

Situation Awareness and Strategic Culture

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Abstract

The state of uncertainty in the strategic environment has been a persistent challenge throughout human history. The concept of situational awareness has existed for many years and entails understanding what is currently happening and, based on that information, what might occur in the future. Strategic culture represents a set of beliefs held by a specific community, gradually formed over time through a unique and lengthy historical process, with clear principles and practical application regarding the use of force. In this context, effective strategic planning requires a credible assessment of the starting point and the operational environment in the form of situational awareness, which is crucial before developing a VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) strategic plan. Both components support strategic foresight as a key concept and tool for making effective and timely decisions. The aim of this paper is to present strategic culture and situational awareness, analyze scientific sources, and using the example of Ukraine, demonstrate how incomplete situational awareness can lead to erroneous thinking and, ultimately, tragically incorrect decisions.

Key words

situational awareness, strategic culture, decision making, concept of situational awareness

Introduction

Situation Awareness is the process of building comprehensive pictures of the battlespace to the decision maker who can further utilize it for threat evaluation. The concept of situational awareness is well-established in the domain of studying human factors in complex environments. In practice, there is a long list of examples that convince someone that situational awareness has its reality and significance. Indeed, knowledge of information relevant to the effective performance of tasks is crucial for safety and productivity in a wide range of situations, such as air traffic controllers, supersonic aircraft pilots, operators of nuclear power plants, and military commanders (Durso, F. T., & Gronlund, S. D. (1999). Situation awareness. In F. T. Durso (Ed.), *Handbook of applied cognition* (pp. 283–314). John Wiley & Sons Ltd.).

However, when attempting to define situational awareness (SA), the result is highly variable. Reviews of definitions from different sources (e.g., Dominguez, 1994; Breton and Rousseau, 2001) clearly indicate a diversity of perspectives on SA. As Breton and Rousseau (2007) and emerged as a crucial concept in dynamic human decision-making. When experts discuss the existence of the general phenomenon known as situational awareness, most discussions are reasonably consensual.

One might not be overly concerned about this situation. As Pew (2000) pointed out: The concept of situational awareness shares a common history with several psychological concepts such as intelligence, vigilance, attention, fatigue, stress, workload, or compatibility. For decades, all these concepts were poorly defined. However, each became important as it drew attention to critical processes or mental states that were previously unknown. Ultimately, they changed the ways in which human factors issues were studied and brought about new advantages

Defining Situation Awareness

Situation awareness is the understanding of an environment, and represents the understanding of what is happening now, and given that information, what may happen in the future. Furthermore, SA is an adaptable, externally

focused awareness that yields knowledge about the dynamic environment of tasks and directed action within that environment. It is recognized as a key foundation for successful decision-making in various situations, while inadequate situational awareness is acknowledged as one of the primary causes of accidents attributed to human error.

Research into SA definitions reveals a diversity of concepts currently conveyed in the literature. Breton and Rousseau (2001) conducted a systematic classification of 26 SA definitions. It turned out that these definitions were evenly divided into two classes that correspond to the now accepted duality of SA as a state or as a process.

Situational awareness represents the dominant concern of a system's operation, based on a descriptive view of decision-making. This exploration delves into the relationship between situational awareness and numerous factors comprising individuals and the environment. Among these factors, the ability to concentrate, focus on tasks, and absorb large amounts of information constitutes critical limiting factors in gathering and interpreting information from the environment to form situational awareness. Mental models and goal-directed behavior are assumed to be important mechanisms for overcoming these limitations. Individual awareness can be influenced by various factors such as specific design or model by which an individual behaves in a work environment, workload, stress, as well as the complexity of the information system used as a tool.

Modeling situational awareness is often used in the command and control domain to assess situations and provide decision support. However, models are complex in real-world applications and not straightforward to use. This paper introduces a Context-aware Decision Support system (CaDS), which consists of a situation model for collaborative modeling of situational awareness and a group of entity agents, one for each individual user, for focused and tailored decision support. By incorporating a rule-based reasoning mechanism, entity agents provide functions including event classification, action recommendations, and proactive decision-making. The implementation and performance of the proposed system are demonstrated through a case study on a simulated management and control application.

Defining Strategic Culture

Today, strategic culture can best be defined as a set of beliefs, which arise gradually over time and are created through a unique long-term historical process, held by a certain community, with clear attitudes and application in practice regarding the use of force. These beliefs of values and norms shape the country's approach to strategy and decision-making in international relations.

The study of strategic culture teaches us how to understand and interpret state and military action, how to locate individual maneuvers in a broader historical context, and consequently, how to better predict state behavior.

International Security Studies and Strategic Culture

Johnston (1995) discusses the progress made in studying strategic culture and raises conceptual and methodological issues in the literature. He advocates for caution in using strategic culture as an analytical tool and argues that the dominant approach to strategic culture is simultaneously insufficient and predetermined. Johnston suggests that the links between strategic culture and behavior should be approached with a great deal of caution because research on symbolic elements of strategy suggests that strategic culture may not have a direct, independent, and socially specific impact on strategic choices.

The question of culture did not attract much attention in international security studies and international relations theory until the last ten to fifteen years, when interest in culture, strategic culture, and other ideational explanations for the behavior of states has grown. Much of this new research is consistent with the conclusion of Joseph Nye and Sean Lynn-Jones (1988) that strategic studies has been characterized by American ethnocentrism and a concomitant neglect of "national styles of strategy". At the same time Ken Booth's study (1979), investigates the way in which cultural distortions have affected the theory and execution of strategy.

Most of those who use the term "culture" tend to argue, explicitly or implicitly, that different states have different predominant strategic preferences that are

rooted in the early or formative experiences of the state, and are influenced to some degree by the philosophical, political, cultural, and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites. Ahistorical or “objective” variables such as technology, polarity, or relative material capabilities are all of secondary importance. It is strategic culture, they argue, that gives meaning to these variables. The weight of historical experiences and historically-rooted strategic preferences tends to constrain responses to changes in the “objective” strategic environment, thus affecting strategic choices in unique ways. If strategic culture itself changes, it does so slowly, lagging behind changes in “objective” conditions.

Although the works on strategic culture of Jonathan Adelman and Chih-yu Shih (1993), David T. Twining (1989) and James March (1978), are somewhat older, they are still relevant and contemporary this does not imply that the strategic culture approach necessarily rejects rationality-though some of its proponents mistakenly treat strategic culture as opposed to assumptions of rationality. Indeed, strategic culture is compatible with notions of limited rationality (where strategic culture simplifies reality), with process rationality (where strategic culture defines ranked preferences or narrows options), and with adaptive rationality (where historical choices, analogies, metaphors, and precedents are invoked to guide ~choice). Scheling (1980) in his series of closely interrelated essays on game theory discuss how the strategic culture approach does seem potentially incompatible with game rationality. Whereas strategies in games focus on making the “best” choice depending on expectations about what other players will do, strategic culture, as the concept has been used to date, implies that a state’s strategic behavior is not fully responsive to others’ choices. Johnson (1991) point out how a burgeoning literature, however, points out that in multiple equilibria games (eg, coordination games, iterated prisoners’ dilemma games, etc.), ideational variables may explain why players’ expectations converge on certain equilibria, and how initial preferences and perceived payoffs are defined.

Instead, a historically imposed inertia on choice makes strategy less responsive to specific contingencies. Thus, in the view of some American analysts of Soviet strategic culture, the Soviets did not adopt American

MAD-based deterrence doctrines, as US. policy makers had once predicted they would, since Soviet strategic culture-based preferences

Gray (1999), one of the most esteemed scholars in the field of strategic thinking, elevates the scientific argument on studying and understanding strategic culture to a new level in his work titled "Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation Theory Strikes Back." This article serves as a direct response to recent criticisms of the so-called first generation theorists of strategic culture. The author reexamines both the topic of strategic culture and what he wrote about it fifteen or more years ago. He finds that, while there is significant room for improvement in what he wrote at that time, recent theorizing by Alastair Iain Johnston, in particular, is based on a misunderstanding of the nature, character, and "action" of strategic culture. Johnston's insistence on separating ideas from behavior, with the dominant purpose of developing a theory that can be falsified, is particularly noteworthy. Therefore, "Strategic Culture as Context" thoroughly reconsiders issues of definition, with a specific focus on the nexus of ideas and behavior. The article proceeds to identify arguments that should enhance the understanding of how strategic culture "functions" and proposes a better set of discriminators, different perspectives, for a more nuanced consideration of evidence on strategic culture. Overall, the article suggests that strategic culture provides a context for understanding, rather than explaining causality of behavior.

Strategic culture: definition and origins of the debate

Strategic culture refers to a set of beliefs, values, and norms that shape a country's approach to strategy and decision-making in international relations. This culture plays a crucial role in forming perceptions of external threats, the state's identity, security priorities, and in shaping long-term strategic goals. Understanding strategic culture assists analysts, policymakers, and experts in international relations in better interpreting a state's behavior on the world stage.

Al-Rodhan Nayef (2015) speaks very broadly about strategic culture giving the view on strategic culture as an analytical lens through which to better view the continuities underlying international crises and the motivations

of a state's actions. Often, they are supported by a historical tendency of the state to preserve its perceived spheres of influence. Strategic culture can leave a lasting legacy in a state's strategic thinking for decades. Essentially, strategic culture is an attempt to integrate cultural considerations, cumulative historical memory, and their impacts into the analysis of a state's security policies and international relations.

Snyder (1977) defined strategic culture as the "sum total of ideals, conditional emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of the national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to [...] strategy".

The strategic culture emerged from the Cold War and remain in low profile until the end of the Cold War when it was liberated from the monopoly of realist and neo-realist theories. Culture and nation-specific narratives deserve a thorough examination in the analysis of state security because they are engrained in our irrational mental strata, forming a code of conduct that is strong enough to resist environmental changes.

The strategic culture of any country has numerous sources and must remain a 'flexible' concept given the various factors influencing the formation of national culture and subsequent rationality of security policy and strategic thinking. Some essential principles can be extracted from the theoretical framework of strategic culture. Factors such as geopolitics, norms and customs, perceptions of regional and international roles, political systems, and power structures (including the balance between military and civilian actors or how military power and institutions are structured) solidify in collective memory and identity through political narratives, educational programs, artistic and popular interpretations (often carefully selected) of historical episodes, interpretations of shared memories, etc.

As Al-Rodhan (2015) emphasize each and every state enters the international arena with its historical baggage of accumulated experiences, beliefs, cultural influences and geographic and material limitations; all of which impact its conduct. As examples he presents Israel's highly emotional view of its culture or Iran's deep need for distinguishing itself are not just superficial facets of their 'national personality' but constant and predominant features of their

foreign policy. A clear example of these historical motivators could be given by China. It is virtually impossible to look at the foreign policy of China without considering the deeper historical and cultural roots that shaped it.

Policy framework

Studying strategic culture teaches us, as Al-Rodhan (2015) suggests, how to understand and interpret state and military actions, how to place specific maneuvers in a broader historical context, and consequently, how to better predict a state's behavior. Strategic culture is not dogma, nor is it a restrictive lens through which we view the past or future. It is a useful tool for understanding the circumstances under which a state defines appropriate means and goals to achieve its security objectives. Strategic culture thus encompasses what I term the 'emotions of states' (national pride and prestige) and the 'self-interest of states' (pursuit of national interests). This approach provides a holistic view of strategic culture as it considers both conceptual variables and specific constraints that states encounter in the international system.

In the process of deconstructing this discourse, more space is created for a clearer depiction of history, a more realistic and balanced acceptance of one's own past, friends, and foes. Such introspection reveals the sources of state self-characterization and also reveals deeply rooted uneasy, apprehensions and aspirations. It also build the groundwork for construct peace and a more stable international environment. Anarchy that can appear in global environment and its implications can be mitigated if and when these perceptions are successfully managed. Therefore, the relevance of strategic cultural analysis to policymaking aids interstate interaction to occur in an atmosphere of reduced tension and diminished prejudice.

Strategic culture represents a country's presentation of its culture and history, and more often than not, it is crucial for its state-building presentation. This paper is not supporting for abandoning the discourse of national unity but rather for a less hyperbolic and more moderate interpretation of cumulative experiences and the others that support individual national histories.

Cultural approaches to strategic studies, as Lantis (2009) sees it have existed in various forms for many years. The argument that culture influences national security policy is grounded in classical works, including the writings of Thucydides and Sun Tzu. Clausewitz advanced these ideas by recognizing war and military strategy as a “test of moral and physical strength.” The goal of strategy was much more than defeating the enemy on the battlefield – it was the elimination of enemy morale. In the twentieth century, studies of national character linked Japanese and German strategic choices in World War II to deeply rooted cultural factors. Russell Weigley’s classic 1973 work, “The American Way of Warfare,” further emphasized the importance of cultural roots in strategic dispositions. Jack Snyder’s work on Soviet nuclear strategy during the Cold War directed scholars’ attention to the crucial link between political and military culture and strategic choices.

The subject of strategic culture matters deeply because it raises core questions about the roots of, and influences upon, strategic behaviour. By strategic behaviour, Gray (1999) means behaviour relevant to the threat or use of force for political purposes. Gray and other scholars of the first generation authors on strategic culture, though, how fundamentally correct in understanding of the subject, could be insufficiently critical of the friction that intervenes between cultural preference and behaviour.

Situation Awareness and Strategic Culture

Predicting the future of warfare is a highly challenging task that requires a deep understanding of geopolitics, military strategy, and human behavior. While historical trends and patterns can provide insights into future possibilities, the complexity and unpredictability of war make it nearly impossible to accurately predict its outcomes with certainty.

To embark on predictions, one must first reflect on the present and become aware of the dynamism of the security environment. This entails continuous monitoring of events, data collection, and processing, as well as dissemination. Without a high level of situational awareness and the presence of strategic culture, strategic prediction would not be comprehensive and valid. These

two concepts are fundamental to successful decision-making, as illustrated in the figure below. For this reason, the paper will first explain both concepts before delving into strategic prediction, which forms the backbone.

Figure 1. Dependence of strategic forecasting on situational awareness and strategic culture



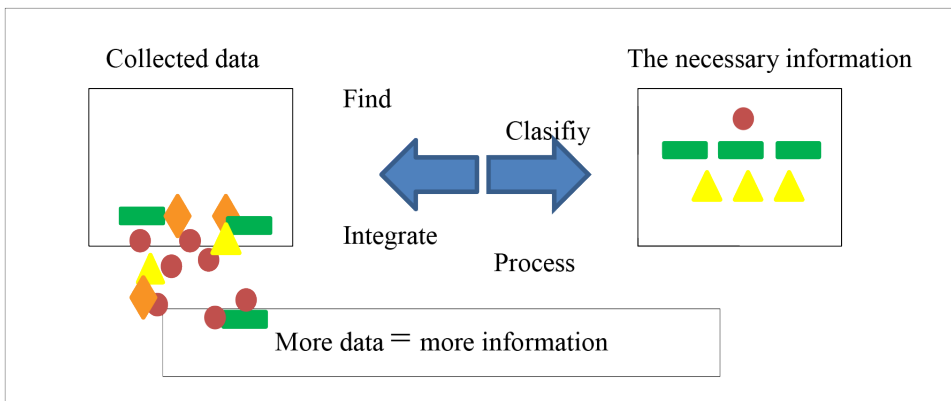
Source: Authors

Looking back over the years, good situational awareness has mostly involved training and experience, focusing on recognizing individual signs and learning about the “weight” of their significance. Technology, advanced sensors, data analysis tools, and decision support systems have elevated situational awareness to a higher level, enabling it to provide real-time information, data visualization, and predictive analytics.

Today’s systems and sensors dedicated to data collection are capable of generating vast amounts of data, both about the status of their own components and the conditions of the external environment. Thanks to advanced achievements in various segments of data communication and internet technologies, these systems provide data on almost everything, anywhere in the world. The challenge with such systems is no longer a lack of information but rather finding exactly what is needed at the moment it is needed.

The trend that is emerging, triggered by the overwhelming deluge of data, is a lack of informativeness. The reason for this is the vast gap between the large amount of data collected and people's ability to sift through and discern what is truly important in that heap. As the image below illustrates, more data does not necessarily mean more information. After identification, the data needs to be processed along with existing data to generate the necessary real and relevant information. When processing this data, special caution should be taken with all the challenges that arise due to the presence of strategic culture.

Figure 2. Information gap



Source: Authors

Theoretical Framework: Situation Awareness and Strategic Culture

The theoretical framework of situation awareness defined by Mica R. Endsley and Daniel J. Garland (2000), is based on various disciplines, including psychology, cognitive science, ergonomics, and various military sciences. A widely accepted definition describes situation awareness as the perception of elements in the environment within time and space, understanding their meaning, and projecting their status in the near future. This includes

awareness of relevant information, its accurate interpretation, and using that understanding to make effective decisions. Simply put, situation awareness is “knowing what is happening around you.”

According to the model developed by Endsley and Garland, situational awareness consists of three basic components: perception of situational elements, understanding situational elements, and predicting future events.

Strategic culture is an integrated system of symbols that act to establish pervasive and enduring strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and effectiveness of military force in inter-state political affairs and shaping these concepts in a way that makes strategic preferences uniquely realistic and effective. According to a widely accepted definition: “Strategic culture provides an analytical lens through which the continuities underlying international crises and the motivations of state actions are better perceived” Al-Rodhan (2015). In other words, it is a system of inherited concepts expressed in symbolic forms through which people communicate, sustain, and develop their knowledge and attitudes towards life. Many theorists conceptualize strategic culture as collectively held semi-conscious or unconscious images, assumptions, codes, and scripts that define the external environment. Johnston (1995) explain how these codes, images, and scripts enable a group to cope with issues related to external adaptation or internal integration. Essentially, it is an attempt to integrate cultural considerations of cumulative historical memory and their impacts on the analysis of states’ security policies and international relations.

Impact of Situation Awareness and Strategic Culture on the Decision-Making Process

By providing a foundation for assessing options and selecting appropriate courses of action, situational awareness influences decision-making processes¹. When discussing the decision-making process, the Situation Awareness (SA) model consists of several levels that form the structural

1 The general definition of this term states that it is “the process of identifying decisions, collecting information, and evaluating alternative solutions, with the result being a decision.” More commonly known as the Decision-Making Process.

basis for creating systems and tools that effectively measure and support SA. If any of these levels are not satisfied, strategic planning will not be effective, and decisions may be flawed. Additionally, it is crucial in the forecasting stage to ensure a “pool of expert analysts” who are unbiased, objective, and carefully consider all parameters, avoiding any influence from bias in their analyses.

The relationship between situational awareness and the decision-making process is mutual. Situational awareness provides the necessary information and overall understanding for effective decision-making, while decision-making relies on a clear and accurate understanding of the situation. Situational awareness also influences the speed and reliability of decision-making. Individuals who are situationally aware can process information more quickly, identify important details, and make real-time decisions.

Without situational awareness, an individual would lack the ability to gather, interpret, and analyze relevant information, resulting in irrational decisions. It is important to emphasize that all analytical work related to situational awareness, involving continuous monitoring and measurement, should be presented in numerical or other measurable forms. Referring to the quote at the beginning of this chapter, without a numerical representation and the ability to numerically demonstrate results, it would be challenging to convince people around them of the accuracy of their predictions.

What strategic culture should do is provide decision-makers with a uniquely structured set of strategic choices from which predictions about future behaviors can be derived. These behaviors can be observed in strategic cultural artifacts, and their changes can be tracked over time. The problem that arises with strategic culture is the dominance of subcultures that impose cultural forms on other groups, manipulate them, or persuade them that the dominant cultural forms are precisely their own forms.

Most users of the term “strategic culture” tend to argue that different states have different preferences rooted in the early or formative experiences of the state. They claim that the cognitive characteristics of a state and its elite are, to a certain extent, influenced by philosophical and political factors. The weight of historical experiences and historically rooted strategic preferences tends

to limit the response to changes in the “objective” strategic environment, thus influencing strategic choices and decisions.

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If it is established that strategic culture limits decision-makers, then it must be monitored and analyzed from its origins. In other words, if strategic choice is largely determined by values or assumptions deeply rooted in the ideological history of the state, it must be approached with caution because strategic culture provides the framework for strategic foresight through which decision-makers ultimately interpret or assess information. It shapes their perceptions, priorities, and inclinations. For example, different cultures may have different risk tolerances, leading to different influences on decision-making readiness. A culture more inclined to risk will result in an adventurous approach, while a risk-averse culture will likely opt for a more conservative version. Cultural factors such as openness to new ideas, willingness to adapt, and the ability to learn from mistakes also significantly influence the outcome of decisions. It is concluded that both situational awareness and strategic culture are equally important, and without them, it is impossible to conduct strategic foresight that will provide quality outcomes for decision-making.

Consequences of Poor Situation Awareness: Case Study Ukraine

The dual aggression of Russia against Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 is an example of how incomplete situational awareness can lead to erroneous thinking and, ultimately, even tragically wrong decisions. Since Russia’s significant involvement in the so-called uprising of the threatened population and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, a belief prevailed among Western political leaders and analyst that Russian President Putin would not lead his country into new armed conflicts.

For example, on February 16, 2022, eight days before the start of the Russian aggression, the analyst from the Atlantic Council listed reasons „why Putin won't invade Ukraine“ (Ullman, 2022). It is worth noting that the Atlantic Council is a reputable organization with a rich 60-year history, describing itself as a nonpartisan organization that galvanizes US leadership and engagement in the world, in partnership with allies and partners, to shape solutions to global challenges - and precisely for that reason, one could expect their analysts to provide better assessments. But of course, it was not just the Atlantic Council that erred. There are other examples of poor forecasters, such as the BBC, which on February 21, 2022 (just three days before the start of the aggression), stated „reasons why Putin might not invade“ (Gardner, 2022).

In these articles, analysts argued that the Russian economy would suffer significant damage due to the aggression; a worsening standard of living would prompt the Russian population to revolt; and consequently, president Putin would (as a rational politician and even a businessman) prefer to abandon the planned „special operation“.

Not even an open attack on a neighboring sovereign state has opened the eyes of all analysts. A year and a half after the start of military operations, many analysts continued to predict the imminent cessation of military operations, still citing the same reasoning.

Indeed, the Russian economy did suffer a blow. The European Council summarizes reports from international financial organizations at the end of 2023 as follows: „According to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2022 was a bad year for the Russian economy. It is estimated that in 2022, Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) dropped by 2.1%. Russia's economy may continue to shrink in 2023. Its GDP is forecast to decline by 2.5% in the worst-case scenario (OECD) ...“ (European Council, 2023).

And still, despite the decline in economic indicators and the likely negative impact on the standard of living for Russians, Putin's popularity and support for the continuation of the „special operation“ remain high. In October 2023, according to a survey by the independent Levada Center, a significant 82%

of Russians supported President Putin's policy, and almost an equal level of support Russians expressed for the actions of Russian military forces in Ukraine (Levada-Center, 2023). Naturally, despite the predictions of Western analysts, the war continues with the same intensity. How is it possible that analysts were so wrong?

Above all, Western analysts persistently underestimate the strength and significance of Russian nationalism. A. C. Nehrbass writes about Russian nationalism, which is not just a harmless part of folklore but a clear foundation of the regime's strategy (Nehrbass, 2020). Putin does not casually evoke nationalism in the Russian public; instead, he almost exclusively uses it to push through unpopular decisions or secure a new presidential mandate for himself. Therefore, even when all else fails, as is the case when indicators of the standard of living begin to decline, Putin returns to nationalism, encouraging Russians to dream of the once-great Russian Empire. Russian pride is further fueled by reminders of the „glorious Soviet Union“. Actually, it was the time of the USSR that laid the groundwork for many of today's paranoias and phobias in the Russian public. During that era, the ruling members of the Communist Party constantly warned the domestic public about the „evil West“, portraying it as a force just waiting to destroy their country. The decadent and capitalism-poised West was the primary justification for all problems – a narrative that persists even today. Putin, therefore, is now merely reflecting decades of perfected mass manipulation, with inevitable external and internal enemies. External enemies have consistently been embodied in the West, characterized by capitalism and imperialism, while internal enemies no longer include opponents of communism or the Church. Instead, a new minority has been identified (homosexuals), towards whom concentrated public hatred is directed. This eventually led to Putin's 2013 law imposing fines and restrictions on propagandizing „nontraditional“ sexual relationships among minors.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), on the other hand, has undergone a transformation from an enemy of the state to the foremost advocate for the ruling structure. The state actively promotes the Church's involvement in all spheres of public life. In this manner, a perfect harmony is established, driven more by the mutual interests of both sides than by any sincere alignment

of ideologies (Soroka, 2022). Some authors even refer to this phenomenon as the „weaponizing of the Church“ (Davis, 2019). The reality is that the Church adeptly fulfills its role as a mobilizer of masses for the Kremlin’s needs. The influence and interests of Russian Orthodox Church extend beyond the borders of today’s Russian Federation. Given the Church’s canonical jurisdiction, not to mention its economic interests, ROC also willingly participates in cross-border affairs.

The enduring presence of the imperial legacy in Russia’s political life cannot be ignored. The relationship between imperialism and Russian nationalism is perfectly reciprocal because, on the one hand, invoking the ancient glory of Tsarist Russia nurtures nationalism, just as nationalism prevents Russian society from stepping into the 21st century but constantly draws it back to times long past. The combination of Russian nationalism and imperial consciousness is a phenomenon distinctive to Russia and could be termed „imperial nationalism“. While this term may sound peculiar, especially to scholars raised within the Western academic tradition where nationalisms more often aimed at destroying empires, in Russia, imperial nationalism precisely supports imperial aspirations and aggression towards neighboring states that are supposedly to be reattached (effectively subjugated) to some new Russian Empire (Pain, 2016).

This imperialism at the expense of neighboring countries was blessed by Putin himself during the annexation of Crimea in 2014, in his well-known speech where he introduced the term „russkii narod“ (Kolstø, 2016). Here, Putin does not refer to the multi-ethnic people of his country or only to ethnic Russians within the Russian Federation; instead, he refers to Russians wherever they may live. In this speech, Putin lamented how the „russkii narod“ had become perhaps the most dispersed ethnic entity in the world after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The expression he used was a concept used, in the modern Russian political lexicon, only in the ethnic sense and not in referring to the political nation. For the latter, the Yeltsin Administration had introduced the term „rossiiskii narod“.

But now Putin returns to the terminology of the Russian Empire, and this would decisively mark the continuation of his policies. By invoking historical injustice that scattered Russians mercilessly across the world and

then claiming some imaginary right to reunite the entire „russkii narod“ in one homeland (even if it meant changing borders with other states), Putin laid the groundwork for a new, aggressive policy towards neighbors.

This backward (and foreign to them) thinking surprised scientists, analysts, and politicians of the modern West. The role of nationalism within the Russian public remained an underexamined but especially important driver of the crisis surrounding Russia's annexation of Crimea and the open aggression against Ukraine in 2022 (Gerber, 2014).

Situation awareness obviously failed in this case. It failed in the analysts' ability to understand the thought process of the subject of their analysis. The analyses of Western intelligence services (and the political leadership of these states) started from the assumption of a rational Russian society that would, with its rational decisions, compel Putin to make rational choices. Could he perhaps abandon the idea of aggression against Ukraine, realizing the crisis and isolation that Russia could face?

However, that did not happen, primarily because Putin was not a politician willing to engage in diplomatic solutions and dialogue with neighbors and the West (a separate article could be written about the absence of the same willingness in the West). Additionally, there was no control mechanism in the form of reduced public support that would force Putin to take corrective actions. Better situation awareness could and should have recognized the prevalence of nationalism in Russian society and the consequent high likelihood of precisely such a negative course of events.

Conclusion

From the discussion on strategic culture and situational awareness, several conclusions can be drawn such as: mutual influence, limitations of strategic culture, strategic foresight, risk and decision-making, comprehensive understanding, strategic predictions and adaptability. For each of components can be described as follows:

Mutual Influence: Situational awareness and strategic culture mutually influence each other. Strategic culture shapes the framework through which decision-makers interpret information, while situational awareness provides the necessary information for effective decision-making.

Limitations of Strategic Culture: Strategic culture, if overly dominant, can limit decision-makers. It may lead to biases and predetermined preferences that stem from the historical or cultural background of a state.

Strategic Foresight: Strategic culture is crucial for strategic foresight, as it provides decision-makers with a unique set of strategic choices rooted in the cultural and historical experiences of a state. This influences how information is interpreted and decisions are made.

Risk and Decision-Making: Cultural factors, such as risk tolerance, impact decision-making. Different cultures may exhibit varying degrees of risk aversion or risk-taking, influencing the approach to strategic decisions.

Comprehensive Understanding: Both situational awareness and strategic culture are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing decision-making. While situational awareness provides real-time information, strategic culture offers a deeper context for interpretation.

Strategic Predictions: The combination of situational awareness and strategic culture is necessary for effective strategic predictions. Decision-makers need to consider both the immediate context and the historical-cultural context to make informed and successful predictions.

Adaptability: Cultural factors like openness to new ideas and the ability to learn from mistakes influence adaptability. Decision-makers from cultures with these traits may be more flexible and responsive to changing situations.

In essence, the interplay between strategic culture and situational awareness is vital for decision-makers to navigate complex geopolitical scenarios, make informed choices, and adapt to evolving circumstances.

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Svijest o situaciji i strateška kultura

Sažetak

Stanje nesigurnosti u strateškom okruženju predstavlja trajan izazov kroz povijest čovječanstva. Koncept situacijske svjesnosti postoji već dugi niz godina i podrazumijeva razumijevanje onoga što se trenutno događa, a isto tako – na temelju tih informacija – što bi se moglo dogoditi u budućnosti. Strateška kultura predstavlja skup uvjerenja koje određena zajednica drži, a koji se postupno oblikuju kroz jedinstven i dugotrajan povijesni proces, s jasnim načelima i praktičnom primjenom u pogledu uporabe sile. U tom kontekstu, učinkovito strateško planiranje zahtijeva vjerodostojnu procjenu početne točke i operationog okruženja u obliku situacijske svjesnosti, što je ključno prije izrade VUCA strateškog plana (volatilnost, nesigurnost, složenost i dvosmislenost). Obje komponente podržavaju strateško predviđanje kao ključni koncept i alat za donošenje učinkovitih i pravodobnih odluka.

Cilj je ovog rada predstaviti stratešku kulturu i situacijsku svjesnost, analizirati znanstvene izvore te, na primjeru Ukrajine, pokazati kako nepotpuna situacijska svjesnost može dovesti do pogrešnog razmišljanja i, u konačnici, tragično pogrešnih odluka.

Ključne riječi

situacijska svjesnost, strateška kultura, donošenje odluka, koncept situacijske svjesnosti