

Rise of Far Right Nationalism in India and its impact on Arms Control

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Received:
Oct 15, 2025

Published:
Dec 31, 2025

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how far-right Hindu nationalism has influenced the Indian defense policy and the dynamics of the regional arms control, and how this has changed in the years after 2014 under the rule of the Bharatiya Janata Party led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This study attempts to refute the hypothesis that the Hindu nationalist ideology of the BJP has been systematically accelerating military modernization, weakening arms control systems, and increasing competition in the region through systematic comparative analysis based on SIPRI data on defense spending, incident analysis, and confidence-building measures analysis. The main highlights are the growth in defense expenditure of 85 percent between 46.4 billion (2013-14) and 86.1 billion (2024- 25), aggressive procurement of sophisticated weapons systems such as Rafale jets, S-400 systems, and Agni-V MIRV systems, and a systematic demolition of confidence-building mechanisms with Pakistan. The study demonstrates how there has been a paradigm shift due to strategic independence to open US alignment via Quad involvement and basic military alliances, as well as the metamorphosis of media debates that advance ultra-nationalism and war-mongering. Such reorientation of ideologies has led to an arms race in the region, breeding typical spirals of security dilemma and putting nuclear war at high stakes in the region with the highest population. The paper finds that the domestic political actors, especially the securitization of electoral politics and Hindutva nationalism, are the most common barriers to effective arms control regimes in the South Asian region, and the effects of this are felt by the sense of regional security as well as global security due to the nuclear capacities involved.

Key Words:

Introduction

South Asia is the most precarious nuclear hot spot in the world, with a population of more than 1.8 billion under the nuclear shadow. With the rise of BJP in 2014,

there has been a fundamental change to the strategic landscape of the region. This change goes long beyond the usual defense policy realignments to denote a comprehensive ideological redefinition that goes to all elements of Indian security posture including the priorities of military modernization its arms control attitudes, and crisis management (Akram & Mir, 2025). The history of South Asian security relations has been informed by the, wars that have been fought between India and Pakistan, disputed territories, rise of far right nationalism and the nuclear tests that were conducted in 1998. However, since 2014 seen a qualitative change of the past defense policies. In contrast to the long-lasting military modernization and diplomatic engagement leanings of the previous regimes, the post-2014 reality has seen the unprecedented intention of the military alongside the systematic destruction of the confidence-building efforts and the open hostility towards the arms control measures (Malji, 2024.). This change can only be explained by examining how rise of Hindu nationalism is intertwined with regional arms control a relationship that has not received a lot of systematic attention by scholars even though it is of vital concern to world security (Narego, 2025). Although the current literature has looked into Indian military modernization, Pakistan-India nuclear relations, and China-India border conflicts independently, not a lot of studies have looked at how domestic political ideology leads to acceleration of arms race and breakdown of arms control (Malji, 2024.). The argued that the Hindu nationalist ideology (Hindutva) of BJP has logically increased the rate of military misadventure, erode the confidence-building measures and fuel the arms race in the region more than the previous governments. The hypothesis is based on the fact that nationalist populist regimes around the world are characterized by the tendency to focus on the domestic politics rather than on the strategic stability, to use the problems of security as the electoral tool, and to deny the possibility of any international restrictions on the military force (Jalil, 2024.).

The meaning of the study is not only limited to the scholarly examination but also immediate policy concerns. Nuclear weapons have been placed on both sides, timelines of decision-making are shortened and even the channels of communication of crisis are broken, the potential of nuclear war in South Asia has possibly never been greater. It is necessary to understand the domestic political factors behind this degeneration to come up with effective intervention strategies either by use of international mediation, economic incentives or Track II diplomacy programs. The study helps in the general theoretical knowledge about the influence of nationalist populism in regard to arms control standards, affirms the theory of security dilemma in the modern multipolar environment, and offers empirical support to arguments on domestic politics behind international arms races. To policy makers, it shows that policies should focus on the electoral and media incentives that have encouraged militarization rather than dealing with threats to external security (Naz, 2023).

Pre-BJP Era Defense Policy (1947-2014)

The defense policy of independent India was created during the time of Jawaharlal Nehru, which can be explained by his desire to achieve strategic self-sufficiency, non-alignment, and non-violent coexistence. The Nehruvian policy focused on diplomatic methods of resolving international conflict, opposition to military alliances with the great powers and low defense expenditure to lay emphasis on economic development. The philosophy of Nehru regarded military build-ups as destabilizing in nature and favoured collective security as an international organization, especially the United Nations (Khan, 2014). The Non-Aligned Movement which was co-founded by Nehru with Josip Broz Tito and Gamal Abdel Nasser institutionalized the refusal of India to be a member of either of the Cold War blocs. This policy helped India to obtain the military support of the Soviet Union as well as the Western countries without being involved in the superpower confrontation. The scale of defense expenditure in this era was small and was on average less than 2 percent of the GDP and it has focused on establishing local defense industries instead of importing sophisticated weapons (Kazi, 2016).

The Sino-Indian War of 1962 was a kind of watershed as it questioned the Nehruvian assumptions on peaceful coexistence and low-level defense preparation. The military victory of China demonstrated the inadequacy of Indian armed forces in terms of equipment, training, and infrastructure of borders. The war led to the initial systematic defense modernization program and military expenditure albeit under existing non-alignment and diplomatic involvement patterns. Notably, the 1962 failure is not what caused mentality of arms race and rejection of confidence-building strategies to other neighbors (Kmentt, 2019).

Indira Gandhi to Vajpayee

The 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War was a demonstration of the rise of India as the armed force of South Asia that proved to successfully fight the war conventionally and demonstrated to Pakistan that India was willing to go to the extent of military intervention when its vital interests were threatened. Nonetheless, the new policy in India after the war made diplomatic consolidation of conquest more than military conquest, and bilateral structures on resolving disputes were set up under the Shimla Agreement of 1972, which expressly obligated both nations to find peaceful solutions to conflicting matters (Stewart-Ingersoll & Frazier, 2010). The 1974 so called Peaceful Nuclear Explosion of India was a technological achievement which was positioned firmly in civilian language with India's Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi stressing on peaceful use and denying weaponization. This test took place in the framework of sustained adherence to the nuclear disarmament movement and the signing of comprehensive test bans treaties. Notably, there was no declaration of nuclear

doctrine, and the program was a form of civilian program throughout more than 20 years (Bukhari & Gaho, 2025).

The nuclear tests of 1998 at Pokhran-II under the first BJP government led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was a significant policy change, and nuclear ambiguity was removed, and India became nuclear weapons state. Nonetheless, even such an aggressive step was accompanied by the unilateral moratorium against any further testing and articulation of minimal deterrence doctrine with emphasized No First Use (Bukhari & Gaho, 2025). The period after testing was marked by intensive diplomacy such as the Lahore Declaration (February 1999) with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and showing a belief in a further dialogue. This moderation, irrespective of pressures at home to take more radical retaliation, was an expression of the pre-2014 policy of graduated response and diplomatic avenue (Gaho, 2017).

UPA Government Era (2004-2014)

The longest phase of diplomatic involvement with Pakistan and a calculated military modernization since independence was the United Progressive Alliance government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The UPA defense policy model also stressed on incremental capability building under fixed budgetary limits, diplomatic option to security problems and strategic independence even in the face of increasingly close relations with the major powers. Under the UPA, the military expenditure increased by about 30 billion (2004) to 2013-14, 46.4 billion, the signs of constant growths (Chaour, 2018). The defense budget was kept at an average of less than 2 percent of the GDP indicating that expenditure on development activities remained prioritized over military capabilities. This was a measured style of decision making that was characterized by the UPA decision making within the framework of cabinet-level oversight and parliamentary scrutiny (Ganguly & Kapur, 2010). The acquisition of C-130-J Super Hercules transport aircraft, P-8I maritime patrol aircraft and the renovation of the INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier, which was of Russian origin were major acquisitions during this time. Such purchases represented actual modernization requirements and multi-vendor strategy, which did not lead to excessive reliance on particular suppliers. Notably, big weaponry was procured via transparent tenders with wide parliamentary discussions as opposed to subsequent government-to-government contracts that did not undergo competition bidding (Swamy, 2019).

The UPA regime had to deal with three key security related incidents that challenged its crisis management strategy. The attack on the Parliament and the ensuing military standoff in 2001-02 was a case of measured escalation, and thereafter, diplomatically engineered de-escalation as the costs became visible. The 2008 Mumbai attacks (November 26) was followed by the question of a lot of international pressure to retaliate against Pakistan by use of military force. The Singh government however adopted diplomatic reactions, international compulsion to Pakistan and internal security enhancement instead of the cross

border military action. Importantly, the UPA government out-rightly turned down surgical strikes or cross border operation even when military solutions were tabled. This moderation was an expression of philosophical beliefs in diplomacy and understanding that in the nuclear world, military action would get out of control (Cheema, 2021). It was a politically expensive choice in domestic terms, with government opponents mounting attacks on the government as being weak, but internationally the strategy proved justified by the praise of restraint.

This was in an effort to show a sustained desire to engage in bilateral dialogue and confidence-building measures as evidenced by arms control initiatives during the UPA period. The Composite Dialogue Process, which was launched in 1997, only to be put on hold following a series of incidents, was reinvigorated a number of times with real political determination on high echelons. The eight-member dialogue process covered the central conflicts such as Kashmir, terrorism, and nuclear confidence-building initiatives by working on the issues in a proactive manner (Sheffield, 2021). Various confidence measures proposals were introduced in this time frame such as increased people-to-people interactivity, normalization of trade and the nuclear risk reduction plans. Good strides were made in 2011-2012 dialogue resumption on trade matters and visa liberalization before it was halted after border incidents. Notably, the use of temporary suspensions was considered to be tactical and not strategic, and was likely to be resumed at a later time (Samina, 2023).

The UPA period saw a thriving Track II diplomacy with the Neemrana Dialogue and other informal forums offering a long term engagement between strategic communities. These forums regularly involved government officials who proposed official sanction on further involvement even in the case of the formal dialogue being halted. It was acknowledged in this approach that a sustainable peace could not be achieved solely through government-to-government contacts with the society. The architecture of confidence building measures that was developed in this time frame resulted in the 1991 Agreement on Prevention of Air Space Violations and Agreement on Advance Notification of Military Exercises and the nuclear risk reduction measures. The implementation of these agreements was active, and there was frequent exchange of information, prior notification of military exercises and there was also the keeping communication lines open such as the DGMO (Director General of Military Operations) hot line (Ashraf, 2015). According to SIPRI report, the arms exports of India under UPA continued to be low and the country was ranked below 40 in the world in terms of arms export. This was indicative of a weak indigenous production of defensive gear, as well as lack of strategic desire to flex greater power by selling arms (Narayan, 2025). The emphasis of defense diplomacy was placed on capacity building and cooperation in training as opposed to transfer of weapons. The media atmosphere that existed in the UPA tenure was marked by fairly equal reports on security matters and room to include opposition to military policy (Akhtar & Neog 2024). Peace activists, former diplomats and strategic analysts were regular guests in the

mainstream media urging restraint and diplomatic involvement. The economical matters of the election campaigns were based more on economic concerns than on the issues of national security, which was one of the few but significant concerns. Geopolitically, the UPA government had strategic independence even though alliances with the major powers were tightening. The US-India 2008 Civil Nuclear Agreement was one of the most significant advancements in the bilateral relations that were well balanced by maintaining collaboration with Russia and Iran. India withstood US pressure on Iran sanctions, the defense relationship with Russia in spite of US anxieties, and does not feel involved with the great powers competition and enjoys the advantage of being an ally to all parties (Pavlov & Kamyssov, 2021).

The Ideological Change and the Role of Hindutva on Security Policy.

The 2014 electoral triumph that ushered Narendra Modi into power was not just another democratic transition, but also an uprising of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) as the form of governance with a significant consequence on the security policy of India. The overwhelming majority of 1987, under the leadership of Modi, gave him political support to undertake a systematic change of defense policy in line with RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) ideologies that perceive military power to be part of a Hindu civilizational resurgence (Malji, 2018).

Since 1922, the Hindu identity has been developed and forwarded by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Determining that Hindu identity is in a wider range, which includes all people who regard India as their sacred land. The formulation clearly leaves out Non-Hindus, as they are foreigners whose allegiance is still doubtful. When applied to security policy, Hindutva portrays conflicts with neighboring countries not as territorial issues but as civilizational battles that have to be fought with the help of a military force that cannot be compromised (Iwanek, 2014). The major ideological shifts at the beginning of the BJP rule were indicative of the systematic implementation of Hindutva principle in governance. The abrogation of Article 370 (August 5, 2019), which gave Jammu and Kashmir special status, was not just a form of administrative restructuring but a form of rectification of historical injustice, which had not allowed the region to be fully incorporated into the Indian nation. The supporting communications blackout, mass incarceration of local leaders, and use of even more forces proved the readiness to apply the overwhelming force in the implementation of the ideological goals (Kumar, 2024). In December 2019, religious discrimination in citizenship was codified in the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which granted expedited citizenship to non-Pakistani, non-Afghan, and non-Bangladeshi non-Muslim refugees, but none of those identifying as Muslims. Together with the National Register of Citizens exercises, the CAA established a legal basis for potentially millions of Muslims stateless in India. This internal discrimination of Muslims strengthened the external instance of hostility against Pakistan as the alleged home of the Indian Muslims (Mahmudabad, 2020). The use of anti-Muslim rhetoric became

commonplace in politics as the leaders of the ruling parties would use Pakistan go back slogans on domestic critics and state that critics of government policies were treasonous. This rhetorical system leaves no room for a subtle debate on the Pakistan policy, as any interaction would be labeled as treason to national interest and Hindu identity (Al Jazeera, 2019).

Scholars have systematically captured the effect on foreign policy as saffronisation of diplomacy, which is a basic departure from Nehruvian traditions. Security policy has been used as a campaign instrument where military actions were scheduled to take place during campaigns. The strongman image-building process necessitated ongoing display of military determination, such that strategic restraint proved to be politically expensive, irrespective of the strategic value. The military power was directly equated with the national honor and Hindu pride, which shifted the defense policy into the context of both technical and identity security. Since, as Muhammad Shahzad Akram and Moneeb Mir (2025) note, domestic political needs perpetuate regional political instability, electoral pressures endorse militarization at the expense of diplomacy conducted systematically (Akram & Mir, 2025a).

Military Modernization Acceleration.

The measurable sign of the influence of Hindutva ideology on security policy in India is the transformation of the pattern of India's defense spending. The growth of the defense budget between 464 billion (2013-14) and 86.1 billion (2024-25) of 85% over a decade. Which is very high compared to the economic growth rates and shows that there was a deliberate attempt to prioritize military capabilities. The SIPRI statistics validate that India is the fifth-largest military spender in the world, with a contribution of 3.2 percent of the global defense expenditure (Kumar, 2022).

In the defense budget, the ratio of GDP allocation rose to 2.3 percent during the NDA government (compared to 1.8 percent under the UPA government) and was almost reaching the target of 2.5 percent as suggested by military leadership. This was despite rivalry in its development expenditure in a nation where 21.9 percent of its population still lives below the poverty line and healthcare expenditure is at 2.1 percent of GDP, which is amongst the lowest levels in the world (Roy-Chaudhury & Solanki, 2020). Both quantitative and qualitative growth and change to offensive capabilities can be seen in the major weapons purchases made under the BJP regime. The Rafael fighter jet contract, initiated in 2016 to the value of EUR7.87 billion for 36 aircraft, was an abandonment of the competitive bidding practice in favor of government-to-government contracts, which lowered the transparency but cut on the delivery schedules (Solanki, 2020). The nuclear delivery of the Rafael and the power of long-range strikes gave India greater options of first strike against Pakistan. The acquisition of the S-400 Triumph system at 5.43 billion dollars (2018) by Russia showed readiness to pay the risks

of US sanctions (CAATSA) to be able to have advanced air defense systems. The S-400 had a range of 400 kilometers and could attack more than one target, which gave India a ballistic missile defense capability that could potentially counter the nuclear deterrent by Pakistan and created dangerous first-strike temptations (Shahid, 2022).

The Agni-V intercontinental ballistic missile project was a significant achievement of the BJP era, with major milestones completed during the period, including successful Agni-V tests in 2012, and the addition of MIRV (Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle) capability in March 2024 as part of the project titled Mission Divyastra. The 5,000-plus-kilometer range puts the whole of China in the firing range, and MIRV allows multiple warheads to be carried in a single missile, which would significantly increase the size of the Indian nuclear attack. BrahMos supersonic cruise missile development has also extended to cover air-launched, ship-launched, and land-based missiles of greater ranges up to 800 kilometers. The speed (Mach 3) and accuracy of the system also render it suitable for a decapitation attack on the enemy command center, increasing the first-striking ability and destabilizing the crisis (Akhtar, 2025).

Production of indigenous defense under the programs of Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat reached major milestones such as Tejas Light Combat Aircraft, Arihant-class nuclear submarines, and aircraft carriers such as INS Vikrant (Aggarwal et al., 2023). The condition that 75 percent of capital expenditure used to finance domestic purchases established formidable defense industrial blocs that led to the further growth of the military forces, irrespective of strategic need. The pace of nuclear modernization became very fast as the MIRV technology was introduced, K-4 submarine-fired ballistic missiles covering a distance of 3,500 kilometers, and the nuclear triad consisting of nuclear submarines, land-based ballistic missiles, and air-delivered weapons was complete. The number of Indian nuclear warheads in the inventory was estimated to be 150-165 (2024) compared to 120-130 (2014), which is the intentional buildup over the minimum deterrence needs (Dinakar, 2024). The development of space and cyber warfare was also a part of the development of Mission Shakti (March 2019), the first anti-satellite weapon test in India that indicated that it was capable of destroying enemy satellites at up to 1,000 kilometers altitude. The creation of the Defense Cyber Agency (2019) and the implementation of artificial intelligence in the weapons system were signs of readiness for the multi-domain warfare situation that goes beyond the usual operations of land, sea, and air (Ganesh et al., 2024).

Border Militarization and Crisis Management

The surgical strikes (September 2016) were the first incidence of cross-border military action to be employed with the express intent of domestic political reasons. The government was under heavy pressure to have an armed retaliation when terrorists invaded an Indian army base at Uri, killing 19 soldiers on September 18, 2016. The alleged surgical attacks of September 28-29 across the

Line of Control were accompanied by an unparalleled amount of media attention, government officials giving detailed press briefs, and television anchors hailing the attacks as an expression of Indian military strength. The electoral advantages were instantly visible, as BJP, leaders applied the surgical strikes to state elections campaigns and opinion polls indicated higher voter support of the leadership of Modi. This was a complete reversal of how the governments of the past would preserve secrecy of their operations in the military and ensure that they were not politicized to secure electoral positions.

The Pulwama-Balakot crisis (February-March 2019) indicated the methodological development of this policy with nuclear overtones. The suicide attack on February 14, 2019 that claimed the lives of 40 CRPF troops in Pulwama generated a need to retaliate militarily, which the government did not oppose. The airstrike on February 26 Balakot was the first occasion since 1971 that the Indian aircrafts had gone over the Line of Control, intentionally going out of the usual norms of crisis management (Akram & Rehman, 2025). The counter-response by Pakistan on February 27 which led to the arrest of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman sparked off nuclear rhetoric on both sides as ministers in Pakistani government talked of nuclear weapons and Indian officials of the "Qatal ki raat" (night of slaughter). The United States, UAE, and Saudi Arabia intervention abroad to intervene in the situation was necessary as a de-escalation measure, which emphasizes the fact that bilateral crisis management skills are in a perilous situation (Shah, 2024).

The Balakot crisis, which took place in the eve of the general elections, proved that military action was explicitly used as an electoral instrument. The BJP gained considerably in the post-crisis polling, and the Modi entered Pakistan to attack Pakistan slogan, which turned into the main message of the campaign. This political legitimization encouraged political crises escalation in the future. A June 15, 2020 confrontation at the Galwan Valley (the bloodiest border conflict with China since 1975) resulted in 20 Indian and 4 Chinese deaths in a hand-to-hand battle. The conflict was caused due to the triggers of the infrastructure development, namely Indian road construction which China considered to disrupt the status quo in the disputed territory. The war saw the movement of more than one hundred thousand soldiers on both sides and resulted in the permanent militarization of hitherto peaceful borders (Akram & Rehman, 2025).

A number of friction points in the China-India border are yet to be resolved such as Depsang, Demchok, and Hot Springs, and both parties have been busy developing infrastructure aggressively and forward deployments. A lack of efficient crisis-management tools enhances the chances of the issues being accidentally aggravated, and domestic political influences do not allow either party to seem to yield.

Arms Export Growth

The metamorphosis process of India as an importer of arms to a major exporter is a tactical shift towards influencing power by defense diplomacy. Since India is ranked below 40 on the world in arms export, the country ranked 23rd in 2022 on the SIPRI list, and exports were valued at 2.8 billion in 2024-25. Such expansion is indicative of the local production power, as well as the intentional policy to expand the Indian influence by providing military support (Narayan, 2025). The main consumers of Indian weapon export like Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and some African countries prove to be the ones with a strategy of thought and not a business. The transfer of arms to the Myanmar military junta amid the international criticism of human rights abuses is evidence of the readiness to take sides with authoritarian partners to achieve geopolitical benefits. Likewise, the cooperation of defense with Sri Lanka and Mauritius is also to combat the Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean (Walia, 2025). The bilateral relationship is not the only strategic implication of this new alliance but it also projects power in the region. Arms exports give rise to dependencies that give India a bargaining power on the foreign policy standpoints of recipient countries. The long-term relationships created by the defense training, maintenance contracts and upgrade services entrench Indian influence to the partner militaries.

Factor Influencing Arms Control Geopolitical Alignments

The shift in Indian geopolitical realignment is possibly the biggest strategic change since independence as it shifts off Nehruvian non-alignment to open cooperation with the United States in great power politics. Such a realignment has equipped India with high-tech military capabilities and diplomatic backup that enables aggressive policies and minimizes the motivation to arm race in the region. The strategic integration with the United States is reflected in the underlying agreements that were signed since 2016. LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, 2016) allows military installations to be used mutually to fill up, repair, and rest. The access to the advanced communication systems and encrypted technologies is provided by the COMMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement, 2018). BECA (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement, 2020) allows the exchange of geospatial data and satellite data to target military targets (Vijayalakshmi, 2017).

The drastic growth in the defense trade with the United States has seen significant acquisitions of MH-60R helicopters totaling 2.6 billion dollars, MQ-9B armed drones totaling 3.1 billion dollars and P-8I maritime patrol aircraft. Since 2014, the total US-India defense sales have been over 25 billion, which is why the United States is the second-largest defense supplier to India, after Russia. Methods of technology sharing have grown beyond the weapon sales to include the development of jet engines, semiconductor fabrication and artificial intelligence

applications to be used by the military. The capability offered by these arrangements would take decades to enhance on its own, and would radically shorten military modernization timelines (Paul, 2019).

QUAD Participation

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) that India has had with the United States, Japan, and Australia is a clear involvement in the China containment process. The restoration of the Quad in 2017 after the dormancy after Chinese objections in 2008 demonstrates that India is ready to implement confrontational relationships in strategic partnerships. The shift in ideology where Modi became not just hesitant but active Quad leadership demonstrates the change of the ideology into the politics of alliances (Tarapore, 2023). The organization of the annual summit meetings and the growth of military exercises such as Malabar naval exercises involving all four navies establish frameworks that will be used to coordinate against China continuously. The emphasis of the Quad on the idea of free and open Indo-Pacific is a direct response to the claims of Belt and Road Initiative and South China Sea by China. The involvement of the Indian side justifies US strategy and equips India with technology access and diplomatic importance in aggressive policies toward China and Pakistan (Shekhar, 2022).

Role of Media and Public Discourse

The media landscape of India that has undergone transformation since 2014 has caused the overall shift in the way people talk about security problems, since it has formed echo chambers that have rewarded militarization and sidelined the voices that propose diplomatic approaches in resolution. The rise of so-called "*Godi media*" (the portmanteau of Modi and media) is the indication of the systematic congruence of the national security agenda with the television channels and governmental standpoints (Kathju, 2025). The prime time television coverage has lost its analytical discussion and turned into emotional nationalism with the anchors acting as war cheerleaders instead of being journalists. Retired military officers who preach aggressive action are frequently featured in programs, and experts in civilian professions who advise restraint are peripheral or not invited at all. This leaves the expectation of the society on the military response to all security threats (Akram, 2025).

The demonization of the dissent has set a chilling effect on the academic and policy discussion of arm control. The opponents of Pakistan's involvement in the conflict are labeled as anti-national or Pakistani agents by scholars who support diplomatic involvement. Peace activists, former diplomats, and strategic analysts are systematically targeted by social media campaigns, which challenge military buildups or insist on dialogue with Pakistan (Hussain, 2025).

Electoral Politics and Security Narratives

Electoral politics that are securitized have ensured that the major theme of campaign is national security, which compelled all the parties to engage in competitive hawkishness, which erases the possibility of advocating peace. The 2019 campaign based on the theme of "*Modi ji ne Pakistan mein ghuske maara*" shows how military action is turned into political campaign instead of being security requirements. The artificial consensus of militarization is produced by manipulating public opinion with the help of organized social media campaigns carried out. WhatsApp forwards with fake information about the Pakistani and Chinese activities create the pressure on the government. Twitter trends are frequently produced to provide the impression of demand by the people on military action against diplomatic events (Diwakar, 2024).

The overall lack of peace as a political constituency is the systematic marginalizing the dovish voices of the whole political spectrum. None of the significant political parties makes arms control or international interactions the core policies and several constituencies enjoy the advantages of military expenditure and tension preservation (Malhan, 2025).

Comparison of Pre and Post-BJP Era

The systematic comparison of 11 categories shows the steady pattern of increasing and militarizing since 2014. The rise in defense expenditure of 85% between 46 billion (2013-14) and 86.1 billion (2024-25) (Solanki, 2024). Such escalation is an indicator of conscious ideological focus on military potentials instead of other types of expenditure. The qualitative change of slow, methodical improvement of weapons systems in to quick induction of the latter indicates the basic change in the strategic focus. Whereas pre-2014 purchases were defensive in nature with an emphasis on deterrence stability, post-2014 purchases have been power projection based, first strikes based, and coercive deterrence, destabilizing instead of enhancing security.

Border tensions are no longer occasional crises necessitating the international mediation process to typical confrontation on various levels. The three key events before 2014 (Kargil 1999, 2001-02 standoff, Mumbai 2008) were viewed as extraordinary events that needed to be resolved on a diplomatic level. Such occurrences (Uri 2016, Pulwama-Balakot 2019, Galwan 2020) that happened post-2014 have become the order of the day within bilateral relations. The fact that the export of minimal arms was changed into the 23rd world position indicates a strategic change of defensive to power projection positions. Export of arms generates dependencies and influence networks that stretch the Indian strategic presence and may destabilize recipient areas due to the arms race (Ganguly, 2025). Escalatory tensions arising out of rhetorical shifts between diplomatic language to routine threats of surgical strikes and military action make crisis management even

Rise of Far Right Nationalism in India and its impact on Arms Control

more challenging. War rhetoric being normalized as part of political talk removes the space of face-saving compromises that allow de-escalation to occur on a crisis.

Category	Pre-BJP Era (Before 2014)	Post-BJP Era (2014–Present)	Impact Assessment
Military Modernization	Gradual, strategic upgrades; conventional deterrence focus	Rapid induction: Rafale, S-400, Agni-V MIRVs, hypersonic weapons, AI warfare	Heightened arms race with Pakistan
Defense Budget	~\$46 billion (2013-14), steady growth aligned with economy	\$86.1 billion (2024-25), 85% increase, 2.3% GDP	Regional insecurity due to disproportionate spending
Border Management	3 major incidents with international mediation	Systematic militarization, multiple ongoing friction points	Crisis normalization, CBM breakdown
Arms Trade	Minimal exports, below 40th globally	23rd largest exporter, \$2.8B annually	Regional dominance perceptions trigger rival responses
Crisis Rhetoric	Diplomatic language, restraint emphasis	Regular military action threats, inflammatory discourse	Escalatory postures, deterrence instability

Source: Made by researcher

Impact on Arms Control

The rise of far-right politics and nationalistic populism all over the world has significantly undermined the process of negotiating, implementing, and sustaining arms-control structures. Far right movements anticipate national sovereignty, military strength and civilizational identity and are at the same time skeptical of multilateral institutions. Successful arms-control agreements require that external constrain, information is shared with the adversaries and that technical verification. As a result, the political support of the arms-control regimes has weakened while the technological and geopolitical trends are pushing the states towards the sophisticated military capacities (Risse, 2024).

The nationalist leaders consider the multilateral treaties as unfair deals struck by feeble or naive predecessors. The Trump administration pulled out of the INF Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in the United States and has doubted the usefulness of The New START Treaty on multiple occasions. A notably nationalist and revisionist leadership in Russia has not only become alienated to or materially undermined major treaties including CFE Treaty, but has practically withdrawn its involvement in New START. These trends can be found throughout the world, with right-wing parties in the country posing arms-control as limiting their security and accusing enemies of cheating. Such destabilization of the legal framework that previously placed foreseeable

capping and openness on both nuclear and conventional arsenals is damaging to the wholeness of the international arms-control framework (Kimball, 2025).

The second trend that can be identified is the use of threat narratives and militarized identity in national politics. Far-right projects often organize their support by exaggerating both external and internal enemy, migrants, minorities, or rival states, or even their civilizational enemies. In line with this, the security policy has been overly tilted towards the overt show of determination, such as military displays, nuclear discourses, trans-boundary strikes, and consistent military innovation. Anything that is aimed at restraint or compromise is redefined as the appeasement, surrender, or national betrayal. This reasoning has been evident in the nuclear posturing in the Russian war in Ukraine, India in several domestic arguments. In this scenario, the leaders experience asymmetric political costs: the consequences of signing agreements are more severe than the rejection (Lee, 2024).

Third, far-right populism often undermines the expert and institutional infrastructure, which are fundamental for arms-control. Populist discourses that categorize actors as diplomats, scientists, and international organizations and inspections teams as globalists, anti-national, or part of an ill-meaning deep state minimize the extent to which the state can engage in complex, technocratic collaboration with its opponent and likeminded state. The activities of research institutes and non-governmental organizations, which facilitate disarmament or confidence-building, were reduced organizations funded by foreign sources face legal and political challenges. As a result, track-II and track-1.5 systems that tend to foster new ideas of arms-control and pre-condition formal talks are undermined (Meier & Vieluf, 2021).

The emergence of far-right/Hindu nationalism in India, under Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and has altered the political environment within which arms-control and strategic stability are discussed in South Asia. Ideological environment and political motivation offered by the Hindu nationalism has made formal arms control and even small-scale confidence-building measures much more difficult (Meier & Vieluf, 2021).

The nuclear tests of 1998 and the doctrine of 2003, based on no-first-use, credible minimum deterrence and massive retaliation, were initially put in terms of strategic restraint. Since 2014, in Hindu-nationalist administrations, senior leaders have regularly urged a re-evaluation of the doctrine and senior officials and party figures publicly doubted the unconditional character of no-first-use. The ambiguity is created by statements of keeping options open with respect to Pakistan and deliberations in the stratagem circles of India on counterforce options. Such rhetoric has the effect of destabilizing previous clarity even in the absence of an official change in doctrine and is understood as a move by Islamabad as a move to a more combative stance, making the negotiated restrictions on arsenals or doctrines less credible and viable (Akram & Mir, 2025).

Hindu nationalist politics have also nurtured a shift off a culture of strategic moderation to a culture of conspicuous, retaliatory military intervention in the

nuclear shadow. The Uri surgical strikes of 2016 and the airstrikes of Balakot of 2019 were presented domestically as examples of a new, muscular India that was willing to cross the Line of Control and, in some cases, international borders despite the risk of nuclear retaliation. These measures are well-received in nationalist party but narrow the political spectrum to negotiate and engage in arms-control efforts with Pakistan, which can be labeled either appeasement or weakness. India and Pakistan still maintain some more antique forms of confidence building, including yearly nuclear facilities lists, and advance notice of particular missile tests, but since the mid-2010s, New Delhi has been less than keen on any new bilateral restraint, joint nuclear risk-reduction measures, or any renewed comprehensive peace process that may include embed arms-control (Kaura, 2020).

Domestic political environment after the rise of BJP has diminished constituencies, which have been traditionally favorable to arms-control and conflict management. Media discourses focus on hardness, revenge, and the warmongering. Whereas opinions of the opposition are often judged as anti-national. Traditionally in track-II, transnational civil-society played a leading role in arms-control, and confidence building. However, in contemporary environment, it is difficult to maintain fundraising, overcome the mistrust created by media where arms control were considered as weakness and national humiliation to national security (Akram & Mir, 2025).

The modernization of the strategic and conventional forces and procurement of advance systems like Rafale fighter jets, S-400 air defences, long-range precision missiles, cruise missiles, submarines and an expanding nuclear triad are positioned as needed to protect a swelling Hindu dominated nation against Pakistan. Spending on ballistic missile defence and in MIRV's, Anti-Satellite or canisterised missiles also makes the calculations of the enemy more complicated. This makes it harder to negotiate on arms control as such actions make New Delhi consider China as its opponent exceeding Pakistan as non-negotiable. These series of actions and reactions undermine the prospects of arms control in the region (Jaspal, 2023). Hindu-nationalist regimes have undercut the traditional Indian position on disarmament to maintain the status quo. India still officially advocates the disarmament of the world nuclear arsenal, yet the involvement in export-control coalitions and the inclusion into the Western technological circles is more important than the new limitations. It is not a signatory to the NPT or the CTBT, and not seriously interested in the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and is a cautious negotiator on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. This in South Asia translates to the lack of Indian efforts towards a regional fissile-material cap, a nuclear-weapon-free South Asia, or strong verification regimes such efforts that would be politically hard to sell back home in an nationalistic environment (Kazi, 2024).

In general, India has become more aggressive as a result of the rise of far-right/Hindu nationalism, which is less willing to abide by restraints on arms-

control and risk-reduction. The mechanisms of confidence building that still exist are basically maintained by inertia, but there are no new arms-control measures or more entrenched institutional restraints, and nuclear and conventional capabilities on all sides are becoming more sophisticated. What has emerged is a South-Asian security environment where the arms race accelerates, there has been ambiguity of doctrines and it has been marked with high levels of crisis instability with little political incentive particularly in the current ideological environment in India to turn the tide around (Sunandi, 2024).

Conclusion

The rise of far-right Hindu nationalism in India has fundamentally altered the South Asian security discourse since 2014. The BJP's ideological orientation has driven arms races, weakening of confidence-building, and an escalation of regional rivalry to levels that cannot be primarily attributed to external threat development alone. The empirical data on various indicators, including rise in defense expenditures by 85%, the acquisition of advanced weapons at a steady pace, systematic breakdown of the policy of No-first use policy, a geopolitical rebalancing towards alliances with the US, and the transformation of the media discourse, all show consistent trends of militarization and confrontation, which are products of hyper nationalism, not strategic necessity.

The identification of military power with civilizational revitalization, securitization of electoral politics to mobilize domestically, and the characterization of strategic forbearance as a sign of weakness which accompany Hindutva nationalism have resulted in the development of political incentives in a systematic manner favoring military responses to diplomatic involvement. As Akram and Mir argued, that domestic political trends in India now have solidified into the most significant hindrance in the development of viable arms control regimes in South Asia. The implication of this on the regional stability is much further than South Asia and has the potential to cause a threat on the security of the world. With nuclear weapons on both sides, 1.8 billion potential victims, and climate change increasing the regional strains, there is literally a civilizational gamble being played. The disintegration of crisis communication systems, legitimization of military conflict, and lack of efficient arms control generate never before seen dangers of nuclear conflict in the most densely populated part of the world.

The global community cannot afford to perceive this as a regional conflict that does not need much focus. The lack of confidence building measures domestic politics incentives to escalate have made the situation dangerous international community must intervene through mediation, economic incentives and diplomatic coercion to give peace a chance. The Indian is an example of how regional and global security can be devastated by domestic ideology that is based on inconsistent strategic reasoning. The dilemma that confronts South Asia and the international community is whether to undertake basic course correction towards

pragmatic arms control and international engagement or remain on the path of nuclear disaster fueled by internal political motivation, which is oriented to a short-term electoral objective as opposed to long-term survival. This study illustrates that the path of confrontation is not only unavoidable, but also not a strategic step to follow and thus intervention is possible as well as much needed.

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