Reflections on Bangladesh's Strategic Culture

Syed Misbah Uddin Ahmad[a]

Abstract

Knowledge of strategic culture as a way of life provides the ways and means for a nation to design its national security architecture. It is significant for Bangladesh, a predominantly Muslim country encircled by India—a constitutionally secular republic that adorns Hindutva as its way of life. The constitution of Bangladesh, before the last amendment, pledged that the high ideals of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the fundamental principles. This demands that the strategic culture of Bangladesh ought to point toward Islam as Bangladesh's way of life. The research endeavors to evaluate the reality by identifying culture and its derivatives, followed by analyzing the history—the pointer of the country's strategic culture. Cases of two of the greatest democracies, i.e., India and the USA, are briefly examined in light of their strategic cultures. The indivisible connections between absolute trust in the Almighty and the strategic culture of the people of Bangladesh are examined to articulate Bangladesh's prosperity duo.

"Verily, we were a disgraceful people, and Allah honored us with Islam, so if we seek honor from other than Islam, then Allah will humiliate us."

- Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) (Nishapuri, 2019)

Keywords: Strategy, Culture, Customs and Religion, Traditions, Belief, Hindutva, Christian, Islam

Introduction

The knowledge of strategic culture and warfare is inextricably linked. For ages, knowledge of one's adversary has been sought to improve military prowess. Herodotus recorded it in his monumental book, *The History of Herodotus*, into the origins of the Greco-Persian Wars fought in 490 BC (Herodotus, 2013). Lawrence of Arabia boarded on a similar quest after the 1916 Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire. He immersed himself deeply in local culture: "Geography, tribal structure, religion, social customs, language, appetites, and standards were at my

Contact: Commodore Syed Misbah Uddin Ahmad ✉ misbah28686@gmail.com
[a]Commodore Syed Misbah Uddin Ahmad, (C), NUP, ndc, afwc, psc, BN (LPR) is the Director General of BIMRAD

finger ends. The enemy I knew almost like my own side" (Hart, 1989).

Hosts of nations have also learned Sun Tzu's maxim by heart: "Know thy enemy, know yourself; your victory will never be endangered" (Tzu, 1989). Academics tend to agree that "Know thy enemy" is one of the first classical principles of war. Reminding the significance of learning the enemy's strategic culture, former US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara stated, "I had never visited Indo-china, nor did I understand or appreciate its history, language, culture, or values. Regarding Vietnam, we found ourselves setting policy for a terra incognita region" (McNamara, 1995).

The national security decision-making of any country is destined to falter if its own strategic cultural identity is neither identified by nor infused upon the psyche of the decision-makers. Revealing a believer's strategic cultural identity, the holy Qur'an pronounces, "It is He (Allah) Who has named you Muslims both before and in this (the Qur'an)!" (The Noble Qur'an, 2: 143, 1999). Some indicators of the unique strategic culture of Bangladesh's Muslims include the traditional history, war of liberation, geopolitical tyranny, revenge of geography, lack of strategic depth, religious tolerance, and their global identity as the most populous Muslim nation (Hasanuzzaman, 1997).

Bangladeshi Muslims account for over 91.28% of the country's total population (Worldpopulationreview, 2024). The people of Bangladesh are highly peace-loving and liberal and can also display excellent examples of heroism and uprightness once called for. It is one of the world's bravest and most patriotic nations. No power in the world could destroy its quest for freedom. It earned independence, defying Pakistan's oppression despite both countries professing Islam. Before the euphoria of the victory of the glorious war of liberation was over, Bangladesh found India—a Hindu nation encircling it (hindutvawatch.org, 2024). Thus, it is imperative to understand Islam, a complete way of life (The Noble Qur'an, 5:3, 1999), from a strategic cultural point of view vis-à-vis Bangladesh's ability to defend itself against threats to its independence and survivability (The Noble Qur'an, 8:60, 1999). Defending a homeland displaying patriotism is an age-old issue. It is incredibly close to the hearts of Muslim citizens. Because a Muslim firstly submits to Allah and affirms allegiance to defend his nation should the bugle to do battle ever sound.

The issue of national security is of immense importance. The subject of national security penetrates directly to the heart of the matter when one engages in

the public discourse over whether this little speck of land is worth defending and dying for when it comes to the decisive moment. It concerns the fate of every Bangladeshi with a vital bonded concern in ensuring the state's survival well into the future. One needs to remember the superb identity and learn from excellent analogies. For instance, a terse dictum made by a National Serviceman of Singapore has since become a quotable quote engraved in the everyday awareness of Singaporeans: "What you cannot defend, you do not own" (Tan, 1999).

The current turmoil within Muslim countries, from Algeria to Indonesia and particularly in Bangladesh, may be attributed to the oblivion of their superior strategic culture (Team, 2024). Even after 53 years of nationhood, Bangladesh may be considered a relatively young nation still wrestling with its original sense of identity and loyalty issues. Public interests are often emotional and sometimes hesitant. However, the fact that we are a Muslim nation remains alive. The constitution of Bangladesh, before the fifteenth amendment, pledged that the high ideals of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, among other things, shall be the fundamental principles (Ministry of Law, 2024). Hence, a clear understanding of Bangladesh's strategic culture is necessary to comprehend the relevance of Islam to the defense of Bangladesh in the twenty-first century and beyond (Philips, 2024). The strategic culture focusing on the national interests of Bangladesh should point toward Islam as the Bangladeshis' way of life.

The paper will initially highlight culture and its derivatives, followed by an analysis of history—the pointer of the strategic culture. Subsequently, the indivisible connections between absolute trust and strategic culture are examined to articulate Bangladesh's prosperity duo. The research questions for this study are: Is culture a way of life familiar to a particular folk based on religion and social traditions? If American self-identity reaffirms its Anglo-Protestant heritage, why should Bangladeshi citizens not be proud of their identity as Muslims? When the Indian strategic culture—Indianness, or Bharatvarsha and Hindutva—originates from Vedic, Kautilyan, and Ashokan traditions that date back several millennia, why should not Bangladesh's strategic culture be derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah of the seventh century?

Research Methodology

This paper followed a modified 'qualitative method' taking both primary and secondary sources into consideration. The basic foundation of the paper is designed through interviews with a few political scientists having expertise on the subject. In addition to the teachings of the holy Qur'an and Sunnah, the

constitution before its amendment, various religious and secular books, doctrinal publications, newspapers/periodicals, professional journals, presentations, web-based articles and reports have also been consulted. To validate the nature and extent of strategic culture as a 'way of life,' two of the greatest democracies of our time, i.e., India and the USA, are briefly scrutinized in terms of their strategic culture.

Culture and Its Derivatives

Defining Culture

Culture is derived from the verb *colere* (Latin root), meaning "to inhabit, cultivate, or honor." It alludes to human activities in general. Diverse definitions of culture correspond to various theories of human behavior or standards of value. In their 1952 book *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn published a list of more than 200 definitions of culture. Presently, UNESCO defines culture as the "set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group." In addition, "culture encompasses art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs" (The European Security and Defence Policy, 2003).
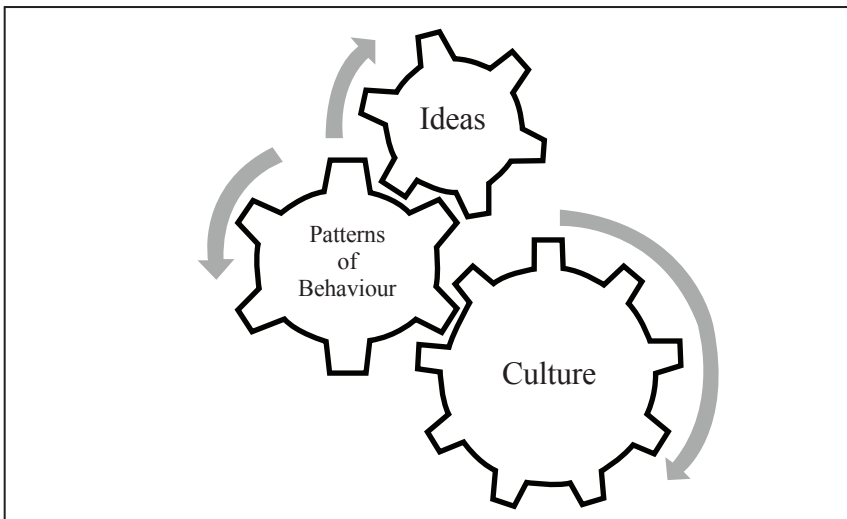

Figure 1: Culture as the Interplay between Ideas and Patterns of Behaviour

The free dictionary by Farlex defines culture as "the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought" (free-dictionary-by-farlex.html, 2008). Thesaurus further explains culture "as a particular society at a particular time and place," or "as the tastes in art and manners that a social group favors," or "all the knowledge and values shared by a society," or "the attitudes and behavior that are characteristic of a particular social group or organization." A population's culture can also be described as all of its inherited customs, institutions, and artistic expressions that are passed down from one generation to the next. Culture has been called "the way of life for an entire society" (Wikipedia, 2024). Culture comprises rules of behavior like law and morality, as well as systems of belief and artistic expression. It also includes clothes, language, religion, rituals, and code of conduct.

Strategic Culture

The term strategic culture can be traced back to a research report by J. Snyder in 1977. In the report, strategic culture is defined as "the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community share with each other with regard to [nuclear] strategy" (Snyder, 1977). He proposes that a variety of factors, including political culture, geography, and historical experience, serve as limitations on the strategic options available. In the middle of the 1980s, a second generation of writers appeared, providing a qualitatively distinct viewpoint on strategic cultures. Rather than concentrating on cultural limitations, these scholars were interested in the ways that culture is employed as a broad instrument to validate strategic ideologies (Klein, 1988).
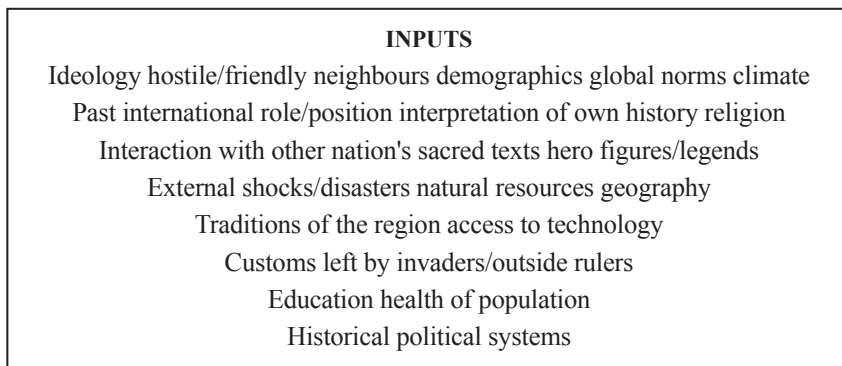

INPUTS

Ideology hostile/friendly neighbours demographics global norms climate

Past international role/position interpretation of own history religion

Interaction with other nation's sacred texts hero figures/legends

External shocks/disasters natural resources geography

Traditions of the region access to technology

Customs left by invaders/outside rulers

Education health of population

Historical political systems

Figure 2: Inputs to Strategic Culture (Johnson, 2006)

NATIONAL CULTURE
Security-Related Outputs

Identity: A nation-state's view of itself comprising the traits of its national character, its intended regional and global roles, and its perceptions of its eventual destiny.

Values: In a cost/benefit analysis, the material and/or ideational factors which are given priority, and elected over others.

Norms: Accepted and expected modes of behaviour.

Perceptive Lens: Beliefs (true or misinformed) and experiences or the lack of experience, which colour the way the world is viewed.
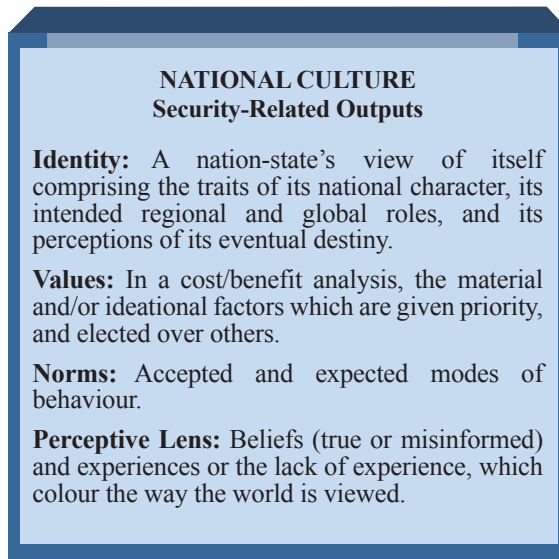
Figure 3: National Culture - Security Related Outputs (Johnson, 2006)

The Sources of Strategic Culture

A country's geography, resources, history, experience, and social and political structure all influence its strategic culture (Gray, 1999). It stands for a strategy that a particular state has already proven effective. It is not absolute, but it tends to change gradually. It is no coincidence, for example, that Britain has historically favored seapower and indirect strategies or has traditionally eschewed the maintenance of a large army. The Americans preferred 'isolationism' in both great wars till it was favorable for them to participate. According to Handel (1994), "Israel's lack of geographic depth, its small but educated population, and technological skill have produced a strategic culture that emphasizes strategic pre-emption, offensive operations, initiative, and—increasingly—advanced technology." A recent study suggests that "Australia's minimal geopolitical status, its maritime rather than continental identity, and its formative military experiences have shaped its way of war" (Evans, 2005).

Physical	Political	Social/Cultural
Geography	Historical Experience	Myths and Symbols
Climate	Political System	Defining Texts
Natural Resources	Elite Beliefs	
Generational Change	Military Organizations	
Technology		

<-----------------{Transnational Normative Pressures}----------------->

Figure 4: Potential Sources of Strategic Culture (Lantis, 2008)

Culture as a way of life

From the conversation above, it can be seen that culture is a way of life that a specific folk group has come to know through social customs and religion. The subsequent paragraphs will shed light on the reality that India and America, the two greatest democracies in the world, actively promote their beliefs as their way of life and are proud to have been influenced by them.

Hindutva: The Indian Way of Life. Academics argue that the Indian strategic culture—Indianness, or *Bharatvarsha and Hindutva*—originates from *Vedic, Kautilyan*, and *Ashokan* traditions that date back several millennia. Embedded in the hearts of educated social elites and illiterate common masses alike, the consciousness of "Hindu values" has been prominent in the sacred belief called "Mother India." Thus, the secular treatise named *Arthashastra* by *Chanakya* (Kautilya), which is a near equivalent to Niccolo Machiavelli's *"The Prince"* in that it expounds on monarchical statecraft, realpolitik in interstate balances of power, war and peace practices, is the source of Indian strategic culture. Indian attitude towards the SAARC member states may act as an aide memoir (Cohen, 2001). According to India's concept, a particularly potent example of an enemy is the Muslims (Jones, 2006). Another facet of Indian strategic culture, to reap benefits by defining a common enemy, is the US-India-Israel strategic trio. This reminds us of our oblivion of the holy verse, "Strongest among men in enmity to the Believers, wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans" (The Noble Qur'an, 5: 82, 1999).

Christian Theocracy: The American Way of Life. Conversely, the American way of life is an expression that refers to the "Lifestyle" of people living in the United States of America. It has some connection to American exceptionalism and the American Dream. "Who Are We? America's Great Debate," published in 2004, is a non-fictional work by leading political scientist and security planner Samuel P. Huntington. The author addresses American self-identity at the beginning of the 21st century and argues for reaffirming the country's Anglo-Protestant heritage. However, tensions have emerged between Christian nationalism and liberalism in recent years. Paul Miller's book is another insider's account of Christian nationalism, and Miller (2022) states that "Christian nationalism is fundamentally at odds with American liberalism and with Christian teachings." Many Americans believed that their country was "God's chosen land and that the government should protect Christianity's role in it, and their heirs are the Christian nationalists of today" (Lambert, 2008). Two famous journalists, John Stanton, and Wayne Madsen, in *The Emergence of the Fascist American Theocratic State*, accurately depict the mindset of Huntington and the current state of affairs in America: "Historians will record that between November 2000 and February 2002, democracy—as envisaged by the creators of the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution—effectively came to an end. As democracy died, the fascist American theocratic state was born" (Choudhury Hasanuzzaman, 2008). Tim Alberta identifies July 4, 1976, as a turning point, and in his book he states that "it was then that Jerry Falwell, a television preacher, proclaimed to a crowd of 25,000 that "the devil" invented the idea that politics and religion should not mix "to keep Christians from running their own country". That notion is the core of American Christian nationalism." Alberta (2023) also states that "In 2020, 85% of white evangelicals who regularly went to church voted for Donald Trump." According to a survey by the Pew Research Center regarding the upcoming presidential elections in November 2024, 60% of Protestants, including 81% of white evangelicals, plan to vote for Donald Trump. Burge (2022) portrays that "14% of the population are white evangelical voters, and they account for the same share as they did during Ronald Reagan's first term as president." This consistency in voter turnout and ideological alignment emphasizes the enduring influence of evangelical Christian nationalism on American politics.

Culture vis-à-vis Strategic Culture: Linkage between the Two

Historically, the cultural supremacy of the stronger states against the weaker ones suggests that culture and strategic culture intensely influence nations' way of life. The superior culture dominates. Cultural decadence is one of the prime

factors for lowering a nation's international standing. The globe has seen a strategic culture that was once proudly referred to as "socialism" come to an end. Its breeding ground—the USSR—has also disappeared from the world map. The bankruptcy of the proponents of democracy and their followers is also clearly visible. Due to biased interpretations of the cultures and not being able to separate the native culture of a nation from its strategic culture, the Muslim world is divided manifold. For instance, there is a stark difference between Muslim and Islamic cultures. The Muslim population is allegedly controlled by despotic pro-western rulers with the narrative that Western culture is better than Islamic culture. Besides, if Indian and American ways of life can be derived from their *Vedic* and Anglo-Christian religions, respectively, is it rational for a Muslim country like Bangladesh to be bashful of declaring that its way of life is Islam? Can a society contribute to the prosperity of its country until it first identifies itself and identifies its worldview, i.e., the way of life it has opted for? Presently, it is witnessing the American strategic culture called 'Christian Theocracy.' Therefore, if Islam is, according to the Qur'anic instructions and Prophetic guidelines, the complete code of life, why can't Bangladeshi Muslims' birth, worldly living, and death not revolve around Islam? They should return to the holy book to adhere strictly to this verse: "Truly, the religion with Allah is Islam. Those who were given the Scripture (Jews and Christians) did not differ except out of mutual jealousy after knowledge had come to them. Moreover, Allah surely is Swift in calling to account for whoever disbelieves in Allah's Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, signs, revelations, etc.)" (The Noble Qur'an, 3:19, 1999).

History—The Pointer of our Strategic Culture

Madinah Charter to Post-Cold War

The First Islamic State. "The individual for the state; the state for the individual, and all for Allah" was the bond that tied the plural society of Madinah under the leadership of the Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him). The Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him) taught the concept of Allah's Oneness for thirteen years. His followers in Makkah endured various forms of persecution and mistreatment at the hands of their community, who viewed the new faith as a threat to their traditional ways and an end to the worship of idols. At last, Allah allowed the Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him) to move to Madinah, where he founded the First Muslim State.

The Madinah Charter. When the Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him) first came to Madinah, he made a contract for good relations

between the Ansars and the Jews, called the Charter of Madinah or the Constitution of Madinah. There were as many as 51 clauses in that charter. This charter can be compared with many modern charters including the UN Charter, formed after 1300 years (Khondakar, 1998). From the invaluable detailed writing about the Charter of Madinah we can understand that "the Constitution established the security of the community, religious freedoms, the role of Madinah as a sacred place, the security of women, stable tribal relations within Madinah, a tax system for supporting the community in a time of conflict, parameters for exogenous political alliances, a system for granting protection of individuals, a judicial system for resolving disputes among diverse groups living as one people (Ummah) but without assimilating into one religion, language, or culture" (Ramadan, 2006).

The Spread of Islam. From Madinah, the message of Islam spread at an electrifying speed. Islam had reached three continents within half a century of the Prophet's (Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him) death. Contrary to popular belief in the West, Islam is neither a religion of the sword, nor did it propagate mainly through warfare. Islam was only spread by warfare against enemy tribes in Arabia, a region where a primitive form of paganism was widespread, which was inimical to the new faith. However, according to the CEO of Hewlett Packard (2001), "Christians and Jews were never forced to convert. Islam was destined to become a world religion of superior culture and to create a civilization that stretched from one end of the globe to the other." The historical study about early Muslim caliphates indicates that "first the Arabs, then the Persians, and later the Turks set about to create classical Islamic civilization" (Britannica, 2024). Africa and India became important hubs of Islamic civilization in the 13th century. Muslim kingdoms were founded in the Malay-Indonesian peninsula not long after. All across China, the Chinese Muslim population flourished. During the past 200 years, Islam has gained popularity in Africa despite the formidable influence of European colonial rulers. Islam is still expanding today, not just in Africa but also in Europe, North America, and South America. Islam is the religion with the fastest rate of growth in North America and Europe. Islam is now proven to be the second-largest religion in the entire world, destined to be the largest in 2 to 3 decades (Heckett, 2017).

Relevance of Sub-continental History to the Birth of Bangladesh

Relevance of Own History to the Strategic Culture. History instills life into nations and inspires citizens of their strategic culture. If a nation is to be destroyed, they are to be made oblivious of its history, or a distorted history should

be presented to them (Ali, 2006). The history of Bangladesh is a case in point. Shetty (1994) highlighted the importance of understanding Islam and suggested that "it is of great significance to expose undistorted history along with the correct understanding of Islam to our future generation so as to save this Muslim nation from extinction. The history of the Muslims in Bangladesh is a history of torture over two hundred years by the Hindu society in general and mainly Hindu feudal lords sponsored by the colonial British rulers."

Vanguards of Muslim India. In 1940, Tiger of Bengal—Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq, moved the "Lahore Resolution," calling for a separate land for the Indian Muslims from the British Raj (Wahab, 2004). On 14 Aug 1947, East Bengal celebrated its freedom from British colonial rule as it became East Pakistan— a province of Pakistan. For obvious reasons, West Bengal remained with India, which celebrated its independence the following day (Jafor, 2005). A handful of Muslims came forward with constructive thought and vision to renew Muslim's sense of identification with their religion, culture, and historical heritage (Qureshi, 1974). The ulamas, the vanguards of the Muslim community in India, believed that the only thing keeping Muslims from plunging into a life of self-destruction was the resurrection of Islam. In doing so, they made contributions that had a lasting impact on the people and political landscape in the Indian subcontinent.

Birth of Bangladesh. Through gradual growth, the moral and intellectual forces organized over time by these men culminated in the Pakistan Movement. Pakistan Movement was based on the theory that Muslims are entirely separate people from Hindus in every respect. They form an ideological community with divine guidance for every realm of human life. It is a dictate of their faith to establish a state where they can rule according to the law revealed by the Almighty (The Noble Qur'an, 5: 44,45,46, 1999). The two-nation theory was the springboard for this movement. The movement, led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, created Pakistan—both West and East Pakistan—in less than ten years. The oppression by West Pakistan caused deprivation of East Pakistan, resulting from the absence of Islam as a way of life and the adoption of a political structure that was created by men fashioned by Western culture. To express their resentment, the Bangla- speaking people of East Pakistan waged a war in 1971 and gained independence.

Who Are We? Muslim Essence and Strategic Culture

Islamization of the Bengal. The glorious history of the Muslims as a nation is not time-bound (The Noble Qur'an, 4:163,164, 1999). The Islamic culture

began its journey with Prophet Adam (Peace be Upon Him) and has occasionally struggled with falsehood, modified by divine revelation. It received the final shape with the Prophethood of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him). It was in 712 that Islam entered the Indian subcontinent through the swift military-politico victory of Muhammad Bin Qasim through Sindh and ultimately spread up to Punjab. Even though Islam entered Bengal much earlier, between 600-1200, it could not establish its foothold without a political victory. During Emperor Kutubuddin Aybek, Bakhtiar Khilji almost miraculously entered Bengal and established his political dominance in 1203. However, historians are convinced that Islam entered much earlier than this, though it was not a political power of the society. It started influencing society, especially the lower class, with its superior culture and justice (Ali, 2006).

Muslim vis-à-vis Islamic Culture. The phrase "Muslim culture" is mainly used in secular academia to refer to all cultural customs that Muslims have historically observed. Pre-Islamic Arab culture dominated early Muslim norms when Islam reappeared in Arabia in the seventh century. But as the Islamic empires quickly expanded, Muslims encountered and assimilated many aspects of Persian, Turkish, Mongol, Indian, Malay, Berber, and Indonesian civilizations. However, this assimilated culture is called "Cultural Islam," and the culture that flows from the holy Qur'an and the authentic teachings of the Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon Him) is called Islamic culture (Philips, 2024).

What Is Bangladesh's Cultural Identity? To answer the question - who are we or what is our cultural identity, the holy Qur'an decisively declares, "Thus We have made you [true Muslims - real believers of Islamic Monotheism, true followers of Prophet Muhammad and his Sunnah (legal ways)], a Wasat (just) (and the best) nation, that you be witnesses over mankind and the Messenger be a witness over you" (The Noble Qur'an, 2:143, 1999). Despite being of the same faith, Bangladesh earned its independence by the sword, denouncing Pakistan's oppression. Bangladeshi Muslims justified their strategic culture as a fighting race in 1971. Despite the overwhelming influence of Hindu writers of both the Bengal, the author could not find substantial contributions of Hindu freedom fighters in 1971. This concludes that a negligible percentage participated in Bangladesh's glorious war of liberation. In other words, "let the Muslims of West and East Pakistan kill each other while we enjoy the outcome." However, it is to be noted that the "Lahore Resolution" and "Two Nation" theory were, among others, two of the landmarks in the path of struggle for Independent Bangladesh. One might argue that even without the Lahore resolution of 1940 and the two-nation theory,

Bangladesh could have become independent owing to a separate culture and language. The answer is to look at West Bengal, a province of India, and the intellectuals who always instigated the people of East Bengal but chose to remain with "Mother India" owing to nothing but "religious" affiliation. So there is no denying that had Bangladesh remained part of India and not Pakistan, it would remain part of "Okhand Bharat," and the independence could have been a far cry. Thus, the reality of independent Bangladesh dictates that the Lahore resolution and two-nation theory sow the seeds for the glorious Independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

Indivisible Connections between Absolute Trust in the Almighty and the Strategic Culture

Absolute Trust in the Almighty

Tawakkul, or Absolute trust in Allah, is a fundamental part of the Islamic *Aqeedah*. *Tawakkul* is translated as either trust or dependence. Putting the believers' trust in Allah is a matter of faith and contributes to Muslims' worldview regarding this life. To clarify this point, some Qur'anic verses are quoted: In Surah Ale Imran verse 160, Allah says, "If Allah helps you, none can overcome you: If He forsakes you, who is there after that, which can help you? In Allah, then, let Believers put their trust." In Surah At-Tauba verse 51, Allah says, "Say: 'Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us: He is our protector': And on Allah let the Believers put their trust." In Surah Ash-Shu'araa verse 217, Allah says, "And put thy trust on the exalted in Might, The Merciful." In Surah Al-Imran verse 159, Allah says, "...Then, when thou hast taken a decision, put thy trust in Allah, For Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him)."

Muslims are instructed to rely only on Allah in all of the verses mentioned above. This cosmos is under the sole direction of Allah, and good and evil are His decrees. Allah's omnipotence is the important factor that must always be taken into account. As a result, neither human behavior nor the availability of financial resources can ensure the success of our undertakings. For example, our material and physical strength may deceive us into believing that victory on a battlefield is inevitable (The Noble Qur'an, 8:17, 1999). The truth is that our strength or weakness has no bearing on the outcome of the battle, and it is only by the will of Allah that we become victorious or defeated by the enemy (The Noble Qur'an, 9:14, 1999). According to Ghadanfar (2001), "This firm belief led a handful of Muslims during and after the time of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him) to fight so valiantly against formidable enemies over and over again."

Significant Elements of Bangladesh's Strategic Culture

Owing to unique geopolitical and religious realities, the strategic culture of Bangladesh evolves, keeping a host of unresolved disputes with its two neighbors, India and Myanmar. The core of Bangladesh Armed Forces professionals has, since the liberation war, acted as the precursor in attaining the core national interest, disregarding Indira or Gujral doctrine. To address the issues of national security, Bangladesh's history and strategic context generate four (Azizul, 2008) broad characteristics of the country's strategic culture:

a. **Opposition to Indian Hegemony.** Except for a small minority, the majority of Muslim nationalist political and military leaders in Bangladesh are united in their rejection of Indian hegemony as the foundation for a stable and peaceful regional order. The very notion of an independent Bangladesh was premised on the right of East Pakistan's Muslim population to enjoy the benefits of freedom free from the domination of West Pakistan's hegemonic attitude. Sullivan (2008) accentuated that "after gaining independence and unveiling a genuine Indian attitude, the Bangladeshi political and military elites have treasured their hard-won independence and resisted every Indian effort to curtail their freedom of action." The August Revolution, where Generation Z-led victory toppled the Indian puppet tyrannical regime that ruled Bangladesh brutally for more than 16 years, is another glaring example of anti-Indian sentiment in Bangladesh.

b. **Primacy of Anti-Indian Sentiment.** Whether pro-Indian civilians or the military ruler ran the Bangladesh government, anti-Indian sentiment has always been Bangladesh's (reasonably held national elections) top election-winning triumph card (Ali, 1997). Although Bangladesh continues to experience intense poverty, poor infrastructure, a weak educational system, nearly non-existent social services, and dependence on India for many commodities, anti-Indian sentiment runs very high (Pattanaik, 2008).

c. **Conventional Deterrence.** Despite economic constraints, Bangladesh has maintained a determined campaign to acquire and modernize its armed forces since its creation to give a strong political signal across the border that any attempt to violate its independence will cost very dearly (Worden, 1989). Bangladesh's deterrent posture is predicated on a moderate conventional force capability and demonstration of its mass people's willingness to defend their land triggered by its strategic culture to run high risks and pay high costs for any potential adversary (Army, 2024).

d. **Identification with Conservative Islamic Causes.** To Worden (1989), "the emphasis on Muslim nationalism that brought Bangladesh into being continues to play an essential role in shaping its national identity and foreign relations." Following the war of independence, particularly after the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Muslim nationalism became more prominent and more significant than a nationalist ideology. It became a rallying cry for Islamic solidarity and Muslim causes worldwide. Thus while Islam (Banglapedia, 2024) remains a major part of Bangladesh's political identity, it generally is not the dominant theme in Bangladesh's foreign and defence policies.

The Indivisible Connections: Trust in the Almighty and Strategic Culture

The indivisible connection between the trust in the Almighty and the Strategic Culture to survive, defend, and even die for what Bangladesh owns and loves remains the cornerstone of its existence (Seng, 2002). To stand disinterested or disaffected is to be divided. As freedom-loving citizens, one cannot afford to be "flaccid" in opinions and stance on the question of patriotism, national resilience, and fighting spirit, especially when we live in a Muslim society (muslimcentral.com, 2018). An account of any of our rough and tumble childhood: we played with kites, tops, marbles, and even fighting cocks but joined the mosque for prayer when the call was made. These games and submission to Allah through prayers nurtured a fighting spirit and the will to win. Bangladesh needs a strong "heartbeat" to brave any "drumbeat" of war.

Any fighting force's true center of gravity lies in its fighting spirit (Tong, 2002). A resolute spirit is not about whether one gets battered easily but can jump back. Also, it is likely to hinge on how to focus on fortifying bodies and minds for the future. The fighting spirit of all Bangladeshis will depend on how successfully it inspires the citizens' "heart ware"—genuine patriotic love for the country (Zia, 2008). Just as a sturdy human being's strength is its bursting two arms, the resolute fighting spirit, which is inseparable from the strategic culture, Bangladesh's prosperity must rest on the support of the two arms: absolute trust in the Almighty Allah and the strategic culture—as fundamental to the conduct of strategy and the execution of policy. One cannot exist without the others.
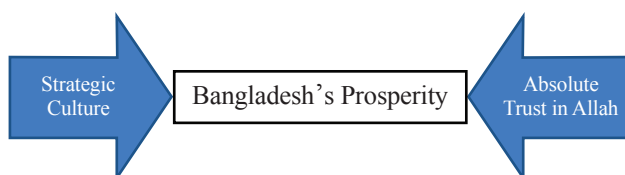

Figure 5: Bangladesh's Prosperity

Conclusion

Culture encompasses art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs. Culture has been called the way of life for an entire society. A nation's strategic culture flows from its geography, resources, history, experience, society, and political structure. It represents an approach that a given state has found successful in the past. Culture is a way of life familiar to a particular folk based on religion and social tradition. The brief case studies provided insight to indicate that both of the world's greatest democracies—India and America are proud to be influenced by and tirelessly preach their belief as their way of life. Conversely, putting trust in Allah is a matter of belief and contributes to Bangladesh's strategic culture and way of life. Culture and strategic cultures are thus two sides of a coin that identifies a nation.

No society can contribute to improvement until it first identifies its own self and its world view. When the Indian and American way of life can be derived from Vedic and Christian theocracy, then is it rational for a Muslim country like Bangladesh to be bashful of its Islamic way of life? What prevents them from upholding the constitutional pledge of absolute trust in the Almighty Allah as the basis of attaining national interests? To solve the question about Bangladeshis identity, the holy Qur'an decisively declares, "Thus We have made you Muslims" (The Noble Qur'an, 2:143, 1999). The history of the Muslims in Bangladesh is a history of torture over two hundred years by the Hindu society sponsored by the colonial British rulers.   The absence of Islam as a complete code of life led to the political imbecility of West Pakistan who deprived and oppressed the Bangla-speaking people of the East. East Pakistan became independent Bangladesh by fighting a Liberation War in 1971. Bangladeshis vindicated their strategic culture as a fighting race.

Bangladesh is a proud nation that represents a plural society. It is very much possible to keep this nation integrated emulating the example of Madinah. The Madinah Constitution was successful in establishing the following: community security, religious freedom, Madinah's role as a sacred place, women's security, stable tribal relations, a tax system to support the community during times of war, an individual protection system, and a judicial system to settle disputes amongst diverse groups living as one people but not merging into one language, religion, or culture. Bangladesh can also achieve its national goals through Islam as the way of life since Muslims form about ninety-two percent of the total population. If Bangladesh is to remain secure through the twenty-first century and

beyond, it is essential to understand the linkage that builds the prosperity duo. Bangladesh's prosperity must rest on the support of two arms: absolute trust in the Almighty Allah and a strategic culture of resolute spirit.

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