Guest Editorial

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In recent decades, International Relations (IR) has evolved into a major academic discipline for studying relations among states, as well as their ties with international organisations and sub-national entities in the fields of politics, security and economics. In order to understand the dynamics of international relations, such as conflicts and diplomacy, IR initially took a fancy to 'game theory' to analyse and predict the strategic behaviour of various states.

However, IR scholars were quick to realise that 'game theory' modelling was founded on a rigid mathematical structure, which often failed to factor in the unpredictability of human behaviour in real-life situations, particularly in the realm of strategic decision-making. The very premise of game theory that all actors behave as 'generic strategists'—free of any individual quirks and cultural particularities—proved inapplicable in complex real-life situations, where there are several unquantifiable variables at play. This shortcoming necessitated a new approach and an alternative theory for studying the dynamics of international relations, and thus a new theory was propounded that the strategic behaviour of nations is mostly influenced by their individual historical experience and culture. Thereafter, the study of countries' distinctive 'strategic culture' or 'sub-cultures' caught the fancy of many IR theoreticians and analysts.

Although the earliest evidence of linking a nation's culture with its strategic orientations can been traced back to the 'national character

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studies' conducted by the Foreign Morale Analysis Division, United States (US) Office of War, during World War II, the formulation of 'strategic culture' as a concept came much later and was first enunciated by US strategic thinker Jack Snyder in 1977. In his report titled, 'The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations', Snyder argued that the strategic responses of the US and its then arch-enemy, the Soviet Union, could not be mirror images of each other as their strategic thinking 'had developed in different organizational, historical, and political contexts, and in response to different situational and technological constraints'.

He added that these differences could possess a quality of 'semi-permanence' that placed them on the level of '"culture" rather than mere "policy"'. It is in this context that Snyder formulated and defined strategic culture as the 'sum total of ideals, conditional emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of the national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to...strategy'.[1]

Since then, the concept of strategic culture has itself evolved and its understanding has witnessed at least four generational shifts in a span of over four decades. In fact, the feasibility of the theory of strategic culture to explain the choices nation-states make has still not been conclusively proven. In this respect, Alastair Iain Johnston has provided a viable notion of strategic culture that is falsifiable, has its formation traced empirically and has differentiated its effect on state behaviour from other non-ideational variables.[2] In 1990, Ken Booth provided a clear definition of strategic culture as 'a nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behavior, habits, customs, achievements and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force'.[3] In 2005, Darryl Howlett listed a host of constituents and variables associated with the strategic culture of a country, which includes its 'geography, climate and resources; history and experience; political structure; the nature of organizations involved in defense; myths and symbols; key texts that inform actors of appropriate strategic action; and transnational norms, generational change and the role of technology'.[4]

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the growing popularity of the concept of strategic culture, in 1992, RAND Corporation (a US non-profit global policy think tank) sent its distinguished researcher, George K. Tanham, to India to study the strategic might of the country. Having just a few months to write his report on India's complex strategic culture,

Tanham used the paucity of clearly enunciated strategic documentation as a pretext to surmise that India has never had a developed strategic culture in his report, 'Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay'.[5] Although the US military scholar Rodney W. Jones refuted Tanham's summations in his paper 'India's Strategic Culture' (2006),[6] by likening India's strategic culture to a mosaic, Indian scholars and practitioners of international relations became conscious of the importance of exploring and developing the country's strategic culture ever since.

Even as the theory of strategic culture developed diachronic and synchronic tensions that have been difficult to resolve, Indian scholarship has been sifting through its own enormous intellectual history and cultural heritage to explore and discover the various constituents of its strategic culture as it evolved over several millennia. In fact, so far the scholarship has largely focused on India's diverse strategic 'sub-cultures' in an attempt to apply Johnston's approach to Indian particularities.

In this regard, significant contributions have been made by scholars, such as Kanti Bajpai, Runa Das, Rohan Mukherjee, Rahul Sagar, Shivshankar Menon, Deepa Ollapally, Rajesh Rajagopalan, Shrikant Paranjpe, Stephen P. Cohen, Bharat Karnad, Michael Liebig, Deepshikha Shahi, Amitabh Matoo and Ali Zaman, among several others. However, the formulation of clearly developed concepts with regards to Indian strategic culture has remained a challenge because of the highly dense and diverse cultural heritage and the ambivalence surrounding the definition of terms on strategic culture itself. Thus, there is an urgent need to lead the debate in an objective and useful direction based on rigorous research. In this regard, the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) has played a major role and has published research papers of immense significance.

This special issue has five research papers presented at a conference, 'Exploring the Roots of India's Strategic Culture', organised by the MP-IDSA and held at its premises on 5 October 2017. The aim of the conference was to explore mainly those elements that have been influential in shaping Indian attitude towards perceiving threats, use of force, diplomacy, war, understanding and acquisition of power, etc.

This special issue of the *Journal of Defence Studies* attempts to explore and investigate some of the historical sources and strands of India's rich strategic culture in order to better understand the origins of its broad strategic thinking and behaviour.

It would not have been possible for this special issue to have come about without the 'ichha shakti' (willpower) and 'utsah shakti' (enthusiastic zeal and power) of Col Pradeep Kumar Gautam (Retd), former Research Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA). Like a selfless missionary driven by a higher cause, he picked up bright and young scholars and persuaded them to make their own individual contributions on the subject, guiding and motivating them with his wisdom and scholarship every step of the way. This special issue, which carries his singularly insightful analysis of two ancient strategic treatises of *Arthashastra* and *Nitisara*, is dedicated to the singular resolve and whole-hearted dedication of Col Pradeep Kumar Gautam (Retd) and to his scholarly exploration of various historical sources of Indian strategic culture over the years.

Notes

1. Jack Snyder, 'The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations', Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, September 1977, p. 8.
2. Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 38.
3. K. Booth, 'The Concept of Strategic Culture Affirmed', in C.G. Jacobsen (ed.), *Strategic Power: USA/USSR*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990, p. 121.
4. Darryl Howlett, 'Strategic Culture: Reviewing Recent Literature', *Strategic Insights*, Vol. IV, No. 10, October 2005, p. 4.
5. George K. Tanham, 'Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay', Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1992.
6. R.W. Jones, 'India's Strategic Culture and the Origins of Omniscient Paternalism', in J.L Johnson, K.M. Kartchner and J.A. Larsen (eds), *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction. Initiatives in Strategic Studies: Issues and Policies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.