

## **Nexus of Nationalism and Security**

*Managing Strength, Autonomy and Reputation*

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People pay for, fight for and sometimes die for their country, and demand that it be worth the sacrifice. States engage in policies of war and peace, affecting the national pride of their citizens in the process. The linkages between nationalism and security policy determine how sudden change or gradual evolution of one ultimately impacts the other. Yet despite the great consequence of mechanisms connecting nationalism and state security behavior, our understanding is limited by theoretical obstacles and empirical complexity. This short paper takes a modest cut at clarifying the interaction of nationalism and security policy by investigating causal arrows in both directions. First, definitional issues are addressed. Then various means of interaction are discussed and a framework for analysis is presented. Examples are provided by application to the China case. The paper concludes with general implications for managing the linkages between nationalism and security policy toward constructive international competition and away from costly military conflict.

### **Established State Nationalism**

With respect to the great diversity of opinion about what nationalism is and how to study it, a few words are necessary on the conceptual focus of this paper. Nationalism has mattered throughout modern history as a powerful ideology motivating nations to fight for their own state. This has involved the creation of republics in place of monarchies, the union or division of existing states, the establishment of states by peoples freed from colonialism, and so on. Nationalism has also been a force for terrible death and destruction in the hands of fascist Germany and imperial Japan, and in civil wars in Africa and irredentist/separatist terrorism around the globe. However, this paper does not examine brands of nationalism that seek a rightful state for the nation or that aim to bring about domination or destruction of other nations. The focus here is established state nationalism, the goal of which is to achieve a 'rightful' place in the international system for a nation's existing state. This form of nationalism entails the beliefs of a nation about the role their state should play vis-à-vis other established states in the international system.

Nationalism is not antithetic to rational maximizing behavior but rather is the product of human psychological needs for meaning and purpose. It is a matter of identity wrapped up with emotional justifications for the prevailing institution of socioeconomic order. In other words, it is about the continuation and prosperity of a nation's state. Nationalism presents methodological complications because it cannot be easily studied as an independent or dependent variable within a standard social science research design. It involves both how citizens place demands on national leaders as well as how the state leadership maintains legitimacy and mobilizes populations for a national cause. Ultimately, nationalism informs the utility functions of states

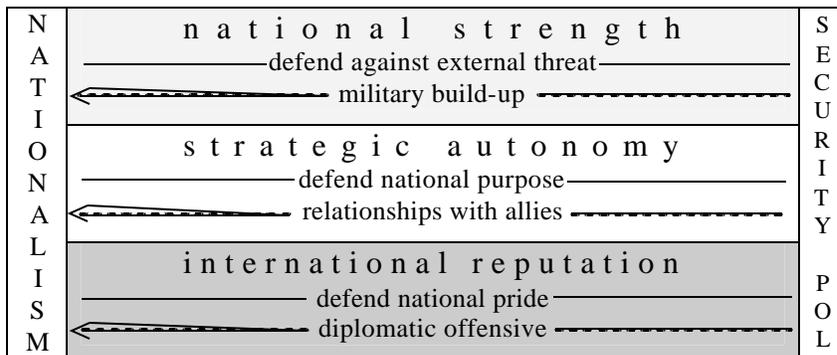
so that security policy follows a combined logic of appropriateness and consequences. What is more, state security behavior inspires change in the content and intensity of nationalism. The issue at hand then is specifying the mechanisms that inexorably tie the two together – where do we look to observe the interaction between nationalism and security policy?

**Linkages with Security Policy**

A state's use of force and efforts at peace are more than affected by nationalism. These policies also influence what posture people believe their state should assume in a dynamic international environment. I propose a framework examining the interaction between nationalism and security policy on three dimensions:

1. *national strength*: relative military capability;
2. *strategic autonomy*: freedom of action in security matters; and
3. *international reputation*: prestige among nations.

I suggest it is on these three dimensions that nationalism and security policy interact and that the following mechanisms mediate change in either direction:



If we know which dimension a state's nationalism emphasizes at a particular time, we can anticipate the relevant mechanism pushing for an update in security policy. And if we observe change in security policy associated with a particular mechanism, we can predict change in nationalism along the corresponding dimension. This framework (as briefly presented here) is not meant to be a tool for precise measurement of nationalism or pinpoint predictions about security policy, rather it is meant to be useful in suggesting where to look for consequential interactions between the two.

**Lessons from China**

There is a great deal to learn from China in terms of evolution of nationalism and security policy along the dimensions of national strength, strategic autonomy and international reputation. American strategic planners are concerned about what they perceive as increasing Chinese nationalism pushing for a more aggressive security policy. But the relationship between

nationalism and state security behavior is neither one-dimensional nor one-directional. Several key examples illustrate this below.

Chinese nationalism regarding strength affects security policy via calls (by the public, political leadership or both) to better defend the nation against external threats. This involves emphasizing the dangerous capabilities and malicious intentions of competitors. Such calls will encourage state security policy to increase military capabilities. The military build-up then plays a role in Chinese nationalism because a stronger, more advanced military increasingly becomes a subject of national pride. This process is clearly exhibited by Chinese concerns for the more assertive defense posture of Japan.

The autonomy dimension of Chinese nationalism affects security policy via appeals to the national purpose. The core international function of the state is to serve as an autonomous political unit of the nation that acts as the nation's legitimate representative on the global stage. If Chinese nationalism finds the state's strategic autonomy to be compromised, such appeals to the national purpose will be the mechanism to influence security policy. The corresponding mechanism that connects change in security policy to nationalism is the state's relationship with allies. In pursuing a more autonomous security policy, a state will rely less on allies and increasing strategic independence will play back into nationalism. This process was at work during the Sino-Soviet split, after which China became more self-reliant and took greater pride in its strategic autonomy.

Chinese nationalism concerning reputation influences security policy via demands to defend the national pride. Such demands come in the form of public protests and government officials' fear of a crisis of legitimacy. The corresponding mechanism that links change in reputational security policy and nationalism are diplomatic offensives ranging from international security contributions to saber-rattling to coercion. For example, after the American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, public protests and government face-saving motivated a more assertive diplomacy. Chinese nationalism subsequently showed increased sensitivity along the dimension of international reputation.

Nationalism is inevitably concerned with national strength, strategic autonomy and international reputation, as is state security behavior. Although it is very difficult to predict with accuracy changes in nationalism or security policy, the framework applied above helps to demystify the mechanisms that link the two. Attention to these mechanisms can better our understanding of the interaction between nationalism and security as the Chinese nation redefines the international role of their state.

### **Nationalism's Choice: Costly Conflict or Constructive Competition**

Nationalism and security policy are fundamentally linked on the dimensions of strength, autonomy and reputation. It is unlikely that nationalism and state security behavior can be decoupled in the foreseeable future given the deep seeded roots that connect them. However, by understanding the mechanisms that link nationalism and security, it is possible to better manage the interaction. While domestic calls to defend against external threat, defend the national purpose and defend national pride are to be expected, they need not be met by security policies that tend toward military escalation. Take for example Chinese efforts at arms control, security engagement with SCO and ASEAN, and deployment of military assets for relief work in the wake of the 2004 tsunami disaster.

Working to manage the mechanisms connecting nationalism and security policy can help states avoid identity security dilemmas and arms-races. Moreover, nationalism evolves with a nation's historical memory, so with a new generation comes new opportunities to address issues of national strength, strategic autonomy and international reputation. The interaction between nationalism and state security behavior is complex but can be steered in the direction of costly conflict or constructive competition. It is ultimately up to the people of our nations to choose.