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Name of the Topic: Strategic Culture and Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan

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Findings of the Study:

The present study critically examines the relationship between strategic culture and civil-military relations in Pakistan by employing the theoretical framework of Strategic Culture and Social Constructivism. It argues that Pakistan's civil-military relations cannot be adequately explained through conventional theories that focus primarily on institutional arrangements, economic modernization, or external dependency. Instead, the research demonstrates that Pakistan's strategic behaviour and the enduring predominance of the military are rooted in historically constructed beliefs, collective memories, ideological narratives, and deeply embedded perceptions of insecurity that have shaped the state's identity since its creation in 1947. The study establishes that strategic culture provides a more comprehensive and persuasive explanation for the evolution of Pakistan's political and security institutions than traditional realist or institutional approaches.

A major finding of the research is that Pakistan's strategic culture emerged from the traumatic experience of Partition and the ideological foundations of the Two-Nation Theory. Rather than viewing national security merely through the lens of territorial defence, Pakistan gradually developed a strategic outlook centred upon the preservation of its ideological identity, territorial integrity, and perceived survival against external threats. Historical experiences of communal violence, displacement, political instability, and recurring conflicts with India generated a collective security consciousness that became institutionalised within the state apparatus. These historical experiences transformed military preparedness from a policy choice into a defining characteristic of state identity, thereby allowing the armed forces to occupy a central position in national decision-making.

The study further demonstrates that Pakistan's strategic culture has consistently portrayed India as the principal existential threat to the state's survival. This perception has

remained remarkably stable despite changes in governments, military leadership, and international political circumstances. Indo-centric threat perceptions became embedded within Pakistan's historical narratives, educational discourse, strategic thinking, and institutional memory. Consequently, national security planning, defence expenditure, military modernization, and foreign policy priorities have continued to revolve around countering India, making security considerations dominate developmental and democratic priorities throughout Pakistan's history.

Another significant finding is that Afghanistan occupies an equally important position within Pakistan's strategic calculations. The unresolved Durand Line issue, concerns regarding Pashtun nationalism, recurring instability along the western frontier, and India's growing engagement in Afghanistan collectively reinforced Pakistan's perception of strategic vulnerability. These geopolitical concerns strengthened the military's argument that Pakistan faces a two-front security challenge requiring continuous military preparedness and institutional autonomy.

The research establishes that ideological factors have also shaped Pakistan's strategic culture. Islam became integrated into the state's national security discourse and strategic outlook, while the military consistently projected itself as the guardian of Pakistan's ideological foundations, sovereignty, and Islamic identity. This ideological legitimacy enhanced military influence over governance and policymaking, particularly during periods of political instability.

The study reveals that structural weaknesses inherited during state formation—including weak civilian institutions, leadership crises, constitutional instability, ethnic divisions, and administrative challenges—enabled the military to emerge as the most organised institution in Pakistan. Military predominance therefore evolved not simply because of repeated coups but because strategic culture increasingly legitimised military leadership as essential for national stability.

Another important finding is that Pakistan's military expanded far beyond its traditional defence role into economic enterprises, infrastructure, administration, intelligence, diplomacy, and development projects. Military-controlled organisations enhanced institutional autonomy and economic power, thereby reinforcing military influence across civilian governance.

The research further finds that nuclearisation fundamentally transformed Pakistan's strategic posture without altering its underlying security assumptions. Nuclear weapons strengthened deterrence against India while simultaneously increasing the military's institutional prestige and reinforcing its central role in national security. Nuclear capability became an important component of Pakistan's national identity and strategic culture.

The study concludes that Strategic Culture Theory offers a more comprehensive explanation of Pakistan's civil-military relations than Institutional Theory, Modernization Theory, or Dependency Theory because it integrates historical memory, ideology, identity, geopolitical insecurity, and institutional evolution within a single analytical framework. The persistence of military dominance cannot be explained solely by constitutional arrangements or external influences but by deeply rooted strategic beliefs reproduced through political discourse, military institutions, education, and public narratives.

Finally, the research concludes that sustainable democratic consolidation in Pakistan requires gradual transformation of its strategic culture alongside stronger civilian institutions, economic development, reduced regional tensions, and political stability. Although democratic processes have strengthened in recent years, the military continues to enjoy exceptional legitimacy because of historically embedded strategic assumptions. The study therefore demonstrates that Pakistan's civil-military relations are fundamentally products of its strategic culture and historical evolution rather than merely institutional or political developments.