

STRATEGIC CULTURE AND INTER-STATE RELATIONS: A CASE OF PAKISTAN AND INDIA

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Abstract

Geography, culture and history play a central role in shaping a nation's perceptions, biases and images of adversaries. The combination of these factors constitutes strategic culture. Strategic communities tend to adopt diverse approaches to interpreting, analysing and reacting to a given situation. They may incline to pick peculiar strategic choices, such as using force or relying on external alliances, while not opting for a range of others. Decisions and choices are affected by patterns of thinking that evolved over the years. Strategic culture has evolved and generated significant discussion on theoretical frameworks and potential applications in a regional and international security context. Pakistan-India strategic equation is a complex phenomenon, fraught with hostility and mistrust, impregnated with conventional and non-conventional hazards. India views Pakistan as a stumbling block in realising her power ambition, while Pakistan considers India an existential threat. The article analyses the effect of strategic culture on inter-state relations with emphasis on Pakistan-India relations. Unique historical events, geography, the influence of dominant strategic strata and perception biases shape respective strategic cultures. It further analyses strategic culture based on Hofstede's Model, besides pondering upon symbols and philosophical influences.

Keywords: Strategic Culture, Inter-State Relations, Security, Strategic Communities.

The strategic equation between Pakistan and India is characterized by a complex security environment impregnated with both conventional and non-conventional hazards. It is a classic manifestation of the 'dialectic of opposing wills'¹ between two geographic neighbours having significant differences in their strategic cultures. It is a case study to understand the 'Small Neighbour-Big Neighbour'² syndrome, the effects of conflicting ideologies on state policies, diplomatic impasse, wars, etc. For many reasons, the Pakistan-India imbroglio is an intriguing case for students and observers of national security. While traditional approaches to solving the complexity of Pakistan-India rivalry have led to a deadlock, the proponents of strategic culture maintain that as an alternative to neo-realism³ and rational thinking, the strategic cultural approach is potentially helpful. However, its critics assert that strategic culture, being an evolving model, is not determinative, hence incapable of accurately predicting an adversary's preferred strategic choices and behaviour.

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Strategic Culture: A Conceptual Framework

The debate on strategic culture came to the fore in the late 1970s. Jack Snyder proclaimed that the “behaviour of Soviets as a nation and their strategic elites as the strategic community was different from that of American masses and strategic community.”⁴ Strategic culture, therefore, refers to a “nation’s traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, habits, symbols, achievements and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force.”⁵ It can be described as “an integrated system of symbols and beliefs that establish pervasive and enduring preferences,” by clothing, these conceptions with factuality strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and helpful.⁶ The proponents of strategic culture forward two assertions: First, different communities make different strategic choices when faced with similar security challenges; and second, strategic culture helps identify persistent trends in security communities’ behavior.⁷

Strategic culture is to integrate cultural considerations, historical memory and their influences on security policies and inter-state relations. Keepers of strategic culture are the dominant elite that gives input to decision-making, chalk out and implement policy guidelines, and plan military undertakings to support the state policy.⁸ Strategic culture is, therefore, built upon national, political and military underpinnings. Defining culture and its influences is imperative to comprehend the strategic culture. Culture is usually defined as social behaviour and norms found in human societies, which shape individuals’ knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities and habits.⁹ National culture is a set of norms, behaviours, beliefs, customs and values shared by the population of a sovereign state.¹⁰ It refers to specific characteristics, such as language, religion, ethnic and racial identity, cultural history and traditions.

On the other hand, political culture is a set of “attitudes, beliefs and sentiments that give order and meaning to a political process” and provides underlying assumptions and rules governing behaviour in a political system.¹¹ Since political leadership is an essential component of a strategic community, the political culture of each state affects its strategic culture. Military leadership is also a significant component of strategic community, greatly influenced by respective cultures. Ideology, history, values and traditions equally shape military culture. This perspective offers an insight into the nature of the military’s interaction with the state and society.¹² US Army defines Army values as loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honour, integrity and personal courage. Pakistan Army’s motto is *Iman, Taqwa, Jihad fi Sabil Allah*, while the Turkish Army’s motto is peace at home, peace in the world. The strategic culture has numerous sources, thus bound to remain elastic.

There are three generations of strategic culturists, which have evolved over the years. The first generation believes that “each country’s political culture, geography and history shape its strategic culture.”¹³ They find strategic culture highly deterministic, leading to predictable strategic behaviours. Among the proponents are Colin S. Gray and Jack Snyder. Gray defines strategic culture as persistent socially transmitted ideas,

attitudes, traditions, habits and preferred methods of operation specific to a security community having a unique historical experience. Second-generation strategists like Bradley Klein and Edward Locke delinked strategic culture from actual strategic behaviour and asserted that the idea of strategic culture is a tool of elite hegemony.¹⁴ The third generation, including Alastair Iain Johnston, avoids the determinism of the first generation, stresses the need for theory testing¹⁵ and accords more value to recent experiences, domestic changes and technological innovations than historical practices.¹⁶ Therefore, strategic culture does not reject rationality, albeit a historically imposed inertia on choice makes strategy less responsive to specific contingencies.¹⁷

Strategic Culture and Inter-state Relations

Strategic culture influences national strategy and policy-making while shaping the identity of a nation. In international relations, the choices to nurture inter-states relations are shaped by shared beliefs, interests, values and norms. Strategic culture is all about ideas and the impact that ideas have on the choices of states for competitive international politics. US strategic culture stems from influences such as geographical invincibility and self-righteousness. Geographically, the US is a secure country with oceans on its two flanks and comparatively weak neighbours in the north and the south. Being geographically invulnerable, the US preempts potential threats to their presumable source of origin. During European imperialism, the US advanced as a land of freedom and equality, becoming a melting pot of cultures. US self-righteousness stems from its liberal democratic values, Judeo-Christian roots and abundant resources. Therefore, the eviction of colonials infused a sense of exceptionalism in the American mindset. Monroe Doctrine (1823) warned European colonials not to interfere in continental affairs. Such influences continue to affect US strategic culture.

Russian strategic culture draws its strengths from four aspects, grandiosity, uniqueness, geography and nationalism. Russian strategic community holds that its geography, polity, economy and strategic position are unique; consequently, solutions for Russia's defence must be unique. Invasions of Russia have traditionally been undertaken from the West, and this vulnerability has hemmed into the collective psyche of the Russian strategic community. Therefore, Russia seeks insulation from the west through buffer zone or expansion, especially in its 'near abroad.' Nationalism is a strength for Russians, who call their country 'Mother Russia.' Also, in Christendom, they are the flag bearer of Orthodox Christianity, hence in contrast with the western Papacy.

China is a more than 4000 years old living civilization with two dominant strands of strategic culture: its Confucian roots and the Chinese Communist Party's realpolitik. Both influences are operative side by side, and the interaction between the two produces a distinctive strategic culture. Chinese philosophical thinking has deep cultural and historical roots impacting Chinese strategic behaviour. According to Confucianism, the Chinese love peace and harmony, even winning a war without fighting. However, western academics argue that Chinese thinking about Just War [*yizhan*] dates back thousands of years. They tend to cite the idea of 'active defence' (*jiji*

fangyu), a relatively recent concept in Chinese strategic thought. Deng Xiaoping stated that “active defence includes our going out so that if we are attacked, we will certainly counter-attack.” While discussing the strategic cultures of the US, Russia and China, it is essential to understand how such cultures affect their relationship.

a) **US-Russia Relations**

Americans and Russians are proud nations; Russians are culturally, linguistically, ethnically and religiously more homogenous than Americans. Russia is a millennia-old civilization, dating back to 862 (1100 years old), whereas the US is relatively younger (244 years old). Russians claim to have shed the Communist cloak but still carry the traces of Czarist and Soviet legacy. Hence, Russia asserts itself in this era of global contestation with a resurgent mindset. On the other hand, the US, in its strategic thinking, regards Russia as a potential threat, a country that can profoundly affect US national interests, especially in Europe.

b) **US-China Relations**

In the case of US-China inter-state relations, military might is pitched against economic clout, strategic patience and Confucian roots against self-righteousness. No factor influences a nation’s strategic culture more than its power relative to others and how that power is perceived. US National Security Strategy and National Défense Strategy declare China a strategic competitor. Both states are already embroiled in a trade war. Entrenched in their respective ideologies, they view world affairs through their strategic cultures. The competing strategies of Pivot to Asia and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have found global salience. While the US views BRI through the prism of geostrategy, China dismisses the allegation and terms BRI as a vision of shared prosperity and growth. Competing philosophies can turn strategic competition into a confrontation in the future; thus, the so-called Thucydides trap is set in place.

The influence of strategic culture on inter-state relations is also visible in South Asia. Pakistan and India have distinct strategic cultures based on their ideologies, values, attitudes, behaviour patterns, symbols and ways of adapting to the environment. Indian strategic culture is more inclined toward Hindutva’s religious extremism and having a hyper-nationalist approach in its policies. On the other hand, Pakistan has been facing repeated security threats from India in one way or another, thus making its strategic community security conscious.

Indian Strategic Culture

Indian strategic culture can best be understood using a five factors framework, including geography, history, culture, scriptures and political philosophy. In his book “Discovery of India,” Jawaharlal Nehru claimed that India has a role to play in the world due to its size, population and resources. Geography has contributed to Indian leaders’ belief in its magnificence. Indian history dates back several millennia, during which India has been attacked several times from the northwest by Arabs, Persians, Turks and

Mongols. It has also seen the British colonial era. However, the partition of the subcontinent has left a lasting imprint on the Indian strategic culture. Many in the Indian strategic community view the 1947-partition as an aberration of the concept of *Akhand Bharat*.

Indian culture is deeply rooted in mythology and legends. A caste system is also deeply embedded into Indian society; thus, Indians tend to view other nations based on the same hierarchical system. Scriptures also play a significant role in the makeup of Indian strategic culture, and these scriptures profess varying facets of statecraft, from diplomacy to covert and overt means of war. Chanakya Kautilya has the most enduring and prominent effect on Indian philosophical underpinnings of politics and inter-state relations. His work, the *Arthashastra*, is admired by the Indian strategic community as an ancient Indian political thought. Mandala theory explicates his idea of realpolitik. The concept of Mandala is an aggregate of Kings (friendly, hostile and neutral) grouped around the figure of a central King, called *vijigishu*. The theory assumes that the enemy of the enemy is a friend. Chanakya kept self-interest supreme and directed that a king should not hesitate to break any friendship or alliances that could be disadvantageous.

Kautilya formulated a six-fold policy, known as *Shadgunya*, for implementing the Mandala philosophy. *Shadgunya* is a set of strategic choices to be used as per the given environment. Its components include *Sandhi* (Peace), whoever is inferior to another shall make peace; *Vigraha* (War), whoever is superior in power shall make war (a policy of hostility that has been advised for a stronger nation with a relatively weaker enemy); *Asana* (Neutrality) is a stance of keeping quiet, waiting for the enemy to get weaker (it also includes discreet efforts to weaken the enemy – a type of proxy war of modern era); *Yana* (March), whoever possesses necessary means shall march against his enemy (direct manifestation of a policy of *Vigraha* – it is to be followed when one is sure to prevail over the enemy); *Sansraya* (seeking alliance or shelter), seeking protection of another through alliance, choice of the relatively weaker side; and *Dvaidhibhava* (Double Policy), *Sandhi* with one king and *Vigraha* with another (it is suggested for a ruler who is strong enough to fight but may not win without getting additional support of an ally).

The modern Indian political system is characterized by the same philosophy, which has nurtured a strategic culture giving rise to four distinct schools of thought. The adherents of Gandhianism have practically no influence in Indian policy making. Nehruvian thought has strategic autonomy as its central strand. Neoliberals profess economic gains through the open market. Hyperrealists are overly hawkish, adherents of an extreme ideology, forming the core of present Indian leadership. Other influencing factors in Indian strategic culture include self-Image and image of the adversary.

Indian strategic elite views themselves as guardians of a superior ideology and ancient civilization, yet to attain the rightful place in the hierarchy of nations. Pakistan is perceived as a perpetual threat and a strategic barrier to India's reach toward Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. China is the intermediate state as it shares borders with Pakistan and India itself. Where India feels increasingly threatened by China's economic

might and takes measures to enhance its deterrence, it also tries to find common ground. Afghanistan and Iran are on the flanks of the perpetual threat, and they figured out to be natural allies with whom strong relations are to be maintained. Since India feels threatened by China, friendly relations are to be maintained with Russia, China's neighbour.

Pakistan's Strategic Culture

Pakistani strategic culture is influenced by geography, Islamic ideology, two-nations theory, history, culture, text and scriptures. Geographically, River Indus passes through different land connections. East of Indus is contiguous to the subcontinent, while the west is contiguous to Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, with visible cultural imprints. Pakistan's geostrategic location is a great challenge and a unique opportunity amid great powers' contestation. Recently, Pakistan has been able to capitalize upon its geography in the form of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Islam was introduced in present-day Pakistan through Arab preachers and merchants, followed by the first expedition led by Muhammad bin Qasim in the 7th century. In the tenth century, Muslim invaders spearheaded the Islamic conquest in India through traditional north-western invasion routes. Their successors established Delhi Sultanate, which changed hands amongst different Muslim dynasties till colonization by the British Empire in 1857. Pakistan's strategic culture finds its genesis in the independence struggle driven by the desire of Muslims to govern themselves as per their religious aspirations. The fall of the Mughal Empire and colonization at the hands of western Imperials left the Muslims of the subcontinent in an identity crisis. Searching for the answer to a critical question, who are we? Quaid-e-Azam addressed the issue, "It is as clear as daylight that we are not a minority. We are a nation. Nation does not live in the air. It lives on the land and must have territorial state, and that is what we want to get."⁸

Although the creation of Pakistan witnessed a coarse beginning in the form of mass migration, unfair distribution of assets and forced annexation of Jammu and Kashmir, the nation began its journey based on three basic principles, Faith, Unity and Discipline. Indian leadership never accepted the partition and always sought to destabilize Pakistan. However, the resilience shown by the Pakistani nation towards nation-building was unparalleled. Due to security challenges, Pakistan took tough decisions and adopted a policy of alignment with the US (SEATO and CENTO). Later, Cold War politics and Indian nuclear tests (1974) disturbed the regional balance of power and forced Pakistan to pursue its nuclear program. The Afghanistan war and the disintegration of the former Soviet Union gave a new dimension to the security calculus of the region.

Pakistan's strategic culture can also be traced to cultural and historical moorings. The advent of Islam from the southwest, the introduction of diverse culture from the northwest and distinct native culture led to present-day Pakistani culture,

essentially cross-cutting through ethnic and geographic identities. Quran and Sunnah are two principal sources of guidance and inspiration, as enunciated in the constitution of Pakistan.¹⁹ Sufism is the second principal influence on Pakistani society, inspired by the teachings of great Sufis and poets, such as Ali Hajveri, Bulleh Shah, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, Rehman Baba and Allama Muhammad Iqbal.

Pakistanis are a proud nation, eager to compete and willing to accept challenges. At the same time, they remain prone to societal vulnerabilities; however, their unique Islamic identity keeps the nation together. Some circles also view Pakistan as the fortress of Islam. Pakistani nation and its leadership maintain that Pakistan neither has regional ambitions nor will it accept the hegemony in the region. On the other hand, Pakistan's image of the adversary has become synonymous with India due to its forced annexation of Jammu and Kashmir, role in the dismemberment of East Pakistan, encroachment in Siachen, state-sponsored terrorism, etc. Pakistan's strategic behaviour can be termed as cautious yet bold, which tends to avoid confrontations and shows little room for compromise on sovereignty. The bilateral and multilateral relations policy with big powers addresses economic and security objectives. Pakistanis have a passionate association with the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir with continued political, diplomatic and moral support despite limited resources. Pakistan's security community views strong military and nuclear status as a guarantor of its sovereignty.

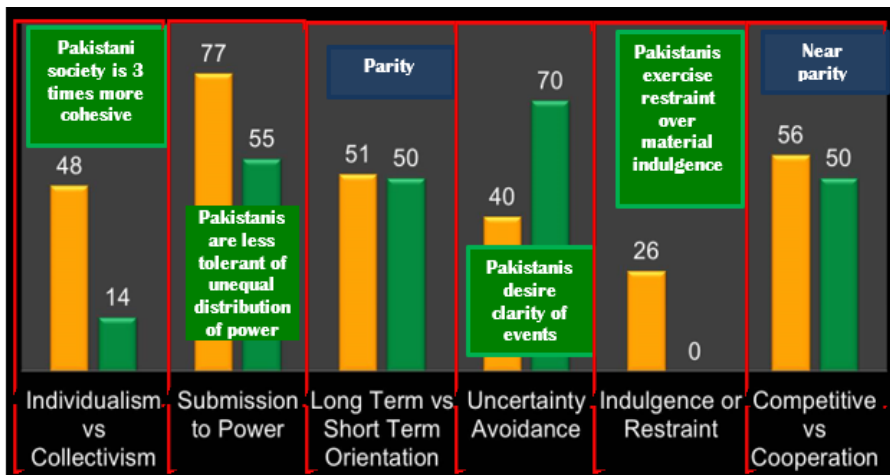
Pakistan-India Strategic Cultures: An Analysis

Experts believe that instead of adopting a linear approach, it is better to be eclectic in analysing strategic culture.²⁰ Accordingly, a cultural analysis based on Hofstede's Model, followed by the analysis of symbols and philosophical and political influences, has been carried out.²¹

a) Hofstede's Model

For cultural analysis, Hofstede's 6-D framework is applicable. Geert Hofstede is the author of the acclaimed work 'Culture's Consequences.'²² According to his research, Pakistani society is three times more cohesive than India since they believe in collectivism. They are less tolerant of unequal power distribution; on the positive side, it signifies political and social awareness. Both states demonstrate limited temporal vision as they stand shoulder to shoulder in long versus short orientation. Pakistan and India are almost equally competitive. Scoring higher in uncertainty avoidance, Pakistanis exhibit the ability to work in ambiguity though they desire clarity in the events. In the indulgence versus restraint factor, Pakistanis display a strict code of conduct about virtue and materialistic involvement. In a nutshell, the cultural foundation of Pakistan provides a solid base for building a robust strategic community.

Figure 1: National Character of Pakistan and India



(Source: Author’s Compilation based on Hofstede’s 6D Model)

Since the findings favour Pakistan, an additional filter of the World Happiness Report is also applied to compare Pakistan and India. Although Pakistan’s overall standing has declined in the last two years (67th in 2019, 66th in 2020, and 103rd in 2021), Pakistanis are still ranked higher than Indians (140th in 2019, 144th in 2020, and 136th in 2021).

b) Symbol Analysis

Interpretation of national symbols is helpful for a deeper understanding of cultural and historical linkages. Three national symbols have been selected for analysis. a) National Emblem: India’s national emblem is the Lion, the capital of Ashoka’s empire, the most significant Hindu empire. Pakistan’s national symbol comprises a wreath of Jasmines, staple crops, and the national motto Faith, Unity, and Discipline. While both emblems instil pride, one has an offensive interpretation, and the other is essentially nonviolent. b) National Anthem: Pakistani national anthem does not refer to any racial or ethnic group. Predominantly, the Persian lexis symbolizes a historical connection with the Muslim neighbours. Written by Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian national anthem mentions Punjab and Sindh as parts of India while missing out on Mysore, Kerala, and Kashmir despite being claimed parts of India. South Indians are sketchily referred to as *Dravida*, while North Indian Aryans are explicitly mentioned as *Marathas*. c) Social Order. Based on the caste system, India sees the world divided into classes. Pakistan’s societal outlook is somewhat tribal and communal, but its primary inspiration remains Islam which is essentially egalitarian and views all humans as equals.

c) Philosophical and Political Influences

The philosophical influences of India and Pakistan differ significantly. India's most significant influence is Kautilya, while Pakistan's greatest influence is Allama Muhammad Iqbal, who acts as a bridge between subcontinental identity and Islamic legacy.²³ Kautilya focuses on statecraft and strategy, while Iqbal's light shines on moral and spiritual dimensions. Kautilya's statecraft is predicated on shrewdness, while Iqbal's message is about Truthfulness, Justice, Bravery, and Leadership.²⁴ Kautilya's notions of universal monarch and law of fish (*Matsya Nyaya*) endorse 'might is right.' In contrast, Iqbal symbolizes Muslims with a soaring Eagle (*Shaheen*) that seeks freedom of flight, not just glory (*Shaheen ka jahan aur, kargas ka jahan aur*). Kautilya's *Maya* and *Indarjal* advocate forgery and deceit as a matter of policy. Iqbal, on the other side, demands his followers to be just and honest.

National political parties tend to develop the bondage between subcultures by enjoying representation of all social segments and accommodating ethnic-lingual diversity. In the process, they strengthen their respective strategic cultures. Indian political system is mainly non-dynastic, but, in recent years, it has a visible tilt toward religious extremism at the cost of claimed secular orientation. Conversely, Pakistan's political outlook is fragile due to weak democratic institutions. There is a need for strategic vision and long-term policy planning.

Since 2014, the Indian strategic community has been following a collision course, at home and against Pakistan, owing to the adoption of Hindutva-inspired extremist ideology. Its elite appears to have closed the doors on two hundred million Indian Muslims, anguishing the pain caused by exclusion, mob lynching, vigilantism, hate speech and violence. At the regional and international level, the conflict between Pakistan and India has become grimmer and more consequential than ever. Indian unilateralism and disregard of the international bindings manifested on August 15, 2019, illegal annexation of IIOJK demonstrates fragility and vulnerability of regional peace. Viewed from the strategic culture prism, the Indo-Pak rivalry is reminiscent of the grand chessboard, where every move and counter-move is against each other. On the ideological plane – it is a clash of the ideology of *Akhand Bharat* and the Two Nations Theory. India, under BJP, disowns 800 years of Muslim legacy, while Pakistanis pride their linkage with Arab and Central Asian rulers. Geographically, Kashmir is considered the jugular vein by Pakistan and *Atoot Ang* by India. Indian self-image is of *Hindu Rashtra*, while Pakistan is the Islamic Republic. India sees Pakistan as an anomaly; conversely, Pakistan is wary of India because of the fall of Dhaka and state terrorism. In short, Indian strategic behaviour remains adversarial, characterized by indirectness and deception. Its strategic choices will likely alternate between six strands of Kautilya's *Shadgunya*.

Conclusion

Despite its exploratory nature, the strategic culture approach provides a helpful tool for analysing possible choices in inter-state relations. Pakistan-India strategic equation is complex. The worldview of the Indian strategic community dominated by Hindutva ideology sees India up to the west of the Indus.²⁵ Pakistani strategic community is cognizant of this view and guards against Indian intransigence while pursuing efforts to normalize relations with its neighbours. Pakistan's strategic culture can potentially respond to future challenges. However, the progression in strategic thought is predicated on an inclusive and broad-based strategic community. There is a need to diversify and strengthen sources of inspiration, ranging from Islamic heritage to Pakistan's sub-continental traditions.

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