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Comparative Strategic Culture: The Case of Pakistan

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by [Feroz Hassan Khan](#)

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Introduction

Explaining strategic culture in respect of newly formed nation-states—still evolving and in the process of discovering their identity—is in itself a challenge. Strategic culture in new states is affected by two factors: the regional security situation and the local political culture. In such cases, what might appear as “culture” could well be evolving trends within society, reactions to regional or local threats, and repercussions of events elsewhere. Strategic culture assumes a connotation of quasi permanence—a subtle attempt to identify a pattern of response or predict strategic responses or military behavior.

Many new nations are yet lacking complete structures that are necessary to form a modern nation-state. In examining case studies such as that of Pakistan, there is a danger of reading too much. Developing nations have national psyches and strategic outlooks based on their historic experience, which might differ from the western experience. Strategic choices are often determined on narrow parochial interests, driven by local factors and normally in response to a regional-based competition, which is invariably fierce. In countries such as India and Pakistan dominant elites build narratives, hypothesize threat perceptions, and develop notions of war and peace. They create narratives and “myths to help consolidate local interests’ domestic politics, and organizational interests.”^[1]

Politico-military policy-makers do not necessarily make a comprehensive net assessment of threat based on reality, but often shape their security disposition by “their image of the situation.”^[2] This does not imply that security policy dispositions and responses are made impulsively but in essence from a mix of realism, organizational dynamics, and a backdrop of a relatively permanent strategic culture.^[3] Hasan-Askari Rizvi, a well-respected Pakistani scholar has defined strategic culture as “a collectivity of beliefs, norms, values and historical experiences of the dominant elite in a polity that influences their understanding and interpretation of security issues and environment, and shapes their responses to these.”^[4]

Pakistan is a young nation-state, with a still evolving concept of itself and its role in the world. In the world of states, it is a teenager—internally struggling with hormones, living in a bad neighborhood, and still in the process of developing its strategic personality. It has a well-defined “strategic enclave,” however, which directs the strategic dialogue in the country.^[5] This group is

dominated by the military in Pakistan, with the support of professional bureaucrats, particularly those in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These individuals are the keepers of Pakistan's strategic culture. Like most bureaucracies, they are slow to admit mistakes, resistant to alternative worldviews, and tend to lean on organizational preferences when faced with new situations that require change. These inertial forces in policy may give Pakistan a greater consistency in strategic thought than might be expected given its often turbulent domestic political situation.

This paper will explain Pakistan's strategic culture by examining several factors: historical experiences, image of the self, images of adversaries, experience with strategic alliances, and the role of nuclear weapons.

Historical Experience

With some 150 million inhabitants, this Muslim nation has over half a million armed forces and possesses an unspecified but substantial number of nuclear weapons and delivery means.^[6] Pakistan has had a checkered history of relations both with its immediate neighbors as well as within the state and society. Though short in history as a nation-state, it has had an extraordinary share of security challenges. Pakistani nationhood is evolving under the shadow of a sensitive geopolitical arena at the confluence of three large and relatively rich and powerful neighbors. China, India, and Iran have past memories of being great civilizations and hold ambitions of becoming great powers. Pakistan's historic narrative is replete with a sense of wrongdoing and injustices, betrayals of trust and treaties, abandonment by allies, and victimization due to religion, race, and color.

Domestically, it faces an identity crisis as to whether it is a homogenous Muslim state or an Islamic state, and faces ethnic and sectarian clashes and unsettled civil-military relations. Regular bouts with regional rivals on unsettled borders both to its east and west have fostered a security-intensive environment. In short, its experiences in dealing with security threats—both external and internal—have led Pakistan to become less secure, impacting both its civil society as well as the military.

The ascendancy of the military in Pakistan is a direct outcome of its security intensive environment. The Pakistan military inherited the British tradition: subservient and answerable to the civilian masters, while still playing a significant role in governance and security. After partition, unlike its neighbor India, Pakistan's political and security structures took off on quite a different trajectory. Save for the military, Pakistan never had robust state institutions.

Pakistanis believe that India has never accepted the concept of Pakistan, at least not completely, and has sought proactively to undermine Pakistan's security. The trauma of partition, the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, and the debate over distribution of assets are the main issues that pitched Pakistan and India onto a track of hostility and wars, and both countries have not been able to change course—even after nearly six decades. Afghanistan's claims over Pakistan territory—duly supported by Delhi and Moscow—exacerbated Pakistan's security concern. Pakistan's experience with external alliances—with the United States and with China—could not redress its security concerns. At best, both provided some military equipment and marginal political support, while also enabling Pakistan to present its grievances internationally. But during times of intense crises, outside alliances were unable to ensure Pakistan's national security.

Based on its historical experience over time, certain traits peculiar to the Pakistani nation are discernable. Pakistanis are extremely proud of their history, culture and traditions. They are always eager to compete with neighbors and accept challenges much greater than might be handled objectively. They have a belief in their own self-righteousness. Pakistanis internally have a penchant to confront state authority and generally distrust government. This is part of a broader tendency to reject or express skepticism on face-value explanations. Pakistanis are always

searching for conspiracies. These traits, coupled with Pakistan's intrinsic national insecurity, entwine to form images of self and others, as is explored in the following section.

Image of the Self

A nation's image of itself has a strong link to the historical experiences of the people. Like its neighbors in Iran and India, Pakistanis consider themselves to be second to none. These nations re-live their past glories, and take pride in their histories. The Muslim nation evolved over centuries, and carved out its distinct identity of Indian Muslims in the subcontinent. Pakistanis believe that they are the descendents of the Muslim rulers of the subcontinent who fought for (and won) an ideology entitling them to a separate homeland. At the core of Pakistani nationhood lies this emphasis on separateness and distinct identity—a character of the nation and especially of the keepers of the strategic culture in Pakistan. And Pakistani insistence of separateness is dismissed with equal vigor by India. The Pakistan strategic enclave has internalized this belief that Pakistan must be protected physically and ideologically from the more powerful influence of India.

Pakistani military culture is central to understanding Pakistan's self image. The military prides itself as the guarantor of the state—an enduring legacy of the British times. The military played a key role in consolidating the British Empire in India and was always an equal partner. The British Indian civil administration depended heavily on the army in fulfilling local responsibilities and establishing control of the rowdy principalities, feuding princes, and hostile tribes in the frontiers. The Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) was second in order of precedence to the Governor General/Viceroy, and his role was significant—both in strategy and policy. Defense expenditure was the single largest item in British India, and always took away more resources than education, health and other needs—a pattern that continues to date in Pakistan.

This tradition of governance—being the bulwark of the state—was strong in the congenital self-image of the military. The British Indian Military was viewed as the guarantor of external security and the safeguard against the internal collapse, and this gave the military an expanded role.

In collaboration with the senior bureaucracy, the military became a powerful actor in decision-making within the set-up in India. [7] Immediately at independence, the regular army—still being divided between India and Pakistan—was simultaneously engaged in a border crisis, handling an influx of refugees, and otherwise dealing with the trauma of partition. The regular army could pride itself for its role in state-building and its aid to civil power, while simultaneously managing a war over Kashmir when Pakistan was barely on its feet. Since Pakistan's birth, the security threat was real and imminent and thus strong defense was the foremost priority, a view equally shared by both military as well as civilians. [8]

The first decade of Pakistan's existence revealed that its political leadership showed little respect for democratic and parliamentary principle, norms, and conventions, which are the essence and foremost principle of civilian supremacy over the military. The military respects civil institutions when these ideals are upheld. Absent that, the polity becomes a battlefield of brute power politics, fragmenting political forces, and weakening civil society. And when political institutions decline it creates a vacuum allowing the military-bureaucratic elite to gain the upper hand, in which they assume the role of the savior of the state. As a professional, disciplined, and task-oriented force, the military brings in a semblance of order and stability to the relief of the people. In the process, the military discovers wrongdoings by their political masters and develops disdain for the politicians. This validates the self-image not just as savior, but also as the ultimate key to national security and the prosperity of the state. This pits it against the civilian politicians. And when the civil powers return, their energies are consumed in settling scores with the opposition and power-consolidation rather than strengthening institutions. For the past five decades, Pakistan has been caught in this vicious cycle, which is the tragedy of Pakistani politics.[9]

The institutional belief that the military must be well paid and well respected for its sacrifices and challenges is an accepted norm in most countries. Though the role of and reward to the military were legacies of the British times, the Pakistan military faced much stronger adversaries and greater structural handicaps in performance of its role. In retaining its pride and self image, the military blames handicaps and failures to ill luck, and is not prepared to accept that it lacked will, or professional competence, to face national challenges. Because of the Pakistani military's frequent take-over of power, the civil politicians resent the military's overbearing role, and Pakistan is caught between this vicious cycle of democracy, quasi-democracy, and military rule.

The greatest damage inflicted to the self-image of the savior of Pakistan was Pakistan military's defeat in Bangladesh at the hands of India, following widespread accusations of gross human rights violations and even genocide. The military's explanation is that excesses were committed to save the federation from secession, and that it was India's machinations and intervention that exploited Pakistan's vulnerability in order to humiliate it. The Pakistani strategic elite had internalized the latter factor, and as an institution the military examined and learned lessons from its professional failures, but kept those lessons internal and classified. In their view, defeat was caused by bad luck or a unique situation, not a matter of overall incompetence.^[10] Virtually no one was held responsible for the fiasco of Bangladesh or brought to justice^[11]—and this has become a reference point in the blame-game and subsequent civil-military frictions in Pakistan.

The Pakistani military does not concede superiority to the adversary, and with each subsequent episode and set back—such as Siachin in 1984 or Kargil in 1999—it resolves to live and fight another day. From a broader strategic cultural viewpoint, Pakistan refuses to acquiesce to Indian military might, and remains determined to find ways to equalize or balance. Preservation of national sovereignty is thus the primary objective, and in pursuance of national security all tools—including the use of an asymmetric strategy—are justified. The military expects the nation to understand its difficulties rather than ridicule it as it faces an uphill battle.

The meddling by Pakistan's military in domestic civil affairs emerges from its efforts to protect its professional integrity from interference and exploitation by the domestic political leadership. Pakistan's military has viewed civilian political leadership with disdain—as will be explained below. The military also feels threatened from being ridiculed or disrespected in the eyes of public. In a departure from this trend of ducking criticism, the Musharraf regime—especially since he restored controlled democracy in 2002—has allowed unprecedented media and press freedom. This has resulted in both healthy and unhealthy criticism. Desperate and disenchanting politicians mostly in opposition have found the new media freedom a platform to vent their anger against the military. And the military watches carefully from the sidelines. In cultural terms, it picks up criticism *a la carte* for reform and adjustments, but watches its interests and protects its way of life.

Though Pakistan faces identity crises in a political sense, at the cultural level there is no issue as to the nature of its people and society. Pakistan is a Muslim country with a strong sense of “Islam” and its virtues. The ethos of its society remains moderate, conservative, and traditional. The Pakistani military and strategic elites are from the same stock. Since the birth of the Pakistani army there have been three sources of motivation: Regiment, Nation, and Faith. A soldier fights for his Nation (Pakistan) and upholds the pride of his Regiment (British tradition), and he sacrifices in the cause of Islam (in the name of God). A soldier's sacrifice makes his regiment, his family, his clan or tribe, and his country proud, and above all he is a soldier of Islam who sacrifices in the name of God for a just cause. The Pakistani Army derives its strength and morale from all these sources, but most importantly its over-arching cause is the omnipresence of God in every facet of a Muslim life. When a soldier dies in the line of duty, he is revered for having embraced the highest form of death—Shahadat.

In the mid 1970s, Zia-ul-Haq became the army chief. He institutionalized the role of Islam in the military. He gave the motto to the army “Iman (Faith), Taqwa (Piety) and Jihad (Struggle for Truth and Godliness).” The injunction of faith as a force-multiplier and the belief that superior training

and faith will compensate against the otherwise larger and materially superior foe—India—was ingrained. During Zia-ul-Haq's tenure in the 1980s, the army ethos gradually evolved towards simplicity and a conservative lifestyle. Zia never dismantled the traditional structures of the military, or its organizational outlook and regimented style.

He institutionalized rankwise privileges in the army and gave a clear template for professional development. And affecting not just the armed forces, Zia's vision shaped the social fabric of the entire society. Other developments in the region, such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the Islamic revolution in Iran, contributed to this evolution in Pakistani society and strategic culture. The influx of global aid, mercenaries, and Islamic warriors from all over the world, and their ultimate success against the Soviets, had a significant impact on the military culture in terms of the influence of Islam and virtues of asymmetric wars.

By the late 1980s, Pakistani security thinking based meeting the challenge from India at three levels: asymmetric, conventional force response, and nuclear deterrent. It was not until the turn of the century that the realization came that support for ideological radicalism can boomerang. The attack by global terrorists based in Afghanistan on September 11, 2001 signaled the diminishing return and unintended consequences of encouraging ideological zealots. In a bold move, Pakistan reversed course after two decades to get back into the mainstream. This strategic reorientation is multi-dimensional: supporting the United States in its war against terror, rapprochement with India and Afghanistan, and focusing on economic revival and domestic issues. Pakistan's reorientation is a reflection of its powerful realist compulsions. Realism often trumps other factors, leading it to take bold initiatives—some that can backfire and others that can pull it out from deep troubles.

Image of the Adversary

Pakistan's insecurity is derived from three major factors: its geophysical and structural asymmetry with India; its lingering perceptions of India's role in undermining Pakistan, and eroding its sovereignty and independence; and, finally, the intrinsic belief that Pakistan has been used by the United States and then abandoned when those interests were served.

At the heart of Pakistan's rivalry with India is its belief that the Hindus never truly accepted the presence of the Muslims in their midst. This perception is reinforced with every major act of communal violence that frequents India targeting minorities, mostly Muslims (such as the Ayodhya mosque destruction in 1991, and the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002). Communal rioting harkens back to the memory of the traumatic partition, and validates the two-nation theory.

Pakistani grievances of treachery and conspiracy are grounded in more than simply the narrative and bitter experience of partition, but also in India's overall aggressive behavior with all of its neighbors. Kashmir has several dimensions relating to the Pakistani polity. Besides the historical and ideological affinity of geographically contiguous Muslims, Pakistani strategic compulsions are tied to the region. All major rivers flow from Kashmir into Pakistan, and India has demonstrated it is willing to strangle Pakistan's lifeline. As well, Pakistan has found alienated Kashmir suffering under forced occupation, and Pakistan's objective is to deny India's forceful attempt to pocket Kashmir. Pakistan has supported the Kashmir insurgency, and facilitated and encouraged volunteers to fight an asymmetric struggle in Kashmir. For fifteen years now this insurgency has tied down Indian forces that would otherwise either crush with impunity the Kashmiri Muslims or menace Pakistan's eastern frontiers. Since September 11th, this insurgency is looked upon as terrorism by India, but as the continuity of a freedom struggle or insurgency by Pakistan.

Pakistan's external and internal threats often interacted in ways that were disastrous to Pakistani security. Internally, Pakistan faced serious ethnic divisions and questions about the proper role of religion in the public sphere. Externally, Pakistan faced threats on its northwest border with

Afghanistan, and at points the Soviet Union, as well. Though this was less dangerous than the eastern threat, the problem on the northwest border included the sponsoring of Pashtun militants by Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. Most critical to Pakistani security was the India problem. This security challenge was exacerbated as Pakistan attempted to secure two wings separated by a hostile India. And the Pakistani nightmare manifested itself in the 1971 war, when India successfully severed Pakistan's eastern wing, and played midwife to the new state of Bangladesh. During the long political crisis that preceded the 1971 war, Indian analyst K. Subrahmanyam noted that the situation provided India with "an opportunity the like of which will never come again."[\[12\]](#)

Subsequent events reinforced Pakistani suspicions that India will seize any available opportunity to erode Pakistan's position. Traumatized by the loss of its eastern half, Pakistan—under duress—signed the Simla Agreement in 1972. But for Pakistan, the Indian security threat did not end with Simla. India continued a forward-leaning policy along the Line of Control in Kashmir, most visibly evident in the operation to seize the Siachin glacier in 1984. At several points in the 1980s, Pakistan also received what it viewed as credible intelligence that India was planning for a preventive strike against Pakistan's centrifuge plant at Kahuta. In 1987, India's large-scale Operation Brasstacks caused real concern in Islamabad about India's possible hostile intent, especially since Pakistan was occupied with the Soviet threat in Afghanistan.

From their experiences in the 1970s and 1980s, Pakistani decision-makers were increasingly convinced that if India was presented with an opportunity, it would weaken Pakistan. When the Kashmir uprising came about in 1989 and 1990, it surprised Pakistani policymakers. The Kashmir dispute would once again take center-stage in the India-Pakistan relationship, a position that it continues to hold even today. The unresolved Kashmir question was at the center of Indo-Pakistani discord throughout the 1990s and until today.

For decades, Kabul asserted a revisionist claim on Pakistan's western border as Pakistan was struggling in a fight for survival against India. Afghanistan's strategic networking with India and the Soviet Union created problems in the two volatile western provinces of Pakistan. This posed a two-front challenge for Pakistan that bedeviled its relations with Afghanistan. In the 1990s, Pakistan continued its forward policy in Afghanistan—even when the United States abandoned Pakistan. Pakistan, though left alone, was still determined to continue with the success begun with the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s. Its support of the Taliban was derived from its sense of abandonment and its fear of victimization for its role of supporting the United States during the Cold War. Its sole purpose was to prevent forces inimical to Pakistan from taking power, and to open routes for energy and economic access to Central Asia. This policy boomeranged, and its consequence was immense, as manifested on September 11, 2001.

Pakistan has thus resorted to a range of strategies, which are a mix of realism and strategic culture. To balance against its geophysical and conventional force disadvantages, it has sought an alliance with the United States and China in the hope of bridging the gap, and redressing this fundamental insecurity. And it has relied upon asymmetric strategies and conventional force deterrence to make aggression costly and/or deny strategic space to its principal adversary, India.

But Pakistan is unwilling to accept perceived injustices, unwilling to acquiesce to Indian hegemony, and resolved to compete rather than recognize an unfavorable state of imbalance.[\[13\]](#) It has suffered losses and reputation costs, but is beholden to the dynamics of threats and response. Under a rational assumption, the logical course for Pakistan would be to come to terms with the status quo power of India. But Pakistan is psychologically unwilling to accept India's superiority and political dominance. It can accept primacy—but not hegemony. Strategic culture demands a "never say die" attitude of acceptance of strategic defeat—and subservience remains a non-option.

Strategic Choices

Strategic culture plays an important role in determining state behavior and responses to emerging threats and policy courses. When weak states confront stronger states within a regional construct, they have two fundamental options: bandwagon with the emerging power, or seek to balance against a perceived threat. Both are rational options but each course has a price to pay. When states exercise the first option, they accept the dominance of the stronger state and reconcile that their continued safety relies on the will of the stronger state. Necessarily, such bandwagoning requires an intense sacrifice by the weaker state and a coming-to-terms with this status-quo. India believes it is the status quo power, but Pakistan is neither willing to sacrifice its sovereignty, nor ready to accept the terms of the status quo. Islamabad can sense the rise of India, but feels that a policy of acquiescence will put it on a slippery slope and refuses a slow evolution into a "West Bangladesh."

The second option for Pakistan is to seek balance against the security threat, which is more closely aligned to its strategic culture, and in conformity with the history of Pakistani reaction and response to external threats. A balancing course might include a mix of several strategies: the involvement of international institutions, the pursuit of alliances, and/or the development of internal military capabilities. Pakistan has pursued all of these potential options in its desire to balance against growing Indian power. Given these multiple challenges and three-dimensional threats, and driven out of fear and concerns over its ultimate survival, Pakistan's case is analogous to another state: Israel. Stephen Cohen summed up the Pakistani situation, and has argued:

Like Israel, Pakistan was founded by a people who felt persecuted when living as a minority, and even though they possess their own states (which are based on religious identity), both remain under threat from powerful enemies. In both cases, an original partition demonstrated the hostility of neighbors, and subsequent wars showed that these neighbors remained hostile. Pakistan and Israel have also followed parallel strategic policies. Both sought an entangling alliance with various outside powers (at various times Britain, France, China, and the United States), both ultimately concluded that outsiders could not be trusted in a moment of extreme crisis, and this led them to develop nuclear weapons.^[14]

Strategic Culture and External Alliance: China and the United States

Despite uncertainties about its allies, Pakistani security policy has been shaped by strategic partnerships with the United States and China. The onset of the Cold War provided Pakistan an opportunity to seek a formal alliance with the United States. But it was soon apparent that there existed only a marginal overlap between United States and Pakistani security interests. U.S. security guarantees, so enticing to Pakistan, were found to have no utility when Pakistan faced Indian forces in 1965 and 1971. Pakistan drifted from the "most allied ally" in the 1950s and 1980s to the most sanctioned ally in the 1990s, to the "most suspected ally" from 2001 onwards.

Dennis Kux in his appropriately titled book, *U.S.-Pakistan Relations: Disenchanted Allies* records how relations between two differently focused countries developed over decades. Each episode ended with disappointment, leaving a gap between expectations and delivery. At one time in the 1950s and 60s, Pakistan trusted its security to its alliance with the United States. The Pakistani strategic enclave began to believe in its own self-deception about the nature of the alliance, and the degree of U.S. commitment to Pakistan's security concerns regarding India and Afghanistan. But generally after 1965—and most certainly after 1971—Pakistani strategic thinking concluded that Pakistan's survival could not be guaranteed by an outside power.

Pakistan's shifted its policy towards the Middle East and China during the 1970s, and commenced its nuclear program—which brought further alienation and friction with the United

States. Though China also did not provide substantial support during periods of intense crisis, it has provided Pakistan with military, technological, and diplomatic support for several decades. In the early 1960s, Pakistan was formally in alliance with the United States, but immediately after India's defeat in the 1962 India-China border war, in a shrewd Machiavellian move, Pakistan extended a hand to China.

Much to the chagrin of India and the dislike of the United States, Pakistan settled its border issues with China, ceding territory to China, and establishing a long-term relationship that has lasted to date. Realism brought Pakistan a strategic partner in China, and in the decades ahead helped Pakistan—especially during the period of U.S. abandonment. While China, like the United States, valued aspects of its relationship with Pakistan, Beijing did not necessarily agree with all of Islamabad's security concerns and threat perceptions.

So why is China seen as a more reliable partner? China and Pakistan have memories of supporting the other during moments of international isolation. The Pakistani narrative recalls that China came to Pakistan's help, if not rescue, in times of dire need and international isolation. China helped Pakistan even under pressure from the United States, and also suffered sanctions for Pakistan's sake (such as U.S. sanctions against China in the early 1990s). In turn, Chinese strategic leaders almost always recall—and remind Pakistani leaders of—their appreciation of the risks Pakistan took when it gave unstinted support to an otherwise lonely China in the 1960s. Pakistan faced the wrath and annoyance of the U.S. administration during the Johnson period. Later it was Pakistan that facilitated the Nixon-Kissinger initiative in 1971 that revolutionized China's relationship with the world.^[15] The Pakistani strategic community believes, especially within the military-scientific community, that there is this common "Islamic-Confucian" cultural value of not abandoning friends—an experience which contrasts sharply with the Pakistani experience of its western alliance, especially with the United States in critical times for Pakistan (1965, 1971, 1990 and 1999).^[16] The continued sustenance of a "Sino-Pakistani entente cordiale"^[17] can be explained as the result of both realist compulsions and strategic cultural inclinations.

As a smaller partner in its alliances, and a weaker protagonist in its rivalry with India, Pakistan's ambition exceeded its capacity. Pakistan repeatedly miscalculated in challenging and confronting a much stronger India. There existed a gap between Pakistani strategic expectations and the actual delivery from Pakistan's allies. The most enigmatic aspect of Pakistan's regional security policy has been Pakistani decisions to undertake adventures alone, even when there's no realistic hope of support by allies. Pakistani strategic policy in 1948, 1965, 1971, the 1990s (Kashmir and the Taliban), and 1999 (Kargil) exemplifies this pattern. This aspect of Pakistani policy defies the logic of realism, but can be explained as the result of strategic compulsions, organizational dynamics, or strategic culture—or a combination of all. Even though Pakistan's experience with allies has been disappointing, together, these political relationships have prevented India-centric positions on the Kashmir issue in international forums, and these military relationships have provided Pakistan with much needed equipment and technology in its race to maintain a conventional and nuclear deterrent against India.

Strategic Culture and the Nuclear Factor

Failing to find support from allies and international institutions, Pakistan determined that only by matching India's conventional and nuclear development could its security be ensured. Pakistan's quest for nuclear weapons began in 1972 after its defeat in the Bangladesh War. But India's 1974 "peaceful nuclear experiment" jostled Pakistan out of its nuclear complacency. Coming so close after its defeat in East Pakistan and reeling under domestic pressures, Pakistan had a severe shock.

There were two sets of responses in Pakistan. First, there was a firm belief that only nuclear response could neutralize a nuclear threat. Pakistan never countenanced seeking a poor man's equalizer through chemical and/or biological options. Second, nuclear weapons were seen as a force multiplier to deter aggression by conventional force. As nuclear capability developed, it compensated for Pakistan's limited resources and its strategic asymmetry with India. Nuclear weapons are critical to Pakistan and an assurance for national survival. There is no constituency in Pakistan that believes otherwise.

The nuclear weapons factor might best explain cohesive Pakistani strategic culture perceptions: Pakistan firmly believes that for every proliferation act committed by India, Pakistan was (and would be) punished. Pakistan faced three major challenges in its pursuit of a nuclear deterrent, and takes great pride in being able to overcome all three. The first political-technical challenge for Pakistan was to develop a nuclear weapon despite the global nonproliferation regime. The second challenge for Pakistan was to acquire and/or develop a means of delivery, again jumping over the hurdle of sanctions—and in particular the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). Third, Pakistan needed to validate its delivery means and its weapons designs through testing. Facing multiple layers of sanctions because of its nuclear weapons and missile programs, Pakistan could have only conducted tests if India obliged—and India did oblige.

By the end of the century, the story of defiance and ingenuity through which Pakistan acquired its nuclear weapons capability had been passed on to three generations. The Pakistani public eulogized every innovative method applied by A. Q. Khan to acquire Pakistan's nuclear capability, and this norm-defiance was indeed a cultural trait, one that is so hard for the West to comprehend. When the A. Q. Khan saga unfolded, the Pakistani nation saw a hero in A Q Khan—and the consequences of black market activity was not a matter of concern but rather a symbol of defiance of the West.

But only when A. Q. Khan resisted efforts to come under authority did he become a source of concern, and was sacked. When his proliferation network took a life of its own, and was exposed, there was no choice but to take action. But the immediate political reaction in Pakistan was to search for a conspiracy, and then to accept the official explanation. Pakistani strategic culture will admit there were mistakes committed in the process of its acquiring nuclear capability, but the belief extends that in the quest to get its nuclear capability at all costs, such mistakes were unavoidable.

Acquiring nuclear weapons did not imply that deterrence was automatic. Pakistan faced challenges of other sorts. The lessons of modern strategy are equally applicable in the region as well. Pakistan's fundamental security policy is to deter India from aggression, and therefore Pakistan must deny strategic space and raise the cost should India contemplate conventional force attacks. And India has avowed to create such strategic space, occupy it, and "punish" Pakistan through coercive military policies and the use of force.

This strategic construct has escalatory potential. Pakistan is compelled to match all levels of escalation and put the onus of escalation and risk on India to take the conflict to the next level. The risk in this game of chicken is high, and unacceptable when nuclear weapons are in the backdrop. Precisely because Pakistan denies India's ability of escalation control, it has been able to deter conventional conflict with India. Pakistan's major strategic centers are perilously close to the Indian border, and Pakistan must respond quickly if it is to ensure that these key centers of gravity are protected. This explains Pakistan's rejection of no-first-use which is "a natural refusal to lighten or simplify a stronger adversary's assessment of risk; it implies the retention of an option, not a positive policy of first use as a preferred course."[\[18\]](#) It is precisely for this reason that Pakistan has neither explained the red lines nor articulated a public nuclear doctrine. As U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower said to his vice president, Richard Nixon, in 1958, "You should never let the enemy know what you will not do."[\[19\]](#)

The use of nuclear weapons as a war-fighting tool is not a contemplated doctrine in Pakistani strategic thinking; however the command system believes that the integration of nuclear and conventional forces is necessary to create a credible deterrent. This does not necessarily mean that Pakistan is considering elaborate nuclear war-fighting scenarios. Instead, Pakistan's command system at the highest level should know what both the "conventional hand" and the "nuclear hand" are doing. Pakistan's civil and military leadership operates jointly at the Joint Services level under a unified military command system.

Conclusions

In a mix of realism and strategic culture, Pakistan's behavior is predictable in many ways. It will not seek parity with India but will do its utmost to balance and retain initiative; it will seek external alliances with outside powers (the United States or China), but will not sacrifice its regional objectives. Pakistan will be cognizant of "emerging India" in partnership with the United States, but will never assume that this rise will be benign. The most rational path that might be suggested for Pakistan is to accept this reality, give up its claims, and bandwagon with emerging India. But realism and strategic culture will predict that Pakistan will never accept hegemony. Strategic culture will explain that the Pakistanis will work night and day to develop responses and countervailing strategies to ensure that India has a high cost to pay for any adventure. This was ingrained in Pakistan's military since the very onset of Pakistan when its founder Jinnah stated:

Pakistan has been created and its security and defense is now your responsibility. I want them to be the best soldiers in the world, so that no one can cast an evil eye on Pakistan, and if he does we shall fight him to the end until either he throws us into Arabian Sea or we drown in the Indian Ocean.[20]

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3. Rizvi, *Ibid.*, 307.
4. *Ibid.*, 307.
5. The concept of a "strategic enclave" is borrowed from Itty Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb* (London: Zed Books, 1998), 57.

6. For details see International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2004-2005* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, October 2004), 155-7.

7. Hasan-Askari Rizvi, *Military State and Society in Pakistan* (Lahore Pakistan: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003), 6.

8. *Ibid.*, 6.

9. See Saeed Shafqaat, *Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan: From Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Benazir Bhutto* (Boulder, Co.: Westview, 1997).

10. This tradition is retained in both India and Pakistan. In India's 1962 fiasco accountability was not publicly known. Also the Kargill committee (1999) did not apportion blame of failures to any senior leadership and indeed glossed over the military failures.

11. A judicial commission headed by Chief Justice Hamood-ur-Rahman was established by the Bhutto government but its findings were never made public until a few years back it came out open due to media leaks.

12. K. Subrahmanyam, *National Herald* (Delhi), April 5, 1971 as cited in Dennis Kux, *United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2001), 206.

13. Some scholars have spun the idea that it is primarily Pakistan's military that keeps the India threat alive to preserve military corporate interests, and as such remains the chief impediment to accepting India's status quo power. Some India-origin U.S. scholars have also labeled Pakistan as a "revisionist state" with "chauvinistic nationalism." See, for example, Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions since 1947* (Washington DC: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7. Also, see Ashley Tellis "[U.S. Strategy: Assisting Pakistan's Transformation](#)," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2004-05) 97-116.

14. Stephen Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 204.

15. For details, see Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001), 147-178.

16. This is based on the author's own personal experience. Though both the military and scientific communities have benefited from China, and both realize that China has inherent limits in its support. The narrative is that China may not support Pakistan at times due to expediencies; the Chinese view strategy in terms of Sun Tse's long term vision, and find the virtue in keeping support of a trusted ally, located at a geopolitically sensitive location for China's long term interests. The term Islamic-Confucian connection is borrowed from Samuel P. Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993).

17. The term is used by John Garver in *South Asia in 2020: Future Strategic Balances and Alliances* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2002).

18. Michael Quinlan, "How Robust is India-Pakistan Deterrence," *Survival* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2000-2001): 149-50.

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20. Words said by the founder of Pakistan, Governor-General Muhammad Ali Jinnah speaking to the guard commander in Peshawar, March 1948. Cited by Major General (retired) Shaukat Riza, *The Pakistan Army: 1947-49* (Lahore Pakistan: Wajid Alis (private) Limited, Pakistan Army Book Club, 1989), 305.

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