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India's Maritime Strategy in the Indian Ocean Region: Issues of Strategies

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Introduction

A report drafted by the RAND (Research And Development) cooperation in 1992 entitled as Indian Strategic Thought (RAND Cooperation, 1992). In this report it is described the influences of geography, history, culture and British rule (era of the Raj) on Indian strategic thinking. The author of the report was George K. Tanham and he concluded that India does not have strategic thought or a strategic culture. Tanham argued that due to a lack of a monolithic political entity in India, there is a lack of strategic thought. This conclusion came as a shock to Indian strategic and academic communities. Since then, a debate emerged whether India has a strategic culture or not (Xinmin, 2014). Rodney W. Jones wrote that India has a history of strategic thought, captured in the symbolism of the pre-modern Indian state systems and the Vedic civilization which date back several millennia. Harjeet Singh believed that geographic variables have contributed to a lack of "Indianism" (Singh, 2009). India lies at a focal point in the Asian landmass and has always been susceptible to outside invasions and plundering. "Its vast territory, complicated internal structure and strong cultural tension have helped it avoid long, continuous rule by any single empire" (Xinmin, 2014). Due to this, it was not possible for a strong strategic culture to evolve, given several disruptions in Indian history and civilization.

Some authors like Gautam Das justify India's lack of strategic culture by saying that geographical India was made up of many kingdoms at different times with few political empires (Das & Gupta, 2008). This made it difficult for the formulation of a static strategic culture from which modern strategists and decision-makers in government can draw upon (Xinmin, 2014).

It is necessary to carry out research on Indian strategic thought and culture because we will be able to know how India's strategic culture is able to exert an impact on its strategic choices and international behavior, the "strategic cultural paradigm" (Johnston, 1998). According to Johnston, "There is the assumption that the strategic environment constitutes the central paradigm of a strategic culture, comprising the role of war in human affairs, the nature of the adversary and the threat assessment, and the efficacy of the use of force. Second, based on the acceptance of the central paradigm, a set of operable policy preferences can be enforced in order for time to be deduced. Obviously, the focus of this strategic cultural theory is the culture of war and the efficacy of the use of force" (Johnston, 1998).

Simply put, a country's strategic culture can explain its security behavior. "Strategic culture is made up of a country's worldview, judgment of subject-object relations and model of behaviors based on that country's geography, history and economic and political development. Interaction among these symbols can forge a collective national identity distinct from other countries, while also limiting the social and cultural environment of its strategic decisions" (Johnston, 1998).

John Duffield claimed that a country's security culture is formed by the strategic preferences of the entire society and political elites on some policies and actions that are different from other countries (Duffield, 1999). Economic well-being is vital for national security, an impoverished Indian society can't feel or be secure. This leads to dissatisfaction and insecurity among the people. In order for India to feel secure, trade and economic interactions in the form of free market policies for example, will ensure mutual gain between states. Therefore, India's strategic culture must encompass the notion of interdependency and focus on trade, investment and technology, not just war.

Overall, India's strategic culture is best explained when "governments and peoples are more clear-headed and did their cost-benefit calculations correctly" (Bajpai, 2010). Also, rivalry and violence would be conceived as irrational because military conflict cannot be "sustained as economic globalization moves forward. For neoliberals, force is an outmoded and blunt instrument unsuited to the new world order" (Bajpai, 2010). The Narendra Modi "doctrine" (2014) is close to explaining what India strategic culture should encompass. He mentions 'vikas vaad' (development) and 'vistar vaad' (expansionism), both characteristics of a Grand Strategy, strategic culture and neoliberal thinking.

This report analyzes the historical, geographic, and cultural factors influencing Indian strategic thinking: how India's past has shaped present-day conceptions of military power and national security; how Indian elites view their strategic position vis-a-vis their neighbors, the Indian Ocean, and great power alignments; whether Indian thinking follows a reasonably consistent logic and direction; and what this might imply for India's long-term ability to shape its regional security environment. The author identifies four principal factors that explain Indian actions and views about power and security: Indian geography; the "discovery" of Indian history by Indian elites over the past 150 years; Indian cultural and social structures and belief systems; and the British rule, or raj. India has a predominantly defensive strategic orientation, although some leaders now seek a more offense-oriented strategy. India retains a longstanding commitment to strategic independence and autonomy, although it's economic, industrial, and technological shortcomings continue to limit the success of such a strategic design. Indians realize that the high technology being developed for India's long-term defense has implications for Indian strategy. Domestic and budgetary constraints will continue to limit Indian military power for many years.

Theoretical Framework

The discussion in this essay is best understood by applying the neo-liberalist theoretical framework. Systemically, states look for military and economic security in their relations with one another. Realism posits that international relations are determined by a constant state of war that interdependency gives rise to coercion among states in the form of balancing, bandwagoning or hedging. Neo-liberalists agree, but emphasize that economic strength is the ultimate basis for military power (Bajpai, 2010). They argue further that economic well-being is akin to power which can be more effective than military power. Therefore, due to the inter-dependence among states, relations need not be based on force. According to Bajpai, "in situations of 'complex inter-dependence', force is unusable or ineffective" (Bajpai, 2010). They argue further that economic well-being is akin to power which can be more effective than military power. Therefore, due to the inter-dependence among states, relations need not be based on force. According to (Bajpai, 2010). In the Indian context, the neo-liberalist approach to researching strategic culture is the most relevant. Since economic well-being is vital for national security, an impoverished Indian society can't feel or be secure.

This leads to dissatisfaction and insecurity among the people. In order for India to feel secure, trade and economic interactions in the form of free market policies for example, will ensure mutual gain between states. Therefore, India's strategic culture must encompass the notion of interdependency and focus on trade, investment and technology, not just war. Overall, India's strategic culture is best explained when "governments and peoples are more clear-headed and did their cost-benefit calculations correctly" (Bajpai, 2010). Also, rivalry and violence would be conceived as irrational because military conflict cannot be "sustained as economic globalization moves forward. For neoliberals, force is an outmoded and blunt instrument unsuited to the new world order" (Bajpai, 2010). The Narendra Modi "doctrine" (2014) is close to explaining what India strategic culture should encompass. He mentions 'vikas vaad' (development) and 'vistar vaad' (expansionism), both characteristics of a Grand Strategy, strategic culture and neoliberal thinking.

Methodology

Johnston (1998) argues that in order to establish the existence of a strategic culture it is necessary to show that there exists a set of strategic preferences that are consistently ranked in some canonical texts (Bajpai, 2010). He also suggests that actual state behavior representative of a strategic culture must be based on preferences that anchor the thinking of decision-makers which will determine government policy (Johnston, 1998). Arun Prakash states that India's maritime history is a description of past events, on what happened and not why it happened (Prakash, 2013). Methodologically, Prakash suggests that it has left research on India's strategic culture in a void. However, since 1998, the Indian navy has produced a strategic

framework for the deployment of maritime forces in peace and in war (Prakash, 2013). In this essay, we will focus on scattered writings in the press, academic journals, think tank publications, and biographies and autobiographies of past decision-makers. It will refer to three documents, namely The Indian Maritime Doctrine (2004) and Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy for the 21st Century (2007) and Nonalignment 2.0 (2012). In conclusion, this essay will analyze Narendra Modi's thoughts for the Indian Ocean and beyond (Cronin & Baruah, 2014).

Assumptions/Hypotheses

This essay hypothesizes that, first, India does have a strategic culture but is somewhat muddled and not yet conceived of concretely due to the absence of an amalgamation of strategic cultures of pre-Independence Indian/Hindu states. Second, that India does have a grand strategy paradigm about operational policy in the IOR, which is a component of strategic culture. Discourse on these two hypotheses includes an historical understanding of India's actions in its maritime neighborhood.

Definition of Strategic Culture

More than four decades ago, a global debate on strategic culture emerged. At the height of the Cold War, answers were sought after to questions about the origins of strategy and how policy decisions on strategy were formulated (Al-Rodhan, 2011). For example, the United States and the Soviet Union (as well as their satellite states) wanted to know how the adversary made decisions to protect their national security. The discourse centered on the role that culture played in safeguarding their respective spheres of influence. The term strategic culture was coined by Jack Snyder in 1977, when he wrote "The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Options" (Al-Rodhan, 2011). He defined strategic culture as the sum total of ideals, conditional emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of the national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to [...] strategy" (Snyder, 1977). Johnston defines strategic culture as follows: Strategic culture is an integrated set of symbols (i.e. argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors, etc.) that acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting grand strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious (Johnston, 1998). According to Bajpai, strategic culture consists of two parts: The first is the central strategic paradigm—the basic assumptions about orderliness in the world. Included here are assumptions about the role of war in human affairs, about the nature of the adversary, and about the efficacy of the use of force. The second part is grand strategy, or the secondary assumptions about operational policy that follow from the prior assumptions (discussed above). These may be gleaned from various texts written over time by statesmen, soldiers, scholars, commentators, and diplomats (Bajpai, 2010). Strategic culture thus integrates cultural symbols such as religion, myths and legends with historical memories of ancient