. Structures cause powers to be exercised given some input, some 'efficient cause', e.g. the match lights when you strike it. In asking about the structure generating some power of some entity, we are asking about the mechanism creating an event. A mechanism in this sense is not necessarily mechanical in the sense of the Newtonian mechanics. It could be an animal instinct, an economic tendency, a syntactic structure, a Freudian 'defence-mechanism'." Roy Bhaskar, *Plato etc. The Problems of Philosophy and their Resolution* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 43. Cited in Heikki Patomäki, "How to Tell Better Stories About World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 2, no. 1 (March 1996), p.118.

test situations, according to scientific realism, are in principle impossible in social scientific research.[31]

Since effects in open systems are caused by the interaction of multiple causes, it is more appropriate to talk about causal *tendencies* rather than causal laws when referring to the relationship between generative structures and their effects.[32] This, it seems to me, is the essence of Waltz's idea of balancing: at the level of the real, the structure of the international system creates an incentive for balancing against power, but at the level of the empirical we witness events, which have in part been produced by the interplay between structure and other factors (misperceptions, domestic power plays, economic interests, cultural beliefs etc.). When evaluating the explanatory power of structural realism we should thus also search for other causal mechanisms that might be part of the causal complex producing the observable events.

However, studying the effects that causal mechanisms (in the real) have on observable behavior (in the empirical) in social life forces us to confront the fact – pointed out by Waltz as well as Weber – that observable behaviour is always embedded in particular cultural, temporal and spatial settings. Thus, in order to uncover causal mechanisms we must engage in hermeneutical analysis of the meaning that actors attribute to their behaviour in particular settings. Here I suggest, in line with Scandinavian scientific realists such as Ekström, Hedström, and Swedberg, that the Weberian method of using ideal types in order to search for causal processes that lie behind observable correlations, comes quite close to the scientific realist search for non-observable causal mechanisms. More precisely, idealisations can be used to lead the way for the discovery of causal relations and their modelling: In Ekström's words: "Conceptualisation and theory construction refer to a process whereby we abstract from context-dependent data in an endeavour to capture the not directly-observable causal mechanisms and structures that generate observable phenomena and events. The

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[31] On open and closed systems, see Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979), pp. 47-68; Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994), 30-69.

[32] Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, pp. 158-169.

search for hidden causes is nothing metaphysical or less than scientific but a fundamental aspect of causal analysis of social actions, which calls for constructions of concepts and theories."[33]

At a very general level, the research strategy can be defined as process-tracing: a search for evidence of (non-observable) causal mechanisms that have the power to produce an observable effect. An example of process-tracing might be a case study on the formation of certain ideas (e.g. the "cult of the offensive", or the doctrine of mutually assured destruction), and the way the idea surfaced in political debate at a certain time and finally, after a political bargaining and decision-making process, became a rule with causal relevance over behaviour (such as the adoption of an offensive doctrine, or a certain kind of nuclear posture). Careful application of counterfactual methods can be also be useful in creating research puzzles and in bringing theoretical rigour to process-tracing.

5. Strategic Culture and International Society

A major problem in existing studies of strategic culture is the atomistic way in which culture is treated: strategic culture as an analytic concept is used to refer to temporally persistent ideas within one state (or empire), while the wider cultural context – the extent to which similar strategic beliefs are held by other major actors in the system - is not incorporated into the analysis. It seems to me that assessing the causal relevance of ideas within one state is rather hard without considering the cultural context – the extent to which the given international system can be considered a "pure" anarchy or a rather ordered international society - in which that action takes place. In the following, I will therefore try to make the case for studying the strategic culture of individual states in the context of strategic beliefs shared by actors across the system.

[33] Ekström, op. cit, p. 117. Compare this to Waltz's advise for the evaluation of theories: "Evaluating a theory requires working back and forth between the implications of the theory and an uncertain state of affairs that we take to be the reality against which the theory is tested."… "[W]e should test a theory in all of the ways we can think of – by trying to falsify or confirm it, by seeing whether things work in the way the theory suggests, and by comparing events in arenas of similar structure to see if they follow similar patterns." Waltz, APSR…

At this point, I believe strategic culture theorists might benefit considerably from work done within the English School of international relations, especially the writings of Hedley Bull.[34] What makes the English School particularly interesting for scholars of Nordic security, is its treatment of balance of power not as a state of nature, or a state of affairs arising naturally from anarchy, but as an *institution* which provides *order* into interstate relations. Order, according to Hedley Bull's definition, refers to a pattern of international activity, which aims to sustain four goals: the preservation of the system and society of states itself; the maintenance of the sovereignty of individual states; the preservation of peace (as subordinate to the two previous goals); limitation of violence and stabilisation of possession by rules of property.[35] Within this context, the balance of power, Bull claims, has fulfilled three functions, all of which have contributed to the goals of order. First, the general balance of power has "prevented the system from being transformed through conquest into a universal empire". Second, local balances of power have "served to protect the independence of states in particular areas from absorption or domination by a locally preponderant power". Third, general and local balances of power "have provided the conditions in which other institutions on which international order depends (diplomacy, war, international law, great power management) have been able to operate".[36] Thus, in contrast to structural realism, Bull's definition of order incorporates a moral dimension: the role of the balance of power is not only to create balances against aspiring hegemons but also to act as an institutional basis for norms and rules promoting justice.

The difference between the structural realist and English School notions of the balance of power can be seen in structural realism's treatment of the Cold War and the European nineteenth century balance of power system as fundamentally similar systems (the only major difference being the number of poles, and the existence of nuclear weapons in the Cold War system), while the English School sees a radical difference in the thinness of a common

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[34] The English School originates in papers presented to the British Committee for the Theory of International Politics, many of which concerned the nature of state systems. See e.g. Herbert Butterfield & Martin Wight, *Diplomatic Investigations* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966).

[35] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 16-19.

[36] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 106-107

culture between the Cold War superpowers and the numerous cultural bonds uniting European great powers in the previous two centuries. As Hedley Bull wrote in 1977: "In the European system of those centuries one factor that facilitated both the maintenance of the balance itself and co-operation among the powers that contributed to it was their sharing of a common culture, both in the sense of a common intellectual tradition and stock of ideas that facilitated communication, and in the sense of common values, in relation to which conflicts of interest could be moderated. Among the United States, Soviet Union, China and Japan there does exist, as will be argued later, some common stock of ideas, but there is no equivalent of the bonds of common culture among European powers in earlier centuries".[37] Thus, if structural realists attribute ontological primacy to the material structure of the international system, the English School takes a step in bringing culture back in by arguing that systemic order is related to the existence of a common intellectual tradition and values among the main actors in the system.[38]

Studying strategic culture within the context of the English School thus leads one to look at how cultural factors figure in the processes in which states succeed or fail in constructing instruments for managing dilemmas of collective action. According to Bull, the key concept for uncovering the role of cultural factors in international relations is *rules*, which he defines as "general imperative principles, which require or authorise prescribed classes of persons or groups to behave in prescribed ways".

Rules, Bull argues, can have the status "of law, of morality, of custom or etiquette, or simply of operating procedures or 'rules of the game'". Either way, their function is "to spell out the

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[37] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 115.

[38] From this perspective, the idea of common culture can also be seen as interlinked to the "sameness effect". The English School's perspective leads us to look at the intricate relationship between, on the one hand, advances in military technology, and, on the other. hand, social and political change The argument for the causal connection between these two levels was made already by Edward Gibbon, who – somewhat ethnocentrically – claimed that the transfer of military techonology for non-European peoples, such as Russia during Peter the Great, went hand in hand with "Europeanisation", the more general "progress of arts and policy".) For a historical survey of this problematique, see Jeremy Black, *War and the World: Military Power and the Fate of the Continents 1450-2000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Jeremy Black, *European Warfare 1660-1815* (London, 1994).

kind of behaviour that is orderly".[39] This implies, of course, that rules are merely social constructs and that their causal relevance depends upon whether they play a part in the calculations of those to whom they apply. Bull provides a long list of requirements that determine the effectiveness of rules as social institutions: Rules must be made, communicated, administered, interpreted, enforced, and legitimised. They must also be capable of adaptation and be "protected" against developments that would undermine them.[40]

According to Bull, the extent to which states share common "rules of the game" is dependent on the extent to which the states share a common culture or civilisation. Elements of a common culture, in Bull's words, include "a common language, a common epistemology and understanding of the universe, a common religion, a common ethical code, a common aesthetic or artistic tradition".[41] These cultural elements, Bull claims, help in constructing the "rules of the game" in two ways: "On the one hand they may make for easier communication and closer awareness and understanding between one state and another, and thus facilitate the definition of common rules and the evolution of common institutions. On the other hand, they may reinforce the definition of common interests that impels states to accept common rules and institutions with a sense of common values."[42]

Obviously, defining whether an international system qualifies as an international society involves difficult problems. International systems may have some elements of a society, and the acceptance of these elements may vary. According to Bull a society of states (or international society) exists "when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another and share in the working of common institutions". In practice, Bull claims, the existence of an international society is reflected when states "respect one another's claims to independence"… "honour agreements into which they enter"… and are "subject to certain limitations in exercising force against

[39] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 54.

[40] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 56-57.

[41] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 16.

[42] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 16.

one another". A central element in the formation and existence of international society is international law. According to Bull, international law helps maintain order and the idea of society in international relations through performing three functions. First, it identifies "as the supreme normative principle of the political organisation of mankind the idea of a society of sovereign states". Second, it states "the basic rules of coexistence among states and other actors in international society". Third, it "helps mobilise compliance with the rules of international society".[43]

One way of assessing whether the English School helps us understand aspects of strategic decision-making in international relations better than structural realism, can be inferred from the above. Before describing in more detail a method of doing so, let me briefly outline the main idea behind the method.

As argued in the earlier discussion about structural realism, the realist idea of order being maintained primarily by the balance of power is derived from the Hobbesian dictum "where there is no common power, there is no law". In other words, structural realism maintains that in the absence of a sovereign there can be no binding rules of behaviour, and therefore legal reasoning in international relations is merely a question of "positive international morality" rather than of "proper" law. However, from the perspective of the English School, the realist interpretation of the relationship between law and order in international relations seems to be based on two fallacies. First, in the real world, international law *does* rest on the idea of coercion, force and sanctions, just like municipal law. Second, even if anarchic political systems lack a central authority, they might still have a *decentralised* political authority – the international society – that exercises the "force monopoly" of the community.[44]

Thus, from the perspective of the English School, the extent to which international law is followed and enforced is a question about the extent to which states perceive themselves as part of international society. It follows from this that assessing the causal relevance of the

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[43] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 140-141.

[44] Bull, op. cit., pp. 130-131.

idea of international society for strategic decision-making is not a purely empirical question focusing on whether a supranational authority exists or whether states follow international law or not – it is also a question about the role that the principles of international law play in the strategic thinking of statesmen. In particular, it is a question of whether the thinking of political decision-makers reflects an "attempt to shape decisions in relation to an agreed body of legal rules".[45] According to Bull, this is the normal state of affairs in international relations: "If it were possible or meaningful to conduct a quantitative study of international law, it might be expected to show that most states obey most agreed rules of international law most of the time".[46] As an example of an aberration of this tendency, Bull provides Bolshevik Russia, which not only broke international law through her foreign policy, but stated her rejection of some of its fundamental principles, thereby revolting against the idea of international society itself, leading, according to Bull, to a local and temporal weakening of the decentralised authority – the international community - in the international system.[47]

Assessing the ways in which the idea of international society affects strategic thinking and security policies of states raises several methodological questions. Let me next discuss these questions in more detail within the context of the theoretical approaches outlined so far.

6. On Method

Using Weberian ideal types as a methodological tool rejects the conceptual realism of scientific realists in the strictest sense. From the Weberian perspective, ideal types of strategic cultures can be seen as reconstructions of certain contexts of meaning, which help us explain the emergence of certain types of strategic thinking. Ideal types of international systems (e.g. differences in the thickness of a common culture in the system) can similarly been seen as reconstructions of contexts of meaning, which affect the strategic choices of states. Thus, the aim here is *isolation of causal relationships through abstraction*, or "iconic modelling" in scientific realist discourse.

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[45] Bull, op. cit., p. 129.

[46] Bull, op. cit., p. 137.

[47] Bull, op. cit., p. 138-139.

By formulating the research question carefully, we can focus our enquiry into the point where interpretive understanding meets causal-explanatory research. A useful first step in this direction would be to follow the Weberian method in explaining meaningful action through categories of means and ends in specific cultural settings. In international relations literature, the concept used to refer to the way in which polities balance ends and means, both in peacetime and war-time, to fulfil the interests of the polity is grand strategy. [48] The concept captures nicely both the way in which grand strategy acts as the entity, which gives meaning to observable deeds (the "means" of fulfilling the national interest), and as the source which helps us understanding why a polity seeks to deal with its long term threat perceptions the way that it does (the "ends").[49] In scientific realist terms, we can talk about grand strategy as existing in the level of the *actual*, something which is produced by generative mechanisms (e.g. the imperative of balancing, a strategic culture, national traumas etc.) at the level of the *real*, but which we can observe only at level of the *empirical* through referents such as official documents, strategic debate, decisions about, military reform, procurement and deployment of military hardware etc. [50]

Thus, in evaluating the causal relevance of strategic culture, it seems helpful to think about the connection between strategic culture, grand strategy, and security policy, as a *causal relation* between three levels of reality, the real, the actual, and the empirical, which cannot

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[48] A grand strategy, as defined by Barry Posen is "a political-military, means-ends chain, a states' theory about how it can best 'cause' security for itself".Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 13. A grand strategy defines a polity's vital interests, the threats to those interests, and how to best employ a state's political, military, and economic resources to protect those interests. See Christopher Layne, From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy," *Intrenational Security*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Summer 1997), p. 88; Paul Kennedy (ed.), Grand Strategies in War and Peace (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 4-5.

[49] The term "grand" does not mean that the concept could only be applied to great powers. In Finnish, the meaning of the concept *kokonaisstrategia* ("total strategy") is roughly identical to the meaning of grand strategy, as is the meaning of the German word *Gesamtstrategie*. See Pekka Visuri, *Turvallisuuspolitiikka ja Strategia* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1997), pp. 8-12.

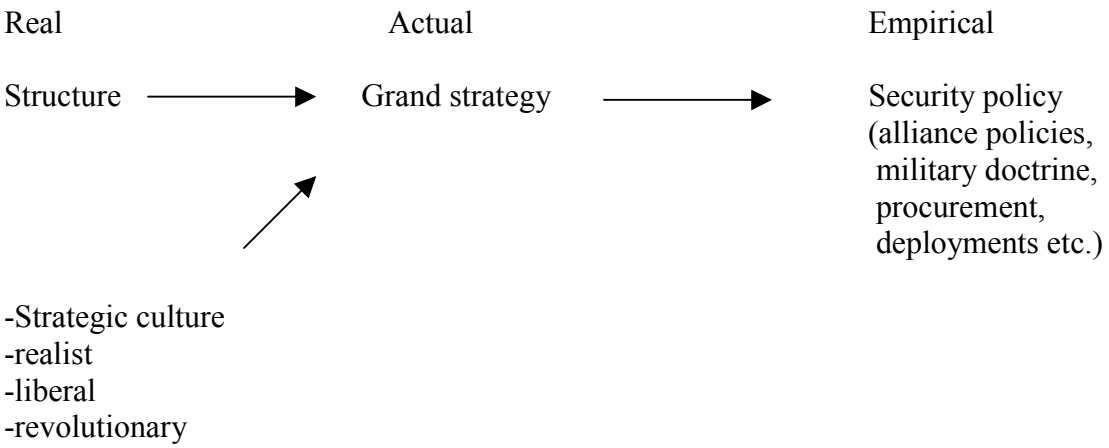
[50] Military doctrine is a key source for reconstructing the grand strategy of a state. Military doctrine is the subcomponent of grand strategy that deals explicitly with the military means of that a state uses to defend its interests. In particular, a military doctrine answers the questions: What means shall be employed? How shall they be employed. Posen op. cit., p. 13. A military doctrine is a particularly important component of grand strategy, because it affects directly states' perceptions of and reactions to one another.

be reduced to each other. This means that a grand strategy that would diverge from a given strategic culture could imply a break in the continuity of a strategic culture (and, consequently, a weakening of the explanatory power of the strategic culture approach in the case), but that does not necessarily have to be the case. In other words, a grand strategy cannot be used to falsify the explanatory power of a strategic culture, since the practical scope of grand strategies covers a wide range of activities that are partly dependent, among other things, on the economic, technological, and geographic factors (e.g. polarity, the technical aspects of the offense-defense balance, geostrategy) at any given moment, and cannot be explained by strategic culture alone. (The means for satisfying for example a desire to build or maintain an empire, or a desire to build large offensive forces, might - at the level of the empirical - look very different at different times or in a different geographic context.) The fact that the grand strategies needed for pursuing similar goals might look different from each other does not mean that the underlying strategic cultures would be different.[51]

For the sake of isolating the operation of causal mechanisms within strategic thinking, it could be useful to construct different kinds of ideal types of strategic cultures (supposedly existing at the level of the real), which can be hypothesised to produce certain kinds of grand strategies (at the level of the actual), which in turn are reflected in certain kinds of decisions that can be studied at the level of empirical. Thus, strategic cultures can be seen as contexts of meaning, which helps us construct causal explanations for the emergence of certain types of grand strategies. It should be emphasised that this does not imply that different modes of strategic thinking would be seen as a (potential) intervening variables between structure and behaviour, but rather, that ideal types of grand strategies are used as a methodological tool in the process of evaluating the potential *effects* of causal powers of strategic cultures *within* strategic thinking. Ideal types of grand strategies can thus treated as hermeneutical devises in the process for evaluating the explanatory power of structural realism and the English School within certain cultural, temporal and spatial settings.

[51] Thus, the same "structural modifiers" that make evaluation of structural realism so hard, also pose problems for the evaluation of theories of strategic culture. See Wohlforth, "The Russia-Soviet Empire…", p. 216.

As a first cut in assessing the causal relevance of structural and cultural factors in security policy, let me suggest three ideal types of strategic culture, where each strategic culture is presumed to have a causal input into the process of strategic decision-making by inclining actors sharing that culture to prefer some options over others.[52]



1) *Realist* strategic culture (or culture of *strategic optimisation*). Ideal type of strategic culture (at the level of the real) which stresses the role of perceived systemic imperatives in dictating grand strategies (at the level of the actual), leading into policies (at the level of the empirical) where the basic principles of international society, e.g international law, can be violated when systemic responses so demand. In particular, pursuing balancing policies, whether conducted through coalition building (external balancing) or military reforms (including refraining from coalition-building or military build-ups, when systemic pressures so demand), should not reflect an attempt to strengthen or defend international society, but to simply maximise one's own security in the existing anarchic system. In other words, balancing is seen as resulting from an ideal type of logic where the actors "read" the distribution of capabilities in the international system and realise that it does not protect them against external threats.[53] The actual formation of balances in the international system is a

[52] Once again, it is worth stressing that "inclining" here refers to *tendencies* in an open system where various generative mechanisms are at work, and that the ideal types presented here are a methodological tool for uncovering causal relationships through abstraction.

[53] For a discussion, see Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 34-37.

consequence of this process: great powers seek to balance either by forming alliances and/or by increasing (and reforming) their military capabilities in order to prevent the transition of the international system from anarchy to unipolar hegemony. Important to note here is that the logical process implied by the imperative is not one where all states intentionally seek to produce situations of mathematically testable balances of power, but rather a process in which strategic thinking in great powers reflects the desire to check the powers of would-be hegemons through the formation of coalitions and acquisition of military capabilities.

2) Liberal strategic culture[54]: Ideal type of strategic culture (existing at the level of the real), which reflects an acceptance of the idea of the state system as a society of states, reflected (at the level of the actual) in grand strategies shaped by an acceptance of international law as a body of norms limiting violence. At the level of the empirical, this kind of strategic culture should result in balancing policies reflecting an attempt to create order in relation to an agreed body of legal rules, not only in relation to the imperative of balancing against power as such. In practice, this ideal type could be used to explain situations where states form, maintain, or break coalitions, and reform their militaries in order to defend (jointly or individually) international society from breaking down, even when such policies are not explainable by balance of power logic and even when they might lead to imbalances of power.

3) Revolutionary strategic culture. Revolutionary strategic culture (existing at the level of the real) should reflect an intention to overthrow international society, manifested (at the level of the actual) in grand strategies rejecting some of the fundamental principles of international law. At the level of the empirical, balancing policies following from this logic should reflect a desire to balance against the power of those states and institutions upholding international society, in order to forcefully create an international society based on different principles than the existing one. In particular, coalition building and military reforms should be targeted at making possible the realisation of the alternative concept to world order.

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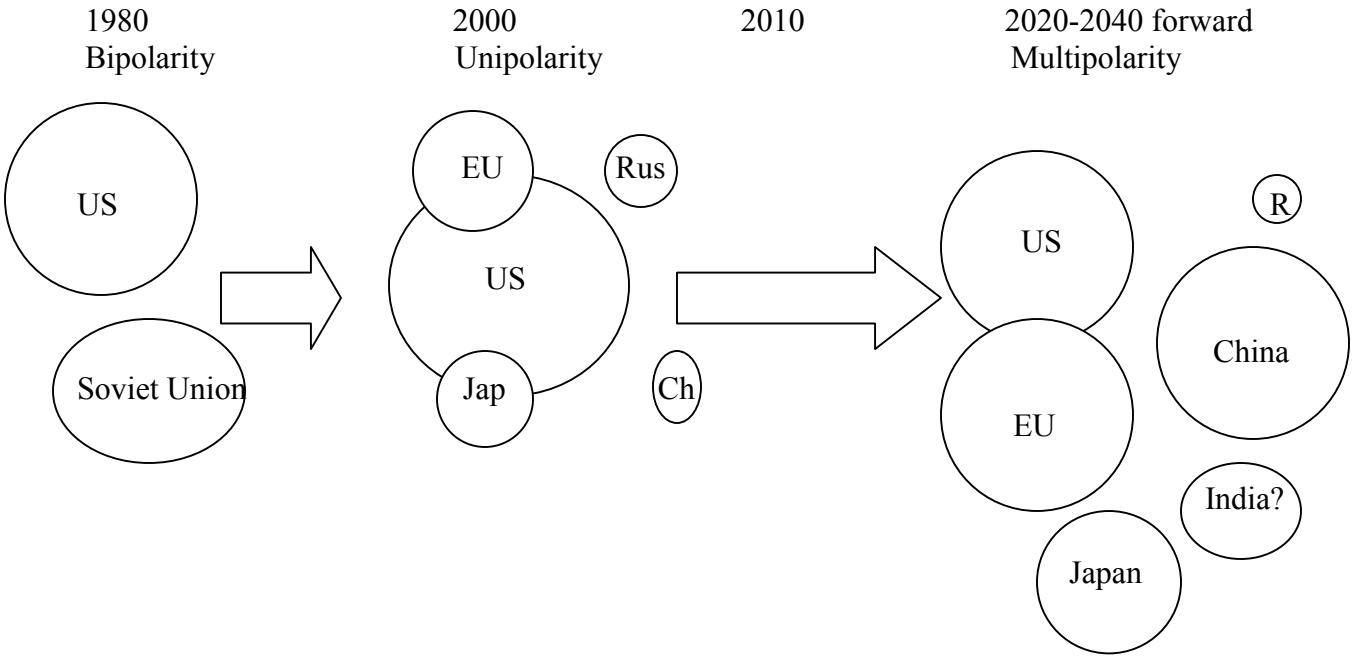
[54] Perhaps a better label would be "republican" strategic culture, since it would tie the culture to a lengthier historical continuity. See Nicholas Onuf, *The Republican Legacy in International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

As mentioned earlier, the way in which states relate to the idea of international society is dependent on the nature of international society at any given time. The fundamental principles of international society have differed radically between different eras, and the pay-offs and effects of grand strategic choices have obviously been influenced by the "thickness" of the culture in the international system. For example, offensive grand strategies might result in different effects within a system of a shared anti-hegemonial culture (e.g. the Concert of Europe) than they would in a system lacking such a culture. However, as Herbert Butterfield, Hedley Bull and others have argued, the emergence of common cultures, such as that of the European international system, is not something constructed merely through interaction (as mainstream constructivism suggests) – it is a function of similarities in the worldviews of the major powers in the system, which in turn are created by powerful intellectual currents such as the Renaissance and the Reformation.[55]

[55] Bull, *The Anarchic Society*, pp. 24-40; Butterfield …

7. Some thoughts on strategic adjustment in the Nordic region.

The following diagram provides a general snapshot of the structural change in the international system.[56]



The figure suggests a possible story-line for the changes in the Nordic-Baltic region during the last couple of decades. The Soviet empire's decline turned the international system into a unipolar one, freeing the Baltic states and providing the Nordic countries with more room for maneuver. Thus, Nato-enlargement. Now we are witnessing the early stages of a shift into a multipolar system, where (over the next few decades) structural pressures will work to erode the credibility of US security guarantees for the Nordic region and a European pole will slowly emerge as the main source of security guarantees. Thus, ESDP and all that.

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[56] The size of the balls does not directly reflect GDP, the number of nuclear warheads, power projection capabilities etc., but a general assessment on how the different players score on the various attributes of polarity. See e.g. Waltz, Structural Realism after the Cold War, *International Security* (Summer 2000).

In the field of strategic culture the Russian elite has turned from a Soviet revolutionist strategic culture into a realist one. Thus, Russia's tacit acceptance of Nato-enlargement. The shift from revolutionary to realist strategic culture has enabled the Russian elite to cooperate with the West, and even flirt with the idea of joining some of the core institutions. However, Russian strategic culture still seems far from the liberal mainstream of Western strategic culture.[57]

The Nordic countries meanwhile continue to subscribe to the principles of liberal international society. However, at the level of grand strategy, their choices reflect the structural changes in the international system: adaptation to the change from bipolarity to unipolarity, and preparing for multipolarity. One might actually go as far as to say that nothing has changed in Nordic strategic culture since the end of the cold war, and try to explain the grand strategic shifts that have taken place (i.e. Finland and Sweden's road from neutrality via non-alignment to Nato) by the change in polarity and the opportunities opened by the change in Russian strategic culture.[58]

In sum, an analysis of the present and future of the Russian-Western security dilemma in the Nordic-Baltic region based on the ideas presented in this paper would concentrate on the following question: How to maintain credible Western security guarantees for the region's small democracies when the West itself is being divided into two poles and the potential enemy, Russia, is not a revolutionary threat to liberal international society nor a part of it. Getting right the ontological questions related to structure, culture and strategy might be a useful starting point.

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[57] See Heikka *Beyond the Cult of the Offensive: The evolution of Soviet/Russian strategic culture and its implications for the Nordic-Baltic region* (Helsinki: UPI/IEP, 2000).

[58] For an interpretation of the Finnish case along these lines, see Heikka, "Suomi ja kansainvälisen järjestelmän rakennemuutos," *Ulkopolitiikka*, 4/2001. Forthcoming in English in the 2002 Yearbook of Finnish Foreign Policy.