

security. Material or "objective" issues of disagreement and clashes of interests are often (if not usually) the greatest obstacles to security-building. But to stop at this point is to ignore both the role that inter-subjective and perceptual elements can play in the unfolding (and often exacerbation) of these disagreements, and the fact that behind so-called "objective" clashes of *interests* lie sets of *ideas*, which give practical content to states' (and regimes') definitions of their interests. There is no separate relationship between two distinct things — "cultural ideas" versus "material interests" — the point is rather that the way in which decision makers define their security interests is derived from their collective historical/social/cultural experiences and understandings. As Price and Tannenwald point out with respect to nuclear and chemical weapons, for example:

in order to understand the anomalous status and patterns of non-use of chemical and nuclear weapons, it is necessary to understand how particular social and cultural meanings become attached to certain kinds of weapons, how these normative understandings arise historically...and how they shape actors' conceptions of their interests and identities.¹²

Second, it is extremely easy to reify different political and strategic cultures, and to treat them as somehow insulated from criticism, or from outside influences. Broad and fuzzy notions of "American insensitivity," "Arab deceitfulness," "Asian avoidance of saying 'no'" may all have some kernel of truth, or relevance to the issue at hand, but cannot simply be carted out as explanations or justifications of particular policies. In fact, the history of cross-cultural exchanges and borrowing, the globalization of many "cultural" influences, and the rapidity of social change in the contemporary world, all make such ossified notions of culture irrelevant. One must see culture not as some fixed pattern of "learned behaviour" that imprisons participants in security-building dialogues, but rather think of "culture in context" in order to see how particular influences may become important in certain regions, or with respect to certain issues, or in certain negotiating contexts.

Third, the problem of an ethnocentric standpoint is difficult to overcome, especially given that most analysts of arms control and disarmament issues are people who are steeped in the East-West or European history of arms control and security-building, and who wish to make the best use of this expertise in other regional or multilateral security-building projects. At a minimum, this project must not only attempt to draw out the central concepts of the East-West arms control discourse (such ideas as transparency, verification, confidence-building, balance, stability) and ask how these are defined in different regional contexts, but to ask the more difficult question: "what sorts of concepts or experiences shape ideas of peace and security in different regional and cultural contexts, and how might these be useful or relevant to the non-proliferation and arms control dialogue?" This is a more difficult task, which requires a fairly broad understanding of (or sensitivity to) the experience of war and peace, security and insecurity, in different regions.

Finally, one must avoid accepting at face-value the occasionally self-serving language of "culturism" that has emerged out of different regional contexts. Just as rejection of Western notions of human rights has been a convenient shield behind which dictators and oppressors have hidden, rejection of well-established and potentially successful Western (or East-West) processes of confidence-building and measures of non-

¹² Price and Tannenwald, in Katzenstein, *Culture of National Security*, 115.