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Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

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For Magdalena

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INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is one of the "new" nuclear powers. It formally joined this exclusive club in 1998, when it conducted its first nuclear test explosions, although analysts had been writing about the fact that this country possessed these weapons of mass destruction for almost two decades. Currently, the country's nuclear potential is estimated at 130 to 140 nuclear warheads. The possibility of using these weapons is the subject of scientific research as well as inquiries by publicists. Equally interesting is the question of their potential transfer into the hands of numerous Islamic terrorist organisations. In analysing the possibility of escalation of the nearly 70-year-old conflict in South Asia and the threat of nuclear weapons proliferation into the hands of terrorists, the factor of Pakistan's strategic culture is very important. It determines the perception of external threats by decision-makers, both military and political. The following text is an attempt to look at this issue. When considering strategic culture, it is necessary to start by defining the concept, which will be the subject of Chapter One. Chapter Two will provide a sketch of the history of Pakistan. It is a state that was established in 1947 as a result of the partition of British India. To understand the contemporary implications of this process, it is necessary to go back to the period of the Muslim conquest, then to present the period of British colonial rule and finally to show the process of dividing the Subcontinent into two independent dominions according to religious criteria. Chapter Three will examine Pakistan's military. Two determinants shaping the strategic culture are shown here: British heritage, still alive and visible in the continuity of traditions of existing units, which is so important for the military, and Islam, which is one of the most important factors unifying the multi-ethnic society

of Pakistan. Chapter Four is devoted to the main directions of Pakistan's foreign policy – i.e., relations with its neighbours: India, China, Iran and Afghanistan, as well as the United States and the Russian Federation. Chapter Five presents the assumptions of the defence doctrine of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

1. THE CONCEPT OF "STRATEGIC CULTURE"

In order to structure further considerations, both Polish and international definitions of the concept of strategic culture will be presented below. It is important to note at the outset a certain significant explanatory weakness in these definitions. They have all been developed from the Western experience, whether in the process of analysing threats from the Cold War period, as a basis for research on phenomena occurring in the broadly understood Western civilisation, or for describing the foundations of the political decisions of the Soviet Union. Pakistan, on the other hand, is a Muslim country; therefore, it is guided not only by secular motivations, but also, and perhaps above all, by the religious factor, which will play a serious role in the decision-making process.

As noted by Roman Kuźniar, strategic culture reaches and influences strategy through various routes. Firstly, it provides ideas and norms for the community of both professional strategists and politicians, who set specific goals and tasks for strategists (or take on the role of strategists themselves). Secondly, strategic culture conditions the perception of the strategy's environment (i.e., internal politics and the international situation); it constitutes the "glasses" through which the world is viewed and the processes and events taking place in it are assessed. Thirdly, it selects strategic options that emerge on its own initiative or in response to external challenges. Fourthly, strategic culture conditions the ability to mobilise national resources for the goals set by the strategy. Finally, there is no doubt that strategic culture frames the public debate on national security.[1]

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[1] R. Kuźniar, *Polityka i siła. Studia strategiczne – zarys problematyki*, Warszawa 2006, pp. 186-187.

Krzysztof Malinowski argues, on the other hand, that strategic culture refers to the sphere of beliefs shared by society and political elites relating to security policy and – thus – to the place of a given state in the international system. In a narrower sense, it pertains to the political aspects of the use of military force.[2] British researcher of international relations Kerry Longhurst defines strategic culture as collective beliefs, ideas, values, positions and practices regarding the use of force, which are formed gradually through specific historical processes and are subject to change as a result of a nation's dramatic experiences.[3]

According to American political scientist Jack Snyder, strategic culture is the sum total of ideas, conditioned by emotional reactions and behavioural patterns, that members of a national strategic community have acquired through learning or imitation and shared with each other regarding nuclear strategy.[4]

According to Alastair I. Johnston, strategic culture is an integrated system of symbols (e.g., argument structures, languages, analogies, metaphors) that seeks to establish comprehensive and long-lasting strategic preferences by formulating conceptions of the role and effectiveness of military force in interstate political affairs and clothing these concepts with such an aura of facts that strategic preferences appear uniquely realistic and effective.[5]

Colin S. Gray defined strategic culture using the example of the USA as modes of thought and action in relation to power, derived from the perception of national historical experience, aspirations for self-characterisation, and all the many distinctly American experiences (geography, political philosophy, civic culture and way of life) that characterise an American citizen.[6]

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2 *Kultura bezpieczeństwa narodowego w Polsce i Niemczech*, ed. K. Malinowski, Poznań 2003, p. 16.

3 K. Longhurst, *Niemiecka kultura strategiczna – geneza i rozwój*, [in:] *Kultura bezpieczeństwa narodowego w Polsce i w Niemczech*, ed. K. Malinowski, Poznań 2003 p. 194.

4 J.L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Options*, Santa Monica 1977, p. 8.

5 A.I. Johnston, *Thinking about Strategic Culture*, "International Security" Vol. 19, 1995, no. 4, p. 46.

6 C.S. Gray, *National Style in Strategy: The American Example*, "International Security" Vol. 6, 1981, no. 2, p. 22.

According to Yitzhak Klein, strategic culture, on the other hand, is the set of attitudes and beliefs held by the military establishment regarding the political objectives of war and the most effective strategy and operational methods for achieving them.[7]

Pakistani researcher Hasan-Askari Rizvi defines the concept of strategic culture as a set of beliefs, norms, values and historical experiences of the dominant elite that influence the understanding and interpretation of security problems and the environment, shaping its responses to them.[8]

As K. Malinowski points out, there are two possible approaches to the issue of the importance of culture in security research: rationalist and constructivist. The first recognises the limited value of this factor in explaining state behaviour. Culture is treated here as "absent" or, at most, as an auxiliary element, one of many variables alongside institutional pressures, the influence of lobbying groups or the ambitions of decision-makers. It is politicians who manipulate public opinion according to these assumptions, using references to culture. In the constructivist approach, international politics is interpreted in social terms as the effect of interactions between social structures and an actor (the state), determined mainly by norms and values. Identities and norms act as the primary causal variables, creating the actor's own preferences and, finally, even to some extent, the effects of their actions.[9]

In the case of Pakistan, we are dealing with a specific society that differs in values from the Western societies the aforementioned perspectives were designed to describe. Therefore, the optimal solution is to use both approaches functionally, aiming to gain a clearer understanding of the motives driving political decision-makers. Becoming aware of the deep cultural differences between the researcher and the researched object (in this case, the Pakistani elites) is crucial to avoiding a mistake often made by Western researchers: using "our" (i.e., Western) conceptual clichés to describe societies guided by an axiological system different from the Western one.

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7 Y. Klein, *A Theory of Strategic Culture*, "Comparative Strategy" Vol. 10, 1991, no. 1, p. 5.

8 H.-A. Rizvi, *Pakistan's Strategic Culture*, [in:] *South Asia in 2020: Future Strategic Balances and Alliances*, ed. M.R. Chambers, Carlisle 2002, p. 307.

9 *Kultura bezpieczeństwa narodowego…*, pp. 24-25.

This difference is far greater than the distinctions between the strategic cultures of the West and the Eastern Bloc, which have become the basis for theoretical considerations in the field of strategic studies.

2. HISTORICAL DETERMINANTS OF PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC CULTURE

Considerations on the strategic culture of Pakistan should begin with a brief presentation of the genesis of this state. Indeed, it was the process of political emancipation of Indian Muslims that led to the conflict with the Hindu majority, which continues to this day and has a significant impact on the perception of both the great eastern neighbour and, more broadly, the international environment as a whole by Pakistan's social and political elites, including the military.

2.1 Islam in the Indian Subcontinent

Islam began to reach the Indian Subcontinent in the very first years of its existence, that is, at the end of the 8th century. The spread of this religion has been influenced by the traditional caste-based social structure that developed in Hinduism. According to its principles, a person is born assigned to a place on the social ladder with no possibility of advancement. Belonging to the lowest, so-called "untouchable" castes, places an individual practically outside society. Islam, on the other hand, is an egalitarian religion, like Christianity. Muhammad's prophecy is addressed to every human being, regardless of their social status. The new religion has received a lot of attention, especially among representatives of the lowest Hindu castes, which should come as no surprise. Conversion to Islam opened up opportunities for Hindus for social advancement, which involved

a change of occupation. This was particularly true for the trade and service industries, which, being very profitable, were reserved for the upper castes. The belief that those who avoid the caste system through religious conversion should be removed from society is still evident today, especially in the statements of far-right Indian politicians, who regard Muslims living on the Indian subcontinent as apostates of Hinduism and, therefore, at the very bottom of the traditional social pyramid.[10]

In the 7th century, the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan were subjugated to the then Islamic Persia. There were mass conversions to Islam in the conquered territories. Subsequent Muslim dynasties came from Afghanistan. The Ghurids and Ghaznavids extended their rule to the southern reaches of the subcontinent. The reign of the Mughal dynasty resulted in the flourishing of a specific local culture, combining Islamic elements with those rooted in the Hindu tradition. Excellent examples of richly illustrated writing and calligraphy have survived to the present day. Mention should also be made of the magnificent examples of Indo-Muslim architecture, such as the 17th-century Taj Mahal mausoleum and the imperial forts in Agra, Delhi and Lahore, as well as numerous mosques.[11] The Mughals established an administrative system modelled on the Persian structure and hierarchy of public offices. Attempts were also made to spread the Persian language as a literary and courtly language. The result of this policy was the formation of the Urdu language, initially used by soldiers serving the dynasty. The liberal policies of the Mughals encouraged the interpenetration of Muslim and local cultures. Followers of Hinduism began to hold high offices in the Mughal state. The exception was Emperor Aurangzeb, who ordered the destruction of temples in the areas under his control and the construction of mosques, as well as forced conversions.[12] The memory of his bloody rule has a greater impact on Hindu-Muslim relations today than the period of tolerant rule of his predecessors. During the reign of the Mughal dynasty, a social order based

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10 Ch. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, New York 1996, pp. 358-360.

11 H. Kulke, D. Rothermund, *A History of India*, London 2004, pp. 161-196.

12 S. Wolpert, *A New History of India*, Oxford 2000, pp. 149-169.

on religious tolerance was established. Hindus were exempt from the jizya tax, as stipulated in the Koran regarding non-Muslims.[13]

2.2 British Rule

British interest in India resulted in the establishment of the East India Company in 1600. Initially, it operated as a private enterprise, profiting from the monopoly guaranteed by Elizabeth I on trade with the Indian principalities. Gradually, it began to build its own factories in India, expanding the territory it controlled. After winning the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the Company took full control of the province of Bengal.[14] Gradually, the government in London took over the management of the Company and, through it, of India. British policy towards the local population was based mainly on economic exploitation.[15] For Hindus, the Europeans had replaced the previous rulers, and in order to find employment in colonial institutions, they only had to learn another foreign language – this time English. For Muslims, British rule was initially a serious shock, experienced by the entire Muslim community of that time, subject to colonial rule. The Quran assumes the rule of Islam as the last prophecy, and in the meantime, new rulers appeared, considered infidels or, at most, tolerated "People of the Book". The Muslim elite did not want to accept the new situation and learn the language of the colonisers.[16] The only structure in which Indian Muslims have traditionally participated in large numbers is the armed forces. This was due to both the existing socio-political order in India and the pacifism prevalent among followers of Hinduism. In 1857, the Sepoy Mutiny took place – an uprising of Indian soldiers serving in the Company's army.[17] Its result was a reform of the colonial structures of the British authorities, consisting of taking control of India from

13 J. Kieniewicz, *Historia Indii*, Warszawa 2003, p. 295.

14 H. Kulke, D. Rothermund, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

15 *Ibidem*, pp. 215-219.

16 *Ibidem*.

17 J. Kieniewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 505.

Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is a compelling and well researched exploration of Pakistan's strategic mindset which offers insight into the country's nuclear posture, military traditions, and geopolitical imperatives. In a time when South Asia remains a focal point of international security concerns, this book provides an in-depth analysis of how Pakistan perceives external threats and formulates its defence policies.

One of the book's key strengths lies in its structured approach which unfolds the evolution of Pakistan's strategic culture. The author ensures that readers—whether scholars, policymakers, or general enthusiasts of international security—are equipped with the necessary theoretical tools to understand the complexities of strategic thought. This foundational discussion transitions into an examination of Pakistan's historical trajectory, illuminating how its past experiences continue to shape its current defence and security decisions. The use of case studies, historical documents, and primary sources strengthens the presented arguments ensuring that readers gain a holistic understanding of the subject.

This book enriches academic discourse and provides an insight necessary to comprehend Pakistan's defence strategies and their broader implications in an increasingly complex global security landscape.

Excerpts from a review by dr. Muhammad Arif Khan Assistant Professor, Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology, Karachi, Pakistan

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