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How Indian Domestic Politics Impacts Regional Arms Controls

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ABSTRACT

The interaction between domestic politics and arms control policy is a critical yet often underexplored dimension of strategic stability in South Asia. This paper examines how internal political dynamics in India influence its approach to arms control, disarmament, and strategic restraint. Traditionally viewed through the lens of regional security competition particularly with Pakistan and China, India's arms control posture is also entrenched in domestic factors such as political ideology, bureaucratic interests, civil-military relations, electoral compulsions, and the influence of strategic elites. Using a qualitative methodology and process-tracing approach, this study analyzes key policy decisions from successive Indian governments especially under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and investigates how nationalist rhetoric, public opinion, and the political utility of strategic technologies (e.g., missile tests, nuclear modernization, and space militarization) have shaped India's arms control behavior. The paper argues that India's reluctance to embrace formal arms control mechanisms is not solely a response to external threats, but also a reflection of internal political incentives to project strength, technological autonomy, and strategic assertiveness. By contextualizing India's withdrawal from multilateral arms control forums, its strategic ambiguity regarding the No First Use (NFU) policy, and its modernization of conventional and nuclear forces, the paper highlights the challenges such domestic-political linkages pose to regional arms control dialogues. The study contributes to the broader discourse on how democracies particularly rising powers steer the tension between strategic responsibility and domestic political gain. It also accentuates the necessity for regional and global arms control frameworks to account for internal political pressures when engaging states like India. Ultimately, this research seeks to enhance understanding of the domestic drivers of arms control policy in India and their implications for regional security, crisis stability, and the future of arms control in South Asia.

Keywords: Arms Control, No First Use, Regional Security, Political Ideology, India.

Introduction

South Asia remains arguably the globe's most perilous nuclear neighborhood, shaped by historical enmities, lingering territorial disputes, and a continuous competitive buildup among major regional powers. Though international mechanisms directed at arms control and non-proliferation exist, the subcontinent has struggled to institutionalize lasting norms of restraint or sustained dialogue. Central to the deficiency of regional arms control is the evolution of India's domestic political landscape, which has come increasingly to embody a fusion of nationalist populism, militarized nationalism, and a strain of strategic exceptionalism. Political leaders, responding to electoral imperatives, the ambition of attaining great-power stature, and the frequent politicization of security policy, have resisted reciprocal commitments to bilateral or multilateral arms restraints (Stewart-Ingersoll & Frazier, 2010).

The development of India's arms control posture is inseparable from the trajectory of its domestic political dynamics. Beginning in the early 2000s, and more decisively during the tenure of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the country's strategic culture has shifted to elevate nationalism, the modernization of defense capabilities, and strategic autonomy, relegating multilateral disarmament obligations to the periphery. The prevailing political discourse frames arms-control initiatives as self-imposed hindrances rather than as mechanisms of mutual security, while overtures to Pakistan and China are regularly depicted, through dominant media and state rhetoric, as indications of political frailty. Consequently, initiatives capable of reinforcing regional equanimity such as strict adherence to the No First Use (NFU) doctrine, engagement with the proposed Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), or the launch of South Asian arms dilution dialogues are either attenuated in official discourse or overtly dismissed (Bukhari & Gaho, 2025). The exploitation of security narratives for electoral advantage, the ascendance of militant Hindu nationalism, and the systematic sidelining of the strategic community from defense deliberation have together solidified a domestic climate resistant to arms-control discourse, with grave ramifications for enduring peace and regional stability in South Asia.

India's quest for recognition as a preeminent global actor remains a decisive factor in its reluctance to engage substantively with arms control proposals. Successive administrations have consistently framed the expansion of military capabilities, including the nuclear enterprise, as integral to national dignity and the assertion of regional primacy. This conviction, which has become a fixture in political rhetoric, legitimizes sustained augmentation of warhead stocks, delivery systems, and supporting infrastructures, thereby embedding arms acquisition within a narrative of unavoidable sovereign assertion (Ganguly & Kapur, 2010). At the same time, any proposal for regional arms control is interpreted through a lens of suspicion; such frameworks are often read as instruments engineered to circumscribe India's ascent or to draw an equivalence between its nuclear posture and that of Pakistan, a conceptual equivalence Indian planners energetically

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contest. The resultant domestic narrative valorizes deterrent depth and strategic autonomy to such an extent that the deterrent its proponents recognize the analytical merit of stability-enhancing measures, the prioritization of autonomy and prestige, and the perceived zero-sum character of security guarantees have, to date, inoculated the Indian state against measures that might attenuate the risk of deliberate or inadvertent escalation across the subcontinent.

India's internal politics now obstruct collective arms control in South Asia, primarily because of fraught relations with Pakistan and escalating competition with China. India's governing elites, spurred by Hindutva rhetoric, the instrumentalization of the armed forces, and the defense-industrial lobby, perceive any moves toward disarmament or transparency as politically damaging. A close examination of institutional behavior, revised military doctrines, and public discourse reveals that such domestic imperatives sustain the region's strategic turbulence and render cooperative security frameworks increasingly unviable (Spencer-Churchill & Mehmood, 2025).

The domestic political landscape deeply permeates India's stance on regional arms control and reveals a multi-layered calculus. Legislative cycles, factional polarization, and the competing logics of military and civilian rule interact such that statesmen consistently prize domestic stability or the appearance of it over multilateral security incentives (Carranza, 2003).

Domestic Political Factors Influencing Arms Control Electoral Politics and Party Polarization

Domestic electoral calculations and heightened party polarization exert notable pressure on arms control initiatives (Carranza, 2003). Strategies designed to retain core voter blocs or to preserve intra-party cohesion often eclipse the long-term strategic gains promised by control regimes. Fragmentation across intra-party factions, combined with delegation of security narratives to charismatic leaders, produces volatile and frequently contradictory policy trajectories (Pavlov & Kamyssov, 2021).

India's arms control diplomacy has, over recent years, come to reflect the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) domestic political exigencies, above all, its right-wing nationalist agenda. As Iqbal Kazi argues, New Delhi has progressively moderated its earlier rhetorical embrace of disarmament in favor of a decisively assertive, realist orientation grounded in strategic computation. This recalibration is propelled by the imperative to cultivate and project a muscular nationalist identity, obliging leaders to equate military capability with national honour. As a consequence, official circumspection toward arms control accords, especially in the subcontinent, has hardened: Islamabad is consistently portrayed in domestic discourse as an enduring menace, discouraging Indian diplomats from entering the sustained and reciprocal confidence-building measures that could render regional stability feasible.

As India's arms control and disarmament shows an ambition for its recognition as a major global power, this notion appears to be strongly resonating within the domestic political discourse. This search for such a stature creates an urge for large-scale funding of military upgrades, including sophisticated innovations with regards to upgradation of its nuclear arsenal, such as multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) and an evolving and augmenting ballistic missile defence capability. In this manner, deployments have the effect of upsetting the strategic equilibrium within South Asia and complicate the prospects for workable bilateral or regional arms control measures. Indian Politicians, mindful of domestic expectations, decline to accede to instruments such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty or the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. They cite perceived inequities within those instruments, yet the decisive motivation resides in a political narrative that exalts strategic autonomy and insists upon military self-reliance.

India's interaction with the international nonproliferation regime has been shaped by selective and conditional engagement. It has supported global norms mainly when doing so offered strategic advantages, such as gaining the Nuclear Suppliers Group waiver or signing the United States–India civil nuclear agreement. For India's political leaders, these treaties and norms are often viewed as tools to build international credibility rather than as a sign of genuine commitment to disarmament. This outlook, influenced by domestic politics, has kept New Delhi cautious about taking part in substantive disarmament efforts, especially in the South Asian security context.

Kazi further observes that the “Make in India” defense program and the concurrent expansion of defense-industrial collaboration with partner states serve the ruling coalition as politically expedient modes of signalling national resilience. These initiatives, inseparable from the domestic political agenda, solidify a security-first epistemology that diminishes the salience of arms-control frameworks. Economic growth is explicitly conjoined to indigenous defense manufacture and to the broader narrative of sovereignty; consequently, political and institutional incentives are systematically skewed against arms restraint and against the pursuit of regional military restraint (Iqbal, Kazi, 2025).

India's domestic landscape—marked by nationalist populism, aspirations for global pole status, militantly mercantilist economic strategies, and a philosophy of strategic exceptionalism—constitutes a major impediment to arms control in South Asia. These domestic imperatives, almost reflexively, exacerbate strategic rivalry and systematically discourage cooperative institutionalization. Consequently, envisioning a regional arms control architecture in which India plays a generative, rule-abiding role becomes an ever-more daunting enterprise.

The contemporaneous ascendancy of Hindu nationalist ideology, notably under the leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party, has substantially refracted India's security agendas and discourses (Delaet et al. 2006). This ideological prism tends to nationalize the security narrative, enlarging the legitimate perimeter of military capability acquisition and constricting the bandwidth for arms control

articulation. Consequently, a nuanced comprehension of the Congress and BJP trajectories, and the evolving interplay between them, becomes indispensable for any analyst wishing to decode the Indian arms control disinclination (Delaet et al. 2006).

Domestic Impediments to Arms Control

Domestic impediments continue to obstruct the trajectory of arms control, often eclipsing the cooperative gains that such initiatives could yield (Chary & Roy, 2024). These impediments vary in form and intensity, encompassing bureaucratic lethargy and ideologically motivated political resistance.

Within this broader frame, the Indian political landscape emerges as a decisive variable affecting the country's regional arms control posture. Electoral incentives, ideological imperatives, and the alternating configurations of political leadership coalesce to constrain diplomatic latitude. The enduring and adversarial bilateral interaction with Pakistan intensifies the calculus, necessitating sophisticated and context-specific arms control architectures designed to attenuate escalation risks and foster enduring stability.

A salient proposition in Miller's analysis is the notion that domestic political calculus frequently eclipses the rational calculus of arms control, a claim that retains its salience in the South Asian milieu (Miller, 1990). Within India, domestic political logics, particularly when shaped by nationalist parties in power, increasingly dictate strategic trajectories that diverge from the premises of regional arms control. Mirroring Miller's observations regarding the U.S. context, wherein factional political actors and defense interest groups subvert treaty initiatives, Indian decision-makers, motivated by nationalist discourse and bureaucratic imperatives, display a marked hesitancy to implement arms control regimes vis-à-vis Pakistan or to participate substantively in multilateral disarmament fora, including the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the proposed Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (Miller, 1990).

Miller further illuminates how electoral calendars become disruptive agents, pushing political leaders toward populist gestures and steering them away from the restrained and cooperative practices that arms control requires. This dynamic is unmistakable in the Indian context, where significant military choices and provocative rhetoric become conspicuously sequenced to coincide with impending electoral contests. Both the 2019 Balakot air operation and the subsequent constitutional abrogation of Article 370 served the twin purpose of consolidating nationalist enthusiasm and framing any display of military circumspection as indisputable political crippling.

Miller states that similarly to how American presidents often pause, delay, or water down arms talks when they fear that public opinion changes at home. In Indian, it is quite similar, as Indian leaders behave much the same way. Strategic dialogue or confidence-building with Pakistan or China is not given any

importance, not because it lacks significance and merit, but because it risks political backlash or could depict leaders as weak. Miller also says that bureaucracy rivalries also play their role, their habits obstruct arms control. When it comes to the the US, the Pentagon and the military industrial sector stymie such agreements that have potential of threatening their budgets or disrupting their long terms plan. In this way, India has its own version, as the Ministry of Defence, the strategic enclave, and agencies such as the Defence Research and Development Organisation tend to be vying for indigenous military buildup under the slogans, such as “Make in India” and “Atmanirbhar Bharat.” They do possess a strong influence in politics and often show that overture toward restraint is weaken the cherished strategic autonomy, which finds its audience among the decision makers as well.

Accordin to Miller, Public opinion, is not only shaped by it but it also feeds into this cycle. It is because, in India, the mainstream debate which is fueled by media and is coated with nationalistic rhetoric, shows unilateral restraint is tantamount to appeasement. Therefore, being cognizant of such risks, political leaders give precedence to electoral survival ahead of security dialogue.

Ultimately, this leads towards avoidance of arms control talks even when they could strengthen deterrence in the long run. Negotiations with Pakistan are then seen through the prism of political vulnerability which makes it a daunting path to tread. Miller’s point that elites use regional tensions to justify the slow erosion of arms control fits the Indian experience all too well.

When parliamentary debate frames reciprocal restraint as collusion with a presumed aggressor, leaders fortify the security asymmetry and expand the strategic asymptote. The downward spiral thus created reproduces the very reactive dynamic the scholar observes in the superpower competition of the late twentieth century. Rather than fostering a stabilising feedback loop, such politics privileges escalation and institutionalises the arms race as both tactic and doctrine. Furthermore, Miller asserts that, in domestic political environments where arms control is treated more as a political burden than as a policy gain, advancement toward such arrangements becomes substantially constrained. This pattern is manifest in Indian politics, in which no significant political party, particularly in periods of elevated nationalist sentiment, positions arms control as a front-burner concern. Rather, proactive military postures are engineered as indicators of decisive governance. Consequently, the Indian political apparatus is, by design, categorically resistant to arms control, even when such accords possess the capacity to foster stability in the strategically precarious landscape of South Asia.

Role of Leadership

Emerging scholarship indicates that the increasing sway of nationalist populism threatens the normative foundations of nuclear restraint and thereby inflates the probabilities of strategic instability. This analysis travels easily to the Indian context, where the ascendance of Hindu nationalist populism beneath the

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Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has paralleled the fusion of civil-military institutions and a more overtly militarized nuclear doctrine. Such leaders typically represent their politics as perennial victims of a malevolent international order, vowing to recover national grandeur through overtly assertive and militarized postures. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Indian state has re-cast national security through a hyper-nationalist lexicon that exploits cross-border military operations—exemplified by the Balakot airstrikes and the 2019 abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir’s special status—to project a strongman persona. This politicized amalgamation of state legitimacy and military dynamism has calcified the strategic calculus, rendering any substantive pursuit of arms control or sustained diplomatic engagement with nuclear peers a politically perilous enterprise.

Nationalist Populists

The leader follow the patterns of Nationalist-populism tend to weaken the rule-based global order by adhering to policies of rejecting the norms of restraint, diplomacy, and multilateral cooperation which are its rudimentary elements. Seeing New Delhi in this perspective, it is conspicuously clear that it is reluctant to cooperate with global nonproliferation regime, from the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty to the proposed fissile material cut-off treaty, reflects above all an assertion of strategic autonomy presented as national dignity. The Indian government under Modi therefore calls for “strategic sovereignty” which inherently questions the value of any binding commitments that might limit the expansion of nuclear arsenal or the modernization of conventional forces. Such stances can possibly have certain strategic logics but the primarily stem from domestic needs, which are to project bravado and resolve, to satiate urges of the nationalist base, and to depict one’s demeanor in a manner that others are deterred.

In this way, nationalist-populist paths tend to be concentrating authority in the executive, which leads towards weakening of the institutional checks, and sidelines expert voices that once supported restraint. In the Indian case, security policy is mainly shaped by the Prime Minister’s Office where a small group of advisers controls the important decisions. This has reduced the roles of the erstwhile important factors that played their role in strategic decision making, such as foreign service and strategic analysis agencies. The narrowing of institutional interaction therefore leads towards reduction in the exchange of views that helps prevent misinterpretation, and opacity that results from it increases the risk of miscalculation and dangerous escalation during crises.

It cannot be denied that populist-nationalism often becomes most persuasive when external threats are exaggerated and used for canvassing. This has been happening in India, where continuous vilification of Pakistan and China’s projection as a long-term adversary is common practice. This rhetoric lead toward obstruction of any talks on arms control, justify augmenting defense budgets, encourages changes in doctrine such as a possible shift away from No First Use,

and threatening tones and risky strategic signaling. Together, this leads towards increase in the regional arms race.

By taking factors like India's political climate, driven by nationalism, centralization of power, and the deliberate use of security narratives, it can be asserted that this leaves small room for any possible arms control talks in South Asia. India appears to be building a regional order on military competition, where disarmament and restraint remains a pipe dream.

Rise of Hindutva

The ascendancy of radical Hindutva as the predominant governing ideology in India has decisively altered the country's strategic culture, transmuting national security into an apparatus of political consolidation while corroding the normative framework governing arms control in South Asia. Such was the salient argument articulated at the Islamabad Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI) book-launch of *Rising Hindutva and its Impact on the Region*, where it was observed that the advance of Hindu majoritarianism now normalizes militarism, exclusionary nationalism and hegemonic designs. General (Retd) Ehsan ul Haq observed that the Bharatiya Janata Party's elevation to power, under the lifetime guide of RSS pracharak Narendra Modi, has entangled the oppressive tenets of Hindutva within the public and political sphere and has, far more ominously, begun to shape the nation's military and nuclear doctrine (Haq, 2019). Such an ideological mutation has fostered an Indian cavalierism toward the region's arms control architecture and has rendered bilateral confidence-building with Pakistan an asymptotic exercise. Hindutva, as articulated by Hali and sustained by other participants, produces a strategic tableau in which military predominance is fused with civilizational revival. This lethal amalgam renders strategic restraint politically heretical in a milieu that reflexively categorizes concession as subjugation.

The incremental integration of Hindutva ideology within India's military establishments, as identified by General Ehsan, provokes serious apprehension regarding the evolving character of the country's nuclear posture, especially in light of the observable shift—however tentative—away from the long-standing No First Use commitment toward more conspicuous counterforce posturing (Ehsan, 2019). Within this politicized milieu, arms-control measures are not merely disregarded; they are, by definition, contested at the level of principle.

India's deepening embrace of Hindutva is now a defining feature of its domestic and foreign policy, distorting the normative underpinnings of regional arms control and strategic equilibrium. The watershed moment arrived with the 2014 parliamentary elections. Narendra Modi, openly associated with Hindu nationalist circles, secured a commanding mandate, consolidating the Bharatiya Janata Party's long-standing ideological turn toward Hindu majoritarianism. That electoral result represented a definitive departure from the post-colonial commitment to secularism, as the BJP's platform now openly prioritised Hindu identity over religious neutrality (Rafi & Mehkri, 2021). Almost immediately, BJP

partisans began to declare that any opposition to the party amounted to treason, pledging that dissenters were better off in Pakistan; the exhortation fused anti-Muslim rhetoric with anti-Pakistani hostility as a means of electoral solidification. The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35-A in August 2019 tightened the ideological grip on the Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir region, dissolving its constitutional protections and reconstituting it as a pair of Union Territories. The move was, and remains, widely interpreted as an attempt to erase the region's demographic and political distinctiveness, drawing international rebuke for its apparent violation of settled principles of self-determination.

With the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in December 2019, the Indian state formally accelerated the exclusion of Muslim populations by exempting non-Muslim refugees from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh from the standard naturalization timeframe (Rafi, 2021). The law came into force on January 10, 2020, contemporaneous with a Uttar Pradesh government announcement of 40,000 alleged irregular migrants, igniting countrywide mobilization and resulting in 42 fatalities in the New Delhi metropolitan area. The CAA's design, alongside inflammatory official discourse, the February 2019 escalatory sequence with Pakistan over the Pulwama incident, and the subsequent Operation SINDOOR, denotes a militarized nationalist rationale entwined with religious bigotry. The consolidation of Hindutva, moreover, transgresses the domestic arena, informing Delhi's foreign and security orientation, manifest in aggressive defense investments and the pursuit of subcontinental primacy (Mehkri, 2021). Under this doctrinal imprint, the Indian state has publicly emphasized the survivability of its nuclear triad, thereby unsettling regional interlocutors concerned by a more uncompromising and potentially destabilizing strategic design. The ideological underpinnings of Hindutva hence amplify a militarized Indian posture, including indigenous missile enhancement and forward-based deployments, placing significant strain on regional arms control architectures and jeopardizing the fragile equilibrium in South Asia.

Evolution of India's Nuclear Doctrine: Ambiguity around No First Use (NFU)

India's nuclear doctrine, initially commended for its conceptual clarity and deliberative restraint embodied in the No First Use (NFU) principle, now displays incremental yet consequential modifications driven by internal political currents. Formalised in 2003, NFU purposed, among other objectives, to convey the posture of a judicious nuclear neighbour. In the intervening years, however, prominent figures of the governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have raised, openly and repeatedly, the prospect of revising the absolutism of this commitment. The observations of former Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar, subsequently echoed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in 2019, asserting that the NFU posture is not sacrosanct, have injected intentional vagueness into the strategic framework

(Singh, 2019). Such pronouncements signal the ascendancy of a domestic nationalist discourse which interprets strategic circumspection as strategic deprivation. The erosion of NFU, in turn, not only dilutes the internal coherence of India's nuclear doctrine, but also inflates regional uncertainties, especially vis-à-vis Pakistan, thereby constricting avenues for effective bilateral or multilateral arms-control architectures.

Doctrinal Drift Toward Counterforce Strategies

Parallel to the dilution of its NFU posture, India's strategic thinking has exhibited a doctrinal drift toward counterforce strategies pre-emptive strikes aimed at disarming an adversary's nuclear arsenal. Political narratives than by actual military necessity drive this shift more. Within the domestic sphere, political leadership has embraced a more aggressive stance on national defense, portraying the willingness to strike first as a demonstration of strength and resolve. Such a posture appeals to a hyper-nationalist voter base and aligns with the broader Hindutva ideology that equates military dominance with civilizational revival (Babar & Mirza, 2020). However, counterforce doctrines are inherently destabilizing, particularly in a region as volatile as South Asia where short flight times and compressed decision windows increase the risk of miscalculation. By advancing counterforce capabilities and signaling a willingness to use them, India is effectively undermining mutual deterrence a foundational principle of strategic stability and thereby impeding any meaningful progress on arms control (Ibrahim, 2024).

Refusal to Enter Arms Control Discussions Citing "Strategic Compulsions"

India has consistently resisted engaging in regional or international arms control frameworks by invoking "strategic compulsions," a narrative deeply rooted in domestic political priorities. Policymakers often argue that India cannot afford arms limitation agreements due to its complex security environment. However, this rationale is increasingly shaped and amplified by internal political considerations, including the desire to project India as a rising global power unwilling to be constrained by external treaties (The Changing Contours of India's Arms Control and Disarmament Policy - Shahid Iqbal, Reshmi Kazi, 2025). The political leadership, especially under the BJP, frames arms control as an externally imposed mechanism that threatens India's sovereignty and freedom of action. A nationalist media and public discourse that interprets disarmament as appeasement further reinforces this perception. As a result, India remains outside key agreements such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), weakening not only regional stability but also global non-proliferation efforts.

Political Regimes and Self-Reliance in the Arms Industry

Changes in political regimes can impact India's focus on achieving self-reliance in arms manufacturing (Spencer-Churchill & Mehmood, 2025). Policies associated with shifts in political leadership can affect arms imports, as seen in the analysis of the period from 2004 to 2022 (Spencer-Churchill & Mehmood, 2025). The government's initiatives to reduce arms imports are closely tied to domestic opportunities and constraints (Chakma, 2010). India's defense-industrial policy is primarily driven by domestic opportunities and constraints, despite facing some international threats (Chakma, 2010). The desire for technology transfers is strong, but domestic factors can hinder their effective utilization (Chakma, 2010).

Social Protest and Domestic Preferences

Social protest plays a crucial role in shaping domestic preferences for arms cooperation (Gleditsch & Høgetveit, 1984). Research often overlooks the role of social protest, treating domestic politics as mere constraints or viewing the public as only imposing constraints on international cooperation (Gleditsch & Høgetveit, 1984). Protest can influence the types of arms control measures that gain traction and the level of public support for such initiatives.

Need for a Comprehensive Nuclear Arms Control Regime

The danger of regional Armageddon in South Asia argues for a comprehensive nuclear arms control regime (Miller, 1984). Without such a regime, India and Pakistan risk resembling a permanent Cuban Missile Crisis (Miller, 1984). Confidence-building measures (CBMs) and nuclear risk-reduction measures (NRRMs) are vital as building blocks for negotiating a robust nuclear arms control regime (Miller, 1984).

Accidental Missile Launches and Procedural Arms Control

Arms control measures are necessary even in hostile rivalries to prevent accidental escalation (Tan & Tan, 2015). Measures such as training alerts, no travel zones, declarations on training standards, incident notification, and no-testing moratoria are crucial (Tan & Tan, 2015). These measures can help manage the risks associated with nuclear arsenals and reduce the chances of inadvertent conflict (Tan & Tan, 2015).

Divergent Views on Nuclear Disarmament

South Asian nations, particularly India and Pakistan, have divergent views on global efforts toward arms control and disarmament (Mir & Nazir, 2024). Security considerations, regional dynamics, historical conflicts, and domestic politics (Mir

& Nazir, 2024) shape these views. Understanding these perspectives is essential for advancing arms control in the region (Mir & Nazir, 2024).

Impact on Pakistan: Increased Threat Perception and Deterrence Instability

It should be understood that India's inclination toward hyper-nationalism blended with an assertive military rhetoric has intensified the threat perceptions across the border thereby weakening the fragile strategic stability in South Asia (Oberst et al., 2018). The strategic uncertainty is fast increasing as when it comes to Indian nuclear lexicon, specifically the No First Use doctrine, which can go through a change has coupled with the intensified discourse on counterforce capabilities, which has amplified the risks for Pakistan.

Resultantly, Pakistan, in response has ensured that Credible Minimum Deterrence remains intact while adhering to the policy of 'Quid Pro Quo Plus'. Indian political leaders are seen, especially during election rallies, continuously brandishing the prospect of surgical strikes and steep retaliatory escalatory ladders, by making security a greatly populist and nationalist realm away from reality.

Such rhetoric has been instrumental in domestic mobilization which leads to increase in the regional distrust and creating a constant security dilemma for Pakistan. This leads to an unrestrained arms race. What further deteriorates the crisis, it is the absence dialogue, aggravated by the political decision made in New Delhi to stymie confidence-building or arms control engagement which has led to regional strategic milieu prone to the tip off from a limited skirmish to a total war. (Oberst et al., 2018).

Impact on the Region

India's internal political architecture, which privileges Hindu nationalist discourse alongside an assertive foreign policy, has recalibrated its interaction with critical South Asian neighbors—Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan. Motivated by domestic imperatives to validate regional supremacy and visibly imprint strategic heft, New Delhi has fortified border installations and reformed border-management protocols with an explicit confrontational edge. Nepal and India, having moved beyond minor adjustments, now confront overlapping maps that politicize territory whose native claims had remained dormant. Simultaneously, tensions with Dhaka over migration and citizenship reaffirm themselves via interpretative loops surrounding the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens, both of which draw from the Hindutva canon. This deliberate conviction of strength has effectuated apprehension across India's smaller neighbors, compelling each to cultivate a broader menu of strategic partners and, more pointedly, to deepen consultations with Beijing. The resulting regional apprehension has exacted a dual cost, fraying bilateral niceties and, more critically,

eroding the multilateral milieu essential for arms restraint and security confidence-building designed to contiguous peace.

Undermining SAARC, BRICS, SCO, and Regional Cooperation Platforms

India's current political environment characterized by a nationalist populist agenda and a foreign policy grounded in ideology has, in parallel, eroded the operational capacity of South Asian regional groups, notably the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa grouping, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Originally designed for cooperative engagement and the mitigation of interstate tension, SAARC now stands inert, with the lifeblood of negotiation and engagement stilled primarily by New Delhi's unwillingness to negotiate with Islamabad in the prevailing political frame (Rüland & Michael, 2019). Under the Modi administration, the elevation of bilateralism over any multilateral modus, framed by a domestic refusal to entertain discourse with declared competitors, has drained SAARC of the institutional heft necessary to sponsor arms-control dialogues or initiatives for regional stability. Parallel processes animate India's behaviour in both BRICS and the SCO: Delhi's increasingly dominant posturing frequently recasts these forums as instruments of strategic signalling rather than venues for substantive concert. Consequently, the arena for concerted dialogue on disarmament, conflict prevention, and confidence-building has contracted markedly, leaving India's unilateralist tendencies, animated by domestic political imperatives, fully exposed (Chakravorty, 2000).

Conclusion

India's domestic political currents have now crystallized as the predominant impediment to the formulation of viable arms control regimes in South Asia. Fuelled by intensified hyper-nationalism, the consolidation of Hindutva political tenets, and the pervasive securitization of the nation's identity, India's internal trajectory increasingly privileging military expansion and strategic assertiveness at the expense of diplomatic resolution and restraint. Under the BJP, the securitization of electoral rhetoric has blurred the boundary between national defence and domestic politics, rendering defence and nuclear doctrine instruments of populism and ideological proclamation. Under these conditions, regional arms control initiatives, whether pursued bilaterally or in broader forums, are predominantly interpreted in terms of national prestige and electoral arithmetic, thereby subordinating genuine strategic restraint to the politics of demonstration and regional power assertion.

Moreover, the encroachment of radical doctrinal currents into the strata of policy formulation and the military echelon has compromised the legacy of strategic rationality—disinterested, institutionally embedded, and calibrated against excessive military impulse—that previously permeated the Indian

disarmament narrative. The retreat of deliberative fora, the active repudiation of confidence-building modalities, and the categorical aversion to multilateral frameworks such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty reveal an ideological recalibration that reinterprets arms control as acquiescence rather than an instrument of shared security. In such an ideological climate, the terrain for substantive arms-control initiatives across South Asia is inhospitable unless New Delhi recalibrates its internal rhetorical continuum towards inclusivity, institutional merit, and a sense of regional stewardship. Absent this recalibration, the subcontinent will remain susceptible to the dangers of strategic misperception and escalatory cycles, induced not only by external challenges but also by domestic political currents emanating from its largest polity.

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