

Strategic Culture of Pakistan

Authors

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Abstract

This article offers a detailed exploration of Pakistan's evolving strategic culture, spanning from its birth in 1947 to the present day. It scrutinizes the intricate factors that mould Pakistan's strategic mindset, encompassing historical legacies, geographical positioning, and leadership dynamics. Particular emphasis is placed on the lasting impact of the Kashmir conflict and its strained relations with India on Pakistan's strategic orientation. The article underscores the central role played by the military establishment in safeguarding Pakistan's strategic culture, especially within the realm of nuclear deterrence. It delves into how the acquisition of nuclear capabilities has profoundly influenced Pakistan's national security approach, resulting in a policy of deliberate ambiguity regarding the potential use of these weapons. Additionally, the article highlights the role of Islamic fundamentalism in shaping Pakistan's strategic culture, emphasizing the significance of defending Islamic principles and national sovereignty. It further examines how historical grievances and the persistent rivalry with India continue to shape Pakistan's strategic decision-making. In conclusion, this study presents an exhaustive analysis of Pakistan's contemporary strategic culture, shedding light on the core elements that define its national security strategies. It underscores the necessity of comprehending these intricate dynamics for policymakers and scholars seeking a deeper understanding of Pakistan's role in the ever-evolving global geopolitical landscape.

Keywords:

Pakistan's Strategic culture, historical legacies, strategic orientation, nuclear deterrence, Islamic fundamentalism, national sovereignty and geopolitical landscapes.

Introduction

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The term Strategic culture entered into the subject of security studies late in the Cold War era but brought immense changes in the security literature and policy making especially of nuclear weapons states. The concept revolves around the different things. It is made of crucial things like what are its sources and most importantly who are the real keepers and guardians of strategic culture. In new countries, it is challenged and affected by local political culture and regional security situation. In such cases, Strategic culture in new states is affected by two factors: the regional security situation and the local political culture. In the beginning, there was no such constitutional structure in Pakistan after partition both India and Pakistan continued to hold the act in 1935. However, political instability has been one of the fundamental problems in Pakistan since its birth. Unfortunately, Pakistan failed to make its constitution for the first 9 years, comparatively India got its first constitution after one year of its independence from the British. The first ten years of Pakistan are prominent, as a student of history we can learn, how problems have originated in these years. So, these fundamental problems are still deep-rooted in its political structure till now after 76 years of its independence. According to C. Christine Fair Pakistan was a “revisionist state”⁴. Pakistan pursued revisionist policies which motivated it to start a territorial campaign in Kashmir which resulted in war with India in 1948. The first war began in an unlikely situation where Pakistan had a lack of resources and weak diplomatic ties, burdening its strategic environment, which resulted in complex hostility with India and failure to win wars over Kashmir in 1948, 1965 and 1999.

Pakistan is one such nuclear weapon state whose specific strategic culture is discussed in this paper. Pakistan a new nation born has faced many threats since its inception in 1947. The existential national security is from the eastern side in the form of India where Pakistan fought many wars over the issue of Kashmir and in the western side in the form of Afghanistan. More to this one fundamental tenet is Islamic fundamentalism included in the strategic culture of Pakistan.

Defining the Term:

Strategic culture:

Strategic culture appeared on the screen of Security Studies when Jack Snyder introduced it sometime in the mid-1970s.⁵ He coined the term while studying Soviet Union nuclear doctrine and showed how to interpret it successfully by comprehending Soviet Culture as well. Previously both superpowers USSR and the USA studied the concept nuclear doctrines of each other on the basis of principles of rationality and economics. This new astonishing concept sheds light on that different aspects of culture and belief systems are also important.

⁴Fair, C. C. (2016). Pakistan’s strategic culture: implications for how Pakistan perceives threats and counters them. *SA16 Pakistan/special report*. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Carol>

⁵Jack Snyder, *the Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options* (Santa Monica: Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1977), 8.

Snyder defined it as Strategic culture is a set of general beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour patterns with regard to nuclear strategy that has achieved a state of semi-permanence that places them on the level of “cultural” rather than mere policy.⁶

Rosen later defined it as Strategic culture is comprised of ‘beliefs and assumptions that frame . . . choices about international military behaviour, particularly those concerning decisions to go to war, preferences for offensive, expansionist or defensive modes of warfare, and levels of wartime casualties that would be acceptable’.

Sources of Strategic Culture:

The sources of strategic culture have both factors inherited in it whether material or ideational, according to findings of literature. The main sources of strategic culture are history, geography and leadership (both military and civilian).⁷ The sources provide the inner view of strategic culture what it is and how it is applied by different states in different situations.

Geography:

It remains one of the key sources of the strategic culture. Every state makes decisions regarding their national security and defence by looking at where they are present. I’m the middle of two countries being sandwiched or located far away from other countries in the middle of the ocean where water is protecting you from all sides. Geographical positions are one of the central to comprehending why different states choose specific strategic policies as compared to others.

Example:

Norway and Sweden's policies during the Cold War era remained neutral because of their proximity to the Soviet Union and US forces stationed in Europe. So their leaders decided to not choose side with either of the two giants and remain neutral in order to save themselves from the wrath of both giants.

Similarly if one looks at the policies of Australia, the country has adopted the policy of continental defence and doesn’t have any aggressive postures. Australia knows that they are surrounded by water on all sides, thus continental defence strategy will suit them.

History:

History is a key phenomenon. History plays a major role in determining what countries and people think. It determines and predicts their behaviours. It is one key thing in determining the strategic culture of a particular state. Whether that state will react aggressively or defensively or surrender when threatened. How a state behaves in pressure situations.

Leadership:

⁶ John Baylis, James J. Wirtz and Colin S. Gray, *Strategy in the contemporary age*, 4th ed.(London: Oxford University Press, 2013) 77.

⁷ John Baylis, James J. Wirtz and Colin S. Gray, *Strategy in the contemporary age*, 4th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 2013) 81.

Leadership and organisations of a state are key players. They are the ones who make policies and strategies and decide what will be the strategic culture of their state. The leadership includes both political and military. They jointly formulate the strategic culture of their state. They are the ones who decide when to go to war and when to act defensively. They are the real architects of strategic culture.

Keepers of Strategic Culture:

The debate revolving around the keepers of Strategic Culture has been present for quite some time. Contemporary security studies shed light on this immense debate. The question arises from the debate that who are the real keepers. The answer to the question is not simple but somewhat complex as it involves certain key players. It is specifically the Elite, which includes the persons from the highest offices of the state whether military or political involved in the process of policymaking are the central keepers of Strategic culture. It has its roots in the people of the country. Newer studies on policy discourse show that the concept can be best defined as the reality negotiated among key policy-makers otherwise known as elites.

PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC CULTURE:

Pakistan's strategic culture is not one like that of Chinese and Britain which took hundreds of years to develop. The newly dominion strategic culture is based on less than a hundred years, and that is not much time. Moreover, the newly born republic saw and still sees the events occurring through the lens of Islam as well. Further, it is the strategic environment around Pakistan that has to be objectively evaluated for realistic assessment.

The state of Pakistan is one of the least secure states on this planet known to us as Earth. It lacks strategic depth as its major countries are on the eastern border with India facing blatant military aggression at any time. Pakistan as a state was insecure as it immediately faced a bigger threat on its border in the form of India on the very day of its birth.

Rudimentary Principles of Pakistan Strategic Culture:

In view of historical data and beliefs of Pakistan's Strategic community, the following main postulates emerged which form the basis of Strategic Culture in Pakistan based on empirical evidence and historical data.

Insecurity from The Eastern and Western neighbours:

The enmity among the states of Pakistan and India had a long history. It started when Britain left India and carved out a Muslim-majority state from the sub-continent and named it Pakistan. This was done religious basis. The relations between Pakistan with India remained tense from the very beginning. Both nations remained in constant hostilities with each other. India always remained an aggressor while threatening the national security of Pakistan.

This was because of the bitter and heartbroken memories when millions of Muslims migrated from India to Pakistan and hundreds of thousands of them were killed by Hindus and Sikhs of India. More to this the new state of Pakistan learned that Indians from the very beginning rejected the notion of the **Two-Nation Theory** which formed the basis of partition. The Indian support of militant Bengalis commonly known as **MuktiBahini** in East Pakistan in

1971 reinforced that argument in front of the Pakistani establishment.⁸ This action clearly showed Pakistan that India was in the mood to capture the whole of Pakistan and bring it under the umbrella of Greater India.

Moreover, the new-born country faced threats from Afghanistan on the Durand line because of the rejection of Afghanistan to accept the Durand line as an international border and aspirations to include areas up to Attock within the territory of Afghanistan. Afghanistan wanted to name this area as Pashtunistan by merging areas of Afghan Pashtun populated areas and that of Pakistan Pashtun population. More to this Afghan government facilitated insurgents and miscreants in Pakistan to raise the voice of Pashtunistan.

Pakistan face a threat from Afghanistan with which it shares mile long border commonly done as the Durand line demarcated by the British in 1893.⁵ The threat is not as great as it is from India on eastern borders but recent support of Indian establishment to Afghanistan since 2001 making it a major threat to national security of Pakistan. This is clear because of India's support of Afghanistan's claim on Pakistani land.

Early search for safe zones and historical linkages

Block Politics:

After the independence of Pakistan in 1947, India was the biggest enemy of the Pakistan. Indian leadership had never accepted Pakistan as an Independent state. In this regard, Pakistan was fully aware of India's strategy against Pakistan. The two-nation theory is also important in a scene that it was not only for getting an independent state but also a very strong belief. When the independence movement of a separate homeland was launched by the Muslim League, there was no brief discussion about the security and migration problems being discussed before the independence. The division of Pakistan was the bone of contention because the British had divided the nation into two parts east and West Pakistan there was a huge distance between East and West Pakistan and between thousands of miles distance, so there was Indian territory in between, it was very easy for India to give security threat to Pakistan, in 1965 war it was assuming that East Pakistan was also fought a war on the behalf of West but it was difficult to give send army assistance there, that why mostly provinces were left on the mercy of Indian army, thankfully they didn't attract on east Pakistan⁹. It has assumed strategic importance on the world stage, acting as both a linchpin in the global war on terrorism and a "swing" state in the ideological conflict between democracy and dictatorship, and between Islamic and secular rule¹⁰. From the beginning, Pakistan had faced a lot of problems and hardships, distribution of resources was unfair Pakistan didn't get the resources equally. Pakistan fought its first war with India which is known as the first war on Kashmir (1947-1948). Kashmir was also occupied by India. Maharaja Hari Sing of Kashmir wanted to join India but the local Muslim population of Kashmir was with Pakistan. At that time Pakistan had no army structure, and with the help of some tribal areas they had faced this harsh attitude from India. This was the main event that happened after the Partition

⁸ Dr FarrukhSaleem, "MuktiBahini, " The Forgotten Terrorists", The News, accessed June 09, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/105117-Mukti-Bahini-the-forgotten-terrorists>⁵ArwinRahi, "Why the Durand line matter", The Diplomat, accessed June 08, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/02/why-the-durand-line-matters/>

⁹Ahmed Faruqui, rethinking the national security of Pakistan: (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003) 41,4.

¹⁰Wynbrandt, James. *A brief history of Pakistan*. InfoBase Publishing, 2009.

of the sub-continent. Pakistan was very much worried about its security and sovereignty. The first prime minister of Pakistan Liaqat Ali Khan decided to visit the United States in 1950, it was an official visit. On this visit, it was very clear that Pakistan wanted to join the U.S. as a safe zone from India. There were two superpowers at that time the bio-polar world communist and capitalist block. On the other hand, Pakistan was also making good relations with China and Iran. This visit of Liaqat Ali Khan proved very effective for Pakistan, he emphasized that countries like the US should share their Economic and technological experience with newly independent countries. He also praised the U.S. leadership and their struggle for independence from the colonial states. This visit was the first strategy of Pakistan to Join the Bio-polar world. In this regard, there is a Question of why Pakistan joined the US at that time. First, need to understand the base of ideology. Pakistani leadership have the same ideology as the US and Europe Secondly US was in power to economically help Pakistan. On the other hand, the USSR was not strong enough to aid or help Pakistan. Pakistan became a member of CETO, CENTO in the 1950s for her own security.

The long-standing Kashmir Dispute:

The beautiful valley of Kashmir remained part of major wars between Pakistan and India. The Kashmir dispute started when the Hindu Dogra Maharajah Hari Singh as part of a plan against Pakistan joined India and acceded to India by signing a treaty. The Maharaja joined and acceded to India against the wishes of the Kashmiri Muslims. The state was a Muslim majority with a Hindu minority. As a part of the partition plan Muslim majority states were to be made part of Pakistan but that did not happen in the case of Kashmir.

Pakistan sees Kashmir as a source of its lifeline. Kashmir is a jugular vein of Pakistan and this phenomenon is supported by various statements from both political and military leaders over the years. Kashmir served as a lifeline for Pakistan as all major rivers flow from Kashmir into Pakistan including the mighty Indus.¹¹ If India blocked them Pakistan's fertile land of Indus would become barren land and desert thus bringing Pakistan to its knees without even firing a single bullet. To make sure this would not happen in the future Pakistan will do everything to settle the Kashmir dispute in its favour.

Kashmir plays a key role in formulating Pakistan's Strategic Culture. Thousands of innocent lives have been lost because of this conflict. It brought Pakistan to war with India on multiple occasions. The Kashmir conflict has the power to even bring nuclear catastrophe to the subcontinent. The Kashmir dispute until it is resolved will remain a key part of Pakistan's strategic culture.

Opposition to India's Hinduism:

The past had its own memories. In Pakistan's past the memories were bitter. The Muslims of Pakistan to this day remember the atrocities committed by the Hindus of India at the time of partition when they killed hundreds of thousands of Muslims including women, men and infants. The horrors of the past still haunt the ones who lost their loved ones at the time of partition. Adding to this tragic events like Babri Mosque and Gujrat riots in which thousands

¹¹Dipinjan Roy Chaudhry, "India to stop its river water system flowing into Pakistan", Economic Times, accessed June 06, 2020, https://www.google.com/amp/s/m.economictimes.com/news/politics-andnation/india-to-stop-its-water-share-from-flowing-into-pakistan/amp_articleshow/68105098.cms

of Muslims were killed by Hindus.¹² This naked aggression solidify the beliefs of Pakistani Muslims that Muslims and Hindus can't live together and the enmity towards Hindus increased due to such incidents. So the agony towards Hindus in Pakistan's societal culture also forms the basis of the Strategic culture of the country.

Opposition to Indian Hegemony:

Both powerhouses in Pakistan whether political or military establishments hundred percent agree on one thing which is to stand up against Indian hegemony. To defy Indian hegemonic designs Pakistani political and military elites are unified in regarding efforts to minimize the Indian power in the region by any means necessary.

The rationale behind it is that Pakistan was based on the notion that the Muslims of the Subcontinent would be granted a separate homeland where they were free to perform their prayers without any fear. They will be granted a sovereignty free from any sort of Hindu domination. In doing to preserve this Pakistani government over the years whether civilian or military spent enough resources on the defence of the country. Identification with Islamic Principles.

Pakistan was built on the notion that Muslims of India needed a spare homeland where the ruling authority rests with Allah Almighty and they can say/perform their religious prayers freely without anyone threatening them. They have religious freedom in the newly born state which was not granted to them before. This notion plays an important role in setting the foreign and defence policies of newly-born states from the very beginning.

The country has strong Islamic values and virtues. Muslim nationalism has become a key part of nearly every government. It further paved the way for the establishment of close and brotherly relations with all Muslim countries in the world and emphasised closer cooperation with each and every one, Thus Islam and tenets of Muslim nationalism perform a crucial role in government minds when formulating policies related to the national security of the country.

Nuclear Deterrence:

Pakistan as a state facing the loss of East Pakistan in the year 1971 decided to acquire nuclear weapons. The Indian testing of nuclear weapons in 1974¹³ pushed Pakistan to aggressively enhance its quest to acquire nuclear capability. Islamabad thus pays more attention and allocates enough resources to achieve nuclear capability. At last in 1998 after testing six nuclear weapons Pakistan achieved its primary goal of becoming a nuclear-weapon state.¹⁴ The test of 1998 restored the balance of power in the region because now Pakistan's nuclear weapons are balancing those of India. This prohibits India to not doing anything like 1971.

¹² Dexter Filkins, "Blood and soul in Narendra Modi's India", The New Yorker, accessed June 07, 2020, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/12/09/blood-and-soil-in-narendramodis-india/amp>

¹³ John F. Burns, "INDIA SETS 3 NUCLEAR BLASTS, DEFYING A WORLDWIDE BAN; TESTS BRING A SHARP OUTCRY," New York Times, accessed June 07, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/12/world/india-sets3-nuclear-blasts-defying-a-worldwide-ban-tests-bring-a-sharp-outcry.html>

¹⁴ Tahir Niaz, "The Story Of Pakistan Going Nuclear", The News, accessed June 08, 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/28-May-2019/the-story-of-pakistan-s-going-nuclear>

Who is the Real Keeper of Strategic Culture in Pakistan?

After mentioning the factors that are part of the strategic culture of Pakistan one major question arises Who is the real keeper of Pakistan's strategic culture? After examining the historical data and empirical evidence the answer is rather easy. One of the main elements involves the use of force and use of nuclear weapons.

In Pakistan, over several decades the firm control over nuclear weapons is of Pakistan's military and in military the army. Army leadership remain committed to maintaining and preserving the strategic culture at any time. The de jure control seems to be in the hands of the political establishment but de facto control remains with the Pakistan army.

Why Pakistan army: The strategic culture of Real Keepers doesn't only involve the elite but also the organizations. In Pakistan, only the organization of the military is functioning properly. Parliament, bureaucracy and the executive over the years lost their credibility and degraded. These organisations had malfunctioned. That's why the responsibility to keep the strategic culture remains in the domain of the Pakistan military.

Defining Pakistan's Contemporary Strategic Culture:

Pakistan's contemporary strategic culture has evolved over the passage of several decades. It also saw the shock in the form of separation of East Pakistan and changed accordingly. Pakistan's current strategic culture revolves around the state nuclear policy and commitment to defend the sovereignty of the Nation. Pakistani establishment firmly believes that if someone crosses the borders of Pakistan and breaks the nuclear threshold defined by Pakistan, then as a result Pakistan will have no other choice but to retaliate with nuclear weapons. In that regard, Pakistan's strategic culture chooses to adopt a policy of ambiguity not specifying how much area if an adversary captured or came inside Pakistan, that country would use nuclear weapons.

Pakistan's strategic culture has had the ingredient of Islamic fundamentalism in it as well for a very long time. That's why opponents of Pakistan are convinced that it may resort to using extreme paths if threatened. Because in Islam dying while protecting the sovereignty of the Almighty Allah is the noblest deed one Muslim can do. As the entire country's elite is also making of Muslims the notion remains clearly in front of Pakistan's Enemies. This leaves Pakistan on the list of those countries that can do anything.

Conclusion:

Conclusively to sum up the debate, it is a fact that Pakistan's Strategic Culture has evolved over a period of time since its inception. Especially after the tragic event of the loss of East Pakistan. The military is the real keeper of the strategic culture as other organisations have failed miserably. Islamic fundamentalism will remain a key factor in determining a country's strategic culture. India and Afghanistan as primary roots of Insecurity also remain the predominant factor in the country's strategic culture. The understanding that shapes Pakistan's strategic culture are: opposition to India, national defence, nuclear deterrence and opposition to anti-Islamic ideologies are the first priorities for Pakistan. Reciprocity and mutual understanding in the International arena. However, some events and incidents have changed Pakistan's diplomacy as well. However, Pakistan has become more understandable and sovereign after wars, conflicts and conspiracies.

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