



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Indian Foreign Policy towards Pakistan during Modi Era: Assessing the Role of Hindu Nationalism

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Foreign policy conduct of a State, executed by its leaders, broadly reflects various patterns of its experiences, beliefs and policies. Domestic factors coupled with systemic pressures play an important role in shaping states' behavior. In addition to various domestic and external factors, leadership and its ideological association play an important role in a country's foreign policy formulation and conduct. Nevertheless, the belief system, politico-religious identity of the statesman is reflected through his foreign policy conduct. With Modi in power, Hindu nationalism has been on the rise wherein Hindu nationalists feel permitted to undermine religious minorities (Muslims) in India, Kashmiris in Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir (IIOK) and neighbors including Pakistan. Thus, the rise of Hindu nationalism has not just challenged the secular identity of India but has also affected India's interaction both at the domestic and international levels. BJP's policies and actions during Modi's tenure have undeniably eroded India's secular identity. Modi, having a politico-religious ideology of Hindutva, has adopted a policy of belligerence towards Muslims and Pakistan. Since India's politico-religious party – Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – under the leadership of Modi has come to power, India's relationship with Pakistan has been at its lowest ebb. The objective of the study is to understand the role of Hindu nationalism on Indian foreign policy behavior towards Pakistan.

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Introduction

The foreign policy of a state is influenced by the leader's personal traits, belief system, ideology, and perceptions about the world. Politico-religious ideology of the head of the state is a key determining factor in devising and implementing the state's foreign policy. Leaders perceive the environment around them through the lens of preconceived notions and belief systems. In India, the Prime Minister of the country holds a supreme position in making and implementing the foreign policy of the country. For India, Modi's perception is based on and inspired by the concept of Hindutva, affecting how India perceives and views Pakistan. Therefore, Modi's belief system, that largely focuses on Hindutva dictums needs to be analyzed in relation to its effect on his foreign policy towards Pakistan.

In 2014, the BJP gained power by winning the majority in parliament with its roots in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). With Modi's win, the political locus of power shifted from secular identity to the politico-religious identity of Hindu nationalists. Several incidents of religious intolerance and derogatory remarks about Muslims and Pakistan by Hindu nationalist leaders and organizations demonstrated a clear departure from the much-acclaimed identity of secular India. During the Modi era, the rise of Hindu nationalism was witnessed, ranging from the killing of Muslims upon eating cow's meat to cancelling visas for Pakistani artists. On the diplomatic front, the pressure of Hindu nationalists often led to the disruption of bilateral engagements between Islamabad and New Delhi. In an interview with Reuters, Modi was asked if he did the right thing in 2002 (a reference to the killings of Muslims in Gujarat); he maintained to be known as a Hindu nationalist.¹

The basic purpose of the study is to inquire about and understand the role and influence of Hindu nationalism on India-Pakistan bilateral relations. The research aims to study the role of the politico-religious identity of Hindu nationalism in India, power structure, national interests, social structure and institutions in foreign policy making. This assessment is aimed at identifying and analyzing the questions if 'Whether Hindu nationalism' has a role in steering Indian foreign relations concerning Pakistan, what are the associated dynamics affect the bilateral relations and how Modi, with his RSS background and Hindutva leanings, is conducting relations with Pakistan?

The politico-religious, ideological inclination of leaders and their perception and belief systems tends to influence their decision-making and foreign policy conduct. Leaders interpret the systemic environment and conduct state foreign policy in line with domestic imperatives. The foreign policy of a state is influenced by the leader's personal traits, belief system,

¹ "Yes, I am a Hindu nationalist: Narendra Modi", *Indian Express*, 13 July 2013, <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/yes-i-am-a-hindu-nationalist-narendra-modi/1141243/>.

ideology, and perceptions about the world. Modi's inclination for Hindutva and Hindu nationalism continues to affect its foreign policy demeanour towards Pakistan.

The paper attempts to examine the rise and degree of influence of the right-wing Hindu nationalists on India-Pakistan relations, focusing on Modi's era. Dominant Hindu nationalists' organizations such as RSS, *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP), Bajrang Dal have influenced and shaped India's political discourse. By and large, these factions largely associate with the dictums of 'Hindutva' and Hindu superiority and domination. This research is aimed at examining how beliefs of *Hindu* chauvinism in Modi's era affect Indian foreign policy conduct with Pakistan in particular.

The paper will discuss an important correlation between the ideology of Modi and his approach to dealing with Pakistan. Under this backdrop, the same will be discussed under the theoretical paradigm of neo-classical realism, which underlines the ideological and belief system and personality of the leader and to what extent the belief system influences the decision-making of the leader. Modi is the leader of the state having roots in Hindutva ideology, will be discussed to examine the influence of ideology in relation to Pakistan.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this study is based on qualitative research. In this study, historical, descriptive and analytical methods are used by studying primary and secondary sources such as books, articles published in journals and newspapers and related reports on the subject. The Source of data collection includes both printed material as well as databases accessed through the internet.

Neoclassical Realism: A Theoretical Approach to Explain Foreign Policy and Belief System of a Leader

Undeniably, the foreign policy of a state cannot be divorced from the international system. States have to tailor their policies in accordance with the prevalent environment of threats and opportunities posed by the system. However, the role of intervening variables, i.e., the role of ideology of the state and the leader, cannot be ignored for their casual relevancy in the foreign policy making and implementation process.

In comparison to major theories and other variants of realism, neoclassical realism indeed elucidates little more on account of foreign policy in relation to the international system. The primary rationale of neoclassical realism is to build an approach to foreign policy and international relations that maintain the supremacy of the international system. For instance, in contrast to structural realism, neoclassical realism contends that two states,

despite being placed in a similar position in the international system, can behave in a different fashion owing to different national preferences.

Neoclassical realists attempt to employ theories in a heuristic fashion wherein they combine the core assumptions of structuralism with that of intervening variables defined by constructivism, such as the role of identities and ideas.² Besides systemic pressures, irrefutably, domestic stipulations such as competing values, cultural norms, and often conflicting identities come into play to influence the foreign policy behavior of the state, demonstrated through its actors (leaders). This framework will be considered to assess the evolution of Indian foreign policy in relation to Hindu nationalism. Theoretically, neoclassical realism is not a departure from the realist tradition; rather, it is more of its extension with an addition of providing a substitute to constructivism and liberal approaches.³

Unlike other variants, neoclassical realism underscores the importance of the domestic characteristics of a state in defining and making foreign policy preferences. Hence, the role of ideology, leader's psychology and perceptions do play a role in the decision-making of a state. According to neoclassical realists, decision makers' belief system influences the interaction between international power distribution and foreign policy. The neoclassical viewpoint thus widens the scope and considers the possible effects of a leader's belief system or perceptions about the international system or states it is dealing with.⁴

In the foreign policy analysis of states, a set of questions needs to be looked into, such as how do decision makers perceive and respond to the international system? To what extent, and under what circumstances, personal characteristics of the leader and domestic variables influence the state's foreign and security policies? Unlike other theoretical models, these few essential questions of international politics are attempted by neoclassical realism.

According to the neoclassical paradigm, states do not act as a unit; instead, states are driven by their people, leaders, policy and decision makers. Implying that a state system, bureaucracies, institutions etc., are indeed made and run by individuals. In neoclassical realism, these statesmen are often referred to as *Foreign Policy Executive*, acting on the state's behalf to safeguard its national interests. Since states are run by individuals, it is, therefore, likely to be affected by the perception, ideology and belief system of the leaders. Analysts such as Gideon Rose, Schweller, Fareed Zakria etc, attempted to explain the foreign policy of states and provided a foundational

² Derek Beach, "Analyzing Foreign Policy," Palgrave Macmillan (2012), 64.

³ Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, "Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics" (Oxford University Press, 2016), 19.

⁴ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Oct., 1998), 157 – 158.

basis for this relatively new theory of neoclassical realism. The theoretical construct provided by neoclassical realism, is endowed with a variety of analyses for foreign policy choices and grand strategic adjustments made by the states. In the more ordinary circumstances, due to evolving environment of international politics, states are often faced with apparent threats and relatively less optimal policy options to deal with systemic imperatives.⁵ However, in assessing the foreign policy, it is imperative to understand the patterns and strategic culture of the state. In terms of decision making process, a leader's image, worldview, and the strategic and political culture of the state determine the leader's ability to take the decision.

In neoclassical realism, domestic factors such as ideas and political orientation of the states are being described as of equal importance to unfold the state's foreign policy. It explains why, how and under what circumstances, domestic features of the state influences domestic social groups or decision makers to recognize and respond to international threats and opportunities in a defined way or to hold a certain line of foreign policy towards their respective counterpart. In the neoclassical framework, the description of a causal relationship between different variables at systemic and domestic levels is manifold.⁶ Neoclassical realists consider that states' foreign policy or conduct of international relations can better be understood through the prism of intervening variables such as ideology and (mis) perception of statesmen about the system. To them the study of ideational and material variables equally provides a comprehensive breakdown of a state's policies. Moreover, such psychological variables, rooted in the history or ideology of the nation and its leadership, provide a context to unfold the state's understanding of the system. Thus, internal factors of the state, combined with systemic pressures, largely shape decisions and foreign policy behavior of the state.

Hence, to understand the foreign policy of the state, it is imperative to be first cognizant of the power and ability of the ideology the state believes in so to comprehend as to how and to what extent; the very ideology is driving or influencing the states' foreign policy. The paper analyses how the Hindutva ideology and Hindu nationalism evolved in India to influence and make headways in Indian politics and Indian foreign policy. Further, how does India, under the administration of Prime Minister Modi having his political affiliation with the Hindu nationalist organization – RSS, conduct bilateral relations with Pakistan. In this context, understanding the role of

⁵ Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, "The State of Neoclassical Realism," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 280–299.

⁶ Jalal Dehghani Firoozabadi and Mojtaba Zare Ashkezari, "Neo-classical Realism in International Relations," *Asian Social Science*; Vol. 12, No. 6; 2016, ISSN 1911-2017 E-ISSN 1911-2025, 98.

ideology, leaders' belief systems, and their political affiliation not only influences his insight but, in the end, frames the foreign policy of the country. This aspect would help understand the case study of Modi's era with reference to Pakistan.

Influence of Hindu Nationalist Approach on India-Pakistan Relations

During Modi's tenure, Hindu nationalism, based on Hindutva ideology, remained a significant component in the Indian political landscape. Hindutva was more of a cultural ideology than a political one; nevertheless, when the cultural dominance of an ideology is transformed into a political reality, it causes problems as it seeks oppression to win and stay in power. However, the rise of Hindu nationalism in the Indian political scene was widely witnessed in the 1990s with the political struggle of the BJP. The analysis of the BJP's three-decade-long politics from the 1990s to the present pronounces some continuations and changes in its foreign policy conduct primarily influenced by ideational force - the Hindu nationalism. While maintaining Hindu nationalistic identity and appealing non-Hindu nationalistic voters remained a challenge for the BJP's political behavior.

The BJP's Politics and Hindu Nationalism

By and large, Congress dominated the central political landscape of India. With its Hindutva appeal, based on Hindu nationalist rhetoric, the BJP continued its struggle in the political realm. In the 1984 general elections, the BJP contested; however, it could not win over Congress. Indeed, Indira Gandhi's assassination provided the Congress with a bulk of sympathy votes and resulted in its success. The BJP failed to mobilize even the majority of Hindu voters based on its politico-religious identity in the country.

The loss of the 1984 election led the BJP leadership to revise its strategy and intensify its ideological influence among the public. Thereby, the BJP focused to utilize its organizational structure to infuse Hindu nationalist ideology with politics through RSS and VHP-like sub-organizations. Among the BJP leadership to reinstate Hindutva ideology, Lal Krishan Advani played a vital role in capitalizing on conventional Hindu nationalist rhetoric among the general public. Later, Hindutva ideology in the political domain served the BJP by winning more seats in the 1989 election. A concrete demonstration of Hindutva political mobilization was witnessed during the historical and politico-religious dispute, the Ayodhya case.

The dispute over a piece of land led orthodox Hindu nationalists and Muslims to communal riots. To Hindu nationalists, the Muslim's Babri mosque (masjid) was perceived to have been built on the sacred place of their God *Ram's* birthplace by demolishing the earlier built Hindu temple. The communal riot intensified in December 1992, when religiously-charged mob of Hindu nationalists demolished the Babri masjid. The BJP used the

Ayodhya episode to demonstrate its religious and political strength. The wave of this communal rift continued and led to another infamous incident of Gujarat violence. Narendra Modi, by then the Chief Minister of the state of Gujarat, was largely held responsible for turning blind eye to Hindu atrocities against the Muslim minority. In the political sphere, votes won by the BJP were mainly due to its religious identity, influenced by the RSS and VHP dictums.

The Ayodhya and Gujarat incidents strengthened the basic Hindu nationalistic rhetoric and BJP's associated identity. However, the BJP's association with the RSS in the case of the Gujarat massacre denoted the party's approach to alter the so-called secular society into a Hindu heartland under Hindutva ideology. Despite BJP's political solid association with the RSS, its tenure from 1998 and onwards portrayed a relatively soft and moderate image of the BJP primarily in order to have wider acceptance at the domestic and international level.

It was in the late 1990s when BJP took recentre power and came into the limelight. Seeing acceptance of congress' democratic identity at the domestic level, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee chose a moderate rather than the conventional course for BJP. To further transform the impression of radical militant Hindu nationalism, the BJP started focusing more on nationalistic themes such as democracy, secularism, national unity and assimilation in political manifestos.⁷ India's official declaration of a nuclear explosion in May 1998 further underpinned Hindu self-confidence, and the explosions were largely celebrated with the religious cum political victory of the right-wing Hindu nationalists' government. Indeed, nuclear tests widened the BJP's political acceptance at the domestic level and soon turned much perceived Hindu nationalism rhetoric into Indian nationalism.⁸

Although, being in the coalition government, BJP got restricted to define and demonstrate its expected hardliner and hawkish approach in foreign policy towards Pakistan. Then PM Vajpayee tried to create a soft image the BJP even at the international level by making progress in bilateral relations with Pakistan. It was in the BJP's tenure in the late 1990s, led by Vajpayee, during India and Pakistan agreed on various bilateral agreements under Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). During BJP's first term in the office, BJP was examined to have adopted a relatively softened demeanor against the much-anticipated fundamentalist rhetoric. However, there is no denying the fact; that despite adopting the relatively moderate conduct, the BJP did not shift away from its foreign policy goals in its interaction with Pakistan. Taken together, the Vajpayee government largely made policies different

⁷ Yogendra K. Malik and V. B. Singh, *Hindu Nationalists in India, the Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party*, (San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), 38.

⁸ Aijaz Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present: Ideology and Politics in Contemporary South Asia*, (London; New York: Verso, 2000). 240-243.

from that of previous governments. The same was witnessed during the Kargil war when Indian foreign policy towards Pakistan was largely characterized by a Hindu nationalist's approach.

However, soon after the Gujarat incident and followed by international criticism, the BJP attempted to moderate its image in society. The BJP did not divorce its political orientation embedded in Hindutva identity and maintained a strong association with the Sangh Parivar, i.e. RSS. Nevertheless, the BJP has been able to levy its Hindu nationalistic approach to domestic politics and foreign policy. Unlike Modi's era, the BJP in the 1990s could not execute the Hindu nationalist agenda or extremists' policies overall due to the necessity of political coalition except on occasions of common ground towards Pakistan, such as 1998 nuclear weapons testing and the Kargil war. Later elections ended in Congress's clear victory in the polls and putting the BJP in opposition; the Congress' tenure largely focused on the economic development of the country while capitalizing on secular identity and its democratic character.

The winning of the BJP with a heavy mandate in the Lok Sabha elections of 2014 and again in 2019 shows how successfully the BJP, with its Hindutva leaning, is gaining acceptability among the general public. This is not to confirm that India's secular identity has been changed. Seeing contemporary trends in the Indian policies at the domestic and international level, it may be argued that the BJP under Modi largely transformed Indian society to adopt the Hindu nationalistic worldview. Modi's coming back into the government twice indicates that the BJP ideology was largely endorsed by the secular and democratic society of India. Implies that the Hindu nationalists managed to influence Indian society towards more of a Hindu nationalistic outlook than Indian nationalism. Historically, Nehru propounded the idea of Indian nationalism owing to dealing with multi-ethnic, multi-caste and diversity of religions in India.

The biggest threat to the Indian social fabric from Hindu extremism is from the changes being made to the national narrative that was based on the principles of equality through secularism. Despite the fact that the Indian constitution claims to protect the rights of minorities, the institution filled in by the Hindu fascists violates the laws by not taking action against the abuses done against minorities. The nationalist and Hindu extremists are challenging the norms and social buildup of the Indian society by forcibly converting Muslims and Christians back to Hinduism under the so-called "Ghar Wapisi" program. Recent events such as the abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A followed by the Citizenship Amendment Bill of India suggested that Modi's foreign and domestic policies are driven by the Hindu nationalist agenda.

An examination of Modi's tenure, starting from 2014 and a massive victory for the second term in 2019, signifies an increased acceptance and influence of right-wing Hindu nationalists in Indian politics. Nevertheless,

with the arrival of Modi in 2014, the Hindutva and Hindu nationalism syndrome revived. Two important contours of Modi's election campaign of 2014 remained the economic uplift of the country and the preservation of Hindu nationalists' identity. Likewise, for the 2019 election campaign, the anti-Pakistan narrative was exploited by Modi's administration to attract a larger vote bank. The Pulwama incident followed by Indian fighter jets' intrusion in Pakistan was applauded by staunch Hindu nationalists.

Rise of Hindu Nationalism and influence on Politics

Extremism is not a new phenomenon to this era nor this region, yet the kind of rapid transformation that is taking place in this domain in contemporary international politics is a matter of greater concern for welfare and human development. Since September 11, 2001, the world is only focusing on the violence perpetrated through Islamic extremism while ignoring the catalysts for these actions. There are also major violent trends in Hindu extremism that have largely been ignored in the U.S. and worldwide. With the fading secularism and rising extremism, India gives a clear picture of how the democracies move away from democratic to undemocratic paths.

Historically, Nehru being the first Prime Minister of India, set the foundation of India on the principles of secularism and democracy. Undeniably, Hindu-Muslim riots date back to pre-partition time and continue in present India, but the frequency of communal unrest was relatively rare. Nehru was largely viewed as an opponent of using religion for political gains. In doing so, Nehru also promoted the People Act of 1951, discouraging politicians from using religion.⁹

The rising extremism and intolerance in India depict India moving away from the core principles of democracy, equality and secularism. It has been estimated that up to 80 % of the population largely consists of Hindus, but the rising Hindu nationalism has led to a huge increase in violence against minorities on the basis of caste and religion. Another important factor that further intensifies the extremism is the leadership in India which is, unfortunately, a hawk. Narendra Modi himself has been the torchbearer of Hindutva throughout his political struggle. Hence, it is not surprising that during his tenure, Hindutva reached its peak. There has been increased violence against Muslims in particular and other minorities in general under his tenure. Muslims have been under attack in India since the partition; however, the frequency has amplified.

India has always claimed itself to be the "world's largest democracy" and showed pride in its secularism; however, the ground realities are mostly ignored intentionally and are overlooked due to various reasons. Hinduism is

⁹ Christophe Jafferlot, "The Fate of Secularism in India", Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 04 April, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/04/04/fate-of-secularism-in-india-pub-78689>.

the biggest religion in India right now. The relationship between religion and caste remains a problem in India and contradicts democratic values. In 1947, when India got independence, it decided to become secular on the basis of hundreds of languages, a number of ethnic groups and castes, even though Hindu nationalists wanted a Hindu state. There is an idea that faith and culture based on the Hindu religion should shape the state and its policies of the state.

The demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 by Hindu extremists led to a massive Hindutva surge that finally brought these forces into the political mainstream and propelled them to power. Nevertheless, the construction of the Hindu Ram temple in place of Muslims' Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, followed by massive communal riots in Gujrat, marked infamy to the much acclaimed secular identity of India. This was the first demonstration of what Hindu extremism was capable of, but the world ignored this atrocity and numerous incidents afterwards in order to appease India, which was emerging as a major economic market.

In the wake of recent episodes in India, it is evident that the BJP driven by the politico-religious dictums of RSS holds a greater degree of intolerance towards India's religious minorities, particularly Muslims. BJP is a political front of RSS and has taken steps to launch a campaign against Muslims through various means and leaving minorities even more vulnerable.¹⁰ Even before taking the PM office, Modi had expressed his obligation towards the Hindutva ideology by saying, "*The nation and Hindus are one. Only if Hindus develop will the nation develop. Unity of Hindus will strengthen the nation*"¹¹. RSS also introduced its "Ghar Wapsi" program aimed at inculcating Hindutva dictums among minorities coupled with the incentive of providing better health and education. A large number of schools are run by RSS, wherein Hindu superiority against Muslims is instilled. According to an estimate, about 20,000 RSS-controlled schools exist in Uttar Pradesh State with an objective to inculcate anti-Muslim and anti-Christians opinions.¹²

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, the BJP, backed by pro-Hindu sympathies, arose as the largest party in the Indian Parliament. The rise of the BJP has further intensified Hindu nationalism. Indian society, deeply divided over caste, has been facing a number of challenges but still sustaining its historic violent, unjust and unequal form of Hindu social order. Since coming into power, BJP Ministers and other officials have been overtly supporting Hindutva ideology.

¹⁰ Amartya Sen, "The Country of First Boys and Other Essays," London: Oxford University Press (2015).

¹¹ Kalim Siddiqui, "Critical Study of 'Hindu Nationalism' in India," Vol. 3, No. 2; June 2016, *Journal of Business & Economic Policy*, 9.

¹² Rupal Oza, "The Geography of Hindu Right Wing Violence in India", D. Gregory and A. Pred (ed.) *Violent Geographies*, London: Routledge (2007).

In the 2014 election, many were of the view that BJP is a dying party and will not be able to make a place for itself. However, the results of the elections took many by surprise when BJP, led by Modi, took the power stage in 2014. Since then, the BJP has become the center of attention in the Indian political system. BJP's 2014 and 2019 election victories can be accredited to the unification of ideology on two political grounds; statism and recognition.¹³ India's nuclear weapon testing in 1998, under the BJP government, has remained an important part of Hindu power projection tactics in India to incite an anti-Pakistan narrative at the domestic level to attract votes in elections. Support for Hindus and preferential treatment against minorities remained a persuasive political tool for Hindu nationalists.¹⁴

Further to pacify domestic and international concerns about India turning into an intolerant ideational-based society, Modi attempted to focus on more economic liberation, same was not welcomed by Hindu nationalists. Addressing the global business elite at the 2018 World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, Modi presented India as a powerful contender for globalization and free trade. Modi projected India to be an open economy and best suited for free trade and foreign direct investment (FDI).¹⁵ However, the RSS didn't endorse it but instead criticized it and was of the view that "FDI has done more bad than good to the economy."¹⁶

Modi's Hindutva Disposition

Prime Minister represents a state and is responsible for managing the complex interplay between international and domestic politics. Therefore, his perceptions, approach and belief system largely affect the foreign policy of the state. Modi's association with RSS, coupled with Hindu nationalist leaning, requires to be analyzed in relation to comprehending his approach towards Pakistan.

Modi joined BJP in 1985 and became General Secretary in 1998. In 1999, he was assigned to run the BJP's political campaign in Gujarat for the General elections. Then Gujarat Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel was removed from the seat owing to corruption charges; therefore, the party nominated Modi as

¹³ Rahul Verma, *The Emergence, Stagnation, and Ascendance of the BJ*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 4 April 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/04/04/emergence-stagnation-and-ascendance-of-bjp-pub-78735>.

¹⁴ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India and Indian Politics*, (Columbia University Press: 1996), 306–335.

¹⁵ "India Now Most Open Economy in the World for FDI, Says Modi," *Hindustan Times*, June 20, 2016, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/business/india-now-mostopen-economy-in-the-world-for-fdi-says-modi/>.

¹⁶ "RSS Affiliate Objects Against FDI Easing," *Press Trust of India*, November 16, 2015, <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/zWpT0o9im7fhcDL5ziO7pl/RSS-affiliateobjects-against-FDI-easing.html>.

an alternative to Patel.¹⁷ In October 2001, Modi became the Chief Minister of Gujarat and Gujarat witnessed the infamous communal riots.¹⁸ Hindu extremists agitated the situation and resulted in the killing of Muslims. The uprising not only caused the massive killing of Muslims, but they also lost properties as homes were set on fire. While on the other side, Muslims were alleged to burn Hindu devotees on the train.¹⁹ Further, Muslim victims were denied any help from law implementation forces.²⁰ Hindu mob uttered that “*He (Modi) had given us three days to do whatever we could.*”²¹ According to official estimates, hundreds of Muslims lost their lives and more than that were compelled to leave their homes for the sake of life.²² The possibility of clashes stemming from religious polarization can still not be ruled out as the influence of RSS liked factions in Indian politics, and foreign dealings have further strengthened during Modi’s tenure.²³

Although due to communal riots in India, Modi faced international infamy while gained a fair degree of fame and acceptance at the domestic level, demonstrated through his unanticipated victories in the polls both at the state and national levels. Following gaining popularity at the state and Ministerial level, Modi’s nomination as BJP’s candidate for PM was largely feared by liberals as a threat to the democratic and secular identity of India. BJP’s landmark won in election polls of 2014 was a formal beginning of religious polarization. Taken together, BJP’s policies and actions during Modi’s tenure have undeniably eroded India’s secular identity.

As anticipated, Modi’s election campaign for 2014 was largely supported by RSS. According to sources, RSS and its associates prepared various groups

¹⁷ V. Venkatesan, “A Pracharak as Chief Minister,” *Front Line*, vol.18, issue 21, October 13-26, 2001, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1821/18210310.htm>.

¹⁸ “Modi: From Tea Boy to India’s Leader,” *Al Jazeera*, May 27, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/05/modi-from-tea-boy-india-pm20145139742599119.html>.

¹⁹ Raoof Mir, “Decoding Modi of India’s Ambitious Desires,” *Foreign Policy Journal*, April 23, 2014, <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2014/04/23/decoding-modi-of-indiasambitious-desires/>.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch “*We Have No Orders to Save You’: State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat*”, 30 April 2002, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3cd263c9a.html>.

²¹ “Ahead of Polls, Gujarat Riots Haunt Modi,” *Times of India*, October 26, 2007, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Ahead-of-polls-Gujarat-riots-haunt-Modi/articleshow/2491416.cms>.

²² Human Rights Watch “*We Have No Orders to Save You’: State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat*”, 30 April 2002, available at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3cd263c9a.html>.

²³ Praful Bidwai, “RSS Anoints Modi as PM-Candidate: Stooping to a new communal low,” Praful Bidwai Blog, September 20, 2013, <http://www.prafulbidwai.org/index.php?post/2013/09/20/RSS-AnointsModi-As-PM-Candidate%3A-Stooping-to-a-new-communal-low>.

of Hindu nationalists to support Modi's election campaign.²⁴ RSS' student wing not only called Modi one of them but also expected him to pursue a harsh policy towards Pakistan and to deal toughly with the Kashmir issue by abrogating Article 370.²⁵ An examination of RSS-BJP linkage approves the growing dominance of Hindutva ideology in the Indian political scenes. BJP leadership had always been vocal against Muslim minorities, and Kashmiris' rights and abrogation of Article 370 had always been on BJP's agenda. Notable BJP leader Rajnath Singh also affirmed BJP's resolve to construct the Ram temple at the Ayodhya site, abrogating Article 370 and subjugating policies that may favor Muslim minorities.²⁶ The BJP's resolve turned into reality with the reelection of Modi as PM in 2019. Modi's two important decisions, the abrogation of article 370 and the Indian Supreme Court decision on the disputed territory of Ayodha, further reinforced apprehensions related to the dominance of right-wing Hindu nationalists in Indian political discourse.

On the domestic front, Modi seems to be caught in a situation where it was difficult to manage the demands of his Hindu extremists while painting India as a secular and tolerant society. Although Modi maintained that for India to achieve success, it needs to free itself from a system of caste and communal divide.²⁷ On contrary, RSS and associated Hindu nationalists factions gained power in the Indian political discourse. Nevertheless, the revocation of Article 370 and 35A from the Indian constitution and the contentious decision on Ayodha authenticates Hindu nationalists' influence on Modi's decision-making and policy conduct.

India claims to be the largest democracy on the basis of a number of voters and peaceful power transitions; however, these are not the only parameter to measure democracy. Instead, the track record of India shows that it has constantly been violating the basic norms of democracy. According to the World Freedom of Press survey, India has one of the lowest freedom of the press in the world. It has been estimated that 95% of the media is controlled by Brahmins.²⁸

²⁴ Saba Naqvi, "Modi Metrics," Outlook, April 21, 2014, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/Modi-Metrics/290196>.

²⁵ "Men in Shorts," Economist, May 17, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21602283-election-over-narendramodi-may-drop-hindu-right-men-shorts>.

²⁶ "We'll build Ram temple: Rajnath," Debating India, 25 December 2006, <https://india.eu.org/spip.php?article7303>.

²⁷ C. Raja Mohan, "Held Back by Hindutva," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (December 23, 2014), <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/12/23/held-back-by-hindutva>.

²⁸ "RSF Index 2018: Hatred of journalism threaten democracies", <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-index-2018-hatred-journalism-threatens-democracies>.

Impact of Hindu Nationalism on Indian Foreign Policy towards Pakistan during the Modi Era

The rise of Hindutva has had many far-reaching consequences for Pakistan. A famous BJP leader, Subramaniam Swami, is on record for threatening Pakistan to be broken into four pieces.²⁹ Anti-Pakistan narrative is always used in Hindu nationalist political campaigns as a tool to win elections in India. During the 2002 elections, Modi used a portrait of President Musharaf with a caption indicating that voting against Modi would be equivalent to favoring Musharaf and Pakistan.³⁰ Later in the 2014 elections, the posters were seen in India saying a vote against Modi would be a vote for Pakistan and terrorism.³¹ India has been portraying Pakistan as a terrorist state, ignoring that Pakistan has paid a huge price of having sacrificed thousands of civilian and security forces personnel. Pakistan has always desired India to resume dialogue and explore opportunities for further engagements but could not break the ice, especially during Modi's era, bilateral relations could not witness any breakthrough.

The foreign secretaries' meeting of August 2014, a much hyped bilateral event during Modi's premiership, was unexpectedly shelved under the pretext of a meeting between the Pakistani diplomats and the Kashmiri Huriyat leaders.³² The Indian response was marked with disappointment among the academia and diplomatic fraternity that was largely anticipating the event to provide an opening to establish good diplomatic terms. Pakistani official position maintained that meeting between the Pakistani diplomats and the Kashmiri leaders was a normal practice. The tension not only continued on the Line of Control, but also on the diplomatic fronts. As part of India, Pakistan's hosting of the SAARC meeting in 2015 remained futile as both sides could not reach an agreement to resume the dialogue process. The dialogue process has long been halted between India and Pakistan due to the difference in the prioritization of issues. For India, the issue of terrorism becomes the first agenda point, while Pakistan maintains to first address the

²⁹ Haider Ali, "BJP leader Threatens to Break Pakistan in to four pieces," Daily Pakistan, Sep 30, 2017, <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/pakistan/bjp-leader-threatens-breaking-pakistan-into-four-pieces-in-2018/>.

³⁰ Manoj Joshi, "In his attempt to win elections, Narendra Modi does not see bound by propriety or even dignity." Scroll.in. Dec 12, 2017 <https://scroll.in/article/861137/narendra-modis-mention-of-pakistan-to-marginalise-muslims-is-not-a-good-sign-for-india>.

³¹ Parevz Jabr, "India political parties use anti-Pakistan rhetoric to win elections," Business Recorder, March 19, 2018, <https://www.brecorder.com/2018/03/10/403953/india-political-parties-use-anti-pakistan-rhetoric-to-win-elections/>.

³² "India Cancels Talks with Pakistan over Kashmir Row," BBC News, August 19, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-28832477>.

core issue of Kashmir as per the ruling of the UNSC resolutions and as per the will of Kashmiris.³³

India-Pakistan bilateral relations witnessed a thaw during Modi's tenure in 2015 when leaders of both sides met and finally agreed to resume the delayed dialogue on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Ufa Russia.³⁴ Followed Ufa, PM Nawaz Sharif and PM Modi also met during the Climate Change Conference in Paris. Later, Modi, while returning from his trip to Afghanistan, made a layover in Pakistan and met PM Sharif. The visit was hyped and appreciated for breaking the record of Indian PM visiting Pakistan in a decade and for exchanging views between the two sides to make progress.

Later in 2015, India and Pakistan agreed to restart the long-awaited comprehensive dialogue process to discuss all issues of concern, including Kashmir.³⁵ Before the process could have resumed, an alleged terrorist attack on the Indian Pathankot airbase disturbed the process, and India put the blame on Pakistan and called off the dialogue process. India's involvement in disturbing the internal peace and stability of Pakistan came public when serving Indian Navy official, Kulbhushan Yadav, was captured by Pakistani forces. Yadav confessed to being an agent of the Indian Intelligence Agency RAW and facilitated terrorist activities in Balochistan and Karachi.³⁶ There is no end in sight. Being a responsible member of the international community and having all the rights of self-defence, Pakistan is committed to ensuring its peace and stability, and in honoring the commitment, Pakistan not only made India the offer to investigate the Pathankot incident but also shared intelligence in March 2016 of suspected movement of non-state actor crossing into India.³⁷

On the contrary, the statement by the Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar that India would use "terrorists to kill terrorists" was very ill-fated.³⁸ While talking of terrorism and seeking justice, India forgets that it still has

³³ Frederic Grare, "India-Pakistan Relations: Does Modi Matter?" *The Washington Quarterly*, 37 (2014): 4,101-114, DOI:10.1080/0163660X.2014.1002158.

³⁴ "Ufa meeting: Modi ready to visit Pakistan next year," *Express Tribune*, July 11, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/918802/ufa-meeting-modi-readyto-visit-pakistan-next-year/>.

³⁵ "India, Pakistan Agree to Resume Comprehensive Dialogue," *Express Tribune*, December 9, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1006610/afghanpresident-ashraf-ghani-arrives-in-islamabad-2/>.

³⁶ "RAW's serving Indian Navy Commander held in Balochistan," *News*, March 25, 2016, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/107858-RAWs-servingIndian-Navy-commander-held-in-Balochistan>.

³⁷ "NSG Deployed in Somnath, Delhi Put on High Alert," *Hindu*, March 6, 2016, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/nsg-deployed-in-somnathdelhi-is-put-on-high-alert/article8321055.ece>.

³⁸ "Pakistan Slams Minister's Statement," *Hindu*, May 24, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/parrikar-statement-on-terrorissues-pakistan-slams-ministers-statement/article7239580.ece>.

not brought the culprits of the Samjhota Express case to justice, wherein about sixty-eight Pakistanis had lost their lives, and the Samjhota incident had happened much before the Mumbai incident.³⁹

Since 2019, Pakistan-India bilateral relations have witnessed various incidents of crossfire and skirmishes across the Line of Control (LOC). During Modi's tenure, India adopted a more aggressive policy dealing with Pakistan. Modi used anti-Pakistan rhetoric to win the second term in 2019. Following the Balakot incident, airstrikes took place when the Indian warplanes violated Pakistan boundaries allegedly against terrorists in February 2019, just ahead of the Indian general elections. India claimed to shot down Pakistan air force F-16 and alleged terrorists camp. Claims proved to be false; indeed Pakistan Air Force hunted down an Indian warplane and took its pilot in custody. Certainly, the timing of the Indian airstrike coupled with a false claim of victory seemed to gather nationalistic appeal to win the general elections.

Despite all, Modi's winning the elections in 2019, revocation of Article 370 and 35-A, followed by the Citizenship Amendment Bill of India, unmistakably implies strong footprints of Hindutva ideology in India. The change in the Indian constitution, by depriving Kashmiris of their autonomous status, has further intensified the situation.

India-Pakistan bilateral relations are marked by a combination of crisis and diplomatic engagement without achieving significant breakthroughs. After a tense round of ties in 2019, as part of the diplomatic process, both sides committed to renewing the ceasefire, a silver lining for improved relations.⁴⁰ Through such commitments, tension may be de-escalated; nevertheless, for sustainable peace, the primary issue – Kashmir – has to be resolved. Certainly, a step towards peace is welcomed to clear the air of tension between the two states. Indeed, the success of such small steps would require consistent support from the domestic level, especially in the case of India. India's aggressive approach toward Pakistan needs to change in order to open a window of cooperation. Nevertheless, an analysis of Hindu extremists' influence in steering Indian political and foreign interaction seems less promising to change the mindset of Hindu nationalists in the prevailing settings.

However, for improved bilateral relations, mutual peace and regional development, India must recognize that unless the Kashmir issue is resolved per the demands of the people of Kashmir and the relevant UNSC

³⁹ Anees Jillani, "The Frenzy Mongers," *Out Look India*, May 20, 2013, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/The-Frenzy-Mongers/2853>.

⁴⁰ Khurshid Kasuri and Radha Kumar, "There is hope for Pakistan-India peace process," *Dawn*, March 24, 2021, Dawn News, available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1614187/there-is-hope-for-pakistan-india-peace-process>.

Resolutions, peace and stability cannot be achieved in the region.⁴¹ Pakistan maintains and should continue to flag the need for recommencement of the result-oriented dialogue process. If history is a guide, to achieve mutual peace, harmony and development, states are required to come to the negotiation table with an approach to resolve the differences rather than avoidance. For a long, India has deferred and disregarded the contention between India and Pakistan. The Kashmir issue needs to be resolved as per the UNSC resolutions and the will of Kashmiris so that two major players of the region may turn to the path of regional peace and development.

Previously, events of February 2019, Pulwama and its aftermath, flexing of Indian military muscle for domestic gains is set to embroil the region in a security deadlock. Additionally, India's military actions inside IIOK and along the LoC and the Working Boundary have the potential to escalate into limited conflict, reminiscent of the Kargil Conflict. This is a dangerous phenomenon between two nuclear-armed countries. The Indian military force, posture and doctrine developments are another issue of grave concern as they are destabilizing the region. The Indian possible shift from the No First Use [of nuclear weapons] to ready arsenal further complicates India's political and military stance towards Pakistan.

Challenges and Future Prospects of Pakistan-India Relations and Role of Hindu Nationalism

India constitutes a greater part of the South Asian region, coupled with having the largest population.⁴² Hence, political developments in India have direct repercussions throughout South Asia. In India, national movements inspired by religious ideology have gained strength. The extreme behavior and attitude of extremist Hindus towards Dalits and other minorities is a common feature. Given the current scenario, it seems that Pakistan – India relations will still face a number of challenges. Bilateral ties based on respect of rights with the aim of ensuring peace are crucial for the socio-economic progress of India and Pakistan.

Modi seems to be a controversial politician and a threat to India's claimed secularism. The policy opted by the Modi government to deal with Pakistan is going to be counterproductive and will have serious implications for regional peace, integration and strategic stability. The two nuclear powers cannot afford misperceptions and miscommunication. Peace and cooperation should be the ultimate goal of both states. Both states are facing the menace of terrorism, and it is their mutual interest to come together and fight against

⁴¹ Riffat Fareed, "We're not alone": Besieged Kashmiris hail Imran Khan's UN speech," *Aljazeera*, September, 28 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/9/28/were-not-alone-besieged-kashmiris-hail-imran-khans-un-speech>.

⁴² Milan Vaishnav, *When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

it. In doing so, the road to conflict resolution rather than relying on conflict management alone would be more result oriented.

Taken together, Hindutva extremism has altered India's secular identity and is shaping the Indian society into a more conservative and intolerant character. The Indian Constitution is clearly in contrast to the Hindutva ideology. The whole constitution of India is, in fact, at risk, and there are many in India who are deeply concerned about the way and speed Hindu extremists under Modi's flagship have dented India's secular and democratic identity.

Seeing the strong influence of Hindu nationalists', the dynamics of India – Pakistan bilateral relations are likely to further experience uncertainty. As per practice, any planned progress between sides subsided in the wake of any unfortunate event of tensions across the border. The detention of Kulbhushan Yadev and his confessions of involvement is evidence of India's direct interference to disturb peace and stability within Pakistan. Nevertheless, such episodes of interference coupled with belligerence demonstrated through Pathankot and Pulwama events further lower the chances of progress and instill distrust. India's repeated episodes of such belligerence and denunciation of Pakistan's offers for dialogue bring matters back to square one. Further, BJP leadership needs to minimize the overarching role of Hindu ideology in steering its dealings with Pakistan. Unless this ideational friction and the Kashmir issue are not addressed, any substantial progress with regard to dialogue and the peace process will remain unproductive.

Seeing the prevalent trend of interference, distrust and hostility, leadership on both sides is required to commit to taking the path of result-oriented dialogue rather than confrontation while avoiding spoilers from both sides that have been able to disrupt the dialogue process time and again. This phenomenon will only be subdued when both sides acknowledge that some extremist miscreants on either side of the border should not be allowed to take almost two billion people hostages. Both India and Pakistan are set to benefit from peace and stability in the region rather than the perpetuation of decades-long hostility and turmoil.

Though it may seem like a cliché, the fact of the matter remains that for a sustainable peace in the South Asian region, religious extremism and polarizations needs to be abated. For India, curbing the domestic implications of Hindutva is exceptionally critical, as described throughout this analysis. Hindu nationalism has the potential to not only cause domestic fallout but also has the ability to alter India's much acclaimed international image of a tolerant and secular society.

Conclusion

Examining the evolution of the BJP's political demeanour reflects the influence of Hindu nationalists' ideology on Indian foreign and political discourse. Modi's decision to abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A, followed by the Citizenship Amendment Bill of India, evidently signifies that Modi's foreign and domestic policies are driven by the Hindu nationalist agenda. At large, Modi, with his staunch Hindutva ideology, has dented the secular identity of India. At the domestic level, the Gujarat massacre and the Indian policies towards Kashmir and Sikhs confirm how effectively Hindu nationalists and Hindu nationalism can affect public opinion, decision making and policies of the country. With the arrival of the BJP in power since 2014, Modi's ideological leaning towards Hindutva has and will continue to influence the domestic and foreign policy of contemporary India.

Given the ideological orientation of the BJP and Modi's Hindutva leaning, India's foreign policy is likely to pursue an assertive approach towards Pakistan in particular. The reelection of Modi in 2019 and the BJP's win at state-level elections reflected that the 'Hindu card' managed to influence the domestic audience at large. With the winning of elections with a heavy mandate, abrogation of Article 370 from the Indian constitution, and debatable decision on the Ayodhya case, Modi is expected to execute a more aggressive policy towards Pakistan. Seeing this pattern of exploiting ideological grounds, inciting anti-Pakistan feelings at the domestic level by fabricating a reason to win, India – Pakistan bilateral relations during the Modi era are likely to remain in perpetual fear and uncertainty without making any substantial breakthroughs.