

THE COMMITTEE TO ABOLISH HELL:  
STRATEGIC CULTURE, OODA LOOPS, AND DECISION-MAKING BY THE U.S. NATIONAL  
SECURITY COUNCIL DURING THE BOSNIAN WAR

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## ABSTRACT

Justin Pullen: The Committee to Abolish Hell:  
Strategic Culture, OODA Loops, and Decision-Making by the  
U.S. National Security Council During the Bosnian War  
(Under the direction of Robert Jenkins)

How are important policy decisions made? There are multiple heuristics that have been employed by political scientists, but few of them make use of contemporary control theory heuristics to analyze decision cycles at the national level. However, the difficulty of applying control theory is that it tends to promote rationalistic models that often do not take into account cultural and emotional factors that may strongly shape the actual decision. To bridge these gaps, this thesis seeks to examine the Observe-Orient-Decide-Act (OODA) loop postulated by John Boyd as a decision-making model and integrate it with strategic culture theory, which provides a means of understanding the non-rational influences that shape decisions. The United States National Security Council's decision to deploy ground troops in support of the Dayton Peace Agreement is used as a case study.

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## **CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION**

### **Questions to a Quiet Room**

It was clear almost immediately after the Serbs invaded the UN safe area at Srebrenica beginning on 6 July 1995 that something dramatically significant had happened, but the full import of the events would not become clear for several days, when satellite photos revealed that mass graves had been dug for thousands of men and boys killed during the raid. As news began to spread, senior members of the White House foreign policy team met to discuss what should be done. Referring to a front-page story in the *Washington Post*, Vice President Al Gore mentioned to the assembled group that his 21 year-old daughter had read about a woman who had been raped by Serb soldiers, and her shame and pain had led the Bosniak woman to hang herself. Gore's daughter, the same age as that refugee hanging from a tree in Bosnia, asked her father why the United States wasn't doing anything about the conflict. "My daughter is surprised the world is allowing this to happen . . . I am too," Gore observed (Daalder 2000: 73). When Gore related this story to the President and his assembled national security staff, "everyone around the room was very, very quiet" (Turque 2000: 301). In that moment, Gore had no answer for his daughter, and the President and his National Security Council had no answer for the world about what to do in Bosnia.

### **A Brief Overview of the War in Bosnia**

The Clinton Administration had come to power in January of 1993 with bold ambitions, both at home and abroad. Bosnia was a particularly knotty problem. Yugoslavia had held together as a state for over a decade since the death of Josef Tito, but by 1991 the government was coming unraveled. There were difficulties and conflict in every region of the former Yugoslavia, but nowhere more so than in Bosnia. Unlike its neighboring regions, Bosnia had no clear ethnic majority, but instead was an ethnically

and religiously heterogeneous mixture of Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croatians, and Muslim Bosniaks. Further complicating the problem was that in many parts of Bosnia the groups were not geographically separated, but often lived in close proximity. As tensions erupted into war, the UN Security Council decided to impose a blanket arms embargo—a decision that would strongly benefit the Serbs, who were able to obtain weapons left over from the remnants of the Yugoslavian Army (JNA) or directly transferred from the rump Yugoslav state dominated by Serbia. Better armed and equipped than the Croatians or Bosniaks, the Bosnian Serbs were able to make significant gains in territory, gains that they attempted to secure by evicting, imprisoning or killing non-Serbs in the areas they held. The war's cost was most acutely observed in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, which was located along an ethnic faultline between Bosniaks and Serbs. The Serbs surrounded the city, effectively placing it under siege.

In response to this metastasizing conflict, the international community sought to make peace. The UN Security Council approved the deployment of approximately 9,000 troops in February 1993 in a mission that would be known as the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). Lightly armed and severely restricted in the use of force, UNPROFOR was primarily focused on protecting the distribution of humanitarian relief supplies to the beleaguered citizens of the area and providing support to diplomatic initiatives to forge a peace plan. These initiatives proceeded almost entirely absent the involvement of the United States, which under the Bush Administration was content to leave the problem to the Europeans to solve.

### **Defining the Problem**

As a candidate for President, Bill Clinton had seized on the Bush Administration's inaction in Bosnia, and had used the campaign to propose that more should be done to address the crisis there. So why did it take two and a half years for the Clinton Administration to finally act decisively? They were unequivocally aware of the problem from the day they took office, and Srebrenica was far from the first horrific incident in the war-torn country. Yet it is hard not to have at least some sympathy for the

Administration—they were hardly the only group seeking a solution for Bosnia, but no one seemed to know what to do.

Government decisionmaking is a tricky topic, because in many cases the means of deciding is baked into intricate policy paradigms that subdue problems by digesting them with the inhuman enzymes of bureaucratic process. Many political science models ignore the decision process altogether, and simply look at the gestalt movement of government as indicative of broader influences. Granular analysis of individual decisions is “inside the black box,” and may ultimately be inconsequential vacillation in the grander arc of destiny.

However, this perspective bears no relation to the situation that actually confronts policymakers with difficult choices to make about intractable situations like the one in Bosnia. Is there any means to understand how decisionmakers make sense of problems? If such a means exists, it may provide clues not only about why they made the decisions that they did, but also hint at a systemized approach that may suggest how decisions can more fully take into account the enormous variety of factors that shape outcomes.

For this reason, Bosnia is an excellent case study. The resolution of the conflict ultimately involved all the major powers of Europe plus the United States and Russia, and yet the fate of the former Yugoslav states were not seen as a central interest of any of these powers. The conflict also had an unusual tripartite nature—unlike the other parts of Yugoslavia, Bosnia had no clear ethnic majority, but was split between Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, and Muslim Bosniaks. Their dispersal across Bosnia was not cleanly segmented—in many areas they intermixed, and not all areas where one group held a majority were contiguous with other areas controlled by that same group. In other words, there was no simple way to partition Bosnia into ethnically homogenous regions. This meant that the best way forward was not obvious—at least, not short of condoning ethnic cleansing and the creation of vast numbers of refugees.



## **Approach Overview**

So how did the Clinton Administration ultimately figure out what to do? What happened in the nearly three years between Clinton's inauguration in January 1993 and the signing of the Dayton Accords in December 1995? When faced with a complicated but important problem, what did the decision process look like? To answer these questions, two analytical tools will be brought to bear. The first is a concept called the Observe-Orient-Decide-Act (OODA) loop. While still contested, the OODA loop has developed considerable influence in military circles as a powerful tool to gain advantage in difficult conflict environments. The second is a body of theory on a concept called strategic culture. Because decisions are not made by ultra-rational machines, but humans who operate in history and culture, strategic culture theory has emerged as a means of understanding the broader context in which decisions are made.

This thesis will look particularly at one of the most difficult decisions American policymakers had to confront—whether to deploy ground troops in Bosnia. Following the signing of the Dayton Agreement, the United States would ultimately deploy thousands of troops as a part of the Implementation Force (IFOR) and its successor, the Stabilization Force (SFOR). The core of individuals that formulated the answer to this question were all members of the National Security Council (NSC), and their approach would, after many dead ends and endless meetings, develop a solution that was both practical and politically tenable. Confronted with what Secretary of State Warren Christopher called “a problem from hell,” their debates within the Administration and negotiation with outside elements (both domestic and international) would position them as a committee desperately resolved to abolish the hell on earth that Bosnia had become.

## **CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

### **The OODA LOOP**

#### **Understanding What is Happening in the World**

In the complex realm of global policy, decisionmakers and political scientists must first grapple with the same challenge: to understand what is happening in the world. But how is this accomplished? The question is particularly important because if correctly analyzed, it will suggest how political scientists might best create work that will improve the ability of those decisionmakers to effectively comprehend the difficult problems, and consequently act to address them.

There are a variety of different decision models that have been posited, but it is impossible to ignore the enormous influence of John Boyd's Orient-Observe-Decide-Act (OODA) Loop on military doctrine and key policymakers in the security arena, both in the United States and elsewhere. The concept is embedded in the doctrine of every American military service and reportedly had a decisive effect on the strategy employed during the first Gulf War (Hasik 2013, Coram 2002), though the practical impact of the OODA loop in terms of specific decisions is still under debate (Mets 2004, Young 2012). If the OODA loop is a flawed method of understanding how decisions are made, it is an error that needs to be corrected immediately. If the concept is limited in its applicability, those limitations need to be identified. However, if the concept proves sound for military decisions in the security realm, might it also provide useful insights for other governmental organizations—foreign ministries, interagency working groups, national command architectures, and so on? If it works everywhere, it should be used everywhere. If it only works in certain contexts, we need to know what those contexts are.

## **Fighter Pilot Philosophy – A Brief History of the Thinking of John Boyd**

It is perhaps telling that most discussions of the OODA loop include a section on the life and personality of its originator, John Boyd. Totally aside from its theoretical rigor or practical utility, the idea's popularity is in many ways an enduring testament to Boyd's impact as a warfighter whose pursuit of a sort of grand unified theory of war was undaunted by the size and inertia of the Pentagon bureaucracy. Boyd's iconoclasm still retains a degree of romance especially for military officers weary of conventional thinking, and so in that regard his approach is important not only as a theory but as an attitude, an emotional heuristic that prizes aggressiveness, adaptability, decisiveness, and the ability to maintain a rapid tempo (Coram 2002, Hasik 2013).

Boyd initially came to fame in the Air Force during the late 1950s as an instructor at the Fighter Weapons School, where he successfully defended a bold claim that he could win an engagement with any other fighter pilot in 40 seconds or less (Coram 2002). Building on his experience there and as a pilot during the Korean War, he authored *Aerial Attack Study* (a guide to tactical engagements for fighter pilots), which, while influential on its target audience, was merely a precursor of the massive impact he was soon to have. Famously, Boyd "stole" over a million dollars' worth of computer time from the Air Force to research aircraft performance in order to co-create Energy-Maneuverability (E-M) Theory, an empirically grounded aeronautical conceptualization that continues to have an immense impact on how engagements are flown and how fighter aircraft are designed to this day (Coram 2002).

One of the important concepts in E-M theory is the notion of "fast transients"—in essence, the ability of pilots to quickly maneuver in ways that allow them to go from being the hunted to being the hunter. Fast transients are to a certain extent dependent on the capabilities of the equipment being used (i.e. the aircraft), and consequently Boyd's early work was focused on quantifying the aircraft characteristics and flight profiles that best supported this, and eventually designing aircraft that took

advantage of this understanding.<sup>1</sup> However, one of Boyd's key insights was that fighter engagements are not contests won simply on the technical merits of the aircraft in play—they are complex events packed with decisions made by pilots, and those decisions often materially determine the outcome of the engagement. This was validated by Boyd's experience in the Korean War—the F-86 Sabre, which he flew, was clearly an inferior aircraft to the MiG-15s flown by the Communists according to his own E-M Theory, yet by the official tally by the end of the war was that Sabre pilots shot down ten MiGs for every one of their own brought down. The official line on this was that the ratio was due to better American training, but as Boyd developed E-M Theory, he suspected that this didn't adequately capture what was going on. What Boyd realized was that fast transients are not just about an aircraft's ability to maneuver rapidly; they're also about the pilot's ability to conceptually process events as they unfold and to make decisions about what to do next (Coram 2002). But what if this concept applies to more than just fighter engagements?

### **What is the OODA Loop and What Does it Mean?**

It is important to understand that while fast transients often entail acting quickly, it's not merely a question of speed, but *tempo*. It is not enough to make decisions quickly; a rapid tempo implies that they are consciously executed in support of a coherent heuristic. It is the difference between noise and music. Decision-making entities—be they individuals, groups, or vast organizations—do not merely make single decisions in a vacuum; they make multiple decisions in a time-constrained environment. Some decisions are made quickly and some slowly, but because each decision exists in a broader stream of multiple actions (many of which, as path-dependency theorists note, are interdependent and shaped by their sequential nature [see especially Hay and Wincott 1998, pg. 955]), individual or collective

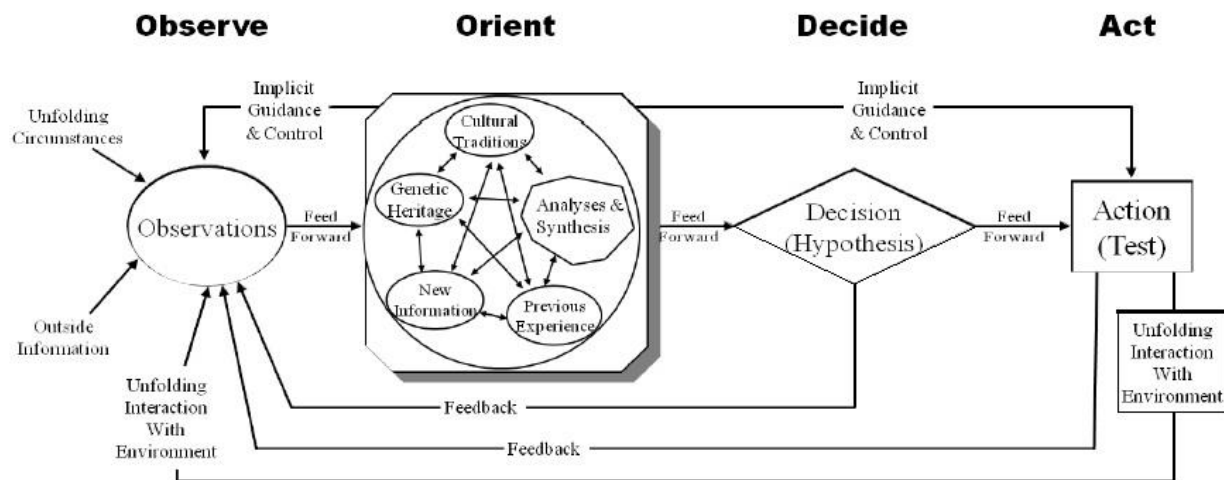
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<sup>1</sup> Boyd's equation demonstrated that the specific energy of an aircraft is equal to thrust minus drag divided by weight, all of which is multiplied by velocity, or  $Ps = \left[ \frac{T-D}{W} \right] V$  (Coram 2002, 147-148). This formulation was crucial to the design of the aircraft that would eventually become the F-15, F-16, F/A-18, and A-10.

decisionmakers have a “pace” that profoundly affects the actor’s<sup>2</sup> ability to react and adapt. The conditions that influence decisions are constantly changing, so there is therefore a continual process of information gathering and reevaluation. Yet because decisions and the actions that put those decisions into effect do not take a negligible amount of time to implement, it is possible that the action taken is based on outdated information, especially in highly bureaucratic decisionmaking environments.

To describe this process, Boyd created a four step model called the OODA loop (Fig. 1). Stripped down to the most basic terms, the OODA loop describes how an actor gathers information about what is happening, makes sense of it, decides what action should be taken, and then executes that action. Because the actor receives feedback about the consequences of its actions and often has new decisions to make, the process is dynamic and responsive, so it would be incorrect to understand it as an unbroken cycle that returns to where it started. While decisions and actions may be discrete, observation and orientation are continuous.

**Figure 1: The OODA Loop (Coram 2002, 344)**



The OODA loop implies that several things are happening whenever actors are confronted with a decision. The “observe” step is a reaction to the first question any actor must ask: what is happening? On a basic level, there is a need for raw data, perhaps indicated in a political crisis by intelligence or news

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of coherency, “actor” will be used here as a term for state, non-state, and sub-state elements with the ability to make decisions. The term can refer to individuals or groups.

reports of a destabilizing event. Note that the observation phase may begin long before the specific sequence of events that circumscribe a specified action, though it is debatable how to separate “unfolding circumstances” from “previous experience.” If a World War II general studied the Franco-Prussian War as a cadet, does that knowledge count as “previous experience” or is it part of a long chain of unfolding circumstances, or is it outside information? Boyd’s material does not make fully make clear the impact and appropriate classification of experience, which will consequently merit further attention and potentially refinement in this paper’s application of the OODA loop.

The “orient” step (which occurs while the actor continues to observe and receive new information) hangs on a more profound question: what do these observations mean? For the purposes of this thesis, the orient step is the most critical of the four, because it bears the weight of an actor’s assumptions, biases, and emotional considerations, all of which is manifested in the decision phase. If an actor makes an irrational decision, it is fundamentally because during the orient phase the actor accepted emotional or otherwise non-rational inputs about the significance and impact of the events at hand.

The “decide” phase also grapples with a question: what should be done? In Boyd’s model it is the least complicated part of the theory, perhaps in part because of its origins in the cockpit of fighter pilots making split-second decisions. But it is also potentially shaped by Boyd’s admiration for blitzkrieg-style tactics and daring raids that maximize speed and shock. These are not the methods of timorous men wracked by indecision, but are rather the tools of confident, authoritative leaders. Essentially, Boyd creates the model for military commanders, and he assumes unity of command unfettered by any kind of interagency or negotiation process. But unity of command does not always exist, and the impact of that problem is one of the questions that this thesis will seek to address.

The “act” phase, unlike the others, does not come with a question, although implicit in the model is the assumption that actors will consider whether their intended action has translated into actual action, which is in of itself a set of observations that create a feedback loop that perpetuate the OODA process, potentially requiring a new set of actions. Additionally, the “act” phase in Boyd’s model suffers from some of the same shortcomings that the “decide” phase has in that it assumes a certain simplicity in

actions, when in reality those actions may be enormously complex and time-consuming to implement, even assuming there are no new observations or countervailing decisions. Boyd is clear that commanders should act quickly, but there is little acknowledgement that “quickly” is an extremely relative term.

One of the three most significant authors to produce book-length examinations of Boyd’s work,<sup>3</sup> Dutch fighter pilot Frans Osinga (2007),<sup>4</sup> cautions that it is facile to understand the OODA loop merely as an imperative to loop as fast as possible, a notion further supported by Boyd acolyte Chet Richards (2012), who observes that it is overly reductive to depict the actual behavior of organizations in conflict as clean, uninterrupted cycles, and further argues that this was not Boyd’s intent in the first place. Richards further acknowledges that there is a tension between making quick decisions and making decisions that are sufficiently well-considered that they will not require revisiting at a later time. As the theory has achieved increasing attention (particularly in military circles, but occasionally in a business context), advocates of Boyd’s work have been careful to warn against simplistic interpretations that reduce the OODA loop to a “plug and play” formula. Hasik (2013) draws attention to David Fadok’s comparison of Boyd to John Warden, another famed airpower strategist. Fadok’s 1994 paper points out that Warden is Jominian, which is to say that he pursues orthopraxy—how to act in war, with a focus on developing particular methods that hold true regardless of the particular circumstances of the conflict at hand. Boyd, on the other hand, is a Clauswitzian, pursuing instead orthodoxy: “how to think about war,” but eschewing formulaic prescriptions (Hasik 2013: 584).

Frustratingly, Boyd never formally published anything on the OODA loop, and even his unpublished work is extremely limited. Dissemination of his ideas was primarily through a brief titled “Patterns of Conflict” that never seemed to settle into a final incarnation and eventually ballooned into a 193-slide behemoth that took six hours to present (Coram 2002). However, those slides reveal—if not a

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<sup>3</sup> The other two are Robert Coram’s 2002 biography of Boyd and Grant T. Hammond’s *The Mind of War: John Boyd and American Security* (2001). See Hasik (2013) for a brief examination of the current literature on Boyd’s work.

<sup>4</sup> As of early 2014, Osinga is a Commodore (equivalent to a brigadier general) in the Dutch Royal Air Force and is a professor at the Dutch Defence Academy (NLDA). His rank and position within the (relatively small) Dutch military suggests that the OODA loop concept has a significant constituency within Dutch military strategy.

full exegesis of Boyd's thinking—a window on the scope of the OODA loop's potential for application. Far more than just a tool to understand individual decisions in a tactical engagement, the OODA loop is a philosophical approach that seeks to illuminate the whole of warfare, and perhaps even the whole of conflict or competition-based interaction in the realm of human endeavor.

### **Critiques of the OODA Loop**

Despite the fact that Boyd died in 1997, his theories still receive considerable attention. For example, the U.S. Marine Corps inaugurated an annual “Boyd and Beyond Symposium” in 2010, and military publications like *Airpower History* and *Armed Forces Journal* still regularly feature articles on his work (McIntosh 2011, Maccuish 2011, Hasik 2013). However, many of these works seek only to discover how Boyd's work might be applied, rather than evaluating whether the OODA loop model itself actually holds up.<sup>5</sup> As James Hasik (2014: 583) points out, Boyd's work is “advocated more than tested.” Consequently, this has left the theory vulnerable to some significant methodological critiques. Hasik's analysis of Boyd's work provides a particularly adroit deconstruction of the OODA loop under the harsh light of rigorous methodological analysis. Based on a careful study of Boyd's available work (particularly “Patterns of Conflict”), Hasik outlines six problems with the OODA loop model: 1) Boyd's basic epistemology builds on reasoning by analogy, which is suspect; 2) a tendency to generalize that tactical truisms apply to grand strategy; 3) poor methodology in Boyd's analysis of historical examples, including omitted variable bias, selection bias, and an unwillingness to engage with counterexamples; 4) a lack of originality, given the existence of earlier, similarly-structured decision models; 5) a lack of published material for scholars to engage with; and 6) questionable applicability to modern strategic challenges like nuclear warfare policy.

Hasik's critiques are not all of equal import for scholars seeking to understand if the OODA loop is useful for contemporaneous analysis. The lack of published material is not so much a failing as it is an

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to the work of Hasik discussed here, David Mets (2004) provides some useful criticism of the Boyd mythos in general, though his critique is focused more on misconceptions perpetuated by Boyd's adherents (particularly Robert Coram) than on Boyd himself.



invitation to modern thinkers to build on and refine the OODA loop with their own published material. Similarly, questions of how the OODA loop was derived through extrapolation of tactical principles, potentially cherry-picked historical examples, and questions of applicability simply indicates that the idea is ripe for further examination and testing in multiple scenarios. The potential lack of originality is pertinent within the context of academic attribution, but of limited relevance to the theory's empirical validity. Hasik points out that Boyd's OODA loop was long preceded by Shewhart's 1939 "Plan-Do-Check-Act" model, and also cites Lawson's "Sense-Process-Compose-Decide-Act" and Wohl's "Stimulus-Hypothesis-Option-Response" models (both published in 1981) as precursors to Boyd's work, though this seems at odds with the fact that Boyd was briefing versions of "Patterns of Conflict" (including the OODA loop) as early as 1976.

These are problems that would be grave if Boyd was an academic facing peer review but can be dismissed as water under the bridge for scholars looking to see if the theory can be effectively tested and applied. However, a more serious concern deals with potential structural flaws in the OODA loop. Scholars of control theory point out that the OODA loop does not explicitly model the interaction between friendly OODA loops and those of an opposing entity, since both are often making decisions simultaneously. It also has no means to model the interaction of the separate OODA loops of actors who are cooperating with one another, no recognition of structured planning and decision-making processes that might distort the loop, and no accounting for the fact that actors have the capacity to learn—and potentially, to forget (Grant and Kooter 2005).

Interestingly, for both Hasik and Grant & Kooter, these problems are reasons why Boyd should be studied more, not less. In fact, Hasik proposes that "Boyd's theories should be taught in any strategic studies programme, business school, or war college, though perhaps not in the doctrinaire way Boyd would want" (2013: 595). He acknowledges that while Boyd developed his concepts inductively, that does not mean Boyd was wrong, merely that his ideas are unproven and in need of additional examination by both scholars and practitioners. It is with that spirit in mind that this thesis will examine the OODA

loop at work specifically in the case of the U.S. government's reaction to the crisis in Bosnia, and attempt to determine if it is a suitable model for application.

### **Concerns About the Use of the OODA Loop**

There is a practical reason to be concerned about suggesting the use of the OODA loop outside of a military or business context. Both military organizations and businesses are fundamentally competitive, and justifiably concerned with “winning.” Boyd was a fighter by profession and by temperament, so his exposition on the OODA loop is fundamentally oriented towards showing the practitioner how to gain an advantage over an opponent. But what about interactions where winning is not the point? A foreign ministry could point out that while they are responsible for promoting the interests of their home country, this is achieved by cooperation more than competition. Using the OODA loop as a framing device for bureaucratic organizations that are (in theory) not designed to “win” or “lose” anything might be a grave error. Alexander Wendt (1995: 73) suggests that social structures are defined by “shared understandings, expectations, or knowledge,” so by that logic the very act of introducing the OODA loop might create a shared expectation of competition where none existed before, perhaps to the detriment of the system as a whole.

Admittedly, concern should be taken seriously. However, there are several reasons why that concern is not an impediment to continuing to use the OODA loop as an analytical framework. The first reason is that the OODA loop is hardly a secret—and indeed, is part and parcel of foundational mission command doctrine for the military (Young 2012)—so it is not as if further discussion of the idea will open a Pandora's Box of Machiavellian scheming in previously benign institutions. Introducing the idea of operational tempo and decision cycles will not plunge innocent government agencies into Original Sin. The second reason is that the OODA loop has already been identified to lack structures for cooperation, collaboration, and other multi-agent interactions, so applying the OODA loop in a full-spectrum context will necessarily divert it from its competition-focused origins (Grant and Kooter 2005). The power of the

OODA loop is that while it provides the tools for aggressive action, its framing of how decisions are made does not inherently require bellicosity.

## **Strategic Culture**

### **A Historical Approach to National Ways of War**

Unlike the OODA loop, the concept of strategic culture has received a fair degree of attention in the academic community, especially among scholars who specialize in security studies. But as Lawrence Sondhaus points out,<sup>6</sup> the idea has gained traction not only as a political science concept but as an area of study for historians, in part because the debate about strategic culture is intertwined with the idea of “national ways of war” popularized by B.H. Liddell Hart in his eponymous 1932 book *The British Way in Warfare* (Sondhaus 2006). Hart’s book spawned a long-running discussion about culturally-determined approaches to war, and proved particularly fruitful because it not only allows for but demands unique analysis of each state, which subsequent military historians have dutifully tackled. Russell Weigley’s *The American Way of War* has been particularly influential, as has Victor Davis Hanson’s *The Western Way of War*, but in addition to multiple new perspectives on the British way of war, scholars have written on ways of war for Germany, South Africa, Russia, India, the Arab states, and Europe as a whole (Sondhaus 2006, Williams 2005). Yet this modern strain of scholarship is hardly the first time that scholars have turned to cultural explanations to analyze how states deal with conflict; Keith Krause (1998) points out that there are examples of perspectives that use culture as an explicatory agent as early as 1716, as found in François de Callières’ book *The Art of Diplomacy*. Cultural study is an inherently broad and multidisciplinary field, and consequently its impact often predates the formalization of the academic disciplines that now attempt to dissect or apply it.

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<sup>6</sup> Sondhaus is a historian by trade, so his (excellent) overview of strategic culture literature is particularly careful to examine the concept in both historical and political science scholarship. Colin S. Gray also relies heavily on historical references in his works, though he begins with a political science perspective. Most approaches focus on literature in one field or the other, but not both.

## **The Emergence of Strategic Culture in Political Science Studies**

But the term “strategic culture” as a specific analytical concept (in contrast to the more nebulous “national way of war”) can be traced specifically to the work of Jack Snyder, a political scientist whose work with the RAND Corporation in the late 1970s and early 1980s on Soviet military policy introduced the term and provided an initial definition: “the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy” (Snyder 1977, pg. 8). Snyder’s key insight was that the rationalist models of human behavior (particularly the then-ascendant concept of realism) failed to explain the fact that Soviet policies often did not align with those of a generic rational actor, and needed to take into account cultural influences. Not only were Soviet leaders not “culture-free, preconception-free game theorists,” but it was “presumptuous to speculate about Soviet leaders’ attitudes toward limited nuclear conflict when those attitudes are doubtless far from fully formed—and, in fact, can never be fully formed until the moment of decision has arrived” (Snyder 1977, pg. 4). His approach stands in stark contrast to the rationalist notion of actors as “calculating machines who always know what they want and are never uncertain” (Risse 2005), particularly the neorealist paradigm that “assumes states are functionally undifferentiated units that seek to optimize their utility” (Johnston 1995).

When Jack Snyder coined the term “strategic culture,” he was just 26 years old and relatively unknown, but when Colin S. Gray expanded on Snyder’s ideas in his 1981 essay “National Style in Strategy” that the idea began to generate academic traction and accumulate legitimacy as nascent subfield within political science (Sondhaus 2006, Toje 2008). Gray posited that while the USSR had a strategic culture, so too did the United States, and that understanding this culture could be used to explain the past decisions of American policymakers and potentially predict decisions that had yet to be made.<sup>7</sup> Gray’s involvement with strategic culture theory would prove particularly significant because following the

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<sup>7</sup> In his book *Modern Strategy* [1999] Gray would later retreat from the idea that strategic culture theory could effectively be used to predict future decisions, for reasons to be addressed shortly.

election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency, Gray was selected to serve on the President's General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament. In that capacity he argued that the Soviets' strategic culture did not include some of the most important American assumptions (most importantly, that "no one can win a nuclear war") which justified abandoning détente in favor of pursuing the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, better known as "Star Wars") (Snyder 1977, Gray 1981, Johnston 1995, Sondhaus 2006).

Snyder was notably unhappy with this use of his idea, confirming N.T. Wright's observation that "when you invent a phrase, you quickly discover that phrases are like young adult children. They go away from home, get into stray company, and bring home undesirable acquaintances" (Dunn and Wright 2007: 2). Snyder instead argued that strategic culture should be interpreted far more narrowly, and must not be conflated with "political culture or national culture in general." Instead, strategic culture describes "a distinctive approach to strategy [that] becomes integrated in training, institutions, and force posture" and takes on "a life of its own, distinct from the social interests that helped give rise to it" (Sondhaus 2006: 4; quotes from Snyder's article which is the first chapter in Jacobson 1990).

Despite their disagreement, both Snyder (1977, Jacobson 1990) and Gray (1981) acknowledge a substantial debt to Kenneth Booth's (1973) work in *Strategy and Ethnocentrism*, which does not directly discuss strategic culture as such but laid the groundwork for the dialogue by identifying and critiquing the pervasiveness of ethnocentric heuristics in strategic thought (Jacobson 1990; see both Snyder article and Booth's book). In particular, Booth finds strategic culture important as an approach that helps to make sense of a country's decisions "on its own terms," to counter the tendency to analyze a state's foreign and domestic policy separately, to comprehend decisions that seem to be irrational, to better utilize history as a means to understand "the motivations, self-image, and behavioral patterns of others," and in both perceiving and assessing threats (Booth 1990: 121, 125-6; Sondhaus 2006).

### **Johnston's "Three Generations" Taxonomy**

When he reviewed strategic culture literature in 1995, Alastair Iain Johnston identified three “generations” of theorists on the topic. Snyder, Gray, and Booth are all a part of the first generation, along with David Jones, Carnes Lord, and Richard Pipes.<sup>8</sup> Initially, “strategic culture” was used almost entirely for analyzing issues concerning the possible use of nuclear weapons, and consequently the majority of the early literature reflects the imperative for (largely American) Western thinkers to develop effective paradigms that provided insights on how the Soviets made decisions. Johnson critiques this generation as “mechanically deterministic” and argues that the definitions used by Gray and Jones in particular are so all-encompassing that “there is little conceptual space for a non-strategic culture explanation of strategic choice” (1995: 37). If strategic culture is omnipresent, how can it be tested for theoretical validity? According to Johnston, another flaw common to the first generation of thinkers was that they failed to account for instrumentality: the idea that strategic culture could be utilized by “the strategic hegemony” to justify particular decisions while pursuing an operational strategy that supports their true interests (1995: 39).

Johnston claimed that the second generation of strategic thinkers (including Bradley S. Klein and Robin Luckham) address instrumentality by theorizing that strategic culture provides a legitimate cover behind which decisionmakers covertly pursue what best supports their desires. Klein’s perspective is shaped by “critical Marxism” (in particular that of Antonio Gramsci) and colored with a strong streak of realism,<sup>9</sup> and consequently his analysis consistently returns to calculations of how governments accumulate power, legitimacy and influence both domestically and within the international system. The state (and the elites that control it) must maintain legitimacy for their actions at home in order for their domestic sovereignty to remain unchallenged, and strategic culture is a standard by which to determine

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<sup>8</sup> Johnston (1995: 32) points out that while Gray was advising the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Pipes was on Reagan’s National Security Council and also served as an outside advisor to the director of the CIA when George Bush held the office.

<sup>9</sup> These two would seem to be somewhat contradictory. Klein is a realist in his focus on power, but rejects some of the assumptions that tend to come with realism, like a sharp division between domestic and international affairs. He uses Gramscian Marxist logic to explain the behavior of elites within a realist-type competitive system.

what legitimacy means within the state's historical context. But because some of these norms arise in an international context, it is natural for elites at the state level to seek international legitimacy and ultimately a world hegemony that mirrors their domestic sovereignty (Klein 1988).

The problem with second generation theorists, according to Johnston, is that they decouple strategic culture from behavior, which makes it unclear what sort of effects we should actually expect strategic culture to have. Is it just a smokescreen that does not alter outcomes? Also, if elites all over the world are using this sort of instrumentality, what kind of differences can we expect from one state to another? Asle Toje (2008: 17) also points out that by positing unspoken interests behind the overt "declaratory doctrine," scholars may be tempted to find implicit support for whatever theory they wish to confirm.

To address the shortcomings of the previous generations—particularly their lack of theoretical rigor--Johnston suggested that the third generation of strategic culture theorists (which, in addition to Johnston himself, include Jeffrey Legro and Elizabeth Kier) has sought to address the problem by treating strategic culture (but not behavior) as an independent variable (Johnston 1995, Morgan 2003). This allows for a more scientific analysis of the effect of culture (and potentially permits an analyst to empirically compare culture with other factors), but raises the question of how culture and behavior can realistically be separated. Colin Gray has been particularly active in rebutting Johnston's concept, pointing out that "a definition driven by the needs of theory-building rather than by the nature of the subject is unusually likely to lead scholars astray." Furthermore, he adds, "From the perspective of methodological rigour it is hard to fault him. The problem is that one cannot understand strategic behaviour by that method, be it ever so rigorous. Strategic culture is not only 'out there', it is also within us; we, our institutions, and our behaviour are in the context." (Gray 1999: 132-3). However, the complexity of this context also prompted Gray to retreat from his assessment that strategic culture could be used to predict future decisions, because while strategic culture influences decisions, it is not necessarily in a way that allows for direct attribution. He notes that

“The idea of strategic culture does not imply that there is a simple one-to-one relationship between culturally traceable preferences and actual operational choices. The claim, rather, is that culture shapes the process of strategy-making, and influences the execution of strategy, no matter how close actual choice may be to some abstract or idealized cultural preference” (Gray 1999: 135).

### **Problems and Outliers**

Though Johnston’s theories about the proper meaning and application of strategic culture remain contested, almost all scholars have (implicitly or explicitly) accepted his three generation taxonomy of the field, and it has emerged as the dominant way to summarize the ongoing debate over strategic culture (Gray 1999, Williams 2005, Morgan 2003, Sondhaus 2006, Meyer 2006). This description of the debate is useful as an orientation tool, but it does not actually provide an accurate picture of the panoply of thinking on strategic culture. On one hand, it groups scholars together (like Snyder and Gray) who explicitly disagree on fundamental issues; on the other it identifies new “generations” (in the case of the second generation comprised of only two people) while the previous generations are still writing and developing theories. It also encourages the exclusion of ideas that do not fit neatly within its heuristic, whether they are historians like Geoffrey Parker, or social scientists working on similar ideas, like James March and Johan Olsen’s logic of appropriateness or the “social ontologies” of Colin Hay and Daniel Wincott’s approach towards historical institutionalism (1998).

It’s also important to point out that while not all the literature relevant to the strategic culture debate is labelled “strategic culture” (or even “culture”), nor is everything labelled “strategic culture” is engaged with the dialogue that Snyder, Gray, and Johnson are taking part in. For example, in 2001 Paul Cornish and Geoffrey Edwards asked if there were the beginnings of a “European Strategic Culture,” but their definition of strategic culture (“the institutional confidence and processes to manage and deploy military force as part of the accepted range of legitimate and effective policy instruments,” pg. 587) bears no resemblance to any other definition of the term. Clearly, their definition is constructed solely to address the European Union’s coherence as an actor in a military context, and has limited utility in examining institutions other than the EU.



In light of the ongoing debate, what is the current status of “strategic culture” as a coherent idea? Can strategic culture be said to be a subdiscipline of cultural studies, or is it a theory within security studies that applies cultural considerations? And (perhaps most importantly), is there agreement on what “strategic culture” means? Due to its origination as a means of analyzing nuclear deterrence doctrine and policy, strategic culture has remained situated in the realm of security studies, and consequently most definitions of strategic culture make some reference to war or the use of force. This is significant because it influences the tools various authors reach for when seeking to understand decisions. Do they reason from history, or create empirical models? While strategic culture theorists make use of cultural and sociological scholarship to deepen their understanding of security organizations, they would be more accurately described as strategic thinkers who consider culture than as cultural theorists who wonder about strategy. In this sense, at least, Snyder, Gray, Johnston, and their colleagues have carved out a broadly coherent subdiscipline. (Therefore, that group is what is being referred to with the term “strategic culture theorists.”) But perhaps it is unsurprising that there is no generally agreed-upon definition of strategic culture, and it seems unlikely that one will emerge, largely due to disagreement over scope and matters like the separability of behavior from culture. The discussion of strategic culture is defined less by a common vision and more by a stream of dialogue on how best to understand “ways of war” and the assumptions that underlie them.

### **Toward “Grand Strategic Culture”?**

Thus far, strategic culture literature has focused almost entirely on the matter of states using force, which is generally appropriate given the Clausewitzian definition of strategy: “the use of engagements for the object of war” (Clausewitz 1976: 128). But the example of Bosnia suggests that this use of strategic culture is too narrow, because most organizations at the top level of government (most of which are intimately involved in decisions to go to war and, once launched, how to prosecute that war) have a multitude of functions in peace as well. Does strategic culture emerge spontaneously once war appears on the horizon, and then disappear as soon as the war is over or the threat of it disappears? It

would be absurd to think so. Even in situations where military force is the preeminent option under consideration, it is never the only one available to the men and women steering the ship of state. So while it might be possible to speak of a strategic culture purely in the context of war for military officers operating in a purely “high intensity conflict” situation (i.e. with no direction to conduct peacekeeping, stability, or humanitarian operations), it rarely happens that the mission is so clearly limited. It is possible to contemplate Air Force or Naval officers tasked with executing kinetic strikes in support of the objectives of the national command (e.g. by flying strategic bombers or crewing submarines equipped with ballistic missiles) as executors of pure strategy in the Clausewitzian sense, but the vast majority of agencies and bodies in government have a far broader remit than merely orchestrating engagements in support of war. Boyd speaks of using *schwerpunkt* (focus of the main effort) as a means to harmonize the actions of disparate echelons (and presumably, peer organizations only distantly connected hierarchically, like subordinate elements of the State Department cooperating with the military), but what if the focus of the main effort is not inherently tied to the use of force? The example of Bosnia is instructive because it demonstrates that even though the use of force was an important issue in the broader policy debate, not even the Department of Defense could limit itself to thinking about how force might be used. Indeed, one of the most important questions was how the military forces could support the goals of American grand strategy *while minimizing* the need to use force. While the deeper objectives of American policy in the Bosnia situation have been subject to intense debate, the stated policy aims can unequivocally be reduced to one word: peace. To the extent that force was used, it was (ironically) designed to ultimately perpetuate peace (Clinton 2004, Holbrooke 1999, Lake 2000).

So if strategy is properly considered to be a consideration endemic to war, we can use grand strategy as the concept that encapsulates the broader aims of the state, and how policymakers seek to promote the state’s interests on the global stage. Whether these interests are self-aggrandizing or in support of Machiavellian power stratagems (as the realists might suggest) or could be genuinely idealistic notions (as liberals might suggest) is, for the moment, irrelevant. The point is that governments and organizations within that government consistently have considerations beyond the use of force, and they

do not lay aside their culture when determining which approach to use. If strategic culture shapes decisions on the use of force, it is necessarily merely a part of a larger grand strategic culture, for which force is only one option in a much broader menu of options.

So why not abandon the notion of strategic culture entirely, and speak only of a cultural approach to politics? There are several reasons for this. The first is that there is a legitimate need for the cultural approach to be used to be tailored to the organization it seeks to describe, which means that the theorist can either attempt to run the culture studies through the wash until it has shrunk to fit the organizational psychology specific to organizations that play a role in grand strategy, or strategic culture literature can be “stretched” to encompass a community that has broader considerations than just force. Especially for questions related to security (not merely national security, but also international and human security), the actors are the same as they are in a classical strategic culture debate over (for example) the use of nuclear weapons. If nuclear deterrence was a product of a strategic culture that flowed from “geopolitical, historical, and other unique influences,” were not those same influences present in the same people who were making decisions about every other aspect of policy? (Gray 1981: 22) Strategic culture theory is already designed to look at a specific group of people with specific powers operating in a specific historical and social context. Why abandon the work that has been so far completed. In this particular case, it is easier to scale up than to scale down.

### **Nesting Strategic Culture within the OODA Loop**

Even if strategic culture and the OODA loop are useful tools in understanding how governments make decisions, can they be used together as part of an integrated whole? The answer is rather simple: strategic culture provides the means to improve the OODA loop’s description of orientation. Boyd’s model seems odd in certain respects—for example, how does “genetic heritage” affect orientation? In others, it overlaps neatly with strategic culture descriptions, particularly in its use of cultural traditions and previous experience as descriptors. This suggests that strategic literature can be used as a means to refine and improve Boyd’s concept of orientation and to better make it applicable to national policy

decisions. Boyd was clear that orientation was the most important stage of the OODA loop, but the complexity of national-level decisions demands accommodation. Because strategic culture is specifically designed to look at policy at that level, its use as an orientation tool allows OODA to better accommodate the demands of strategic thinking.

### **Model Validation**

The next challenge is to determine, independent of our case study, what conditions and evidence will be required to validate the integrated OODA/Strategic Culture model. Validation is particularly challenging because the OODA loop was derived inductively, and strategic culture is similarly unresolved as to whether culture can be treated as a testable variable, perhaps by bottling it up and using it to titrate a culture-free security environment. Both have also depended on reasoning from history, another process that necessarily draws more from analysis than deduction.

So to validate these theories, the first question that needs to be asked against what alternative they are being tested. One of the initial givens is that a decision is, in fact, being made, so the test will have the flexibility to identify a decision made by the actor in the case study and reverse-engineer how it was decided. But for a given decision, if the OODA/Strategic Culture model did fail, what does failure look like? One technique would be to find a competing model for decisionmaking, and determine which works better. In the case of strategic culture, empirical testing is difficult because there is no null-culture example, which presents an attribution problem: how can we know to what extent a decision was shaped by culture vice some other factor?

The OODA loop has a different fundamental challenge: though there are a variety of different models, most of them are similar enough that much of the basic architecture has substantial overlap. In 1988 Mayik and Rubin conducted a review of 15 different models of command and control (though they did not include OODA), and concluded that while no two models are exactly the same, they can generally be mapped onto one another. Grant and Kooter (2005) used this methodology to directly compare OODA to five different decision models, which enabled them to identify a number of shortcomings with

OODA but did not discover any dissonance so fundamental as to render any model incompatible with the others. Their analysis suggests that a comparative analysis of variant decision models will not provide sufficient uniqueness to be particularly helpful.

The flow of the debate over strategic culture also suggests a methodological danger identified by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and elaborated upon by philosopher James K. A. Smith: that of conceptual projection. In Morgan's (2003: 7) overview of strategic culture literature, he notes that second generation theorists like Kier and Largo favor "process-oriented relationships" (i.e. interactions that tend to be driven by bureaucratic or organizational forms) whereas Johnson and others of the third generation use "value-driven linkage" (i.e. hierarchical and peer relationships with quantifiable cultural merit variables) which can be modeled with empirical data. But are the relationships between principle actors in a decision actually process-oriented? Is it realistic to expect that the key figures in the Bosnia crisis actually perceived their interactions in terms of "value driven linkages"? There is good reason to suspect otherwise. Richard Holbrooke, for one, provides a list of the major people involved in the American-led peace negotiations that culminated with the Dayton Accords, but—tellingly—he titles this list "Cast of Characters," as though they were roles in a play (Holbrooke 1999: 377). Holbrooke's co-chair at Dayton, Carl Bildt, does the same in his memoir (1998: ix). Similarly, Strobe Talbott (2002) is unequivocal that Bill Clinton's personal relationship with Boris Yeltsin was the gravitational center of American policy towards Russia during the Clinton administration, and that policy and process were merely tools to facilitate agreements negotiated in the context of this relationship. Elizabeth Drew notes that National Security Advisor Tony Lake's perspective on Bosnia was explicitly shaped by non-process, non-rational experiences. She observes: "Tony Lake had been deeply affected by his Vietnam experience. He admitted to being 'emotional' about Bosnia and believed that emotion had a proper role in the formulation of foreign policy . . . [Lake comments] 'I think you should be emotional, but I don't think you should

allow your emotions to cloud your judgment. But you can sure hate it when you turn on the television and see the carnage” (Drew 1994: 143).<sup>10</sup>

These anecdotes about perspective do not prove, per se, that relationships are never process-oriented or shaped by value-driven linkages. Sometimes individuals or groups operate in accordance with forces or tendencies that they do not fully understand. However, the discrepancy does flag a potential problem. As James K.A. Smith (2013: 77) notes, “interpretations of practice too often smuggle in assumptions that effectively construe practitioners as thinkers, constituting the world of practice in the image of the scientist.” Smith’s point is further supported by research on decision-making by Wohl (1981) and Klein (1998), who point out that decision-making is often not fully rational and that in “naturalistic decision-making” (NDM), experts make decisions in ways that depend more on problem recognition in terms of previous experience to make intuitive decisions, rather than to work through process-driven models (Grant and Kooter 2005). Again, this does not invalidate strategic culture literature or the merit of empirical data to support deduction. But the circumspect political scientist must recognize the limits of deductive reasoning in attempting to quantify and rationalize a process that is from the perspective of the practitioner heavily shaped by inductive analysis.

Perhaps the optimal balance between inductive and deductive analysis will be better revealed through specific enumeration of the testing process used to validate the hybrid OODA loop/Strategic Culture model. The first task is to identify the decision under consideration. An alternate approach would be to first pick a decision-making actor, and follow them through time as they are confronted with inputs and must determine what decisions will be made. However, “reverse-engineering” a decision will—for purposes of validating the model—ensure that the specific question actually culminates in a decision and has sufficient evidence to test the model’s validity at each stage. Once the model has been validated it can then be tested in cases where issues were posed, discussed, and potentially abandoned

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<sup>10</sup> From the context of the passage, it appears this quote is from a personal interview Drew conducted with Lake “in his office, in early 1993,” although she does not specifically identify the quote as being collected first-hand.

without action. Inaction is, of course, a type of decision, but it is often more difficult to trace what specific factor precipitated the inaction.

The next task is to identify the specific actor whose OODA loop and strategic culture are to be examined. Because policy decisions are made in complex environments with multiple actors from multiple states, rather than attempting to map every possible actor, a single actor (either an individual or an organization) can be identified, and then peer, superior, and subordinate actors who shape the decision can be identified through study of the chosen actor's decision process. Admittedly, this may not necessarily identify every single actor involved in shaping the outcome for that particular issue. However, that is in some ways a benefit, because it will exclude actors who failed to influence the decision process of the actor under consideration. It helps reduce the number of OODA loops and strategic cultures to be compared to the ones that actually interacted.

Once the actor under consideration has been identified, the inputs (in OODA terminology, "observations") need to be identified. In essence, how does this particular actor receive information about what is going on? Consideration of this question raises a potential flaw in the OODA model: what about observations that are rejected as worthless or incorrect? What about observations that are incorrect, but are accepted as true? Broadly speaking, false-positive observations fit with Grant and Kooter's concern about OODA's failure to incorporate "learning." If a decisionmaker is confronted with inputs from a person who is known to be a liar, the liar's statements are still observed. Not only that, but the liar's statements may still influence the decision that is ultimately made, *but not because they are accepted as true*. This process of rejection or interpretation needs to be integrated in the orientation step of the model.

The next step is to identify external guidance or boundaries imposed on the actor by other actors, particularly inputs that will distort or change the decision cycle. These may be included as observations, but they may also serve as orientating factors that frame the policy debate or the interaction with other actors. Examples of these influencers include guidance from superior actors (in hierarchical organizations), resources available, peer OODA loops, and both collaboration and opposition from external bodies (i.e. from international actors, if the OODA loop under consideration is one of a domestic

ministry or policymaker). It is also possible to consider time and space to be constraints, although Kantian epistemology would classify those as the medium in which decisions are being made, rather than as resources to be expended (Durant 2005, Kant 1990).

Once constraining or shaping circumstances are identified, the actor's means of receiving inputs and developing orientation should be clarified—in essence, how is the sausage made? Ivo Daadler (2000: 3) describes what this looks like in Washington: “on the corridors of power where memos are written and read; meetings are convened; deals are cut; decisions are made and ignored; bureaucratic games are played; and egos are confirmed and broken.” Policy is traced historically by artifacts—memos, published doctrine, speeches, email, and so on—but the making of that policy often plays out in a far larger theater that includes personal conversations, diplomatic engagements where minimal notes are taken, and so on. Furthermore, the specific instruments are themselves shaped by the progress of technology, the leadership style of key figures, and the strategic culture of the actor. So the specific media for policy debate must be identified for the case study.



## **CHAPTER 3 – BOSNIA CASE STUDY**

### **Challenges and International Climate**

Of the decisions faced by the Clinton Administration regarding Bosnia, the choice to deploy ground troops as a part of the NATO element that would come to be known as the Implementation Force (IFOR) and later Stabilization Force (SFOR) was perhaps one of the most critical. The decision was controversial for several reasons, not in the least because the Administration had been badly stung by its experience in Somalia. The Clinton Administration had inherited the mission from the Bush Administration, which had decided to conduct a humanitarian intervention in the light of near-apocalyptic famine conditions, and sent a multi-service task force with over 10,000 troops to distribute food and other aid. However, soon after taking power the Clinton Administration discovered that the task was not as simple as simply handing out food, because local warlords were attempting to use the food as an instrument of power in local clan conflicts. In October of 1993 the United States deployed a Task Force of Rangers and Special Operations Aviation to kill or capture one of the warlords, Mohamed Farah Adid, but the mission went badly wrong, and images of dead Rangers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu made an indelible impression on both Congress and the American public. These events would haunt Bosnia discussions.

The comparatively low-risk use of airpower to bomb Bosnian Serb military elements was far more politically feasible, but created difficulties abroad. In particular, the British, French, Canadians, Dutch and Spaniards had troops already on the ground as a part of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia, and they feared that increased NATO airstrikes would result in reprisals against their troops. (Andreatta 1997, Daalder 2000, Holbrooke 1999). This fear prompted the introduction of a cumbersome “dual-key” process whereby both NATO and the UN had to approve the release of any ordnance from military aircraft. This proved to be incredibly cumbersome and slow, often leaving troops

engaged with hostile elements waiting for long periods of time while the appropriate approvals were obtained (Holbrooke 1999, Daalder 2000). Recognizing the constraints under which both UNPROFOR and NATO were operating, the Bosnian Serb forces were able to continue to operate with relative impunity. Clearly, the situation was untenable, but UNPROFOR and aggressive NATO airstrikes could not co-exist unless American troops were on the ground.

The situation was grave both for the Bosnians of all backgrounds, given the rising toll of war, but it was also emblematic of the existential challenges faced by NATO, which was struggling to define its purpose in light of the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Critics were already asking if NATO was still needed; a failure to act coherently and potently might provide proof that absent the chilling clarity of the Cold War NATO was unfocused, irresolute and irrelevant.

Yet despite these obstacles NATO ultimately did act, and it was American willingness to lead both in the air and on the ground that proved crucial. But how did this decision come about? More precisely, how did the situation change in such a way that allowed American policymakers both the understanding of the problem and the understanding of the options available to them to pursue that choice? The war was already underway when the Clinton Administration took office in January of 1993, yet it took nearly three years to reach a peace agreement. During that time, over 45,000 people were killed as a result of the war, and many more were wounded, raped or displaced.<sup>11</sup> Whatever the cause, the delay in reaching a solution was incredibly costly in human terms. Was the impediment a failure to fully comprehend the situation? Bureaucratic friction within the decisionmaking process? A simple lack of resolve? Could they have acted sooner—possibly curtailing the number killed in the ethnic conflict—or were there conditions that had to change for the ultimate policy approach to become possible?

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<sup>11</sup> Casualty figures come from the Bosnian Book of the Dead, a by-name database project compiled by the Research and Documentation Centre in Sarajevo. As of 2014 the database (and the Centre's website) are no longer publically accessible, but researchers at the University of Sussex (Ball, Tabeau, and Verwimp 2007) conducted a detailed assessment which includes "cleaned" records that correct duplications and other errors. Ball et al (2007: 34-35) indicate that from February 1993 to December 1995 (i.e. the time from Clinton's inauguration to the deployment of the US-led Implementation Force [IFOR]) there were at least 45,107 deaths due to the Bosnian War.

All these questions are undergirded with a significant assumption: the policy decisions made by the Clinton Administration had a material effect on the resolution of the Bosnian conflict. Is that assumption reasonable? It is clear that the Clinton Administration was far from the only body able to influence the conflict, given the involvement of NATO, the UN, and the residents of Bosnia and the rest of former Yugoslavia, but from a decision analysis standpoint, the Clinton Administration clearly thought it had a significant role to play in resolving or ameliorating the conflict, and policy is a catchall term that describes the product of their deliberations.

### **Focal Point: The National Security Council**

To understand how the Clinton Administration worked out what to do about Bosnia, this thesis will focus on one particular body within the American government: the National Security Council (NSC). The NSC is a particularly fruitful target for examination because of their role at the center of the policy process, where the positions and concerns of multiple Cabinet-level agencies are debated, analyzed, and ultimately presented for the President's consideration. Established by the National Security Act of 1947, the NSC is essentially a forum for those top-level appointees, though it also has a staff of its own advisors and experts (White House 2014). However, unlike the Department of Defense (which can deploy troops) or the State Department (which can send diplomats), the NSC is fundamentally a coordinating substrate rather than a body that takes direct action to implement the policy decisions that it coordinates.

However, there are several complications with using the OODA loop and strategic culture to analyze the NSC's role in the crisis. The first is rather basic: can we actually attribute the decision to employ American ground troops in Bosnia under NATO to the NSC? Can we meaningfully attribute that decision to any actor at all within the US government? The President would seem an obvious candidate, but his authority to deploy troops is constrained by the War Powers Act, which limits overseas deployments to 90 days without Congressional consent. Yet while Congress has the ability to declare war (which they did not, in the case of Bosnia), authorize funding, and conduct oversight hearings, command authority ultimately resides with the President, which he exercises through the Department of Defense.

But even within those constraints, there are clearly a host of small decisions being made—from diplomatic negotiations to conference scheduling to target selection—that are clearly being made at a lower level than the President, or even Cabinet-level officials. Is the President like the captain of a ship, whose movement is the product of a vast array of complex events that are ultimately centrally controlled and directed, or is he more like the manager of a soccer club,<sup>12</sup> able to shape outcomes and provide general direction, but unable to effectively exercise granular control? Fortunately, an exploration of the Bosnia case study will help better shed light on these questions.

### **Policy Evolution During the Clinton Administration**

During his 1992 campaign for the Presidency, Bill Clinton seized on the crisis in Bosnia as a foreign-policy weakness of the Bush Administration, and argued that intervention was necessary to stop the growing humanitarian disaster (Holbrooke 1999, Daalder 2000, Turque 2000). Thus, these campaign promises provided the conditions for a new approach the American policy towards Bosnia once Clinton took office. However, the actual resolution of the conflict proved to be frustratingly convoluted, both within the NSC and in engagements with external actors. The decision process can be roughly divided into six phases: Indecision (January 1993 until April 1993), Lift and Strike (May 1993), Dual-Key Strikes and UN Engagement (May 1993 until February 1994), Ceasefire and Contact Group Formation (February 1994 to November 1994), Containment (November 1994 to May 1995) and finally Commitment (June 1995 until the Dayton Agreement was signed and beyond) (Daadler 2000). These phases are not well-bounded, since in most cases the shift from one approach to another was gradual, and in many cases the individuals involved changed their perspective on what should be done at different rates. Also note that what is important here is not what actually happened in world events, but rather how the problem was perceived by the members of the NSC, thus dictating their actions within the decision process. So if, for example, the Bosnian Serbs are perceived as the instigators of the conflict and ultimately as the “problem” that must be fixed, the NSC will determine the actions it needs to take in reference to that

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<sup>12</sup> Thanks to Dr. Robert Jenkins for the soccer club manager example.

problem *regardless of whether that is an accurate reflection of what was actually happening in Bosnia.*

This is not to say that the actual situation was irrelevant, just that for decision analysis perception is more significant.

When Clinton was inaugurated in January 1993, the imperative to formulate a specific plan for Bosnia was hampered not only by the inherent complexity of the problem but also by bureaucratic disorganization within the incoming administration. Many Cabinet-level positions were not decided until late on December 23, 1992; much of the White House Staff was not announced until January 14 (less than a week before the inauguration), and the laggardly decisions on Cabinet posts meant that decisions on sub-Cabinet posts were even further delayed (Drew 1994). In his memoir, Clinton (2004, pg. 467-468) acknowledges that the selection process took too long, and that the late selection of a White House staff that was, by and large, very inexperienced in Washington caused difficulties across the board as the Administration sought to establish priorities and tackle the problems it was newly empowered to address.

While there are many factors that shaped the Clinton Administration's approach to its foreign policy challenges, it is particularly interesting to consider to what extent these challenges are a reflection of Clinton's leadership style. The changes between presidential administrations can hardly be isolated to a single-variable, but the complexity of the environment is precisely the value of strategic culture analysis: it allows a contextualization of decisions in light of factors that remain relatively static (e.g. American history, Constitutional law) and the difficult-to-empiricize philosophical changes that intuitively shape the decisions under a new chief executive. There are several clues that give a sense of the world in which Clinton's appointees worked. Strobe Talbott (2002) recounts how Clinton exhorted his foreign policy staff to create a new phrase to describe the post-Cold War environment—terming it “post-Cold War” was fundamentally backward-looking, and failed to capture the spirit of newness and possibility. Though several ideas were suggested, Clinton's advisors could not come up with a satisfying label that would evoke—and perhaps help further form—the new era. Then again, labels were never Clinton's strong suit. His memoir has the blandest title imaginable (*My Life*), and none of the chapters have titles—in fact, there is no table of contents, just a short prologue before it plunges into the nearly

thousand-page narrative. Even the chapter divisions are somewhat arbitrary, as the book follows a generally chronological path that—like Clinton’s famously inquisitive intellect, frequently takes excursions to explore and ponder side issues that interest Clinton. This is not to suggest that Clinton was incapable of developing structured plans or that he was averse to them, but that because his orientation towards the world was relational (i.e. fundamentally comprised of relationships with people), he was comfortable with less structured approaches. Thus, he created a cultural environment wherein the objective was to investigate emotional and philosophical disagreements and find a way to get all participants to partake of a common narrative. In this culture, agreement isn’t an objective; it’s a byproduct of something more fundamental: the formation of a community of practice (Smith 2013). Acknowledging that you are, in fact, all a part of the same story is in itself a form of agreement, and in Clinton’s logic sets the stage for more specific types of agreement on knotty issues.<sup>13</sup> But the problem was that at first, no one in the NSC could decide in what kind of story they were, leading to Colin Powell (1995: 576) to observe that “discussions continued to meander like graduate-student bull sessions or the think-tank seminars in which many of my new colleagues had spent the last twelve years while their party was out of power.”

Are anecdotes from Clinton’s primary advisors indicative of the strategic culture that informs how the Clinton Administration oriented to the crisis in Bosnia? Do they in of themselves explain why, as one critic suggests, the Administration “displayed hesitation, vacillation, and ambivalence” in dealing with Bosnia and other foreign policy crisis (Henriksen 1996)? Can the strategic culture of an entire country depend so much on personality of one man? Investigating that question brings us back to one of the first problems with using the OODA loop in situations with multiple actors in a complex environment. Boyd’s concept assumes unity of command—was that present in the Clinton White House? It is undeniable that many actions pertaining to Bosnia were made without the President’s direct intervention. For example, following the abandonment of the Administrations’ “Lift and Strike” proposal in May 1993,

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<sup>13</sup> This mentality was nowhere more apparent than Clinton’s relationship with Boris Yeltsin, which was predicated on the idea that while the two might disagree on practical matters, the transcendent power of their friendship would create space for continued engagement and improved relations over the long term (Talbot 2002).

a renewed round of diplomacy led to a 16-hour session of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, which ultimately resulted in the August 3 communique authorizing NATO airstrikes when concurrence from the UN could be obtained, otherwise known as the “dual key” arrangement (Daalder 2000). While Clinton’s consent was required for the US to ultimately support the communique, he did not actually attend the meeting or personally hammer out the details. More prosaically, once NATO had an agreement in place to conduct airstrikes under certain specified conditions, Clinton generally did not select or approve individual targets (a la Lyndon Johnson during the Vietnam War). Many of the gritty details of statecraft and war necessarily had to be handled by bureaucrats down in the trenches, as it were.

These are decisions, of a sort, but are they *policy*? Tony Lake (Clinton’s National Security Advisor), Ivo Daalder (a member of the NSC staff during the Bosnia crisis), Warren Christopher (Clinton’s Secretary of State), Madeline Albright (American Ambassador to the UN during Clinton’s first term), and Colin Powell (the outgoing Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) all are careful to note the importance of receiving the President’s consent or at least acknowledgement, and Lake notes that “at all times, I kept the President and Vice-President informed of the trends in our thinking” (Lake 2000: 146). It is possible to argue that some aspects of *how* policy was made were beneath the level of Clinton’s direct attention, but the principal actors so consistently reference the imperative to update the President that it is difficult to support the notion that his consent was not required for any aspect of what the policy actually was. Due to the political sensitivities of deploying ground troops (not to mention the limitations imposed by the War Powers Act, and the aforementioned experiences in Somalia), it is nearly impossible to argue that the decision to deploy ground troops in Bosnia was taken without Clinton’s direct approval.

These challenges created confusion and inefficiency in the Administration’s approach to all policy issues in its early months, but the NSC was not without experience. Tony Lake was a veteran of both the State Department’s Foreign Service (where he had worked with Richard Holbrooke during the Vietnam War) and the Carter Administration, and had spent the Reagan-Bush years teaching international relations at Mount Holyoke College (Holbrooke 1999, Lake 2000). Sandy Berger had worked for Lake during the Carter Administration, and thus was a natural fit as the Deputy National Security Advisor.

Because of Berger's longstanding personal relationship with the President, he would prove to be an unusually influential deputy during Clinton's first term, presaging his further ascension within the Administration (Daalder 2000, Clinton 2004). Albright worked as the NSC's liaison to Congress during the Carter Administration, and like Lake had spent part of the Reagan-Bush years teaching international affairs, in her case at Georgetown (Albright and Woodward 2003). Some of the other key members of the NSC—particularly the Vice President, Al Gore, and the Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin, were experienced with foreign policy and security questions, but largely through the lens of their former positions in the Senate and House, respectively (Hamilton 2007).

### **Key Figures from the Principals Committee**

Multiple sources (Drew 1994, Daalder 2000, Albright and Woodward 2003) indicate that most of the work on Bosnia was conducted by a modified version of the NSC known as the "Principals Committee," and consisted of Lake (who served as chairman for the meetings), Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Aspin, outgoing Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, Director of Central Intelligence James Woolsey, and U.N. Ambassador Madeline Albright.<sup>14</sup> This group was often supplemented by the participation of Berger and the newly-created position of National Security Advisor to the Vice-President, which was held by Leon Fuerth. The Principals Committee typically met in the Situation Room located in the White House basement, with absent members often participating via VTC or telephone to remain engaged with emerging discussions (Talbot 2002).

It is also perhaps significant that while Christopher, Aspin, Powell, and (to a lesser extent) Albright had jobs that entail a heavy degree of domestic and international travel and thus frequent absence from Situation Room meetings, Lake, Berger, Woolsey and Fuerth more consistently operated from Washington, shaping the perspectives of each. Drew points out that in the early years of the Clinton

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<sup>14</sup> During the Reagan-Bush years, the Ambassador to the UN was not a Cabinet-level position. Before she learned of the position to which she was going to be appointed, Albright served on Clinton's transition staff and coincidentally recommended that the UN Ambassador be re-upgraded to Cabinet-level job—a recommendation that Clinton accepted (Albright and Woodward 2003).



Administration there was not a regularly-scheduled meeting between Clinton and his foreign policy advisors, and of the Principals Committee only Lake saw the President on a day-in and day-out basis. Furthermore, Daalder (2000) mentions that while prior Secretaries of State like Cyrus Vance and James Baker regularly drafted “night notes” (brief memoranda on matters they wanted to bring to the President’s direct attention), Christopher rarely used this technique and instead occasionally provided memos on more significant policy issues. Clinton’s memoirs indicate that when taking office his focus was on domestic issues, particularly the economy.<sup>15</sup> To the extent that he thought about the military during the first months of his Presidency, it was regarding the integration of gays, a matter that generated a firestorm of controversy and alienated Clinton from his senior military personnel (Drew 1994, Powell 1995).

Thus, while other NSC members might have had greater ability to influence major decisions, Lake in particular was especially well-positioned to personally shape the President’s orientation on the Bosnia problem. Additionally, the fact that Lake and Madeline Albright almost always agreed on foreign policy issues may partially explain her increasing access and influence within the Administration, eventually resulting in her appointment as Secretary of State in 1997 (Lake 2000, Daalder 2000, Talbott 2002, Holbrooke 1999).<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, Clinton would particularly credit five Americans for the successful creation of the Dayton Accords: Richard Holbrooke (along with his negotiating team), Warren Christopher, Tony Lake, Sandy Berger (who Clinton praises because of his role as chair of the deputies’ committee meetings, where he ensured interagency coordination), and Madeline Albright (Clinton 2004: 684).

Woolsey potentially might have had the same capacity for influence, but he is curiously absent from almost all the major accounts of discussions about Bosnia in the White House. Both Lake and

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<sup>15</sup> Clinton (2004: 520) even quantifies this: he mentions that he conducted an analysis of how he spent his time during his first hundred days of as President, and found that he spent “55 percent on the economy and health care, 25 percent on foreign policy, 20 percent on other domestic issues”.

<sup>16</sup> This is not to marginalize Albright’s achievements on her own merit, merely to suggest that because her positions were complementary to those of Lake, they were able to function as an ad-hoc “team,” ultimately to the benefit of both.

Daalder's accounts mention him only once each (and Lake's mention is not in the context of Bosnia); even in Clinton's voluminous memoir Woolsey's name appears in just two paragraphs. Drew recounts that although someone from the CIA briefed the President daily (meetings for which Lake, Gore, Berger, and Fuerth were also present), Woolsey himself saw the President only sparingly, and in fact had so much difficulty getting on the President's itinerary that on one occasion he asked retired Admiral William Crowe (who had influence with Clinton) to bring up an issue for him (Drew 1994: 153). The scattered nature of Clinton's interactions with most of his foreign policy team suggests that the CIA's daily briefing was a unique opportunity to provide both observations to the President (in the form of raw intelligence cited in the briefs) but also implicit orientation, in the form of the analysis. The presence of Lake, Gore, Berger, and Fuerth gave them a relatively unique three-pronged advantage in the policy process: they were able to receive most of the same observations the President was getting (and, in the case of all but Gore, the luxury to concentrate their time almost exclusively on security issues), they were able to provide their own analysis—in essence, exporting their orientation—to the President, shaping his contextualization of events as he was made aware of them, and finally to directly receive the President's reactions and feedback.

Consequently, Lake's role was more than just that of an advisor. However, Lake's own perception of his role was relatively modest, considering his perpetual proximity to the President. He comments that "my model for a national security advisor was that of the behind-the-scenes consensus builder who helped present the communal views of senior advisors to the President" (Lake 2000: 131). Holbrooke and Talbott—both of whom worked for the State Department, and thus were in no way subordinate to Lake—separately recount that when they were away from Washington and had observations or memos that they wanted to introduce in a Principals Committee meeting, they generally contacted Lake, who would present their views to the other members, sometimes including the President. Lake was accounted by both to be an excellent "honest broker," even on issues where Lake's personal counsel was contrary to the recommendation he was presenting as a proxy. In particular, while traveling around Europe to conduct "shuttle diplomacy," Holbrooke argued strongly that final peace negotiations

should take place in the United States, and provided a memo to that effect to Lake. Despite the fact that most of the other Principals Committee members (including Lake) supported allowing a European country to host the negotiations, Holbrooke's position eventually won out, resulting in the selection of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, as the site where the final peace agreement would be hammered out.

It was in this environment that the question of Bosnia was considered for the first time by the Principals Committee on January 28, 1993. Using a "Presidential Review Directive" (PRD), Clinton mandated a holistic review of American options regarding Bosnia specifically by posing questions to the State Department, the Department of Defense, and the CIA "in order to stimulate serious consideration of more activist U.S. policy options, including those that had long been rejected by the Bush administration" (Daalder 2000: 8). Disregarding for a moment the specific outcome of the policy review, PRD-1 is significant within the context of the NSC's OODA loop and strategic culture for several reasons. The first reason is that the PRD itself is inherently a directive to assess the government's orientation on Bosnia. It is not necessarily an explicit directive to formulate a new orientation (since the assessment could result in a confirmation of the preexisting orientation), but the need for an amended orientation is strongly implied—why would a PRD be issued if the President was satisfied with the old orientation? The distinction between an explicit directive to come up with something new and the implicit directive is important, because implicit direction often creates unspoken assumptions about what the President (or other NSC member) will accept as a feasible course of action, leading to a rejection of old policy positions because they are old, not because they were identified to have a specific flaw. Ironically, an explicit directive to abandon an old policy stance entails specific enumeration of what is to be abandoned, and often creates space for discussion of the change and the rationale behind it. Implicit direction, by contrast, has the potential to create a miasma of rejection that may encompass policy options that the decisionmaker (in this case the President) did not intend to abandon.

PRD-1 also indicated to the NSC that it could not blindly import the assumptions of the Bush Administration. Reviews like PRD-1 are tightly intertwined with (and clearly inform) the strategic

culture of the NSC, but it is also important to acknowledge the limitations on a government's ability to recognize the full depth of its strategic culture, and how this determines implicit and explicit assumptions. For all its willingness to hew a new way forward distinct from the approach of the Bush Administration, the Clinton Administration inherently shared the resolution to protect American interests and promote American values. The specific definition of those interests and values may have varied, but often remain anchored by powerful cultural references. For example, it was completely infeasible for any American President to announce that genocide is the fastest route to lasting peace in Bosnia and not a threat to American security, even if this is true. However much an incoming President might dictate a far-ranging policy review, publically accepting genocide will not be proposed as a feasible course of action.

This is not to say that an Administration might not quietly accept genocide when it can feasibly do so without repercussion. Samantha Power eloquently described the tendency of American government officials to equivocate or obscure genocidal conditions in her book *A Problem From Hell*, and—in the case of the Clinton Administration—is further corroborated by Tony Lake's observation that while the US did eventually take action on ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo, it did little to address the conflict in South Sudan that was one hundred times more lethal than Kosovo (Lake 2000: 115).

The Clinton Administration's reluctance to acknowledge genocide illuminates the fact that sometimes fundamental assumptions contradict one another, resulting in an awkward cognitive dissonance. American values dictate that genocide is unacceptable; consequently this "red line" has become embedded in the nation's strategic culture and manifested in a host of international laws that explicitly permit (and implicitly require) intervention when genocide is present. But what if stopping genocide requires the employment of ground troops, and a refusal to employ ground troops is another embedded assumption? In fairness to the Clinton Administration, the chain of logic was more complex than that. As the Clinton Administration contemplated its options in Bosnia, two events—one recent, one older—provided powerful stratego-cultural context for the taboo on employing ground troops. The recent event, as discussed earlier, was the debacle in Somalia, which demonstrated how the use of troops in support of a benign American value (providing food for those confronted by famine) could go horribly

wrong. But the more distant event cast an impossibly long shadow of its own: the war in Vietnam. Lake's revulsion at the adoption of containment towards the Bosnia crisis was palpably shaped by his experience in Vietnam (Drew 1994, Albright and Woodward 2003), but at least as significant was President's complicated relationship with the war. In his memoirs he notes that shortly after being elected President, he received a letter from former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, who praised Clinton, saying "For me—and I believe for the nation as well—the Vietnam war finally ended the day you were elected president . . . your refusal to draw back from the belief that it is the responsibility of all citizens to question the basis for any decision to send our youth to war, has strengthened the nation for all time" (2004: 469). The weight of these experiences created a powerful check on the impulse to deploy ground troops for any reason, and set the stage for contrasting assumptions that it was both unacceptable to permit genocide but also unacceptable to deploy ground troops to intervene. In foreign policy terms, it was not merely a contradiction—it was a dilemma.

But even assuming that the moral imperatives were utterly clear for the Clinton Administration, there were numerous external constraints to be reckoned with. Perhaps the most important check was an abstract one: that of the uncertainty of the future. What would happen if the United States deployed troops in force, but the violence was too deeply embedded to contain? The increasingly sorry fate of UNPROFOR, doomed to watch helplessly as the war escalated, suggested that the risk of deployment without the benefit of peace was an all-too-possible outcome. If deploying American troops carried with it the guarantee of a specified outcome, the deployment still would have been controversial due to the expense and questionable importance of Bosnia to American interests, but the fact that no such guarantees were possible meant that any deployment would be part difficult choice, part gamble. Both required a substantial tolerance for political risk.

While the President's Daily Brief is a key source of information that remains somewhat enigmatic to scholars due to the fact that most of its content are still classified, far more remarked-upon is the so-called "CNN effect," caused by the shift in public opinion due to evocative images from crisis zones often beamed to the public in real time (Robinson 2002). CNN had only begun broadcasting in 1980 and had

only emerged as an important force during the 1990 Gulf War, so the power of 24-hour news was still emergent at the time. Drew (1994: 273-275) astutely points out that because of the nature of their workloads, President Clinton and members the NSC tended to watch CNN more while they were on trips, as they coped with jet lag and filled the interstitial time between high-level engagements. It is clear that CNN's images of the Bosnian Serb's siege of Sarajevo had a direct impact on Clinton's resolve to take action, which Drew correlates to her claim that Clinton began to specifically entertain the possibility of employing ground troops in July 1993. According to her account (based on interviews and first-hand observations as a journalist), Clinton had the opportunity to watch CNN while he was in Tokyo for the G-7 summit, and was distinctly perturbed by images of the plight of Sarajevo. Though the G-7 summit dealt principally with economic issues, in a follow-on trip to South Korea (where Clinton met with American troops and traveled to see the Demilitarized Zone along the international border) Lake was able to speak with Clinton privately to get his personal authorization for the mission to capture or kill Mohammad Aided in Mogadishu. Clinton took this opportunity to tell Lake that Bosnia merited renewed attention, and for the first time expressed his willingness to consider the use of ground troops. Given that Clinton's itinerary in Tokyo and Korea is largely public and clearly focused on matters other than Bosnia, it is highly likely that Drew is correct in saying that CNN's depictions of the siege of Sarajevo were in fact a trigger that prompted Clinton to entertain the notion of troop deployments despite opposition from the public and from Congress. Unfortunately for him, the fact that his willingness to contemplate the use of ground troops and the decision to conduct the ill-fated raid in Mogadishu were expressed at the same meeting meant that the former would be very difficult to discuss in public due to the repercussions of the latter. Thus, the Somalia debacle is part of the reason why there was a two year gap between germination and flowering of the ground troops policy option for Bosnia.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The "flowering" of the ground troops policy option can be dated to August 8 1995, when Clinton approved the "endgame strategy" developed by the NSC, which included the use of ground troops (Daadler 2000: xvii). Once the endgame strategy was approved, Lake went to Europe to propose it to the allies and Holbrooke began the shuttle diplomacy that made Dayton possible.

## **External Constraints**

Were the myriad constraints that the Clinton Administration was confronted with obstacles to be overcome, or fixed elements that simply had to move into the appropriate conjunction? Was the opposition from other countries or from Congress like a padlock, with multiple pins of different lengths, each of which had to align perfectly for the lock to turn? Or was this a door that could be broken open with a sufficiently hearty kick? In his comprehensive biography of Clinton's first term, Nigel Hamilton (2007: 483) recounts how Lake's thinking had changed by early spring of 1995. He quotes Lake:

"It's a chess concept. Instead of thinking, 'We're here; what's the next step to get somewhere where we want to be?' we should *start* with : 'What's the end state we want to achieve? And what are the decisions that will get you there? And if we make *those* decisions—primarily about military force—can we use that then to leverage a diplomatic solution? And what are the key barriers to it?"

## **UNPROFOR and the European Powers**

Lake determined that UNPROFOR was fundamentally the root of the difficulty in enacting a Bosnia policy with actual teeth. The problem was that there was a legitimate need for humanitarian intervention (which UNPROFOR was facilitating), and so pulling them out might make the crisis worse before it made it better. Perhaps the Serbs would eventually capitulate, but would that be any help to Bosnians of any ethnicity who froze or starved to death in the meantime? The Europeans were deeply committed to UNPROFOR, so it would not be a minor change to remove it from the equation. Note that while UNPROFOR was an obstacle, all the major players in the NSC clearly saw it as a proxy for manifested Western European interests, particularly those of Britain, France, and Germany. When the Clinton Administration decided to pursue "Lift and Strike" in May 1993, Warren Christopher did not make his case in New York—instead, he traveled to London, Paris, Moscow, Brussels, Bonn, and Rome. After Christopher's trip failed, Tony Lake and Reginald Bartholomew later made a secret trip to Europe on 24-25 July 1993 to talk with British and French officials, an act of diplomacy that ultimately paved the way for the "dual-key" strikes approved by the North Atlantic Communique of 2 August. Daalder's narrative makes it clear that the inclusion of the UN in the NATO airstrike approval process was not due

to the power of the UN, but rather the decisive influence of Britain and France in the approval for NATO actions. He notes, “given dominant British and French roles in in the UNPROFOR command, the dual-key provided London and Paris with a way to manipulate the air strikes threat to their own purposes . . . London and Paris were able to use their dominant roles in the UN to veto or restrict the scope of NATO action” (Daalder 2000: 23).

The very existence of the dual-key structure is proof that American policymakers felt obligated to gain British and French consent for any policy avenue that entailed the use of force. But does the OODA loop provide the means to map the influence of this constraint, or even acknowledge its existence? Unlike the Russians, it is clear that while the British and French may have been an obstacle, they basically shared American objectives for resolving the Bosnia conflict.<sup>18</sup> Thus, it is implausible to consider the British and French as “opponents” in the Administration’s decision cycle. So where do they come in? Does their resistance to NATO airstrikes constitute an observation, perhaps as a part of what Boyd called “unfolding interaction with the environment”? But how is that any different from another one of Boyd’s observational inputs, “unfolding circumstances”? Or was concern for their opinion simply a part of the NSC’s orientation? (And if so, how?) This is all unclear, and demonstrates that the OODA loop is basically ill-suited to accommodate inputs and constraints from cooperating decisionmakers.

However, many other decision models suffer the same shortcoming, at least in terms of having explicit structure to accommodate cooperation. Rasmussen’s three-level model of operator thinking also assumes a single actor, though it could potentially incorporate other actors in its “rules for tasks,” albeit in a relatively static fashion. Similarly, Klein’s Recognition-Primed Decision-Making model allows for models of interaction with allies, but only the actor has prior experience working cooperatively. Some work has been done on applying decision models to teams, but even this treats the teams as basically unified (Grant and Kooter 2005). None of these models explicitly incorporates a separate actor with their own interests, goals, and objectives working in cooperation with the actor of interest.

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<sup>18</sup> While the official Russian response was less bellicose, Strobe Talbott notes that in January 1994 the leader of the opposition bloc in the Russian Duma, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, visited the Serbs in Bosnia and declared that he would consider “NATO action in Bosnia a declaration of war on Russia” (Talbott 2002: 122).



### **Constraints from Russia**

Even more ambiguous is the decision cycle interaction between the United States and Russia. In the case of Bosnia it is possible to consider the Russians as an obstacle to be overcome, or as a cooperative ally whose interests must be accommodated. Nor is it necessarily the case that NSC members held a fixed concept of Russia as one or the other. Russia held a paternalistic, culturally influenced perception of the Serbs as fellow Orthodox Slavs (a mix of “cultural traditions” and “genetic heritage” in the orientation phase of Russia’s OODA loop), but also had a private interest in inhibiting the use of force: they wanted to restrict the growth and effectiveness of NATO (Holbrooke 1999: 114, 143-144). Talbott (2002: 167-179), who attended the talks between acting Secretary of Defense William Perry and the Russian Minister of Defense, Pavel Grachev in the summer of 1995, notes that Grachev had basically accepted the strength of the American’s position and determination to act regardless of whether Russia cooperated and was intent instead on ensuring that Russian troops in Bosnia would not be seen as subordinate to NATO officers. Their begrudging integration in the Dayton Implementation Force suggests that in a limited sense, Russia was (reluctantly) cooperative in the American OODA loop, but still had an oppositional perspective on NATO. The quandary of how to accommodate Russia also fundamentally explains the creation of the Contact Group—“ Its stated objective was to revive the peace process in Bosnia, but its real purpose, in the minds of the allied foreign ministers, was to keep Russia, as they variously put it, inside the tent, on the reservation, or, in [Warren Christopher]’s phrase, sullen but not obstructionist” (Talbott 2002: 123).

### **Opposition from the Serbs**

Perhaps the actor that has the clearest position within the OODA loop is the Republika Srpska, the political and military organization of the Bosnian Serbs. While both the United States and most of Western Europe ultimately wanted the fighting to stop, over time several actions by the Serbs placed the West ever more firmly on the side of the Bosnian Muslims and, to a lesser extent, the Croats. The siege of Sarajevo, whose effects provided arresting fodder for the media throughout the course of the war, was

particularly key in providing the foundation for the narrative of an oppressed and dying Muslim minority in danger of being wiped out by a vastly better-equipped army of Serbs. Considering that American military might was only used against the Serbs, it is safe to say that they were considered to be “the enemy” that needed to be subdued. It may be that this relatively clear position in a highly complex decision environment explains their relative lack of prominence in the American decision narratives. The memoirs of the participants in the American decision process almost seem to treat the Serbs as a fixed quantity, a duplicitous group immune to peaceful incentives or diplomatic coercion. This perspective is probably due to the manifest failure of both Lord Carrington’s peace efforts and the Vance-Owen peace plan, although the extent of those failures only became fully obvious over the course of the Clinton Administration’s attempts to grapple with the situation. Clinton’s directive to analyze all possible policy options (in PRD-1 and at subsequent stages leading up to the Dayton Agreement) presumably included options that did not include the use of force at all, and Richard Holbrooke’s “shuttle diplomacy” suggests that diplomacy was paramount throughout. Yet almost all the American narratives have a resigned sense that the Serbs would not heed anything but the use of force. Consequently, the notion that American military power would be an inevitable prerequisite to an acceptable peace agreement has signal import in defining the problem: not *if* force should be used, but *how* it could be used while still navigating international and domestic constraints.

Of course, deciding that force is necessary and deciding that the United States would need to commit ground troops are not the same thing. But of the five options explicitly mentioned when the President issued PRD-1, four dealt with using or enabling military action.<sup>19</sup> The Administration was clearly willing to use diplomacy where possible, but even early on it was clear that—particularly when in dialogue with the Serbs—diplomacy was only effective when it was backed up with the implicit or explicit threat of force. Holbrooke makes this point most forcefully in *To End a War*, and it is basically

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<sup>19</sup> They included enforcing the UN no-fly zone over Bosnia with airpower, conducting air strikes on Serb forces, changing the UN arms embargo so that Bosnian Muslims had easier access to weapons, and the deployment of UN peacekeeping missions to Macedonia and Kosovo to keep the fighting from spreading. The only non-military option mentioned was the establishment of an international war crimes commission to deal with various atrocities that were already being reported (Daalder 2000: 8).

uncontested by any other member of the NSC. However, it is unclear to what degree this position is an emergent result of hindsight. In retrospect, nonviolent peacekeeping of the variety practiced by UNPROFOR was doomed to provide little remedy to aggression (particularly that of the Serbs, as Srebrenica made abundantly clear). Yet if it was so obvious that UNPROFOR was a poor palliative for the systemic violence, why were they still in Bosnia?

### **Congress as a Peer Actor**

Without delving into the European decision cycle, it is probably safe to say that if American policymakers had thought UNPROFOR had a chance to bring about a peaceful resolution to the Bosnia crisis on its own, they would not have pushed for airstrikes. Absent other constraints, if they were really convinced that UNPROFOR would work with airstrikes, they would have been more enthusiastic about supplementing UN troops with American ones. But this brings up the last constraints to consider: Congress and the popular opinion of American citizens. The two are worth considering in tandem, particularly because (like the president) Congress' continued employment is loosely dependent on popular approval, a fact that was particularly highlighted by the Democrats' dramatic loss of control of the House and Senate to the Republicans in the 1994 by-election. The issues that drove that change were more related to domestic issues than foreign policy, but the unpopularity of foreign deployments—especially after the mixed experience of Haiti and disastrous one of Somalia—fomented caution for those who supported the deployment of troops to Bosnia, and encouraged louder protests by those opposed to it. Of the ten bills the new Republican-dominated Congress brought to a vote as a part of the “Contract with America,” only one dealt with foreign policy: the National Security Revitalization Act, which (among other things) prohibited American troops from being placed under UN control and curtailed US funding of UN peacekeeping operations (Library of Congress 2014). Though the bill did not become law, its passage in the House of Representatives demonstrated a Congressional climate of hostility to foreign deployments, particularly in support of UN peacekeeping.

For all the difficulty in establishing the appropriateness of the OODA loop for the executive branch, it is even more difficult to establish if Congress can fit the OODA model, or if they have a discernable strategic culture. While most key policy decisions by the executive branch can ultimately be traced to the authority of the President, members of Congress each have far greater autonomy to make their own decisions, though this is not to say that their own decisions are not constrained by factors like party politics, campaign considerations, committee membership, constituent interests, and so on. But even if the OODA loop could be used for Congress, would it be one loop or 535 loops?<sup>20</sup> Are their decisions limited to passing laws, or should we include things like killing or promoting certain government initiatives through hearings?

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<sup>20</sup> 435 members of the House of Representatives, 100 members of the Senate.

## **CHAPTER 4 - CONCLUSION**

### **Endgame Realized**

If decisions in the real world were as clearly defined as theoretical models, the Clinton Administration's decision to deploy ground troops to Bosnia would be neatly demarcated and easy to identify. The reality is more nebulous. Because deploying American troops overseas in support of peacekeeping operations was unpopular, it was in the Administration's best interests to allow the idea to emerge in the public consciousness as gradually as possible, minimizing politically costly public statements. Because Clinton had promised European leaders that the United States would assist militarily in the withdrawal of UNPROFOR should it become necessary, even early on there was grounds for accepting the serious possibility that American soldiers would at some point be on the ground in Bosnia. As the NSC became aware of the implications of NATO's OPLAN 40104, the notion grew from a general sort of possibility into a definite plan. However, this was not so much a product of a decision to deploy American troops as it was an uncomfortable effect of alliance politics, and even then it was not a peacekeeping mission.

There was almost definitely no single moment when the NSC collectively concluded that they would support deploying American troops to Bosnia for a peacekeeping mission. In reality, it was a growing realization that emerged at different rates among the various members of the NSC (Daalder 2000: 102-106). However, the single most important point in solidifying this realization probably came as a result of a meeting in Tony Lake's office in the West Wing on July 17, 1995. Lake presented the NSC staff's take on the way forward on Bosnia, and asked Warren Christopher, Bill Perry (by that point the acting Secretary of Defense), Madeline Albright, John Shalikashvili (Powell's replacement as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), and Sandy Berger to provide feedback on where they saw Bosnia in the long term. Daalder (2000: 101) recounts that Christopher, Perry, and Shalikashvili were

disinterested in discussing a Bosnian endgame, but Lake had cannily arranged for the President to stop by as the meeting was close to concluding. When he arrived, Clinton commented that he was dissatisfied with where the current policy was, and asked that the group provide new ideas. Lake then used the President's input to press the other senior advisors to submit papers that would lay out their respective agencies' positions on what the Bosnian endgame should be.

As a result of the July 17 meeting, four papers (one each from the US Ambassador to the UN, the NSC staff, the State Department, and the Defense Department) were submitted to Tony Lake, and on August 7, 1995, the principals met with the President to discuss their papers. According to Ivo Daalder (whose account is drawn from his personal experience working on the NSC staff at the time), the papers submitted by the UN Ambassador's office and the NSC staff both acknowledged that deployment of American ground troops to Bosnia would probably be necessary. In contrast, the papers submitted by the State Department and the Department of Defense did not concede that point. All these positions were presented to the President, who—after asking for feedback from those present—expressed support for Albright's paper in particular and some of the specific points presented by Lake. Follow-up meetings on August 8 and 9 were used to refine the President's guidance into a single set of talking points that Lake then presented to European governments as the approach the President had decided to pursue in Bosnia.<sup>21</sup>

Lake's talking points did not specify that the United States would definitely deploy ground troops, but by virtue of the fact that the new initiative was an exercise of American leadership, it was implied that the US would be willing to deploy troops if required. (Specifically, one of Lake's points was that if diplomatic negotiations failed, the US would “encourage the presence of a multinational force to assist the Bosnians in defending their territory.” [Daalder 2000: 113]). The implication, veiled in diplomatic statements and media engagements, was made explicit in the interagency discussions on implementing the new initiative that began as soon as Lake left for Europe. Daalder (2000: 140-149) observes that once the new policy was endorsed by the President in early August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were immediately tasked with developing concrete plans for the expanding employment of military force,

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<sup>21</sup> Daalder (2000:112) indicates that Lake visited London, Paris, Bonn, Rome, Sochi, Madrid, and Ankara.

including ground troops. Many subsequent disagreements and issues would arise regarding the size, composition, and most importantly duration of any ground deployment to Bosnia, but by early August 1995 it was clear that the Clinton Administration had decided that they would need to be ready to deploy ground troops, and the rest of the government began planning accordingly. Technically, the decision to deploy ground troops was finalized when the United States agreed to support the peace agreement worked out at Dayton with American ground element in the Implementation Force. But that decision was merely the execution of the policy shift that occurred in August 1995.

### **Assessing the OODA Loop's Effectiveness**

The NSC staff and the chief decision-maker they supported—the President—were presented with an incredibly complex and intractable problem in the War in Bosnia. Propelled by his campaign promises, Clinton came to office with basic understanding that something more needed to be done to stop the killing. Yet it would ultimately take nearly three years from Clinton's inauguration until the Dayton Accords were initialed on November 21, 1995, and human cost for that decision interval was terrible. But this is not about affixing blame—whatever the Clinton Administration's failures, they were not the instigators of the grim harvest of blood in Bosnia. The question, rather, is to understand the process by which they reached decisions about what to do in Bosnia, and to determine if various conceptual models provide insight not only regarding how the decisions were made, but to clearly identify the limiting factors that stretched out the action timeline.

If the OODA loop is a good model for assessing the NSC's decision to deploy ground troops, the components of the OODA loop should be clearly identifiable in the Bosnia case study. For some components, this is easy. It is clear that the NSC made observations, including the reception of outside information, interacting with the environment, and engaged with unfolding circumstances. It's also clear that a decision was made, and eventually that an action was taken as a result of that decision. But if the decision to deploy ground troops was not reached in any kind of a linear fashion; instead it was a convoluted process filled with dead ends and frustrated ambitions. The lack of alignment between the

OODA loop diagram and the way the decision was actually taken might suggest that had the NSC used the OODA loop model, they would have been empowered to make decisions more quickly.

Unfortunately, it is doubtful that the NSC would have found the OODA approach helpful in resolving the Bosnia crisis, because it fails to account for so many factors that shaped the NSC's actual decision process. The problem was not that the NSC needed to operate at a higher tempo to achieve victory over their opponent. Instead, the problem was that the NSC could not figure out what course of action would end the violence in Bosnia while promoting American interests and values. Actions that could bring about military domination over the Serbs—namely, airstrikes—had to be weighed against negative repercussions to alliances and the web of relationships the United States has with the international community.

The OODA loop is in need of substantial revision before it can be a useful tool for understanding decisions at the level of the NSC. The potential that OODA holds is mesmerizing—it exists not just as an abstract model describing human behavior, but as a philosophy that promises decisive advantage to those willing to apply its tenants with audacity. What if the Clinton Administration had embraced Boyd's teachings, and acted rapidly to identify the appropriate *schwerpunkt* of the Bosnian crisis, and then struck decisively to break the gridlock? This is where Boyd's concept breaks down. On the tactical and operational level, surprise and speed can paper over the shortcomings of an aggressive decision. A poorly-chosen focal point can still lead to a successful engagement if executed with enough vigor and a little luck. Strategic decisions—and even more so, grand strategic decisions—do not often have that same luxury, because their consequences reverberate for decades and sometimes centuries. The specific principles laid down in the Dayton Accords are still in force in Bosnia today, nearly two decades after its signing. When the US managed to get the belligerent parties to capitulate and come to the bargaining table, details hashed out long before, like the division of Bosnian territory so that Federation dominated by Bosniaks and Croats would have 51 percent and the Serbs 49 percent (initially worked out in the 1994 Contact Group plan) would return to prominence, sometimes to the point of nearly derailing peace negotiations (Holbrooke 1999: 294-309).



Thus, the chief advantage of using the OODA loop is negated by the introduction of complex, interconnected scenarios with decidedly non-binary outcomes (it's not just a question of winning or losing) and enormously distant repercussions. Still, decisions must be made and, totally aside from the "Patterns of Conflict" influenced philosophy, the OODA loop does present a coherent and basically logical sequence of steps that generally occur when decisions are made. The NSC did, in fact, collect observations, develop an orientation towards what was happening in Bosnia, and eventually they decided and acted, ultimately deploying ground troops as a part of the Implementation Force (IFOR) in late December of 1995. But as Mayk and Rubin (1988) point out, almost all command, control, and communication (C<sup>3</sup>) paradigms possess most of the same characteristics of observations that are analyzed and then acted upon, though the similarity is often obscured by specialized jargon. At the grand strategic level, there is little that recommends the OODA loop over Wohl's SHOR model, or Rassmussen's model of operator thinking, Endsley's model of Situation Awareness, or even models drawn from computer network specifications, like the ISO OSI Reference Model for communications.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the OODA loop is insufficient for the actual considerations that the NSC had to deal with, but most competing models share the same failings.

In particular, most control theory models do not adequately account for cooperative decisions made in conjunction with peer organizations. It is impossible to know for certain what the Clinton Administration would have done in Bosnia (and how quickly) had they not been constrained by Britain, France, Russia, Congress, and a reluctant American public, but the reality is that those constraints did exist, and they were of critical importance in defining the menu of realistic options available to the NSC at any given time. Merely classifying friendly and semi-friendly peers as a part of the environment or unfolding circumstances is a possible means to make OODA "work," but at that point OODA becomes useless in providing insight on how to resolve the problem—it's merely another procrustean theory that awkwardly redefines the situation until it fits within the formula.

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<sup>22</sup> A chart comparing the ISO OSI Reference Model for Communications to a proposed C<sup>3</sup> model can be found in Mayk and Rubin 1988, pg. 56.

The story of NATO's intervention in Bosnia is ultimately one of compromises between autonomous yet interconnected actors, and a decision model that contributes to a deeper understanding of that story must capture that interconnectedness. The interconnectedness also relates to another gap in the OODA model: planning. Many later theorists have acknowledged the absence of a distinction between deliberative planning and more spontaneous, "on the fly" decisions in the OODA loop, and consequently some have inserted it into the model (Hasik 2013). Interconnected planning proved particularly relevant in Bosnia over NATO's OPLAN 40104, which if approved would have necessitated the deployment of American troops to facilitate the withdrawal of UNPROFOR. That particular scenario was perceived at the time almost as a sort of decision that would obligate the US even without American consent. At the very least, Richard Holbrooke (1999: 65-68) was of the opinion that because OPLAN 40104 was endorsed by the North Atlantic Council, the United States would be compelled to send troops to support the plan. Significantly, Ivo Daadler (2000: 56-61) points out that Holbrooke's narrative is fundamentally flawed—the North Atlantic Council never approved OPLAN 40104, and would not even be asked to approve it unless the UN had requested assistance in withdrawing UNPROFOR. And even at that point, the North Atlantic Council would meet and member states (including the United States) would have the option to veto the plan. In essence, Holbrooke gave completely inaccurate counsel to President Clinton on the sequence of events and inherent obligations had the UN voted to withdraw UNPROFOR. However, the debate is still significant because it shows how deeply interconnected the planning process was for that particular contingency. Even though the United States would not have been "forced" to deploy troops by OPLAN 40104, Clinton would have been in an awkward position not because of arcane NATO rules, but because he gave his word that the US would assist should UNPROFOR need it in withdrawing from Bosnia.

### **Assessing Strategic Culture's Effectiveness**

Unlike the OODA loop, strategic culture literature is intentionally targeted at decisions made at the national policy level. But this is a double-edged feature—though OODA may be inadequate for

questions of grand strategy, it still has utility as a tactical and operational tool for warfighters. Strategic culture has no such fallback position in which to take refuge. Either it helps to understand the policy environment in which decisions were made during the Bosnia crisis, or it is ripe to be discarded entirely.

But what is it, exactly, that strategic culture theory is actually enabling us to do in the context of this situation? The “three generations” of theorists cannot reach any agreement on what strategic culture means, so it is rather unlikely that they would be able to agree on what the body of theory might empower us to do when examining the Bosnia situation; in fact, there is no guarantee that they would even argue that strategic culture *should* enable us to do anything. This is a classic example of what Rittel and Webber (1973) call “wicked problems.” They proposed that purely scientific solutions to questions of social policy are doomed to failure because

“Policy problems cannot be definitively described. Moreover, in a pluralistic society there is nothing like an undisputable public good; there is no objective definition of equity; policies that respond to social problems cannot be meaningfully correct or false; and it makes no sense to talk about ‘optimal solutions’ so social problems unless severe qualifications are imposed first. Even worse, there are no ‘solutions’ in the sense of definitive and objective answers.” (pg. 155)

In a complex, messy world that has abandoned universal moral norms in pursuit of more perfect pluralism and amoral science, why should we expect that strategic culture theorists would be able to find agreement on something so complex?

What makes matters worse is that because culture is the product of a vast panoply of factors, it is almost impossible for empirical analysis to capture all the germane elements that may shape outcomes. How can hundreds or thousands of years of history—to name a single factor in present in an organization’s strategic culture—possibly be reduced to a quantity that can be cross-compared to other test cases? Despite the efforts of the third-generation strategic culture theorists, it cannot. This is not to say that the third-generational approaches are totally without merit, just that in order to have any deductive merit at all, the case must be so constrained that it can only have limited practical application. And, as Colin Gray points out, there is no null-culture sample against which to compare their data, which makes it very difficult to attribute outcomes to a particular element of an organization’s strategic culture. When the Clinton Administration decided to pursue a “lift and strike” policy in Bosnia, they sent Warren

Christopher to seek approval from America's peers on the international stage, and the trip proved to be an utter failure. Just two months later Lake and Bartholomew would make another trip and meet with many of the same people, resulting in the successful issuance of the NAC's communique of 3 August that provided for dual-key airstrikes. Did Lake and Bartholomew find a different outcome because of the different policy they supported, because of their presentation style, because of variations in interdepartmental strategic culture, or was there something else at work? While there are many facts that might be used to demonstrate one conclusion or another, the point is that they do not lead to an empirical validation of anything. Inductive reasoning is necessary.

For this reason, first-generation style strategic culture theory (particularly in the style of Colin Gray) may not precisely be political science, because ultimately a heavy dose of political philosophy, semi-abstract reasoning from history, and raw good judgment is needed to make analytical progress. So what does strategic culture literature have to offer? Gray (1999: 131-136) observes that strategic affairs engage in a continuous interplay between ideas and behavior, and it is this relationship where strategic culture thinking may have insights on matters like the Bosnian war. It prompts us to ask: what sort of ideas did the NSC entertain on Bosnia, and how did these translate into actual behavior? If we interpret strategic culture to mean "a national way of war," this would mean that there are certain ideas that Americans tend to have, and that these ideas are habitually manifested in patterns of behavior. For example in the Gulf War, Bosnia, Kosovo, and many other contemporary conflicts, the US has shown an aversion to taking military casualties: the idea. The behavior that correlates to this idea is a heavy reliance on airpower, which is why in Bosnia the US was enthusiastic about conducting NATO airstrikes (as they did in Operation Deliberate Force) but was reticent to deploy vulnerable ground troops. But aren't most countries averse to taking casualties? Even if a country's specific threshold is different, it's fair to say that no country welcomes the slaughter of its citizens on a military deployment. So why is it that countries like Britain and France were willing to deploy ground troops as a part of UNPROFOR while the US was not? If we are seeking "indicators" to signify strategic culture in action, should we expect behavior or ideas to be the indicator? The answer is that both are indicators, but they do not act

alone. Because strategic culture examines the interplay between ideas and behavior, when similar ideas are present (as with the US and Europe with regard to casualties) but different behavior is evidenced, strategic culture provides a means to explain the difference.

The strategic culture difference that prompted Britain and France to deploy troops to Bosnia while the US held back was not simple casualty aversion, but rather casualty aversion combined with perceived national interests. As European powers, Britain and France (and many of the other countries of Europe) concluded that security in Bosnia was in their interests, and thus judged the significance of Bosnia greater than the risk of casualties. But, as Gray (2000: 139) notes, for the United States “isolationism, certainly unilateralism, remains a potent icon and impulse for policy.” Does this mean that American strategic culture had to change for its behavior to overcome the isolationist idea? Gray would suggest not. Instead, the pre-existing American strategic culture had to adapt as the pressure to do something about Bosnia increased. That pressure didn’t demolish American strategic culture; it merely provided the requisite impetus for the actors to overcome barriers to action. So, for example, the fact that the US deployed troops to Bosnia didn’t mean that Clinton could have easily deployed troops elsewhere. The Kosovo Air War (and the fact that the combat portion of the war was comprised strictly of airpower) is evidence that Clinton faced similar obstacles just three years after deploying troops to Bosnia. These sorts of patterns demonstrate how strategic culture can, using linkages between ideas and behavior, illuminate barriers and incentives to action that may not be neatly quantifiable but are nonetheless essential to understanding strategic action.

### **Understanding the Right Questions to Ask**

If the search for the answer to a factual question fails to generate that answer, it is a failed quest. Deduction demands conclusions. But the inductive search for wisdom is often able to content itself with discovering the right questions to ask, and that is the true value of what strategic culture literature can provide with regard to the crisis in Bosnia. It is also where strategic culture theory most clearly overlaps with the OODA loop: orientation does not predetermine what answers an actor will reach, but it does

define what questions the actor will think to ask. In his 1994 book *Beyond Peace*, completed just two weeks before his death, Richard Nixon called Bosnia “one of America’s most unfortunate and unnecessary foreign policy failures” (pg. 153), and observes that Bosnia is an example of “multilateralism serving as an escape hatch from individual responsibility” (pg. 90). Though Nixon’s own record on foreign policy is mixed, his mention of multilateralism astutely illuminates how the lack of clear American interests in Bosnia not only allows policymakers to avoid answering the question of what to do, but to deny that the question was theirs to answer.

Lake would eventually come up with three questions on which he thinks debates over peacekeeping missions should focus. First, “how best do we pursue diplomatic solutions to internal conflicts?” Second, “How best do we conduct peacekeeping operations to reinforce diplomatic agreements.” And finally (and most importantly), “what are the proper *purposes* of our diplomatic and peacekeeping efforts?” (Lake 2000: 116; italics in original). His third question demonstrates the value of studying strategic culture and the orientation phase of the OODA loop, because every government that became embroiled in Bosnia was forced to grapple with the same problems, but they often did so implicitly rather than explicitly. The Russians did not have to be told that the Serbs were fellow Slavs—they were constantly aware of that fact. The use of strategic culture provides means to examine *why* they would continue to support the Serbs despite multiple incidents of the Serbs failing to uphold agreed-upon peace deals, which severely undermined Russia’s ability to provide assurances that previously-enacted measures were sufficient constraints on the Serbs.

Similarly, without strategic culture, the trail of promises and ambitions that litter the American policy position on Bosnia looks decidedly odd. Realism offers poor justification for the United States’ involvement in Bosnia, and while liberalism provides some explanation, it approaches the problem exactly backwards—it starts with a prescribed set of principles, and seeks to understand how this scenario fulfills them. Strategic culture, at least, brings the analytical freedom of first asking what the people involved actually thought, and then seeking to understand why they acted as they did. Why would Clinton promise to provide American troops if UNPROFOR had to withdraw? Why would the United

States, seeing the need for airstrikes, first seek the approval of both NATO members and non-NATO members? There are multiple answers to these questions, but the first question from which all these answers spring is “who does the NSC think it is?” Identity sets the stage for motive; motive prompts action. Unfortunately, even if strategic culture is a philosophically valid way to think about organizations, its ubiquity makes it very difficult to subject to empirical dissection without risk of attribution error. Correlation is easy; causation is difficult. The Bosnia scenario is an exemplar of this difficulty. It is easy to speculate about the sources and nature of American strategic culture during the Clinton Administration, but because the question ultimately concerns the private motivations of small groups of people, it is somewhere between difficult and impossible to conclusively prove why they made the decisions that they did.

The tragedy of Bosnia raises questions about the nature of man, and the nature of the political structures that enable governments to kill or to prevent killing. Academic research can seek to understand how the principal actors understood those questions, and how that understanding shaped the actions that they took. Strategic culture is a mildly useful tool in this quest, but it is something that most policymakers consider intuitively, and it seems unlikely that the literature in this realm would be any more helpful than simply reading historical literature instead. The OODA loop also has some value as a philosophy, but is more limited in its utility as a practical guide to policymakers. Even if Boyd is correct that people observe, orient, decide and act, do we really need a model to tell us that? Some of those parts are easy to identify (like the action of deploying IFOR, which can be validated through official orders and actual movements in theater); others—like the orientation of the NSC—are exceedingly difficult to definitively quantify. Furthermore, the OODA loop’s recommendation to operate at a higher tempo breaks down when applied to complex strategic decisions like whether or not to deploy ground troops to Bosnia.

It is important to resist the temptation to reduce the problem of Bosnia to discrete, easily compartmentalized sections suitable for antiseptic analysis. Bosnia was a complex, messy problem whose full breadth only emerged over time, and any problem analysis that neglects that complexity is

essentially unhelpful. The National Security Council was confronted with a hell on earth, and herculean efforts were required to abolish it. By coming alongside the weary decisionmakers and seeking to comprehend their challenges, the scholar will find that world problems will appear not easier, but harder. But it is this humility before the great problems of the world that may provide a window into true wisdom.



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