# Culture: An Underrated Element in Security Policy

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# An Underrated Element in Security Policy

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# Content

## Executive Summary

Culture is a strongly underrated element in security policy. For some time we dismissed the importance of cultural differences, particularly since we seemed to be moving towards a globalized world where such differences were likely to disappear. But these differences have come back with a vengeance, as the increasing terrorist attacks in 2015 have demonstrated. Globalization has continued, but clashes have multiplied. All the issues separating cultures are still present and have not really been examined, let alone resolved. We entered a globalized 21st century without having developed a clear theoretical background about living together on a culturally diverse planet where we are moving closer and closer together.

A proper understanding of culture demands a strongly interdisciplinary approach rarely seen in today's scientific texts or intercultural trainings; and culture is not static, but is an ongoing process. When we use the term in the plural it should be an indication that culture must be understood on different levels. We must look at the culture of an individual, then of the family into which he or she was born. There is also the culture of a city, a region, and a nation.

The paper develops a theory of culture that allows us to put key notions into a more general context. The focus is on the basics of human existence and social organization, which allows us to develop a comparative theory of culture from its basic elements, the individual and the community. The paper uses anthropological, sociological, and psychological approaches to develop a coherent picture of cultures based on a bi-modal distinction. Closeness and detachment are the key factors of differentiation. They are based on the fact that cultures may either stress the rights and freedoms of an individual or her/his integration into a community. This key difference affects approaches to security policy, both on the strategic and operational levels, and this forms the central focus of the paper.

## Introduction

The terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015 provide a good example of the underrated role of culture in the security field.[1] Nearly all reactions to these attacks underlined the need for closer international cooperation and a better exchange of information. Attempts to limit such attacks, however, have to start at a very different point – at the level of the individuals who carry out the attacks. The answer to the "why" of these attacks will not be found in a lack of cooperation among nations, but in a lack of understanding of the individual situation of the terrorists and their problems with self-identification in a host society. The Paris attackers had French nationality – but, contrary to the uproar in the press, they never belonged to French society: they were never regarded as Frenchmen by the French people, Paris did not accept them, and they did not want to be part of French society. Security starts with the individual involved in an act of terrorism and with the policeman defending the security of a country's population. National security starts with terrorists' own, very personal understanding of themselves and their roles. And the worst case is the one in which these roles are neither clear nor accepted.

There are historical reasons for this underestimation of cultural factors. Since colonial times we have not dared to speak about cultural differences in the West. In the 19th century cultural differences were used to justify Western supremacy. In the 20th century after decolonization we started to hold the view that we are all human beings and therefore are all the same. Both views are extreme and are thus not precise enough for a proper handling of intercultural challenges at the moment. If we want to understand the motivation of the young men and women who support the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or who commit terrorist attacks in their home countries we must have the courage to speak about cultural differences and we must analyze the influence of these differences at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.

Questions of identity and self-identification are very important. Second- and third-generation immigrants from North Africa ask themselves whether they really are French – in spite of the fact that they were born in France and are holders of French passports. The search for identity and for their own culture becomes a key motivation for such people, particularly the young.

Another example in the context of culture and security are United Nations (UN) peacekeeping forces in Africa, composed of blue helmet soldiers from very different continents of our planet. If you are the commander of such a UN contingent, how do you manage to control them? They all come from different cultures and will have different thinking and behavioural patterns. What are these cultural differences and what do they mean for the commanding officers of such contingents? How can these officers use these differences if they are contributing in a positive way to their mandate and how can they control them if they endanger their contingents' operations? Why do UN troops on

occasion sexually assault members of the local population they are supposed to protect? How can this kind of behaviour be foreseen and controlled? These are clear management issues in a multicultural environment.

Both examples look at culture and security at an individual level. But we may also look at the question from a geostrategic point of view. GCSP has recently published a paper on security cooperation in Southeast Asia.[2] In light of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Europeans tend to believe that Southeast Asia should undertake closer security cooperation. Although the countries of the region would probably have an interest in doing so, it is unlikely that this would be possible, because regional societies and social dynamics are different from European ones. A key variable – in-group/out-group differences – is much more marked than in a European context. The German-French example is often mentioned in order to indicate the difficulties of, but also the need for, closer security cooperation. This European example, however, merely indicates the problems in an Asian environment rather than indicating solutions to these problems. Even in a European environment with broadly similar cultural traits it needed two world wars and years of prior enmity to make the French and German peoples understand that cooperation is better than an adversarial relationship. Under the much stronger in-group/out-group differentiation in Asia such a move is even more difficult. The social dynamics and competition among Association of Southeast Asian (ASEAN) members are strongly different in Southeast Asia, and this will affect security structures among nations. The rather loose system of security cooperation in ASEAN is a consequence of the cultural factors that characterize ASEAN members, but the organization's security system must be termed a success, although the looseness of its structures is often criticized. In general terms, what are these cultural factors and to what other consequences will they lead in the security field?

# 1. Culture – a key factor in the field of security

If we want to understand how culture affects social, political, and economic processes we should first understand what it actually is. We must start with the basics and try to see how culture is formed and why it is formed in this particular way. There is an unfortunate tendency in the political sciences to concentrate studies on the phenomenological level of events and to forget about the basics – especially if they are not part of these sciences. Although the complexity of political phenomena in the modern world is generally recognized, the step to interdisciplinary research is often avoided. This is especially problematic for the political sciences because their topics are deeply rooted in individual and social psychology, as well as in sociology and history. The notion of culture in particular can only be explained in interdisciplinary terms. Culture is a complex process, both on an individual and a national level. It is strongly related to self-identification and identity formation and lies at the base of any phenomenon that the political sciences observe and try to understand.

Culture is generally underrated or overlooked, especially in the field of international relations. There are various reasons for this. The first is a lack of understanding of what culture means and how it can influence politics. Basically, its definition is not clear enough. The second reason is that culture is usually perceived statically rather than as a process. The third lies in the lack of acknowledgement that culture covers all levels of society, from the individual to the community, from the tribe to the nation, and is not limited to one social level in particular. Discussions about national character and culture date from the 1940s.[3] Social scientists struggled with the definition of a national culture and tried to find ways to reconcile the individual with the national level. Modern studies neglect these issues in an unacceptable way, with direct consequences for politics, the results of which are obvious in many fields.

Culture starts with the person and then involves the group, because human beings are social beings as well as individuals. The relationship between person and group is therefore an important element in defining what culture means. Each individual is part of her/his own group, and a range of groups constitute society. How these groups interact with other groups is another important element in a definition of culture. The political sciences, especially the field of international relations, focus too much on the national level. It recognizes new ways to conduct warfare, but has not really looked into social dynamics at lower than national levels. The political sciences may take internal political structures into account, but analysis rarely goes further than this because it would involve other fields of the humanities with which political scientists do not feel comfortable. Political events, however, are not only political – they are social and may even be very personal, if we think of the role Wilhelm II played in the outbreak of the First World War or Hitler in the Second World War. Of course, these people were part of a social system, but at the same time they had the power to influence this system due to the particular position they occupied at the time.

### 1.1 Definitions

Culture is a continuous process experienced by every person and community living in a particular natural and social environment. It starts with the natural and communal challenges this environment poses to the individual. How does such an individual interact with her/his natural and social environment and what are the influences of this environment on that individual? The relationship between nature and people is mutual. They define each other and are the first two factors that create the process of culture. The third element that defines culture is the mutual relationship between nature and the community. How does a community deal with the challenges posed by nature and what limits does nature impose on the community? If we define culture in this way it becomes evident that it is not static, but represents an ongoing process. It never stops influencing the lives of people or communities. At any given moment the result of this process is used to confront new challenges presented by nature and society. Culture is in constant flow and, as this definition tries to show, it is not in opposition to nature, as it is often understood to be: culture is intrinsically linked to nature. The fourth and last element in a definition of culture is the fact that this cultural process is not played out on a clean slate. The culture of earlier generations affects the present generation and will continue to affect future generations. The traditions our ancestors created are part of what we are today. At the same time we create new traditions, attitudes, and values that will be taken up and modified by our children.

At a given moment culture is therefore the result of four components:

1) the individual's relationship with nature;
2) the individual's relationship with her/his community;
3) the community's relationship with nature; and
4) the individual's/community's/nation's relationship with the culture of earlier generations in the form of traditions.

If we define culture in this way it becomes evident that both social structure and social dynamics are part of culture and that the value patterns that a community has developed have their roots in this social base. Religion, for example, is dependent on the community. What a community has chosen as its religious belief is not a coincidence. The Roman Catholic faith had to be "reformed" to be accepted by the new bourgeois societies developing north of the European Alps, because the centralization and hierarchical structure of the old faith were no longer acceptable to these communities. I am aware, of course, that this argument contradicts Weber's thesis that Protestantism allowed the spirit of capitalism to develop. In my view it was the basic social structure and dynamics of these new European societies that formed the basis of capitalism. They reformed the old belief and created both Protestantism and the capitalist ideas that culminated in the Calvinist affirmation of the "chosen" individual.

As a further example, the northern part of East Asia adopted Mahayana Buddhism rather than the Hinayana version of the faith because the former was better adapted to the communitarian character of Northeast Asian societies. Hinayana Buddhism has some characteristics that emphasize personal choice and the Chinese therefore felt it to be too individualistic. Hinayana Buddhism would not have been viewed positively in the strongly collective Chinese environment, as the latter's views on Daoism also demonstrate. The Chinese authorities have always regarded this original Chinese religion with some scepticism because it stressed the individual way – dao – more than the social integration of the individual into her/his social environment.

Values, too, were defined by society. But in all societies the power of definition has often been controlled by religious elites, thus increasing their social position and the power that accompanies it. Ethics and morality in particular were part of this definition process and were adroitly used to strengthen the elite who carried out this process. C.G. Jung's assessment of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin in an interview with H.R. Knickerbocker in 1938 is a remarkable piece of analysis in this respect.[4] At the same time the key work of T.B. Veblen entitled The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899) has lost none of its relevance more than a hundred years after its initial publication.[5]

Both works show how strongly culture is linked with the individual and the society of which that individual is a part. Culture must therefore be seen and analyzed in terms of the various levels on which a society functions. The most basic level is the culture of the family in which the child grows up. Other levels are the culture of peer groups and of other groups of which the individual is a member while growing up, which include city, ethnic community, county/province, region, religious grouping, etc. Whenever we analyze culture we must be conscious of these different levels on which it functions. This also applies to any attempt to compare cultures.

Comparing China and Japan may provide an example of this. Any comparison is a complex process because of the history of the two nations. It is rarely justified to put them simplistically into the same basket. The level and nature of such a comparison, however, will decide whether this is possible or should be avoided. There are some very obvious differences between the two societies. For example, Chinese culture remains rooted in the family,[6] while Japanese culture is based more in the village community.[7] The consequences for these countries' respective social dynamics are decisive and very different. But when we compare European societies with those of China and Japan, however, the latter two countries appear to be quite similar. The level of abstraction ultimately defines the way in which a comparison can be made.

This somewhat lengthy introduction was in my view necessary. I feel that in many texts the basics of a social analysis are not interdisciplinary enough and falsify the results of such an analysis to the point of making them nearly worthless.

## 1.2. Culture and identity at the personal and national levels

Culture and identity are intrinsically linked on the personal level. Identity may be defined as the balanced state of a person in her/his social and natural environment. Somé describes how African peoples perceive human illness in terms of a lack of equilibrium in the relationship between the individual and her/his environment. [8] The successful management of the cultural challenges that an individual encounters in the surrounding community and natural world is therefore a precondition to identity. The conscious definition of one's place in nature and society leads to self-identification and a sense of personal identity. The degree of acceptance or rejection of this environment plays a key role in this process. Any disturbance in it will lead to psychological problems and may also cause problems for the wider community.

It is very easy to find elements of a lack of integration into the community and society in the case of the terrorists who carried out the Paris attacks in January 2015 (and November 2015) or for young people in general who join militant groups, be they criminal, terrorist, or both. The four people involved in the January 2015 Paris attacks – Chérif Kouachi, Saïd Kouachi, Amedy Coulibaly, and Hayat Boumeddienne – all lacked a normal family background: one or both of their parents died early and the children grew up in foster homes or families. All of them where born in France in immigrant families: the Kouachis and Boumeddiennes were of Algerian descent, while the Coulibalys came from Mali. But they could also have come from a purely French background, as converts demonstrate who have left their native countries to fight with ISIS in the Middle East. A combination of youth, social and economic difficulties, and very often problems with the authorities leads to a problematic process of self-identification. The January 2015 Paris attackers all had French passports, but felt themselves to be outcasts from French society and were searching for their identities.

Very similar processes – and derailments in the process of self-identification – can be observed on a more aggregate social level. Obvious examples are the National Socialist and Fascist movements and their disastrous consequences for Germany, Italy, and the world in the first half of the 20th century, or the current strong and generalized tendencies towards the political right in a globalizing world. Research into a modal national identity goes back to the post-Second World War period and was nourished by political developments in the 1920s and 1930s, which followed a difficult historical period.[9]

Today it is globalization that acts as a driver in the process of defining new identities for individuals, communities, and nations. In a world that is rapidly globalizing and marked by massive patterns of international migration, identity has to be redefined and it is to be expected that the process starts at the local level. Here lie the roots of the contrary developments of growing localization in an increasingly globalized environment. We first need to know who we are and where we come from if we want to become international citizens. This process has only started, but it explains the current strong nationalistic tendencies worldwide. Currently these tendencies seem to be becoming more intense with the number of refugees flowing into Europe. But without a clear local identity that has to be redefined in a broader international context, we shall not be able to think and act globally.

This is as true for the societies hosting the refugees as it is for the refugees themselves. Unfortunately there is no shortcut to internationalization – we have first to go through this phase of nationalism. Only then will it become possible to take the next step into truly global thinking. But before we reach this stage we shall experience some very problematic phases that we need to manage. I think first of the challenges presented by the immense mobilization of peoples around the globe, initiated by global communication and made possible by global transportation networks, both legal and illegal. Globalization has come much more rapidly than the social processes needed to manage these new developments. This imbalance between rapidly growing globalization and slowly developing new patterns of self-identity explain the difficulties with which we are confronted around the globe.

These difficulties may have different local manifestations, but they are basically linked to an acculturation process resulting from new geosocial and geopolitical situations with which we first have to come to terms both on the personal and national levels. Unfortunately, conditions change much more rapidly than our ability to adapt to them. But there is no way around the problems that we face and the developments that are under way will occupy us for some time, especially in the many fields of security.

## 2. Mutual relations between communities and people

We are all individuals, but all of us are also members of a community; in other words, we are not only individual people, we are also social beings. Our self-realization does not only depend on ourselves, but also relies on the social groups to which we belong. This allows a very simple model of our being in an equilibrium of tension between what we want and what our social environment allows us to do. If we look at the world in terms of this model we basically see two social extremes. One extreme is formed by a system whereby the individual is a member of a group and the group defines the individual's private space.

The other is created by a person who is detached from the group, who is first of all an individual, and decides the course of her/his own life. In the latter social mode an individual's detachment is a key characteristic, while in the former it is closeness to the social environment

If we examine a normal population and attempt to understand the independence and integration of an individual into her/his community we can represent it with a Gauss curve of a normal distribution. In doing so and by taking gender differences into account, we realize that men are generally more independent and women better socially integrated.

**Figure 1. Extent of the social integration of the sexes**



If we examine the modern world we can say that some cultures focus more on self-realization and others on social integration. We can therefore complete Figure 1 with a global pattern of social integration (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Global pattern of the integration of the sexes**



self realization                                                    social integration
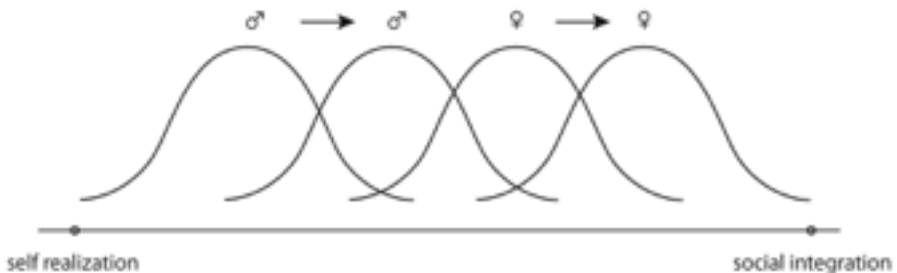
The greater degree of independence or the better integration of an individual into the environment has a very direct effect on perception. Being better integrated means living more intensely in close surroundings, both natural and societal. A higher degree of detachment leads to greater independence and gives the individual more space to move, both physically and intellectually. These differences have very important consequences, as I will attempt to show in the next section.

## 3. Social integration and detachment as key factors in the cultural process

When culture is defined in this way it is obvious that the way in which we perceive nature and our community is very important. What is relevant to us, how relevance is decided, and how we perceive things as relevant become important influences on the formation of the cultural process. I therefore see perception as the key to understanding culture.

Perception depends on the functioning of our senses in a given environment. The effects of perception are purely physical at first, depending on the way in which the senses function and how reality presents itself to us. Proximity and distance play an important role in the physical process of perception. In distances greater than a few metres only seeing and hearing can be used for perception. Taste and touch demand direct contact and smell is also limited to the person being close to the source of a smell. We must focus our eyes on an object when we want to see it. But the physical functioning of the lenses does not allow us to see everything equally well. When we focus on something near, we can no longer see distant objects clearly. The reverse is true when we focus on a distant object: under these conditions we cannot see things nearer to us clearly.

Distance automatically excludes the three senses of touch, taste, and smell. This leads to a very important reduction of information intake, because information is only available through hearing and sight. Distance therefore allows a further reduction of information about things that are important to us at a given moment. Pieces of information that are not related or relevant to our interest are simply ignored. Apart from these judgements between important and unimportant information, we can also make judgements about causes and effects. The most important factor in information intake from distant objects is, however, the strongly reduced mass of information due to the distance and due to the focus individuals have on their own interests.

Information from close sources has completely different characteristics to information from more distant sources. Firstly, in the former situation all five senses are participating in the information intake. This kind of situation does not allow easy differentiation between

relevant and irrelevant pieces of information: the senses take up information in a largely unfiltered way. If somebody steps on my toe in a densely packed bus I cannot avoid the feeling of pain, although I do not like it. Or I may not like the artificial fragrance spread in the department store over the air-conditioning system, but I have no way of avoiding it unless I leave the store. The mass of information taken up in a close environment largely surpasses information intake from distant sources and confronts the brain with what has been called information overflow.[10] The large mass of information forces the brain into a different mode of managing information intake. The effect is comparable to watching a film: the feeling of flow is a consequence of an overload of information. The Gestalt psychologist Wertheimer has shown this empirically. By strongly reducing the time between turning off a lamp and turning on another one he proved that at a certain point an observer was no longer able to see the turning off of one lamp and the turning on of the other. What actually happened was that he/she all of a sudden saw a movement of light from the first to the second lamp.[11] The same phenomenon is created by information from close sources. The inability to select information under these conditions and to concentrate on it leads to a much higher mass of information intake and to a different way of managing information by the brain.

The brain also deals differently with information from nearby sources because the three senses of touch, taste, and smell are strongly related to the survival of the species. Information from these senses first passes to the brain stem and is only later dealt with in the neocortex. In some cases the brain is not even involved, like when we touch a hot object. The reflex to quickly pull back our hand is dictated by the nerves from the spinal cord and the feeling of pain is taken up only slightly later by the brain.

The different ways of handling information from proximity or distance has several important consequences. Pulling our hand back from a hot object is one of the results. Information from close sources is directly interpreted and often leads to an immediate reaction. The sequence of the cognitive, affective, and conative components of perception is immediate. Especially in intercultural encounters this can have tragic consequences, because it largely excludes contact with other people from different cultures. We react immediately when we dislike something. The foreigner realizes this and a potentially interesting encounter is almost impossible from the moment two people meet. Information from distant sources is different. The time involved in perception and the detachment of the observer from the object allows a separation between the components of perception. Judgement and action are more independent, while our reactions to perception and judgement can be controlled much better.

The second consequence is related to the first, but leads to different characteristics. Information from close sources includes emotions, but they can be excluded to a great extent from perceptions of distant events. A detached observer is not only further away from the scene perceived, but is also mentally less involved than a participant in a nearby event. This characteristic forms the basis for the lack of emotional intelligence so often linked to Western cultures and Westerners.

The combination of different masses of information that come from close or more distant sources leads to a third characteristic. Information from close sources and its different management by the brain create a flowing and intuitive understanding of reality; in other words, the individual is able to feel the flow of reality. When combined with short perception horizons, reality is no longer perceived statically, but is felt to be in constant motion. Only the much smaller mass of information from distant sources can be perceived in a static way, which is the precondition to analysis and abstraction, as well as to any planning process.[12]

These influences of the horizons of perception become very important, because cultures show decided differences in their predilection for information. Closeness-based cultures where people have remained better integrated into their social environment manifest different priorities in perception than distance-based cultures. In closeness-based cultures information relies much more on the direct natural and social environment, whereas in distance-based cultures perception horizons are usually broader. Once again, closeness and detachment must be seen physically first as the perceiver's closer or looser integration into the natural and social environment. But related to this purely physical integration is a mental process of integration that is as important as or even more important than the physical aspect.

## 4. Influences on behaviour and thinking

### 4.1. Behaviour
Members of communities that stress closeness are using most of their psychic energy in the processes of communication with and integration into their close or immediate social environments. The pressure of this environment on the individual is quite high and leads to a concentration of attention on the in-group. Every society or community distinguishes between the in-group and out-groups. But in the case of closeness-based societies, this differentiation is much stronger and has a number of direct consequences in the security field.

In-group/out-group differentiation is a key element in the development of personal identity. A certain degree of differentiation is necessary for personal identification with a particular group. On the other hand, if such differentiation is too strong, the group is not integrated into the rest of society. The previously mentioned third-generation Algerians whose families came to France after the Algerian war provide a good example of this. The terrorists who came from such families experienced difficulties with their family cultures, did not agree with the more integrative path their parents were taking, and thus followed a more radical line for their own self-identification, seeking a group that was more representative of what they felt. Whether we should go as far as Gruen in his analysis and say that terrorism is motivated by an internal hatred against part of oneself or against one's parents is another matter.[13] What is certain is the fact that issues of personal culture should be taken more seriously in the evaluation of security issues.

Similar to identity issues, in-group/out-group differentiation is the important factor in the development of nationalism. Nationalism is a strengthening of the in-group and can occur for many reasons, whether internal or external to the nation in question. Strengthening nationalism leads to the typical consequences of a stronger differentiation of the in-group from out-groups, seeing one's own group in a much better light, stressing the nation's strengths, and debasing or even denigrating out-groups.

In-group/out-group dynamics are also key factors in majority-minority relations. In many multiethnic African countries a head of state may favour his own in-group, i.e. his own tribe, much to the detriment of other tribes in the same nation. Such a head of state's family feeling is not a feeling for the nation as a whole, as expressed in the Chinese term for "nation" – guojia, meaning national family – but has remained at the tribal level.

In-group/out-group differentiations also form a key element in relational ethics, because out-groups are not felt to be part of the in-group and therefore do not profit from the in-group's inclusive moral feelings. An extreme case is the treatment of prisoners of war by Japanese troops during the Pacific war. In Japanese bushido ethics a soldier should not surrender to the enemy. The Allied troops who did so were not only non-Japanese, out-groups, but had no honour in Japanese eyes and were treated accordingly.

Differences in in-group/out-group behaviour can play a role in international relations. China is a closeness-based society with a rather strong in-group/out-group differentiation. It thus has much higher obstacles to overcome in order to become involved in, for example, international peacekeeping operations than a distance-based nation. China participated in the anti-piracy control measures on the Somali coast only when pirates targeted its own ships. When Chinese ships were attacked it became an in-group issue, followed by corresponding policy decisions by the central government in Beijing.

Group culture, social structure, and the related dynamics therefore play a very important role in any security issue, from managing a multiethnic international peacekeeping force to evaluating a situation that poses political risk in the Middle East or assessing bilateral or multilateral security relationships. It has an influence on the personal and social levels, from family and tribe to the majority and minorities in a national context, as well as in international relations among nations.

In-group/out-group belonging is also an important factor in terms of moral issues. Closeness-based societies tend to rely more on relational ethics than distance-based societies that use a detached and absolute value system of good versus bad. In the former type of societies belonging to out-groups automatically means that in-group do not take these groups into consideration in moral terms. This cultural difference leads to potentially critical security situations because actions against out-groups do not need a moral justification. This kind of situation is the explanation for sexual assaults by UN peacekeepers on civilian populations they are supposed to protect. These populations are seen as out-groups that do not fall into the moral consideration horizon of the troops involved. They are in no way seen as belonging to the in-group – unless the peacekeepers' commanding officers insist on training their troops to regard the population as being "near" to them.

As in the case of prisoners of war in Japanese camps during the Second World War, cultural and moral differences can easily lead to an accumulation of critical factors. On the one hand, the situation of war pushes participants into extreme behaviour, while on the other hand the lack of perception of and moral attention towards out-groups heighten the problem further. But a clear difference can be found between this kind of situation and the Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. Whereas these camps were based on an ideology and a strategy, a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp was basically operational. In the moral field the difference is quite clear. Nazi actions were based on an absolute value pattern of Arian versus non-Arian, and thus "good" and "bad", whereas in Japanese camps moral judgements were situative. The prisoners of war were there because they had surrendered to the enemy. In terms of results, however, the two types of camps were often quite similar, because the camp inmates were outcasts in the eyes of the guards.

### 4.1.1. Absolute and relational ethics and morality – and legal understanding
An important cultural component in both assessing security and working in the security field in various cultures is the difference between absolute and contextual morality. Closeness-based societies have a relational or contextual value system. Personal relations play an important role in such a system and their harmony should not be disturbed. This is Somé's basic approach when he writes of the healing practices of his African tribe.[14] An illness is the expression of a dysfunctional relationship of the individual with either her/his

community or the surrounding natural environment. Ethics and morality – and therefore the legal system – are not based on absolute, but on contextual evaluations of a situation. Personal relations play an important role not only in social behaviour, but also in judging a specific legal case. When a driver crosses an intersection when the traffic lights are green and has an accident because another driver did not see the red light, this does not automatically put the blame on the second driver. Although the light was green, the driver with right of way should still have been careful, so part of the blame is on that person as well. Right and wrong are not seen in absolute terms.

A different understanding of values is equally important in assessing security on a more strategic level. This means that legal security is not assured in the same way as in distance-oriented societies where absolute views dictate the handling of differences and where controversial issues are usually discussed in quite aggressive ways. For an analyst it is important to be aware of social power structures in a closeness-based society, because the lines of influence of such structures will dictate the outcome of a solution to a conflict. In closeness-based societies the danger of corruption or misuse of the legal system is systemically higher than in a more detached community. Reliance on the legal system as such is not a general problem, although the basis for a judgment differs. This may, of course, lead to different judgments that are nonetheless still in accordance with the contextual rules. Much more problematic is the fact that the judge may be less independent and will hand down a judgment that defends local interests rather than being a neutral intervention between conflicting parties. The role of the legal system is different, jurisdiction is different, and judgments are very likely different as well. But on top of this the judge is part of her/his community and this may also have an impact on jurisdiction – often a decisive one.

### 4.1.2. Differing relations between individual and state
The fact that members of closeness-based societies have not detached themselves from the in-group and the community also has important consequences for the relationship between the individual and the state. Under these circumstances society and state are not separate and both are seen as representing the interests of their members. In such societies there has never been a detachment of the individual from the state of the kind that occurred in the French Revolution and therefore no need to protect the individual from the state either. Society and state are seen as one. The government is the defender of personal interests at the highest level of the community. At the same time it does not do so all the time. The state does not take action unless this seems necessary and the situation asks for such an intervention.

Closeness-based societies rely much more on harmonious and consensual relationships between individuals and groups and only when such relationships are failing and do not achieve consensus does the state become actively involved. This means that the legal system is only used to govern society in a general way and to provide a last resort when inter-communitarian conflicts cannot be settled in a consensual way. As we have seen, the legal system, too, functions more broadly on a relational or contextual basis and does not manifest the more absolute legal characteristics of Western European law.[15] Legal security is thus understood differently and does not provide the same static base and security as in distance-based societies.

Relating in-group and out-group patterns to the lack of detachment of individuals from their community has direct consequences for a nation's structure and dynamics. At the same time it provides the basis for an understanding of democratic challenges in different social structures. The key problem of participation in a closeness-based society is not the lack of personal engagement in politics. It is there because a tribal leader cannot lead without taking members' views and opinions into account. The much bigger problem is the regard or disregard for other tribes once a tribal leader becomes the head of a nation. Are other tribes taken into account at all or are they excluded? The treatment of a minority or majority starts to look very different in such a situation, because a tribe can represent both a majority or a minority when it takes a leading position in the political field. These differences have to be taken into account when we attempt to assess transition processes or when we offer assistance and training to societies that may be very different from our own.

It would be a major mistake to see patriarchal rule as automatically autocratic, as Western observers do in many cases. If such a social system functions well the views of the leader's own clan or tribe have to be taken into account. Tribe/clan members also want to see the results achieved by the leadership of their tribe/clan, both materially and non-materially. The real question under these conditions concerns out-groups. How are they engaged? Are they taken into consideration at all or are they simply excluded, as is often the case? Majority and minority relations become very important under these circumstances. Such a lack of social balance is a strong indicator of a problematic security situation.

Power relationships among the leading families in a society become an important issue in evaluating future developments. The fact that no constitutional checks and balances are in place may not be problematic, because the leading families will check one another's influence. This kind of social control may well be more effective than any system of constitutional rule, because a family's fate depends on the corresponding power relations. The leading families will therefore be scrutinized very closely and any attempt to change the relationship among them will be responded to with countermeasures. Checks and balances do not need to be included in a constitution for such a society or state to function. Control

can be purely social and will be no less effective because of the need to assert their own interests that controls the various parties in the struggle for power.

## 4.2. Thinking

Distance allows analysis and abstraction, whereas closeness is the basis for feeling/ experiencing the impact of a particular situation. Detachment allowed ancient Greece to develop a static view of reality and engage in scientific progress. This development came to a halt with the Roman Empire, and many Greek achievements actually found their way to Renaissance Europe through Arab channels.[16] In European countries social development started at the end of the Middle Ages, when the Greeks had prepared the ground and the detachment of the individual from community and state increased with the developing modernity.

The Greek detachment of the individual from her/his natural and social environment led to the end of the concept of panta rhei – "everything flows" – as Heraclitus understood reality. Detachment is the precondition for the perception of reality as static. This static view allowed the development of binary logic and an absolute value system with its black-and-white, good-versus-evil approach. Although this detachment and its accompanying subject-object differentiation form the basis of Western cultural success in modern science and technology, it is starting to show some clear disadvantages in modern times. The very rapid development of reality driven by technological innovation requires an understanding of the concept of flow. But feeling reality to be in flow is only possible if we take a closeness-based approach, because it means including information from senses other than sight and hearing.

The differences in thinking patterns are important in an international context when we examine the distinction between closeness-based and detachment-based societies. Communities in which the individual remains better integrated into the group develop higher empathy and a greater ability to manage  emotions. People must constantly integrate with and monitor their social surroundings. Their information intake is therefore never restricted to sight and hearing alone, but always includes information from the senses that rely on closeness, and easily leads to a holistic feeling of flow rather than to a static understanding of reality. Detachment-based societies, on the other hand, have an analytical and abstract understanding that sees the outlines of reality, but is relatively insensitive to the flow of events.

Detachment and its accompanying static view of the world have also allowed the development of binary logic. The resultant view of reality as expressed by black and white – or 0 and 1 in digital terms – is static and does not allow one to see reality in its various

shades of grey. What is even more concerning is the fact that it is highly inflexible. Western development has relied on binary logic at least since Renaissance times. The real breakthrough came with the Enlightenment and its stress on pure reason. Kant did not make the step into atheism himself – the social conditions of his times probably prevented him from doing so. But the basis he laid was strengthened with further developments in Western societies, although southern Europe did not follow the trend to the same extent as northern European countries. What the West has not realized and what creates major problems nowadays is the fact that this development led to the strengthening of static views of reality. Western companies call for a way of thinking that understands change more easily as a flow than a sequence of static situations, but "process thinking" does not go as far as company leaders would like it to. A feeling of flow is limited to the present. It is not possible to extend it to include the future, because the mass of information necessary to truly experience reality cannot be mobilized from the past or the future. It is essentially linked to the present and is strongly related to perception.

Closeness-based societies that feel reality live in the here and now. The future is not seen to be dependent on the actual moment. It is a pure vision, completely detached from the actual moment. In detachment-based societies, on the other hand, the future is seen in terms of a linear development extrapolated from the present and the past. The major advantage of this kind of thinking is the ability to plan. The planning process allows the evaluation of risks on the path to the future by relying on a static analysis of information. But the advantage of this static approach is simultaneously its disadvantage, because it reduces reality to a static system. Attempts have been made to correct this disadvantage, like the development of fuzzy logic. But even fuzzy logic remains in the mathematical and thus static area of human thought and does not really provide what would be needed for a holistic experiencing of a situation.

The distinction between different thinking patterns and their ways of seeing the world is also relevant because ideologies, for example, can only be developed by using a static view of reality. Analysis and abstraction are only possible in a static context and are the necessary inputs for an ideology. Communism, National Socialism and Fascism are ideologies developed according to a Western view of the world. Communism or socialism in China cannot be compared to these ideologies because China is a closeness-based society and uses these ideas in a pragmatic way to generate social visions that cannot be compared to the static understanding of a Western ideology. Socialism has always been used and abandoned in China according to the demands of a given situation. What blurs the picture in China is the fact that the country is in theory much more advanced on the road to communism than any Western nation because of its closeness-based social structure. The sense of community is a fact; it does not have to be artificially created, as was the case in Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union. The collective spirit is there already,

although it is limited essentially to the family. But due to the fact that the state represents this family at the highest social level, the concept of family is easily extended to the whole nation by the government. It is no accident, therefore, that the Chinese word for "nation" is "national family". We realize once again that society and the state have never been differentiated in closeness-based societies. This leads to a very different understanding of the responsibilities of the state.

### 4.2.1. Strategic vs operational and tactical approaches

These differences in thinking and behavioural patterns become important because strategizing requires an analytical and therefore a static approach to reality. Operations and tactics, on the other hand, demand a feeling for situations and require reactions to them. Leadership requires the ability to link these two contradictory elements. The management of proximity and distance is probably the clearest expression of the challenges that a real leader faces. We all tend to be strong either on the strategic or the tactical side – there is no simple 50-50 separation between strength in detachment or strength in proximity. We all combine the two factors more or less successfully in daily life. The problem is, firstly, that the two approaches are somewhat contradictory and, secondly, that we only have strengths in one of the fields. The theory shows quite clearly, however, that mastering both sides is the real key to leadership and management success. This has important consequences for personnel development. We should not insist on developing our strengths further, but should work at our weaknesses in order to balance proximity and distance in a more equitable way.

The growth of terrorism worldwide and the attractiveness of these terrorist groups to disaffected individuals have led many political scientists to believe that the West has no real strategy to counter these movements. Cultural theory makes clear that a strategy is impossible to develop. A strategy needs time to be developed and the necessary analysis can only take place on a static ground. Terrorism, however, is highly tactical and does not rely on any ideology. It works with visions and strikes where it finds targets. This is the reason why Western countermeasures can at best be disruptive. It is impossible to develop strategic countermeasures to these movements – unless the West looks at the social, political, and economic conditions that favour the development of extremist views. Reactions must come from a better understanding on the meta-level and from better cooperation among nations and counterterrorist departments to improve reaction time. Improving the operational and tactical reaction speed is the only short-term method to counter modern terrorism. Developing a strategy will not work because this static view would never allow us to counteract any move on the operational or tactical front. The strategist will always be too late. For the short and medium term this means constant vigilance, especially on the internet, and a strengthening of international cooperation.

At the same time the phenomenon has to be countered at its social base, which misleads young adults to join these terrorist movements.

A real improvement to the situation would require what many of these groups are asking for – a more equal sharing of the wealth of the planet and a corresponding better distribution among nations, and among the majorities and minorities that comprise these nations. A real attempt to deal with the problem of terrorism should question the inequalities in the modern world. It would, in other words, have to take the demands of these groups into account as equally legitimate – which currently does not seem to be necessary at all, given their extremist positions. This would mean taking the reasons for their dissatisfaction into account even if they do not fit our Western views of the world a nd the politics that accompanies them. A global world is in many respects a smaller world. Modern means of communication allow people to see what is happening in other parts of the world. And they think they know these areas because they have seen them – although they have never been there themselves. Such people are the first to underrate cultural differences. The streets in the West are not paved with gold, and the cultures of the non-Western parts of the world have their value too, of which those who embrace these cultures can be proud. We live in a world of cultural misunderstandings and we should start to take them seriously. Only by doing so will we be able to control extremist views and modern migration patterns.

### 4.2.2. Risk assessment and risk management

This understanding of the future leads to very different ways of influencing that future. Whereas a Western, detached view tries to control the future with a planning process, most non-Western societies are happy to wait until it presents itself. This does not prevent them from thinking about what they want, but these ideas are independent of the present. Interestingly enough, controlling cultures will be on a more predictably course, very likely with fewer failures than closeness-based cultures. But closeness-based cultures are more readily able to arrive at where they want to be, whereas detachment-based ones would probably arrive at where they will be. The difference is based on the fact that closeness-based cultures see the future as a vision, while detachment-based cultures tend to project the present into the future by means of planning.

Risk assessment and risk management that accompany the two ways of moving forward are therefore very different. In detached cultures planning allows an assessment and thus a management of risk. If a project is too risky, it is not implemented. We then look for ways to reduce risk and change the original plan to some extent. When we are reasonably sure that we can handle the risks involved we decide to go ahead. Closeness-based cultures, on the other hand, are always exposed to the whole risk of a developing reality. The only way

to try to control this reality is through an excellent personal network that indicates coming risks early enough to react to them. And if everything fails, this personal network also provides social security. It is the only stable thing in a mind that sees reality in flow and it is the reason why personal networks are so important in closeness-based societies. Thinking patterns are therefore clearly linked to their social base.

This leads to culturally very different risk behaviour. Closeness-based societies are strong risk takers and always understand risk in its ambivalent sense of danger and opportunity. With their "here and now" attitude they tackle problems when they occur and concentrate on problem solving at that moment. Detachment-based societies function differently. They are very risk aversive and introduce a planning process in order to evaluate potential risks beforehand. If a project proposal does not clearly limit risk it will not be accepted. In these circumstances risk means primarily a threat to what one intends to do.

## 5. The impact of cultural differences on security

When we take cultural differences in a security environment into account we increasingly realize how important they are. Perceptions of time and space, as well as behaviour and thinking, are different and have an impact on all cultural levels, starting with the individual and ending at the national level. Many questions that are of prime interest to social, political, and military circles should be assessed more closely in terms of their dependence on the influence of cultural factors.

On the regional level I mentioned the idea of the OSCE as a model for a more coherent Southeast Asian security cooperation system. Cultural characteristics make it impossible for the structure of a European security network – which actually does not even work very well in the European context – to be used as a model in a region that is socially very different. We make similar mistakes when we talk about transition in North Africa and the Middle East. The much stronger clan context of these societies makes it impossible to think about democratic transitions as Western ideas about democracy define them. Transitions in these countries will have to introduce their social structures into the political process in any effort to increase higher individual participation in the political system. The structure and dynamics of greater public participation will be very different in such societies from a Western democratic system. Even among Western countries there are very different forms of public participation. In some cases this participation is simply reduced to voting a parliament into office.

Does such a reduced process of public participation in a Western social environment deserve to be called democratic? The flawed European reality should be seen as a reason for developing a more open mind about public participation in politics in other societies.

Other security concerns are related to security risks and their assessment. Assessing risk in the security field is never easy and should comprise both an analytical and an intuitional approach. Once again a comparative theory of culture allows one to see the difficulties of such an approach. Analysis often works well in a Western environment, but Westerners master the holistic understanding of a situation very badly. An Asian or Middle Eastern person intuitively responds much better to a given situation, but would find it difficult to develop an analytical approach to that situation. In this respect the greater use of women in the process of risk assessment may be of great help because women tend to respond more intuitively to a given situation. Another solution to fight against Western weakness in this respect is that of developing a more sensitive local understanding of a particular situation. The female assistant of a male defence attaché may be much better at doing so than the attaché himself, coming as he does from a military culture and command structure that relies heavily on (detached) hierarchies and analytical approaches.

I have mentioned, too, that many researchers in the anti-terror field call for a strategy to counteract terrorism. But a strategy cannot be developed as a countermeasure to highly operational or tactical actions. All terrorist groups are strongly operational and tactical. Even the (Western) Irish Republican Army did not really have a strategy in Northern Ireland. Terrorists usually work with very short action horizons. Under these circumstances it is impossible for the other side to develop a strategy: actions will always be too late and never attain the level of a response that corresponds fully to the terrorist action. Under these circumstances it becomes essential to cooperate much more closely at the £international level. But the real solution would be to try to understand and correct the social background that leads to these kinds of aggressive acts.

In the case of terrorism, reaction remains reaction, i.e. a response to something that has already happened. Real countermeasures to modern terrorism would have to take the roots of the cause of such terrorism into account. This is where things become much more complicated and where actions against terrorism are comparable to actions against narcotics networks. The US fight against drugs is a fight against symptoms, not root causes, very much like the international fight against terrorism. In both cases the roots lie in developed nations and their social challenges. Here lie the real problems – and they are the responsibility of these societies and of their political systems and politicians.

The most important cultural differences with a direct impact on security are probably the static view of reality in distance-based societies and the understanding of a flowing reality by closeness-based societies. After returning from more than twenty years in Asia I feel that one of the biggest problems in Switzerland is the static understanding of reality. We often change structures in order to create dynamism – and do not realize that it should be the other way round.

Western linear thinking relies in a different way on the flow of time than non-Western societies do. The West plans the future and tries to understand where it will be in fifteen or twenty years. Asian or Middle Eastern societies think about where they would like to be and then develop visions accordingly. Their reliance on the flow of time is fundamentally different. They believe that time will present opportunities to realize these visions and they normally believe that they have the ability to do so when the moment has come. They try to influence the moment, but do not try to control time itself. The understanding of control, what to control and when to control are fundamentally different from culture to culture. This is the reason why at a geostrategic level China's visions of its global position are already clashing with US strategies to try to control the development of these visions.

In terms of behaviour I should mention the stronger in-group/out-group differentiation in closeness-based societies compared to their detachment-based counterparts. This process of differentiation automatically means that the "outer world", as Hsu called it, is there to be shamelessly exploited as if we were not living in a common, global environment. The sense of common responsibility is much less developed in closeness-based societies and will create one of the key problems in international cooperation to find solutions to global problems. As long as all the inhabitants of our planet do not share the understanding of a common fate, these differences will continue to play a decisive role and will create considerable problems in international relations.

The in-group/out-group differentiation also has a very individual characteristic by defining a functional or disrupted identity. This simple factor is in itself a key building block for any security policy, as we know from daily life. A person who has personal problems is never a reliable member of a larger social entity. This is true for a normal social environment and is also true for any aspect of security. All social levels are important for an evaluation of any security situation and we will make a huge mistake if we concentrate only on a specific social level or on a specific cultural environment. Our world is already globalized in many ways. But the more globalized it becomes the more important the local base will be.

Here lies the justification for taking cultural differences into account. Only then will we understand people from different cultures. The important thing in doing so is to accept others and their solutions for their challenges at an equal level to our own perceptions.

What they have developed is neither better nor worse than the systems we have developed to deal with our problems. A differentiating approach must not lead to a distinction between "advanced and developed" against "backward and underdeveloped", or between "better" and "worse", but must accept differences in the ways people react to the cultural challenges with which we are all confronted.

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## Footnotes

1. The same can undoubtedly be said of the terrorists who carried out the attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015. This paper was in its final stages of production very soon after these attacks.

2. H.J. Roth, "The Dynamics of Regional Cooperation in Southeast Asia", Geneva Papers Research Series No.14/15, Geneva, GCSP, 2015.

3. See various studies undertaken during and after the Second World War, e.g. A. Inkeles and D.J. Levinson, "National Character: The Study of Modal Personality and Sociocultural Systems", in L. Gardner (ed.), Handbook of Social Psychology, vol II,. Reading, Mass., Addison Wesley, 1954, pp.977-1020; M. Mead, "National Character", in A.L. Kroeber (ed.), Anthropology Today, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1953, pp.642-667; and G.G. Brown, "Culture, Society and Personality: A Restatement", American Journal of Psychiatry, September 1951, pp.173-175.

4. C.G.Jung, "Diagnosing the Dictators", interview with H.R. Knickerboker, Cosmopolitan Magazine, 1938, pp.115-136.

5. See T.B. Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007.

6. See F.L.K. Hsu, Clan, Caste, and Club, Princeton, Van Nostrand, 1963.

7. See T. Fukutake, The Japanese Social Structure, Tokyo, Tokyo University Press, 1989; and C. Nakane Japanese Society, Tokyo, Tuttle, 1987.

8. M. Somé, The Healing Wisdom of Africa, New York, Tarcher/Putnam, 1998.

9. See the works of various anthropologists or psychologists such as A. Inkeles and D.J. Levinson, 1954; M. Mead, 1953; and G.G. Brown, 1951.

10. See e.g. J. Schultz-Gambard, "Crowding: Sozialpsychologische Erklärungen der Wirkung von Dichte und Enge", in D. Frey and M. Irle (eds), Theorien der Sozialpsychologie, Bern, Verlag H. Huber, 1993, pp.175-208.

11. M. Wertheimer, "Experimentelle Studien über das Sehen von Bewegung", Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie, 1912, pp.161-265.

12. Ibid.

13. See A. Gruen, Wilder den Terrorismus, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 2015.

14. M. Somé, 1998..

15. The English Common Law system is different and shows how legal tradition also depends on a historical base and does not only reflect current social structures and dynamics.

16. See e.g. M.M.O. Mohamedou, "A Forgotten Debt: Humanism and Education, from the Orient to the West", in N.R.F. Al-Rhodan (ed.), The Role of the Arab-Islamic World in the Rise of the West, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp.144-166; and G. Saliba, Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2011.

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