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*A MORE ROBUST INDIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE
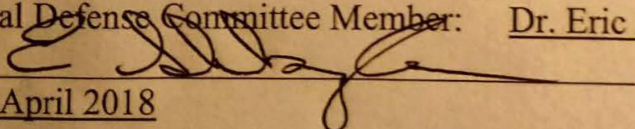ACHIEVED BY IMPROVING CIVIL MILITARY RELATIONS*

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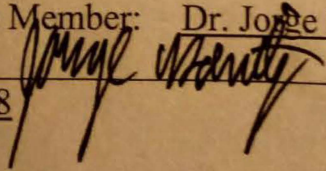AUTHOR:

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Executive Summary

Title: A More Robust Indian Strategic Culture Achieved by Improving Civil Military Relations.

Author: Major Saurabh Kumar Misra, Indian Army.

Thesis: India has a passive strategic culture that has been influenced by its ancient civilization, Strategic Autonomy, and Strategic Restraint. This makes India a defensive and reactive power, the reasons for which are: Cultural Pacifism in the Indian society, national perceptions on non-violence, lack of existential wars in India's modern history, and ambivalence towards military in national security decision making. This passivity can be overcome by energizing civil military relations, which will involve the military in India's security decision-making and enable it to adopt a proactive approach to strategic affairs in order to secure national interests.

Discussion: India's strategic behavior since independence can be explained using the concept of strategic culture. Numerous influences on the Indian mindset since ancient times have resulted in a strategic culture that makes India a reactive power. Being non violent and peaceful is an inherent attribute of Indian philosophy but with rising challenges to India's sovereignty both internally and externally, a reactive approach to strategic issues may let the country down. It is imperative to analyze the reasons behind India's passive strategic culture in order to overcome India's reactive and defensive behavior. While it is not possible to change historical reasons behind India's passivity, energizing the presently obsolete civil military relations promises a cascading effect on India's strategic culture.

Conclusion: Establishing a balanced civil military framework and developing cross functional expertise within the national strategic establishment promise a way to overcome passivity in India's strategic culture, provided political will prevails over bureaucracy. India's efforts to achieve a more robust strategic culture will determine its ability to overcome its shortcomings in strategic culture, and enable it to attain a respectable status in the international order.

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Preface

India's strategic behavior presents a dichotomy to an interested observer. The country produces adequate wherewithal to be a significant power, yet chooses to be a reactive and defensive nation. I have tried to find an explanation in the study of India's strategic culture, specifically the reasons behind India's passivity in strategic issues. I have attempted to identify key factors in India's history, which in my understanding have significantly influenced India's strategic culture. It is my conviction that Indian decision-makers need to understand the formative influences on the national mindset to be able to identify potential weaknesses, and institute measures to guard against these. India is poised to be a major power in the coming decades. At the same time however, India will be confronted with even greater challenges. Unless the Indian strategic community firmly acts to overcome the shortcomings in its strategic culture, achieving the status of a developed country that is regarded as a major power might prove to be impossible.

Introduction

India is a status quo power and has used force only to maintain sovereignty, both internally and externally. This is a result of India's strategic culture, which has been a subject of debate in the past two decades. This debate has gathered momentum as the country has experienced a high rate of economic growth and is poised to be one of the major powers of the 21st century.[1] In *Joint Doctrine: Indian Armed Forces*, the national aim is spelt out as, "To create a conducive external and internal security environment for unhindered and inclusive socio-economic development."[2] This articulation of the national aim epitomizes the essence of the Indian strategic culture and it is in this context that this paper aims to study it to explore the shortcomings and ways to enhance its effectiveness.

In 1992, George Tanham wrote that India comes across as country with an absence of strategic thinking, and hence an incoherent strategic culture.[3] This makes India a reactive and defensive power.[4] That India lacks a strategic culture has been effectively refuted by a number of experts, both Indian and international. However, Tanham's argument of India being a reactive and defensive power holds true. India has consistently followed a policy of "Strategic Restraint"[5] in matters of military strategy and in the face of threats to national security.

Strategic restraint has often compromised India's vital interests. For example, India has been a subject of cross border terrorism since the late 1980s and has not yet been able to address the root cause of the problem, which is a Pakistan sponsored proxy war that exploits religious fundamentalism.[6] There are many examples like this in India's post independence history. In terms of national resources alone, India might have paid a heavier price in exercising strategic restraint than what it might have incurred while being proactive in tackling threats to national security. This is a

dichotomy especially when one considers India's considerable military and economic resources. In terms of military capability, India has one of the largest armed forces in the world, a credible nuclear weapons and delivery program, and a vibrant space establishment. This dichotomy can be explained by examining the passivity in India's strategic culture.[7]

India has a passive strategic culture that has been influenced by its ancient civilization, Strategic Autonomy, and Strategic Restraint. This makes India a defensive and reactive power, the reasons for which are: Cultural Pacifism in the Indian society, national perceptions on non-violence, lack of existential wars in India's modern history, and ambivalence towards military in national security decision making. This passivity can be overcome by energizing civil military relations, which will involve the military in India's security decision-making and enable it to adopt a proactive approach to strategic affairs in order to secure national interests.

In the coming decades, India will experience increased challenges to its national security and a passive strategic culture will not bode well for the nation's interests. India will confront increasing complexity of global affairs, an ever-deteriorating security situation in South Asia, and strategic competition with China. India will also combat increased radicalization and violent non-state actors internally. The need to provide for a huge population and the quest for economic prosperity will require providing uninterrupted economic growth for the country, while keeping external threats at bay.[8] For this, India has to overcome the inherent passivity that it displays in strategic affairs and develop a more robust strategic culture.

This paper has a three-fold approach to recommending measures to achieving a more robust Indian strategic culture. First, the concept of strategic culture will be explained. This will be followed by an analysis of Indian strategic culture, which will

explore the reasons behind passivity in Indian strategic culture. The third part of the paper will consist of recommendations for achieving a more robust strategic culture.

Strategic Culture

A country's strategic culture provides some explanation of the way in which it interprets national security matters.[9] It is important to understand this because different communities think differently about strategic matters due to the influence of culture on their collective wisdom.[10] Alastair Iain Johnston mentions that strategic culture is an "ideational milieu, which limits behavior choices" of a nation.[11] This concept has evolved since its inception in the 1970s and has assisted in understanding the actions of nations based on their perceptions.[12] For the purpose of this paper, Kerry Longhurst's definition will be used:

> A distinctive body of beliefs, attitudes and practices regarding the use of force, which are held by a collective and arise gradually over time, through a unique protracted historical process. A strategic culture is persistent over time, tending to outlast the era of its original inception, although it is not a permanent or static feature. It is shaped and influenced by formative periods and can alter, either fundamentally or piecemeal, at critical junctures in that collective's experiences. The logic of strategic culture then, resides in the central belief that collective ideas and values about the use of force are important constitutive factors in the design and execution of states' security policies.[13]

Strategic culture limits the set of acceptable options that inform national strategy, foreign policy, and other aspects of statecraft. The actual manifestation of these aspects of statecraft is a negotiated settlement of competing interests inside the nation, within the limited set of options inside the ideational milieu.[14]

Three major sources influence strategic culture: physical environment, political system and beliefs, and socio-cultural attitudes on security. Historical experiences influence the latter two sources.[15] The nature of civil-military relations is also an important source in forming strategic culture and may be considered under the political

system and beliefs. Raj Shukla writes about the relevance of civil military relations on

matters of national security:

> Vital issues of statecraft and national security are determined by the pattern of institutional interaction between the civil and military components of a nation's polity. The ordering of civil – military relations, therefore, lies at the heart of a nation's security framework.[16]

The nature of civil military relations determines the preconditions and rationale behind

the use of force by the state.[17] This interaction between the executive, bureaucracy, and

military institutions influences strategic culture. All these factors combine to form a set

of experiences for the state from which it can draw vital lessons.

Historical influences weigh heavily on a nation's strategic culture and help the

state in making sense of the world around it. While strategic culture is not a permanent

feature and slowly evolves, with a continuous "fine tuning", drastic fundamental

changes are rare.[18] The strategic culture of pre and post WW2 Japan is a rare example

of fundamental change.[19] Present day pacifist strategic culture of Japan limits the set of

options that the state conceives in order to manage strategic affairs. However, with

escalating tensions in Japan-China and Japan-North Korea relations and a lack of trust

in the US security commitment, one can observe a gradual shift from the pacifist

attitude.[20]

Another important attribute of strategic culture is that this concept does not

replace rational choice; rather, it influences its perception amongst the decision makers.

Colin S. Gray writes that, "The trouble lies with the content of that rationality, with its

reasonableness in our encultured view, not with the process which purposefully

connects means with ends."[21] He goes on to give the example of a suicide bomber, who

is a rational actor within his encultured view, but to others, this behavior is not

reasonable. Gray however, cautions against determinism and stereotyping strategic

culture and attempting to use it to accurately predict future state behavior. This is

because variations in behavior are bound to occur and yet may not be powerful enough to alter the strategic culture. The true utility of strategic culture is in helping understand observed state behavior in the present or the past.[22]

The strategic culture of a country can lead it to be either a status quo or revisionist power. Status quo states seek to preserve the present international order. Revisionist states on the other hand strive to change the way the affairs of the international system are conducted or seek more territory or power. They are dissatisfied with their place in global affairs.[23] Both revisionist and status quo states work towards possessing the capabilities they deem necessary to achieve their desired end state.[24]

An example of a status quo power in Asia is South Korea. It considers war with North Korea a distinct possibility. However, it accepts the international order, working towards attaining national prosperity and countering the existential threat from its northern neighbor within the existing international system.[25] North Korea, on the other hand is an aggressive revisionist state. Its behavior is a result of the expectations and ambitions of its ruler who has been able to engage in brinksmanship using the threat of nuclear weapons. It is unsatisfied with the present international order and aspires reunification with South Korea.[26]

Within Asia, Pakistan is also a revisionist state, striving to redraw boundaries with India since independence.[27] China is an assertive revisionist power. It believes that the international order does not yet recognize its true worth. It is on a path of rapid military and economic development to realize its vision of being the "Middle Kingdom."[28] China and India are often referred to as "Asia's rising giants", with markedly different international behavior.[29] In the case of India, its strategic culture can provide some explanation of this difference.

India's Strategic Culture

Apart from its physical environment, political system, and sociocultural values on security, India's strategic culture is founded on the concepts on Strategic Autonomy and Strategic Restraint. These factors lead to India being a status quo state. India aspires to work within the existing international order and be capable of securing its national interests.[30] Deep-rooted historical values of peaceful coexistence, acceptance of other cultures, and use of force as the last resort shape the outlook of this strategic culture. However, there is an awareness of the need for self-help in a perceived anarchic world order, and thus an element of Realpolitik can be detected in India's strategic culture.[31] The overall orientation of this strategic culture is towards realizing the quest of India as a developed nation with its rightful place in the world.

India's understanding of its rightful place in the world is very different from the Western construct of international influence or the Chinese Middle Kingdom "Complex." Shyam Saran, former Foreign Secretary of India states that India's world-view does not apply centrality or superiority to the nation, and accepts other cultures and nations.[32] This has remained consistent throughout the history of its civilization.

Historical influences on India's strategic culture are profound. Since ancient times, Indians have considered India to be a geographical entity covering the Indian subcontinent, south of the Himalayas, and east of the Hindu Kush. This area is part of a larger landmass, referred to as the "Jambudvipa", or Asia.[33] This worldview indicates acceptance of other civilizations and accommodation of their values, an embrace of pluralism.

Geography has allowed Indians interaction with other cultures since antiquity. India has been at the cross roads of both maritime and land based trade, spread of religion, and conquests.[34] Large-scale conquests predating Alexander the Great to the arrival of the Europeans have taken place in the subcontinent. On many occasions, the

conquerors were eventually assimilated into the Indian culture.[35] For example, the Mughal Empire, a Muslim dynasty, ruled over a Hindu dominated subcontinent for over 300 years. In spite of foreign origins, these rulers became one with the local population. It is interesting to note that historically, empires in the Indian subcontinent have rarely attempted to conquer territory beyond the geographical confines of the subcontinent.[36] A common factor of Indian society, irrespective of religion or ethnicity, has been the belief in "Dharma" or a "way of life".[37]

The concept of Dharma has often been misquoted as a Hindu way of life. It is rather a code of conduct or a basis of behavior. Two timeless ancient Indian epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* serve to teach Dharma.[38] The concepts of a just war and the victory of good over evil are deeply ingrained in the Indian culture to this day. However, above all, the desire for peaceful co existence and the use of force only as the last resort, dominate this culture. Mahatma Gandhi, who spearheaded India's freedom struggle, also emphasized non-violent methods. Thus contemporary India has inherited a culture that is averse to violence.

In contemporary times, there is a realization that in order to attain the national aim and uplift the standard of living of one sixth of humanity, India must transform itself. Former Foreign Secretary, Shivshankar Menon, says that the scale and enormity of this task implies that India must become economically and militarily powerful. He states that India needs strength not to change the international system but for protecting national interests in the face of growing internal and external security challenges.[39]

Peaceful coexistence and multi-polarity in the world order remain the cornerstones of Indian foreign policy. Indian statesmen have stated consistently that Indian military power will not be used in a way that is harmful to other nations and it will strive to work towards mutually acceptable solutions and not resort to coercion,

even if it acquires considerable might.[40] Menon further quotes former Prime Minister

Indira Gandhi who articulates, "India will be a different kind of power."[41] In charting

this course towards the national aim, strategic autonomy has become an essential

attribute of India's strategic culture.

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh writes that strategic autonomy is "the

ability to take relatively autonomous decisions on matters perceived to be of vital

interest to India."[42] Strategic autonomy was born after the experience under the British

Empire. The subjugation to British rule spanning over 200 years has impacted collective

opinion. There is consensus that such a situation should never be allowed again, and the

nation should chart its own course in realizing its destiny. Post independence, this

manifested in mistrust of Western intentions, which were perceived as neo-

imperialistic.[43] India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, set the tone for India's

strategic autonomy, epitomized in his support for the Non Aligned Movement. [44]

Realpolitik in Indian strategic thinking also has ancient roots. The *Arthshastra*

is a treatise on economic policy, military strategy, and statecraft, written in the 4th

century BCE. It is an inspiration to modern Indian strategic and military thought and is

taught in civil service and military institutions. It teaches the pursuit of power through

realpolitik, and does not solely rely on military force. Western experts have compared

its author Kautilya to Machiavelli and the *Arthashastra* to Sun Tzu's *Art of War.*[45]

Arthashastra continues to inspire India's foreign policy. India's Non Alignment

Policy, apart from being set in ideals of peaceful co existence, also exhibited a sense of

realism. It enabled India to develop its Strategic Autonomy. Saran quotes Henry

Kissinger:

> The essence of this strategy was that it allowed India to allow support
> from both Cold War camps. However irritating to Cold War America, it
> was a wise course for an emerging nation. With a nascent military
> establishment and underdeveloped economy, India would have been a

respected but secondary ally in either superpower's camp. As a free agent, it could exercise a much wider reaching influence.[46]

Strategic autonomy has allowed India to chart its own independent path in the international community by formulating an independent foreign policy based on national interests. This has allowed India to become a major player in international affairs. Strategic Restraint on the other hand, has often taken India in the opposite direction and has markedly characterized India's behavior.

Strategic restraint has been a major attribute of India's strategic culture. Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta write that, "Reticence in the use of force as an instrument of state policy has been the dominant political condition for Indian thinking on the military," and that, "India has used force mainly in response to grave provocation and as an *unwelcome* last resort."[47] The desire to avoid confrontation has frequently prevailed over military necessity and led to suboptimal results for the nation; emboldening its rivals and creating negative implications for the future. While this has been labeled as "discretion" due to a "clear headed realization of India's strengths and weaknesses," its efficacy is suspect.[48] Foreign analysts like Tanham are not entirely mistaken in their observation of India lacking coherent strategic thought because what they observe is counter intuitive.

On numerous occasions, the nation has lacked a national strategy and firm political guidance for threats requiring the use of force. Military capability exists to preserve the status quo in order to secure national interests. The *intent* to use it, even in the face of dire threats has been found lacking. This is due to passivity in the country's strategic culture and has also been articulated by India's former External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh. He writes, "Indian nationalism which is non-territorial, emotional, and non-proselytizing, renders a passiveness in India's strategic cultural thinking."[49]

The nation's defensive behavior is due to a lack of national ambition to create the right conditions to settle conflicts. India's strategic culture has manifested in an uncomfortable and apologetic attitude in using force beyond immediate self-defense.[50] However, India's rivals, China and Pakistan are both revisionist powers and encircle India along her land borders. This "anti India" relationship has actively sought to damage India through nuclear weapons and ballistic missile proliferation, export of terrorism and proxy wars,[51] and the prospect of a "two and a half front" war for India, to include combatting internal instability.[52] In spite of such grave threats to India's survival interests, there is a glaring absence of national debate on strategic affairs and security, especially when contrasted with the intensity of debates on economic issues and politics.[53] Cohen and Dasgupta summarize this national attitude as:

> Public opinion polls in India as well as the actions of most Indian governments indicate that the tendency to restraint runs deep and remains the default option for most Indians. Polls evince an ambiguity about threats and offer no strong guidance to policy or strategy.[54]

The Indian Armed Forces have never displayed a lack of resolve to serve the nation, as with most professional armed forces of the world. This was evident in the Kargil War of 1999, which is still fresh in the nation's memory. General V.P. Mallik, the Army Chief during this war writes that the rate of attrition suffered was unusually high. In most battles, which were fought in altitudes above 15,000 feet, the combat ratio was 9:1 in favor of the defending Pakistan Army.[55] Similar accounts have emerged from all the wars and numerous external conflicts of the country since independence.[56] Within the Indian strategic culture, the military by itself has performed commendably. However, its management by the leadership and bureaucracy has lacked sophistication, which offers a glimpse into the passivity in mindset.

General Mallik condenses the nation's flawed approach to strategic affairs citing failures committed by India when dealing with China and Pakistan:

Tragically, several successive events (after the 1948 India-Pakistan War) approaching the UN Security Council on the J & K issue when we were winning that war, granting 'suzerainty' to China over Tibet in the 1950s without a quid pro quo (like the Indo-Pakistan dispute over J & K), provocative forward deployment policy on the Sino-Indian border without military preparedness in 1962, return of the strategically important Haji Pir Pass to Pakistan after the 1965 war, return of over 90,000 prisoners after the 1971 war without making Pakistan agree to a permanent solution of J & K and dithering for 24 years between testing of a nuclear device in 1974 and of the nuclear weapons in 1998 reflect on our inexperience and neglect of a strategic mindset. In 1999, we prepared a draft nuclear doctrine but introduced a clause of No First Use: We shall not use our weapons till the enemy bombs us![*] In 2002, we kept the armed forces deployed on the border for 10 months. But we were not clear as to what we wished to achieve from that.[57]

Today, India faces strategic challenges for which it is not prepared,[58] yet there is a lack of national outcry over these issues. Notable amongst these are: underutilization of allocated defense expenditure,[59] stalled military reforms and modernization due to lack of political will,[60] and countering Chinese "containment" of India.[61] General Mallik says that long-term strategic thinking, sociopolitical will, and national determination to amend strategic flaws are lacking in the nation, alluding to the passivity in strategic culture.[62]

Being a democracy, the military in India is completely subjugated to the civilian government. The population elects the political leadership, whose efforts are oriented towards issues considered important by the mandate of the population. The executive is assisted and advised by the bureaucracy, is responsible for articulating the nation's grand strategy and then executing it. David Fraser writes:

The art of strategy is to determine the aim, which is or should be political: to derive from that a series of military objectives to be achieved: to assess these objectives as to the military requirements they create, and the preconditions which the achievement of each is likely to necessitate: to measure available and potential resources against the requirements and to

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[*] India's nuclear weapons program, while accelerated due to Pakistan's similar program, is primarily meant for deterrence against China. In the scenario of a two front war, a No First Use policy may not be suitable for the survival interests of the country.

chart from this process a coherent pattern of priorities and a rational course of action.[63]

However, blaming or attributing success to the political leadership in hindsight cannot undermine the influence of strategic culture over the long term.

Strategic culture limits the options that a nation considers acceptable to approach a given situation. Within these options, consensus amongst the leadership, bureaucracy, and the legislature decides the final course of action to be taken. Throughout history, there have been societies and their leaders who have displayed the effective use of all instruments of power to achieve national aims. In case of India, these decisions have been clouded by a dearth of knowledge on military matters that has resulted in poor civil military relations and a lack of realistic assessment of the national security environment.

The consistent choice of strategic restraint over the years has failed the nation. If a cost benefit analysis were to be carried out it would be evident that India has spent more resources in maintaining strategic restraint compared to the cost of adopting a proactive strategy. This realization is certainly not lost on the leadership, bureaucracy, or the population.[64] Continuing with strategic restraint in spite of this realization clearly points towards a sense of passivity in the strategic culture. There *has* been a considerable reduction in this passivity since 2014 that deserves investigation.

India's actions since 2014 have indicated a behavioral shift in dealing with issues of national security. The government elected in 2014 has been able to overcome the shortcomings in the national strategic culture by the power of their personalities and the comfortable majority with which it was elected.[65] (Previous governments had been consistently bogged down by the vagaries of coalition politics.) A proactive Indian foreign policy and a less defensive military posture have been noticeable under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi.[66]

It may be argued that the element of passivity has reduced considerably since 2014. However, strategic culture is slow to change and the recent proactive behavior may fall back into passivity unless the root causes of passivity are addressed. India does not yet have a solid foundation to sustain the present proactive approach beyond the current administration. The country still doesn't have a declared National Security Strategy and lacks formal institutionalization of security related procedures.[67] Whether the measures implemented by the present administration result in long-term implications on India's strategic culture is not yet known, although there has been a propensity of the Indian state to behave in a reactive and defensive manner.

The bias in Indian strategic culture against the use of force can be attributed to four principle reasons. The foremost reason is the nature of Indian philosophy and approach to confrontations. The second reason is the non-violent nature of India's freedom struggle. The third reason is the absence of an existential war in the history of contemporary India. The last reason is a distrust of the military resulting in poor civil military relations.

Cultural pacifism has formed an important part of India's strategic culture. It is generally traced back by historians to King Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE who ruled over almost the entire Indian subcontinent.[68] Ashoka fought gruesome wars of conquest and became increasingly troubled by the violence and suffering. He subsequently embraced and propagated Buddhism, which abhors violence, in order to pacify his conscience. Though a minority in present day India, Buddhism has deeply affected the Indian concept of Dharma, to include a pacifist attitude.[69]

Cultural pacifism is evident across religious divides in the subcontinent. Hinduism, the dominant religion in the region, has influenced certain common philosophical perceptions as all other religions arrived later, converting existing Hindu

populations.[70] One such perception is about proselytization. Hinduism does not endorse a proselytizing tradition.[71] Historically, apart from invaders from the West, there have been no wars to spread religion in India. Even the powerful Mughal Empire, with the exception of one ruler, did not actively pursue conversion to Islam.[72] Tanham writes that in spite of having being repeatedly invaded over the millennia, India's ability to accommodate in various ways to the invaders has created a culture that defines India's identity.[73]

Scholars consider the term Hindu as a geographical rather than a religious concept that is all encompassing. This also implies that the inhabitants of this region are governed by Dharma.[74] Hindu derives its name from the River Indus that flows along the western portion of the subcontinent.[75] The subcontinent itself is referred to as "a world family", or *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.*[76] This philosophy encourages a pacifist culture, secularity, acceptance, and an accommodative attitude.

The lack of expansionist military tradition in India is also an essential part of this attitude. Geography and natural resources, coupled with a nonaggressive philosophy did not create sufficiently lucrative incentives for Indian empires to expand beyond the Indian subcontinent.[77] The Indian subcontinent accounted for between 25 to 33% of the world GDP till the 18th century, prior to the Industrial Revolution in Europe.[78] Fertile river valleys, forests, and mineral deposits ensured that all requirements of the empires were met within the subcontinent. Land and seaborne trade were vibrant and the need for military expansion beyond the subcontinent never arose. In the South, seaborne military expansion took place nearly a thousand years ago, creating colonies in Southeast Asia, but the impetus died down subsequently. Modern India has largely inherited this geographical construct, which explains a lack of expansionist military tradition in the present times.[79]

National perceptions on the use of violence have been founded in the country's freedom struggle under Mahatma Gandhi. He was the main protagonist in shaping independent India's identity as a Non Aligned nation and the national belief in non-violence.[80] His method of mobilizing the masses against the British rule was in the form of "Nonviolent Civil Disobedience" rather than revolutionary ideologies. The success of his methods in India, and their emulation around the colonized world at the time immortalized his philosophy.

National leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru who were groomed under Mahatma Gandhi carried forward this conviction in an independent India.[81] Most of this generation of leaders were idealists and believed that India should chart a different course for itself in the world using non-violent means. Moreover, the freedom struggle was the only time when the entire population was mobilized for a national cause, which happened to be founded on non-violence. Never again has the nation been united with the same intensity and sense of purpose and this is the reason why non-violence has remained firmly in the national conscience.

The Preamble to India's constitution lists out "peaceful co-existence, pluralism, tolerance, and international peace" as some of India's National Values.[82] However, Gandhi, cognizant of an anarchic world order, also says, "I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honor than that she should, in a cowardly manner, become or remain a helpless witness to her dishonor."[83] To proactively use force therefore would seem to be a contradiction from national values. These perceptions have affected the strategic culture.

India is the only country in the world that has a significant military capability but has not fought an existential war either historically, or as an independent nation. When contrasted with European history, the tradition of strategic thinking has been

absent in India.[84] Post-independence, wars with Pakistan and China did not threaten the survival of the country. While Pakistan does retain a third of the province of Jammu and Kashmir, it had invaded this province *before* it acceded to India. Pakistan is a significantly smaller adversary and could not claim worthwhile operational successes in its wars with India.[85] The war with China was swift and restricted in nature. China intended to consolidate its control over Tibet and establish a psychological victory over India. It succeeded in these limited aims.[86] India has also not experienced a civil war that would unhinge its society.

The need to inculcate a militaristic outlook in the society or to innovate as a nation has never arisen. Cohen and Dasgupta contrast this with Israel, Vietnam, and Pakistan. These nations have all had to innovate because they have fought larger powers for their survival.[87] Israel has a clear distinctive strategic culture, and its society is psychologically and physically equipped to be able to deal with the permanent state of existential crises.[88]

The impact of existential wars on the civil societies of major world powers like the US, China, or Russia has been significant. Whenever nations have fought superior adversaries, their ability to innovate and proactively pursue national interests has risen dramatically. The *whole of government approach* to fighting the war has been enabled by an energized civil military cooperation. The forced systemic reforms that occur during such wars are sudden, and often permanent. The Unified Command Plan and National Security Act 1947 of the US for example, are post-war formal institutionalizations of command of forces during WW2.[89] This has enabled these nations to effectively bring into the wars their entire national effort and develop strategic thinking in the society. During the World Wars, in spite of the enormous contribution of the British Indian Army around the world, the effect on Indian population was

minimal. Moreover, Indians received no experience in strategic planning, since the British restricted that to themselves.[90]

A subconscious ambivalence in India towards the military is the final reason behind India's pacifist attitude. This feeling has subsided considerably 70 years after independence. However, at the time of independence, India had inherited the *British Indian Army*. The same army had been used by the British Empire to preserve its hold on India, and was looked upon with contempt by the Indian freedom fighters.[91] Secondly, the nation deemed powerful standing armed forces as a drain on its precious resources,[92] especially up to the 1962 India-China War. Prime Minister Nehru believed that India would be able to make a difference in the world through its diplomacy and soft power.[93] These factors played an important role in shaping national biases about the military and use of force. The repeated military takeovers of civilian government in Pakistan have also bred a sense of unease in India regarding its own armed forces.[94]

Indian armed forces have consistently been an important pillar of the nation, but there is a realization that the armed forces should not be allowed to become too powerful. Thus the existence of Samuel Huntington's "Objective Civilian Control" in India is prudent to preserve democracy.[95] However, the *nature* of this civilian control has compromised effective civil military cooperation.

Indians inherently lack a militaristic outlook, unlike other societies that have experienced war at close quarters. In addition, military aspects are often overlooked in government decision-making.[96] The bureaucratic status of the armed forces in the country is also not commensurate with their responsibilities. As a result, civilian bureaucracy interdicts legitimate security concerns and interprets them with a different perspective.[97] The addition of protocol on the premise that the political leadership will need assistance in interpreting strategic military decisions[98] is flawed. This results in an

underrepresentation of the military's perspective, which is often directly linked to survival interests of the country.

In major powers such as US and China, the military actively participates in relevant areas of national decision-making, enabled by effective civil military relations.[99] In India, an absence of such institutionalized mechanisms[100] leads to neglect of strategic issues and hence a sense of passivity. Cohen and Dasgupta summarize the situation as follows:

> India simply lacks civilian expertise in military matters. Few politicians are interested in defense until forced by events. The bureaucracy that functions as the secretariat for the political leaders comprises generalists with little practical knowledge of military matters, but this group lobbies powerfully to preserve its position against military encroachment. Even the Ministry of External Affairs, with the greatest institutional capacity for international relations, has very few people with sound knowledge of military matters. Although the armed services are highly professional and have the necessary expertise, they remain excluded from the high table.[101]

Shukla too says that India's national security apparatus excludes the armed forces from its ambit with its structural design and accompanying bureaucracy. He says that this is an outdated structure and will likely falter when dealing with strategic challenges in the future.[102] India inherited the erstwhile British system of civil military relations in 1947, while the British themselves have evolved four times since in keeping up with modern day challenges.[103] India, on the other hand has regressed in the efficacy of its own civil military relations.[104]

The four factors stated above have combined to produce passivity in India's strategic culture. While no single factor can significantly affect national perceptions, this combination is powerful enough to affect India's strategic culture. All other facets of shortcomings in India's strategic culture may be traced back to these four factors.

Historical causes for passivity cannot be changed. An acceptance of the disadvantages of passivity in strategic culture is the first step in trying to improve it. The

past 70 years has given the Indian state vital strategic experience, in spite of passivity. A number of lessons have been drawn out and it may be said with certainty that the continuous "fine tuning" in strategic culture is at play, especially with the proactive approach of the current administration. The awareness of the need to come out of a passive strategic mindset has increased considerably.[105] There is a realization that India will be able to tackle future challenges only if there is a change in its approach to strategic affairs.[106]

Energizing civil military relations offers a way of overcoming this passivity and institutionalizing measures that will ensure that its negative effects are mitigated. There is still a dissonance between the views of the civilian and military leadership on the proper role of the military in national security policy formulation and decision-making.[107] The foremost objective in overcoming passivity is to achieve this convergence. Energizing civil military relations must be directed towards involving the military in national security decision making[108] and enabling a proactive approach to securing national interests.

The Way Forward: Energize Civil Military Relations

Involving the military in national security decision-making is the most crucial step in the way forward. This will have a cascading effect and will make the executive and bureaucracy aware of the military's perspective on strategically important issues. The awareness of certain sections of the population may improve with a greater involvement of the military, which will influence the political mandate of elected governments to act on these issues. Institutionalization of reforms that materialize as a result will have a reinforcing effect on the nature of civil military relations. If

consistently pursued over time and over emergent strategic challenges, these changes will influence the "fine tuning" of the Indian strategic culture, making it more robust.

A number of high-level committees have projected the need for reforms in civil military relations since the 1999 Kargil War. These include the Kargil Committee Report and the Naresh Chandra Committee Report, which explicitly highlight the lacunae in the higher defense organization of the country, inefficient civil military relations, and need for systemic reforms.[109] In spite of the gravity of the matter, only cosmetic action has been taken[110] in response due to the pivotal shortcoming of civil military relations at the highest echelons of the government.[111] The first step towards energizing civil military relations would entail two important aspects: establishment of a balanced civil military framework at the highest level of government and affecting "cross-pollination" between military, civilian expertise, and bureaucracy. The execution of wider reforms will become much simpler once these basic steps are taken.

Establishing a balanced civil military framework at the Cabinet level will allow for a suitable representation of strategic issues through the participation of the armed forces. An institutionalized direct dialogue between the PM and military will result in a top-down emphasis on national decision making inclusive of strategic and military matters.[112] This is possible by amending the National Security Council (NSC). The NSC is the apex authority for national security decision-making and functions under the Prime Minister and has the Ministers of Defense, Finance, External Affairs, and Home Affairs as its members.

The National Security Advisor (NSA) is the top government officer in the NSC, assisted by two Deputy NSAs.[113] The NSC was established in 1998 after a prolonged effort by the Armed Forces to institutionalize the top echelons of national security. Ironically, the armed forces are under represented in the NSC while bureaucrats from

the foreign, administrative, and police services are appointed as the NSA/Deputy NSAs.[114] The armed forces and their expertise in strategic affairs must be represented in the NSC by having at least one of the NSA/Deputy NSAs as the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC). This will ensure direct strategic inputs in national security decision making to the political leadership.

The interface between the military and executive provided by the bureaucracy on the pretext that India's political leadership is incapable of dealing directly with the military is inefficient and based on shaky grounds.[115] Removing this bureaucratic layer will allow the military to directly convey the gravity of strategic issues to the executive. Shukla describes this as two-tiered structure: executive on the top tier, and the military and civilian bureaucracy sharing the bottom tier.[116] The involvement of the military in the NSC increases the "cross pollination" in civil-military relations that needs urgent attention.

Cross-functional expertise or "cross pollination" is indispensible in institutions making complex national security decisions. This needs participation by professionals specializing in their respective fields and working together towards a common purpose. The civilian bureaucracy, by virtue of their profession does not specialize in niche aspects of strategic affairs.[117] Similarly, the military is schooled in matters of war fighting and does not have adequate resources for important aspects that need academic expertise. The national security establishment needs cross-functional expertise in which it can draw on strengths of the bureaucracy, armed forces, academia, and the strategic community.[118]

The bureaucracy's education on strategic affairs to include military aspects is essential. This must commence with an increase in the level of strategic studies in government training institutions and must also be supplemented by increased training

with the armed forces in their institutions.[119] The establishment of a National Defense University (NDU) is underway with the aim of bolstering cross-functional expertise in the field of strategic affairs.[120] It aims to improve inter agency cooperation and civil military relations. The NDU must be made a key participant in enabling cross-pollination by imparting relevant education. The armed forces need experience in managing higher defense organization of the nation in coordination with the bureaucracy, and this aspect must be factored in defense establishments for General officers such as the National Defense College (NDC) in New Delhi. Senior officers in the military and bureaucracy are well placed to drive changes and therefore must be groomed accordingly by respective institutions.

Academics, technocrats, and think tanks in the strategic community are an untapped resource in the country. These must be included inside the government decision-making process in various capacities. These resources can bring in vital expertise into the strategic community that the bureaucracy and the military are incapable of providing for by themselves. Domain specialists can provide vital advice and insights to the decision makers and inform their opinion.[121] There are a number of Indian scholars capable of advising the government through various mechanisms who work in influential think tanks in India and abroad. A high degree of cross-functional expertise exists in the United States and generates an enormous amount of expert advice for the nation's security community.[122]

Improving National Security Architecture and ensuring "cross pollination" are small yet significant steps in energizing civil military relations. Given the present state of affairs, wherein on one hand there is a sense of passivity, and a sense of deep unease due to threats to the nation on the other, these measures could unleash a wave of change. These require huge political will to overcome the institutional resistance of the

bureaucracy.[123] The present administration is well placed to execute these reforms, though it has been difficult to detect tangible progress.[124] Once implemented, they have the potential to trigger off a series of national reforms, which will assist in overcoming the shortcomings in the nation's strategic culture, and adopting a proactive approach.

Conclusion

India's strategic culture lends it to being a status quo power as it aims to achieve socio economic growth and development. The strategic culture has been influenced by India's ancient history, culture, and geography that have had a major impact on the Indians' perceptions on the use of force. Since independence, India has consistently exercised strategic autonomy and strategic restraint, which have affected the nation's strategic culture. The consistent choice of strategic restraint, in spite of any perceived advantages, betrays passivity in India's strategic culture. India may have lost more due to its restraint than it would have if it had been proactive, and this realization is not lost on the country's rulers.

Passivity in Indian strategic culture is due to historical and cultural reasons. One of the major reasons has been an ambivalence towards the military, which has resulted in poor civil military relations and sidelining of the military. Civil military relations influence strategic culture of a nation, and the same is true in India, contributing to passivity. While historical reasons cannot be changed, the nature of civil military relations in the country can certainly be energized to affect a proactive approach by the nation. Establishing a balanced civil military framework and "cross pollination" of expertise can enable this, provided political will prevails over bureaucracy. In the end, India's ability to generate a more robust strategic culture will determine its ability to overcome its shortcomings in strategic culture, and enable it to attain a respectable status in the international order.

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