



Rise of Hindutva

and its Impact on the Strategic Stability of South Asia

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Abstract

The rise of Hindutva has become internalized in India, making it an aggressive state, and has exacerbated South Asia's strategic instability. Religious extremism is now a significant issue of discussion in Indian political circles. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) not only represents its ideals but also promotes the Hindutva mindset. If Hindutva continues to be the guiding principle for shaping Indian decision-making processes, the Indian leadership is likely to become more inflexible in dealing with other states, more so with its neighbors – the relationship with Pakistan is a case in point. Moreover, India has been rapidly increasing its defense spending for the last decade and a half. With the additional funds available for defense, India has imported advanced and sophisticated weapon systems and made huge investments in the domestic production of defense equipment. South Asian strategic stability has been further undermined by BJP's defining credo of Hindutva which led to the enactment of the Indian Citizenship Amendment Act, the rise of fundamentalist Yogi Adityanath, and an increase in tensions with Pakistan. This paper elaborates

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on how the rise of Hindutva is inimical to strategic stability in South Asia.

Keywords: Arms Race Stability, Crisis Stability, South Asia, Hindutva, Bharatiya Janata Party

Introduction

India's animus against Pakistan dates back to the time of their independence from British colonial rule. While ending their tyrannical rule, the British scorched the political earth for Pakistan and India. Since 1947, Pakistan and India have been harvesting the crop of the seeds of rivalry sown by the British. Both have fought three major wars and faced several major crises with nuclear overtones. In May 1998, India resumed nuclear weapons tests and Pakistan was forced to end its restraint to establish overt deterrence. With no major security threat at hand, India developed nuclear weapons for prestige and to revise the global order in its favor. The nuclear dimension complicated South Asian stability and created a security dilemma for Pakistan, forcing it to acquire nuclear weapons to establish strategic stability in the region.² Strategic stability is contingent on the absence of a major territorial or economic dispute, symmetry in military capabilities, the existence of extensive confidence building measures (CBMs), and an active role of great powers in conflict prevention.³ These factors are missing in South Asia.

Inter alia, Kashmir remains the unresolved agenda post-independence and the key source of crises and conflicts between India and Pakistan. India has a conventional and nuclear military advantage over Pakistan. Although there are four CBMs in place between the two – such as the Agreement on Pre-notification of

2. Iqbal, Daniyal J. "The Pakistan-India security dilemma." The News. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/154747-The-Pakistan-India-security-dilemma>.

3. Cheema, Pervaiz Iqbal. "Strategic Stability in South Asia: The Role of USA." Journal of Contemporary Studies. <https://jcs.ndu.edu.pk/site/citationstylelanguage/get/chicago-author-date?submissionId=121&publicationId=121>.

of the BJP, which professes Hindutva ideology in India, on strategic stability in South Asia. The central research question this paper attempts to address is why the Hindu supremacist government is a threat to strategic stability between India and Pakistan. The research methodology used is the qualitative analysis of data from secondary sources.

The study is divided into three parts. The first part theorizes strategic stability in the contemporary South Asian context, the second explains the coming to power of the Hindutva-inspired BJP regime, and the last part describes the impact of BJP policies on strategic stability in South Asia.

Strategic Stability in South Asia

The idea of strategic stability dates back to the time of the Cold War. The foremost concern of strategic stability theorists then was to ward off chances of a surprise attack by the adversary.⁷ Addressing this problem, Elbridge Colby posited, “a situation would be stable when both parties would see that massively launching first would be either unnecessary or foolish.”⁸ According to Stephen Cimbala, “the concept of stability in nuclear deterrence divides itself into three aspects: first-strike stability, crisis stability, and arms race stability.”⁹ These three elements are closely interlinked and do not operate in isolation.

First-strike stability is described as a situation in which both adversaries believe that there is no great difference in the cost of striking first and likely cost of a first strike if one withholds

7. Trenin, Dmitri. “Strategic Stability in the Changing World.” Carnegie Moscow Center, March 2019. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/3-15_Trenin_StrategicStability.pdf.

8. Colby, Elbridge A. Gerson, Michael S. “Strategic Stability: Contending Interpretations.” February 2013. https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2013/ssi_colby-gerson.html.

9. Cimbala, Stephen J. “Parity in Peril? The Continuing Vitality of Russian-US Strategic Nuclear Deterrence.” *Contemporary Security Policy*, February 14, 2007, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13523260601060347?journalCode=fcsp20>.

Ballistic Missiles Tests – there is ostensibly space for reducing nuclear risk and building strategic stability. India’s interest to become the regional hegemon and its foundational strategic agreements like nuclear deal with the US have increased Pakistan’s security dilemma and undermined the regional security calculus. Although the Indo-US nuclear deal fell victim to Indian prohibitive nuclear accident liability laws, it paved the way for more than a dozen similar deals. These deals have unencumbered India’s domestic uranium reserves to be used for making more nuclear weapons rather than fueling nuclear power plants.⁴

The coming to power of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – a Hindutva-inspired political party – is having a consequential impact on regional stability. The ideology of Hindutva believes in the supremacy of the Hindu religion and seeks to transform India from a so-called secular state into an ethno-religious one, known as “Hindu Rashtra.”⁵ Also, the believers of Hindutva ideology propagate the idea of “Akhand Bharat.” According to Savarkar, “Akhand Bharat” or “united” or “indivisible” India extended from “Kashmir to Rameswaram, from Sindh (in present-day Pakistan) to Assam.”⁶ Proponents of Hindutva believe that even violence can be employed to achieve their objectives. Before coming to power, actions like the destruction of Babri mosque in India by BJP activists are illustrative of their belief in the use of violence to achieve their goals. In addition, BJP’s power has resulted in the polarization of Indian society, which shows no signs of abating.

This paper attempts to assess the impact of the coming to power

4. Jaspal, Zafar Nawaz. “Indo-US Nuclear Deal: Altering Global Nuclear Order.” *Journal of Strategic Studies*. <https://issi.org.pk/indo-us-nuclear-deal-altering-global-nuclear-order/> and Kazmi, Zahir. “Normalizing the Non-proliferation Regime.” *The Survival*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2015.1008302>.

5. “What is Hindutva.” *Hindutva Harassment Field Manual*. <https://www.hindutvaharassmentfieldmanual.org/defininghindutva>.

6. Das, Madhuparna. “What RSS Chief Bhagwat Really Meant When He Said ‘Akhand Bharat’ Could be Reality in 10-15 Years.” *The Print*, May 23, 2022. <https://theprint.in/india/what-rss-chief-bhagwat-really-meant-when-he-said-akhand-bharat-could-be-reality-in-10-15-yrs/963004/>.

the attack.¹⁰ In short, if the situation between two states satisfies the concept of Mutually Assured Deterrence (MAD), then first-strike stability is achieved. Crisis stability can be defined as the structural features of a conflict, implying that even after a conflict has escalated to crisis proportions, it still permits decision-makers to prevent the crisis from escalating. Crisis stability is a broader concept related to military strategy and doctrine, which provides a holistic approach to nuclear deterrence and decision-making processes in case the crisis escalates. According to Brams and Kilgour, “nuclear parity and first strike stability reasoning do not necessarily prevent a crisis from happening. Moreover, higher instability crisis and unpredictability lead to more strategic stability.”¹¹

The third element of strategic stability is arms race stability. Arms race stability is generally described as the absence of incentives to build a nuclear force. Arms race stability has a meaningful role in connecting political (diplomatic), defense (defense planning), and military (military deployments, training, and modernization) elements. Furthermore, arms control can lead to effective crisis management. Primarily, the strategy was connoted to specific military and political circumstances but, by the end of the Cold War, strategic stability came on par with the strategic balance used in the field of nuclear strategy.

During the 1990s, strategic stability was predominantly designed to reduce strategic offensive weapons. It is important to note that the US and erstwhile USSR had negotiated to maintain strategic stability by revisiting their respective strategic armaments. For instance, Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) was signed

10. Kent, Glenn A. Thaler, David E. “First-Strike Stability: A Methodology for Evaluating Strategic Forces.” RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1400/RR1408/RAND_RR1408.pdf.

11. Kilgour, Marc. “Escalation in Negotiation: Analysis of Some Simple Game Models.” Cambridge University Press, October 10, 2009. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/escalation-and-negotiation-in-international-conflicts/escalation-in-negotiation-analysis-of-some-simple-game-models/1AF2A47B9BEFD39857919155E5FD5A62>.

between the US and Russia on 31 July 1991, and Russia had to alter the structure of its nuclear forces to maintain strategic stability.¹² South Asian strategic stability can be understood by delving into Indian and Pakistani perspectives on strategic stability.

In the case of Pakistan, strategic stability is intertwined with maintaining its security and balancing its nuclear forces vis-à-vis India. Pakistan faces an existential threat from India as it is the only South Asian state resisting Indian regional hegemonic aspiration. Also, to bolster its credentials as a hegemon, India has to work for a solution to the Kashmir dispute in its favor. Pakistan aims to achieve strategic parity with India to maintain its national security and therefore balances Indian conventional military superiority through its nuclear weapons. Pakistan has developed Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) strategy to credibly deter India at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.

India claims that it faces a two-front threat from China and Pakistan, which is a justification for its vertical nuclear proliferation and huge military spending. Indian designs to build status and address its perceived security concerns against this so-called calculus create a security dilemma for Pakistan. The consequent deterrence and arms race instability fuels strategic instability. China and Pakistan are the icebergs in Indian aspirations.¹³ That is why India and its axis partners use the term Southern Asia, instead of South Asia, to drag China into the South Asian equation. Indian Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) of 2004 was a strategy for a short-scale war with Pakistan without crossing the nuclear

12. "Russia's View on Nuclear Arms Control: An Interview With Ambassador Anatoly Antonov." Arms Control Association. <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-04/interviews/russias-view-nuclear-arms-control-interview-ambassador-anatoly-antonov>.

13. Hilali, A. Z. "India's Strategic Thinking and its National Security Policy." University of California Press, 2001. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2001.41.5.737>.

threshold.¹⁴ Indian nuclear doctrine gives a conditional and ambiguous no-first use (NFU) policy. It has several times signaled even the conditional NFU pledge. Indian conventional forces are being modernized and regrouped to fight a short-scale pre-emptive conventional war with limited objectives.

Pakistan's FSD strategy has checked the Indian ambition to fight a limited conventional war against the former using nuclear blackmail. Indian contemplation of a counterforce nuclear strategy will only increase the possibility of a wider conflict. The BJP-led regime's goal of Akhand Bharat can only be achieved if India destabilizes the three pillars of strategic stability in its favor. To achieve its purpose, India is swiftly modernizing its military forces and has changed its military doctrine. Moreover, internal polarization in India is bringing the region to nuclear brinkmanship. Indian air strikes inside the Pakistani mainland, conducted to satisfy domestic audience after the Pulwama incident, is a case in point.

Impact of Hindutva

Hindutva is a political ideology that defines India as a Hindu state and views Indian culture through the prism of Hindu cultural and religious beliefs. According to Vinayak Savarkar, Hindus are the only true Indians as their *pitrbhu* (fatherland) and *punyabhū* (holy land) are located in India. Muslims and Christians cannot be considered Indians as their holy lands are not in India but in far-off lands of Arabia or Palestine.¹⁵ Savarkar's ideological successor, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, one of the founders of the RSS, said that the foreign races, i.e. Muslims and Christians in India, must either adopt Hindu culture and language, learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, lose their distinct

14. Dalton, Toby. Perkovich, George. "India's Nuclear Options and Escalation Dominance." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 19, 2016. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/05/19/india-s-nuclear-options-and-escalation-dominance-pub-63609>.

15. Sarvarkar, Veer. "Ideologue of Hindutva." UCLA Social Sciences MANAS. <https://southasia.ucla.edu/history-politics/hindu-rashtra/veer-savarkar-ideologue-hindutva/>.

identities to merge in the Hindu race or stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, and far less any preferential treatment, not even citizens' rights. Hindutva is a violent ideology. Being based on Hindu supremacy, it is deeply exclusionist and discriminatory.

Hindutva organizations, after largely remaining on the periphery of Indian politics for several decades, gathered momentum with the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement in the 1980s, when they began moving to the center of the Indian political stage. The movement vowed to liberate a site in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh (India), which it argued was where the Hindu deity Ram was born. According to them, the Mughal emperor Babar desecrated a temple that once existed on that site in 1528 AD and built Babri Masjid. The movement set off an aggressive campaign to mobilize mass support for rebuilding the Ram temple at the site. In December 1992, Sangh Parivar took a major step to demolish the Babri Masjid,¹⁶ which sparked communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. From winning only two seats in the general election of 1984, the BJP formed coalition governments in the center in 1998, 1999, and 2014. In 2019, it gained an absolute majority in Lok Sabha, the lower house of the parliament.

With the rise of the BJP, the Hindutva ideology spread widely. Its state-backed rhetoric caused trouble for Muslims in India. Since 2019, the BJP has become more aggressive in pursuing the agenda of Hindutva. With the BJP in power, the Parivar constituents have shown less inhibition in unleashing violence on Muslims and other minorities. Cow vigilantism and violent acts targeting Muslims have increased manifold, in several of which there have been allegations that the politicians, police, and the courts colluded to let the perpetrators off the hook.¹⁷

16. Vanaik, Achin. "India's Supreme Court Ruling is Another Victory for Hindu Nationalism." *Jacobin*, 2019. <https://jacobin.com/2019/11/india-supreme-court-ruling-babri-mosque-hindu-nationalism>.

17. Ramachandran, Sudha. "Hindutva Violence in India: Trends and Implications." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, June 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26918077>.

This is the case too concerning major terror attacks carried out by Hindutva organizations. Not a single Hindutva extremist outfit – including the Abhinav Bharat, which was involved in the attacks on Mecca Masjid and Samjhauta Express in 2007 and the 2008 Malegaon blasts – figures in India’s list of proscribed organizations. Those involved in the planning and execution of violent attacks on Muslims have been rewarded by the Indian government – Pragya Thakur for instance, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon blasts case. Despite facing charges under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), she was given a ticket by BJP and was appointed to the parliamentary defense panel after winning the elections. Her rise accentuates the support Hindutva extremism enjoys at the highest levels of the Indian government.¹⁸

Although Hindutva organizations have polarized society with their anti-Muslim hate campaigns and violence, progress in enacting laws that undermine Muslim identity is apace. For instance, on 30 July 2019, the Indian parliament passed a bill criminalizing triple *talaq*, a Muslim practice of instant divorce.¹⁹ The new law could pave the way for the BJP government to push through a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). It is not implausible to think that under the BJP, the UCC will reflect majoritarian Hindu ideals. Despite several references in ancient Hindu mythology of their gods eating meat, BJP Hindutva proponents bar Muslims from observing normal practices, such as eating meat. In 2021, BJP-ruled states of Uttar Pradesh, Gujrat, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh tightened anti-cow slaughter laws.²⁰

In August 2019, the BJP government revoked Article 370 of the constitution, which provided Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu

18. Ramachandran, “Hindutva Violence in India.”

19. Soman, Zakia. “Triple talaq law is a step towards parity.” New Indian Express, July 2019. <https://www.bing.com/search?q=zakia+soman&cvid=eb38ae96671142bdb672b513885ccb93&aqs=edge.0.0i2.2795j0j9&FORM=ANAB01&PC=HCTS>.

20. Bhattacharya, Ananya. “Beef, pork, and nationalism: What’s the recipe for a true Hindu or Muslim in India?” Quartz, July 2, 2021. <https://qz.com/india/2028084/pew-survey-finds-what-indian-hindus-and-muslims-care-most-about>.

and Kashmir (IIOJ&K) with some autonomy, and Article 35A, which served to preserve the demographic composition of the state.²¹ Revocation of the two articles integrates the Muslim majority state of Jammu and Kashmir into the Indian union and has altered its Muslim identity. This step would pave the way for demographic change in IIOJ&K. Likewise, the BJP government has handed over the site of Babri Mosque to Hindus for the construction of a Hindu temple. This decision legitimized the unlawful desecration of the Babri Mosque and lent support to the Hindutva cause.²²

Moreover, the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in 2019 has caused insecurity among Indian Muslims. This act envisages a fast-tracked Indian citizenship process for Parsis, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Hindus from neighboring countries but denies this right to Muslims. CAA blatantly violates the so-called secular principles of the Indian Constitution. Many Muslims fear that, in combination with government plans for maintaining a National Register of Citizens, the CAA will have catastrophic consequences for Indian Muslims. It could strip millions of Muslims of their citizenship.

Another serious development is the ongoing change in school curricula to propagate the Hindutva creed. Since the time BJP came to power in 1988, sympathizers of Hindutva ideology were placed on the National Council for Education and Research Training (NCERT), the school curriculum development and review body at the national level. Over the next several years, NCERT introduced changes to the school curricula per Hindutva principles.²³ The BJP-led states of Uttar Pradesh, Gujrat, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh have implemented these changes.

21. "Article 370: What happened with Kashmir and why it matters." BBC News, August 6, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49234708>.

22. Vanaik. "India's Supreme Court Ruling."

23. Visweswaran. Kamala. Witzel, Manjrenkar. Bhog. Uma Chakravarti. "The Hindutva view of history: rewriting textbooks in India and the United States." 2009, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs. <https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/9887609/GJIA%20--%20Visweswaran%20--%20PDF%20copy.pdf?sequence>.

Due to the powerful combination of Hindutva rhetoric, state power, and a receptive population, Indian society is transforming on an unprecedented scale. The BJP, VHP, RSS, and Shive Sen have made the Indian Hindu population believe their version of Hindu ideology is the true understanding of this religion. Indian society is adopting inimical traits of Hindu religious myths and imagery, while completely ignoring the Lokayata Hindu philosophy, according to which Hinduism has never launched an apocalyptic religious war or tried to impose one answer as the only truth to questions that a man faces in life.²⁴ Certain concepts like Rama, Hanuman, and Mathura, which do not stand the test of rational analysis, are being translated into a coherent set of metaphors, idioms, and emotional expressions to foment unity among the Hindu community. Resultantly, Indian society is losing its secularism and adopting a far-right ideology. For instance, in January 2021, fifty-three people, mostly Muslims, lost their lives while protesting the controversial citizenship bill.²⁵ The impact of the incessant promotion of Hindu ideals is becoming visible in Indian society. A PEW survey shows that 64 percent of Hindus believe that it is very important to be a Hindu to be a true Indian.²⁶

The Future of South Asian Strategic Stability

This section explains how the Indian societal transformation, engineered by Hindutva ideology, influences the three components of strategic stability, namely first-strike stability, crisis stability, and arms race stability. The polarization of India is likely to have an adverse impact on the strategic stability of South Asia. The “saffronization” of India under the BJP is also leading to

24. Banerjee, Sumanta. “Hindutva: Ideology and Social Psychology.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 19, 1991. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4397215>.

25. “Most Indians Believe Only a Hindu can be an Indian.” *TRT World*, June 30, 2021. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/most-indians-believe-only-a-hindu-can-be-an-indian-47967>.

26. Biswas, Soutik. “Pew survey: India is Neither a Melting Pot nor a Salad Bowl.” July 8, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-57723926.amp#amp_tf=From%20%251%24s&aoh=16650674857893&referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com.

aggressive policies, evident in its recent so-called surgical strike against Pakistan. The “diversionary war theory” explains another outcome of domestic polarization. The theory proposes that the leaders who are dealing with domestic issues may be motivated to wage war against an outside foe to divert domestic attention. Under Narendra Modi, India has been portraying Pakistan as a nemesis to garnish domestic political support. For instance, religious restrictions on claims to Indian citizenship and identity have aggravated anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan rhetoric within the Indian public sphere.²⁷ Similarly, Modi is radicalizing the populace through Hindutva ideology. For instance, in the election campaign of 2019, Modi vehemently articulated “Pakistan is still counting the bodies of terrorists killed in Balakot airstrikes. Do you want a strong state?” The crowd chanted “yes.”²⁸ The reverberations were also felt inside Pakistan. The then Prime Minister Imran Khan warned that the Indian government’s agenda was a threat to Pakistan. He also promised a befitting response if Indian domestic chaos and Modi’s fascist leadership did not settle peacefully.²⁹

The path of nuclear brinkmanship adopted by India further explains how an expansionist ideology can disturb strategic stability in South Asia.³⁰ For instance, India had 30-40 nuclear warheads in 2003, which increased to 130-140 by 2018. The estimates about warheads count are politically motivated and

27. “Citizenship Amendment Bill: India’s New ‘Anti-Muslim’ Law Explained.” December 1, 2019, BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-50670393>.

28. “Modi Slams Opposition for Seeking Proof on Terror Strike.” The Quint World, March 29, 2019. <https://www.thequint.com/news/hot-news/modi-slams-opposition-for-seeking-proof-on-terror-strike>.

29. “Imran Khan: Pakistan PM Vows ‘befitting’ Response if India Attacks Pakistan-administered Kashmir.” Sky News, August 30, 2019. <https://news.sky.com/story/imran-khan-pakistan-pm-vows-befitting-response-if-india-attacks-pakistan-administered-kashmir-11797803>.

30. Mir, Moneeb Jaffar. “Rise of Hindutva is Threat to Strategic Stability.” Pakistan Observer, July 4, 2022. <https://pakobserver.net/rise-of-hindutva-is-threat-to-strategic-stability-by-moneeb-jaffar-mir/>.

underplay Indian capabilities. Interestingly, India has an older and larger nuclear weapons program which ranks third after the US and Russia but is underplayed even in comparison to Pakistan. Realistic assessments about Indian fissile material stocks and warhead count hold that it has 490 plus or around 2600 nuclear warheads worth of fissile material stockpiles.³¹

Moreover, statements of Indian officials highlight the provocative nature of Indian doctrine. According to Lieutenant General Balraj Nagal, “India’s nuclear doctrine ought to permit nuclear first use, especially to preempt an imminent Pakistani strike.” Manohar Parrikar, a BJP politician, said, “India should direct its no first use policy only to the non-nuclear weapon states.”³² The statements represent Indian thinking of transforming its nuclear doctrine. In addition, the Pulwama crisis of 2019 and the Ladakh crisis of 2020 are symptomatic of aggressive Indian behavior.

Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh stated after Pakistan-Indian tensions in 2020, “Our first use policy is concerned with the prospect of a state attack. But if we are dealing with a renegade element of some sort, we cannot apply the same rules. I would suggest to PM that we rethink the NFU policy and launch a preemptive strike.”³³ The Indian military also signaled its intentions by deploying a nuclear-armed submarine during a confrontation with China and made threats of missile strike during a crisis with Pakistan – further proof of nuclear weapons use becoming a sig-

31. Hussain Shah, Syed Saddam. Khurshid, Syed Javaid. “Estimating India’s nuclear weapons-producing capacity.” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November 2, 2018; “Indian Unsafeguarded Nuclear Program: An Assessment.” Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, October 24, 2016; Ahmed, Mansoor. “India’s Nuclear Exceptionalism.” Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, May 2017.

32. Clary, Christopher. Narang, Vipin. “India’s Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrine, and Capabilities.” *International Security*, 2019. <https://direct.mit.edu/isec/article/43/3/7/12216/India-s-Counterforce-Temptations-Strategic>.

33. Kornish, Paul. Donaldson, Kingsley. “2020: World of War.” Hodder & Stoughton Limited, 2017. https://books.google.com.pk/books/about/2020.html?id=YriDvgAACAA-J&redir_esc=y.

nificant component of Indian defense strategy.³⁴ There is a growing consensus even among some India-leaning Western experts that, practically, India has already dropped the NFU policy and, in the case of war, India would prepare its nuclear force for preemptive strikes.³⁵

Pakistan does not have a nuclear submarine based assured second-strike capability. Comparatively, India has achieved credible second-strike capability with Russia's help and the US may also be interested in offering its nuclear submarines propulsion technologies.³⁶ India has developed a nuclear triad, INS Arihant, comprising a nuclear-powered submarine fleet armed with a range of nuclear-tipped missiles.³⁷ However, India also lacks credibility since one submarine does not assure credibility. As the second-strike capability of both India and Pakistan is not credible, Indian aggression and societal transformation are destabilizing first-strike stability in the region.

Similarly, crisis stability was less certain in 2022, especially after Pulwama and Balakot incidents. The current situation is of “no war, no peace.” Despite dangers and a greater proclivity for the use of military force, this paradigm is likely to continue in the future, destabilizing crisis stability.³⁸ The growing Indian spending

34. Akhtar, Rabia. “A Greater Role of Nuclear Weapons in India’s General Defence?” CSCR, May 27, 2021. <https://cscr.pk/events/a-greater-role-of-nuclear-weapons-in-indias-general-defence/>.

35. Pant, Harsh V. “Is India Overturning Decades of Nuclear Doctrine?” *Foreign Policy*, October 23, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/10/23/india-nuclear-no-first-use-strike-china-pakistan/>.

36. Wagner, Alex. “Russia, India Sign Secret Nuclear Energy Accord.” *Arms Control Association*, November 2000; Tellis J. Ashley. “Will U.S. Endorse, Midwife INFRUS—India, France Nuclear Compact—in Common Cause to Constrain China?” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 12, 2022; Page, Mercedes. “Is now the time for JAUkus?” *The Strategist*, May 20, 2022.

37. Jalil, Ghazala Yasmin. “India’s Development of Sea-based Nuclear Capabilities: Implications for Pakistan.” *ISSI*, April 27, 2018. <https://issi.org.pk/indias-development-of-sea-based-nuclear-capabilities-implications-for-pakistan/>.

38. Hooda, Deependra Singh. “Three Years After Balakot: Reckoning with Two Claims of Victory.” *Stimson Center*, February 28, 2022. <https://www.stimson.org/2022/three-years-af->

on large conventional military forces modernization makes a future crisis likely to escalate.³⁹ So far, Pakistan's FSD doctrine has applied brakes on growing Indian adventurism.⁴⁰ Interestingly, India has a Full Spectrum Strategy, but it is expansive in its scope.⁴¹

Although optimists believe that the presence of nuclear weapons in South Asia will reduce the threats of conventional conflict and major war, the Indian political and military mindset represents contradictory perspectives. For instance, during the Pulwama crisis, the Indian Air Force carried out air strikes in Pakistan. New Delhi described this as not a defensive, but a preemptive operation, showing Indian willingness to use force in the future, thus endangering crisis stability.⁴² Indian army, intelligence agencies, and the right-wing media have created a *casus belli* by orchestrating the Pulwama incident to attack Pakistan.⁴³ Some experts point out that challenges to stability are derived from the threats of conventional war.⁴⁴ After the Pulwama incident, India conducted air strikes in Pakistan and claimed to have slayed terrorists.

ter-balakot-reckoning-with-two-claims-of-victory/.

39. Malhotra, Aditi. "Pakistan's Flirtation with Tactical Nuclear Weapons." *Scholar Warrior*, 2012.

40. "Two Days International Conference: Nuclear Deterrence and Strategic Stability in South Asia on 6th-7th November 2018" Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad, November 7, 2018. <https://thesvi.org/svi-two-day-international-conference-report-november-6-7-2018-nuclear-deterrence-and-strategic-stability-in-south-asia/>.

41. <https://ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Article-2-IPRI-Journal-XIX-2-Ind-Nuc-Min-ED-SSA.pdf>.

42. Kugelman, Michael. "India Pakistan and the Remote but a Real Threat of Nuclear War." *DW*, 2019. <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-india-pakistan-and-the-remote-but-real-threat-of-nuclear-war/a-47721752>.

43. Akram, Waseem. "False Flag Operation at Pulwama and Ideology of Hindutva into Play." *Hilal Magazine*, October 8, 2022. <https://www.hilal.gov.pk/eng-article/detail/ND-kzMQ.html>.

44. Tellis, Ashley J. "Striking Asymmetries: Nuclear Transitions and Strategic Stability in Southern Asia." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 18, 2022. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/07/18/nuclear-transitions-and-strategic-stability-in-southern-asia-pub-87399>.

However, Pakistan repudiated those claims and provided proof that Indian aircraft dropped a bomb on the vast swathes of trees. While addressing a rally in Rajasthan on 21 April 2019, PM Modi quoted a senior US official who, on the second day of the strike, said that “Modi had kept ready twelve [nuclear capable] missiles and might attack and the situation will deteriorate.” PM Modi also said that “Pakistan announced they would return the pilot on the second day, else it was going to be a ‘*qatal ki raat*’ (night of slaughter).”⁴⁵ Such threatening tactics, volatile political mindset, and the transforming Indian strategic culture from strategic restraint to tactical retaliation are casting clouds over the future of crisis stability in South Asia.

Likewise, the rapid development of nuclear arsenal by India has led to experts warning that strategic instability will increase. While Pakistan has been making efforts to maintain balance and restore stability, Indian pursuits are fueling the nuclear arms race in the region.⁴⁶ For instance, India tested the Agni Prime missile in 2022 which is a new generation advanced variant of Agni class, having a 1000 to 2000 kilometers range. It can easily cover the entire territory of Pakistan. According to the Indian Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO), it is one of India’s most technologically advanced nuclear-capable missiles.⁴⁷

The development of modern arms can instigate an arms race, undermining arms race stability. Similarly, France delivered thirty-six Rafale Fighter Jets to India,⁴⁸ which are nuclear capable

45. Hussain, Yasir. Zahid, Ahsan Ali. “Modi’s ‘Qatal Ki Raat’ (The Night of Massacre).” *Strafasia*, May 2, 2019. <https://strafasia.com/modis-qatal-ki-raat-the-night-of-massacre/>.

46. Weitz, Richard. “South Asia’s Nuclear Arms Racing.” *The Diplomat*, October 1, 2011. <https://thediplomat.com/2011/10/south-asias-nuclear-arms-racing/>.

47. Shukla, Ajai. “Pakistan-aimed Agni-P Ballistic Missile Flight-tested Successfully.” *Business Standard*, June 28, 2021. https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/pakistan-aimed-agni-p-ballistic-missile-flight-tested-successfully-121062801469_1.html.

48. Peri, Dinaker. “France has delivered all 36 Rafale jets to India: French envoy.” *The Hindu*, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/france-has-delivered-all-36-rafale-jets-to-india-french-envoy/article65643887.ece>.

and can undertake air-to-ground and air-to-air combat missions.⁴⁹ Also, India purchased S-400 missiles from Russia. An important feature of the S-400 is its potential offensive that would restrict an adversary's use of its airspace. This weapon system would cover most of Pakistan's territory due to the long frontier it shares with India and will be destabilizing for South Asian stability.⁵⁰ The former Indian Chief of Air Staff BS Dhanoa clearly said, "The purpose of the S-400 and Rafale is to hit Pakistani aircraft inside Pakistani air space."⁵¹ Pakistan is sensitive and responsive to evolving threats.⁵² As a balanced and minimal response, Pakistan is restoring strategic stability through FSD. Former Director General of Strategic Plans Division (SPD), Lieutenant General Khalid Kidwai explained that Pakistan endeavors to close the space for even a limited conventional war by placing delivery capabilities at tactical, operational, and strategic levels of operations.⁵³

On 2 September 2022, the Indian Navy included an aircraft carrier that will give it extraordinary reach at a significant distance from its coastline.⁵⁴ After the Pulwama and Uri strike, the Indian tactical retaliation strategy escalated the conflict. For long-term planning, the Indian defense ministry approved the grant to the armed forces for emergency procurement of indigenous weapon systems and ammunition. Similarly, India is heavily investing in

49. Arif, Shaza. "India's Acquisition of Rafale Fighter Jets: Does Pakistan Need to Panic?" *Strafasia*, September 20, 2022. <https://strafasia.com/indias-acquisition-of-rafale-fighter-jets-does-pakistan-need-to-panic/>.

50. Shaza. "India's Acquisition of Rafale."

51. Bhuyan, Manash Pratim. "Rafales will provide India major advantage." *Rediff*, August 3, 2020. <https://www.rediff.com/news/report/rafales-will-provide-india-major-advantage-in-tibet/20200803.htm>.

52. Dalton, Toby. Tandler, Jaclyn. "Understanding the Arms Race in South Asia." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 13, 2012. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/09/13/understanding-arms-race-in-south-asia-pub-49361>.

53. IISS, Lt General (Retd) Khalid Kidwai: Deterrence, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control – Keynote Address <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bInVdvk39e0>.

54. Pant, Harsh V. "Why India Needs More Aircraft Carriers." *Foreign Policy*, September 21, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/09/21/india-aircraft-carrier-vikrant-navy-china/>.

building and procuring unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from other states, including the US, Israel, etc. The Indian Air Force has UAVs, Searcher Mark 1, searcher Mark 2, and the Heron UAV in its military drone arsenal. Besides that, Indian armed forces plan to induct 5000 UAVs in the next 10 years. These UAVs have been transformed from being a surveillance and reconnaissance asset to hunter-killer roles.⁵⁵ These developments show Indian eagerness and pursuit for modernizing its military, notwithstanding their negative impact on the strategic stability of South Asia.

Conclusion

Contemporary Indian society faces numerous challenges emanating from the state-sponsored extremist Hindutva ideology of Akhand Bharat. The gradual transformation of Indian society towards radicalization and extremism reflects that the common Indian man is being lured into the trap of supporting arms build-up, be it the tenure of any party – BJP or Congress – in the government. One of the world's most populous countries is turning into an “only for Hindus” state and is afflicted by unprecedented challenges, including religious discrimination and ethnic divide. The state is a growing threat, not only to the region, but to its populace. The Indian irresponsible behavior, pre-emptive military postures, arms acquisition, changing contours of strategic culture from strategic restraint to tactical retaliation, and conventional and nuclear forces controlled by Hindutva ideologues have increased the risk of war, undermining strategic stability in South Asia.

55. Mihir, Paul. “National Security.” Security Magazine, 2020. <https://www.securitymagazine.com/keywords/national%20security>.