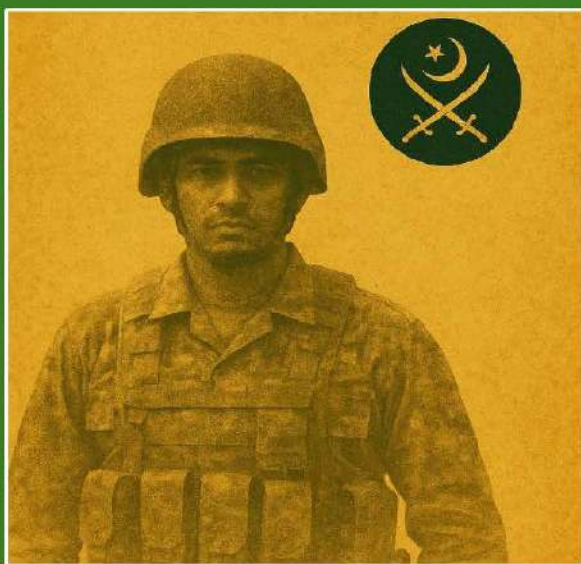


USI Monograph No 6 - 2025

Pakistan Army's Strategic Culture: Implications and Threat Assessment



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United Service Institution of India (USI)
New Delhi

About the Monograph

This monograph offers a comprehensive examination of the Pakistan Army's strategic mindset, shaped by Partition, geography, Islam, military legacy, and rent-seeking geopolitics. It argues that Pakistan's institutional character as a security state has enabled the army to dominate national policy, economy, and society, often at the cost of development. The monograph highlights how Pakistan's strategic culture has been defined by an enduring rivalry with India, a pursuit of parity, and the exploitation of religious identity. It assesses implications for India, including vulnerabilities in Balochistan, sectarian strife, and the army's use of sub-conventional warfare and nuclear deterrence. Importantly, it recommends a strategic Indian posture that avoids reactive entanglement while disincentivising the Pakistan Army's adventurism. Rich in historical insight and policy relevance, the monograph is a vital contribution to understanding a persistent regional threat and the contours of an informed Indian response.

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Introduction

If an Egyptian stops being a Muslim, he is still an Egyptian; if a Turk stops being a Muslim, he is still a Turk; but if a Pakistani stops being a Muslim, he becomes an Indian’.

- General Zia-ul-Haq, 1987¹

In many ways, the Pakistan Army is much like the Indian Army. Their core genetic cultural configurations lead to similar tastes in music, films, and sports. Commonality of languages results in accurate communication without distortions or misunderstandings. These aspects, however, should not mislead India into believing that they are similar in 2025, because the paths that both armies have adopted since 1947 cannot be more different.

Strategic culture reflects the values of a nation regarding the use of force and flows from a nation’s history and experiences, geography, resources, society, and its political structure.² A study of strategic culture of a country dominated by civilians would focus on civilian leaders and institutions. In Pakistan, however, the army and foreign policy, besides permeating most aspects of governance. Hence, a study of the strategic culture of Pakistan is synonymous with the strategic culture of the Pakistan Army.³

The strategic culture of a nation flows from its history, geography, past experiences, society, resources, and its political structure. The contributing factors to strategic culture of the Pakistan Army are:

- Partition.
- Geography.
- Cultural Legacy and Islam.

- The Wars of 1948, 1965 and the shock of 1971.
- Afghanistan.
- The United States (US).
- Resources.

Chapter 1: Contributing Factors to Strategic Culture

Partition

North West Frontier. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh crossed the Indus and captured Peshawar, the winter capital of the Durrani Dynasty in 1823 from the Afghans, it was an important event in history because invaders from Alexander to Timur Lane to Nadir Shah, the Abdalis, and the Mughals had all moved in the opposite direction. The Sikh empire, however, declined rapidly over the next two decades and lost the region to the British via the Treaty of Lahore of 1846. After several costly campaigns to pacify the Afghans, the British forced them to accept the Durand Line as the boundary between British India and Afghanistan in 1893.⁴ A North West Frontier Province (NWFP) was established, where 80 per cent of the Indian Army was normally stationed in the early years of the 20th Century, controlling the unruly tribes to ensure that Afghanistan remained a buffer zone between British India and Tsarist Russia as part of the Great Game.⁵

Martial Races Theory. The experience of 1857 led to a major change in recruitment policies. The upper caste Hindus and Muslims were forbidden into the army, and preference was given to those races that stood by the British during the Mutiny—especially the Sikhs, Dogras, and Gorkhas, among others. This was codified under the ‘Martial Race’ theory.⁶ Muslims from United Provinces were forbidden but those from Punjab, especially the Salt Range (Potwar), were considered reliable as also the Pashtuns from NWFP. When recruitment had to be scaled up during World War I, these regions and tribes got the largest share of recruitment, with almost zero representation from Bengal and

Assam. Similarly, South Indians were also largely excluded from the Martial Races.⁷

World War II. The British were responsible for the campaign in Southeast Asia. Several depots and factories came up along the main supply routes to the theatre for constructing the Ledo Road, as also resisting the Japanese offensive from Burma.

Partition of the British Indian Army. Partition happened very suddenly, and when the decision to divide the armed forces was finally taken, there were only 72 days available to implement the division.⁸ There were to be two phases. The first was a crude division of the existing armed forces on a communal basis. Muslim-majority units stationed outside Pakistan territory would be moved to Pakistan, and vice versa for non-Muslim majority units. In the second phase, every Indian officer and enlisted soldier would be classified as a Muslim or a non-Muslim and allowed to choose which state he would serve. Stores, depots, and training infrastructure were to be retained by respective nations being immovable. The Pakistanis were miffed that all 16 functional ordnance factories were in India because they were located along the main supply routes for the war in Southeast Asia much before partition was imagined.⁹ There was no machinery for the two factories in Pakistan which were not yet functional. India eventually compensated Pakistan with INR 06 Cr to set up an ordnance factory and a secure printing press. Pakistan also got a bad bargain in training institutions. Among the major ones, they got the Staff College in Quetta and the Royal Indian Army Service Corps Centre in Kakul, and all the rest, including the prized Indian Military Academy, went to India. It got the antiquated defensive forts along the Afghan border, along with naval facilities in Karachi and Chittagong.¹⁰

Partition Asset Dispute. The division of immovable assets became an early bone of contention, with India claiming that only personal equipment was to be divided and not stores. Eventually, Field Marshal Auchinleck ruled in favour of Pakistan on the issue. Once the Indians gave them the stores, the Pakistanis claim that what was given to them was broken and useless (see Image 1).¹¹ It was alleged that some tanks of the Poona Horse left behind in Pakistan were made inoperable by fouling their fuel tanks. Trains meant for Pakistan, it was claimed, were stopped East of Lahore and turned back.¹²

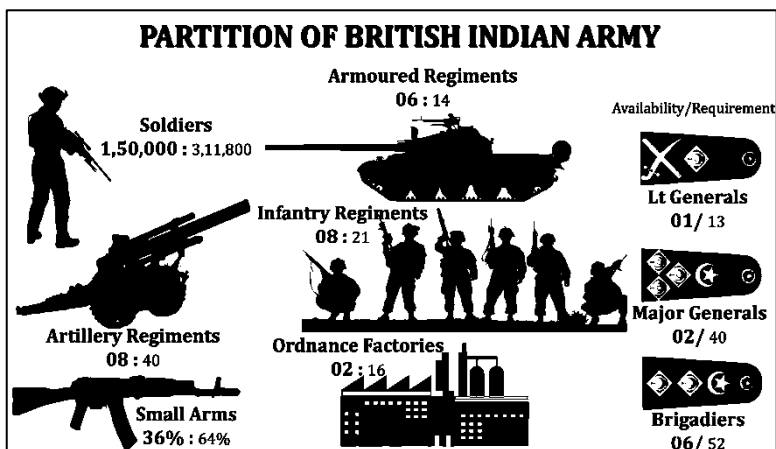


Image 1: Pakistan's share of the British Indian Army on Partition

Source: Visualisation by author

Dividing the Ranks. Except for the Gorkhas who were split between the British and Indian Armies, the rest of the army was divided in the ratio of 64:36, the rough communal ratio in undivided India.¹³ The British had permitted all Hindu and Sikh battalions such as Gorkhas, Dogras, and Sikhs, but had not maintained all-Muslims battalions since 1857.¹⁴ Hence, Pakistan

did not get any homogeneous battalions, leading to a claim that they got a 'Moth-eaten' army and nation.¹⁵

Baggage of Partition. Pakistan, therefore, felt cheated by the experience of Partition:

- It inherited almost all the burden of the external land defence of India, which was along the Afghan border.
- The forces that Pakistan had were needed on the Indo-Pak border, which posed a greater threat than the western front.
- Simultaneously, it was straddled with a huge refugee crisis.
- The British could draw from the revenue of the entire British Raj, but Pakistan's resources were meagre.¹⁶
- India, apparently, added insult to injury by denying Hyderabad, Junagarh, and ultimately Kashmir to Pakistan.

For India, Partition was undesirable and even avoidable, but once it had occurred, the process was complete. India was essentially a territorially satisfied state. Pakistan, however, views partition as unfinished business. It not only sees it as part of Pakistan's past, rather it permeates their present and casts a long shadow into the future.¹⁷ Most nations raise an army proportionate to the size of threat to their security. In Pakistan's case, the magnitude of security threats has been expanded to match the size of an army inherited from the colonial era.¹⁸

Geography

Lack of Geographical Depth. The nation that was formed in 1947 inherently lacked geographical depth in the event of an Indian attack with most of its population centres located close to the India border. The border was artificially drawn along a terrain that offered no natural barriers such as mountains or rivers, especially in the strategic plains of Punjab. Its main lines of communication ran parallel to the Indian border within a range of 100 kms. Except for Quetta, there is no Pakistani airfield farther than 240 kms from the Indian border. This has led to Pakistan seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan.¹⁹

Strategic Depth. This was initially construed as a physical space in which Pakistan could safely disperse its personnel and assets during a war with India. However, it is more appropriately defined as the cultivation of a friendly regime, expectantly an Islamic one, in Kabul that would enable Pakistan to avoid traditional insecurity or at least neutralise Western tribal borderlands and avoid future Afghan governments with strong links to New Delhi.²⁰ Another constraint imposed on Pakistan by geography is water. Pakistan was entirely dependent on water from the Indus and its tributaries, and all of them—except for the Kabul River—flow from India. Pakistan, however, has not had to factor water in its strategic calculus until 2025, because India till then had not leveraged its advantages as an upper riparian state—a generosity that has not been acknowledged by the Pakistan Army.

Cultural Legacy

Seeds of Muslim Insecurity. The ideologues of Pakistani nationalism celebrate the historical legacy of the Mughal emperors Akbar and Aurangzeb as symbols of a lost Islamic grandeur in South Asia. The symbols of Islamic grandeur, however, all lie in India—Taj Mahal, Red Fort, and Char Minar. By contrast, the

Baluchis, Sindhis, and Pashtuns remember the Mughals primarily as the symbols of a past oppression.²¹ These claims notwithstanding the Pakistan movement was essentially initiated by the Muslim elite in Muslim-minority provinces—such as the United Provinces—to compensate for their loss of power, their

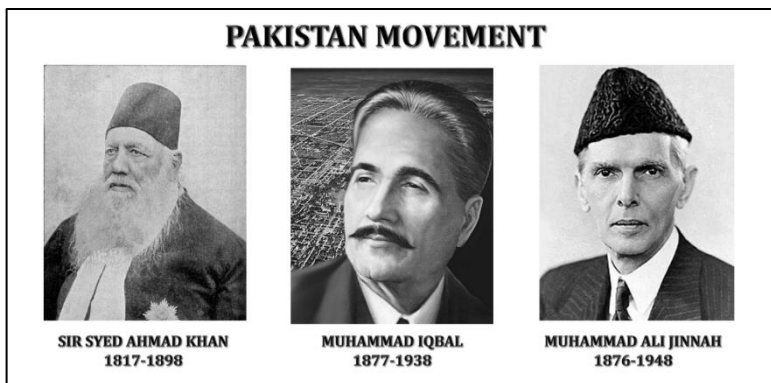


Image 2: The Trinity of Pakistan's founding figures

Source: *Wikimedia Commons*

apprehension of having to live under those whom they had ruled, and to secure their future under a representative government that would be dominated by the majority Hindus. It required a Syed Ahmad Khan to plant the seeds, an Iqbal to imagine, and especially a Jinnah to grasp the opportunity to convert the Muslim insecurity of having lost an empire into the demand for a separate homeland.²²

Achieving Nationhood. The name 'Pakistan' was coined in 1933 by Choudhary Rahmat Ali and stands for Punjab, Afghania (NWFP), Kashmir, Sindh, and Balochistan.²³ The Muslim League passed the Pakistan Resolution in 1940, the essence of which was not independence from the British but separation from the Hindus.²⁴ In this endeavour, they were supported by the British who were peeved at Congress' non-cooperation during the

Second World War. When Gandhi stated that Hindus and Muslims were brothers and equals, Jinnah countered that “Brother Gandhi has three votes, I have only one”.²⁵

Vision Vs Vacuum. From conception (1940 Pakistan Resolution) to fruition (Partition), Pakistan took only seven years to achieve.



Image 3: Pakistan's post-Partition leaders

Source: *Wikimedia Commons*

The leaders were content just to get Pakistan, but having got it, were not sure about what to do about it. On the other hand, Congress leaders had a fairly good vision of how to govern India and what policies they would pursue once independence was achieved.²⁶

Post-Partition Leadership. When Pakistan was born, its founding leaders were mostly from non-Muslim majority areas that remained in India. As a result, they had no mass base in the

newly formed country (except among the Mohajir community) and, not being rooted in it, required assistance in finding their way. The army that emerged out of Partition, however, was dominated by Punjabis and Pakhtuns. Officers such as Ayub Khan, Muhammad Musa, and Yahya Khan were from territories that became Pakistan.

Anti-Ahmadiyya Riots. This aspect became apparent during the 1953 anti-Ahmadiyya riots in Lahore. Unable to control the violence, the army was called in. Major General Azam Khan (later Lieutenant General) brought the situation under control in a few hours and the city returned to normalcy in a few days. The army remained in control for a few more months during which General Khan introduced the ‘Clean Lahore’ campaign in which the city was given a facelift by widening roads, cleaning drains, and public buildings and parks were spruced up. When the army withdrew to the barracks, the press was awash with glowing tributes to the army’s discipline and public service, creating a favourable public impression of the army’s capabilities. More importantly, the army noted the ease with which it had solved the problem and asked—if Punjab could be sorted out in a few days, why not the whole country if required?²⁷

The Munir Report. After the riots, Justice Muhammad Munir was tasked to conduct an inquiry into the riots. In his report of 1954, Justice Munir highlighted that each of the 40-odd Ulema belonging to different sects who appeared before the Enquiry Commission declared every other sect as *Kafir* (infidel) and asserted that his sect alone was truly Islamic.²⁸ Things have progressively become worse for Pakistan since then.

National Language. Urdu was made the national language in 1947 even though it was the language of the refugees who came from India (the Muhajirs) and not an indigenous language of

either East or West Pakistan. Moreover, it was spoken by only 3.7 per cent of the population. Strict measures were undertaken to implement Urdu. Bengali legislators were warned that if they used their own language, they would be tried for treason.²⁹ India, too, faced similar pressures to adopt Hindi as the national language, but the outcomes have been very different. The 1950 Constitution had a provision to use English for the first 15 years and then switch to Hindi.³⁰ The proposal was shelved due to resistance from Southern states, Orissa, and Assam. 25 years later, this was to turn out to be a blessing, when India was able to leverage its proficiency in English to exploit the opportunities offered by the Information Technology revolution and Business Process Outsourcing industry, which kickstarted economic growth commencing the 1990s. However, Hindi has had the last word and is today understood in every corner of India. This has occurred not due to Delhi, but because of Mumbai—due to the soft power of Bollywood.

Islam

A nation state that claims religion to be its reason for creation is bound to turn exclusionist. A state married to religion will always play into the hands of people who have the monopoly of interpreting it and will always lead to a divisive and polarised society fuelled by different religious interpreters.³¹

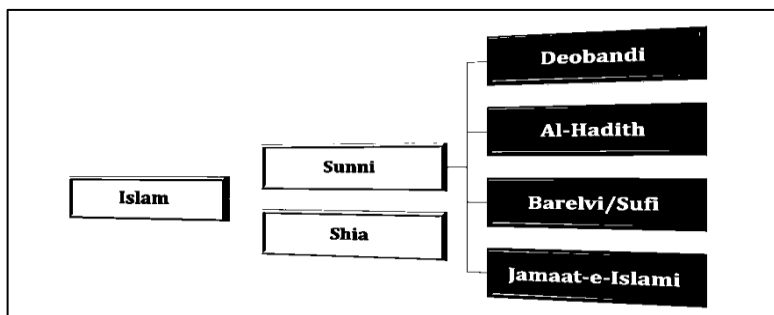


Image 4: Islamic Jurisprudence in Pakistan

Source: *Visualisation by author*

Theocracy in Pakistan. There are five main *maslak* (interpretative traditions) of Islam in Pakistan—Shia, Barelvi, Deobandi, Ahl-e-Hadith, and Jamaat-e-Islami. Each has its own definition of Sharia and looks to different sources for legitimacy. A major hindrance in Pakistan to the emergence of a Pakistani Islamic orthodoxy is the lack of a clerical hierarchy in Pakistan’s Sunni tradition. This is an important contrast with Iran, where the presence of a defined hierarchy enabled a revolution led by a supreme leader and the subsequent consolidation of the clerical regime. The multiple interpretative traditions in Pakistan will prevent it from ever emerging as a theocratic state along the lines of Iran.³²

Instrumentalising Islam in the Army. The Pakistan Army has instrumentalised Islam for a variety of reasons, the main being to frame its conflict with India in civilisational terms, therefore, making itself the protector of its Islamic ideology. Understanding the various roles that Islam plays in the army is fundamental to understanding how Pakistan views the threats it confronts and the available tools at its disposal to confront them.³³

Islamic Sinews. In 1947, the army adopted number 786 as the identification number for the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the new Pakistan Army.³⁴ The number 786 is the numerological equivalent of the opening sentence of the Quran, *Bismillah ir-Rehman ir-Rahim* (in the name of Allah, the Merciful, and Beneficent). Immediately after becoming the Army Chief, General Zia replaced Jinnah's motto of 'Faith, Unity, and Discipline' with '*Iman, Taqwa, Jibad-fi-sibilillah*' (Faith, Piety, Holy Struggle in the name of God).³⁵ General Zia is credited for having Islamised the nation and the army. Although leaders before him had seen Islam only as an instrument of policy, General Zia was the first to have the fire of a true believer.³⁶ There was a persistent emphasis on religious themes, such as the nature of the Islamic warrior, the role of Islam in training, the importance of Islamic ideology for the army, and the salience of *jibad* (Islamic religious war against non-Muslims). Ironically, army journals cover Quranic battles more frequently than Pakistan's own wars with India.³⁷ This reflects an institutional avoidance of self-criticism or efforts to derive lessons learnt from past efforts. The Battle of Badr is a particular favourite, where 313 Muslim civilians prevailed against 1000 seasoned soldiers due to the purity of their faith and morale.³⁸

Utility of Islam to the Army. The Pakistan military emphasises integrating Islamic principles with professionalism, hierarchy, discipline, and a sense of service pride as the fundamental tenets of its organisational structure. The use of Islam serves three interrelated objectives:

- As a means of unifying the country via an identity that can supersede ethnic affiliations and the fissiparous tendencies stemming from Pakistan's ethnic diversity.

- To rally citizens in times of war and to prepare to accept adversity as well as the army's continued domination of national affairs.
- To motivate soldiers by focussing on the purported supernatural advantages conferred by Islamic faith.³⁹

Excessive Islamisation. The Pakistan Army has faced some consequences of excessively invoking Islam within its ranks. In 1995, Major General Zahirul Islam Abbasi, along with 35 officers, was arrested for plotting to assassinate the Corps Commanders during a conference as well as the Cabinet. Between 2004 and 2007, there were numerous instances of mass desertions and refusal to fight in Frontier Corps units deployed in combat operation in Federally Administered Tribal Areas. There were two attempts to assassinate General Pervez Musharraf in which army personnel were involved. Investigations into attacks on the GHQ in 2010 and Mehran Naval Base in 2011 revealed that the attackers had been informed of the blind spots in security from someone inside.⁴⁰

Madrassas for Ideological Goals. In all societies, the primary purpose of education is to educate the young mind, to develop a spirit of enquiry and understanding of the world around, and to prepare them for responsibilities in society. In Pakistan, however, education has been hijacked to achieve ideological and political goals in line with the thinking of the military, which justify it as necessary for national security.⁴¹ In Madrassas, children are trained and educated to counter the arguments of opposing sects on matters of theology, jurisprudence, and doctrines, leading to a narrow view that encompasses rejection of other sects. In short, Madrassa education indoctrinates and greatly contributes to intolerance of other religious interpretations.⁴² Pakistan Army's employment of Islam as a strategic tool unleashed forces under the confidence that they could be controlled, calibrated, and

manipulated, but today are beyond its control. Islam failed as the glue in 1971. Today, the internecine fighting between various strands of Islam is threatening the fabric of Pakistan.

India

1948. While Kashmir has never belonged to Pakistan in any legal sense, acquiring it is integral to Pakistan's national identity. Although the 1948 war ended in a stalemate due to international intervention, Pakistan may have rightly concluded that the strategy of using irregular fighters succeeded. Moreover, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions resulted in Kashmir being recognised internationally as 'Disputed Territory' rather than one on which India exercised uncontested territorial sovereignty. Later, Pakistan sustained a low-level proxy war in hopes of making India's possession of Kashmir so costly that India would simply abandon it altogether.⁴³

1965. The Pakistan Army was emboldened to trigger the conflict by the outcome of the 1962 India-China War, India's tepid response to Pakistani advances in the Rann of Kutch, and a strong Pakistani confidence in its ability to control escalation and defeat India. Infiltration along the Ceasefire Line began in Aug 1965 but local Kashmiris alerted authorities to the intrusion. Indian Prime Minister (PM) Lal Bahadur Shastri had already approved military action at a time and place to be chosen by the Army Chief. Deciding that the terrain in Jammu and Kashmir was unsuitable for large scale operations, a new front was opened through counteroffensives against the cities of Lahore and Sialkot. On 20 Sep, the UNSC passed a resolution calling for cessation of hostilities. India conceded, but on political rather than military grounds, because it was in a position to sustain the conflict and turn the stalemate into an outright victory.⁴⁴ Pakistan was even more willing to settle because military setbacks had cost Ayub

Khan the will to fight.⁴⁵ Due to the rampant misinformation broadcast on local media, the citizens were under the belief that their nation was winning the war. Once the euphoria died down, people realised that Ayub Khan and the army had failed the nation militarily.⁴⁶ Completely disappointed with the expected support from the Kashmiri population, Ayub Khan remarked, “Never again would Pakistan risk 100 million Pakistanis for 5 million Kashmiris”.⁴⁷

Shock of 1971

Bengali Representation in Army. Bengal was not included in the Pakistan imagined by Choudhary Rahmat Ali. At the time of partition, Punjab had 3,49,689 soldiers from its 02 Cr population, whereas there were only 7,117 soldiers for 4.5 Cr Bengalis.⁴⁸ Hence at the time of partition, Pakistan’s Army was predominantly Punjabi and Pashtuns, with relatively negligible representation of Bengalis. Attempts were made to increase the representation of Bengalis in the army and recruitment standards were also lowered, but were not successful in achieving parity in military representation as per demographic realities. By 1963, Bengalis constituted 05 per cent of officers and 07 per cent of other ranks in the Pakistan Army.⁴⁹

Neglect of the East. Until 1971, the Pakistan Army’s logic for defending East Pakistan was ‘The defence of the East lies in the West’. This obsession with Punjab being the strategic core was not lost on the Bengalis, who observed that the Pakistan Army demonstrated no intention or interest in defending the East during the 1965 War, which was another catalyst for the movement for independent Bangladesh.⁵⁰

Racism. To add to this, those in the army’s leadership harboured considerable distaste and condescension for the quality of Bengali officers and other ranks. They were smaller in physical size, dark-

skinned, and more culturally closer to Hindus and, therefore, less Islamic. Elites often dismissed Bengalis as 'Black Bastards'.⁵¹

Suppression of Cultural Legacy. 12 million Hindus remained in Bengal along with 32 million Muslims. Urdu was forced on the Bengalis as the national language and Bengali was relegated to second class status. Bengalis and Hindus used the same Sanskrit-derived script and vocabulary to write their shared language. The Bengali Muslims were persuaded to use the Perso-Arabic script, but their deep cultural pride had often been expressed through their language and literature, and so the Bengalis would not stand for it. The West Pakistanis specially frowned on the rendition of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry which the Bengalis viewed as a cultural legacy rather than in religious terms of Tagore being a Hindu.⁵² This maltreatment of Bengalis was to lay the foundations that ultimately led to 1971. Bengali officers and other ranks formed the backbone of the Bengali resistance during the civil war in 1971.

Political Representation. West Pakistan elites never reconciled to the principle of 'One man one vote' because it would allow the ethnically and politically cohesive East Pakistan to dominate politics. Since East Pakistan had 20 per cent Hindus who were in dominant positions in society, they could form an iron fist in a velvet glove. To counter this, a parity system or 'One Unit' system was introduced in the 1956 Constitution, meaning equal representation between the Western and Eastern wings. Even that measure failed. Ayub Khan ceded power to General Yahya Khan in Mar 1969. Yahya reversed the One Unit scheme and restored individual provincial representation. Elections were to be held in Dec 1970 and East Pakistan was given 162 seats in the National Assembly while West Pakistan had 138 seats. The Awami League won 160 of the 162 seats in the East while the Pakistan Peoples' Party bagged only 81 of the 138 in the West. Mujibur Rehman should have been

invited to form the government, but that was denied, thus, leading to the 1971 vivisection of the country.⁵³

Narrative of 1971 Defeat. The Pakistan Army's narrative of the 1971 War is that the Bengalis who were non-martial and incapable of mounting any sort of offensive of their own succeeded only because of Indian prodding and involvement. After 1973, terminologies such as 'Foxland' and 'Blueland' were replaced by *Kafirs* or *Mushriks* (apostates) and Muslims.⁵⁴ Despite having lost half the nation and 90,000 Prisoners of Wars, Pakistan military literature continues to portray Hindus as meek, dishonourable, pusillanimous, treacherous, and inequitable, and then argue that these traits define the country. India is then portrayed as the perennial source of Pakistan's external and internal conflicts. This narrative allows the army to project itself as the only institution that can protect Pakistan from both external and internal threats which are essentially isomorphous.⁵⁵ Further, this stylised history and security threat perception is replicated in the school syllabus and cultural products aimed at popular audience, including civilian government and official accounts.

Afghanistan

Revisionism. Afghanistan is one of the few countries of the world whose every frontier divides peoples speaking the same language and belonging to the same ethnic tribe.⁵⁶ Kabul saw partition as an opportunity to unshackle itself from the commitments it had made to the British and reassert its claims on Pashtun-majority areas in the NWFP, the tribal areas, and also some parts of Balochistan. Afghanistan was the only nation to oppose Pakistan's inclusion into the United Nations. Afghanistan insisted that the various treaties between Afghanistan and British India became null and void upon Pakistan's independence, including the Durand Line. Most concerningly for the Pakistanis, Afghanistan began

demanding for the creation of an independent Pashtunistan from Pakistan's Pashtun dominated areas.⁵⁷

Continuing British Legacy and Attitudes. The Pashtuns were part of the NWFP, a British nomenclature which continued till 2010, when it was changed to 'Khyber Pakhtunkhwa'. The 'Khyber' was added to distinguish it from the Pashtuns of Afghanistan. The Pakistanis, thus, continued to look upon this region only as a province and characterised the people exactly as the British had—the Pashtuns as 'Unruly, fiercely independent, and religiously zealous', and that of the Baloch as 'Unruly, dangerous, and lazy'.⁵⁸ The areas West of Indus were treated as 'Badlands' that had to be managed, while Pakistan's heartland was East of the Indus.⁵⁹ These areas were placed under a different legal and political system than the rest of India called the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), which involved a political agent for each agency who allowed tribes to govern themselves as per the *Riwaq* (customs), but exercised political control over the area. The tribes were allowed to maintain their militia, which was part of the Frontier Constabulary, under command of a British Indian Army officer. These political agents reported to the Governor of the NWFP.⁶⁰ Pakistan has continued the system of FCR till 2018, despite campaigns by civil society to extend the tools of natural justice to the population of these areas.⁶¹

Strategic Depth. Pakistan's pursuit of strategic depth is largely related to 1971 but a strong proponent was General Zia who believed that strategic depth could best be achieved by building an Islamic block between the Arabian Sea and the Ural Mountains (Russia). He further cemented his conviction on strategic depth during the Afghan War where he felt that by assuming the position of a frontline state, Pakistan had won the right to a regime of its choice in Kabul.⁶²

Securing the Durand Line. Pakistan's policies in Afghanistan are geared to get an Afghan Government to accept the sanctity of the Durand Line as the international border so that no ambiguity remains on its Western borders. The only time it has felt secure about its Western borders was when the Taliban were in power between 1996 and 2001.⁶³

United States

Pakistan's Cold War Opportunism. Afghanistan became the theatre for the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union in the early 1950s. Pakistan was quick to recognise an opportunity and offered itself as a mercenary frontline state committed to thwarting the rise of communism, though its real intentions were always to borrow strength from extra-regional powers towards exploiting for its rivalry with India. Pakistan entered the South East Asia Treaty Organization and the Baghdad Pact in 1954-55.

US-Pakistan Cooperation. In May 1954, Pakistan and the US signed a Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement, which formed a legal basis for US aid to Pakistan. When an initial amount of USD 30 mn was offered, Pakistan threatened to call off the Agreement stating that it was inadequate to compensate for its new responsibilities of stemming the spread of Communism. The amount was then raised to USD 171 mn, which was more to Pakistan's liking.⁶⁴

Impact of US Military Assistance. In 1959, Pakistan received a gift of 12 F-104 Starfighter fighter aircraft in exchange of permitting the construction of a communications facility in Badaber (10 miles from Peshawar). A substantial amount infrastructure came up at Badaber to monitor Soviet plans and activities by flying U-2 spy aircraft into Soviet airspace.⁶⁵ These Starfighters were inducted into the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) in 1961 and were a major force multiplier for the PAF during the

1965 War. India too requested for 36 of these fighters in 1961 in response to rising tensions on the northern borders, but the request was turned down by the US. The F-104s (9th Squadron PAF) were based out of Sargodha, could fly at Mach 2, and fired Sidewinder missiles. The aircraft's technical superiority accorded it a legendary status after it forced an Indian Air Force Dassault Ouragan to land in the Kutch Sector in Jun and a Gnat in Sialkot on 03 Sep 1965. On 07 Sep, during a raid on Sargodha, an IAF Mystere was brought down. The pilot was declared missing and presumed dead. In 1979, the PAF released a book on its history written by a British Historian, John Fricker. Through this book, the IAF learnt that during the raid on Sargodha on 07 Sep, the Mystere had engaged in a dog fight and brought down one Starfighter, before going down. The IAF pilot's dead body was recovered by villagers outside Sargodha, while the PAF pilot survived by ejecting. In the light of this information, a grateful nation conferred Squadron Leader AB Devayya with the Maha Vir Chakra posthumously in 1988, 23 years after his gallant action.

Break in Relations. When the US protested against the Sino-Pak Border Agreement of 1963 pointing out that Pakistan was courting Communists, Islamabad countered by refusing further expansion of the US airbase at Badaber. In response, the US froze aid to Pakistan after 1965. Aid was also stopped to India, but since Pakistan was receiving far more substantial amounts, the action hurt Islamabad more. In 1971, Pakistan facilitated Sino-US Rapprochement, which Pakistan thought would entitle it to US intervention during the humiliation of 1971. When the US failed to intervene as per Pakistani expectations, it led to a break in US-Pak relations in 1972, which was not revived until the Soviets marched into Afghanistan in 1979.⁶⁶ The Starfighters were phased out in 1972, following a mere 12 years of operations due to stoppage of spares from the US.

Soviet Invasion. General Zia was highly unpopular with the US due to nuclear proliferation concerns and the dismissal and execution of an elected PM, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the Carter administration had to choose between its non-proliferation policy and its larger competition with the Soviets. After all, the Soviets had embarrassed the Americans in Korea, and memories of Vietnam were just four years old. This was the opportunity to avenge those two humiliations. However, the US did not have an alternative to Pakistan since Iran had been lost to the Revolution of 1979. General Zia correctly judged this American desperation. When Pakistan was offered a USD 400 mn aid package, General Zia rejected it and denounced it as ‘Peanuts’. After patiently waiting for a year and biding their time to see-off the last few months of the Carter Presidency, the Pakistanis were rewarded by the Reagan administration with a package that was eight times the earlier American offer (USD 3.2 bn).⁶⁷

The Soviet Jihad Experience. The Pakistani experience in the 1980s provided them with a model that would be replicated a decade later in Kashmir:

- The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) acted as the conduit for arms and funds received from the Americans and Saudis exclusively, denying the donors any direct contact with the Mujahideen.⁶⁸ This allowed them to swindle large amounts for their own future activities in Kashmir.
- Complete deniability was maintained of American and Pakistani support to the Mujahideen, though the world knew what was happening on ground.

- General Zia's specific instructions to the ISI were that 'The water must not get too hot', i.e., not to raise the level of Mujahideen resistance to such an extent so as to provoke a direct Soviet attack on Pakistan.⁶⁹
- Of the seven factions of Mujahideen, Pakistan leveraged its role as the conduit to give greater preference to two pro-Pakistan factions led by Gulbaddin Hekmatyar and Burhanuddin Rabbani at the expense of other factions.⁷⁰ The same strategy was used to edge out the Jammu-Kashmir Liberation Front in the Kashmir insurgency in favour of the pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen.⁷¹
- With sustained funding by the US and the eventual introduction of Stinger missiles in 1986, the Soviet Union pulled out from Afghanistan by Feb 1989.⁷² Having played a critical role in humiliating a superpower using this model, the Pakistanis grew confident that they could repeat this with India too, in Kashmir.

Rent-seeking Strategy. Pakistan realised from this early experience in the 1950s that it could leverage its geostrategic location for rent to extra regional powers and exploit their borrowed strength to demand funds, military hardware, and international prestige in its quest for parity with India. This pattern was replicated in 1979 when Zia offered to rent Pakistan to the Americans to wage their war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, then again in 2001 to fight the Al-Qaeda and Taliban. In 2009, the Pakistanis used the funds provided to fight terror to purchase F-16s, aircraft mounted armaments, anti-ship and anti-missile defence systems, and a USD 200 mn Air Defence radar, even though the terrorists they were fighting in Federally Administered Tribal areas did not have a single aircraft or a presence over any

body of water. All in all, the US has fed and financed Pakistan's delusion of being India's regional military equal.⁷³ The latest in this series is how the Pakistanis are allowing the Chinese to use their territory for China's geopolitical needs, in exchange for infrastructure projects that they hope will salvage their economic crises. The Chinese have now taken on the, earlier, US mantle.

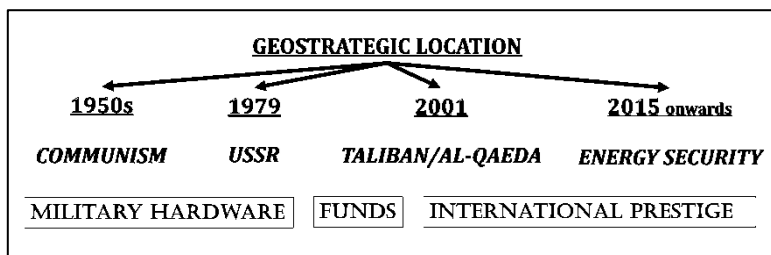


Image 5: Pakistan's rent-seeking strategy

Resources

Security Over Development. Had the quest for parity with India been across-the-board democratic functioning, economic development, education, social sector advancements—there would have been a fundamental shift in Pakistan's priorities. From the very beginning, Pakistan assumed the character of a 'Security State' rather than a 'Development State'. The nation's primary focus and resource allocation were disproportionately directed towards preserving national security and addressing security-related challenges, often at the expense of other facets of national development such as the economy, education, healthcare, and welfare. There remains very little fiscal space for government expenditures or developmental expenditures.

Demographic Dividend. Pakistan is going through a phase called the demographic dividend from 1990 to 2045, essentially a phase when its working age population of 15-64 is bulging. By 2045, this working age population is likely to peak at 68 per cent and then start declining. Pakistan has already lost out 34 years of this 55 year period without any strategy to exploit this once in a lifetime opportunity.⁷⁴ The economy is able to generate less than one million jobs every year, but it is not growing fast enough to absorb the almost three million youth joining the job market every year.⁷⁵ One-third of the youth force is illiterate and the rest has very low levels of technical education. Pakistan is stuck in a low-level skills equilibrium trap which severely restricts its move into higher value-added sectors essential for raising productivity and increasing economic growth. This is the snowballing effect of insufficient investment in the education sector over the decades.⁷⁶ Developmental issues such as water, education, demography, and economic reforms are low priority because the results are barely visible during the short attention span of a general's tenure. Without sustained economic growth and investment in education, the demographic dividend would degenerate into a demographic horde with all its attendant consequences of frustration, alienation, and violence.⁷⁷ But for the Pakistan military, security considerations remain paramount.

Foreign Funding. Whenever foreign funding has been received, it has been squandered without sufficient oversight. A funding in 2008 of USD 50 mn from the US for religious institution reforms to the Ministry of Religious Affairs was

frittered away to modernise offices and buy Sports Utility Vehicles for the bureaucrats.⁷⁸ The history of negotiations on madrassa reforms in Pakistan indicates that enthusiasm is consumed at meetings and ends at press conferences.⁷⁹

Chapter 2: Strategic Culture of the Pakistan Army

Tenets of Strategic Culture

Having discussed all the contributing factors, the strategic culture of the Pakistan Army can be summarised under the following tenets:

- **Insecure Borders.** An acute insecurity about its Eastern and Western borders developed in the early years of independence due to troubled relations with India and Afghanistan.
- **Fear of Indian Domination.** Aversion to an India-dominated regional power arrangement for South Asia.
- **Security State.** A security-first approach for arriving at its foreign policy options and domestic policies.
- **Islamisation of Security.** A close relation between Islam and strategic thinking, leading to connections between Islamic militancy and foreign policy.
- **Self-anointed Guardians.** The army considers itself as responsible not only for protecting Pakistan's territorial frontiers but also its ideological frontiers.⁸⁰ Successive generals have used Islam to achieve a degree of national coherence across a multiethnic nation and in the

Process, garner support for the army's endless conflict with 'Hindu' India.

- **Rent-seeking Strategy.** Entering into rent seeking relations with foreign powers to lease its geostrategic location in exchange for borrowed strength in pursuit of parity with India.
- **Avoiding Self-blame.** An institutional culture of avoiding blame or self-criticism results in a tendency to blame external actors for Pakistan's problems, primarily India, Afghanistan, and the US.
- **Militarising National Narrative.** Ensuring a diffusion of its strategic culture throughout civilian institutions as well as popular imagination, enabling it greater freedom to frame policies meant to provide physical security to Pakistan, ignoring a host of other security parameters.
- **Clarity of Purpose.** A consistent pursuit on what Pakistan perceives as its own national interests. It will give false assurances and toe the line publicly, but balancing India will be its foremost priority.
- **Notion of Victory.** The Pakistan Army holds a unique, self-defined notion of victory. For it, not winning repeatedly is not the same as losing. However, giving up and accepting the status quo—or India's supremacy—is, by definition, considered a defeat. Pakistan's generals would always prefer to take a calculated risk rather than do nothing at all. Pakistan's Army will insist on action at almost any cost, even if that means presiding over a hollow state.⁸¹

- **Muscular Approach.** This is adopted on all issues, even when they do not pertain to its core competence of a military. The Pakistan Army's prescriptions to the genuine political grievances of Bengalis were Operation Searchlight, which led to the formation of Bangladesh. Balochistan has witnessed five insurgencies, each more violent than the previous, largely because of the Pakistan Army's strategy of treating every problem with a sledgehammer. The sheer scale of the Jaffar Express hijacking in 2025 can be traced to the killing of an 80-year-old Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, who had been a provincial Governor and a Federal Minister in the past. He sought to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the Baloch, was deviously trapped in a cave, and murdered on specific instructions of General Musharraf.⁸² That event galvanised the Baloch in their opposition to the Pakistani state as never before.

- **Audacious Planning without Thinking Through.** An example at the strategic level is the Kargil misadventure. At a tactical level, an example is in 1971 when one infantry division (18 Infantry Division) was tasked to march across 90 kms of virgin desert terrain to capture Jaisalmer, without engineer recce and logistics support. The vanguard of this division was famously halted by Alpha Company of 23 Punjab at Longewala.⁸³

Manifestation of Strategic Culture during Operation Sindoor

Various strands of Pakistan Army's strategic culture discussed above were clearly evident during Operation Sindoor:

- **Avoiding Self-Blame.** Until 21 Apr 2025, the Pakistan Army was reeling under pressure from various actors and smarting under losses from Baloch and Tehrik-e-Taliban

Pakistan insurgents. There was a surge in terrorist attacks after General Asim Munir became the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) in Nov 2022. The economy was in freefall and the polity was splintered. The Jaffar Express hijacking exposed the failures of the army in internal security. Seeking an external release from this domestic pressure was a necessity for the Pakistan Army to restore the primacy and relevance of the Pakistan Army in society.

- **Islamising Security.** Revealing a link between Islam and strategic thinking, the Pakistan Army peddled a narrative that portrayed India as a Hindu fascist hegemon to its domestic audience, thus, projecting the Pakistan Army as the protector of the territorial and ideological frontiers of Pakistan.
- **Parity with India.** Pakistan's obsession of parity with India was clearly visible in Operation Sindoor. Ignoring Pakistan, India was racing ahead by ushering in peace and development in Kashmir. This lack of attention from India was anathema to the Pakistan Army. Hence, the need to trigger a crisis by creating a provocation that would trigger a retaliation. Hyphenating Pakistan with India and obtaining a luncheon meeting with President Trump were all aimed at fulfilling their obsession of seeking parity with India. There is no thaw in Pakistan Army's frozen ideas and approach towards India.
- **Notion of Victory.** The Pakistan Army was forced to seek a ceasefire due to India's domination of the escalatory ladder which completely dislocated the Pakistan Army's strategy. Yet the Pakistan Army wove its own notion of victory by focussing solely on the narrative of loss of Indian

aircraft and by spinning a web of lies for internal and external audiences. To burnish the army's credentials, the COAS (General Munir) was promoted to Field Marshal—the first one in military history to be conferred the rank for leading his army to opprobrium on the field. Merely standing up to India is considered a victory marker for the Pakistan Army.

- **Rent-seeking Strategy.** The Pakistan Army continues to revel in rent seeking strategy. It used the borrowed power of China and Turkey to confront India. Munir's engagement with Donald Trump can only be interpreted as a negotiation for favours that Munir would be guaranteed in exchange for Pakistani assistance in advancing American objectives in Iran. Such a development would replay the familiar patterns that played out between the US and Pakistan in the early 1950s, 1979, and in 2001. Pakistan's geostrategic location saw it being rescued again by doles sponsored by the US. Thus, the US has yet again financed and fed Pakistan's delusion that it is a regional equivalent of India.

- **Diffusion of Strategic Culture.** Despite failings on all fronts, the Pakistan Army succeeded in focussing the national narrative on security matters rather than on more pressing needs of the economy. This reflects the success of the Pakistan Army in diffusing its strategic culture into all sections of society, thus, motivating civilians to sacrifice more towards matters of physical security at the expense of a host of other development indicators. The Pahalgam incident and Operation Sindoor

consequently, succeeded in momentary consolidation and alignment of society behind the army.

- **Muscular Approach.** Between 22 Apr and 06 May 2025, the Pakistan Army resorted to sabre rattling and pompously assured a muscular response to the impending Indian retribution. During Operation Sindoor, the Pakistan Army replicated its penchant for bold and audacious responses without thinking through. The gung-ho approach, that is characteristic of the Pakistani Punjabi, saw them spiral into a corner where they pleaded to India's Director General Military Operations to cease hostilities.

Chapter 3: Vulnerabilities

The Soft Spots of the Pakistan Army

Balochistan. There is a strong historical context to the grievance of the Balochis. The status of the Princely state of Kalat was different from other 562 princely states in that, the British by a Treaty of 1876 had recognised the independence of Kalat. Thus, Kalat in 1947 was not obliged to join India or Pakistan as were the other princely states in British India. The lawyer who argued the case for the Khan of Kalat for its independence before the Cabinet Mission in 1946 was Mohammed Ali Jinnah. In Aug 1947, before independence, he even acknowledged this in a Standstill Agreement with the Khan of Kalat because of which Kalat declared independence. However, by Feb 1948, Jinnah had a change of heart and began urging the Khan to accede to Pakistan. When he resisted, the Pakistan Army marched into Kalat and forced the Khan to sign the Instrument of Accession in Mar 1948.⁸⁴

Pashtunistan. If Pashtunistan were to become a reality, Pakistan would lose a major portion of its territory West of the Indus.

Meddling in Internal Security. The army's forays into internal security situations have not had happy endings. The Lal Masjid storming in 2007 led to the formation of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan(c), the operation in Swat led to the rise of Mullah Fazlullah, and the North Waziristan operation has been a failure leading to the 2014 Peshawar Army Public School Massacre.⁸⁵

Militarisation of Society. During the 1980s *jihad* in Afghanistan, the Soviets pumped in military equipment worth USD 36-48 bn. The Saudis, Americans, and Chinese pumped in between USD 6 bn and USD 12 bn. A large part of these weapons found their way into all parts of Pakistan.

Today, there are an estimated two crore weapons held by the Pakistani public, of which only 70 lakh are licensed. In other words, 11 out of every 100 Pakistanis are in possession of a firearm of one type or the other, whether acquired legally or illegally.⁸⁶ Not surprisingly, violence has become endemic.

Sectarian Fissures. By uncorking the genie of domestic religious fundamentalism as a potential strategic tool, the Pakistan Army has ended-up unleashing forces that are now beyond its control. Just one example is the institutional persecution of Ahmadiyyas, who have been excluded from the national definition of Muslims by a Constitutional Amendment of 1974.⁸⁷ Today, it has become fashionable to target the community to demonstrate one's own religious credentials.

Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir. The people of these regions are not allowed to vote in National Assembly elections, despite being part of Pakistan for over seven decades.⁸⁸ This treatment as second-class citizens of the state is causing a frustration that will boil over sooner than later.

Punjabi Domination. Punjab accounts for around 52 per cent of the population, but receives more than its fair share in developmental expenditure due to its dominance in the army and the federal government, much to the chagrin of other provinces. Another example is the Baloch Regiment, which has 27 battalions. Yet, there is no ethnic Baloch in the entire regiment. Its ranks are filled with Punjabis and Pashtuns, who have shown their addresses as somewhere in Balochistan during the recruitment process.⁸⁹

Miscellaneous. Pakistan is heavily dependent on foreign aid, but this is unlikely to deter the army from continuing in their ivory towers. Warnings for water scarcity have been made for decades, but no serious mitigation measures have been contemplated till

date. Nuclear theft by extremist groups is an important concern for the US.

Dichotomous Arguments

A summary of the fallacious arguments of the Pakistan Army indicates its revisionist tendencies:

- **Status Quo.** Arguing for a status quo in the West (Durand Line) while questioning the status quo in the East, in Kashmir.
- **Instruments of Accession.** Complaining about the flawed Instrument of Accession in Kashmir, but having itself obtained the Khanate of Kalat through questionable coercion.
- **Civilian Corruption.** Claiming that political parties are corrupt and ,therefore, the army is the only institution capable of leading the nation—all this despite its own record of corruption.
- **Truth.** Having proved its incompetence in defending the nation militarily, it continues to convince the Pakistani people that it is their best bet.
- **Economy.** Pakistan has no economic strengths—no water, agriculture, oil, minerals, or human resources. The yield of wheat in Pakistan's Punjab is half of that of Indian Punjab.⁹⁰ The only attribute that it is renowned for is it being the fountainhead of terror. Yet it aims for parity with India, which is eight times its economy.⁹¹

- **Pakistan is ‘Too Dangerous to Fail’.** The narrative peddled by the Pakistan Army is that it is the only institution that can prevent Pakistan from collapsing. A RUSI article of Sep 2023 titled, ‘The Paradox of the Pakistan Army’ is an example. The argument goes that the Pakistan Army is the only institution that is capable of defending Pakistan’s nuclear weapons from falling into terrorist hands. Therefore, it is in the interest of all stakeholders—including India—to engage with the Pakistan Army.⁹² This narrative conveniently conceals the fact that the Pakistan Army itself is responsible for having brought the nation, the civilian institutions, and society to the current (as of Jun 2025) precipitous situation in the first place. This is basically a ploy by the Pakistan Army for negotiating with allies and friends by pointing a gun at its own head.⁹³
- **Islam.** This is the glue that holds the nation together. However, it failed in 1971 and continues to tear apart the nation today.

Chapter 4: Pakistan Army's Institutional Strengths

Pakistan's Paradox of Survival

Institutional Resilience. Considering these significant vulnerabilities faced by Pakistan, it makes sense to let Pakistan continue on the path to self-destruction. As a Research and Analysis Wing officer is quoted to have said, "If your adversary is committing suicide, it doesn't make sense to murder him".⁹⁴ Equally pertinent is that Pakistan as a nation has shown remarkable resilience despite numerous predictions that it will fail. The only factor that prevents this from happening is the Pakistan Army. As an institution, the army has some inherent strengths and strategies that incentivise itself to continue on the path of a civilisational conflict with India, despite adequate indicators that such a choice is not good for the nation. An examination of these factors is, therefore, necessary.

Internal Cohesion. The history of the Pakistan Army demonstrates that ethnicity, social class, and religious orientation (if it is moderate) have very little weight in terms of promotion and assignment to sensitive duties. What matters most is loyalty to the army and demonstrated professional military merit. The Pakistan Army's discipline has held firm even after its leaders made spectacularly bad decisions that led directly to national catastrophes like the two lost wars in 1965 and 1971, and the failure in Kargil. There have been three outright military coups in Pakistan, but none was mounted by an officer other than the man at the very top, the COAS. If the army's discipline and cohesion are maintained and, despite occasional concerns expressed about the reliability of individual officers and very small groups of disgruntled individuals, there is little reason to believe this situation

will change in the future. As an institution, the Pakistan Army has shown a remarkable congruence in its values and attitudes, in good times and bad, in times of military rule, and civilian governance.⁹⁵

Organisational Culture. The Army's ideology, ethos, or organisational culture can be briefly summarised as follows:

- The army is the custodian of Pakistani nationalism.
- It guarantees Pakistani sovereignty through its principal existential threat—India.
- It is the only national institution that is competent and honest.
- It is the only national institution that can be trusted to safeguard national interests.
- It is a vehicle for social mobility because promotion is based solely on merit and demonstrated good performance.⁹⁶

Patronage Networks and the Military Business Economy

Military Business. These values are also reinforced through a comprehensive system of patronage that is distributed through the military's infrastructure and its vast business empire. The average officer and soldier receives better pay, better food and housing, better medical care, and education for his children than the average Pakistani. When they retire, they receive free medical care for life and frequently are given jobs commensurate with their military rank in one of the military's business enterprises. This system might be thought of as the Pakistani equivalent of cradle-to-grave socialism. What the army demands in return for this largesse is loyalty,

faithful adherence to its values, and strict obedience to its orders. Some of its features are:

- The Army controls 12 per cent of the nation's land totalling 11.58 million acres. By comparison, India's Ministry of Defence (MoD) has 18.11 lakh acres.
- State land can be converted into private property by the Army.
- Major Generals and above get 50 acres of land on retirement. More is given on awards of gallantry.
- Out of the 46 defence housing schemes, none are for soldiers.
- Army officers do not pay property tax.
- Major Generals and above are permitted to retain retinue staff on retirement.
- Officers can import luxury cars without paying Customs duty.
- Separate schools are established for officer's children and those of other ranks.⁹⁷

The Four Foundations. The Fauji Foundation was established in 1954 for the welfare of ex-servicemen of all three Services. Its initial capital investment of USD 3,00,000 was the money the British Military had provided to Pakistan in 1947 as Pakistan's share of post-War Services Reconstruction Fund for reinvestment purposes. This fund had been established by the British to provide financial help and welfare benefits for British war veterans. As the Pakistan Army strengthened its stranglehold over political control in the country, national resources were diverted towards the Fauji

Foundation. In 1971, the army formed its own Army Welfare Trust (AWT) to create greater employment and profit-making opportunities for the army. The air force and the navy followed suit with the Shaheen Foundation in 1977 and the Bahria Foundation in 1981, respectively. The AWT was established under the Societies Registration Act 1860, whereas, the other three Foundations were formed under the Charitable Endowments Act 1890. Between these four organisations, there are 96 companies that have entered into various aspects of commercial production in the Pakistan economy ranging from shoes, sugar, pharmaceuticals, travel agencies, housing societies, bakeries, etc.⁹⁸

Militaries as Power Elites. The model followed in Pakistan is also replicated in similar fashion in Indonesia and Turkey, where the politically powerful militaries exercise control of the state by penetration into the state, the society, and the economy by maintaining monopoly over political power, financial autonomy and exploitation of the nation's resources.⁹⁹ In all these countries, the military has turned into an independent class. Employments in various military foundations are reward for loyal service to the army's hierarchy or to sideline those who pose a threat due to their competence.

Political Economy of Military Dominance

Power for Profit. Economic and political interests are linked in a cyclic process: political power guarantees economic benefits which, in turn, motivate the officer cadre to remain powerful and to play an influential role in governance.¹⁰⁰ The financial burden of the welfare of soldiers is not defined by the society that bears the cost, but by the recipients.¹⁰¹ It is forcibly taken from the nation as a benign financial compensation for guarding the nation's frontiers.¹⁰²

Monopoly over Violence and Truth. In 1972, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto raised the Federal Security Force primarily drawn from the Sindh province to act as a counterweight to the army, but it was disbanded in Nov 1977 after General Zia seized power.¹⁰³ The Pakistan Army has deliberately resisted reform and professionalisation of the police forces, even though these are the most suitable for internal security duties. This ensures that when a crisis occurs, the Pakistan Army can claim that it is the only institution capable of responding effectively. The army also has a privileged place in defining truth, determining how truth is described, and regulating who gets to articulate it. For most of Pakistan's existence, the army has exercised its power to produce truth from its privileged position as the supreme manager of the state's affairs.¹⁰⁴ Thus, through textbooks, popular Urdu media and the news media, military generals are often portrayed as epitomes of bravery and true representatives of Islam.¹⁰⁵ Elevating national security to the highest salience is in the interest of the army, in order to maximise resources from the national economy.

From Governance to Narrative Control

Government to Governance. Since 2008, the Pakistan Army has moved from 'Government' to 'Governance'.¹⁰⁶ Learning from the Musharraf experience, the army realised that it was more prudent to stay on the sidelines and allow the civilians to do the mudslinging, as long as the army wielded political control, financial autonomy and the narrative.

Non-state Actors. Since 1971, the Pakistan Army has shown flexibility and innovativeness in adopting novel strategic options to offset India's conventional superiority. One is of creating a wide array of options in the sub-conventional level (see Image 4), which factually have led to the deployment and

raising of several new formations by the Indian Army. It has forced India to commit blood and treasure in Kashmir over the past three decades, while on its part exploiting Kashmiri manpower and external funding.

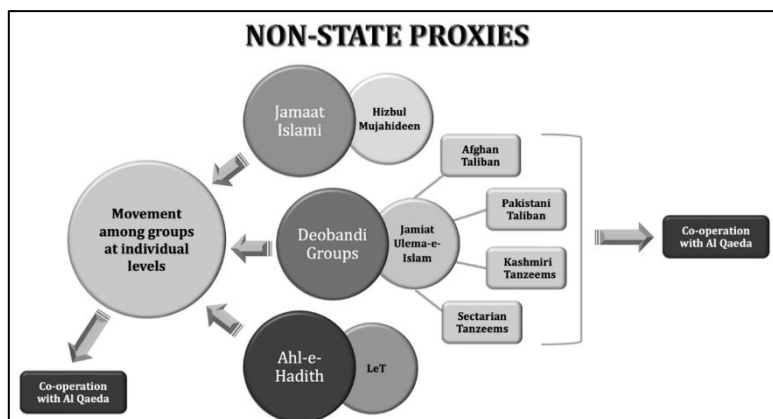


Image 6: Terrorist Tanzeems (organisation) in Pakistan today

Source: *Illustration by C Christine Fair*¹⁰⁷

Nuclear Strategy and Deterrence Posturing

Nuclear Domain. By demonstrating cultivated irrationality and not agreeing to a ‘No First-Use’ doctrine, Pakistan has shrewdly exploited the deterrent value of its nuclear programme.¹⁰⁸ By harping on its flexibility to use tactical nuclear weapons, Pakistan claims to have achieved escalation dominance by achieving capabilities at three levels of the escalatory matrix—sub conventional, tactical nuclear weapons, and full nuclear war—compared to India’s superiority in the conventional domain. In the conventional domain, it hopes to collude with China in a two-front war to offset India’s conventional superiority. Neil Joeck has quoted in this context, “A country, like a man, cannot be hanged twice”.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, Pakistan believes that it cannot be deterred

from using tactical nuclear weapons by threatening it with nuclear devastation because it is already facing the same outcome via conventional means.¹¹⁰ Pakistan's nuclear arsenal has helped it internationalise the Kashmir issue. Any major terrorist by a Pakistan-supported terrorist group and India's toughening posture would immediately bring global powers to defuse the crisis. Pakistan's nuclear blackmail lasted from 1998 till 2019, when after the Pulwama attack India crossed the Rubicon and retaliated with airstrikes in Balakot. This nailed Pakistan's nuclear bluff and steeply raised the costs of any large-scale terror attack on Indian soil, effectively marking the end of the era of 'Strategic Restraint' by India.¹¹¹

Conclusion

For a country that is potentially facing a two-front threat, it would make eminent sense to make peace with at least one of the belligerents. What would be the possible conditions in which India would be able to settle with the Pakistan Army? One would imagine that Kashmir would do the trick. But the Pakistan Army's wish-list is a little longer:

- India hands over Kashmir.
- It withdraws from Siachen.
- No Indian hydel projects on Western rivers.
- No Indian presence in Afghanistan.
- UNSC for India only if Pakistan also gets it.
- India and international community recognises parity of Pakistan with India.
- Afghanistan remains under Taliban.
- Afghanistan recognises the Durand Line.
- Civil Nuclear Deal for Pakistan with the US like it has with India.
- Indefinite liberal bailouts to Pakistan from the West.
- Not asked to 'Do More' against terrorists.¹¹²

It must be appreciated that if the Pakistan Army were to make peace with India, it would be a conflict of its interests. If it were to do so, the army would lose its relevance in its own nation. India's

response, therefore, must be based on cold calculation rather than on hot-headed hubris. The need is to develop stronger but dexterous military muscle, better intelligence capabilities, and more effective international alliances, while retaining focus on India's broader, long-term national interest. The Pakistan Army would want to embroil India in a regional slugfest, replicating the same muscular and tactical mindset that the Pakistan Army embodies—a trap that India should best avoid.

While India looks past Pakistan to manifest its destiny of global leadership, New Delhi must not make the mistake of ignoring Pakistan either. History bears testimony that the Pakistan Army can cause mischief against India. To create a response mechanism that disincentivises the Pakistan Army's belligerent behaviour is the challenge that confronts the Indian strategic community today.

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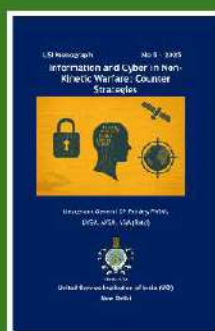
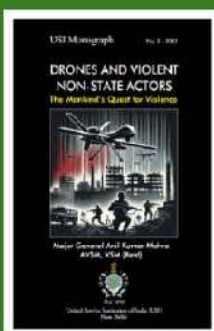
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Brigadier Sanjay Kannothe, VSM was commissioned into 8 GORKHA RIFLES in 1997 and is an alumnus of the Rashtriya Indian Military College, National Defence Academy and Defence Services Staff College (DSSC). He has operational experience in the Kashmir Valley twice—as a young Lieutenant and then as a Brigadier, on the Line of Control in Poonch, in Northern Glacier, and in Manipur. He commanded a Battalion along the Line of Actual Control in the Eastern Theatre. He has served as an Instructor at the Infantry School and DSSC, as an Assistant Military Attaché in Nepal and as a Colonel Military Secretary (MS) in the MS Branch. Brigadier Kannothe has authored articles in various journals, including a USI Occasional Paper in 2023. A monograph authored by him was published in 2025 by USI on ‘China’s Strategic Culture and its Impact on the People’s Liberation Army’. He is presently commanding a Rashtriya Rifles Sector in Jammu and Kashmir.

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