Pakistan's Strategic Culture: A Theoretical Excursion

Strategic Insights, Volume IV, Issue 10 (October 2005)

by Peter R. Lavoy

Strategic Insights is a monthly electronic journal produced by the Center for Contemporary Conflict at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. The views expressed here are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of NPS, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

For a PDF version of this article, click here.

Introduction

Pakistan is a vital U.S. ally in the global war on terrorism. This is not the first time the United States has relied on Islamabad for its defense needs: Pakistan provided crucial support in the Cold War struggle against communism, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, and it re-emerged as a "frontline state" in the covert campaign to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan in the 1980s. After each of these periods, however, U.S.-Pakistan partnership broke down under the weight of altered international conditions and irretrievable strategic divergences. Because of this troubled history, and also due to current uncertainties about Pakistan's domestic stability and commitment to democracy, its close military ties to North Korea and China, its fractious relations with India and Afghanistan, and its checkered history of control over nuclear weapon technology, some observers warn that Pakistan is "at best a reluctant supporter of U.S. goals and at worst a potential long-term adversary."[1] Even if one accepts the rationale for "a close and enduring" U.S.-Pakistan partnership "for the long term,"[2] there is every reason to scrutinize what kind of strategic ally Pakistan may become, especially after Washington's good friend, President Pervez Musharraf, departs the scene.

It is a very challenging task to explain what motivates a country's foreign and defense policies and to predict how it will behave in the future, especially when the country in question is so distant—culturally as well as physically—from one's own nation. Fortunately, international relations theory has something to offer here. Several well developed arguments can be brought to bear on the analysis of a country's foreign policy. But unfortunately, there is no consensus on which of the many candidate approaches is most useful for explaining and predicting a given country's defense strategies. In particular, structural realism (or neo-realism) and strategic cultural analysis offer potentially important insights into Pakistan's past, present, and future security policies. Rather than attempting to describe Pakistan's strategic preferences and behavior through one approach, selected *a priori*, this essay identifies and tests each of these competing theories of foreign policy against Pakistan's actual behavior. The underlying objective is to determine the value of strategic cultural analysis relative to realism and other explanatory approaches.

After describing the general contours of Pakistan's security policy, I infer predictions from two separate theoretical approaches and then evaluate these predictions against the historical data on two specific Pakistani policies: (1) Pakistan's decision to pursue nuclear weapons, and (2) its

post 9-11 decision to reverse its support for the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and more generally support the United States in the global war on terrorism. These two policies are vitally important to Pakistan's national security today; thus this analysis is designed not only to test leading IR theories, but also to generate important insights about the key features of Pakistan's current and future strategic conduct.

I argue that neither of the two theoretical approaches considered can adequately explain why Pakistan has pursued its main security policies. Neo-realism has the most explanatory power, but it cannot explain all of the phenomena that are of immediate interest to policymakers. However, a realist approach, supplemented with a kind of strategic cultural analysis can fill the most important gaps in our understanding of Pakistani security policy. The specific theoretical model that I find to have the most explanatory power is one that combines elements of realism with elements of culture, but also adds a third dimension: the critical role of individual elites who identify and respond to structural (realist) incentives in a manner consistent with culturally accepted modes of behavior, but who also redefine and transform the strategic culture in line with both their own strategic preferences and their understanding of the room they have to maneouvre within the constraints of the international security system. In other words, these elites, whom I call *myth makers*, operate within the constraints of both the international environment and their nation's political culture, but they are not helpless prisoners of these two confining structures; they have some degree of freedom to reorient and expand the internal and external boundaries of their behavior.[3] But, it should be noted, the more a myth maker tries to push out either of these boundaries of traditional behavior, the greater the risk he runs domestically and internationally.

Although this combined explanatory approach sacrifices some elegance and parsimony, and thus may not be particularly attractive to some IR theorists, it serves the needs of policy analysts better than most candidate approaches. It enables observers to identify—and potentially influence—three sets of variables:

1. the regional and international security context of the country in question,
2. its strategic culture, and
3. the perceptions and political actions of national myth makers.

After developing the argument in general terms, I outline several policy implications for the United States related to Pakistan's future strategic conduct.

Competing Theoretical Approaches

Scant theoretical attention has been devoted to understanding Pakistan's foreign and defense policies, but two approaches in vogue in the international relations (IR) theory literature could be specified to illuminate certain of Pakistan's main strategic preferences and behavior. Because these two approaches—neo-realism and strategic cultural analysis—are likely to generate contradictory predictions about Pakistan's security policy, my goal is to test their utility in explaining key features of Pakistani policy.[4] Beyond that, I also show what we should take away for our ongoing project to improve the explanatory power and policy relevance of strategic cultural analysis.

Neo-realism

Realism is the most time-honored approach for understanding general patterns of state behavior in an anarchic international political system. The main expectations of neo-realism, the version of realism popularized by Kenneth Waltz, are (1) the recurrence of balances of power in the international political system; (2) the tendency of states to balance, or strengthen themselves in the face of external military threats; and (3) the inclination of states to imitate one another and to become socialized to the world political system.[5] Power balancing is the oldest concept in the

literature on international relations; it is central to all brands of realism.[6] According to Stephen Walt and Kenneth Waltz, countries usually balance against serious foreign threats to their security; rarely do they *bandwagon*, that is, accommodate or appease the countries making these threats.[7] Countries can balance "internally"—by relying on their own military capabilities—or "externally"—by relying on the military capabilities of allies.[8] Statesmen generally prefer internal balancing because it leaves less to chance and less to the will of others.[9]

Strategic Culture

There is no consensus on the precise definition or characteristics of strategic culture, but most authors would agree, at least in general terms, with the definition offered nearly thirty years ago by Jack Snyder, who describes strategic culture as "the sum total of ideals, conditional emotional responses, and patterns of behavior that members of the national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other…"[10] Stephen Rosen's approach is very similar, observing that strategic culture is made up of the shared "beliefs and assumptions that frame … choices about international military behavior, particularly those concerning decisions to go to war, preferences for offensive, expansionist or defensive modes of warfare, and levels of wartime casualties that would be acceptable."[11] Ian Johnston provides one of the more recent and widely embraced approaches to the concept. In contrast to the material context of realism, Johnston portrays strategic culture as "an ideational milieu which limits behavior choices." This milieu is shaped by "shared assumptions and decision rules that impose a degree of order on individual and group conceptions of their relationship to their social, organizational or political environment."[12]

Nearly all adherents to strategic cultural analysis recognize that in order to understand a nation's strategic culture, the observer needs to immerse him or herself in its history, attitudes, and conduct—in short, the observer needs to practice good area studies. The methodology employed typically is derived from cultural anthropology and political sociology. One does not have to go as far as Clifford Geertz, who argued that "As interworked systems of construable signs (symbols), culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly described."[13] Thick description is necessary for strategic cultural analysis, but it is insufficient for the explanatory task we have at hand.

A reasonable explanation—as opposed to a purely "thick" description—for a country's key strategic policies is possible. It requires a more precise approach, one that singles out specific variables and examines their causal impact. In the next section, I provide a brief, "semi-thick" description of the cultural context of Pakistan's security policy, and then identify five key characteristics of Pakistani strategic culture. This allows me to compare the explanatory value of strategic culture with neo-realism and with the myth-making model that I develop in the following section.

Pakistan's Strategic Culture

Pakistan is one of the least secure countries on the planet. As a reflection of its obsession with security, Pakistan now spends close to $4 billion per year on defense, which ranks 28th highest in the world. More tellingly, it ranks 19th in the world in terms of military expenditure as a percent of GDP (at just 5 percent).[14] All other indicators of military capability show that Pakistan has one of the world's largest and best equipped armed forces, which of course possess a steadily growing arsenal of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. But statistics hardly do justice to the country's intense feelings of insecurity, which are rooted deeply in the past. Emerging out of British colonial India as a homeland for a sizeable portion of the region's Muslim population, one could say that Pakistan was born insecure.

The Roots of Insecurity

The antipathy between the Pakistan and India dates back to August 1947 when Britain partitioned the religiously and ethnically diverse Indian empire into two independent states. India was to become a secular democracy and Pakistan was intended to be a democratic homeland for South Asian Muslims. Because Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs lived in virtually every part of the British colony, more than six million Muslims migrated to Pakistan, and more than four million Hindus and Sikhs moved to India.[15] Communal tensions often flared into violence. More than one million migrants were slaughtered, and the religious minorities remaining behind often were treated poorly.[16]

Bitter memories of partition remain etched in the minds of older Indians and Pakistanis, and even the youth hold strong views because of jingoistic accounts passed down through state-controlled educational texts and the media (especially the vernacular language media). Still worse, Pakistanis fear that India rejects the "two-nation theory" that was the logic behind partition. India's active support for the creation of Bangladesh (which had been East Pakistan) in 1971 reinforced Pakistan's view that New Delhi aspires to re-unify the Indian empire under its control, or at least reduce Pakistan to a position of weakness and subservience like India's other neighbors (with the notable exception of China).[17] Because both countries are vulnerable to religious and ethnic fragmentation,[18] moreover, each side fears that the other will exploit its social and political cleavages to undermine the legitimacy of the state.

For Pakistan, the greatest concern in this regard is in the territory bordering Afghanistan, where Pashtun tribesmen periodically have threatened to withdraw from the Pakistani state to form a greater Pashtunistan nation with their kinfolk across the border in Afghanistan. To this very day, the Afghan government does not recognize the Durand Line, the 1500-mile border the British colonial government created in 1893 to demark the northwest boundary of its Indian empire. Intermittent Pak-Afghan border clashes took place during the 1950s and 1960s, and they have reoccurred recently as Afghan and Pakistani troops deployed along the border for counter-terrorist missions have occasionally fired on each other.[19] Pakistan does not fear outright attack from the much weaker Afghan military, but India's support for Afghanistan's claims on Pakistani territory have long created unrest among Pakistani military planners, who dread the prospect of a major two-front war. This is the larger context in which Pakistan formulates its security policies.

The Kashmir Dispute

The dispute that caused three of the four Indo-Pakistani wars and continues to be a major source of regional tension is a direct product of partition. In 1947, Hari Singh, the Hindu maharajah of the mainly Muslim state of Kashmir, refused to join either India or Pakistan. India wanted Kashmir to solidify its identify as a pluralistic democracy, but Pakistan coveted the territory to complete its identity as a democratic and secure homeland for the region's Muslim population. When tribal militants from Pakistan's North West Frontier Province tried to "liberate" Kashmir, Pakistan's fledgling army supported them. Under pressure from the tribal invaders, on one side, and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's new Indian government, on the other, Hari Singh acceded to India. Fearing that the loss of Kashmir might spur other ethnic groups inside India to press for autonomy, New Delhi sent its own army to crush the tribal rebellion. War then broke out between India and Pakistan. When it ended in stalemate in 1948, Kashmir was divided, leaving India with two-thirds of the territory, including the populous and picturesque Vale of Kashmir. Since then, Pakistan has tried various methods, from diplomacy to the direct use of force, to wrest the remainder of Kashmir from Indian control. For the past fifteen years, it has covertly supported a violent insurgency that—together with India's heavy-handed response—has ravaged Kashmir. Pakistan portrays the insurgency as a freedom movement and India calls it state-sponsored terrorism. Each argument contains an element of truth.

Having claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Kashmiris, and more than once bringing India and Pakistan to the brink of war, the Kashmir dispute has become an unstable, emotionally charged source of nuclear danger.[20] No matter how dangerous the threat of nuclear war has become, India and Pakistan are unable to agree on an effective political process to reduce tensions or resolve the issue. Pakistan welcomes either direct negotiations with India or third-party mediation; but New Delhi opposes what it views as Pakistani ploys to politicize and internationalize the issue. Indian government officials insist on talks only with Kashmiri groups that reject violence and even then, only in the context of integrating them into the Indian republic. Concerned outsiders have proposed various schemes to bring India and Pakistan to the negotiating table, but so far neither side will abandon its self-serving, hard-line position. The threat and actual use of force remain the dominant forms of "dialogue" between India and Pakistan on Kashmir.

Dangerous Military Practices

Some observers predicted that nuclear weapons would stabilize India-Pakistan relations and make war less likely because any conflict now could escalate to nuclear use.[21] This logic caused earlier nuclear powers to act cautiously with one another; however, the opposite appears to hold in South Asia. India and Pakistan exhibit care in handling and even speaking about nuclear forces, but each side engages in risky conduct at the conventional and low-intensity levels of conflict, which creates pressure for escalation to full-scale war. According to New Delhi, the problem began with Pakistan's support for armed insurgents supporting Kashmiri independence. The Indian government estimates that these insurgents have committed over 50,000 terrorist incidents claiming 13,000 Indian lives since 1989.[22] Islamabad retorts that more than 60,000 Kashmiri civilians have been killed in "a reign of terror and repression" by over 600,000 Indian troops.[23] Although each side's claim probably is exaggerated, the advent of nuclear weaponry has not diminished the violence in Indian-held Kashmir or along the Kashmir Line of Control (LOC), where Indian and Pakistani forces routinely have traded small arms and artillery fire.

In fact, all of this border skirmishing and guerilla violence creates strong pressures for conventional warfare. The Indian government mobilized its armed forces in December 2001 to compel Pakistan to withdraw its support for the Kashmir insurgency and possibly to launch an attack if Pakistan failed to withdraw. Although Indian officials claimed that Pakistan continued 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, five general characteristics of the country's strategic culture can be outlined (in decreasing order of importance).[24]

- *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.[25]

- *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 expenditures run very high, ranging from 73 percent in 1949-1950 to around 25 percent in recent years.[26]
- *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,[27] 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.
- *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, Myth Makers, 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 myth makers*. 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, (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 finally (4) convince policy makers to accept and act on these views.

This argument provides insight into the sources of key national security debates as well: if enterprising and well-connected strategic elites manage to cultivate a national—or at least a governmental—consensus around the notion that not pursuing the strategy in question (for example, not developing nuclear weapons, or not aligning with a certain foreign power) would make the country *less* secure or *less* influential, then the government is not likely to initiate or continue this course of action. At any given time and in any given country, of course, various strategic myths will co-exist and compete with rival strategic myths.

The success of one myth over another depends on three factors:

1. the substantive content of the strategic myth and its compatibility with existing cultural norms and political priorities;
2. the ability of the myth maker to legitimize and popularize his or her beliefs among fellow elites and then to persuade national leaders to act on these beliefs; and finally
3. the process whereby institutional actors integrate the popularized strategic myths into their own organizational identities and missions.

Theoretical Assumptions

The emphasis on strategic myth making is not intended to downplay the significance of actual security threats or real status considerations as powerful inducements for countries to seek certain defense policies. On the contrary, it is hard to imagine any responsible government official calling for a significant national security strategy (such as acquiring nuclear weapons) without a prior interest in solving some pressing military or political problem. Realists are correct: the real world does matter. Strategic myths and the existence of genuine security threats are closely correlated.

The chief distinction between the myth-maker approach and the neo-realist or strategic cultural perspectives described above lies at the level of analysis. Whereas security and cultural accounts focus on the prior events or conditions that are believed to trigger a certain strategic behavior, I emphasize the arguments and the political maneuvering that link the triggering conditions to the subsequent decision to adopt this policy and then to the actual process of implementing this policy. Three elements are singled out in my approach:

1. the composition, scope, and logical consistency of the strategic myths themselves,
2. the identity, background and skills of the strategic myth maker, or carrier of these beliefs; and
3. the process of strategic myth making—of legitimizing, popularizing and institutionalizing strategic arguments about national security policy.

This argument rests on two assertions that are not necessarily rejected by neo-realists, but which certainly are not emphasized by them either. The first assumption is that the beliefs of individuals matter for foreign policy making and international behavior.[28] Analysis of foreign policy decision making is not required to understand all security problems, but choices and strategies about certain very important policies, such as acquiring nuclear weapons, are not adequately explained without reference to the beliefs of decision makers concerning the political and military implications of these policies. This is true because of the multiple and only partially predictable political, economic and military consequences of developing, deploying, threatening to use, or actually using nuclear weapons. Second, talented and well-placed experts can play a crucial part in helping to create, diffuse and perpetuate strategic myths.

Types of Strategic Myths

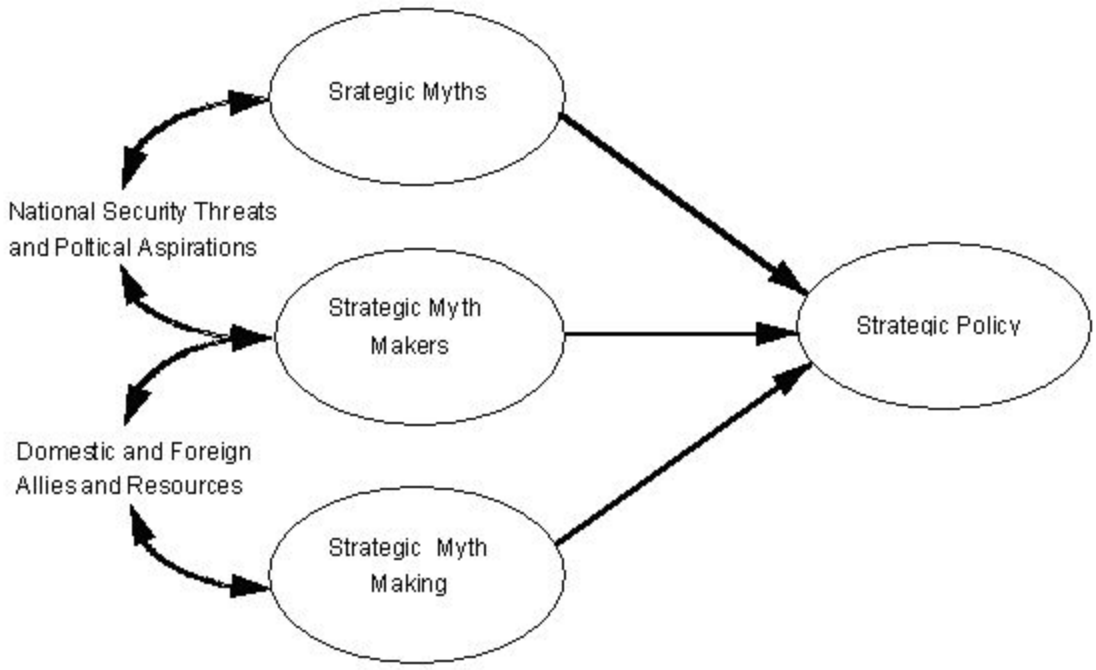
The argument developed above posits that the behavior of various states is influenced by the beliefs that officials in these states hold about national security affairs. To illustrate what kinds of beliefs matter the most, consider the case of nuclear weapons development. Two kinds of beliefs play especially important roles in the development of nuclear weapons. The first beliefs are the myths of nuclear security and nuclear influence. These are beliefs about the desirability of acquiring nuclear weapons. The other set of beliefs concerns the technical, economic, and political feasibility of building nuclear bombs as well as the utility of eventually using these weapons for military purposes. Table 1 lists these sets of beliefs and summarizes their main characteristics.

Table 1: Categories of Beliefs about Nuclear Weapons

Belief Type	**Subject of Belief**
Nuclear Myths	
Nuclear security	Relationship between nuclear weapons acquisition and the political and military dimensions of national security
Nuclear influence	Relationship between nuclear weapons acquisition and the status and political influence of the state in international affairs
Auxiliary Assertions	
Technical feasibility	Capacity to overcome technical difficulties associated with developing nuclear weapons; possibility for industrial spin-offs.
Economic feasibility	Capacity to meet financial costs associated with developing nuclear weapons; possibility for lucrative industrial spin-offs.
Political feasibility	Capacity to mange political problems associated with developing nuclear weapons; impact on relations with important states.
Military utility	Capacity to develop operational nuclear weapons and to devise options for their effective use in military operations.

The key variables in the strategic myth-making approach, as described above, are summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Categories of Strategic Beliefs



Pakistan's Security Policy Analyzed

Having described the essential features of three analytical approaches that can be employed to account for Pakistan's security policy, the task now is to specify predictions from these three separate theoretical approaches and then evaluate these predictions against the historical data on specific Pakistani security policies. I choose two especially pertinent Pakistani policies for very brief, illustrative analysis:

1. Pakistan's development of nuclear weapons; and
2. Pakistan's post 9-11 decision to reverse its support for the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and more generally support the United States in the global war on terrorism.

Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Program

Arguably, the most important—and controversial—strategic choice Pakistan made in its five-plus decades of existence was to develop nuclear weapons. It managed to obtain nuclear weapons and maintain a close relationship with the United States, the stalwart if the nuclear nonproliferation regime. Looking at the issue of whether Pakistan should have developed nuclear weapons, and when, the three theoretical perspectives developed in this essay lead to very different predictions:

- *Neo-realism:* According to the neo-realist model, which posits that countries generally try to balance against security threats first by developing their own military might and only secondly by forming alliances, Pakistan should have launched a crash program to develop nuclear weapons when it learned that its archrival, India, had initiated its own program to make nuclear bombs shortly after China's nuclear test in October 1964. Although many Pakistani officials suspected India of harboring an interest in nuclear weapons soon after independence, when Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru openly mused about the benefits of nuclear power, Pakistan became convinced about India's nuclear program when the latter launched its Subterranean Nuclear Experiment Project (SNEP) in early 1965.
- *Strategic culture:* Focusing more on the internal and historical attributes of Pakistan, this approach would hypothesize that because the dominant national security organization in the country was the armed forces, and because this institution was very conservative and pro-Western, Pakistan would continue to rely on conventional weapons and a close strategic relationship with the United States to meet its security needs.
- *Myth making:* This approach would expect Pakistan to pursue the nuclear option when key national elites were able to convince the country's leadership that nuclear weapons production is required to enhance the state's security, power, and welfare.

The historical record supports each one of these approaches to some extent, but on the whole, the myth making model performs better. As realists would expect, a strong pro-bomb lobby formed in Pakistan in 1964 and 1965. Led by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who served as foreign minister under President Ayub Khan's military regime in the mid-1960s, this group urged Ayub to match India's nuclear progress by approving Pakistan's own secret nuclear weapons research and development program, but Ayub resisted their pressure and ruled against going nuclear,[29] just as strategic culture proponents would expect.

After Pakistan's devastating loss to India in the December 1971 Bangladesh war, however, the Pakistan government finally initiated a nuclear bomb program. This time, realists would predict this decision and strategic culturalists would not. But the key factor was once again the role of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who had emerged as the country's president following the Bangladesh defeat. Now at the helm, Bhutto instructed his top scientists to begin work at once on nuclear weapons.

Pakistan's nuclear policymaking is best understood through the lens of the myth maker approach, which can explain how the myth of nuclear security initially spread in the 1960s, why it failed to

shape official policy at that time, and why Pakistan ultimately decided to go nuclear in 1972. The key factors in this analysis are Bhutto's critical role as Pakistan's primary nuclear myth maker, the gradual acceptance of the strategic beliefs that nuclear weapons would enhance Pakistan's security and influence, and the eventual institutionalization of these beliefs among Pakistan's politicians, the armed forces, and the bureaucracy—to the extent that no leader after Bhutto could (or would want to) reverse Pakistan's nuclear weapons policy.

Pakistan's Post-9/11 Policy Reversal

Al Qaeda's September 11, 2001 attacks against Washington, D.C. and New York city fundamentally altered Pakistan's relations with the United States. The George W. Bush administration's campaign to destroy the Taliban as a haven for terrorist networks with global reach and to eliminate the Al Qaeda network had a particularly dramatic impact on Pakistan, which had been the Taliban's strongest ally. Pakistan had helped the Taliban consolidate power in Afghanistan in the mid-to-late 1990s. Viewing the Taliban as a friendly if fanatical regime that could stabilize Pakistan's often unruly Pushtun population and also provide much-needed "strategic depth" in Pakistan's military competition with India, Pakistani leaders were loathe to see the return of instability, and possibly hostility, on their western flank. But faced with intense pressure from the United States, President Pervez Musharraf agreed to break relations with the Taliban, provide basing and over-flight permission for all U.S. and coalition forces, deploy two divisions of troops along the Afghanistan border in support of OEF, and provide intelligence support to the international anti-terrorism coalition.[30] When he announced this controversial policy reversal on Afghanistan in a September 2001 speech to the nation, President Musharraf indicated that any other decision could have caused "unbearable losses" to the security of the country, the health of the economy, the Kashmir cause, and to Pakistan's strategic nuclear and missile assets.[31]

While most of Pakistan's mainstream political parties supported the government's decision to join the international coalition against terrorism, the country's Islamic groups and parties were outraged. About two dozen religious parties, including the powerful Jamaat-e-Islami, which earlier had cooperated with the Musharraf government, came together under the umbrella of the Pak-Afghan Defense Council and launched a nationwide campaign to oust Musharraf. Strikes and street demonstrations occurred throughout the country, American flags were burned, several people were killed, and many buildings were destroyed. Truckloads of Pakistani extremists also traveled to Afghanistan to fight with the Taliban against the U.S.-led anti-terrorism coalition. However, none of these actions managed to incite the Pakistani population against the government or persuade President Musharraf either to backtrack on his policies or to step down. What would our three theoretical perspectives have to say about Pakistan's post-9/11 policy reversal on Afghanistan?

- *Neo-realism:* According to the neo-realist model, Pakistan would do whatever was required to balance against its key adversary, India. President Musharraf warned in his famous September 19, 2001 address to the nation: "Lets look at our neighbors. They have promised U.S. all cooperation. They want to isolate us, get us declared a terrorist state."[32] Because continuing support for the Taliban regime in Afghanistan would mean opposing the United States, and driving Washington into a military alliance with India, realpolitik dictated that Pakistan join the U.S. counter-Taliban coalition.
- *Strategic culture:* Giving more causal weight to the beliefs and desires of powerful domestic constituencies, such as the pro-Taliban Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISID), the strategic cultural argument probably would expect Pakistan to find a way to maintain its strong support for its Taliban allies in Afghanistan.
- *Myth making:* This approach would argue that Pakistan's policy decision would depend mainly on the strategic beliefs of the country's leader, President Pervez Musharraf. It would recognize that Musharraf faced internal pressures to stand by the Taliban and external pressures to support the United States; but his own beliefs and his ability to

cultivate support fro these beliefs among the country's influential elites (principally among the armed forces) would be the key factor. Because Musharraf's own strategic beliefs, at least in this case, corresponded with the tents of realpolitik, this particular security policy is overdetermined: both the neo-realist and the strategic myth-maker approaches would successfully predict Pakistan's behavior.

The sudden shift in Pakistan's Afghanistan policy poses a potentially big problem for strategic cultural analysis. For that matter, all cultural studies, which point to the steady socialization of values and beliefs over time, have difficulty in explaining change. But some proponents of strategic culture recognize that under certain conditions strategic cultures do change. Jeffrey Lantis observes that two conditions, in particular, cause strategic cultures to transform. First, external shocks can fundamentally challenge existing beliefs and undermine long-held historical narratives and practices.[33] The second cause of change is related to the first. At certain times, deeply held foreign policy commitments clash and force policymakers to make critical choices. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Pakistan suffered a serious external shock and President Musharraf was forced to choose between the Taliban and the United States. This choice posed intense value tradeoffs and arguably caused Musharraf—and Pakistan's strategic culture—to adapt to new circumstances, much as realism and the myth-making approaches would have suggested. The myth-making model is particularly useful in accounting for this policy shift, because it sees leaders (and other strategic elites) as instrumental in defining—and redefining—policy goals. They can preserve traditions or they can choose to move beyond previous boundaries of acceptability. Musharraf clearly did the latter.

Implications

This short essay explores the relative utility of three theoretical approaches in accounting for specific Pakistani foreign policy choices. Neo-realism and a general model of strategic cultural analysis each point to significant constraints on the freedom of choice of Pakistani leaders. Neo-realists correctly comprehend that the imperatives of international competition, and especially Pakistan's long-standing political and military rivalry with India, have severely restricted the room for maneuver of successive Pakistani heads of states. Similarly, proponents of strategic cultural analysis can show how the values and beliefs of the Pakistani population, and especially the conservative armed forces and the bureaucracy, also have constrained Pakistani policies over time.

As Pakistan's policymaking on nuclear weapons illustrates, at one time (the mid-1960s) the Pakistani leadership defied the dictates of Realpolitik and instead acted according to the traditional strategic views of the armed forces (as strategic culture would predict), which was not to go nuclear, but to maintain close security ties with the United States and to beef up its conventional military forces. But at another time (1972), Pakistan's leadership reversed course and chose to manufacture nuclear weapons, even if this policy resulted in the estrangement of relations with Washington (which it did, during the 1990s). Why do some Realpolitik or cultural constraints seem so severe at one time and yet so malleable at other times?

The answer lies with the behavior of strategic key strategic elites, who are free to accept some constraints and yet ignore or overcome others. These elites, whom I call *strategic myth makers*, operate within the confines of both the international environment and their nation's political culture, but they sometimes have some degree of freedom to reorient and expand the internal and external boundaries of their behavior. However, the more a myth maker tries to extend either of these boundaries of traditional behavior, the greater the risk he runs domestically and internationally.

Leadership entails knowing one's limits, but also knowing how to take advantage of rare opportunities for change, when they present themselves. The myth-making approach points

analysts to examine strategic elites as well as their beliefs about national security. It further calls attention to the institutionalization of these beliefs, or myths, in the rules, values, and beliefs of key national security institutions. As organization theorists would understand, the more national security myths become institutionalized, the greater the hold of culture takes over strategic elites. If U.S. policymakers had recognized this, they would have understood why their efforts to discourage Pakistan from going nuclear were doomed to fail from the mid-1970s onward. Similarly, if current American officials understand Pakistan's strategic culture, and the role of key individuals and elites within the country's key strategic institutions, they would have a much better handle on the question of how reliable an ally Pakistan will be now and in the future.

For more insights into contemporary international security issues, see our *Strategic Insights* home page.

To have new issues of *Strategic Insights* delivered to your Inbox at the beginning of each month, email ccc@nps.edu with subject line "Subscribe." There is no charge, and your address will be used for no other purpose.

References

1. Leon T. Hadar, Pakistan in America's War against Terrorism: Strategic Ally or Unreliable Client?" *Policy Analysis* (Cato Institute) no. 436, 8 May 2002. See also Alfred Stepan and Agil Shah, "Pakistan's Real Bulwark," *Washington Post*, May 5, 2004, p. A29.

2. Most senior U.S. officials describe the U.S.-Pakistan relationship in this language. This particular wording comes from then Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, "The Promise of Our Partnership," *The News* (Islamabad) March 17, 2004.

3. An early statement of this approach can be found in Peter R. Lavoy, "Nuclear Myths and the Causes of Nuclear Proliferation," Security Studies 2, nos. 3/4 (Spring/Summer 1993): 192-212. A more recent application is contained in Peter R. Lavoy, Learning to Live with the Bomb: India, the United States, and the Myths of Nuclear Security (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2006).

4. Liberalism (or neo-liberalism) is another popular theoretical approach in the IR literature, but I do not draw on it for my analysis of Pakistan's strategic behavior because the liberal arguments that war does not pay and that cooperation can ameliorate the security dilemma are not particularly useful for illuminating Pakistan's national security policy. For background on neo-liberalism, see Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (New York: Harper Collins, 1977); and Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford Kupchan, "Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe," *International Security* 16, no. 1 (1991): 114-61.

5. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979), 128. The first prediction concerns an outcome of international interaction and thus is less directly relevant to the task of explaining state behavior.

6. On balancing, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; and Stephen M. Walt's applications of realism to the problem of alignment: *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); "Alliance Formation and the Balance of Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (Spring 1985): 3-43; and "Testing Theories of Alliance Formation: The Case of Southwest Asia," *International Organization* 43, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 275-316.

7. Walt argues that states balance not because of an unfavorable redistribution of international political, economic, or military capabilities (Waltz's argument), but rather in response to threats

stemming from the identity, aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive military might, and perceived intentions of adversaries. *The Origins of Alliances*, 21-26, 263-66; "Testing Theories of Alliance Formation," 279-82, 311-13.

8. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 168. On the tradeoffs states make in choosing between arms and alliances in their security policies, see Benjamin Most and Randolph Siverson, "Substituting Arms and Alliances, 1870-1914: An Exploration in Comparative Foreign Policy," in *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy*, ed. Charles F. Hermann, et al. (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 131-57; Michael N. Barnett and Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962-73," *International Organization* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 369-95; and James D. Morrow, "On the Theoretical Basis of a Measure of National Risk Attitudes," *International Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (December 1987): 423-38.

9. Waltz, *Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, 2. On this point, see also Keith Krause, *Arms and the State: Patterns of Military Production and Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 15-16. For inventories of the balancing options available to states, see Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955), ch. 3; and Glenn H. Snyder, "Alliances, Balance, and Stability," *International Organization* 45, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 128.

10. Snyder completed this definition with the phrase, "with regard to nuclear strategy," but that more limited definition was crafted for the particular problem he was analyzing. Jack Snyder, The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options (Santa Monica: Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1977), R-2154-AF, 8.

11. Stephen Peter Rosen, *Societies and Military Power: India and its Armies* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 12. Rosen focuses on the impact of the norms and structures of Indian society (Indian culture) on India's strategic organizations (e.g., the army, the officer corps, the soldiers).

12. Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (Spring 1995): 45. See also Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

13. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). For an excellent survey of the intellectual progression of strategic cultural analysis, see Jeffrey S. Lantis, "Strategic Culture and National Security Policy," *International Studies Review* 4, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 87-113.

14. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Factbook, 2005*.

15. Khalid bin Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase, 1957-1948* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 264.

16. Stanley A. Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 348.

17. By contrast, Indians believe that Pakistan justifies its existence by vilifying India, and cannot live in peace with its large and prosperous neighbor.

18. Pakistan's population is 97% Muslim. About 77% of the population is Sunni; 20% are Shi'a. Language is often a reliable indicator of ethnicity. The breakdown of languages that Pakistanis speak is: Punjabi 48%, Sindhi 12%, Siraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%, Pashtu 8%, Urdu (the

country's official language) 8%, Balochi 3%, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1%, English (official and lingua franca of Pakistani elite and most government ministries), Burushaski, and other 8%. CIA, *The World Factbook, 2005*.

19. For a comprehensive analysis of Pak-Afghan tensions over the Durand Line, with particular emphasis on the destabilizing effect of ongoing combat operations against Al Qaeda and the Taliban, see Tariq Mahmood, "The Durand Line: South Asia's Next Trouble Spot," master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, June 2005.

20. For background, see Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

21. The leading proponent of this view is Kenneth N. Waltz, in Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 109-24. See also Devin Hagerty, *The Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation: Lessons from South Asia* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998); Peter R. Lavoy, "South Asia's Nuclear Revolution: Has It Occurred Yet?" in The *Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime: Prospects for the 21st Century*, ed. Raju G. C. Thomas (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 260-71; and more generally, Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

22. Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), *Fact Sheet on Jammu and Kashmir*, May 20, 2002.

23. Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Jammu and Kashmir Dispute."

24. 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.

25. 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).

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

27. 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.

28. The claim about decision making is well known: the goals, judgments and perceptions of policy makers mediate foreign policy decisions. From the vast literature on foreign policy decision making, see especially Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Harold and Margaret Sprout, *The Ecological Perspective on Human Affairs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); Yaacov Y. I. Vertzberger, *The World in Their Minds: Information Processing, Cognition, and Perception in Foreign Policy Decisionmaking* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990); and Alexander L. George, "The Causal Nexus between Cognitive Beliefs and Decision-Making Behavior: The 'Operational Code' Belief System," in *Psychological Models in International Politics*. ed. Lawrence S. Falkowski (Boulder: Westview, 1979), 95-124.

29. For background, see Zafar Iqbal Cheema, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Policy under Z. A. Bhutto and Zia-ul-Haq: An Assessment,” *Strategic Studies* 15 (Summer 1992): 5-20; and Ashok Kapur, *Pakistan’s Nuclear Development* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 24-28.

30. For background, see C. Christine Fair, The Counterterror Coalitions: Cooperation with India and Pakistan (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2004), MG-141-AF; and Peter R. Lavoy, “Fighting Terrorism and Avoiding War in South Asia: The Indo-Pakistani Situation,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 32 (Autumn 2002).

31. See “Highlights of General Pervez Musharraf’s Address to the Nation,” September 19, 2004.

32. *Ibid*.

33. Lantis, “Strategic Culture and National Security Policy,” 111.