**Strategic Culture and Pak-India Foreign Policy Interaction: A Comparative Analysis**

Prof Dr Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi

Department of International Relations

University of Peshawar

**Strategic culture,** as per Dr Hassan Askari Rizvi, is a collectivity of the 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. It is a perceptual framework of orientations, values, and beliefs that serves as a screen through which the policymakers observe the dynamics of the external security environment, interpret the available information and decide about the policy options in a given situation.

Notwithstanding these comments, strategic culture is an important concept to understand the disposition, responses, and decisions of the security policymakers. It offers a better understanding of how the leaders are likely to react to a security situation and what type of options they are likely to go for. Knowledge of strategic culture helps us to understand the sensitivities of a state and how to meaningfully engage in a dialogue with its leaders in a given situation. Many of the policy options or behavior patterns can be understood with reference to strategic culture. For example, the role of *mujahideen or jihadis* in Afghanistan, Kashmir or Palestine cannot be fully understood without reference to their historical narratives, orientations, beliefs, and values. Similarly, India’s reaction to its participation in the forthcoming SAARC summit, fanning insurgency in Baluchistan, or its support to political parties for subversive activities in Pakistan for a cause may not be appreciated by a rational choice approach. Ideological factors, historical narratives, and perception of the self as well as identification with the cause have better explanatory potential.

Most nations do not easily alter their international orientation. States tend to be conservative about foreign policy. Fundamental changes in foreign policy take place only when there is a revolutionary change either at home or in the world. Much as the ascent of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s produced radical changes in Chinese foreign policy, India’s relations with the world have seen a fundamental transformation over the last decade and a half. A number of factors were at work in India. The old political and economic order at home had collapsed and externally the end of the Cold War removed all the old benchmarks that guided India’s foreign policy. Many of the core beliefs of the old system had to discarded and consensus generated on new ones. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the new wave of economic globalization left India scrambling to find new anchors for its conduct of external relations. This paper examines the origin, dynamics and the implications of India’s new foreign policy strategy.

**In India** there are different points of view on the problematic relations with its neighbors. Kanti Bajpai noted that after the end of the Cold War, India had three branches of possible strategic development. He calls them *Nehruvianism*, hyperrealism, and neo-liberalism. Bajpai insists that the hyperrealists have the most pessimistic view of international relations: “Where Nehruvians and neoliberals believe that international relations can be transformed either by means of communication and contact, or by free market economic reforms and the logic of comparative advantage, hyperrealists see an endless cycle of repetition in interstate interactions. In fact Hinduism regards time as an eternal cycle of sequences, human souls endures these too, continually reincarnating from one essence to another, thus Westerners - with their linear understanding of time - do not understand Indian sluggishness. Conflict and rivalry between states cannot be transformed into peace and friendship, except temporarily as in an alliance against a common foe, rather they can only be managed by the threat and use of violence.”

Underlying India’s current foreign policy strategy, as per Raja C. Mohan, is a set of **important transitions in India’s world view**.

The first was the transition from the national consensus on building a “socialist society” to building a “modern capitalist” one. The socialist ideal, with its roots in the national movement, had so dominated the Indian political discourse by the early 1970s, that a Constitutional amendment was passed in 1976 to make the nation into a “socialist republic”. But 1991 saw the collapse of the Soviet Union, the veritable symbol of socialism, and the edifice of India’s state-socialism began to crumble. Adapting to the new challenges of globalization now became the principal national objective. The change in the national economic strategy in 1991 inevitably produced abundant new options on the foreign policy front.

Implicit in this was the second transition, from the past emphasis on politics to a new stress on economics in the making of foreign policy. India began to realize in the 1990s how far behind it had fallen the rest of Asia, including China, in economic development. With the socialist strait jacket gone, and the pressures to compete with other emerging markets, Indian diplomacy now entered uncharted waters. In the past, foreign for aid was so symbolic of Indian diplomacy that sought to meet the government’s external financing requirements as well as developmental needs. India was now seeking foreign direct investment, and access to markets in the developed world. The slow but successful economic reforms unleashed the potential of the nation, generated rapid economic growth and provided a basis to transform its relations with great powers, regional rivals Pakistan and China, and the neighbourhood as a whole.

A third transition in Indian foreign policy is about the shift from being a leader of the “Third World” to the recognition of the potential that India could emerge as a great power in its own right. While independent India always had a sense of its own greatness, that never seemed realistic until the Indian economy began to grow rapidly in the 1990s. In the early decades of its independent existence, India viewed many of the international and regional security issues through the prism of the third world and “anti-imperialism”. The 1990s, however, brought home some painful truths. There was no real third world trade union, that India believed it was leading. After a radical phase in the 1970s, most developing nations had begun to adopt pragmatic economic policies and sought to integrate with the international market. Much of the developing world had made considerable economic advances, leaving the South Asia way behind. While the rhetoric on the third world remained popular, the policy orientation in India’s external relations increasingly focused on India’s own self interest. There was a growing perception, flowing from the Chinese example, that if India could sustain high growth rates it had a chance to gain a place at the international high table.

The 1990s also saw India begin discarding the “anti-Western” political impulses that were so dominant in the world view that shaped Indian diplomacy right up to 1991. Rejecting the “anti-Western” mode of thinking was the fourth important transition of Indian foreign policy. As the world’s largest democracy, India was the most committed to Western political values outside the Euro-Atlantic world. Yet the Cold War saw India emerge as the most articulate opponent of the Western world view. A strong anti- Western bias crept into Indian foreign policy supported by the left as well as the right and underwritten by the security establishment. The disappearance of the Soviet Union and China’s rise as a great power demanded that India to break the decades old anti-Western approaches to foreign policy.

Finally, the fifth transition in Indian foreign policy in the 1990s was from idealism to realism. Idealism came naturally to the Indian elite that won independence from the British by arguing against colonialism on the basis of first principles of Enlightenment. The new leaders of India had contempt for “power politics”. They believed it was a negative but lingering legacy from 19th century Europe that had no relevance to the new times of the mid 20th century. India tended to see its role in world politics as the harbinger of a new set of principles of peaceful coexistence and multilateralism which if applied properly would transform the world. Although Nehru demonstrated realism on many fronts, especially in India’s immediate neighbourhood, the public articulation of India’s foreign policy had the stamp of idealism all over it. Since the 1990s, India could no longer sustain the presumed idealism of its foreign policy. India had to come to terms with the painful reality that its relative standing in the world had substantially declined during the Cold War. Much like Deng Xiaoping who prescribed pragmatism for China, the Indian leaders began to emphasize practical ways to achieve power and prosperity for India.

Pakistan needs to learn a lot from the changing regional and international scenario. Pakistan’s foreign policy is more reactionary than proactive. Thus in the current circumstances, we need to keep home in order. No one has isolated us. Pakistan’s foreign policy has been formed in such a fashion that the isolation has been imposed by itself upon itself. Our deteriorating relations with Afghanistan and Iran is no secret to anyone. We left them for India which filled the gap.

Pakistan does not have a Foreign Minister for the last more than three years. This reflects how much foreign policy is on the present government’s priority and hence the world too looks at us in the same tone. What is our foreign policy? Its CPEC, CPEC, and CPEC. Rather than going for a multi dimensional phenomenon, our foreign policy is just focused on CPEC and the entire nation is in its spill. We have forgotten improvement of our relations with the US. India just came to the fore after Uri incident. Relations with other regional countries like CARs and Russia are still to be seen in detail by our foreign office. Projection of Pakistan as a soft power is no more on agenda. How many times do we witness Pakistan’s advertisement of its tourism, economy or being victim of terrorism on international media like BBC and CNN? None.

Pakistan has failed to internationalise Kashmir issue. If its getting world’s attention its due to the wrong policies of India. She warmed LOC and its brinkmanship is attracting world attention to the core issue between the two countries.

Regarding India’s going for war, in the current circumstances, she will hesitate to do so. The reasons are numerous. Diplomatic front does not allow her. World community especially the great powers like the US, China, EU and Russia will not accpt just Uri incident for its misadventurism. Shining India and Rising India will be at the disadvantageous end if it goes for a war. Moreover, its rising economy will not allow it for the war. India is a growing economy if not emerging. Hence, a war will be suicidal for itself.