

to support “cross-border terrorism,” Prime Minister Vajpayee ultimately decided not to initiate a war. However, the Indian and Pakistani armed forces continue to prepare for the possibility of conflict. If war starts, Pakistan’s leadership might feel compelled to ready nuclear weapons for use, and Indian officials might follow suit, thus creating a situation where one wrong move could trigger a nuclear war.

Key Elements of Pakistan's Strategic Culture

This essay does not undertake a comprehensive description of Pakistan's strategic culture. But based on this brief survey of Pakistan's strategic history and context, six general characteristics of the country's strategic culture can be outlined (in decreasing order of importance).²⁵

Opposition to Indian Hegemony

Pakistani political and military elites are unified in their opposition to Indian hegemony as a basis for a peaceful and durable regional order. The very notion of an independent Pakistan was premised on the right of South Asia's Muslim population to enjoy the benefits of national sovereignty free from the domination of the region's much more populous Hindu population. After gaining independence, the Pakistani elites have treasured their hard-won sovereignty and resisted every Indian effort to curtail their freedom of action. Pakistan's political and military competition with India therefore forms the centerpiece of its regional and international diplomacy, its military planning, and its arms acquisitions.²⁶

Primacy of Defense Requirements

Regardless of whether the Pakistan government was run by civilians or the military (which has ruled for most of Pakistan's existence), defense has always been the country's top budgetary priority. Although Pakistan continues to experience intense poverty, poor infrastructure, a weak educational system, and nearly non-existent social services, defense

²⁵ This list is similar to the outline of Pakistan’s strategic priorities found in Hasan-Askari Rizvi, “Pakistan’s Strategic Culture,” in *South Asia in 2020: Future Strategic Balances and Alliances*, ed. Michael R. Chalmers (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, November 2002), 305-28.

²⁶ For background, see Peter R. Lavoy, “Pakistan’s Foreign Relations,” in *South Asia in World Politics*, ed. Devin T. Hagerty (Boulder, Colo.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

expenditures run very high, ranging from 73 percent in 1949-1950 to around 25 percent in recent years.²⁷

Nuclear Deterrence

Pakistan has waged a determined campaign to acquire and modernize an operational nuclear deterrent ever since its military loss to Indian forces in the 1971 East Pakistan war and the creation of Bangladesh. Despite Pakistan's detonation of nuclear explosive devices in May 1998 and numerous test flights of various missile delivery systems, the expansion, diversification, and security of its deterrent remain key priorities, especially as Indian military might continues to grow. Pakistan's deterrence posture is predicated on a strong conventional force capability and demonstration of its willingness to run high risks and pay high costs to deter aggression.

Acceptance, But Not Reliance, on Outside Assistance

To compensate for India's vast advantages in manpower, wealth, and military equipment, Pakistan consistently has sought out foreign supplies of modern weapons and military training. The United States was its main arms provider during the 1950s and 1960s and again in the 1980s,²⁸ but Islamabad turned to China and other weapons sources in the 1970s and again in the 1990s when Washington imposed conditions on arms transfers that would inhibit Pakistan from pursuing nuclear weapons, which Pakistani defense planners deemed essential for their competition with India.

Stability on Pakistan's Western Borders

From the first days of Pakistan's existence, tense relations with Afghanistan created not only problems for Pakistan's foreign policy but also its internal security. Early on, Afghanistan refused to recognize the newly independent Pakistan and continues to this day to challenge the

²⁷ Rizvi, "Pakistan's Strategic Culture," 314.

²⁸ Pakistan and the United States signed a mutual defense agreement in May 1954. The following year Pakistan joined two of Washington's three most important regional defense alliances—the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Baghdad Pact (which in 1958 evolved into the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO). Between 1955 and 1965, Washington provided Pakistan with more than \$700 million in military grant aid. U.S. economic assistance to Pakistan between 1947 and 2000 reached nearly \$11.8 billion. K. Alan Kronstadt, "Pakistan-U.S. Relations," *Congressional Research Service Issue Brief*, 3 September 2003, document no. IB94941, 1.

legitimacy of the “Duran Line” that demarcates the Pak-Afghan border. A larger concern has been ethnic Pushtun politics in Pakistan’s Northwest Frontier Province, which borders Afghanistan. Pushtun separatism became the largest threat to Pakistan’s internal stability at the time of independence and remains a long-term worry of Pakistani defense planners. As a result, Pakistani leaders always have preferred “friendly” clients to the West—whether they were the compliant warlords of the 1980s or the Taliban of the 1990s.²⁹

Identification with Conservative Islamic Causes

The emphasis on Muslim nationalism that brought Pakistan into being continues to play an important role in shaping its national identity and foreign relations. In the years following independence, Muslim nationalism became more than a nationalist ideology, it became a rallying cry for Islamic solidarity and Muslim causes all over the world. At times, Pakistan has tried to be seen as a leader of the Islamic world, but these efforts have upset some countries, which saw themselves as more fitting international leaders or which did not place as much emphasis on Islam as a domestic or international political force. Thus while Islam remains a major part of Pakistan’s political identity, it generally is not a dominant theme in Pakistan’s foreign and defense policies.

STRATEGIC MYTHS, MYTHMAKERS, AND MYTH MAKING

Before testing the neo-realist and strategic culture approaches against Pakistan's actual strategic conduct, a third approach must be introduced, one which I believe has potentially more explanatory power over many national security questions. My approach emphasizes the strategic beliefs and political behavior of *strategic mythmakers*. The argument is that a country is likely to adopt a certain national security strategy (such as developing nuclear weapons, or allying with another country) when certain national elites who want their government to adopt this strategy do several things: (1) emphasize their country’s insecurity or its poor international standing, (2) portray this strategy as the best corrective for these problems, (3) successfully associate these beliefs with existing cultural norms and political priorities, and (4) convince policy makers to accept and act on these views.

²⁹ For background, see Feroz Hassan Khan, “Rough Neighbors: Afghanistan and Pakistan,” *Strategic Insights*, 2, no. 1 (January 2003), <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/jan03/southAsia.asp>.