



RESEARCH PAPER

Paradigm Shifts in Strategic Culture of Pakistan: An Assessment of Traditional versus Non-traditional Threat Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to establish a causal relationship that how nontraditional security challenges does not necessarily qualify to acquire a high-priority position in strategic decision-making of Pakistan owing to entanglement with traditional security concerns. The study examines that continual focus on traditional security issues has induced 'tunnel vision trap' where Pakistan cannot transit or at least reprioritize traditional national security challenges with non-traditional security concerns by applying securitization theory. The study finds out that even after displaying responsibility and caution in how it approaches strategic red lines within and beyond its region, its high prioritization of traditional threat perceptions weighs down on its internal nontraditional security concern. The research concludes that for Pakistan, even transitioning from geostrategic prioritization of national interest to the pursuit of geoeconomic objectives does not divorce its traditional security priority in decision-making. Such a tethered securitization architecture renders all transitional junctions to its strategic culture futile or inconsequential.

Keywords: Nontraditional Security Challenges, Prioritization of National Security, Securitization Theory, Strategic Culture, Tunnel Vision Trap

Introduction

In the contemporary era, Pakistan is confronting a host of issues emanating from choices made while determining its strategic culture over seven decades. These challenges range from tumultuous external and internal threats, decades-long menace of religious extremism, regional and global isolation, descending international image, acrimonious relations with eastern and western neighbors, internal instability, institutional confrontation, and economic turmoil. A causal link between these challenges and how Pakistan has designed and implemented its national security architecture can be identified. A dominating role in pursuing traditional security and threat perceptions has shaped Pakistan's strategic culture to resonate with a robust military-centric pursuit. Ahmar (2020) argues that such a prioritization choice renders designing and implementing strategic choices in a vacuumed environment where other more critical issues/concerns can be left at marginally low-priority national security schemes. High dependence on geostrategic prioritization of national security has also kept other more impending issues at understated levels, which has cultivated complex challenges in national interest fulfillment at national and international levels. (Meher, 2012). Identifying a transition in strategic culture then becomes an uphill challenge due to misperceptions and exaggeration of traditional security challenges and overarching nontraditional security aspects to human and national security.

Literature Review

The primary concern in this regard is how the realist paradigm of traditional national security has a tendency in Pakistan to overtake nontraditional security concerns,

which makes fulfilment of national interests either costly or insignificant on a long-term scale. Tahsin (2014) argues that strategic culture should be based on national interest rather than ideology or emotions. It should be entrenched in realism and cost-benefit calculus; for instance, assessments of trade-offs must be objective while assessing strategic environment. For Pakistan, a perception that most of its strategic decisions are offshoots or reprisals to an India-centric narrative weigh down its state responsibilities. This means that Pakistan's strategic culture is often anchored with its traditional, long-standing rivalry with India, which has rendered other objectives at unimportant priority levels in the securitization theory environment. The general perception that Pakistan pursues an India-centric, military-intensive design for its strategic culture is founded on how strategic culture is defined in its construct. Colin S. Gray argues that strategic culture design cannot be undertaken on fixed, static or vacuumed notions about national security and interest. He argues that strategic culture can transit between priorities and preferences set forth by states while determining their policy course of action and that such activity makes strategic culture organic. He also argues that misinterpretation of culture or mistranslation of sociopolitical indicators can lead to misperceptions of the strategic culture of one state and upset strategic equilibrium maintained with adversaries and competitors (Gray, 2009). The general understanding among proponents of strategic culture is that it provides an alternate intellectual space that is meaningful for today's and tomorrow's strategic problems. Booth (1990) defines strategic culture as "a nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behavior, habits, symbols, achievements and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems concerning the threat or use of force." Every state possesses a strategic culture that limits strategic options concerning use of force in response to threats, and perceptions, norms, and values of the political elite predominantly influence it. In Pakistan's context, Das (2009) argues that Pakistan's security managers interpret perceptions regarding strategic insecurities through prism of their strategic culture along with material, domestic and technological factors, and they define its strategic trajectory. This view has remained a principal yardstick regionally and internationally, which has been a defining point for international interaction with Pakistan. Affixing ideology-intensive, military-centric choices to pursue national interest and design national security objectives, Pakistan's strategic culture has often been taken into a misinterpreted context. Avant (2000) argues that "strategic culture is not immune to change and in his "punctuated equilibrium" model wherein emergence of a strategic cultural paradigm is followed by periodic paradigm shifts in strategic culture due to the cumulative effect of actors' adaptation to anomalous experiences, with culture remaining static over a relatively long intervening period proves the point regarding changes in strategic culture."

A general interpretation exists that Pakistan's strategic calculus and strategic culture are shaped by cultural influences on its leadership while designing national security. Fair (2016) has even argued that India has gained momentum in the economic and technological sphere, whereas Pakistan has witnessed a decline international system. She argues that principles of game rationality predict that Pakistan should come to some accommodation with India, as such a prospect will be less costly than doing so in future. Fair's argument indicates that Pakistan feels tethered to maintain a perpetual adversarial relationship with India as part of its national security objectives, thus being a major catalyst to of its strategic culture. Her argument also indicates that a continuous focus on adversarial engagement with India has upset other facets of Pakistan's strategic culture, which has complicated its national security commitments. Taking a segue from this notion, Tehsin (2014) argues that armed conflict with India has a higher cost in terms of internal security than the expected benefit in terms of strategic advantage. The emphasis in this regard is that strategic culture influenced by anti-India rhetoric impinges Pakistan's economic interest/ rational pursuits, if not altogether negates them.

Design Parameters of Pakistan's Strategic Culture in the 21st Century: Decision-making in Aperture

While designing a strategic culture for a state to translate into national security policies or revisiting national interest prioritization, a core argument is to understand the limits beyond which strategic culture either starts overstretching, overreaching or experiencing fatigue. Contemporary issues in Pakistan are linked to its 75 years old strategic culture and emerging global and regional political trends. Apropos of this view, Pakistan needs to rethink and reevaluate its strategic culture. In the past, Pakistan relied on short term policy of active engagement with actors to deal with the crisis at hand, either internal or external, without any substantive change in strategic culture. Recently a change was reflected in National Security Policy (2022) that Pakistan was shifting towards geo-economics and greater emphasis on regional cooperation, indicating that country is giving up on perpetual insecurities. These developments and other factors indicated a review paradigm in contemplation of changing patterns in the strategic culture of Pakistan. A similar review paradigm was witnessed after Pakistan's nuclearization where it experienced significant amendments to its national security architecture and national interest determination. Much like how Pakistan's strategic culture experienced a paradigm shift after nuclearization, a similar trajectory is visible in how it aims to transit from pursuing geostrategic prioritization to a geoeconomic impetus. This means that the strategic culture of Pakistan can be termed organic and not static as previously perceived.

Strategic culture is often viewed as an alternate perspective to explain strategic issues at regional and international levels. In South Asia, it is a general understanding that 'violence is what solves the problem' and is essentially an outcome of systematic cultural understanding (Gerharz et al., 2017). It is deeply entrenched in the strategic cultures of India and Pakistan. This is a significant reason why regional security parameters evolved in spaces of violence rather than dialogue and mutual accommodation between both states. Similarly, according to Rizvi (2002), Pakistan's strategic culture is shaped by multiple societal dispositions, orientations of policymakers, and other considerations such as realism, professionalism, and organizational factors. In agreement with Rizvi, Brinsky (2022) believes the influence of causational factors and effects of 'strategic shocks' define the enduring nature of Pakistan's strategic culture. The acquisition of nuclear weapons was a major shock that induced rethinking and reconceptualization of Pakistan's strategic culture in accordance with the region's new security architecture. Since beginning of the 21st century, orientations of both countries' security managers have been acclimatizing themselves to drastic changes. In the absence of nuclear learning, both states thought that each would not climb the escalation ladder or would refrain from escalation dominance.

Under this impression, Kargil war was seen as a 'major shock' that could escalate uncontrollably. Afterwards, a general understanding developed among the strategic community that the acquisition of nuclear weapons had altered strategic culture orientations of both states in a way that they believed that raising the cost of armed conflict to an unacceptable limit would help them balance each other's military ambitions. Further causational developments between both countries suggest that the strategic cultures of both states observed new shifts concerning how they interpreted conventional adventurism in a deterrence environment and how their nuclear doctrines defined future conflicts. The notion that 'nuclear weapon states do not fight wars' was questioned and there was a paradigm shift to strategic culture and the role of military adventurism was redefined. Kargil became a test case for both states to model their strategic culture as such.

In the context of the Twin Peaks Crisis and prospective military standoffs, South Asia's strategically and culturally decisive environment pushed both countries to adopt more dangerous approaches vis-à-vis each other. Within their Credible Minimum Deterrence structure, with India pursuing deterrence-by-punishment and Pakistan pursuing deterrence-by-denial, room for conventional adventurism was created. Indian

armed forces conducted Operation Parakram under the auspices of its Sunderji Doctrine, and Pakistan understood it had to stretch its denial limitations. These shifts were result of multiple factors, and there was a general realization among the security establishment of Pakistan that India feels that there is a strategic space for conventional war with Pakistan. For Staniland (2020), India, since 2001-2002, is willing to accept more significant risks in using force to pursue its national security agendas. The shift in India's strategic behaviour was an outcome of factors associated with its economic and technological rise. In this context, Hall (2014) endorses Hermann Kahn's argument that the asymmetrical rise of India's economy and military compared with Pakistan has complicated the security environment in South Asia with a risk of an unexpected incident.

The second nuclear decade of South Asia was marked by gradual shift in India's strategic behaviour in the changing security environment and strategic landscape of South Asia. Bharati Janata Party's (BJP) Government opted for the policy of aggressive engagement with Pakistan in the wake of alleged terrorist attacks from Pakistan. The shift primarily was because of newly identified strategic spaces owing to technological ascendancy of India backed by economic cushion to bear the cost of any uncertain eventualities below the nuclear threshold. Lalwani and Haegeland (2018) note that the surgical strike narrative designed by India added further instability to South Asia's already fragile security environment, thus impacting their strategic culture. Such developments changed South Asia's security landscape, marked by a gradual shift in India's crisis behaviour in the second nuclear decade of South Asia. Such a paradigm shift to strategic culture indicates how margins can be exploited to avail short-term goals and damage long-term strategic objectives. Pakistan's intent of balancing India's adventurism bearing higher cost by diverting already depleted economic resources impinged other security sectors. This approach of looking in only one direction caused strategic overstretching as it jeopardized the objectives of comprehensive security in return for minute strategic pay-offs vis a vis India. Barthwal (2022) notes that Pakistan continues functioning on certain strategic beliefs that are dogmatically weaved by the military elite in a vacuum without giving due consideration to other security sectors. Ahmer (2020) believes there is no evolution in strategic culture addressing nontraditional security issues. In the International security architecture of the 21st century, Pakistan cannot remain oblivious to these challenges and must adopt a pragmatic approach towards the decision-making aperture.

Conceptual Framework of Securitization Theory and Tunnel Vision Trap

According to the European Center for Populism Studies, a tunnel vision trap is a lack of perspective caused by an intense focus on one object, leading to neglect of one's surroundings. Sull (2004) argue that the tunnel vision trap comes with certain risks as it distracts policymakers from anticipating the increasing cost of the strategy; it may cause security managers to bet too much and too early on it and lull into a false sense of security. The tunnel vision trap impaired Pakistan's ability to reorient itself in the light of emerging security challenges as it remained too focused on the 'Indian threat', and the response has become institutionalized and thus taken for granted, which rarely let other priorities be highlighted. This fixated vision of security managers distracts them from an emerging situation in the security architecture. It results in a loss of peripheral vision, which causes the limited perception that creates an illusionary view of the security landscape without early warning signals.

Strategic culture must be entrenched in realism and cost-benefit calculus to assess trade-offs; otherwise, states may pay higher costs than expected benefits. The strategic conduct of India and Pakistan after nuclearization reflects that both states resorted to a range of strategies without considering the enormous cost of minute strategic pay-offs. In Pakistan's context Khan (2005) argue that Pakistanis are incredibly proud of their history, culture, and traditions. They are always eager to compete with India and accept challenges much more extraordinary in magnitude, which might be handled objectively. This approach

affects Pakistan's strategic culture, as the Manichean view of India afflicted it with flaws peculiar to itself. It caused a fixated vision concerning threat perception vis a vis India that resulted in an abortion dilemma: as traditional security has impinged nontraditional security issues, Pakistan ends up paying more economic, diplomatic, and social costs for its inclination of balancing India by all means and security managers believes that there is no other option. These strategic orientations towards India based on the psychological unacceptability of India's superiority and political dominance never changed in 75 years of history marked by mutual animosity. Pakistan accepts primacy but not hegemony, and the 'never say die' attitude of strategic culture accepts strategic defeat, but subservience remains a non-option. (Khan, 2005)

However, with this 'never say die attitude, Pakistan is hostage to fixations of seeking parity with its mightier neighbour at all costs and got itself entangled in the 'Tunnel Vision Trap'. This tunnel vision trap is primarily a result of the securitization of traditional threat perceptions and the framing of India as an existential threat in Pakistan's strategic culture, which was the right thing to be done but not at the cost of ignoring other referents of security. Buzan (1998) defines Securitization theory as a socially constructed and intersubjective process by which a threat towards a specific referent object is acknowledged, and the object is deemed worth protecting. Securitization theory views security as discursively constructed (Furlong, 2006). According to Emmers (2006), securitization is dominated by actors in power, the state, and its dominating elites, that may fulfil their parochial interests from the process. The securitizing actor must persuade the audience, public opinion, politicians, military officers, and other elites that the referent object is existentially threatened. In the vast fauna on the matter, the simple description of the securitization theory could arguably be "identifying a specific security referent and prioritizing it above all others at all costs". Apropos to this view, framing of 'traditional threat perception' through securitization has linked it with Pakistan's national survival and resulted in the overlooking and suppression of 'nontraditional security threats, which also proves the core argument of the paper that high prioritization of traditional threat perceptions weighs down on Pakistan's internal nontraditional security concerns which trigger the tunnel vision trap.

This tunnel vision trap resulted in a dysfunctional approach of 'putting all eggs in one basket, which increased the spectrum of threats for Pakistan in regional security architecture. It is observed that Pakistan's Strategic Culture has encouraged this approach, evident from strategic behaviour in the past. The strategic behaviour of security managers exhibits that they think and operate linearly and often go into 'crisis mode by only focusing on traditional security, which becomes detrimental to all other issues significant to national security in the 21st century. In this context, future research could correlate implications of tunnel vision trap with strategic dispositions, doctrinal rethinking, and conflict management. In the past, Pakistan's strategic culture resisted any efforts to rework this approach and could not minimize threats without diversified resources. However, there is no second opinion that there was an exponential increase in the cost of Pakistan's fixated strategic inclinations. In this context, Khan (2022) rightly argues that both India and Pakistan are hanged on to their maximalist stands as he writes, "India and Pakistan are both hostages to stubborn fixations- one of a rising power seeking its place in the sun, and the other of a nation seeking parity with its mightier neighbour."

The Appraisal Cost of Tunnel Vision Trap

Rizvi (2002) notes that according to KE Boulding, security managers often shape security disposition through "their image of the position", but this does not mean that decision-making is not driven by the orientations based on realism and cost-benefit assessments. However, dictates of the strategic culture and realism have led Pakistan's security managers to similar policy measures primarily because of the regional power imbalance and Pakistan's resource scarcity. Pakistan's security inclination becomes too

fixated that policymakers miscalculate repercussions primarily due to the tunnel vision trap. Fair (2016) notes that Pakistan has suffered enormous losses and paid reputational costs for its strategic urge to balance India to deny any strategic space to India. The statistical analysis of the cost by developing an equation might not be possible, but there are specific focal points to assess the appraisal cost of the tunnel vision trap.

Pakistan paid an enormous economic cost of wars and considering its feeble economic muscles it is insufferable. A report 'Cost of Conflict Between India and Pakistan (2004)' assessed that Pakistan incurred 1.2 billion USD cost (1.79 costs per GDP) during the military standoff with India from 2001 to 2002. The figure below mentions the amount of revenue lost by India and Pakistan every day during the crisis on multiple occasions.



Source: Strategic Foresight Group. Jain (2016)

Secondly, Pakistan paid the cost of diplomatic isolation as India found commiseration, even sympathy, in many international capitals after Mumbai attacks 2008, and its Propaganda regarding Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism was believed by the international community. This turned out to be a big dent in Pakistan's national interests as it was translated into economic implications and diplomatic isolation. The downgrading of Pakistan by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was pushed by India, with repercussions on credit rating, the stock market, the banking sector, and currency inflows.

Thirdly, Pakistan paid the cost of a globally deteriorated image as India successfully projected Pakistan as a terror-sponsoring state by successfully insinuating Pakistan's support for Kashmiri freedom as terrorism. Some of the development at the western border of Pakistan made this easy for India, especially after the killing of Osama bin Ladin in Abbottabad.

Lastly, Pakistan paid the cost of weakening social fabric and erosion of human values. Unemployment, religious extremism, the culture of violence, and low social capital formation. These are a few issues that originate from Pakistan strategic overstretching by continuing the strategic behaviour that does not prioritize nontraditional security issues.

Pakistan has paid more costs than pay-offs due to its strategic behaviour. Under the rational assumption, the logical course for Pakistan should be to reevaluate its strategic orientations as the siloed approach towards traditional security is impinging Pakistan's core interest. It is an observable fact that states with a pattern of enmity and deprived of confidence-building measures evoke tunnel visions - although not necessarily mutual - regarding each other, which turns out to be a trap for anyone or both. These tunnel vision traps asymmetrically impair the strategic thinking of the states. In Pakistan, it has left policymakers with limited options: to come to terms with India, as the sooner it accepts India's primacy, the lesser cost it will pay or reprioritize traditional security challenges with nontraditional security concerns. Pakistan's recently released National security policy for 2022 indicates that Pakistan has shifted towards the second option due to the appraisal cost it has to pay for the seven decades of fixated approach towards India even after the nuclearization.

Paradigmatic Shift in Pakistan's Security Approach

The fixated approach towards securitization of traditional threats emanating from India in changing geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic is becoming increasingly

incompatible with Pakistan's core interest, and there was greater realization among the security managers to alter Pakistan's national security policy. Pakistan's recently published national security policy reflects these changing tendencies through the paradigmatic shift from geopolitics to geo-economics. This dispositional change is the upshot of the policymaker's realization regarding the unsustainable cost of the strategy focused on traditional issues only. Secondly, the security managers wanted to avoid committing too much and too early on one strategic direction to pursue a false sense of security. This transformed strategic culture of Pakistan is influenced by the internationalist mindset based upon an understanding of geopolitical realities and can be traced to the 2000-year-old Silk Route, which passed through Pakistan, and it focuses on regional connectivity, political coexistence, and economic interdependence. (Tehsin, 2014)

Similarly, National Security Policy (2022) reflects Pakistan's approach of seeking a peaceful neighbourhood based on mutual coexistence, regional connectivity, and shared prosperity. A secure and economically resilient Pakistan, empowered by the diversity of culture and demographic dividends. After due introspection coupled with pragmatism, it privileges national interests over emotive policy-making. Salman (2022) notes that Pakistan's shift from geopolitics to geo-economics and a greater emphasis on regional cooperation suggests that Pakistan is giving up on the perpetual sense of insecurity.

Pakistan's shift towards geoeconomic and meticulous approach towards geopolitical issues is primarily due to the state's economic necessities, which are now deemed indispensable for the survival of the state. Pakistan's engagement in the Afghan war in the last two decades has brought instability in Pakistan's sectors of security and a wave of terrorism that has internal and external linkages. Pakistan lost the strategic spaces in the wake of challenges from both eastern and western borders, which left it with limited strategic choices. The continuation of Indian centric traditional security approach would have pushed Pakistan towards a cul-de-sac. Meanwhile, India explored nontraditional options and used its diplomatic strength to project Pakistan as a terror-sponsoring country to push Pakistan into FATF's grey list with severe economic implications as MOFA (2021) statement highlights Pakistan's concerns to the international community regarding the politicization of FATF and undermining of its processes by India.

Apart from these, there are multiple reasons why Pakistan gravitates towards geo-economics, but primarily, Pakistan wants to relish the economic dividends while addressing geopolitical concerns. Given present challenges, Pakistan has to navigate the space for its national interests in an era when the Taliban's back in Afghanistan. India's outlook is changing under BJP and the intensifying US-China competition. However, Geoeconomics is a high-hanging fruit, and Pakistan needs robust efforts to utilize unique geoeconomic opportunities offered by its geography. These dynamics foresee/map a future of South Asia in which Pakistan will remain entangled in geopolitics and face an uphill task to fulfil its geo-economics agenda.

Mapping the Future of South Asia's Strategic Stability

There is no doubt that South Asia is a region of consequence as both India and Pakistan do not have general stability due to reasons of enmity rooted in subcontinent division and territorial conflict afterwards. The introduction of a nuclear weapon in the region added a dangerous dimension, as expected strategic stability was never established between the two archrivals—strands of strategic stability needed to comprehend the strategic drifts of both states. Strategic culture as a conceptual framework analyzes strategic directions and drifts by taking rationality and ideational factors into account and concludes that for Pakistan, even transitioning from geostrategic prioritization of national interest to pursuit of geoeconomic objectives does not divorce its traditional security priority in decision-making. Such a tethered securitization architecture renders all transitional junctions to its strategic culture futile or inconsequential. The following arguments support the said proposition of strategic constraints.

South Asia's security conundrum is unmanageable because security parameters evolved in spaces of violence rather than dialogue and mutual accommodation between both states. The influence of cultural orientations rather than rational choice thinking makes the securitization of other referents a secondary priority for Pakistan due to resource constraints. In evolving security environment of South Asia, "old nuclear wisdom" based on deterrence theories needed to be replaced with a broad, integrated, and long-term culturally oriented approach. Understanding the changes through focal points of the strategic cultures of Pakistan is imperative to generate any predictive, prescriptive, or normative arguments regarding the strategic architecture of South Asia. In South Asia's strategic environment, the process of gauging the intentions and actions in the fog of war, crisis or conflict is prone to errors. Nuclear deterrence doctrines have limited explanations regarding the impacts of growing disparities, strategic diversions, and states grand strategies on the strategic calculus of South Asia, in the presence of potential nuclear flashpoints. South Asian security landscape has become even more complex owing to macro-environmental, societal, and micro-environmental changes in a strategic culture based on rhetoric and warmongering behaviour.

Considering Pakistan's economic outlook, geo-economics turns out to be a systematic compulsion as it also offers a new image to Pakistan to address its deteriorating image on the global canvas. However, it is an uphill task for Pakistan to leverage its geography to maximize its economic well-being. Regional and global strategic competitions undermine geo-economics which could generate regional stability, profit, and a mutually beneficial environment. Furthermore, the strategic cultural orientations will keep geo-economics in historical security dilemmas. The points mentioned earlier need to be addressed bilaterally by India and Pakistan to take a joint leap towards geo-economics as a region. After 75 years of intense entanglement, both states cannot act in a de-hyphenation mode towards each other.

Conclusion

Since its independence, Pakistan did strategically overstretch, considering its fixed disposition based on balancing India at all costs by all means. It took seven decades for Pakistani policymakers to take the blinders off and focus on nontraditional security issues with a comprehensive approach. Contemporary security challenges and tunnel vision trap pushed Pakistan towards strategic diversion/drifts that jeopardize its core interests. Furthermore, Pakistan's engagement in Afghanistan as a strategic partner in America's Global war on terrorism exacerbated the already feeble economic outlook. There was greater realization among the security managers of Pakistan regarding the enormous cost paid in return for minute pay-offs. This development made this pertinent for Pakistan to adopt a comprehensive security framework to avoid the tunnel vision trap while navigating strategic spaces in the security challenges of the 21st century. The prioritization of geo-economics in the framework of national security policy is the first step in the right direction.

Apropos to this view, strategic cultural restraints must be addressed, and a decision must be based on cost and benefit analyses rather than emotive policy-making as in the past, Pakistan must look for new strategic spaces where it could pursue a policy of balancing and countering India without increasing cost of strategy vis-à-vis India. However, in an attempt to avoid a tunnel vision trap, Pakistan must not turn a blind eye towards the Kashmir issue rather must explore alternate options to bring India to the negotiation table, as doing nothing on Kashmir will be tantamount to defeat.

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