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Which norms matter? Revisiting the “failure” of internationalism

Jeffrey W. Legro

International relations theorists have in recent years shown an interest in international norms and rules not equaled since the interwar period.¹ This contemporary literature is, of course, quite different—i.e., better—than that of the 1920s and 1930s: it has greater intellectual depth, empirical backing, and explanatory power. The promise of this research, bolstered by the opportunities of the post-cold war era, is that norms encouraging free trade, protecting the environment, enhancing human rights, and controlling the spread and use of heinous weapons may have a substantial impact on the conduct and structure of international relations. But pessimists also exist. Some have taken up the stick E. H. Carr skillfully shook at idealists in an earlier period, arguing that the anarchic power-shaped international arena is not so malleable and that international norms and institutions have relatively little influence.² On the one hand, we are pointed to the centrality of international norms; on the other, we are cautioned that norms are inconsequential. How do we make sense of these divergent claims? Which is right?

I argue that neither of the polarized positions is sustainable. Contrary to what the skeptics assert, norms do indeed matter. But norms do not necessarily matter in the ways or often to the extent that their proponents have argued. The literature on norms has generally misspecified their impact because of several conceptual and methodological biases. In short, by concentrating on showing that norms “matter,” analysts have given short shrift to the critical issues of which norms matter, the ways they matter, and how much they matter relative to other factors. The result has been a

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1. For examples, see Axelrod 1986; Kratochwil, 1989; Ray 1989; Nadelmann 1990; Goertz and Diehl 1992; Finnemore 1993; Reed and Kaysen 1993; Thomson 1993, 1994; Mayall 1990; Goldstein and Keohane 1993; Jackson 1993; Sikkink 1993; Paul, 1995; Price 1995; Klotz 1995; Gelpi 1995; Katzenstein 1996; Finnemore 1996a; and Cortell and Davis in press.

2. Carr 1946. For an example, see Mearsheimer 1994–95, 7.

misguided sense of the range and depth of the impact of international norms. The social focus of norm analysis is indeed central, but recent analyses have overemphasized international prescriptions while neglecting norms that are rooted in other types of social entities—e.g., regional, national, and subnational groups. This oversight has led scholars to ignore significant subsystemic social understandings that can contradict and overwhelm international prescriptions.

To assess the promise and limits of focusing on norms, I draw on a set of cases involving the use of force where the conventional wisdom expects little impact from international prescriptions—that is, “least likely” cases.³ Furthermore, the study focuses on a time period (the interwar and World War II years) that the standard historiography of international relations theory sees as decisively refuting ideational internationalism.⁴ In the 1920s and 1930s, the international community stigmatized three types of warfare as heinous and immoral: submarine attacks against merchant ships, the bombing of nonmilitary targets, and the use of chemical weapons. These prohibitory norms are interesting (and similar to current efforts) because they were not simply part of the “deep structure” of the international system or “invisible” to the participants but instead were explicit objects of construction by states that later had to weigh the desirability of adherence versus violation. Yet, during World War II, these prohibitions had varying effects. Participants ignored the submarine warfare restrictions almost immediately. They respected strategic bombing rules for months and then violated them. But they upheld limitations on chemical weapons, despite expectations and preparations, throughout the war. Why were some norms apparently influential and not others?

Contrary to the conventional historiography, I argue that international norms were consequential for the use of force during World War II. The prohibitions shaped states’ calculations and tactics, inspired leaders’ justifications and rationalizations, and, most fundamentally, appear to be a key reason why certain means of warfare were even considered for restraint. Yet while international norms certainly mattered, a norm explanation cannot account for the variation that occurred in the use of force. The explanation is not that strategic security concerns overwhelmed social prescriptions, since neither the military effectiveness of the weapons nor opportunities for relative strategic advantage can explain the differential adherence of states to the three norms. Instead, it lies in an understanding of organizational culture. This approach does emphasize collective prescriptions, but the focus is on national society rather than on international norms. The dominant beliefs in military organizations about the appropriate ways to fight wars shaped how soldiers thought about and prepared for war, which in turn shaped the varying impact of norms on state aims.

This analysis has several implications for international relations theory. First, it demonstrates the value of providing clear concepts, of examining both effective and ineffective norms, and of considering alternative explanations—methodological additions that can advance both positivist and intepretivist norm research. Second,

3. See Eckstein 1975; and King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 209–10.

4. For example, see Bull 1972.

its results show the benefits of analyzing competing norm, belief, and cultural patterns in international politics. Although many recent accounts have usefully focused on global norms, few have examined such international injunctions in the context of national norms. Yet these intrastate prescriptions (i.e., those of organizational culture) can wield great influence. This, of course, is not to suggest that bureaucratic culture always supersedes international norms or relative power constraints, but it does highlight the need for conceptual tools to weigh the cross-cutting or synthetic effects of different types of cultural and material structures.

The article takes shape in four parts. First, it outlines the limitations of the extant norm literature and develops an approach that seeks to address those shortcomings. Second, it discusses the logic of a competing view based on organizational culture. It then assesses how persuasively these two perspectives explain state preferences on adherence to norms limiting the use of force in World War II. Finally, it addresses the implications of the argument for international relations theory, especially future work on norms.

On norms

Across a range of theoretical and methodological orientations, scholars have shown a renewed interest in the ways that norms—collective understandings of the proper behavior of actors—operate in international politics. Norms are seen as continuous, rather than dichotomous, entities: they do not just exist or not exist but instead come in varying strengths. Analysts typically portray norms as consequential in terms of either constituting, regulating, or enabling actors or their environments.⁵ In any of these roles, the central proposition is that norms that are more robust will be more influential regardless of whether the dependent variable is identity, interests, individual behavior, or collective practices and outcomes. Yet in exploring these relationships, the extant norm literature has been prone to three types of biases.⁶

The first is a failure to conceptualize norm robustness independent of the very effects attributed to norms, thus leading to tautology. This failure is compounded because analysts must confront not a dearth but an apparent profusion of norms in the international arena. Given this availability, one can almost always identify a norm to “explain” or “allow” a particular effect. Since different norms can have competing or even contradictory imperatives, it is important to understand why some norms are more influential than others in particular situations. Thus, whether one emphasizes the behavioral or the linguistic/discursive facet of norms, avoiding circular reasoning requires a notion of norm robustness that is independent of the effects to be explained. This is not an easy task. For example, Alexander Wendt suggests that social structures (of shared knowledge) vary in the degree to which they can be

5. See Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986; Kratochwil 1989, 26; and Dessler 1989, 454–58.

6. Thanks to Paul Kowert for his contribution to this section. For a developed discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of norm research, see Kowert and Legro 1996.

transformed, but he does not specify what defines this trait.⁷ In different ways, both Robert Keohane and Friedrich Kratochwil link a norm's potency to its institutionalization.⁸ But this pushes the problem back to one of theorizing the robustness of institutions, an exercise that has been prone to ambiguity or definition by effect.

A second problem is that efforts to explore norms suffer from a bias toward the norm that "worked." Most studies of norms focus on a single, specific norm—or, at most, on a small set of norms. Typically, the norms under consideration are "effective" norms that seem to have obvious consequences.⁹ Yet, in order to understand how norms operate, studies must allow for more variation: the success or failure, existence or obsolescence of norms. Research on norms has tended to overlook the emerging rules, principles, prohibitions, and understandings that might have had influence but did not. These cases, analyzed in conjunction with comparable cases of norm effectiveness, are critical to the development of this line of thinking.¹⁰ Why norms did not emerge or were not consequential is as important as why they did or were.

The final (but less pervasive) problem of many studies is a neglect of alternative explanations, particularly ideational ones, for the effects attributed to norms. The dangers of not doing so are apparent. One risks spuriously crediting international norms with consequences (e.g., the shaping or enabling of particular identities, interests, beliefs, or actions) that are better explained by other types of factors.

I attempt to avoid these biases by developing an explicit scheme for assessing norm strength; by comparing norms that seem to have been very effectual, such as those proscribing chemical warfare (CW), with those that were less so, such as those concerning submarine warfare and strategic bombing; and by explicitly contrasting a norm approach with an alternative organizational culture explanation and, to a lesser degree, a conventional realist account.

To gauge the robustness of the norms, I propose a conceptualization based on three criteria: *specificity*, *durability*, and *concordance*.¹¹ These three traits are, in principle, as applicable to informal institutions as they are to formal ones. Specificity refers to how well the guidelines for restraint and use are defined and understood. Is there a laborious code that is overly complex or ill-defined or is it relatively simple and precise? Do countries argue about what the restraints entail or how to implement them? Specificity is thus assessed by examining actors' understandings of the simplicity and clarity of the prohibition.

Durability denotes how long the rules have been in effect and how they weather challenges to their prohibitions. Have the norms had long-standing legitimacy? Are violators or violations penalized, thus reinforcing and reproducing the norm?

7. Wendt 1995, 80.

8. Keohane 1989, 4–5; Kratochwil 1989, 62.

9. See, for example, Ray 1989; Finnemore 1993; Jackson 1993; Thomson 1994; Price 1995; Klotz 1995; and Price and Tannenwald 1996.

10. Examples include Nadelmann 1990; and McElroy 1992.

11. Though this is my own schema, it is influenced by traits often implicit in discussions of norms and in the institutionalist literature, for example, Keohane 1989, 4–5; Smith 1989, 234–36; and Young 1989, 23.

Violations of a norm do not necessarily invalidate it, as is seen, for example, in cases of incest. The issue is whether actors are socially or self-sanctioned for doing so. These questions can be assessed by examining the history of a prohibition and agents' related understanding of and reaction to violations.

Concordance means how widely accepted the rules are in diplomatic discussions and treaties (that is, the degree of intersubjective agreement). The concordance dimension may be a sword that cuts both ways. Public efforts to reaffirm a norm may be a sign, not that it is viable, but instead that it is weakening. Which is the case may depend on its context. In the cases examined here, affirmation is more reinforcing because the focus is largely on "nascent" or evolving norms where affirmation seems to contribute to robustness. Do states seem to concur on the acceptability of the rules? Do they affirm their approval by committing reputations to public ratification? Do states put special conditions on their acceptance of prohibitions, thus diminishing concordance? Or do they take the rules for granted, never even considering violating their prescriptions? These questions can be assessed by reviewing the records of national and international discussions that involve the norms.

Overall, the expectation of the norm approach developed above is that the clearer, more durable, and more widely endorsed a prescription is, the greater will be its impact. With respect to the variation in World War II, this suggests, *ceteris paribus*, that states' adherence to norms is most likely in areas where norms are most robust in terms of specificity, durability, and concordance. Conversely, where norms are less robust, states will be more inclined toward violations. If a norm account is right, we should see restraint in those areas where prohibitions are most developed. States' expectations of future use should shift as the accord becomes more ingrained as part of international society. Leaders should make reference to the norm in making decisions and recognize the penalties of nonadherence. Alternatively, the norm may be so robust, violation of it is not even considered. Countries should react to constrain transgressions of principles, especially ones that are clear, long-standing, and widely endorsed. In those areas where agreements have not been concluded or are thinly developed, restraint is more likely to break down. The costs of violation will be seen as nonprohibitive. Leaders will attempt to cut corners on restrictions. The related norms will not be identified with self-interest or identity. In short, the effect of prohibitions on actors, decision making, and practices will be minimal.

Organizational culture

An alternative approach to understanding the varying use of force in World War II comes from a conjunction of cultural and organization theory. An organizational culture approach focuses on the way that the pattern of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that prescribes how a group should adapt to its external environment and manage its internal affairs influences calculations and actions.¹² In a sense, this

12. This definition is loosely based on Schein 1985, 9.

approach focuses on “norms” that dominate specific organizations: culture is, in effect, a set of collectively held prescriptions about the right way to think and act.¹³ Applied to military bureaucracies, an organizational culture perspective highlights how government agencies tasked with vague formal purposes (“provide security”) concentrate on modes of warfare that subsequently condition organizational thinking and behavior. Their dominant way of war tends to become such a locus of activity that, in effect, means become ends.¹⁴ Culture shapes how organizations understand their environment: it acts as a heuristic filter for perception and calculation much the same way a theoretical paradigm shapes intellectual thought or a schema structures individual cognition.¹⁵ Culture also has material consequences. Collective beliefs dictate which capabilities are perceived as better and are worthy of support. Organizations will channel resources to weapons suited to culture. Those weapons will appear more feasible than those that are incompatible with culture and that are subsequently deprived of funding and attention.¹⁶

This cultural view is related to, but different from, the traditional view of militaries based on a formal structural logic as found in Graham Allison’s and Barry Posen’s influential studies. The assumption of the traditional approach is that similar units within the context of similar structures should exhibit similar behavior.¹⁷ This, of course, is the central paradigm that cultural approaches aim to correct by stressing that, despite similar structures, beliefs can differ and consequently so can behavior. Traditional organization theory anticipates that militaries, as similar organizations seeking to maximize autonomy and size and reduce uncertainty, will display common characteristics. They will prefer offensive strategies and resist civilian intervention in operational planning and implementation.¹⁸ Escalation is expected because restraint conflicts with the very nature of autonomy-seeking, offense-oriented, war-winning military organizations. While research has indicated that soldiers do not always desire war, after the decision for war has been made, this argument asserts that militaries are expected to covet operational autonomy and are inclined to use all means at their disposal: gradualism and restraint can cost lives and are inconsistent with such hallowed principles as concentration of force and the goal of total victory.¹⁹ The proposition that follows from this logic is that militaries are likely to foster escalation in any usable means of warfare. From a traditional organizational perspective, we have little reason to expect any adherence in war to norms prohibiting the use of force.²⁰ Restraint is an anomaly. But restraint—aided by organizational complicity—did occur in World War II.

13. For a thoughtful review of the work on culture in security affairs, see Johnston 1995. Kier 1996 provides an excellent analysis of organizational culture and military doctrine.

14. See Wilson 1989, especially 32.

15. See Kuhn 1970; and Khong 1992.

16. Levitt and March 1988, 322.

17. For an explicit statement, see Posen 1984, 37. Also see Allison 1971.

18. For example, see Posen 1984, 41–59.

19. Betts 1977.

20. See Van Evera 1984, chap. 7; and Posen 1992, 16–19.

An additional problem related to bureaucratic theory in general is a failure to explain how and why particular organizational views come to shape state desires.²¹ Governments consist of multiple agencies, so the question is which bureaucracies will matter and when? The brief answer offered here is that a bureaucracy's impact varies with what I call its organizational salience, consisting of at least three dimensions: the extent to which the bureaucracy has monopoly power on expertise, the complexity of the issue, and the time period available for action. When one organization has a monopoly on expertise and no competitors, it faces less pressure to change and no checks on organizational biases. In terms of complexity, the intricacy of an issue affects the degree to which specialist knowledge is required for decisions. The more complex the issue, the less effective senior authorities will be in objecting to or intervening in operations and the more organizational preferences will be felt. The time frame for decision making can also affect bureaucratic effect. When decision-making cycles are short, so is time for adjusting prearranged plans.

These traits all suggest that military organizations will have a high salience in choices on the use of force in war. Militaries are key players in such situations because they generally have monopoly control over expertise in the use of force, military operations are complex and not easily understood by nonspecialists, and the time periods for altering prearranged plans are limited. Civilians may have authority to make final choices, but often contrary to their wishes and efforts, military propensity can prevail in the midst of war due to the organizational salience of the armed forces.

In sum, organizational culture is important because it shapes organizational identity, priorities, perception, and capabilities in ways unexpected by noncultural approaches. Those means compatible with the dominant war-fighting culture will be developed and advocated by the military; those that are not will suffer benign neglect. Even as the cultural tendencies of militaries can remain fairly consistent, their heightened organizational salience in war may lead to change in national policy on the use of force. With regard to World War II, this view predicts that, *ceteris paribus*, a state will favor adherence to norms proscribing a particular form of combat if that form is antithetical to the war-fighting culture of its military bureaucracy. States will prefer violations regarding means that are compatible with organizational cultures. Where a particular means of warfare does not correspond with the military's dominant war-fighting culture, there should be weak planning and little advocacy by the top military leadership for escalation. Culturally shaped maneuvers and exercises will attest to the limited utility of those means. Organizational intelligence findings will be biased against use. On the other hand, violation is likely where a means of warfare is central to the war-fighting philosophy that governs military thinking. In this case, we can expect energetic advocacy; well-developed plans, strategies, and capabilities; and optimistic intelligence reports both on the need for and the expected impact of the prohibited form of warfare. The

21. See Krasner 1972; and Art 1973.

organizational culture approach is less plausible if militaries resist the use of means compatible with their culture; if military biases have no influence on national perspectives; or if military cultures are spurious and seem to change easily under the sway of other factors, such as international norms or the demands of the strategic situation.

Norms and organizational culture in World War II

To assess the relative explanatory power of the two approaches, I rely on two methods. The first is a macrocorrelation of each approach's ability to predict outcomes across a number of cases. The second is an in-depth analysis of some of the history to illustrate the validity of the causal mechanisms.

The cases I examine relate to submarines, strategic bombing, and CW in World War II. These are a good focus because they were the three main types of combat that states had considered for limitation in the interwar period. These three also make sense for assessing the propositions because they allow for variation in both the "independent" (norms and culture) and the "dependent" (state preferences on the use of force) variables, and they "control" other factors, such as the personalities, the causes of conflict, the stakes at risk, and the general international setting. Within the three categories, I investigate a total of eight cases. In submarine warfare, I examine Britain, Germany, and the United States. In strategic bombing, I focus on Britain and Germany. And in CW, the analysis considers Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union. I selected countries because they were either the central possessors or potential users of a particular means of warfare or because their behavior was anomalous. For example, why did the Soviet Union not use CW in June 1941 when it was facing a devastating German invasion and imminent defeat, had the weapons in its inventory, and had adopted a "scorched earth" strategy? I excluded cases that might at first glance seem relevant because they did not allow a comparable assessment of the norms and culture propositions or because I could not verify that norms or culture were not epiphenomenal to strategic realist concerns (discussed below). For example, I excluded both U.S. strategic bombing (including the dropping of the atom bomb) and CW use against Japan because Japan could not retaliate against the United States with comparable means, thus removing a key balance-of-forces condition that is present in the other cases. While the list of cases examined does not comprise the entire universe of possible cases, it is a representative one.

Macrocorrelation

A first way to assess the two alternative propositions is through a small-*n* comparison of their predictions versus the outcomes across the cases. This requires specification of the content of their predictions.

Measuring norms. A norm account requires a sense of the relative robustness, based on the specificity, durability, and concordance, of the prohibitions in the three types of warfare. I offer no precise formula on how to aggregate the three into an overall measure of robustness. Like all coding, this exercise is partly interpretive, but it improves on many studies that offer no way to evaluate norm strength at all or do so tautologically. Any evaluation of robustness must measure it independently from the norm's effects. Here, the evidence for robustness comes from the period prior to 1939 and describes primarily international-level phenomena. In contrast, the dependent variable (discussed below) is national preferences on adherence to norms limiting the use of force after 1939. The prohibitions on submarine warfare, strategic bombing, and CW each deserve brief description.

In submarine warfare, it was not so much the weapon itself that was stigmatized but its employment against civilian ships and personnel. What was considered illegitimate was the destruction of merchant and passenger ships without attention to the safety of those on board—a practice that came to be known as unrestricted submarine warfare.²²

The norm against such unrestricted warfare is notable as relatively robust in its durability, specificity, and concordance. The rules regulating submarine warfare stood out as relatively durable. Modern international limitations on attacks at sea date back at least to the Hague Peace Conference of 1899. When Germany used unrestricted submarine warfare extensively in World War I, it provoked a significant adverse reaction culminating in the U.S. entrance into the conflict. Over the course of the interwar years, prohibitions on submarines were repeatedly discussed in the context of international conferences and generally approved. Most important, even as other international agreements crumbled in the wake of rising international tension in the late 1930s, countries took pains to reaffirm the illegality of underwater boat attacks on merchant ships. They gathered in 1936 to approve the London Protocol on Submarine Warfare, while the broader London Naval Conference dissolved in disagreement. Significantly, when the London Protocol was anonymously violated (by Italy) in 1937 during the Spanish civil war, countries took action to punish any further violations, and the unrestricted attacks stopped.²³

Despite the fact that prominent historians have called the rules explicit and legally binding, the protocol did present some problems in specificity.²⁴ For example, the definition of what constituted a “merchant ship” was not entirely clear. Whether the arming of a vessel, even if for defensive purposes, made it an actual combatant was hotly disputed. Britain was intent on retaining the right to arm its merchants and

22. For solid, concise, secondary accounts of the development of the submarine rules, see Burns 1971; and Manson 1993.

23. See Toynbee 1938, 339–49; and Frank 1990.

24. See Samuel F. Bemis, “Submarine Warfare in the Strategy of American Defense and Diplomacy, 1915–1945,” Study prepared for the U.S. Navy, 15 December 1961, Yale University Library, Box 1603A, 15–16; and Morison 1951, 8.

denied that such armaments altered their civilian status.²⁵ Nonetheless, even defensive armaments comprised a threat to submarines that were highly vulnerable on the surface while conducting the required search and seizure procedures. The rules about providing for the safety of passengers and crews when sinking merchant vessels were likewise vague. Because underwater boats had small crews, they could often not afford to leave men to sail the ship into port. Furthermore, they could not generally take the noncombatant's crew and passengers aboard because of the lack of space. These people could be put in their emergency boats, but countries differed on whether this was safe.

Finally, in terms of concordance, the regime received widespread support. Prior to the war, the submarine rules had been accepted and reaffirmed by a total of forty-eight states. Among them were Britain, Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States, all central combatants during World War II. Overall, in terms of durability, specificity, and concordance, the submarine rules represented the most robust institution of the three examined in this study.

The second norm constrained strategic bombing. Statesmen made considerable efforts during the interwar years to reduce the quantity of military aircraft and/or to find ways to regulate conflict by agreeing on rules and restrictions. The main distinction they hoped to enforce was between bombing civilians and combatants. Persons participating directly in the war effort were generally seen as legitimate targets of air power. All others were to be considered illegitimate victims, on whom only the inhumane and criminal would drop bombs.²⁶

Concordance was low, however. There was little consensus among nations on the rules. No firm agreement on aerial bombing was apparent in the discourse of international negotiations or accepted in treaty language during the interwar years. At the start of World War II, Britain and Germany did agree verbally to an appeal for restraint by U.S. President Roosevelt, but this last-minute accord raised, at a minimum, questions of commitment.²⁷

Because concordance was low, resulting in the absence of a finalized agreement, specificity is difficult to evaluate. Generally, however, the participants seemed to use the 1923 Hague Commission of Jurists' product as a benchmark. Even though they were the most detailed of the interwar years, these rules, too, were troubled by disagreement. The main point of contention was what exactly constituted a military objective. Were civilian factories producing parts for airplanes a legitimate target? Was it acceptable to bomb troop barracks surrounded by hospitals and schools? Each state seemed to have a different way of differentiating civilian from combatant, safe zone from battle area, legitimate from illegitimate bombing.²⁸ In the absence of clear rules, we can only conclude that specificity was indeed low.

Norms on strategic bombing were also as fragile as any studied here.²⁹ Linked to the prohibition against attacking undefended cities was an agreement at the 1899

25. Burns 1971, 58.

26. Spaight 1947, 43.

27. On this agreement, see *ibid.*, 259–60.

28. See Moore 1924, 194–202; and Spaight 1947, 43–47.

29. Parks 1992 argues that the rules were largely illegitimate.

Hague conference that dropping weapons from balloons or “other new weapons of a similar nature” was not allowable. Additionally, while the representatives did not elect to include specific language related to the airplane at the 1907 Hague conference, they did reaffirm the prohibition against attacking undefended cities and dwellings.³⁰ Nonetheless, in World War I some states did bomb cities. By the beginning of World War II, Franklin Roosevelt’s last-minute appeal was the only vestige of states’ explicit external commitment to restrict bombing. To the extent that the 1923 Hague rules comprised a *de facto* prohibition, they were not respected very well in the conflicts in China and Spain during the 1930s. Overall, the norms of air warfare were less developed than those relating to either submarine warfare or CW.

The third major target of diplomatic efforts to limit the use of force in this period was CW. While prohibitions against the use of poison agents had existed for centuries, the interwar norm on gas use showed mixed durability. On the one hand, constraints on chemical use had been a part of international law from the turn of the century. On the other, states had violated the constraints egregiously during World War I. Limitations on the use or manufacture of gas were discussed in a number of conferences during the 1920s and 1930s. The issue of limits on CW was first broached at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 that prohibited Germany from using, manufacturing, or importing poisonous gases or the raw materials and equipment to produce them. CW received considerable attention at the 1921–22 Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armaments, but a provision that prohibited the use of poison gases in war was proposed but never ratified. The 1925 Geneva Conference for the Supervision of the International Trade in Arms and Ammunition and in Implements of War provided another forum in which CW was discussed. After proposals to prohibit the export of poisonous gases and related materials were rejected, diplomats decided to act again on the CW provisions of the Washington treaty.³¹ This agreement became known as the Geneva Protocol. It was the only agreement on CW concluded during the interwar period and had a somewhat stormy record of adherence in those years. For example, Italy violated the agreement in 1935 in its war with Ethiopia. The League of Nations responded weakly with limited economic sanctions that were not enforced and were largely ineffectual.³² In 1938, when Japan used chemical weapons in China, the League of Nations and most other polities simply ignored the event.³³

Concordance with the norm was moderate. The problem was that neither Japan nor the United States publicly ratified the 1925 protocol before the start of war in 1939. Furthermore, Britain and France agreed to respect the norm only in conflicts with other parties that had ratified the agreement and whose allies also adhered to the agreement. This provision might have had significant ramifications in World War II. For example, since Japan engaged in CW in China and was an ally of Germany, Britain’s pledge of restraint would no longer have been guaranteed.

30. On the development of bombing prohibitions, see Parks 1992; Roysse 1928; and De Saussure 1971.

31. For studies of the development of the prohibition, see Moon 1993; and Price forthcoming.

32. See Fair 1985, 45; SIPRI 1971b, 180.

33. SIPRI 1971b, 189–90.

TABLE 1. *Assessing norm robustness*

	<i>Submarine warfare</i>	<i>Chemical warfare</i>	<i>Strategic bombing</i>
Specificity	Medium	Very high	Low
Durability	High	Low	Low
Concordance	Very high	Medium	Low
Overall relative assessment	High	Medium	Low
Prediction	Most likely adherence	Mixed adherence/violation	Most likely violation

The Geneva Protocol was simple and fairly precise, however. Signatory nations would not use CW first if the other side was a signatory and also showed restraint. It allowed only a few minor gray areas. For example, high explosives released small amounts of chemicals; was this a violation? The use of nonlethal gas (such as tear gas) was another unresolved area. Some countries, such as the United States, wanted the freedom to employ nonlethal gases to control their own populaces.³⁴ Overall, the anti-CW norm was more robust than that attached to strategic bombing but less than that limiting submarine warfare. Table 1 summarizes these relationships along with their predicted effects.

Measuring organizational cultures. Organizational culture is gauged according to the ideas and beliefs about how to wage war that characterized a particular military bureaucracy. Specifically, the issue of interest is whether the favored way of war incorporated the specific means prohibited (violation oriented) or designated it either as nonorganic or as peripheral (adherence oriented). A measure of each culture is developed by reviewing available internal correspondence, planning documents, regulations, exercises, and memoirs of individual members. These multiple sources provide a composite picture of the hierarchy of legitimate beliefs within an organization. This is a holistic exercise that depends on the qualitative interpretation of the specific content of each culture. While this makes a priori generalizations difficult, it does allow for the coding of a culture as violation or adherence oriented. Cultural explanations are often accused of being post hoc and tautological: a certain cultural belief can always be found after the fact that “explains” a given action. In this case, however, the sources I have used to measure culture describe bureaucratic thinking and date from the earlier interwar years, while the outcomes to be explained involve national preferences during the later war. Thus the organizational culture hypothesis can be falsified. For example, U.S. Navy culture was oriented toward adhering to prohibitions on unrestricted submarine warfare throughout the interwar period. Yet on the first day of war the United States switched to favoring such warfare. This case tends to disconfirm the organizational culture hypothesis.

Although it is not possible here to document the entire logic of each military’s organizational culture and its relationship to the use of stigmatized force, the brief

34. *Ibid.*, 102–4.

summaries below can give a snapshot of each culture and which prediction—violation of or adherence to the respective norm—follows from it.³⁵

In submarine warfare, the German navy, unlike many, viewed the submarine as a valued combat tool, and because the ethos of its underwater force was based on its World War I unrestricted trade offensive, its plans, operations, and advice were biased in favor of violation. In contrast, the British navy, long dominated by a belief in the supremacy of the battleship, considered submarines a strictly ancillary means of combat. Even when Britain had strategic incentives to turn to submarine raiding, it did not. During the interwar period, the Royal Navy's main expected adversary was Japan, a nation vulnerable to a submarine campaign, yet the navy never considered an anticommerce submarine strategy. British naval culture favored adherence to the rules. Finally, the U.S. Navy, like the Royal Navy, was "battleship-bound" in its thinking during the interwar period. It gave little consideration to an unrestricted commerce campaign against Japan, its main expected opponent, despite Japan's vulnerability to such a strategy. This cultural orientation predicts U.S. adherence to the rules.

In contrast to the navy's orientation in submarine warfare, the German army's culture led it to favor adherence to the CW norm. Army thought highlighted the efficacy of the mobile offensive, and CW—perceived as a static defensive weapon—was seen as ill-suited to the dominant mindset. The British military was also inclined toward adherence but for different reasons. The Royal Army was a tradition-governed antitechnology force that was generally hostile to CW, particularly given its institutional experience in World War I. CW was more compatible with the Royal Air Force's strategic bombing thinking, but the army was in charge of CW development. The air force developed its own biases toward firebombing and high explosives (even though gas was considered a complement, not a competitor, to those munitions). Finally, the Soviet Union's Red Army was dominated by a faith in the offensive, an orientation that was encouraged by its civil war experience and ensuing debates about the proper political-military orientation for the country. It subsequently paid less attention to means such as CW, which was perceived as primarily useful in defense. This orientation favored adherence to the CW rules.

In strategic bombing, Britain's Royal Air Force developed around a "faith" in the effectiveness of strategic bombing, particularly against civilians and their morale. Personnel, plans, weapons acquisition, and intelligence all were affected by this ideology. This culture favored a violation of the rules, even as geopolitical factors and popular concern cautioned against such action. Although it toyed with strategic bombing, the German air force moved away from such concepts as the war years approached. The Luftwaffe, influenced by Germany's continental tradition of warfare and a variety of circumstantial factors, was more focused on contributing to the ground and sea campaigns than achieving victory by targeting enemy morale in an unrestricted bombing offensive. This culture was more inclined toward adherence to the rules on strategic bombing.

35. For a more detailed analysis of these cultures, see Legro 1995.

TABLE 2. *A macrocorrelation: two approaches and the pattern of norm adherence*

Case	Predictions ^a		Outcome (N = 8)
	Norm	Organizational culture	
Britain			
Chemical warfare	Mixed (½) ^b	Adherence (1)	Adherence
Strategic bombing	Violation (1)	Violation (1)	Violation
Submarine warfare	Adherence (1)	Adherence (1)	Adherence ^c
Germany			
Chemical warfare	Mixed (½)	Adherence (1)	Adherence
Strategic bombing	Violation (0)	Adherence (1)	Adherence ^c
Submarine warfare	Adherence (0)	Violation (1)	Violation
Soviet Union			
Chemical warfare	Mixed (½)	Adherence (1)	Adherence
United States			
Submarine warfare	Adherence (0)	Adherence (0)	Violation
Correlational fit	3.5/8	7/8	

^aThe match between prediction and outcome is in parentheses. It was scored as follows: 0 = no match; 1 = match; ½ = half a match (see below).

^bThe mixed pattern represents a middle position on the norm robustness continuum. It predicts that chemical warfare would have shown a varying pattern of preferences for mutual adherence and violation. Since this view also predicts a partial or varying preference for restraint and is indeterminate as to the dominant preference, I have scored it in favor of the norm proposition as half a match.

^cThough the state eventually violated the norm, it did so only after the other side's first use, as allowed by norms in all three categories, and thus was coded as adherence.

Predictions versus outcomes. A macrocomparison of expected effects versus actual outcomes during World War II yields a first look at the influence of norms and organizational culture. For this analysis, "outcome" refers to the preferences of states, not their actions. We can thus distinguish between conscious violation of a norm with those situations where states may have responded to the other side's violation (an allowable action) or where they crossed boundaries by accident. In practice, preferences and action correspond closely. I measured preferences by reviewing the internal discussions of the wartime leadership regarding its desired outcomes. Such decision-making bodies were often small groups that debated and reached a consensus on desired ends.

Table 2 summarizes the relative predictive fit of the norm and organizational culture approaches. Predictions from an organizational culture perspective matched the outcome significantly more consistently than predictions from a norm perspective (7 versus 3.5 of 8). In those cases where normative prohibitions are most robust, for instance, we should expect adherence or at least the slowest shift toward the opposite preference. Where norms are thinly developed, a preference for violation

should be more likely. As Table 2 indicates, however, the relationship between norm robustness and preferences on the use of force seems weak. For example, in submarine warfare, where the institution of restraint was most robust, nations first favored escalation. Yet in CW, where the institution was less developed, nations preferred restraint throughout the conflict.

Table 2 displays a relatively consistent link between military culture and state preferences regarding the use of force. When culture favored violation, prohibitions against use generally were disregarded. And when culture was inclined toward adherence, states tended to prefer adherence to international norms. In both absolute and relative terms, organizational culture correlates strongly with the variation in adherence to the limitations on the use of force.

Microassessment of causal mechanisms

A closer look at the details of World War II is a necessary complement to the macrocomparison in three ways. First, it provides a better sense of the content and use of analytical constructs such as norms and organizational culture. Second, as sophisticated methodologists are quick to point out, correlation by itself does not tell us what caused the apparent association. Microanalysis allows for better checking of the causal mechanisms posited by each approach.³⁶ Finally, such analysis is useful for checking to make sure that the presumed relationships are not spurious owing to some other influence. One clear possibility is political-military advantage. A “strategic realist” view would argue that especially in war, states choose means according to their expected contribution to strategic goals; states will prefer violating norms when they expect to reap relative military or political benefits from doing so. In those situations where violations further a state’s position, escalation is probable. Likewise, when a relative loss or disadvantage will result from escalation, adherence is more likely.³⁷

My microassessment focuses on the German and British submarine warfare cases. Given space limitations, these cases offer maximum analytical leverage. They comprise the same form of warfare, but the two countries involved had different preferences on violation or adherence. The cases allow us to differentiate norm and cultural influences while also checking for spuriousness regarding strategic advantage. Furthermore, they offer “most likely” observations for a norm approach based on both independent and dependent variables. The norm was most robust in submarine warfare, so that norm effects should be most significant in that area. Moreover, the British case at least seems to offer a priori support for the influence of norms: British preferences matched the predictions of the norm hypothesis. A careful study of the decision-making process reveals, however, that this relationship is problematic and that organizational culture was the more influential cause.

36. George and McKeown 1985.

37. For a more developed discussion and assessment of this proposition, see Legro 1995.

German submarine warfare. Restraint during World War II should have been most likely as regards submarine warfare, given the strong relative robustness of that norm. This expectation is particularly true for Germany, a country whose prior violation of the rule in World War I had been heavily sanctioned: the United States was provoked by that transgression to enter the war, resulting in the defeat of the Kaiser's forces.³⁸ An organizational culture view, however, would expect a bias toward escalation. And in this case, that was what happened when Germany quickly came to prefer violation of the norm. Such a preference cannot be dismissed as simply a reflection of the authoritarian government in Germany, which would be less likely to heed international norms. While the Holocaust clearly testifies to the depravity of the Nazi regime, Germany apparently was willing to adhere to some limitations (for example in CW and strategic bombing) in its behavior with other states. The case study that follows shows organizational culture to have played the central role in the outcome. To be sure, a strategic realist argument might contend that submarine warfare gave a significant advantage to Germany against Britain and that Germany's organizational predilection was therefore merely a reflection of that advantage. This argument is unconvincing, however, because Germany chose to escalate at a time when the situation offered no strategic advantage for doing so.

When Adolph Hitler invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, he hoped to avoid a clash with Britain. While the Führer's motives were complex, his primary goal in 1939 was continental hegemony, not invasion of the British Isles.³⁹ Accordingly, when German submarines were sent to sea in August they were given strict orders to obey rules limiting submarine attacks against civilian and merchant ships.⁴⁰ This fit Germany's support of the rules in 1930 and its reaffirmation of those prohibitions, even while renouncing many other treaty obligations, in the 1936 London Protocol on Submarine Warfare. At the beginning of the war, Germany favored adherence, yet within six weeks it turned to unrestricted submarine warfare.

Norm logic has a difficult time explaining this outcome given that the prohibition was relatively robust. The decision-making process supports this finding: considerations linked to the norm did not determine or definitively constrain the turn toward escalation. The prohibitions, however, were still consequential in several ways. First, the rules reinforced whatever stigma of submarines attacking merchant ships was left from World War I. For example, the London protocol contributed to the "rightness" of the earlier restrictions, reinforcing British (and American) opinion that violations were heinous. Thus the rules may have marginally reinforced Germany's calculation that transgressing the rules would give Britain resolve to continue with its declaration to fight, adding to its morale and spirit, or provoke U.S. participation in the war.⁴¹ Second, the rules also shaped the manner of violation. The issue was not

38. May 1959, 416–37.

39. See Hinsley 1951, 4–9; Rich 1974, 394–95; and Office of Naval Intelligence 1947, 3–5.

40. U.S. National Archives, RG 242, "Opbefehl Nr. 2 für U-Boote 'Alarmübung Nordsee' (U27, U30)," Kiel 21.8.39, T-1022, PG32012-NID. Also see Padfield 1984, 191.

41. For an example of a document that mentions an increase in British morale as a potential negative violation effect, see U.S. National Archives, RG 242, Korvettekapitän Roll von der Marinennachrichten-

how to remain within the regime but how to circumscribe it in the least costly fashion. During the war the Third Reich attempted to use language instrumentally so as to avoid reminding others how Germany created new enemies in World War I through its unrestricted use of the U-boat. The terms “submarine warfare” and “unrestricted submarine warfare” were prohibited and replaced by “war against merchant ships.” Eric Raeder, the commander in chief of the navy, proposed that when the timing was right Germany should declare a “siege of England” because “such a military system would free” Germany from its promises under the London Protocol.⁴² Third, consideration of the international norm did affect the timing of military action. Germany delayed its escalation to allow time to offset any negative international reactions. On 23 September 1939, Hitler agreed that ships traveling without lights in the English Channel could be fired on without warning, but the command was not immediately implemented. The Foreign Ministry appealed for a four-day propaganda campaign to influence international opinion before any intensification of the submarine campaign.⁴³ However, while the submarine norms influenced policy implementation, they did not decide preferences or prevent the use of unrestricted warfare. To understand Germany’s violation of the rules, we must look to the organizational culture of its navy.

The German navy, like many, was drawn in the interwar period by the siren call of “battleship supremacy” that held that the big-gun surface ship was the key to naval success. But to a degree not seen in most other countries, the Third Reich had a vibrant pro-submarine culture within its maritime forces. For example, in Britain and the United States, the submarine, particularly as a commerce raider, was relatively ignored in the interwar period, despite the fact that both countries considered Japan—an island nation vulnerable to an anticommerce submarine campaign—as a primary future opponent.⁴⁴ In Germany, the submarine culture was suppressed for a good part of the interwar period as a result of international treaties and internal politics, but the U-boat arm endured and even developed in the interwar years.

The U-boat corps was centered on an aggressive anticommerce doctrine. Germany’s success in using the U-boat against British trade in World War I had created a cult of believers. The submarine force attracted some of the most ambitious and talented officers, seduced by its past exploits and elite attitude.⁴⁵ Karl Dönitz, the chief of the U-boat force, sought to infuse his men with an offensive anything-is-possible spirit.⁴⁶ He also led the renewal of the World War I U-boat creed, one that seemed at odds with a pledge not to attack merchants without breaking the rules. The

inspektion, “Die (Welt) propaganda als Mittel zur Auswertung militärischer Erfolge als Mittel zur Abschwächung der Wirkung militärischer Mißerfolge,” Winterarbeit 1937/8, T-1022, Roll 1970.

42. U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence, “Conference Between the Chief, Naval Staff and the Führer on 23 September 1939 in Zoppot,” 9.

43. FRG BA-MA, RM 71200, “Kurze Aufzeichnung über das Ergebnis der Besprechung in der Seekriegsleitung am 27.9.39.”

44. See Terraine 1989, 158; and Blair 1975.

45. Robertson 1956, 16.

46. See FRG BA-MA, RM 87/3, Befehlshaber der Unterseeboote, Kriegstagebuch, 15 September 1939; and Dönitz 1959, 12–13.

German U-boats practiced attacking convoys that in wartime would include merchant ships. Even the acoustical detection array in the German boats was allegedly designed for an antishipping role.⁴⁷ The enthusiasm for U-boats biased the very peacetime exercises that were intended as objective tests of combat effectiveness. The trials were based on unrealistic conditions, and officials drew positive conclusions from ambiguous results.⁴⁸ Dönitz later used these exercises to argue that the U-boat should be the backbone of the navy's campaign against Britain.⁴⁹ From the beginning of the war, the navy pushed for a decisive assault on Britain. Raeder pressed Hitler both for more submarines and for an end to restrictions on their use against British trade. Violation of the prohibition came quickly thereafter.

Some might argue that this outcome was not so much the result of cultural dynamics as a simple strategic advantage. Britain, as a landlocked island, was vulnerable to unrestricted submarine warfare, since it could strangle the sea lines of commerce on which it depended. Germany, as a land power, was less vulnerable and thus favored unrestricted submarine warfare. This view, however, ignores the strategic political goals at the time and exaggerates the possible military benefits.

Hitler's central aim in this period of the war was to avoid provoking Britain and therefore allow for a settlement short of war. The Führer calculated that Britain was not actively fighting back and therefore might be willing to end hostilities.⁵⁰ Attacking their merchant ships might push the British into a corner where bloodshed was the only option. Equally important, Hitler wished to avoid antagonizing neutral countries whose merchant ships traded with Britain. Having Britain as an enemy was bad enough. Provoking the United States might fundamentally alter the balance of power against Germany.

Against such possible costs, the potential military gains had to be considered. But despite the geostrategic setting, these gains were relatively limited. The Reich had only twenty-six oceangoing U-boats at the start of war, a third of which could normally be on station simultaneously.⁵¹ Dönitz argued that three hundred would be needed to defeat Britain, recognizing that even the "maximum damage" expected from immediate unrestricted warfare would fall far short of victory.⁵²

Nevertheless, despite the risks, the navy pushed for immediate escalation. Raeder and Dönitz zealously promoted their case at the highest levels of government. Dönitz told the Führer in person on 28 September 1939 that "in the U-boat we have, and always have had, a weapon capable of dealing Britain a mortal blow at her most vulnerable spot"—but that more boats would be needed.⁵³ As evidence, naval leaders uncritically used overblown reports of submarine successes while pointing to

47. See Padfield 1984, 158–60 and 171–75; and Simpson 1972, 61.

48. Padfield 1984, 171–80.

49. U.S. National Archives, RG 242, Memorandum from Dönitz to Konteradmiral Schniewind, 23 May 1939, T-1022, Roll 2138; and FRG BA-MA, RM 7/891, Memorandum by Dönitz to OKM, "Gedanken über den Aufbau der U-Bootswaffe," 3 September 1939.

50. U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence 1947, 3–5.

51. FRG BA-MA, RM 7/891, Memorandum by Dönitz to OKM, 3 September 1939.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Dönitz 1959, 123.

British transgressions of the rules.⁵⁴ This occurred even though Foreign Ministry officials argued that the military advantages that would result from unrestricted warfare were not worth the political costs.⁵⁵ Because of the navy's monopolistic role in agenda setting, evaluation, and implementation in sea warfare, however, its input decisively shaped strategic calculations. In the fall of 1939, Raeder went so far as to contend that Germany's U-boats must sink U.S. ships without heeding the submarine rules even though it would risk war with the United States. The German naval staff actually welcomed U.S. entry into the war because it meant more targets and fewer restrictions.⁵⁶ Hitler bit by bit gave in to unrestricted warfare despite the ill fit with his overriding strategic political aim of not antagonizing Britain (or the United States) and despite the meager tactical military results that were expected. Both for prediction and process, organizational culture provides a robust explanation.

British submarine warfare. Britain preferred restraint in this case, an outcome that the norms, organizational culture, and strategic advantage propositions predict. Examining the decision-making process in this case helps to sort out the relative influence of the three because it increases the number of observations that are theoretically relevant and permits differentiation of causal mechanisms.⁵⁷ British calculations on the submarine rules occurred in two key stages: before and after German escalation.

British preferences and actions before the German escalation can be attributed to several causes. The robustness of the submarine norm and Britain's particularly energetic role in promoting it during the interwar period indicate a strong preference for restraint. Strategic realism also predicts restraint because Britain was dependent on trade and defended by a large surface fleet; hence submarine use could only be harmful. From an organizational culture vantage point, the expected effects were the same: the navy orthodoxy saw very limited possibilities for employing the submarine, thus favoring norm adherence.

A second stage, one that allows us to sort out the three propositions, came after Germany had violated the submarine rules in October 1939, when Britain continued to adhere to restraint. A strategic view would expect escalation at this point. Britain no longer had any reason to prefer adherence to the norm because it no longer had to fear that its own use would induce the more costly German retaliation: Germany already had transgressed the rules. More important, submarines could play an immediate strategic role. Germany was using merchant ships to import iron ore—a critical material for Nazi war industries—from both Sweden and, in the winter, Norway.⁵⁸ In October, some proposed that British submarines should be used to

54. See U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence 1947; Dönitz 1959, 123; and Assmann 1950, 665.

55. U.S. 1954, doc. no. 256, State Secretary Weizsäcker to the Foreign Minister, 14 October 1939, and doc. no. 270, Memorandum by the State Secretary Weizsäcker, 17 October 1939.

56. Herwig 1976, 197.

57. George and McKeown 1985, 36.

58. See U.K. PRO, ADM 199/892, Memorandum from First Lord, 19 September 1939; and Roskill 1968, 156.

intercept this trade. Because of icebound Baltic ports in the winter, the iron ore was sent to Narvik and shipped through Norwegian coastal waters and across the Skagerrak and Kattegat, areas where unrestricted submarine warfare would be effective but where British surface ships were either vulnerable or would violate Norwegian waters.

A norm perspective predicts expectations, thinking, desires, and actions that reflect the prescriptions of the submarine rules or concerns about the effects of transgressing them. According to this perspective, after Germany had escalated Britain should have done the same, since the norm was one of *quid pro quo* restraint. If only to reinforce the norm, Britain should have turned toward escalation, yet it did not.

Some evidence suggests norms were influential in Britain's decision-making process, although again, they were not decisive. Specifically, a view that recognizes both the impact of normative prohibitions and strategic concerns captures at least one part of the process. In the early fall of 1939, it became increasingly clear that Germany was violating the rules of submarine warfare. The British Foreign Office noted that, as of 5 October, nine of thirty-one reported incidents related to the submarine rules were violations, amounting to a "formidable list of illegalities." By the end of October, the navy had concluded Germany was making illegal attacks.⁵⁹ As Britain considered how to respond, several ideas were forwarded, ranging from a looser interpretation of the London protocol to permitting unrestricted warfare in the Baltic.⁶⁰ These proposals, however, were rejected. Not only was the idea of unrestricted warfare turned down but the Lords of the Admiralty would not approve even loosening Britain's strict interpretation of the protocol's search and seizure rules. Britain was concerned that the goodwill it was attempting to build among neutral countries would be dissipated should submarines be employed. The Lords sensibly feared that some accident would result that would alienate important countries such as Norway and Sweden.⁶¹ Britain wanted to avoid antagonizing neutral countries especially with regard to one issue, the control of German exports. Britain had already instituted a "contraband" system to limit Third Reich imports and now wanted to do the same to Germany's outgoing trade. To accomplish this, however, Britain would need the support of the neutral countries and therefore had to keep their interests in mind. The British plan was to forgo tit-for-tat replies to Germany's breaches of the London Protocol and instead allow the illegalities to accumulate; it would then respond by controlling German exports.⁶²

59. See U.K. PRO, ADM 1/10584, Memorandum from William Malkin, Foreign Office, 24 October 1939 and ADM 199/892, Minute by the Head of the Military Branch, October 1939.

60. See the following U.K. PRO documents: ADM 199/878, 008070/39, Minute by Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, 25 October 1939; ADM 199/892, Minute by Head of Military Branch, October 1939; and ADM 199/892, Minute by Director of Plans, 3 November 1939.

61. See U.K. PRO, ADM 199/892, Minute by Head of Military Branch, and ADM 199/892, Minute by Director of Plans, the latter of which was approved by the First Lord, First Sea Lord, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff.

62. See U.K. PRO, ADM 199/878, Minute by Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, and ADM 199/892, Minute by Head of Military Branch.

While these incidents indicate the influence of both the prohibitions and the strategic concerns, events that followed cast doubt on whether they were at the heart of British restraint. In December 1939, Britain did implement export controls but in response to Germany's "illegal" mining activity, not its submarine violations. Furthermore, while Britain put plans (Operation Wilfred) into motion in early April 1940 that violated Norwegian waters with underwater mines, it maintained its restraints on submarines.⁶³ Thus even though Germany conducted unrestricted warfare and neutral country reaction became less of a concern, Britain did not turn to escalation. Although the rules allowed Britain to escalate under the circumstances, restraint obtained for five months beyond German escalation while iron ore shipments continued and even during the first days of the Nazi invasion of Norway in April 1940. Why?

Organizational culture offers an answer to this curious restraint. The British navy was dominated by a battleship creed that considered the big surface ship as the pivotal element in the large clashes of fleets that were expected to decide the war at sea. Navy leadership saw the submarine as a strictly ancillary tool. It gave little attention to and sometimes even disparaged commerce warfare, especially the unrestricted type. Despite the devastating success of German submarines in World War I, the Royal Navy's postwar assessment committee reaffirmed that the "battleship retains her old predominant position."⁶⁴ As one captain noted in his diary, the committee "had merely made statements, assertions: had not examined the war to find out what the influence of the big ship was, or whether she was still in the position she used to be [in]. The thing i.e. the future of the battleship must be approached in a far more scientific manner."⁶⁵ The navy's exercises in the interwar years, which were meant to be objective measures of competence, gave submarines little chance to prove their worth. Since the dominant creed assumed that submarines were relatively ineffective, the navy structured its exercises accordingly and rejected results that suggested otherwise. At the end of a 1939 exercise, a submarine officer accurately reported to a hall of one thousand sailors that torpedoes had hit 22 percent of their targets. Instead of the normal questions, Admiral Forbes, the commander of the Home Fleet, stood up, declared that the officer was clearly wrong and that 3 percent was the correct figure, and the session ended.⁶⁶ The navy's battleship cult also affected its evaluation of the threat of enemy submarines. Ignoring readily available evidence, many believed that the danger from German U-boats had been mastered: Britain did not conduct a single exercise in protection of a slow convoy against the submarine between 1919 and 1939.⁶⁷

63. Roskill 1954, 102 and 156–58.

64. See U.K. PRO, ADM 1/8586, "Final Report of the Post-War Questions Committee," 27 March 1920, as cited in Roskill 1968, 115. Also see Terraine 1989, 117–18.

65. Diary entry of Captain (later Sir Admiral) Herbert Richmond for 10 November 1919, as cited in Roskill 1968, 115–16.

66. See Simpson 1972, 48–49, 57–58, and 74–76; Hezlet 1967, 119; Mars 1971, 33; and Roskill 1976, 230 and 430–31.

67. See Henry 1976, 381–82; Roskill 1976, 336–37 and 477; and Roskill 1954, 45, 355, and 536.

In short, it was the battleship orthodoxy that drove decisions on whether to violate the norm on submarine warfare. The deputy chief of the naval staff commented in October 1939 that “if it could be shown that it was essential for us to take full advantage of the latitude allowed by the Submarine Protocol in order to achieve some war aim, then I would say that we should have to do so but, at the present moment, I do not think this is the case.”⁶⁸ In fact, had the submarine regulations been loosened, the underwater boats could have been used effectively for considerable strategic advantage both off the coast of Norway and in the sea channel between Germany and Sweden and Norway.⁶⁹ Even when the gray uniforms of the Wehrmacht were spotted on merchant ships, Britain allowed German shipping to continue in the Kattegat during the early stages of the Reich’s invasion of Norway in April 1940. As it had twenty submarines in the waters through which the invasion fleet sailed, Britain’s restraint in this instance has been called a significant “missed opportunity.”⁷⁰

How norms matter

To argue that norms do not account as well as organizational culture for the differential use of prohibited warfare in World War II is not to say such prohibitions were meaningless. The record clearly suggests that the norms did indeed “matter” in at least one fundamental sense and a number of less consequential ways related to the way that states thought, communicated, and acted with regard to the use of force.

Constituting heinous warfare. The most fundamental effect of norms was to define which means of warfare would even be considered for restraint.⁷¹ Rather than inventory their armories and war plans in search of finding heinous forms of fighting, countries considered for restraint those forms that already were stigmatized by extant norms. This stigmatization was not a simple product of the technological inhumanity of a particular form of combat. States hardly blinked over the use of equally inhumane forms of warfare such as high-explosive artillery shells or flamethrowers. And was it really less moral to bomb London than to besiege Leningrad? Yet bombing was stigmatized while besieging a defended city was not. No objective measure of inhumanity set submarines, strategic bombing, and chemical weapons apart. Only recognized norms dictated the boundaries of acceptable use. At times, these took the form of a moral consideration: whether it was “right” to use such a weapon. For example, when Britain considered the use of CW, one assistant chief of the army general staff argued that “such a departure from our principles and traditions would have the most deplorable effects not only on our own people but even on the fighting services. Some of us would begin to wonder whether it really

68. U.K. PRO, ADM 199/878, Minute 08070/39 by Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, 25 October 1939.
69. See Roskill 1954, 334–35; King 1958, 55–56; and Hezlet 1967, 125 and 138–40.

70. Simpson 1972, 89.

71. This thesis is developed in greater depth in Price forthcoming.

mattered which side won.”⁷² More often, the special attention given to these three prohibitions had to do with the material consequences of violations as seen above. In either case, the effect of the international norms suggests they may be a critical facilitating force in the limitation of otherwise taken-for-granted behavior. To find whether this is in fact the case would entail a broader investigation that would include cases where mutual restraint in using militarily significant weapons obtained but where no legacy of international norms existed. That such cases do not readily come to mind suggests the relevance of norms.

Restricting preparations. In some cases, norms also affected the way states prepared for war. For example, popular anti-CW sentiment in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s combined with Britain’s acceptance of the Geneva Protocol seemed to add slightly to constraints on developing gas warfare. Terms were changed to avoid any reference to offensive CW; training materials were not written or distributed and exercises not conducted to avoid a perception that Britain was preparing for a chemical war. Even the open development of civil defense measures against gas was deferred in 1929 as being ill-timed in light of Britain’s ratification that year of the Geneva Protocol.⁷³ The Foreign Office adamantly opposed proposals to use gas on India’s northwest frontier against Afghan tribesmen in the mid-1920s. It found the turnaround in policy to be too quick. Austen Chamberlain, the Foreign Secretary, argued that since Britain had vilified Germany for gas use in World War I, it had to wait until its “charges against Germany were less present in the minds of the public” before advocating gas use.⁷⁴ Yet one must be careful not to overstate the influence of the antigas norm. Although Britain’s offensive gas program was pushed underground, it was not stopped. After the Geneva Protocol was signed, the work previously done in the Offensive Munitions Department was simply conducted under the heading of “chemical weapons against which defense is required.” A variety of research and weapons development for offensive warfare evolved under the guise of this semantic cover.⁷⁵ By the late 1930s, any constraining impact that public opinion had exerted on CW preparations dissipated, as the threat of war with Germany rose.⁷⁶

Rules also inhibited wartime preparations in the United States. Although U.S. Navy culture had ignored commerce warfare in the interwar years, once war with Japan seemed imminent some navy officials began to acknowledge the possible benefits of using submarines against shipping. When the naval leadership considered the matter, however, it advised against changing the rules because doing so would be “contrary to international law and U.S. policy” and instead recommended maintain-

72. U.K. PRO, WO 193/732, Minute from Assistant Chief of the Imperial General Staff (C) to Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 16 June 1940.

73. See U.K. PRO, WO 188/390, “Lecture to Staff College, Camberly,” 10 April 1931, and WO 188/446, “Preparation of Training Manuals on Chemical Warfare,” 30 September 1930; Harris and Paxman 1982, 46–47; SIPRI 1971a, 269 and 300; Haber 1986, 300; and Spiers 1986, 47–49.

74. The quotation is from U.K. PRO, CAB 2/4, Minute of 215 and 217 Meetings of the Committee on Imperial Defense, 22 July and 11 November 1926, as cited in Spiers 1986, 48.

75. Harris and Paxman 1982, 42 and 47.

76. Harris 1980, 60–61.

ing a traditional posture until circumstances rendered modification advisable.⁷⁷ The Japanese Pearl Harbor attack soon provided such circumstances.

Influencing third-party reactions. Most apparent, international principles affected the expectations of states regarding the reactions of other parties. The rules of warfare set guidelines for what was considered acceptable behavior. States believed that violating such guidelines could cost them the support of other countries or even their own populace. Germany, as mentioned above, fretted that its unrestricted submarine warfare would antagonize Britain or the United States at a time when it wanted accommodation with the former and nonintervention from the latter. Likewise, Britain pondered how its unrestricted bombing or use of chemical weapons would affect the support it desperately needed from the United States.

However, as seen in the case of German submarine warfare, these expected costs led states to alter the manner of policy implementation but not necessarily the direction of decisions. So Britain, when worried that its unrestricted campaign would alienate neutral countries, devised schemes to blame escalation on the enemy in order to mitigate political damage while going ahead with the bombing.⁷⁸

Gaining advantage. Norms also figured in state calculations of gaining advantage over the enemy. Britain concluded that its own restraint, in the face of German transgressions, would bring it favor with third parties. It planned to accumulate this “normative capital” and then cash it in at a later point. For example, in the summer of 1939 the commander of the submarine force, Rear Admiral B. C. Watson, wanted to announce danger zones around British overseas possessions where submarines could defend against invasion by attacking convoys without restrictions. The admiralty denied the proposal. It feared that if Britain initiated action, it could not then blame the Germans for violating restrictions on submarine attacks or respond with “other measures besides a strict tit-for-tat” that would be even more advantageous.⁷⁹ As discussed above, Britain’s plan to control German exports was also typical of this thinking.

Signaling intentions. Norms proved influential in terms of signaling intentions. In this sense they help to define a critical dimension of the concept “threat” that has played so large a role in the international relations literature.⁸⁰ Violating prohibitions was an indicator of the nature of one’s ambitions. Germany, for example, sought accommodation with Britain after its invasion of Poland in the fall of 1939. Even though it believed that its use of unrestricted submarine warfare was to its military

77. See U.S. National Archives, RG80, General Board Study No. 425, Amendment of Rules for Maritime Commerce, Box 133, Department of the Navy, 15 May 1941; and Samuel F. Bemis study, Yale University Library, Box 1603A.

78. Terraine 1985, 143.

79. See U.K. PRO, ADM 1/10360, Rear Admiral (Submarines) to Secretary of the Admiralty, “Remarks on the Use of Submarines in Defence of Territory,” 3 August 1939, and ADM 1/10360, Minute 07295/39 by Head of the Military Branch, 21 August 1939.

80. For example, see Walt 1987, 25–26.

advantage, Germany favored restraint because it acknowledged that violating the submarine rules would indicate to Britain that it aimed for total war; accommodation would then be impossible. Had these norms not developed during the interwar period, the stigma of violation would not have been so great. Norms worked in the same manner in the summer of 1940. Then, Germany refrained from bombing British cities immediately after defeating France. One reason for this restraint was Hitler's interest in striking a deal with Britain; unrestricted bombing would have scuttled such a possibility. Here again the norm was important as a recognized threshold of violence with social significance not applicable to conventional forms of combat.

Possible objections

Both macro- and microanalysis demonstrate the relative explanatory power of organizational culture for the variation in adherence to rules limiting the use of force in World War II. Several possible objections to this thesis deserve brief attention.

One is that measuring norm robustness by means of specificity, durability, and concordance is faulty, leading to defective conclusions. The strongest arguments along this line suggest that restraint against CW obtained because the norm was indeed different. Thomas Schelling, for example, argues that the CW norm itself was qualitatively distinct in that it was simple and unambiguous (all or nothing), represented a more distinct coordination point, and therefore was more prone to succeed.⁸¹ This logic would suggest that submarine and strategic bombing rules failed because adherence and restraint differed only by a matter of degree: use against some targets was acceptable, but use against others was prohibited. If this were true we would expect that states crossed the line of restraint in submarine warfare and strategic bombing due to uncertainties and miscommunication about boundaries and their violation. However, this was not the case. Nations often made explicit decisions regarding restraint or escalation in the face of understood limits and actions. To the extent states misperceived actions of the other side or inadvertently violated the norms, those misperceptions and actions were more a product of organizational culture than a result of norm quality.⁸²

Richard Price also focuses on the all-or-nothing aspect of CW but in a different way than Schelling. He asserts that the discourse generated by this prohibition was qualitatively distinct in that it stigmatized any use of the weapon whatever. In various ways, often indirect, this distinction raised the threshold of use. For example, statesmen often rejected proposals to use chemical weapons during the war on the basis of inadequate preparation, but the preparations and judgments of readiness both were shaped by the CW norm. This discourse also mattered because it compelled leaders to consider more carefully its violation because they assumed that any use inevitably would lead to unlimited catastrophic attacks on civilians. Applied to submarines and strategic bombing, such logic leads to two conclusions: first, because

81. Schelling 1960, 74–75, and 1966, 131–32, 154–55, and 164.

82. For evidence on this account, see Legro 1994.

the norms in those areas were not absolute but involved certain restrictions on employment, nations were not inhibited from preparations in those areas; and, second, leaders assumed that some use in those areas was less threatening than CW use would be, because it would not lead to total catastrophic use.⁸³ Despite its merits, this argument overstates the impact of the all-or-nothing CW norm quality. National preparedness (and judgments thereof) did vary but not so much by norm type as by organizational culture. Thus even those areas of warfare where weapon building for conventional military purposes was not stigmatized, some nations were prepared to do so, while others were not. For example, Britain was fully equipped for strategic bombing, while Germany was not. Nor is CW nonuse reducible to the fear of catastrophic retaliation. Leaders had a similar fear in other areas where clear boundaries were in effect, yet they made explicit decisions to escalate to unlimited use of those means. Thus Britain initiated unrestricted strategic bombing.⁸⁴ In short, the all-or-nothing quality of the norm cannot by itself explain the adherence preference in the cases studied.

A second common objection is that the key contributor to the varied pattern of restraint is military effectiveness. This view, related to strategic realism, holds that gas was not used simply because it was not militarily effective; had it been useful, it would have been employed like submarines and strategic bombing. This interpretation, however, does not square with the evidence and views of the participants at the time. While CW certainly had its limitations, toward the end of World War I the belligerents were increasing their use of gas significantly, not reducing it due to ineffectiveness.⁸⁵ During the interwar period civilian experts such as B. H. Liddell Hart and J. F. C. Fuller highlighted the utility of gas.⁸⁶ CW was also widely recognized by militaries as having significant military utility. In Britain in the summer of 1939, a review of gas requirements concluded that “with added and improved weapons chemical troops will be used in a future war more than they were in the last.”⁸⁷ Based on December 1939 tests the British concluded, “we have at our disposal a potential weapon of great value.”⁸⁸ Chemical weapons were not a decisive factor in World War I, but then again, neither were two other major innovations, the tank and the plane.⁸⁹ The advantages CW offered, as with these other types of weapons, depended on how and when it was employed.

A final objection is that adherence to norms in World War II might have been more a result of national culture or regime type than of organizational culture. The democratic peace thesis suggests that different political structures handle armed

83. Price forthcoming.

84. See Bialer 1980.

85. See Haber 1986, 260–61; Thuillier 1939, 74; Brown 1968, 32 and 46; and Quester 1986, 44–45.

86. See, for example, Liddell Hart 1928, 25, 82, and 85.

87. U.K. PRO, WO 193/740, report prepared by the Director of Military Training and Director of Staff Studies by request of the Intra-service Committee on Anglo-French Chemical Warfare Conversations, “Gases for Use in the Field and the Quantity of Each Required,” 7 July 1939.

88. See U.K. PRO, WO 193/726, Memorandum from MO1 to DDMO, “Chemical Warfare—High Spray Trials,” 30 January 1940.

89. Spiers 1989, 80–81.

conflict in fundamentally different ways.⁹⁰ The problem with this idea is that it is not confirmed in a macro- or microanalytic sense. Dictatorships were willing to adhere to norms (Germany in the cases of CW and strategic bombing), and democracies were willing to violate even robust ones (the United States in the case of submarine warfare).

Conclusion and implications

The contemporary surge in research on international norms inevitably draws our attention to the past—particularly the interwar years. Traditionally the two decades leading to World War II have comprised a paradigmatic case showing that international norms are ineffective in critical situations and that practical efforts based on norm effectiveness are utopian. To be sure, neither the Kellogg-Briand Pact nor the League of Nations effectively prohibited war. But even in this difficult period for international institutions, not all prohibitions were ineffectual. Oddly enough, in a total war, states struggling for survival altered or transcended the expected use of particular forms of military power, in part because of intentionally constructed international prohibitions on those types of warfare.

Yet by considering the question, which norms matter? the drawbacks of focusing exclusively on international norms are also apparent. In World War II, the robustness of such norms did not directly relate to their impact on the thinking and actions of actors or to systemic outcomes. But contrary to the realist answer, neither relative capabilities nor the situations of states was the primary catalyst. Instead, it was the organizational cultures of militaries that more significantly structured how states understood their situations, what types of capabilities they saw as important, and, ultimately, how desirable it was to violate the norm or maintain mutual restraint. Furthermore, these cultures had a marked autonomous effect relative to both norms and to the balance of power—that is, the way militaries and nations thought about fighting was not reducible either to international norms or to strategic opportunities. Of course, the response to the prohibitions during World War II was not a monocausal organizational culture story. As seen in the cases above, concerns about international prescriptions and strategic advantage both had roles to play. Although I have assessed these variables as competing hypotheses here, a synthetic models might, for example, develop an explanation of norm influence that takes into account both the robustness of international prescriptions and the impact of national-level social understandings such as political or organizational culture.

The present argument has several methodological and conceptual implications for the treatment of norms in international relations theory. Most important is the need for a conceptualization of norms that is independent of the effects attributed to them. Additionally, more explicit comparative research that examines effectual and ineffectual norms would lead to a better understanding of why certain norms seem to

90. For an incisive review of this literature, see Elman forthcoming.

be so influential and others not. This line of research, though rejected by some as pseudoscientific and not applicable to interpretation of the social world, is being pursued by even those interested primarily in studying particular social understandings and their enabling or causal effects.⁹¹ The implicit counterfactual is always present in such work: if a particular social understanding had not evolved in a particular way, identities, understandings, structures, and the like also would be different. I suggest only that such counterfactuals be more explicitly developed. Finally, a more accepted practice deserving of wider application in norm scholarship is the explicit relative assessment of alternative explanations for the same effects. Such assessments not only lend credibility to the argument but also offer insights into the interaction among “alternative” explanatory frameworks.

Besides these methodological and conceptual implications, the present results carry a warning for much work in international relations that has focused on collective understandings in global society. Like that of neoliberal institutionalists, constructivists, norm theorists, and sociologists who study global culture, my work stresses collective ideational factors.⁹² Yet this study diverges from other approaches by also considering organization culture, a different level ideational force. The importance of that factor cautions against an “autonomous internationalism” focusing exclusively on global norms. Principles and beliefs that characterize other subsystemic communities may be found to be as or more important than those of international society.

I do not claim that organizational culture (as opposed to norms or strategic concerns) will always be decisive in the thinking and practices of states. Its influence may vary across both issue-area and history. The influence of any particular bureaucratic culture will depend on its organizational salience. Military services in World War II had a high salience in each of the countries investigated. Where similar traits of salience are apparent, organizational perspectives deserve attention.⁹³ The relative influence of organizational culture might also vary historically. While such cultures may have been more important than international norms in the interwar period, the same may not be true today. After all, many scholars see the world today as more “international,” more thickly connected, and potentially more interdependent.⁹⁴ Thus the collective understandings that are part and parcel of a more developed contemporary international society might override national-level orientations such as bureaucratic culture. Such a hypothesis, however, requires empirical research and the appropriate conceptual tools.

This task poses difficult and important analytic challenges. How should we conceptualize the relative strength of different normative (and other) frameworks?

91. For a similar argument that “discursivists” need to offer “causal or quasi-causal accounts of the effects of ideational factors,” see Yee 1996, 102–3.

92. For examples from neoliberal institutionalism and constructivism, see Krasner 1983; Keohane 1989; Wendt 1992 and 1994. For examples from norm literature, see the references in footnote 1, above. For examples from sociology, see the work of John Meyer and his associates in Scott and Meyer 1994; Finnemore 1996b provides a good introduction to that literature.

93. For example, Bachman 1991. In general, see Wilson 1989.

94. See Ruggie 1993; Rosenau 1990; and Buzan, Jones, and Little 1993.

When is it that unit-level ideologies and beliefs will supersede systemic ones? How do the two interact? Can synthetic cross-level ideational models be constructed? International relations theorists have paid relatively little attention to these questions.⁹⁵ Yet in contemporary affairs, contradictions between collective beliefs embedded at different levels have surged to the fore. For example, the international arena seems increasingly dominated by a belief in the importance of individual rights; nonetheless, many societies retain a collective orientation that can conflict with the normative import of the individual. The clashes of the United States with Singapore over “caning” and with China over human rights violations are indicative of these opposing orientations. Likewise, both nationalism and global interdependence seem to be simultaneously on the rise, yet the potential contradiction between the two trends is readily apparent. Understanding how different types of collective beliefs and customs relate to one another, then, is a significant challenge for future work.

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95. Sewell 1992 provides some leads.

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