

NARENDRA MODI AND
THE TRANSFORMATION
OF INDIA'S PAKISTAN
POLICY

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South Asia Scan

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Transformation of India's
Pakistan Policy**

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Executive Summary

Historically, India's foreign policy towards Pakistan has been tied to three issues – Kashmir, nuclear weapons and terrorism. Sovereignty over the province of Kashmir lies at the heart of the dispute between the neighbours. The two countries fought their first major war over Kashmir in 1947, which led to the United Nations (UN) brokering a ceasefire agreement that drew a line over the occupied territory, known as the Line of Control (LoC). India's consistent position on Kashmir has been to maintain the status quo and to convert the LoC into an international border, as it is largely satisfied with the territorial arrangement.

Pakistan, in contrast, is a revisionist power. Following its acquisition of nuclear weapons, Pakistan has repeatedly organised and sponsored terrorist proxies in Kashmir. Its goal has been to foster unrest in the Kashmir Valley in order to exacerbate the nuclear shadow hanging over the subcontinent and compel the international community to intervene, thereby pressuring India to redraw the border. India has resisted all such interventions and has insisted that the Kashmir dispute can only be settled bilaterally. Within these Cold War-like nuclear constraints, India has developed a combination of approaches to counter Pakistan's asymmetric warfare. These include deterring Pakistan through force; negotiation; isolating Pakistan for terrorism in multilateral forums; containing terrorism on its own soil; and downplaying Kashmir as a nuclear flashpoint by diminishing the severity of Islamabad's threat.

India's approach towards Pakistan has traditionally been described as one of 'strategic' or 'cautious restraint', and characterised as being more defensive than offensive in nature. From even as early as the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, this caution earned New Delhi the reputation of going soft on terror. This reputation was also due, in part, to the pressures of the then-international system on India to behave as a 'responsible power'.

In April 2019, however, the Narendra Modi-led BJP government changed this allegedly docile image by ordering an aerial bombing of terrorist camps in Balakot, Pakistan, in retaliation to a suicide bomber's assault on security forces in Kashmir's Pulwama district. Months later, in August 2019, India revoked Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which had granted Kashmir its semi-autonomous status. Some argue that this marks a major shift in India's policy towards Pakistan, with certain critics holding a muscular, xenophobic Hindu nationalism to blame.

This publication argues that the Modi government has revised India's Pakistan policy from one of strategic restraint to realist strategic assertiveness. India's assertive upgrading of its foreign policy can thus be explained by a combination of external and internal factors. On the external security front, India's failure to credibly deter Pakistan's revanchism; India's upsized military and economic capabilities; flexibility to pursue its national interest on its northwestern frontier with fewer fears of international reprisal; and the potential terror threat of radicals moving from Syria to Afghanistan-Pakistan and on to Kashmir, have collectively galvanised the Modi government to act more proactively against Pakistan. Domestically, the BJP's 2019 general elections victory has empowered Modi to take a zero-tolerance policy. This zero-tolerance policy is also attributable to the prime minister's strongman leadership style and the nationalistic support he garnered by confronting Pakistan during the election season. Finally, the BJP's majority in Parliament has enabled the government to advance a Hindu nationalist agenda not possible under the Vajpayee-led BJP government of 1998 to 2004 due to coalition constraints at that time and Vajpayee's 'moderate' style of leadership.

Introduction

On 27 September 2019, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan addressed the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to protest the Indian government's revision of the constitutional status of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. In an op-ed article for *The New York Times* shortly before the UNGA meeting, and later during his UN address in August 2019, Khan warned that India's "occupation" of Kashmir could lead to a "blood bath"¹ and impending genocide once the Indian government lifted its curfew.² This curfew involved the deployment of nearly 46,000 troops, incarceration of local politicians and the shutdown of Internet services, which India insists has been critical for maintaining peace and security.

In his article, Khan argued that India's provocation in Kashmir could have consequences for "the whole world as two nuclear-armed states (got) ever closer to direct military confrontation."³ He explained in his assembly address that his priority upon coming to power in Pakistan was to pursue peace – "we decided to disband all militant groups" – and attested that Pakistan was accused unfairly when "a Kashmiri boy radicalised by Indian forces blew himself up on an Indian convoy."⁴ He laid the blame squarely at India's feet, in the context of New Delhi's callous treatment of Kashmiris in their quest for independence; "There will be another Pulwama incident because of their own cruelty in Kashmir. They will blame us and try to bomb us again." To contravene war, Khan urged the UN to act on the purpose for which it was created in 1945 and to "insist on Kashmir's right to self-determination."⁵

Khan's fiery address to world leaders and attempted internationalisation of Kashmir through threats of nuclear escalation fulfilled his administration's pledge to draw attention to India's abrogation of Article 370.⁶ On 5 August 2019, the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of the Indian Parliament) bifurcated the state of Jammu and Kashmir into two smaller, federally administered

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1. Imran Khan, "Imran Khan: The World Can't Ignore Kashmir. We Are All in Danger", *The New York Times*, 30 August 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/30/opinion/imran-khan-kashmir-pakistan.html>.
 2. Eric Nagourney, "Pakistan Leader Will Urge U.N. Intervention in Kashmir", *The New York Times*, 25 September 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/25/world/asia/imran-khan-kashmir-india.html>.
 3. Khan, op. cit.
 4. Imran Khan, "Prime Minister Imran Khan's Speech at 74th United Nations General Assembly Session, New York, USA (27.09.19)", Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf website. <https://insaf.pk/news/imran-khans-speech-74th-united-nations-general-assembly-session>.
 5. Ibid.
 6. Murtaza Solangi, "Pakistan's Kashmir Narrative is Falling Flat. How Might that Change?" *The Diplomat*, 10 September 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/pakistans-kashmir-narrative-is-falling-flat-how-might-that-change/>.

territories – Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh – and integrated them into the Union.⁷ Khan’s rhetoric is part of Islamabad’s long-time strategy to reclaim territory existentially important to Pakistan. The development of nuclear weapons, threats of nuclear holocaust and Pakistan’s involvement in cross-border terrorism directly emerge as consequences of the original partition of Kashmir. Pakistan calls Kashmir its ‘jugular vein’, a province perceived as core to its Muslim national identity.

The dispute over Kashmir goes back to India’s independence and the two-nation theory, wherein the Muslim-League, a rival of the then-Indian National Congress (INC), argued that Muslims and non-Muslims constituted two separate civilisations, and, therefore, required distinct national territories and identities. The INC, claiming to represent all of India, rejected this proposal. The communal violence that ensued pierced into the heart of both nations – a pluralist, secular India versus an Islam-centred Pakistan, with the existence of one correspondingly invalidating the other.

Within this context, 600-odd princely states were forced to decide whether they wanted to accede to Pakistan or India. Pakistan’s militia preemptively invaded Kashmir after independence, forcing its then-Maharaja to call on India for support. The Maharaja later signed the Instrument of Accession, ceding legal control of Kashmir to India. Since then, Kashmir has become the source of three additional wars – in 1965, 1971 and 1999 – and a hotbed for armed conflicts.⁸ Kashmir also had unforeseen foreign policy consequences for both the neighbouring countries as their polities and the international system have transformed.

For Pakistan, Kashmir became a site to bleed India “by a thousand cuts” and divert its resources away from the pursuit of great power status.⁹ For India, Kashmir posed a vexing issue of national integration. Since the late 1980s, and especially after acquiring nuclear weapons, Pakistan has provoked unrest with the help of radicalisation and terror as a *post facto* justification to demand a plebiscite in Kashmir to wrest the territory from India’s control.

Following a stalemate in the First Kashmir War, the border drawn in the Valley was largely to India’s advantage. Since this time, India has consistently

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7. Ministry of Law and Justice (Legislative Department), “The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019”, *The Gazette of India*, 9 August 2019.
 8. Nicole Burnett, “Kashmir: A Path Forward for India and Pakistan?”, Pacific Council on International Policy, 9 August 2019. <https://www.pacificcouncil.org/newsroom/kashmir-path-forward-india-and-pakistan>.
 9. Ashley J Tellis, “Are India-Pakistan Peace Talks Worth a Damn?”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 20 September 2017. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/09/20/are-india-pakistan-peace-talks-worth-damn-pub-73145>.

held up the status quo along the LoC and has tried to formalise the line into an international border. This was first evident in the six rounds of Foreign Ministers' Dialogue in 1962 and 1963,¹⁰ and was reiterated with the Bangladesh War of Independence and the signing of the Shimla Agreement in 1972,¹¹ where both countries agreed not to violate the LoC through unilateral alterations or the use of force.

India's integration of Jammu and Kashmir – its rationale being better governance and development¹² – and half a year earlier, India's aerial assault on a terrorist training camp in Balakot, thus mark what many call a break in India's status quo approach and policy of 'strategic restraint'. By equating terrorism with an attack by the Pakistani state and unilaterally upending the status quo in Kashmir, India has signalled a decisive shift in its foreign policy towards Pakistan, demonstrating a new willingness to test out the thresholds of international opinion in a global milieu that is increasingly marked by geopolitical adventurism.¹³

The gravity of Khan's allegations at the UNGA – where he called the BJP's primary ally, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), "an organisation inspired by Hitler and Mussolini", and suggestion that India's move in Kashmir could put both the Muslim minority and the world community in danger – have made the need to understand India's shift in Pakistan foreign policy greater than ever. Indeed, reductionist labels like 'fascism' and 'communalism' are often bandied out to the BJP without fully addressing the historic and real-world constraints that have gone into the shaping of India's Pakistan policy, or delving with more nuance into how Hindu nationalist ideology is currently manifesting.

This publication seeks to shed light on three key areas – the degree to which India's behaviour has changed; whether we should categorise this new foreign policy as Hindu nationalist; and how India's domestic politics are spilling over into the realm of international affairs. The authors argue that there are four main reasons why the BJP has changed its policy: i) India's failure to stop

10. Y D Gundevia, *Outside the Archives* (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1984).

11. Ministry of External Affairs (1972), "Shimla Agreement", Treaties and Documents, [Online: web]. Accessed on 15 May 2015. <http://mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?19005/Simla+Agreement+July+2+1972>.

12. S Jaishankar, "Q&A: India's foreign minister on Kashmir", Interview by Stephen Brown and Christian Oliver, *Politico*, 2 September 2019. <https://www.politico.eu/article/q-and-a-india-foreign-minister-subrahmanyam-jaishankar-on-pakistan-kashmir-imran-khan/>.

13. As S Jaishankar observes at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in the US, "We ... see ... at the big table ... larger powers are dealing more opportunistically with each other. Through their behavior, they encourage the rest of the world to do so also." <https://www.csis.org/analysis/indian-foreign-policy-preparing-different-era>.

Pakistan from supporting terrorism; ii) new and emerging external threats; iii) Modi's overwhelming electoral mandate; and iv) Hindutva ideology.

This publication first provides a structural outline of how Kashmir, nuclear weapons and terrorism have defined India's Pakistan policy. It then assesses the contributions of Hindu nationalism to the recent policy shift by comparing the BJP governments of 1998 to 2004 and 2014 to present.

India's Pakistan Policy: Kashmir, Nuclear Weapons and Terrorism

The India-Pakistan relationship has frequently been described as “an enduring rivalry”,¹⁴ “the unending war”¹⁵ and “the enduring stalemate”.¹⁶ This relationship is also frequently misunderstood, especially for those unfamiliar with the rivals’ history and for well-wishers long desiring peace for the subcontinent. South Asia has additional reasons for instability, due in no small part to Indo-Pak relations and terrorism.¹⁷ Where Kashmir was the focal point of their relations after Independence, at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the Kashmir dispute and Pakistan’s acquisition of nuclear weapons interacted with a third issue, terrorism, which set the tenor of their relations. Pakistan’s support for separatists and Islamic terrorists promoted destabilisation through “nuclear jihad” in the subcontinent. This was how Pakistan stirred insurgent behaviour under the protection of its nuclear shield.¹⁸ Terrorism has marred Indo-Pak relations ever since, and has had a spillover effect on the region.

There were hopes, starting with the process of America-led globalisation in the 1980s, that India and Pakistan could reconcile their differences along lines of pragmatic economic self-interest, establish commercial inter-linkages that would help them to assuage historic animosities similar to the European Union and foster people-to-people opportunities for peace to transform South Asia into an engine for regional and global economic growth.¹⁹ Trade among the South Asian countries today is a paltry US\$3 billion (S\$4.26 billion) while the key regional institution, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), meant to promote development and regional integration, is largely viewed as defunct, even as security concerns continue to plague South Asia.

14. T V Paul, *The India-Pakistan Conflict: An Enduring Rivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

15. Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co Ltd, 2003).

16. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, “India-Pakistan: the Enduring Stalemate”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(21), 2003.

17. “Pakistan uses terrorism as legitimate tool of statecraft: Jaishankar”, *The Times of India*, 26 September 2019. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pakistan-uses-terrorism-as-legitimate-tool-of-statecraft-jaishankar/articleshow/71311471.cms>.

18. Praveen Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad: The Cover War in Kashmir, 1947-2004* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

19. C Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New Delhi, Palgrave Macmillan: 2004).

Peace efforts have failed to yield the intended fruit, which has disappointed and frustrated many, not least India. When the BJP was elected in 2014 to replace the Congress, there was hope that Modi, like previously elected prime ministers, would use his electoral mandate for peace.²⁰ Similar hopes were also revived after Modi's huge election victory in 2019. In May of that year, ceasefire violations along the LoC were declining and many commentators viewed the détente as a chance for a breakthrough. No structural dialogue had been held since 2008, and the previous months had also witnessed heavy artillery and gunfire along the LoC. However, in May 2019, only nine ceasefire violations were recorded. The signals looked promising.²¹ During his first speech after his election victory, Modi declared, "Now, there are only two caste(s) living in the country ... the poor and other(s) ... who have some contribution to free them of poverty."²² It appeared that the two 'populist' leaders, Modi and Khan – sharing concerns like poverty, climate change and bringing development to their job-hungry constituencies – might find some growth-oriented platform on which to cooperate.

Khan actively seized on this vision, as was shown by his overtures to Modi before and after the BJP's election victory. He argued in an interview that a BJP re-election had the best chance of negotiating peace with Pakistan; "Perhaps if the BJP – a right wing party – wins, some kind of settlement in Kashmir could be reached."²³ When Modi's victory was assured, Khan wrote a letter to the Indian prime minister and personally congratulated him on the phone, reiterating his vision for "peace, progress and prosperity in South Asia".²⁴ In May 2019, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi commented, "Pakistan is ready to hold talks with the new India government to resolve all

20. Fahad Nabeel, "3 Scenarios for India Pakistan Relations Under Modi 2.0", *The Diplomat*, 25 June 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/three-scenarios-for-india-pakistan-relations-under-modi-2-0/>.

21. "Pakistan urges India to de-escalate border tension, India says act against terror first", *India Today*, 10 May 2019. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/india-pakistan-border-tension-army-tension-pulwama-ceasefire-loc-1521544-2019-05-10>.

22. "Full text of Modi's first speech after historic election victory", *Business Insider*, 26 May 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.in/full-text-of-modi-speech-loc-sabha-election-2019/articleshow/69467611.cms>.

23. James Mackenzie and Martin Howell, "Pakistan PM Imran Khan sees better chance of peace talks with India if BJP wins election", *Reuters*, 10 April 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/pakistan-politics-khan/pakistan-pm-sees-better-chance-of-peace-talks-with-india-if-modis-bjp-wins-election-idUSKCN1RL265>.

24. "'Mutual trust must for peace': PM elect Modi to Imran Khan", *Hindustan Times*, 27 May 2019. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/imran-khan-dials-pm-modi-looks-forward-to-working-together/story-eiHPJRqWKKE8tneckLbdHO.html>.

outstanding issues.”²⁵ Relations also appeared on the upswing when Qureshi exchanged pleasantries with his Indian counterpart, Sushma Swaraj, on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Speculations arose of Modi and Khan meeting during their attendance at the SCO in June 2019.²⁶

However, no meeting took place. Modi gave Khan the cold shoulder, publicly reaffirming that “[c]ountries sponsoring, aiding and funding terrorism must be held accountable.”²⁷ The non-meeting in Kyrgyzstan, therefore, must be looked at from further afield than merely Modi and Khan’s relationship. To fully attribute Modi’s hard-line stance to militant Hindu nationalism also, as Khan argues, would be to turn a blind eye to the lessons India has learned from engaging with Pakistan over the preceding seven decades.

India’s Pakistan Policy Post-Independence

In the first few decades after Independence, there were three wars between India and Pakistan. While Hindu nationalists at that time argued for reclaiming Pakistan in pursuit of *Akhand Bharat* (Greater India) and the formation of a *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu nation), Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister, was content to leave Pakistan alone. He was convinced that given India’s democratic, federalist ethos, Pakistan would have no choice but to one day reunite with India²⁸ or otherwise that friendly relations would develop.²⁹ This was not only in keeping with the two countries’ inseparable cultural history, but was also idealistic, and in hindsight reflected Nehru’s anti-imperialist foreign policy of non-alignment, which objected to the use of force in international affairs. He instead championed consensus and a worldview by which nations’ commonalities would be sufficient to surmount local obstacles.³⁰

25. “Pakistan ready to hold talks with new Indian government: Shah Mehmood Qureshi”, *The Times of India*, 26 May 2019. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/pakistan-ready-to-hold-talks-with-new-indian-government-shah-mehmood-qureshi/articleshow/69502953.cms>.

26. Elizabeth Roche, “Swaraj, Qureshi Exchange Pleasantries on Sidelines of SCO Meeting”, *Livemint*, 22 May 2019. <https://www.livemint.com/politics/policy/swaraj-qureshi-exchange-pleasantries-on-sidelines-of-sco-meeting-1558546193599.html>.

27. “PM Modi shames Pakistan at SCO Summit in presence of Imran Khan”, *India Today*, 14 June 2019. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/pm-modi-bishkek-sco-pakistan-1548665-2019-06-14>.

28. Nisid Hajari, “Why is Pakistan Such a Mess? Blame India”, *Foreign Policy*, 26 May 2015. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/05/26/pakistan-india-independence-gandhi/>.

29. “Freeing the Spirit of Man: Nehru on communalism, theocracy, and Pakistan”, *The Hindu*, 30 December 2019. <https://www.thehindu.com/society/freeing-the-spirit-of-man-nehru-on-communalism-theocracy-and-pakistan/article30433860.ece>.

30. Dhruva Jaishankar, “India as an Asian Power”, in *Seven Decades of Independent India* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2018).

In 1962, however, China invaded India, which was followed quickly after by a Pakistani invasion in 1965. India repelled the Pakistani army but its struggle underlined the inadequacies of its military capabilities. The need to secure Kashmir underlined another foreign policy crisis – racked with secessionist and local nationalist movements, India also had to guard against outside forces fostering separatist tendencies.³¹ The diversity-in-unity defining India's social fabric today was by no means given and presented Nehru with his administration's greatest foreign policy challenge: to keep India from falling apart. The semi-autonomous status granted to Kashmir but reluctance to grant it full sovereignty represents one element in India's long struggle for integration. Kashmir, being Muslim dominated, also represented for Pakistan the 'unfinished agenda' of Partition. Disagreements concerning the boundaries and idea of India manifested post-independence into territorial disputes and debates around self-determination for the cultural communities living there.³²

India's foreign policy soon shifted under the Indira Gandhi government when New Delhi took a more proactive stance towards its neighbourhood. Not only had India's defeat to China been humiliating, but the Indo-Pak war of 1965, in which Pakistan once again invaded Kashmir, also got the Cold War superpowers involved in the dispute. The Soviet Union brought the two warring sides to sign a ceasefire in Tashkent. However, the ceasefire – like the UN-mediated ceasefire in 1947 – failed to address the major issue of Kashmir and the resolution was short-lived.³³ Tensions erupted three years later in the Third Indo-Pak war, known as the War of Bangladesh's Independence. India won the war, dividing East and West Pakistan.

If Kashmir was the underlying motivator for hostile relations, nuclear weapons aggravated them further. China provided Pakistan with nuclear technology as part of a counter-balancing strategy against India. South Asia, once the backwater of the Cold War, thus assumed new-found significance to the United States (US), which feared a nuclear holocaust between the two 'irrational' rivals. In its foreign policy, the US hyphenated Pakistan and India together as part of its strategy to de-escalate nuclear conflict in 'South Asia'.³⁴

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31. Taru Dalmia and David M Malone, "Historical Influences on India's Foreign Policy", *International Journal; Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, Vol. 67, No. 4, Canada after 9/11 (Autumn 2012).
 32. Ariel Sophia Bardi, "India's Hindu Nationalists Still Feed Off Partition's Wounds", *Foreign Policy*, 14 August 2018. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/14/indias-hindu-nationalists-still-feed-off-partitions-wounds/>.
 33. Office of the Historian, "The India-Pakistan War of 1965". <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/india-pakistan-war>.
 34. Stephen Cohen, "Solving Proliferation Problems in a Regional Context: South Asia", *The South Asia Papers: A Critical Anthology of Writings* (Brookings Institution Press, 2016).

In the late 1980s, the SAARC also came into being, a parallel effort within the region to stabilise a rapidly deteriorating security environment.³⁵

By 1990, unrest and anti-Indian sentiment in Kashmir were high due to malgovernance,³⁶ and Pakistan spotted an opening through terrorism. Emboldened by its nuclear weapons programme (which it had started to develop only 13 days after losing the 1971 war) and success in using *muhajideen* fighters to repel the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, Pakistan redirected its terrorist proxies to Kashmir in the late 1980s. India responded by dispatching its army; and, it is argued, also threatened cross-border raids on training camps.³⁷

However, India refrained from such operations on Pakistani soil, fearing nuclear reprisal. Amidst this conflict, which was turning increasingly 'hot', the US dispatched a delegation under Robert Gates.³⁸ He proposed a series of confidence building measures (CBMs), and from 1991 to 1994, the Indian and Pakistani governments held their foreign secretary meetings, where they progressed in establishing communication channels to help prevent conflagration. Through the dialogue process, India agreed to discuss the disputed status of Kashmir but on the condition that Pakistan ceased cross-border terrorism.³⁹

By this point, all three elements – Kashmir, nuclear weapons and terrorism – had come into the picture, defining the landscape of limited foreign policy options within which India, up till now, has had to operate.

Foreign Policy Foundations

India's fundamental policy became formalising the LoC into an international border, which it repeatedly sought to do in 1962-63, through the Shimla Agreement in 1972, and again in 1991 and 1994 during the foreign secretary meetings.⁴⁰ India's policies towards Pakistan through the 1990s, meanwhile, were experimental. As scholar Rajesh Basrur argues, "wracked by substantial

35. Muhammed Jamshed Iqbal, "SAARC: Origin, Growth, Potential and Achievements", National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research in Islamabad. http://nihcr.edu.pk/Latest_English_Journal/SAARC_Jamshed_Iqbal.pdf.

36. Sumit Ganguly, "Avoiding War in Kashmir", *Foreign Affairs*, 69(5): 57-73 (1990). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1990-12-01/avoiding-war-kashmir>.

37. George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: the Impact on Global Nonproliferation* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999).

38. Howard B. Schaffer, *The Limits of Influence: America's Role In Kashmir* (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2009).

39. Sanam Noor, "Pakistan-India Relations and Terrorism", *Pakistan Horizon*, 60(2): 65-84 (2007).

40. J N Dixit, *Anatomy of a Flawed Inheritance: Indo-Pak Relations 1970-1994* (New Delhi: Konark, 1995). Also see Ministry of External Affairs, Annual Report 1993-94, New Delhi: Government of India.

problems of internal rift, economic stagnation and external threat, (India) tried a combination of approaches.”⁴¹ Over time, policy-making limitations would contribute, in part, to a recent criticism, during Modi’s first term, of a “lack (of a) coherent, consistent, and prudent policy” as the current method “alternates between aggressive posture and cosmetic peace overtures.”⁴²

The introduction of nuclear weapons to the subcontinent transformed and exacerbated the existing relationship while also imposing on India new constraints that would lead to unprecedented foreign policy positions. Pakistan also galvanised India to pursue nuclear weapons.⁴³ Just as India’s policy towards Kashmir was to maintain the status quo, its nuclear policy also became one of defensive minimal credible deterrence by building up its capability and negotiating with Islamabad to build rules and norms to avoid a nuclear catastrophe.⁴⁴

The threat of nuclear war, meanwhile, opened for Pakistan the opportunity to wage asymmetric warfare on India through terrorism. Though India before had the option of credible military deterrence through invasion – even if it did not use it – it would now be placed into a permanent defensive posture, unable to take advantage of its largest asset, which was its army. India’s policy toward terrorism would, therefore, evolve into domestic containment through counter-insurgency operations and dissuasion, by threatening limited war to prevent Pakistan from sponsoring terrorism.⁴⁵ In the face of international efforts to de-escalate by the US and establish a responsible nuclear regime – and India’s failure to respond to rising terrorism in Kashmir – India would also opt for a policy of negotiation.

Dialogue did not come without its benefits. Between 1991 and 1994, a series of agreements with Pakistan was signed under the Robert Gates Commission, which increased back channels of communication to avoid miscalculations and inadvertent nuclear strikes, one boon being India’s non-first-use agreement.⁴⁶ The international environment also witnessed a structural change. Under America’s unipolar dominance after the fall of the Soviet Union,

41. Rajesh Basrur, “India’s Policy Toward Pakistan”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

42. Munawar Mahar, “India’s new Pakistan policy”, *Daily Times*, 21 October 2018. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/312547/indias-new-pakistan-policy/>.

43. See “Letter from Commander B.L. Sharma, Member Secretary, JIC, Cabinet Secretariat to M L Trivedi (Deputy Secretary (MEA, PPD)”, Ministry of External Affairs, File No. WII /104/16/82, 19 January 1982.

44. Sreeram S Chaulia, “BJP, India’s Foreign Policy and the ‘realist alternative’ to the Nehruvian Tradition”, *International Politics*, 39: 215-234 (2002).

45. Basrur, op. cit.

46. Dixit, op. cit.

economic regionalism became the new buzzword: wars based on religion and nationalism were increasingly viewed as primordial. While peace talks in the early 1990s and later in the 2000s failed to address the issue of Kashmir, terrorism became a more vexing issue.

In the first 50 years post independence, India's Pakistan policy, for the aforementioned reasons, came to be defined by three elements. On Kashmir, New Delhi maintained a status quo approach. Such status quo had both an internal and external dimension. Internally, no Indian government attempted to change the semi-autonomous governance model guaranteed under the Indian constitution. Externally, India sought to convert the LoC into an international border. India's policy towards Pakistan in the nuclear realm, as demonstrated, was primarily defined by the twin approaches of deterrence and avoiding escalation by embracing strategic restraint. In response to Pakistan's nuclear programme, India began weaponising its nuclear deterrent. On the other hand, given the risks of inadvertent escalation in the subcontinent, it also pursued nuclear CBMs with Islamabad and foreclosed any option of use-of-force against Pakistan's support for terrorism and insurgency in Indian-held Kashmir and beyond.

On terrorism, India continued with its strategy of containment, dissuasion and diplomatic isolation. As the Kashmir crisis witnessed increasing violence, India positioned a large number of army personnel in the region. By the middle of the 1990s, more than half a million Indian military and para-military forces were deployed in Jammu and Kashmir. As Praveen Swami argues, this boots-on-the-ground approach helped New Delhi regain a modicum of stability in the province.⁴⁷ Dissuasion, comparatively, was difficult to achieve. Having allowed Islamabad to control the escalation dynamics and failing to follow through on its punishment threats, India had practically forfeited the use-of-force as a viable strategy.

In repeated dialogues between the foreign secretaries, Pakistan continued to neglect India's constant refrains to stop terrorist infiltration from across the border. For some, this represented a soft approach to tackling cross-border terrorism. Rather than considering it as a war fomented by hostile external powers, as Brahma Chellany argues, successive Indian governments behaved as if the problem was essentially an internal law and order situation.⁴⁸ Except providing documentary evidence of Pakistan's involvement in a number

47. Praveen Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad: The Cover War in Kashmir, 1947-2004*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 177.

48. Chellany, Brahma (2002), "Fighting terrorism in Southern Asia: Lessons of History", *International Security*, 26 (3): 94-116.

of terrorism-related incidents in India, no other initiative was launched by New Delhi. Such continuous low-intensity conflict was a result of regional nuclearisation: nuclear jihad militated against any strong reactions from the Indian side.

Ideology and Foreign Policy Change: Comparing BJP Governments

Around the time of the 1990 India-Pakistan crisis, the BJP was making its presence felt as the major opposition party in Indian politics. Due to its hard-line Hindu nationalist approach, it sought aggressive measures that deviated from the status quo approach so far defining India's foreign policy. Rather than supporting an international border along the LoC, the BJP favoured reclaiming the rest of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). They also argued for the abrogation of Article 370, and proposed meeting Pakistani aggression with force. Developing India's nuclear weapons capability became one core component of this strategy.⁴⁹

From the very beginning of its political rise, the BJP projected itself as an "independent and complete alternative" to the inertia infused by the rule of the INC in India's foreign and national security strategy.⁵⁰ The BJP's revisionist agenda for Indian foreign policy and national security especially targetted India's defensive policy on Kashmir, nuclear weapons and terrorism.⁵¹ The BJP's election promises not only aimed at ending "all uncertainty about the future of the (Kashmir state) by deleting Article 370 of the constitution"⁵² but also vowed to reclaim "the portion of (India's) territory which has been illegally held by Pakistan for nearly five decades."⁵³

Revocation of Kashmir's special status under the Indian constitution and reintegration of the PoK became the running theme of the BJP during the 1990s.⁵⁴ The BJP vowed to firmly deal with secessionism and terrorism whether in Punjab or Kashmir.⁵⁵ It also vowed to "weed out all Pakistani elements from Kashmir" and "provide a free hand to (India's) security forces to deal with the menace of terrorism and induction of men and arms from

49. 2005 National Executive Documents, Bharatiya Janata Party [Online: web]. http://www.bjp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=188&Itemid=453. Accessed on 10 March 2012.

50. Bharatiya Janata Party, Election Manifesto 1991, <http://library.bjp.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/239/1/BJP%20ELECTION%20MANIFESTO%201991.pdf>.

51. "Review Policy on Pakistan: BJP", *The Times of India*, 3 April 1990, p. 9; Jordan Miriam, "BJP's stance on Kashmir, nuclear weapons could raise temperatures in South Asia", *The Times of India*, 6 May 1996, p. 11.

52. Ibid.

53. Bharatiya Janata Party, Election Manifesto 1996, <http://library.bjp.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/261/1/BJP%20ELECTION%20MANIFESTO%201996.pdf>.

54. Bharatiya Janata Party, National Executive: Presidential Speeches of Murli Manohar Joshi, Gandhinagar, 1-3 May 1992, <http://library.bjp.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/248/1/DR.%20MM%20JOSHI.pdf>.

55. "BJP will stop Pak militancy: Advani", *The Times of India*, 28 April 1996, p. 8; "Adopt clear policy on Kashmir, urges BJP", *The Times of India*, 14 July 1994, p. 8.

Pakistan.”⁵⁶ To deter Pakistan from instigating terror, the BJP leadership called for an escalation of the conflict in PoK.⁵⁷ Lastly, on nuclear weapons, the party declared its intention to end India’s nuclear ambiguity and embrace the logic of nuclear deterrence, requiring a “[r]e-evaluat(ion) of the country’s nuclear policy and exercis(ing) the option to induct nuclear weapons.”⁵⁸ If earlier political dispensations had “developed a tendency to bend under pressure” from Pakistan, by the time the BJP became a contender for power in the late 1990s, it claimed “to take active steps to persuade Pakistan to abandon its policy of hostile interference in (India’s) internal affairs by supporting insurgency and terrorist groups.”⁵⁹

The Vajpayee Years: 1998-2004

However, when the BJP government came to power in 1998, it failed to live up to all these hard-line promises. Instead, the ruling party displayed remarkable continuity with the Congress’ policy. First, to compare, on the issue of nuclear weapons, the BJP had initially decided in 1998 to end its policy of nuclear ambivalence and declare itself a nuclear weapons state. Following India’s tests, BJP leaders also vowed to teach Islamabad a lesson for its support of cross-border terrorism. Meanwhile, Pakistan’s rhetoric also showed a penchant for nuclear reprisal. However, later, in a more tempered statement by Vajpayee in the Indian Parliament on 27 May 1998, he softened his hard-line posture and clarified that India’s nuclear weapons were not directed at any country.⁶⁰ Instead, he took forward the proposals articulated in January 1994 and leaned towards reviving an agreement of no first use with Pakistan.

During interactions between the Indian and Pakistani prime ministers in September 1998, alongside the UNGA sessions, both sides agreed to reinstate the composite dialogue process. The memoranda of understanding signed in 1999, targetted at establishing a strategic restraint regime, were the most comprehensive set of nuclear CBMs agreed to since 1988. Prime Minister Vajpayee argued, “Now both India and Pakistan are in possession of nuclear weapons. There is no alternative but to live in mutual harmony. The nuclear

56. Ibid.

57. “Hit PoK Camps: BJP”, *The Times of India*, 3 May 1990, p. 1; Rajdeep Sardesai, “BJP’s Tough Stance On Bombing Camps”, *The Times of India*, 24 May 1990, p. 11; “India will thwart Pak Plans”, *The Times of India*, 1 March 1994, p. 6.

58. Ibid.

59. Bharatiya Janata Party, Election Manifesto 1998, <http://library.bjp.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/241/1/BJP%20ELECTION%20MANIFESTO%201998.pdf>.

60. Press Information Bureau (1998), “Suo Motu statement by Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Parliament on 27 May, 1998”, 27 May 1998.

weapon is not an offensive weapon. It is a weapon of self-defense. It is the kind of weapon that helps in preserving the peace.”⁶¹

Second, with regard to the LOC, the BJP had, when in opposition, made the integration of Kashmir in the Indian Union a major poll-plank, with its leaders often seeking to revoke Article 370. More importantly, its leadership had also questioned previous governments’ apathy towards Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The idea of *Akhand Bharat*, therefore, necessitated India altering the status quo and reintegrating the other half of Kashmir with the Indian Union. As the BJP’s 1998 election manifesto argued, “[the] BJP affirms unequivocally India’s sovereignty over the whole of Jammu and Kashmir, including the areas under foreign occupations.”⁶²

However, when Vajpayee became prime minister, he upheld the mainstream position that the LoC should be made an international border. After the 1998 nuclear tests, during the Indo-US dialogue between Defence Minister Jaswant Singh and Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, the Vajpayee government was keen to make an offer of settling the Kashmir dispute along the LoC. The Indian defence minister first suggested this to Talbott in July 1998 during the second round of the Indo-US dialogue. As Talbott reminisces in his autobiography, “he (Jaswant) mentioned that his government might consider converting the Line of Control ... into an international border.”⁶³ Talbott acknowledged this was indeed a major concession as it constituted “a significant departure from the long-established BJP position that India should persist in seeking the integration of Pakistani-occupied Kashmir.”⁶⁴ The BJP, billed as a party that would act tough on terror, went even further by initiating talks when Vajpayee travelled to Pakistan to sign the Lahore Declaration in 1999. One of the outcomes of the Lahore Summit was to formally link Kashmir to terrorism. Whereas the declaration underlined a commitment to “intensify efforts to resolve all issues, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir”, it also highlighted a mutual “refrain from intervention and interference in each other’s internal affairs.”⁶⁵

Then, in May 1999, Pakistani army regulars and terrorists crossed the LoC into the Kargil sector of Kashmir, disrupting the peace process. Nuclear weapons had emboldened decision-makers in Pakistan to engage in the Cold

61. Quoted in Prakash Karat (1999), “Kargil and Beyond”, *Frontline*, 16(14), [Online: web] 2015. <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1614/16140150.htm>.

62. BJP Election Manifesto 1998, Foreign Policy.

63. Talbott, Strobe (2004), *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb* (Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC), p. 94.

64. Ibid.

65. Ministry of External Affairs, “Lahore Declaration”, Press Release, 21 February 1999.

War activity of ‘salami slicing’, or seizing territory up to the point of nuclear threshold.⁶⁶ Pakistan’s strategy was to emphasise the danger of nuclear war and propose a ceasefire by which to redraw the border. As Indian forces tried to reclaim Indian territory, they faced massive resistance from Pakistan’s entrenched troops. Despite obvious challenges, New Delhi adhered to not crossing the LoC, even when such restrictions made the job of the Indian armed forces much more onerous. This position was reiterated towards the end of May. As tensions in Kargil escalated, Pakistan offered a ceasefire, followed by a dialogue to resolve the issue. India rejected the proposal, arguing dialogue could only be possible with the “restoration of the status quo ante.”⁶⁷

On the third point of terrorism, Vajpayee’s response to the separatists in the Kashmir Valley was also more compromising than aggressive. Termed the ‘hearts and minds’ approach, Vajpayee called for a ceasefire of counter-insurgency operations and invited the separatists into dialogue with the government, though within the ambit of the constitution.⁶⁸ However, following this overture, violence continued, largely due to Pakistan. India’s frustration reached a fever pitch when Pakistan attacked the Indian Parliament in 2001. The BJP retaliated by deploying nearly half a million troops along the border.⁶⁹ However, this ‘limited war’ manoeuvre was costly and yielded limited results:⁷⁰ the BJP fell back on the US to pressure Pakistan to stand down.

Thus, the BJP-led coalition largely followed the mainstream policies of the Congress government before it on the issues of Kashmir, nuclear weapons and terrorism. On Kashmir, it steadfastly refused to engage in any change of the status quo, and unlike its assertions of reintegrating Pakistan-occupied Kashmir during election campaigns, the party adhered to maintaining the sanctity of the LoC. Second, there was no real progress on the development of a nuclear deterrent; the BJP’s self-congratulatory defiance of the US and other instruments of nuclear control readily converted into compliance with its leadership bowing to the directions from the US.⁷¹ Developing and testing nuclear weapons was also not out of keeping with the thinking of previous

66. Kargil Review Committee, *From Surprise to Reckoning* (New Delhi: Sage, 2000).

67. Jaswant Singh, *A Call to Honour: In Service of an Emergent India* (New Delhi: Rupa and Co., 2006).

68. Lal Krishna Advani, *My Country, My Life* (New Delhi: Rupa and Co, 2008).

69. V K Sood and Praveen Shawney, *Operation Parakram: The War Unfinished* (New Delhi: Vision Books, 2003).

70. David Slungaard, “Revisiting Cold Start: Weighing Strategic Shifts in South Asia”, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1 February 2012, <http://csis.org/blog/revisiting-cold-start-weighing-strategic-shifts-south-asia>.

71. Bharat Karnad, “Perils of a Tight Embrace: India, US, Kashmir and Nonproliferation Issue”, *Strategic Analysis*, 26(3) (2002).

dispensations – both the Rajiv Gandhi and P V Narasimha Rao governments had also advocated for the development and testing of nuclear weapons. Third, India’s repeated failures to dissuade Pakistan from terrorism had also earned it a reputation of being soft on terrorism, a feature which became even more pronounced after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks.

Terror and Talks Can’t Go Together: The Current Impasse

In 2004, the golden period in Indo-Pak relations commenced when the peace process at the SAARC was re-initiated under Prime Minister Pervez Musharraf. Under the Composite Dialogue Process, the Congress government went on to address nuclear security, terrorism, drug trafficking, trade and economic development under a policy of ‘constructive reciprocity’.⁷² Though India had little love lost for Pakistan, maintaining the status quo and various international constraints gave credence to the notion that, as Basrur observes, “[s]eeking negotiations despite ... unreliable responses has the potential, if carefully calibrated, to yield dividends as the strategic landscape undergoes slow but significant change.”⁷³

It is difficult to say how the BJP would have acted if it had remained in power, though an argument can be made for continuity with the Congress. In April-May 2004, the BJP lost the general elections, and in the years following, talks again collapsed around terrorism. In 2006, Pakistani terrorists bombed the Lahore Express and, in 2008, the Taj Mahal Palace hotel in Mumbai. Though the Manmohan Singh-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government pursued peace, it was forced to call off negotiations in the face of indisputable national tragedies. In 2009, the coalition government sternly outlined India’s stance that it was now up to Pakistan to take the first step towards the resumption of substantive talks by cracking down on activist groups on its own soil.⁷⁴

In the interim, Musharraf, who had been called the best hope for peace between Pakistan and India – due to the considerable respect he had earned from the military for his role in engineering the Kargil conflict – was ousted from power.⁷⁵ Since then, progress has stalled, though multiple agreements were signed and as many as 45 high-level meetings were held.⁷⁶ Much of this

72. Ashutosh Misra, “An audit of the India-Pakistan peace process”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (2007).

73. Basrur, op. cit.

74. Asad Hashim, “Timeline: India-Pakistan relations”, *Aljazeera*, 1 March 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/kashmirtheforgottenconflict/2011/06/2011615113058224115.html>.

75. Tellis, op. cit.

76. Nicole Burnett, op. cit.

is also due to the psychic damage inflicted on India by terrorism, which has been replayed in Bollywood films and channelled through jingoistic anti-Pakistan sentiments in the media.

There had remained some hope on the economic front, as the lagging economic development in South Asia through the SAARC presumably would concern both Pakistan and India. However, little has progressed economically either, as Pakistan has resisted having its foreign policy compromised by a flood of Indian goods. Though Pakistan announced in 2011 that it would confer India with the most favoured nation (MFN) status, it never did so.⁷⁷ The moratorium on cooperation was further sealed when the 2016 SAARC Summit in Islamabad was cancelled after India, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan boycotted the meeting. This was after four terrorists attacked an army brigade headquarters in the Kashmiri town of Uri.

By the time Modi and the BJP came to power in 2014, India-Pakistan relations had run into a wall: India had failed to respond substantively to acts of terror – first during the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight 814, next in the dead-end military standoff in the Kargil conflict and finally through India’s lack of willingness (or ability) to substantially punish Pakistan for major terrorist attacks in 2001, 2006 and 2008. This impasse was inherited by Modi. Aside from several personal overtures during the first two years of Modi’s government, his change of India’s policy could, in this light, be viewed as a reaction to what Kanti Bajpai describes as “permanent, protracted negotiations”,⁷⁸ and a shift to a more assertive posture.

The Modi Government

The BJP’s 2014 manifesto describes the period under the UPA rule as the “‘Decade of Decay’, in which India had a free fall on all fronts – be it governance, economy, diplomacy, foreign policy [or] border safety.”⁷⁹ The BJP promised to “take immediate and decisive action to address these issues”, which included a more assertive approach to Kashmir, terrorism and India’s nuclear policy. The BJP “reiterate(d) its stand on Article 370”, stating that the party “remains committed to the abrogation of this article”, and on terrorism, promised to “deal with cross border terrorism with a firm hand” – which could be juxtaposed with the “anti-terror mechanism ... dismantled by [the]

77. Basrur, op. cit.

78. Kanti Bajpai, “Narendra Modi’s Pakistan and China Policy: assertive bilateral diplomacy, active coalition diplomacy”, *International Affairs*, Volume 93, No. 1, 6 January 2017. https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/ia/INTA93_1_05_Bajpai.pdf.

79. “Full text: BJP manifesto for 2014 Lok Sabha elections”, *News18*, 7 April 2014, <https://www.news18.com/news/politics/full-text-bjp-manifesto-for-2014-lok-sabha-elections-679304.html>.

Congress.” The BJP also criticised the Congress’s oversight of the nuclear weapons programme, stating that the “BJP believes that the strategic gains acquired by India during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee regime on the nuclear programme have been frittered away.” They pledged to “study in detail India’s nuclear doctrine, and revise and update it, to make it relevant to challenges of current times.”

Yet, in a posture similar to that of Vajpayee, Modi, during the first half of his first term, extended the olive branch to Pakistan, attempting to reset relations. He invited Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif along with other SAARC leaders to his swearing-in ceremony and tried fostering a personal relationship with Pakistan’s Prime Minister. This was perhaps best exemplified by Modi’s surprise visit to Islamabad for Sharif’s birthday and granddaughter’s wedding in December 2015. However, terrorism threw another wrench into the process when, not more than a week after Modi’s Christmas visit, India’s air force station in Pathankot was attacked by terrorists.⁸⁰

According to Kanti Bajpai, in his study of cycles of cooperation and defection between Pakistan and India, Modi’s seeming vacillations in his dealings with Pakistan – characterised by peace overtures during the first half of his tenure and more hard-line assertion during his second – could partially be explained by his inability to get the terrorism-based concessions he wanted through bilateral meetings.⁸¹ For instance, on the sidelines of Modi’s 2014 inauguration ceremony, in a summit he held with Sharif, Modi broached the issue of terrorism, and the two scheduled a meeting between their foreign secretaries. These meetings were cancelled when India discovered that the Pakistani High Commissioner had met with the Kashmiri separatist Hurriyat Group. Bajpai explains that Modi, nevertheless, resumed bilateral diplomacy when he met Sharif at a Cricket World Cup in February 2015 and at the SCO Summit in Ufa in July the same year, where they discussed Modi’s attendance at the SAARC Summit in Islamabad and planned a meeting between the national security advisors. However, terrorist attacks in Gurdaspur and Udhampur scrapped this meeting. Finally, Modi visited Islamabad on Christmas, but as aforementioned, this overture was undermined by the Pathankot terrorist attack.⁸² India refrained from retaliation and instead invited the Pakistan joint investigative team to visit Pathankot to conduct a probe in March 2016. However, the latter argued that this was a ‘stage-managed’ diplomatic trap to embarrass

80. “Terrorism is a Genuine Barrier to India-Pakistan Dialogue”, *Hindustan Times*, 27 May 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/editorials/terrorism-is-a-genuine-barrier-to-india-pakistan-dialogue/story-JiUSvDgaOlZgsIvngVhw6L.html>.

81. Kanti Bajpai, op. cit.

82. Ibid.

Pakistan and shift the blame to it. The downward spiralling in relations was capped by the attack and death of 17 Indian soldiers in Uri, against which Modi authorised surgical strikes. By 2016, the intensity of firing and ceasefire violations across the LoC had also substantially increased. By 2017, Pakistan had claimed 1,140 ceasefire violations, while India was claiming 881.⁸³

In a departure from the policy decisions taken by the Manmohan Singh government, Modi stepped up India's efforts to isolate Pakistan through geopolitical encirclement and aggressive coalition-style diplomacy.⁸⁴ Two examples of India's encirclement of Pakistan can be seen in Modi's success in getting India invited as the Guest-of-Honour country to the Organisation of Islamic Countries in 2019⁸⁵ and also through the good relations India developed with Afghanistan through the extension of sizeable economic aid and, separately, the construction of the Chabahar Port in Iran. Returning to Bajpai's narrative of events, during Modi's visit to the Gulf States of Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirate (UAE) in 2015, he corralled a condemnation of terrorism in their joint statements. During his address to the UN in February 2016, the Indian prime minister argued for a convention on terrorism and global cooperation. This was mirrored by his summit with President Barack Obama several months later in June, when the US agreed to work with India at the UN to target three Pakistan-based terror organisations and perpetrators of the Mumbai and Pathankot attacks.⁸⁶ Modi also pursued other tough tactics like withdrawing Pakistan's MFN status and threatening the Indus River Treaty.⁸⁷

The year 2016 thus marks a turning point in the BJP's Pakistan policy. The party took a more hard-line approach during the 2019 general elections and reaped rich electoral dividends. When Pakistan-backed terrorists attacked military personnel in Pulwama on the eve of the 2019 general elections in India, the Modi government's tough stance was rewarded at the polls. Polling of speeches and social media during the election showed how the BJP's campaign rhetoric shifted away from jobs and economic issues towards terrorism and security.⁸⁸ The BJP's 2019 manifesto also reflected this hard-line against Pakistan, "in order to achieve (India's) long-term goals, we must first

83. Nabeel, *op. cit.*

84. Bajpai, *op. cit.*

85. Pandya, *op. cit.*

86. Bajpai, *op. cit.*

87. *Ibid.*

88. Ronojoy Sen, "ISAS Brief No. 656 - The Changing Narrative of India's General Elections", Institute of South Asian Studies, 30 April 2019. <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ISAS-Briefs-No.-656-The-Changing-Narrative-of-Indias-General-Election.pdf>.

secure (the) country against internal and external aggression.”⁸⁹ The manifesto underscored a “zero-tolerance approach to terrorism” and a continuation of the BJP’s “policy of giving a free hand to our security forces.” Coalition-style diplomacy was also referenced by “us[ing] our foreign policy, where necessary, to tackle the problem of global terrorism.” The airstrike on 14 February 2019, for all these reasons, has been hailed as a major date in India-Pakistan relations. If to some this represented the desire “to break the frustrating talks-terror-talks cycle with Pakistan”,⁹⁰ to others, it showcased “India’s firm determination to root out terrorism even if that required ... war” and put an end to “the days of status quo and classic restraint.”⁹¹

As mentioned in the second chapter of this publication, meanwhile, it is possible that Khan really intended to pursue peace with India. Signs of de-escalation appeared eminent. Pakistan granted India’s External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, permission to fly over its air space; high-level ministerial meetings were resumed; and Khan reached out to Modi to solve many of the issues core to his welfare-centred domestic agenda. However, Modi did not budge. Instead, New Delhi lobbied for Pakistan to be placed on the blacklist of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) for its failure to reign in terrorist financing. India’s maximum pressure campaign elicited sympathy from the US and other countries, whose patience was already wearing thin with Islamabad. For example, US President Donald Trump lambasted Pakistan in a New Year’s tweet in 2018 for squandering billions of US dollars in the fight against terror.⁹² As tensions de-escalated on the border in April 2019, he also called for Islamabad to take “meaningful action” against terror elements using its safe havens to target India (deviating from the US’ traditional even-handedness when dealing with Indo-Pak disputes).⁹³ That July, the FATF also announced it had not seen sufficient action taken by Pakistan to stop money laundering or dismantle funding networks.⁹⁴ Added to this was lastly a geopolitical component. Pakistan suffers from high levels of debt-taking; a loan from the

89. The Print Team, “Full text of BJP’s 2019 Lok Sabha election manifesto”, *The Print*, 8 April 2019. <https://theprint.in/politics/full-text-of-bjps-2019-lok-sabha-election-manifesto/218518/>.

90. C Raja Mohan, “Terms of Engagement”, *The Indian Express*, 13 June 2019. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-pakistan-relations-imran-khan-pm-modi-talks-577730/>.

91. Pandya, op. cit.

92. “Trump attacks Pakistan ‘deceit’ in first tweet of the year”, *BBC News*, 1 January 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42536209>.

93. “US urges India-Pak to De-Escalate border tensions, asks Pakistan to take action against terror safe havens”, *Business Today*, 28 February 2019. <https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/us-urges-india-pak-to-de-escalate-border-tension-asks-pakistan-to-take-action-against-terror-safe-havens/story/323111.html>.

94. “Black or Grey: What Next for Pakistan at FATF?”, *The Indian Express*, 14 June 2019. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/black-or-grey-what-next-for-pakistan-at-fatf-5779649/>.

International Monetary Fund entailed considerable internal reforms, which included greater transparency in its debts to China for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.⁹⁵

A month after the FATF announced it would consider placing Pakistan on the blacklist following a sub-par progress report, India pushed forward to abrogate Article 370 on 5 August 2019. For this reason, when Khan addressed the UN in the US in September 2019, he was tasked with the dual challenge of shielding Pakistan from allegations of both terrorism and money laundering while also painting Pakistan as a victimised country which had been wronged by India and misunderstood by an increasingly Islamophobic world. Modi, meanwhile, riding high on his return from the 'Howdy Modi' rally in Houston in the US, posited India as an important power "in a new age of multilateralism in need of strength and direction."⁹⁶

95. Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "Pakistan to share CPEC debt details with IMF", *The Economic Times*, 16 October 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/pakistan-to-share-cpec-debt-details-with-imf/articleshow/66230479.cms?from=mdr>.

96. Translated by the authors from "PM Modi Addresses the United Nations General Assembly 2019", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AHf6QMAUto>.

Analysing India's New Pakistan Policy

Up until the abrogation of Article 370, nothing major had changed about India's fundamental Pakistan policy though the Modi government could be said to have shifted to the most extreme policy options available. Though the Balakot air strike was held up as a 'red line' in the sand, the Indian government had already threatened limited war, as seen by the build-up of India's military along the LoC in 2001. And while Modi was credited with taking a hard-line stand against Pakistan by authorising surgical strikes in 2016, the Congress government had in fact authorised several similar strikes in 2008, 2013 and 2014.⁹⁷ Thus, while the BJP acted with unforeseen resolve by crossing into Pakistan's sovereign territory and equating terrorism with Pakistan,⁹⁸ structural conditions did not change. The logic holds for India's changing its 'no-first-use' nuclear policy. Certain thresholds for war and nuclear escalation remain intact; it is still inconceivable that India would ever launch a first nuclear strike on Pakistan.

What could be said, however, is that "strategic restraint" has been replaced with "strategic, assertive defense." It is unclear, however, whether India would risk initiating conventional war with Pakistan in response to another terrorist attack or whether this is, as Sumit Ganguly argues, mere "dramaturgy".⁹⁹ However, by stoking fears of a maximal muscular Hindu response, Modi succeeded in lending deterrence some teeth, even if the actual situation on the ground has not changed. It remains very likely that India will suffer another terror attack in the future. But it is unlikely that India will invade Pakistan with an army to claim territory — as Modi himself said, *Akhand Bharat* is now more of a cultural idea than a hard-defined territorial one.¹⁰⁰

More significant is the abrogation of Article 370, which shattered the status quo. One important development since negotiations with Musharraf started under the Manmohan Singh government is the idea of thinking "outside of the

97. "6 surgical strikes' in UPA tenure: Cong backs Manmohan Singh with dates", *Hindustan Times*, 2 May 2019. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/6-surgical-strikes-in-upa-tenure-congress-leader-provides-dates/story-VhiGIV6WcSB1oEkBTRMXxH.html>.

98. Gautam Chikermane, "5 Ways India's Foreign Policy Has Changed Post Balakot", Observer Research Foundation, 8 March 2019. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/5-ways-indias-foreign-policy-has-changed-post-balakot/>.

99. Sumit Ganguly, "Why the India-Pakistan Crisis Isn't Likely to Turn Nuclear", *Foreign Affairs*, 5 March 2019. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/india/2019-03-05/why-india-pakistan-crisis-isnt-likely-turn-nuclear>.

100. Bhanu Dhamjia, "Dream of Greater India: Forget Akhand Bharat or Hindu Rashtra, Bharat Mahasangh", *The Times of India*, 20 March 2018. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-edit-page/dream-of-greater-india-forget-akhand-bharat-or-hindu-rashtra-bharat-mahasangh-of-like-minded-nations-is-a-more-feasible-goal/>.

box” regarding the management of the Kashmir dispute.¹⁰¹ Ashley Tellis quotes Praveen Swami as stating, “Politics ... must offer Kashmir and India a new imagination”, and describes how policies toward Srinagar had been criticised as “unimaginative”.¹⁰² For instance, during the Manmohan Singh government, the Congress attempted to think outside of the box by rendering the LoC “just another line on a map”, which included a framework, mapped out during 20 back channel negotiations, from which to open Kashmir’s borders (without territorial change, to assuage India), enable free population movement and establish a joint mechanism for self-governance.¹⁰³ However, the BJP found another solution: divvying up Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh into union territories and claiming the issue as an ‘internal matter’, while not upsetting the actual LoC.

The reasons for India’s abrupt decision to integrate Jammu and Kashmir can perhaps also be read in terms of India’s future geostrategic prognostications. One explanation offered for the hasty, surreptitious way India went about securitising and integrating Kashmir was Trump’s offer to mediate. However, this answer does not explain the full picture. India is under extreme pressure to change Pakistan’s behaviour, and it has widely been understood that more than Pakistan, China is India’s greatest long-term threat. In recent years, China has challenged India’s regional dominance by setting up infrastructure projects related to its Belt and Road Initiative in South Asia. One of these projects is the Chinese Pakistan Economic Corridor, built in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, which would allow Chinese troops to travel along the border, posing a major security and territorial concern.¹⁰⁴ This may have pushed India into consolidating its controlled territory and building up infrastructure on its side of the border in self-defense.

Finishing his first term in office, Modi had learnt several things about the international environment, one being that states could force land grabs within their sphere of influence without too much fear of reprisal.¹⁰⁵ Modi saw an opportunity and seized it. As Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar remarked, the world has now entered an age of hot peace: “such a world is likely to fall back on balance of power as its operating principle, rather than collective

101. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, *op. cit.*

102. Tellis, *op. cit.*

103. *Ibid.*

104. Mahar, *op. cit.*

105. Bagwe, *op. cit.*

security or broader consensus.”¹⁰⁶ With the US receding, great power politics is also becoming regionalised, signalling the significance of India’s move in Kashmir, given China’s growing influence: “World affairs will see a proliferation of ‘frenemies’”, Jaishankar observes, “and more regional and local balances with less global influence in their working.”¹⁰⁷

Finally, with regards to terrorism, the policy situation has also shifted to maximum containment. Whereas before Kashmir was heavily militarised, it has now been placed under martial law; political elements lending uncertainty to the future stability of Kashmir have been disbanded; and Internet has been shut off, to prevent radicalisation through social media. This, too, is part and parcel of the evolution of India’s foreign policy, as an inflection point of the ‘integrative’ aspects before discussed. India suffered almost 45,000 terrorism-related casualties between 1988 and 2016¹⁰⁸ and fears further radical interference, especially with the potential growth of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Kashmir. ISIS has shown interest in South Asia after the loss of its caliphate as a site to rebuild its strength, pinpointing Kashmir and a province in Bangladesh for ideological infiltration.¹⁰⁹ Kashmir has become especially ideal due to intensifying conflict between the Hindus and Muslims.¹¹⁰ The government perhaps fears, post the Afghanistan peace deal, that disaffected Taliban hardliners will jump into the ISIS Khorosan, a branch established in 2015 to oversee Afghanistan and nearby regions¹¹¹ or that ISIS could join hands with Al-Qaeda.¹¹² The measures the BJP undertook could, therefore, be construed as barricading Kashmir from the incoming storm. Social media was thus shut down to prevent the infiltration of radical ideology, and the BJP is pushing for the state’s development to dissuade impoverished youth from extremism by offering employment as a life-saving alternative.

106. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “EAM’s remarks at Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C. on 1 October 2019”, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/31899EAMs+remarks+at+Center+for+Strategic+and+International+Studies+Washington+DC+on+01+October+2019>.

107. Ibid.

108. South Asia Terrorism Portal, “Fatalities in Terrorist Violence, 1988-2016”. [Online: web]. http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data_sheets/annual_casualties.htm.

109. Uddipan Mukherjee, “Implications of the ISIS ‘province’ in Kashmir”, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA Comment), 17 May 2019. <https://idsa.in/idsacomments/isis-province-in-kashmir-umukherjee-170519>. Also see Michael Kugelman, “The Islamic State will outlive Baghdadi”, *Foreign Policy*, 5 November 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/05/isis-terrorism-killing-islamic-state-outlive-baghdadi-afghanistan/>.

110. Pandya, op. cit.

111. Mukherjee, op. cit.

112. Kugelman, op. cit.

Finally, public opinion in India has been that past policies simply were not working.¹¹³ Tellis quotes *Business Today's* Anilesh S Mahajan as saying, "There is no alternative to a tough policy towards Pakistan. All other alternatives have been tried without success."¹¹⁴ A perception had also perhaps taken root, as Basrur argues in 2015, that "shying away from an active effort to pressurise decision-makers in Islamabad was to allow developments inside of Pakistan to shape the relationship."¹¹⁵ Pakistan's struggling economy also made it susceptible to reform in exchange for aid¹¹⁶ and growing international isolation had reduced the likelihood of war.¹¹⁷ It is likely Modi, disenchanted with his failed overture to Sharif, taking lessons from India's long historic engagement with Pakistan, riding a wave of Hindu nationalism and aware of Pakistan's Achilles heel, which is its reliance on other countries for economic solvency and survival, took the risk of a strategy of exerting maximal pressure.

Hindu Nationalism and Foreign Policy

The final question that must be asked is to what extent India's more assertive posturing towards Pakistan due to the rise of Hindu nationalism. Scholars have argued that its effects are minimal, offering lines like "pragmatism has clearly eclipsed Hindutva",¹¹⁸ or that "ideology (is) less visible whenever it came to dealing with the realm of hard power."¹¹⁹ Ankit Panda states that during the lead up to the 2014 general elections, "it becomes apparent that (Modi's) election would likely change little at all."¹²⁰ Nevertheless, domestic politics and foreign policy are becoming more and more intertwined due to populism and majoritarianism – both of which played a sizeable role in the BJP's election victory. Jaishankar has himself said he is "not sure in every part of the world nationalism means the same thing",¹²¹ perhaps to qualify India's surge in

113. Ashley J Tellis, "Pakistan. Will. Not. Change", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 25 February 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/25/pakistan.will.not.change-pub-78440>.

114. Ashley J Tellis, "No Alternative to a Tough Policy Towards Pakistan", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 April 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/04/19/no-alternative-to-tough-policy-towards-pakistan-pub-78968>.

115. Basrur, op. cit.

116. Brahma Chellaney, "Pakistan, China, and Terrorism", *Nikkei Asian Review*, 19 March 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Pakistan-China-and-terrorism>.

117. Pandya, op. cit.

118. Arndt Michael, "The Hindutva Face of Foreign Policy? Reflecting on Foreign Policy from 2014-2019", Center for the Advanced Study of India, the University of Pennsylvania, 8 April 2019. <https://casi.sas.upenn.edu/iit/arndtmichael2019>.

119. Krzysztof Iwanek, "Under Modi, How Did Hindu Nationalism Affect India's Foreign Relations", *The Diplomat*, 27 April 2019.

120. Ankit Panda, "Modi: Hindutva Will Be An Asset in Foreign Affairs", *The Diplomat*, 24 April 2014.

121. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "EAM's remarks at Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C. on 1 October 2019", op. cit.

nationalism, and that, “bluntly put, the old elite is now out of business and really you have a new set of people there with different thoughts, with their own sense of roots who relate to the world obviously differently.”¹²²

One of the closest articulations Modi has made regarding Hindutva’s effect on foreign policy was in an interview during the 2014 general elections where he said he would follow the (foreign) policies of the Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance government. He explained how he appreciated Vajpayee’s projection of “*shakti* (strength)” and the way he “preserve(d) *shanti* (peace)”.¹²³ He also outlined a Hindutva-guided foreign policy “based on the age-old concept of *Vasudeva Kutumbakum*”, a popular phrase of the RSS, meaning “The World is One Family”. He clarified the meaning of this term afterward, stating, “mutual respect for one another and cooperation should be the basis for relationships with foreign nations.” *Vasudeva Kutumbakum* is also an oft-used term in official speeches and statements.¹²⁴ While such multilateralist sentiments can take on positive notes – such as addressing climate change – it can also take on more forceful ones, such as in internationally isolating Pakistan for terrorism. It is, therefore, instructive to compare Modi and Vajpayee to discern how and why their governments differed and what this might portend for Hindu nationalism’s influence on India’s Pakistan policy.

When the BJP emerged as a political force in the 1990s, neo-liberalisation and market reform came with a rise in identity politics. Politics was shifting from an ‘aggregative’ party system to a ‘representative’ one, with cleavages being reified along social and economic lines.¹²⁵ The Indian middle classes admired the discipline and economic progress of the East Asian tigers. In order to capitalise on middle class fantasies, the BJP thus positioned itself as the party

122. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “External Affairs Minister’s remarks at Atlantic Council, Washington D.C. on 1 October 2019”, https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/31895/External_Affairs_Ministers_remarks_at_Atlantic_Council_Washington_DC_on_1_October_2019.

123. “My Hindutva-face will be an asset in foreign affairs”, interview with Narendra Modi in *The Indian Express*, as quoted in Ankit Panda, “Modi: Hindutva Will Be An Asset in Foreign Affairs”, *The Diplomat*, 24 April 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/04/modi-hindutva-will-be-an-asset-in-foreign-affairs/>.

124. See for example, “Keynote Address by External Affairs Minister on Celebration of 55 years of ITEC (7 October 2019)”, Ministry of External Affairs, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/31914>; and “EAM’s statement on Ministerial meeting on the Alliance for multilateralism – Building the network and presenting results”, Ministry of External Affairs, 26 September 2019, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/31873>. Modi invokes similar concepts in “Full text of PM Modi’s speech at UNGA”, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/full-text-of-pm-modis-speech-at-unga/articleshow/71339829.cms?from=mdr>.

125. Pramod K Kantha, “General Elections, 1996: BJP Politics: Looking beyond the Impasse”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 32, No. 48 (29 November – 5 December 1997).

of political honesty, cleanliness and integrity, best-suited to turn a motley India into a shining one.¹²⁶

Yet, as mentioned earlier, despite coming to power on a number of Hindu nationalist promises, the BJP largely maintained the preceding Congress' policies. The BJP's failure to act on its Hindutva agenda is not because of any lack of will or inconsistency in ideology. One of the biggest trends in Indian domestic politics at the time was coalition-making, which necessitated compromise. The BJP's electoral appeal by itself was limited and insufficient to form a majority. Beyond geographical limitations to the Hindi belt, the limits of the Hindutva plank could also be seen in the BJP's failed attempts to popularise a uniform civil code on par with the march on the Ayodhya temple and inability to garner wide support for the *Garibi Hatao* (Remove Poverty) campaign. This demonstrated a bias in national politics for local rather than national issues.¹²⁷ Overturning a government was not hard, as the BJP had experienced first-hand during its 13 days of rule in 1996. For this reason, it pragmatically and opportunistically reached out to Dalits and Muslims. Where critics found relief that power-sharing arrangements would soften the BJP's hard-line stances, the party, in turn, fostered its 'moderate' image to attract votes.¹²⁸ The argument was that "if anything domesticated the BJP, it is not democracy, but the logic of power."¹²⁹ Adding to the confusion of the BJP's policy stance was infighting, groupism¹³⁰ and party double-speak: the government was beset by inter-ministerial squabbles, and messages put out by Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani seemed at odds, which muddled the BJP's Hindutva ideological stance further.¹³¹

Consequently, the BJP, by moving to a more centrist position, as Anirudh Deshpande argues, became a party that "reflect(ed) the Congress in the process of fighting and replacing it."¹³² This mirrored the BJP's stance in foreign policy making also, where its policies shifted to maintaining the status quo and pushing forward a Congress programme of privatisation, despite the protectionist leanings of the RSS.¹³³ Asghar Ali Engineer, in an issue of

126. Anirudh Deshpande, "Probity, Stability and Responsibility: Ironies and Hypocrisy of BJP", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 32, No. 52 (27 December 1997 – 2 January 1998).

127. Kantha, op. cit.

128. Ibid.

129. Shiv Vishvanathan, "Politics of Performance: BJP in Power", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 35, No. 42 (October 2000).

130. Kantha, op. cit.

131. Asghar Ali Engineer, 'Muslims, BJP and Lok Sabha', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No. 6 (February 1998).

132. Deshpande, op. cit.

133. Rekha Datta, 'Hindu Nationalism or Pragmatic Party Politics? A Study of India's Hindu Party', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Summer, 1999).

Economic and Political Weekly, writes of the times, “gone are the days of single party governments in Delhi.”¹³⁴

Of course, this changed when Modi came to power in 2014 and revived centre-party politics.¹³⁵ The political climate in 2014 was also different. While detractors slammed Modi for the pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat as chief minister in 2002, the first election campaign that he ran was largely an Obama-style one, premised on hope and the economy.¹³⁶ *Sab ka sath, sab ka vikas* (Everyone’s support, everyone’s development) was the BJP’s mantra; Modi tempered cultural nationalism with pledges of inclusive development, to fulfill the aspirations of India’s job hungry youth and reinvigorate an economy that had stumbled under the Congress’ rule. Thus, the BJP’s platform was in scope mostly economic; promises were made that the minorities too would have a share in India’s development.

Where the 2014 general elections were marked by economics and inclusivity, the 2019 general elections, by contrast, veered towards security and protectionism. Despite the BJP’s promises of growth, the economy slowed to around six per cent; and after the terrorist attack in Pulwama, the BJP nosedived away from economics to make national security its central campaign plank. This was accompanied by a xenophobic social media campaign portraying the Congress as anti-national through affiliation with Pakistan and the Muslims. Populism coalesced with nationalism when BJP party workers and supporters lambasted the Congress as elite, foreign, anti-Indian and dynastic. Electorally, the BJP had also learned from its past mistakes by widening its support base while lessening its reliance on minorities and consolidating the Hindu vote.¹³⁷ In another departure, Modi ran India’s first presidential-style campaign, and his foreign policy record, which was seen to have gained India international stature, was also rewarded. The BJP and Modi won 302 out of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Indian Parliament), practically providing them free reign to pursue their domestic and foreign policy agendas.

Given this legislative latitude, it is perhaps not hard to see why the recent BJP government could push through a Hindu nationalist agenda where the first buckled under the weight of mainstream consensus. Within months of reassuming power, the Modi-led BJP oversaw a slew of culturally related

134. Engineer, op. cit.

135. Diego Maiorano and Ronojoy Sen, ‘South Asia Scan: Issue No 6 - The 2019 Indian General Elections and its Implications’, Institute of South Asian Studies, February 2020.

136. Rajdeep Sardesai, *The Election that Changed India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2014).

137. Ibid.

legislative measures such as the end of Triple Talaq, the ruling on Ayodhya for the construction of the Ram temple, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the Abrogation of Article 370, which has been on the BJP's manifestos since the 1990s.

The second reason for the BJP's shift toward assertive cultural nationalism may be seen in the style of leadership between the two BJP leaders. In the 1990s BJP government, Vajpayee, rather than the fiery Advani, was selected to be the party's candidate for prime ministership, due to his genteel image. Indeed, Vajpayee was referred to as a *maukata* (mask)¹³⁸ who assuaged outraged feelings of those shocked by his followers' behaviour.¹³⁹ He was deemed "the right man for the wrong party", whose dexterity allowed him to strike compromises with allies by not mentioning Ayodhya and other communally charged issues like cultural nationalism.¹⁴⁰ Second, Vajpayee has also been described as an aesthete who resonated with the urban intelligentsia through his "talk of poetry ... loneliness ... and philosophy."¹⁴¹ This stands in contrast to Modi's street-fighter image and *chaiwala* (tea-seller) descent, as well as the praise he receives for his masculine leadership style.¹⁴² Jaishankar indirectly corroborates the latter, stating, "there is a sense that today, you need a strong, safe pair of hands to guide national security."¹⁴³ In sum, Modi was 'the right leader for the right party at the right time'. Where Vajpayee was selected for his coalition stitching ability, analysts argue the BJP's victory in 2019 may have owed more to the 'Modi factor' than the BJP itself.

It was thus no fluke that after the 2019 election, a key word was added to the BJP's 2014 mantra – *sub ka sath, sub ka vikaas, sub ka vishvaas* (Everyone's support, everyone's development and now everyone's trust) – reflecting both patriotism in acting tough on Pakistan and nationalism. The addition and slew of recent legislative activities, in fact, highlight the current dispensations' preference for the cultural and security dimension over the economic one up to the COVID-19 crisis. This preference is due to a range of factors, one of the most pertinent, according to Catarina Kinnvall, being the relationship between

138. K N Govindacharya, "I Called Vajpayee 'Face of BJP', Media Made it 'Mukhota': Govindacharya", *Outlook*, 16 August 2018.

139. "BJP's Myth-Making", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31, No. 23 (Jun 8, 1996).

140. Kantha, op. cit.

141. "BJP's Myth-Making", op. cit.

142. Catarina Kinnvall, "Populism, ontological insecurity and Hindutva: Modi and the masculinization of Indian politics", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Published Online 6 May 2019.

143. Ministry of External Affairs, "EAM's Remarks at Carnegie Endowment, Washington DC, 30 September 2019", 2 October 2019. https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/31893/EAMs_remarks_at_Carnegie_Endowment_Washington_DC_30_September_2019.

populist politics and ontological security; that is, the provision of a 'safe, imagined haven' in a world undergoing rapid change.¹⁴⁴ India's 'securitisation' of borders and economics played to the emotions of the electorate. Such emotional governance explains Modi's invocations of Hindu pride, assertive stance towards the Muslims and Pakistan as well as promises of economic growth and protectionism for weaker sections of society.¹⁴⁵

It is at this juncture that nationalism, consolidation of the Hindu vote bank, populism and external action against Pakistan converge. Hindutva, as an ideology, emphasises creating unity in India through the overriding of internal differences.¹⁴⁶ If the 'Muslim' is viewed to be both an internal and external threat to the Hindu body, then the diaspora can also be reimagined, correspondingly, as its transnational palliative, rectifying the ills of Partition.¹⁴⁷ The underlying premise of Hindutva is national and territorial as well as civilisational; the diaspora becomes one strategy to reinforce the Hindu identity of the new India. This is why the BJP's 2014 manifesto called for turning India into a homeland for persecuted 'Hindu' minorities. Meanwhile, the Muslims are excluded, contradicting India's stance during Partition that India was India because of its Muslim minority.

In Varghese George's analysis of India's foreign policy and Hindu nationalism, he quotes Jack Snyder as stating, "strategic culture is about assumption of who is your enemy, who is or could be your ally, and awareness of what is to be done to your enemy."¹⁴⁸ Political Hinduism, according to George, has "a vision of the self, the enemy, how to fight against the enemy and ensure progress for the self."¹⁴⁹ Jaishankar too says, "We in India are proud of our traditions and confident of our future"¹⁵⁰ and "The approach of [the] government in last 5 years has a long-term perspective, taking tough calls when many have been ducked ... Article 370 and legislative changes in Jammu and Kashmir reflect this approach for building lasting peace in the region."¹⁵¹

144. Kinvall, reference to Giddens (1984).

145. Kinvall, op. cit.

146. Varghese K George, "Is there a 'Hindutva Strategic Doctrine that guides Narendra Modi's foreign policy?" *Scroll.in*, 8 November 2018. <https://scroll.in/article/901170/is-there-a-hindutva-strategic-doctrine-that-guides-narendra-modis-foreign-policy>.

147. Kinvall, op. cit.

148. George, op. cit.

149. Ibid.

150. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "EAM's statement on Ministerial meeting on the Alliance for multilateralism – Building the network and presenting results", 27 September 2019, op. cit.

151. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "EAM's Remarks at Carnegie Endowment, Washington DC, 30 September 2019", op. cit.

‘Muscular’ Hinduism and peaceful India, from this lens, can be seen as two sides of the same coin – *Vasudeva Kutumbakum*. It just depends on who is in the family – and Pakistan, being a ‘not normal neighbour’, is not. Hindu nationalist India is not opposed to respecting and cooperating with Muslim nations. While it is true that Modi is a ‘Hindu nationalist’ leader, he also initiated strong ties with Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, where a larger number of Indian diaspora reside.¹⁵² The problem remains India’s external and internal security threat – Pakistan and terrorism – which, as the recent attacks on the Muslims during Trump’s visit and India’s tough stance on Pakistan during the 2019 general elections show – are feeding off one another in a complicated feedback loop, now manifesting in widespread protests against the CAA, which for some is nothing less than a fight for India’s identity.

152. Krzysztof Iwanek, op. cit.

Conclusion

In terms of wider geopolitics, Modi's zero-tolerance stance towards Pakistan and reorientation of India's foreign policy eastwards towards Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific (as epitomised by refusing to invite Khan to his inauguration ceremony, while extending an invitation to the leaders of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation nations), indicates not only India's refusal to let Kashmir and the region be held hostage by Pakistani terror any longer, but also India's newfound flexibility in a multipolar world tending towards regional realpolitik.¹⁵³

One core tension that emerges from Khan and Modi's addresses at the UNGA, importantly, is the clash between human rights and governance. Though Jaishankar has emphasised India's democratic credentials overseas, one item that remains to be seen regarding the development of peace and prosperity in Kashmir is the promise he made in a speech in Finland: whether India can live up to "making a real difference in governance in our people" by means of a "vision of humanity" that supports "inclusivity and diversity" – and not only "fight(ing) fundamentalism and terrorism".¹⁵⁴ India, being the world's biggest democracy, is also caught in a tough neighbourhood, presenting myriad obstacles – of which terrorism is one – of bringing jobs and stability to Kashmir. India's Kashmir gamble could be a powerful formula for consolidating national resources, putting up its shield to the prospective influx of terror, while also laying to rest old ghosts in the region.

However, unrest will continue, jeopardising India's plans and likelihood of ever de-hyphenating itself from Pakistan. India's ability to shape its near-abroad and, therefore, chances of shaping the international system, will now largely depend on local governance – how deftly India manages social challenges, which requires a more nuanced approach than just boots on the ground. "We must not forget the human element", Nehru argued at the Bandung Conference in 1955. This should be kept in mind for India's great power ambitions as well.

153. See Jaishankar's comments on multipolarity in "External Affairs Minister's remarks at Atlantic Council, Washington D.C. on 1 October 2019", *op. cit.*

154. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Remarks by EAM at Finnish Institute of International Affairs", 20 September 2019. https://mea.gov.in/SpeechesStatements.htm?dtl/31839/Remarks_by_EAM_at_the_Finnish_Institute_of_International_Affairs_FIIA_September_20_2019.

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