



CENTRE for AEROSPACE & SECURITY STUDIES

**Dynamics of Sabre-rattling in
Indian Electoral Politics
and Future Trends**

Shaza Arif

Research Associate, National Security

Working Paper

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AIR MARSHAL JAVAID AHMED (RETD)

Edited by:

SARAH SIDDIQ ANEEL

Layout

HIRA MUMTAZ

All correspondence pertaining to this publication should be addressed to CASS, through post or email at the following address:

Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies

☎ +92 051 5405011

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✉ cass.thinkers@casstt.com

🏢 Centre for Aerospace
& Security Studies

Old Airport Road, Islamabad, Pakistan
www.casstt.com



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
Sabre-Rattling: Past Trends.....	3
Analysing India’s Pre-election Environment.....	9
Future Scenarios	15
Discussion.....	17
Recommendations.....	18
Conclusion	21

Abstract

The history of Pakistan and India is marred with enduring rivalry. In the last seven decades, the two neighbours have been embroiled in full-fledged wars and limited conflicts. With a Hindutva-inspired regime in power for nearly a decade, an aggressive anti-Pakistan narrative has been a key facet of its policy framework. The findings of this research reveal that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) benefits from this anti-Pakistan narrative and military adventurism. These activities help flare up nationalist sentiments, divert attention from critical domestic issues and materialise into favourable outcomes in elections. With General Elections in India in 2024, there is an increased likelihood that the Indian leadership may seek to leverage its political standing by taking military action aimed at Pakistan as it has done in the past. These manoeuvres could significantly undermine future bilateral relations and threaten regional stability. In such a context, Pakistan must remain cognizant of these trends and be prepared to address any threats that may arise due to aggressive Indian behaviour.

Keywords: BJP Electoral Strategy, Indian Elections, Anti-Pakistan Narrative, Electoral Politics, Military Preparedness, India-Pakistan Relations.

Introduction

India-Pakistan relations, marked by persistent rivalry, have remained central to the regional discourse.¹ Historical conflicts, geopolitical tensions and lack of trust have hampered peace between the two states.² In recent years, relations have seen a new low, notably due to the aerial encounter on 27 February 2019 and the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A in August 2019, which further strained bilateral relations.³

Anti-Pakistan narratives occupy a central place in Indian elections.⁴ In fact, analysts have observed that sabre-rattling in particular right before elections has proven to help manage polls.⁵ The strategy is a calculated one embedded in nationalist and populist appeals, which unifies the voters under a single banner of perceived threats and national defence. In the current Indian sociopolitical climate, characterised by heightened nationalism, the regime finds an optimal environment to perpetuate its practice of sabre-rattling against Pakistan.

With polls scheduled in Lok Sabha (lower house) and Rajya Sabha (upper house), it becomes imperative to contextualise Indian strategies vis-à-vis Pakistan in the General Elections and beyond. The *Working Paper* aims to explore the strategies of Indian political parties to win elections using sabre-rattling and infer future scenarios that could materialise in the upcoming elections. It aims to highlight the underlying reasons at the domestic level that compels the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to project Pakistan as one of the prominent and central themes in its electoral campaign. The paper will briefly discuss the implications of such aggressive strategies; and conclude by proposing policy recommendations for Pakistan in view of aggressive Indian propaganda and hybrid activities.

The study is qualitative and secondary. Data has been gathered using books, journal articles, reports, newspaper articles as well as news and government websites. Data has been analysed using thematic analysis. It also uses scenario mapping to predict

¹ Muhammad Sajjad Malik, "Pakistan-India Relations: An Analytical Perspective of Peace Efforts," *Strategic Studies* 39, no.1 (2019): 59-76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48544288>.

² Stephan Cohen, *Shooting for a Century: The India-Pakistan Conundrum* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 58.

³ Nimra Sajjad, Sara Batool and Tajjalla Munir, "Foreign Policy of India towards Pakistan: A Critical Analysis of BJP's Era," *Global Foreign Policies Review* 4, no.3 (2021): 9-20, [https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2021\(IVIII\).02](https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2021(IVIII).02).

⁴ Sadia Tasleem, "Internal Drivers – The Nexus Between Domestic Politics and Bilateral Relations: Exploring India-Pakistan, Pakistan-China, and China-India Dynamics," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 5, no.2 (2022): 315-355, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25751654.2022.2158705>.

⁵ Naeem Salik "Nuclear Signalling during the Pulwama – Balakot Crisis 2019," *Islamabad Papers*, no.7 (2019): 1-23.

Indian military adventures against Pakistan before General Elections. The research opens up new avenues for future exploration of how elections, military adventurism, and media interact in the context of India and Pakistan.

Sabre-Rattling: Past Trends

The relationship between India and Pakistan, particularly in the military context, has been complicated ever since the Partition of 1947.⁶ Moreover, the introduction of nuclear weapons in 1998 added a new dimension to this complex relationship, moderating the frequency and intensity of military adventures via establishment of nuclear deterrence.⁷

Despite the presence of nuclear weapons, the two states often get embroiled in limited conflicts which tends to amplify existing tensions. Tensions have been further aggravated in the presence of a Hindutva-inspired regime under the BJP, which shows an inclination to fuel animosity. This regime has explored different domains to intensify the narrative against Pakistan and garner domestic support. Amongst other factors towards this end, aggressive posturing and sabre-rattling against Pakistan has been on an upward trajectory by the Indian military, BJP's political government and its patronage under the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).⁸

One prominent example of how sabre-rattling helps the incumbent government was the rhetoric that followed the Mumbai attack in 2008. The Mumbai attacks comprised a series of attacks on different locations in India including the Taj Hotel, Oberoi Hotel, Central train station and other popular sites killing around 172 individuals.⁹ The blame of the attacks was pinned on Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) with alleged ties to Pakistan.¹⁰ The Mumbai attack marked another chapter aimed at increasing tensions between India and Pakistan, benefiting electoral gains for incumbent governments.¹¹ Although

⁶ Fahad Ahmed, "Pakistan-India Relations: A Critical Appraisal of Power Politics," *Strategic Studies* 42, no.2 (2022): 54-71, https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Fahad_Ahmed_Misson_Vol_2_2023.pdf.

⁷ Abdul Wadood, Faisal Khan and Aziz Ahmed, "The Efficacy of Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: A Case Study of Pakistan and India," *Pakistan Social Science Review* 4, no. 2 (2020):751-762, <https://pssr.org.pk/issues/v4/2/the-efficacy-of-nuclear-deterrence-in-south-asia-a-case-study-of-pakistan-and-india.pdf>.

⁸ Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, *Indian Electoral Politics: Unpacking India's Pre-Poll Dynamics & Implications for Region*, report (Islamabad: Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies 2023), 10, <https://casstt.com/indian-electoral-politics-unpacking-indias-pre-poll-dynamics/>.

⁹ Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis: US Crisis Management after the 2008 Mumbai Attacks*, report (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Centre, 2012).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, *Indian Electoral Politics*.

BJP highlighted the counterterrorism issue from time to time vis-à-vis Mumbai attacks, it did not actively take up the matter in its electoral campaign.¹² According to media sources, the electoral victory of Congress was also surprising for the BJP.¹³ As per one of its MPs, BJP lacked a leader who was able to channel the public's anger.¹⁴ Hence, a combination of BJP not taking up the matter actively and the absence of a nationalist leader contributed to Congress's victory.

This changed when Narendra Modi took up leadership of the BJP and weaponised elections in India to a considerable extent.¹⁵ If recent patterns are analysed, aggressive statements and threat of military actions have helped this party bolster its public support by provoking anti-Pakistan¹⁶ and more recently, anti-Muslim Islamophobic rhetoric¹⁷ and prevail in elections. In 2014, the BJP intensified its rhetoric with a stronger anti-Pakistan narrative.¹⁸ At that time, the BJP's criticism was confined to verbal speeches, as the party lacked the power and capacity to utilise or exploit state machinery, not being in government. Nonetheless, it baselessly targeted Pakistan, blaming it for terrorism.¹⁹ Moreover, it repeatedly advocated for an aggressive military posture against Pakistan.²⁰ The 2014 election results favoured the BJP and augmented Modi's political stature.²¹

While Congress also employs anti-Pakistan narrative, their *modus operandi* is considerably different.²² The party relies more on diplomatic engagements to build its

¹² Sebastian Schwecke, "2009 General Elections in India: The Bharatiya Janata Party and its Prospects," *Heinrich Boll Stiftung*, April 20, 2009, <https://www.boell.de/en/democracy/asia-6571.html>.

¹³ Shaswati Das, Abhiram Ghadyalpatil and Elizabeth Roche, "Remembrance of Things Past: The Three Nights that Redefined Us," *Mint*, November 26, 2018, <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/pGPABW5DnDwPhuimtqmTL/Mumbai-terror-attacks-2611-anniversary-2008-mumbai-attacks.html>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Thomas Carothers, Andrew O' Donohue, Ahilan Kadirmagar, Paul Kenny et al. *Political Polarization in South and Southeast Asia: Old Divisions, New Dangers*, report (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), 2, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Political_Polarization_RPT_FINAL1.pdf.

¹⁶ Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, *Indian Electoral Politics*.

¹⁷ Apoorvanand, "Modi wants to Turn India's Election into a Hindu-Muslim War. And the Election Commission of India is Allowing it," *Al Jazeera*, April 24, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/4/24/modi-wants-to-turn-the-election-into-a-hindu-muslim-war>.

¹⁸ Raja Qaiser Ahmed, *Pakistan Factor and the Competing Perspectives in India* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 104.

¹⁹ Nikhil Rampal, "How PM Modi's Speeches Have Shifted Focus," *Times of India*, April 19, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/lok-sabha-2019/story/narendra-modi-speeches-lok-sabha-elections-1512995-2019-04-29>.

²⁰ Ahmed, *Pakistan Factor and the Competing Perspectives in India*, 104.

²¹ Ashok Sharma, "India Votes: A Modi Landslide," *New Zealand International Review* 39, no.4 (2014): 2-5.

²² Ahmed, *Pakistan Factor and the Competing Perspectives in India*, 90.

anti-Pakistan narrative, whereas BJP uses impulsive techniques to whip up a populist and sensational stance against Pakistan.²³

In September 2016, India claimed that it executed surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LoC) on the pretext of terrorist infiltration - the claim was subsequently dismissed by Pakistan.²⁴ State elections were scheduled shortly afterwards in Punjab, Goa, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur and Gujarat, respectively.²⁵ Apart from Punjab, which was won by the Indian National Congress (INC), the remaining polls were swept by BJP, which had decisive victories in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and was able to form governments with small coalitions in Goa, Uttar Pradesh and Manipur.²⁶

In the months leading up to the 2019 General Elections, India executed the so-called 'Balakot Strikes' to reinforce their anti-Pakistan narrative.²⁷ The pretext behind the act was the Pulwama incident, which led to the death of 40 Indian soldiers. India falsely claimed to destroy terrorist camps as a result of the strike.²⁸ The Balakot strike was clearly an attempt to sabotage the elections and present a nationalist image to the Indian public.²⁹ Nevertheless, New Delhi's aggression was met with a very befitting response by the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) on 27 February 2019.³⁰

Despite the humiliation faced by the Indian side, the so-called 'Balakot Strike' helped generate nationalist fervour and became a significant talking point during the 2019 election campaign.³¹ During one rally in Maharashtra, Prime Minister Modi urged first time voters to dedicate their first ballot to Balakot to 'honour' the services of the Indian

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Surgical Strikes: Pakistan Rejects India's Claims," *Al Jazeera*, September 30, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/9/30/surgical-strikes-pakistan-rejects-indias-claims>.

²⁵ Vibha Attri and Himanshu Bhattacharya, "Assembly Elections 2017-2018," *Studies in Indian Politics* 7, no.1 (2019): 100-129, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2321023019838879>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Adil Sultan, "Pulwama-Balakot Crisis: The Evolving Strategic Discourse in South Asia," *Pakistan Politico*, April 5, 2019, <https://pakistanpolitico.com/pulwama-balakot-crisis-the-evolving-strategic-discourse-in-south-asia/>.

²⁸ "India-Pakistan Tensions: All the Latest Updates," *Al Jazeera*, March 10, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/3/10/india-pakistan-tensions-all-the-latest-updates>.

²⁹ Salik "Nuclear Signalling during the Pulwama," 17.

³⁰ Pakistan Air Force, "PAF Response on 27 February against Enemy's Aggression will be Remembered in History as 'Operation Swift Retort'," press release, May 1, 2019, https://www.paf.gov.pk/public/press_release/uploaded/news/3f6009f20ad3ffad51576d43684068ff.pdf.

³¹ Abhiram Ghadyalpatil, "Why Modi Continues to Invoke Pakistan, Balakot Strikes in Poll Rallies," *Mint*, April 23, 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/elections/lok-sabha-elections/modi-s-penchant-for-invoking-pakistan-in-the-high-stakes-elections-1555905008851.html>.

Armed Forces.³² This appeal effectively stirred up nationalistic sentiments. Although, the Indian Election Commission has established that the Indian Defence Forces must not be used in political campaigns of contending parties, yet the BJP has gotten away with it - multiple times.³³

The nationalist rhetoric employed by Modi, especially following the Balakot incident, significantly boosted his popularity. He was portrayed as the 'indispensable defender of the country,' further solidifying his public image.³⁴ As per opinion polls conducted by *India Today*, Modi's popularity rating stood at 48% in January and rose to 52% in March 2019.³⁵ The figure reached 35% in January and witnessed a slight decline in March (33%). Despite the slight decline in these months, Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi's popularity rose considerably from 10% back in 2017.³⁶

As per a survey conducted by Lokniti, the Balakot incident was identified as one of the three factors that could have altered the dynamics of what would have been a close election.³⁷ Resultantly, BJP had a mega victory in the 2019 elections - surpassing its margin of 2014.³⁸

It is to be noted that in Pathankot and Pulwama, the blame was pinned on Pakistan, shortly after the attack.³⁹ The claim of a 'surgical strike', although fake, augured well within India. When they actually went ahead with the military operation in 2019, it resonated increasingly well with the Indian audience. Hence, the regime shifted from

³² Editorial, "Dedicate your Vote to Men Killed in Balakot Airstrike: PM Modi to First-time Voters," *India Today*, April 9, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/story/balakot-pulwana-army-soldier-young-voters-right-to-vote-1497995-2019-04-09>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jug Suraiya, "The Balakot Air Strike Has Helped PM Modi Get His Poll Mojo Back After Recent Electoral Losses," *Times of India*, February 27, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/jugglebandhi/the-balakot-air-strike-has-helped-pm-modi-get-his-poll-mojo-back-after-recent-electoral-losses/>.

³⁵ Harmeet Shah Singh, "PM Modi's Stocks Up, Rahul Gandhi Lagging 1 Month Before Lok Sabha Elections, Finds PSE: Poll," *India Today*, March 10, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/lok-sabha-2019/story/pm-modi-s-stocks-up-rahul-gandhi-lagging-1-month-before-lok-sabha-elections-finds-pse-poll-1474818-2019-03-10>.

³⁶ Promit Mukherjee, "PM Modi's Popularity at all-time Low; Rival Rahul Gandhi Closing in: Poll," *Reuters*, January 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN1PJ1UL/>.

³⁷ "Balakot Air Strike, 10% Quota and Farmers' Scheme Gave Modi Govt a Boost: Survey," *Hindu*, April 4, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha-2019/higher-support-for-modi-government-following-recent-decisions-survey/article26735746.ece>.

³⁸ Albright Stone Bridge Group, "India Elections: Modi Returns to Power with a Historic Win," May 24, 2019, <https://www.albrightstonebridge.com/files/ASG%20Analysis%20%20India%20Elections%205.24.19.pdf>.

³⁹ Sajjad, Batool and Munir, "Foreign Policy of India towards Pakistan: A Critical Analysis of BJP's Era."

verbal attacks, followed by a fake strike to actual military employment, establishing a potential trend that could be observed or repeated in the future.

There are several key states with a significant number of Lok Sabha seats, which have a notable impact on the overall election outcome. The list includes Uttar Pradesh (80 seats), Maharashtra (48 seats) as the top states.⁴⁰ This is followed by West Bengal (42 seats), Andhra Pradesh (42 seats) Bihar (40 seats) and Tamil Nadu (39 seats).⁴¹ Likewise, Madhya Pradesh (29 seats), Karnataka (28 seats) and Gujarat (26 seats) also have a sizeable number of seats.⁴² Table 1 analyses the trend of Indian election outcomes in key states:

Table I: Breakdown of Results in Key States - 2014 and 2019 Indian General Elections

Year	Pre- Election Strategy	Election Outcome	
		Won by INC / Regional Parties	Won by INC / Regional Parties
2014 General Elections	Verbal Assault on Pakistan	Andhra Pradesh Bihar Gujarat Karnataka Maharashtra Madhya Pradesh Uttar Pradesh	Tamil Nadu, West Bengal
2019 General Elections	Balakot Strike	Bihar Gujarat Karnataka Maharashtra Madhya Pradesh Uttar Pradesh	Andhra Pradesh Tamil Nado West Bengal

Source: Author's own compilation.

⁴⁰ Ministry of External Affairs, "State/UT Wise Seats in the Lok Sabha," Government of India, https://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/19167_State_wise_seats_in_Lok_Sabha_18-03-2009.pdf [Accessed December 17, 2023].

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

Table I illustrates that election outcomes in key Indian states favoured BJP following an aggressive posture against Pakistan. It also shows use of verbal assaults as a tool of sabre-rattling to favourably influence election outcome.

Table II: Breakdown of Results - 2017 State Elections

This table gives the general breakdown of the 2017 State Elections:

Year	Pre- Election Strategy	Election Outcome		
		Won by BJP	Won by BJP (Government established with Coalitions)	Won by INC
2017 State Elections	Claim of Surgical Strike across LoC	Gujarat Himachal Pradesh Uttarakhand	Goa Uttar Pradesh Manipur	Punjab

Source: Author's own compilation.

Table II presents the electoral results of the 2017 State Election, which favoured the BJP following their claims of a surgical strike.

It is pertinent to mention that India has not undertaken another military adventure in Pakistan of a similar scale in the aftermath of the Pakistani response after Balakot. However, it has demonstrated its intent to enhance its capabilities and arsenal by acquiring new weaponry.⁴³ Hence, a similar military act could be employed against Pakistan by the BJP regime to increase its voter base.

In May 2023, the annual threat assessment report by the US Director of National Intelligence⁴⁴ highlighted concerns about a potential Indian attack under the pretext of retaliation against a terrorist strike from Pakistan. The report emphasised the risk of an 'escalatory cycle between two nuclear-armed states.'⁴⁵ In June 2023, the Indian Army killed two Pakistani civilians in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir.⁴⁶ It is

⁴³ Dost Muhammad Barrech and Arhama Siddiq, "Indian Military Modernization under Modi's Regime," *Balochistan Think Tank Network Journal* 1, no.1 (2022): 1-16, https://btttn.org.pk/ojs/index.php/BTTN_Journal/article/view/11.

⁴⁴ Anwar Iqbal, "Kashmir Still Seen as 'Potential Flashpoint' for India-Pakistan Conflict," *Dawn*, March 11, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1741527>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Diane Craft, "Pakistan Army Says Two Civilians Killed by Indian Forces," *Reuters*, June 24, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-army-says-two-civilians-killed-by-indian-forces-2023->

pertinent to mention that the 2003 ceasefire agreement was reaffirmed in February 2021.⁴⁷ The Indian Army did not respond to the request for a comment on the matter.⁴⁸ Hence, even months before the election year, the regime began its notorious activities at the expense of innocent Pakistani citizens.

Analysing India's Pre-election Environment

With elections currently underway in India, it becomes crucial to analyse the political landscape and the challenges facing the incumbent government. Although the contest may currently favour the BJP regime, several factors could influence the electoral environment moving forward:

a) Political Landscape

Prime Minister Modi is the most popular leader in India and the BJP has also performed fairly well in the recent state elections conducted in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, and Mizoram in November 2023.⁴⁹ Due to their proximity to the General Elections, the state elections were met with considerable excitement. The ruling party won three out of five state elections, creating the impression of a sweeping victory. This outcome is perceived as an indicator of what might be expected in the upcoming General Elections.⁵⁰ However, the results of General Elections can differ from those of state elections, as has been observed in past Indian elections.⁵¹ For example, in 2018, the INC won in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, yet just a few months later, it was the BJP that swept the General Elections.⁵² Interestingly, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan were

0624/#:~:text=ISLAMABAD%2C%20June%2024%20(Reuters),nuclear%2Darmed%20South%20Asian%20neighbours.

⁴⁷ Kamran Yousaf, "Two Martyred as India Breaches Feb 2021 LoC Truce," *Express Tribune*, June 24, 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2423398/two-martyred-as-india-breaches-feb-2021-loc-truce>.

⁴⁸ Craft, "Pakistan Army Says Two Civilians Killed by Indian Forces."

⁴⁹ India Today, "Election Results 2023," <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections> [Accessed November 22, 2023].

⁵⁰ YP Rajesh, Rupam Jain and Krishn Kaushik, "In Boost for Modi, BJP Sweeps Polls in Three Indian States," *Reuters*, December 3, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-ruling-bjp-leads-3-4-state-poll-results-tv-2023-12-03/>.

⁵¹ Bharat Bhushan, "State Election Victories Give Modi a Head Start for 2024," *Diplomat*, December 7, 2023, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2023/12/state-election-victories-give-modi-a-head-start-for-2024/>.

⁵² Data Team, "2023 Assembly Elections: In Three States, BJP Leads in 170 Seats held by Congress in 2018," *Hindu*, December 3, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/data/2023-assembly-elections-in-three-states-bjp-leads-in-168-seats-held-by-congress-in-2018/article67595129.ece>.

the same three states in which BJP had a victory in the state elections in 2003.⁵³ However, the General Elections were won by Congress.⁵⁴ This illustrates the distinct dynamics of the general and state elections. The latter are fought over regional or state-specific matters.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the former are influenced by national-level issues.⁵⁶ However, it is pertinent to mention that while state elections are largely influenced by local issues, mega events that trigger nationalist sentiments cannot be discounted and can impact the elections if a notable event occurs ahead of them. Moreover, the BJP's victory in northern India, where it already has a strong foothold vis-à-vis parliamentary seats does not guarantee the same results in other regions.⁵⁷ In this context, executing or even threatening military action against Pakistan can assist in reshaping the General Elections outcomes.

The formation of a new grand opposition alliance, known as the 'Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance' or 'INDIA', has introduced additional complexity to the country's political landscape.⁵⁸ Previously, the INC and other opposition parties were considerably weakened by fragmentation; they were competing not only against each other but also against the BJP, which led to a divided vote bank that favoured the BJP. In 2019, the BJP and its allies secured 45% of the total vote.⁵⁹ This figure shows that a significant portion of the Indian population holds different political preferences; and provides an opportunity for the Indian voters to opt for an alternative government as opposed to the BJP. Furthermore, the significance of regional parties cannot be overlooked, who are becoming increasingly popular due to a strong and dedicated voter base.⁶⁰ These parties identify well with the voters based on cultural, linguistic and ethnic lines.⁶¹ This growing popularity is evident in the political trajectory,

⁵³ Yashwant Deshmukh and Sutanu Guru, "Forget 2023, Even Lok Sabha 2024 Outcome Seems to be a Foregone Conclusion," *India Today*, December 18, 2023, <https://www.indiatoday.in/opinion/story/opinion-forget-2023-even-lok-sabha-2024-outcome-seems-to-be-a-foregone-conclusion-2471747-2023-12-04>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Soutik Biswas, "State Poll Results: Key Wins Boost Indian PM Modi's Re-election Bid," *BBC*, December 3, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-67605339>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Bhushan, "State Election Victories Give Modi a Head Start for 2024."

⁵⁸ "India's Opposition Parties to Jointly Contest 2024 Elections against Modi," *Al Jazeera*, September 1, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/1/indias-opposition-parties-to-jointly-contest-2024-elections-against-modi>.

⁵⁹ Milan Vaishnav, "Decoding India's 2024 Election Contest," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 7, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/12/07/decoding-india-s-2024-election-contest-pub-91178>.

⁶⁰ Pori Sayema Raiya, "Regional Political Parties in India: Origin, Past and Future," *Journal of Namibian Studies* 36, no.2 (2023): 11-23, <https://namibian-studies.com/index.php/JNS/article/view/4686/3284>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

e.g., of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), a prominent example of such regional influence. AAP's appeal among Delhi's electorate underscores the potential impact that well-aligned regional parties can have on national politics. However, the political landscape for AAP and its leaders has been tumultuous. The arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, a key figure in AAP highlights the challenges these parties face. This incident, which AAP has denounced as 'dirty politics', follows the arrests of two of Kejriwal's deputies.⁶² The fact that the main leaders of AAP are now incarcerated could either hinder their electoral momentum or galvanise their support base against what they perceive as political victimisation by the ruling government. Such developments could influence voter sentiment and electoral dynamics, especially if opposition parties can unify around a coherent strategy to leverage the situation. The ability of these parties to set aside internal differences and capitalise on public reaction to such incidents could be crucial in determining their effectiveness at the polls.

Moreover, the Congress Party emerged stronger in the 2022 elections with its victory in Himachal Pradesh, despite the state machinery.⁶³ In March 2023, the Congress party made significant inroads in Maharashtra by winning a seat in Kasba, a constituency that had been under BJP control for the last 28 years.⁶⁴ The BJP also suffered electoral setbacks in Karnataka in June the same year, and Telangana, with Congress making its way to Southern India.⁶⁵ These developments highlight the dynamic and uncertain nature of India's political scene, where outcomes remain unpredictable.

b) Economic Woes

The real-life challenges of ordinary citizens such as those pertaining to the economy also have the potential to impact India's electoral process. A key challenge in this regard is rising inflation with food prices reaching 11.51% in July last year.⁶⁶

⁶² "Indian Opposition Leader Arvind Kejriwal arrested over Corruption Claims," *Al Jazeera*, March 21, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/21/india-capitals-chief-minister-arrested-over-graft-probe-ahead-of-elections>.

⁶³ CNBC, "What led to Congress' Win in Himachal Pradesh Elections 2022? 6 Factors to Look At," December 8, 2022, <https://www.cnbc18.com/politics/what-led-to-congress-win-in-himachal-pradesh-elections-2022-bjp-aap-15378321.htm>.

⁶⁴ Editorial, "Maharashtra By Polls: Congress Wins BJP Stronghold Kasba Seat," *Mint*, March 2, 2023, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/maharashtra-bypolls-congress-wins-bjp-stronghold-kasba-seat-11677749581740.html>.

⁶⁵ K.M. Chandrasekhar, "Why 2024 is Going to be an Existential Fight for the INDIA Alliance," *Wire*, December 6, 2023, <https://thewire.in/politics/why-2024-is-going-to-be-an-existential-fight-for-the-india-alliance>.

⁶⁶ Aftab Ahmed and Nikunj Ohri, "India's Retail Inflation Surges on Food Prices in Challenge to Modi Government," *Reuters*, August 23, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/indias-retail-inflation-rises-15-month-high-food-prices-2023-08-14/>.

Moreover, rising prices of essential commodities such as gas cylinders and LPG have also disproportionately impacted low-earning groups to a large extent.⁶⁷ Furthermore, despite economic advancements under Prime Minister Modi, unemployment remains a challenge. The unemployment rate was relatively stable in India at 5.44% when the BJP government took over but has since spiked several times.⁶⁸ This particularly impacts young people entering the workforce and the voter bank. Additionally, a 2023 report by Oxfam revealed that the richest 5% of Indian citizens own 60% of the country's wealth, manifesting the level of existing inequality.⁶⁹

A new political group - the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance 'I.N.D.I.A' or 'INDIA' - has been advocating for a caste-based census around aimed at challenging the Hindutva-style politics of Modi by highlighting the internal disparities present in the country.⁷⁰ The first caste-based census was conducted in Bihar in 2023.⁷¹ It showed that the Extremely Backward Classes (EBC), with 112 castes, comprises the largest chunk of the population in the state, with a 36.01% share.⁷² However, India's marginalised castes face significant discrimination and are deliberately deprived of opportunities across various fields including education, media, business, and politics, with these opportunities often confined to certain castes.⁷³ If this issue gains momentum, it could play a considerable role in shaping the outcomes of future elections. In fact, an anti-incumbency sentiment may be brewing among certain voters who are seeking change after two consecutive terms under the BJP.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ "LPG Price Hike: Govt Increases Commercial Cylinder Rates," *Mint*, December 1, 2023, <https://www.livemint.com/market/lpg-price-hike-govt-increases-commercial-cylinder-rates-check-details-here-11701404846285.html>.

⁶⁸ Forbes India, "Unemployment Rate in India (2008 to 2024): Current Rate, Historical Trends and More," November 1, 2023, <https://www.forbesindia.com/article/explainers/unemployment-rate-in-india/87441/1>.

⁶⁹ Oxfam, *Survival of the Richest*, report (New Delhi: Oxfam India, 2023), 7, https://d1ns4ht6ytuzzo.cloudfront.net/oxfamdata/oxfamdatapublic/202301/India%20Supplement%202023_digital.pdf?kz3wav0jbhJdvkJ.fK1rj1k1_5ap9FhQ.

⁷⁰ Kunal Purohit, "How a Landmark Caste Census in India Threatens Modi's Grip on Power," *Al Jazeera*, October 4, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/4/how-a-landmark-caste-census-in-india-threatens-modis-grip-on-power>.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Editorial, "Bihar Caste Census Survey: 112 EBC Castes under Reserved Category," *Hindustan Times*, October 2, 2023, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/patna-news/bihar-caste-census-survey-112-ebc-castes-under-reserved-category-see-full-list-101696243258377.html>.

⁷³ Sayantani Biswas, "Bihar Caste Survey Reveals over One-Third Household Earns Less than ₹6,000 a Month," *Mint*, November 7, 2023, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/bihar-caste-survey-reveals-over-one-third-household-earns-less-than-rs-6-000-a-month-11699349648727.html>.

⁷⁴ UP Rajesh, "How Modi's BJP Seeks Muslim Vote in India's 2024 Election," November 10, 2023, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-hindu-nationalist-bjp-seeks-muslim-friends-2024-election-2023-11-10/>.

In this context, the BJP government would have to 'sell' a fresh narrative to engage the public and secure the premier seat for a third term.

c) Aggressive Statements from Indian Leadership

Alongside existing issues, aggressive statements from key leaders have been frequently observed. For example, in February 2021, RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat pushed the concept of 'Akhand Bharat' as an absolute reality, stressing that Pakistan would be merged into India as an integral part of this grand vision.⁷⁵ The Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, repeatedly asserts that the vision of 'Akhand Bharat' will become a reality.⁷⁶

Echoing this assertive stance, India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, while speaking at Pokhran, noted, 'It is true that till now, India has strictly adhered to the No First Use policy. What happens in future depends on the circumstances.' These statements together underscore a potentially aggressive posture in regional policy.⁷⁷ Such aggressive and bold statements from key political figures maintain the anti-Pakistan narrative at the forefront. This narrative often gains further validation through subsequent military actions by the Indian side, aligning rhetoric with real-world manoeuvres as discussed in the next section.

d) History of False Flag Operations against Pakistan

Before discussing potential scenarios, it is essential to briefly overview India's false flag operations against Pakistan. These operations involve deceptive acts carried out by one entity to falsely attribute blame to another, often to justify particular actions or manipulate public perception.⁷⁸

India has a history of conducting false flag operations, each with a specific objective. A prominent example is the 1971 Ganga Hijacking incident, where an Indian plane named Ganga was hijacked. This event served as a pretext to terminate the overflight

⁷⁵ Syed Ali Zia Jaffery and Rabia Akhtar, "Militarized Hindu Nationalism in India: Mapping the Future of Nuclear Nonuse in South Asia," *International Journal of Kashmir Studies* 5, no.1 (2023): 8-21, <http://ojs.kprijk.org/index.php/openjournalssystem/article/view/112/41>.

⁷⁶ Mayank Kumar, "India a 'Hindu Rashtra', 'Akhand Bharat' Will Come True, Says Yogi Adityanath," *Hindu*, February 16, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/india-a-hindu-rashtra-akhand-bharat-will-come-true-says-yogi-adityanath/article66512640.ece>.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Roche, "India's No First Use Policy May Change," *Mint*, August 16, 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-s-no-first-use-nuclear-policy-may-change-rajnath-singh-1565946292515.html>.

⁷⁸ Guru Dev Teeluckdharry, "False Flag Operations: Beyond the Spectre of Terrorism," *Advances in Applied Sociology* 12, no.5 (2022): 158-164, <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=117347>.

rights between the eastern and western wings of Pakistan.⁷⁹ In 2002, the Chittisinghpura Massacre occurred where the Sikh community was targeted in Anantnag and the blame was pinned on Pakistan ahead of US President Bill Clinton's visit to India. General Gill who was a member of the investigation team later revealed that the act was orchestrated by the Indian Army.⁸⁰

Similarly, analysts have pointed out that the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament was orchestrated by the Indian government itself to bolster counterterrorism legislation and secure additional funding.⁸¹ The 2008 Mumbai attacks marked another Indian attempt to malign Pakistan's image.⁸² The 2007 Samjhauta Express bombing, 2016 Pathankot air base attacks and Uri attack in the same year were also false flag operations with similar aims.⁸³ The 2019 Pulwama attack was yet another attempt to gain an electoral victory by the BJP by taking aim at Pakistan, even at the cost of Indian lives.⁸⁴

Hence, while the objectives might have changed over time, the means to achieve them have remained more or less the same. The occurrence of false flag operations raises expectations to respond militarily against the other side. In such scenarios, military options can help rally public support at the domestic level. Hence, there is a possibility that the Indian government might orchestrate more intense false flag operations as a pretext for military action against Pakistan. The current environment appears conducive for the regime to adopt a harsh narrative against Pakistan, thereby consolidating domestic support. Employing such tactics would also distract from more pressing domestic issues, such as unemployment, farmers' protests, inequitable growth,⁸⁵ and other critical concerns.

⁷⁹ Masud Ahmad Khan, "From False Flags to Surgical Strikes," *Nation*, November 1, 2021, <https://www.nation.com.pk/01-Nov-2021/from-false-flags-to-surgical-strikes>.

⁸⁰ News Desk, "Retired Lt Gen Says Indian Army was involved in Sikh Massacre of Chittisinghpura," *Free Press Kashmir*, March 20, 2018, <https://freepresskashmir.news/2018/03/20/watch-retired-lt-gen-says-indian-army-was-involved-in-sikh-massacre-of-chittisinghpura/>.

⁸¹ Saleem Qamar Butt, "A New Malicious Narrative," *Nation*, January 27, 2023, <https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Jan-2023/a-new-malicious-narrative>.

⁸² Khan, "From False Flags to Surgical Strikes."

⁸³ Reema Shaukat, "India's False Flag Operations," *Nation*, February 27, 2024, <https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Feb-2024/india-s-false-flag-operations>.

⁸⁴ Shaza Arif, "India's Dangerous Designs," *Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies*, July 28, 2021, <https://casstt.com/indias-dangerous-designs/>.

⁸⁵ Sukumar Muralidharan, "Indian Economy's 'K-shaped' Recovery shows the Rich are Thriving, while the Poor Struggle," *Frontline Magazine*, November 30, 2023, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/economy/lawless-capitalism-indian-economy-k-shaped-recovery-shows-the-rich-are-thriving-while-the-poor-struggle/article67569346.ece>.

Future Scenarios

As discussed in the paper, despite the popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it is uncertain how a joint opposition could impact election dynamics in India. This is relevant not only for the 2024 polls but also future Indian elections. Moreover, real-life challenges such as rising unemployment and increasing inequality among the Indian populace could further erode trust in the RSS-led BJP regime. Consequently, these circumstances often necessitate hawkish statements and sabre-rattling to amplify anti-Pakistan sentiments and bolster the BJP's position. Moreover, it is possible that such sabre-rattling could escalate into actual military engagement. Therefore, it is crucial to explore scenarios that might arise from these situations. The following section of the paper will discuss potential scenarios that could increasingly influence future Indian elections.

Scenario I: Increased Military Hostility in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJ&K)

Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJ&K) remains a perpetual flashpoint for both India and Pakistan. Given the sensitive nature of the issue, increased LoC provocations could materialise in the form of cross-border firing and limited use of artillery ahead of and during elections. The pretext for such increased military activity could be to counter terrorism, a claim often made by the Indian side without substantiation. These actions could maintain Jammu and Kashmir as a central issue in Indian politics, reinforcing the government's assertive stance and consolidating domestic support. Consequently, verbal attacks against Pakistan, accompanied by escalating military hostility in the Valley, are scenarios that could become more frequent and severe as Indian elections approach.

Scenario II: Expanding Military Strategy

The strategic utility of airpower, despite previous setbacks suffered by the Indian Air Force (such as during *Operation Swift Retort*), remains an important element of India's military capability. Reflecting on operations such as the Pulwama incident, there is a likelihood that state-managed military operations could be used to influence public opinion, especially ahead of key electoral events.

However, in broadening the scope of military options, the Indian military might not only consider air strikes but could also look to expand operations to include naval domains which have hitherto been less targeted. This would involve integrating naval assets in a concerted effort to project power, potentially including the deployment of naval air

capabilities such as maritime patrol aircraft and ship-borne helicopters capable of launching surface-to-sea or air-to-sea missiles. Such an expanded military strategy could serve multiple purposes. Attack helicopters and cruise missiles could remain essential in this broader strategy. These assets are particularly valuable for specific objectives such as operations in challenging terrains, personnel escort, and targeted strikes—capabilities that are crucial not only for the air force but also for enhancing the navy's operational flexibility. By extending military preparedness to the naval arena, the Indian government could send a robust message of deterrence and readiness, underlining the BJP regime's prioritisation of comprehensive national defence and security ahead of electoral considerations.

Scenario III: Military Build-up

Following the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001 and attack on security forces in 2002, Pakistan was accused by India of orchestrating these acts. This period was marked by heightened tensions and a state of readiness along the international border. It led to a massive deployment of troops along both the LoC and the international border.⁸⁶ Similarly, on the pretext of responding to aggression from Pakistan, increased deployment of troops and weaponry near the border region is a possibility. This could project the perception of a strong and prepared leadership. Moreover, major military announcements ahead of elections can also be a potential way to sway voters. These announcements can entail unveiling mega military projects, updates on the progress of indigenous defence technology and procurement of new military equipment. While military build-up has been a longstanding strategy even before the Cold Start Doctrine was implemented, the use of such tactics for coercion remains a viable option, especially given the conventional military asymmetry between Pakistan and India. Moreover, while the financial cost of this strategy is high, it has an advantage of being disguised as a military exercise. This strategy can resonate with voters who wish to see a robust defence build-up against Pakistan.

Scenario IV: Use of Emerging Technologies

Emerging technologies are proliferating rapidly in the region, with India and Pakistan both investing in drones, including armed and unarmed variants. These technologies could be deployed near the LoC to bolster an anti-Pakistan narrative. For example,

⁸⁶ Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*, report (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Centre, 2014), 14, https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/Twin_Peaks_Crisis.pdf.

autonomous armed drones might be used before elections under the guise of countering infiltration from Pakistan. Such actions can showcase technological superiority and active defence measures, portraying the BJP as a forward-thinking and assertive regime, while maintaining a confrontational stance towards Pakistan. In future scenarios, a wide array of emerging technologies such as autonomous systems, Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), space-based capabilities, and hypersonics might be employed. Additionally, advanced tactics like drone swarming could also be considered by India against Pakistan for future use.

Each of these scenarios demonstrates potential ways that military strategies could be employed against Pakistan. While India may continue to use traditional tactics, it is also likely to engage in hybrid warfare, which includes sustained disinformation campaigns facilitated by social and electronic media. The Indian media, known for amplifying government narratives, as seen in the aftermath of the Uri attacks, is expected to continue supporting these efforts.⁸⁷ The same hype was stirred after the Balakot incident.⁸⁸ Any future conflict between the two sides is also likely to follow the same pattern.

Discussion

Undoubtedly, the BJP enters the 2024 elections as a powerful entity. But, for Prime Minister Modi and his party, the path to victory may be more complex than anticipated. Challenges are likely to arise from the united opposition employing new strategies to weaken Narendra Modi's strong position in Indian politics. Additionally, the range of political, economic,⁸⁹ and social issues could further threaten the regime's stability. While the consolidation of opposition parties might not outright defeat the BJP, it could significantly reduce the party's current influence.

⁸⁷ Sushmita Pundit and Sayaan Chattopadhyay, "Coverage of the Surgical Strike on Television News in India," *Journalism Practice* 12, no.2 (2018): 162-176, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17512786.2017.1397529?needAccess=true>.

⁸⁸ Suchitra Vijayan and Vasundhara Sirmate Drennan, "After Pulwama, the Indian Media Proves it is the BJP's Propaganda Machine," *Washington Post*, March 4, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/03/04/after-pulwama-indian-media-proves-it-is-bjps-propaganda-machine/>.

⁸⁹ For example, Elon Musk going to China a week after cancelling a scheduled trip to India to meet Modi in April 2024 potentially signals changing strategic focuses in a global context, highlighting how corporate decisions can influence and be influenced by broader political and economic relationships.

As discussed in this paper, the portrayal of Pakistan as a significant security threat and the framing of aggressive responses are expected to greatly influence public sentiment in India. Therefore, Pakistan must be prepared for potential aggressive military actions from India, particularly in the context of the 2024 elections and future electoral events.

While such a strategy may be employed by Indian leadership to secure electoral victories, it poses serious implications for Pakistan. Relations between India and Pakistan are clearly deteriorating, with little hope for improvement in bilateral ties, regardless of which party governs India. Military posturing can diminish prospects for constructive engagement and exacerbate an already hostile environment, leading to a reduction in collaborative people-to-people activities. Moreover, these efforts to appease domestic constituencies could inadvertently escalate tensions, posing a significant risk to regional stability.

It is important to note that anti-Pakistan narrative has been a feature of previous Indian leadership as well. However, Prime Minister Modi and his party took this to a whole new level during his tenures. This narrative is likely to persist even after (and when) he leaves office, with Home Secretary Amit Shah and Yogi Adityanath frequently mentioned as his potential successors.⁹⁰ Both figures are known for their staunchly anti-Pakistan views. It is probable that, under their leadership, even more aggressive policies and narratives could be adopted than those during Modi's terms. Given their leadership styles and public engagement, these successors might pursue more perilous military actions against Pakistan. Consequently, the threshold for appeasing the Indian electorate could rise, necessitating increased aggression over time.

Recommendations

In the run-up to the 2024 elections, the BJP regime frequently engaged in sabre-rattling as part of its electoral strategy. It is likely that this approach will continue in future elections. Therefore, it is crucial for Pakistan to be prepared for the continuation of such practices and to be vigilant about the potential aggressive actions that might

⁹⁰ Sunil Gatade and Venkatesh Kesari, "Amit Shah or Yogi Adityanath? The Race for 'Number 2' in BJP," *Deccan Herald*, January 15, 2022, <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/amit-shah-or-yogi-adityanath-the-race-for-number-2-in-bjp-1071248.html>.

follow. The next section of this paper will discuss potential strategies that Pakistani policymakers could adopt in response to this looming threat.

a) Diplomatic Efforts

Pakistan needs to develop a coherent narrative both domestically and internationally to highlight the escalating hostility from India and its regional and global implications. Enhanced diplomatic efforts are essential to expose aggressive Indian manoeuvres. The likelihood of false flag operations as a precursor to military actions necessitates a revamp of Pakistan's diplomatic strategies to effectively address and denounce such incidents. Should a military conflict initiated by India arise, international platforms such as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and other relevant forums should be leveraged to lobby against increasing regional hostility and to augment international awareness and support. Additionally, engagement with human rights organisations is crucial to further these efforts.

b) Role of the Think tank Community

Think tanks in Pakistan can play a crucial role in addressing regional tensions. By utilising their research capabilities and expertise, these institutions can conduct comprehensive analyses of the patterns, underlying causes, and regional consequences of using aggressive military strategies for electoral gains. Furthermore, they are well-positioned to offer valuable policy recommendations. Additionally, Pakistani think tanks could organise seminars and conferences to facilitate dialogue among academia, policymakers, and military experts. Such gatherings can help shape public opinion and serve as platforms for diverse voices to discuss and refine broader national strategies.

c) Leveraging Social Media for Public Engagement and Information Integrity

Engaging the public effectively is crucial. A well-informed populace can significantly support the state's efforts both domestically and internationally. While digital media remains important, the rapidly growing influence of social media cannot be ignored. These platforms can be utilised swiftly and effectively to provide accurate updates to the public in the event of aggression from India. Moreover, social media serves as a powerful tool for fact-checking and countering misinformation that circulates online. Therefore, these platforms are essential for combating disinformation, which is often a component of sabre-rattling campaigns by opposing entities.

d) Mobilising the Pakistani Diaspora for Global Advocacy

In potential scenarios of conflict, it is crucial for Pakistan to actively engage its diaspora. Pakistani communities abroad can play a significant role in raising awareness about Indian aggression should military action be taken. Their involvement can extend across engaging with civil society groups, politicians, media outlets, and think tanks to influence international perspectives. This kind of activism is essential to ensure that Pakistan's viewpoint is effectively communicated and understood on the global stage.

e) Political Stability and Economic Security

Pakistan needs to address its internal challenges as well, especially political polarisation. Such division can hinder the ability to present any unified response, be it diplomatic or military. Therefore, building consensus, aiming to create a more cohesive internal environment that is better equipped to address external threats is vital. Addressing economic issues must also take precedence. A financially robust Pakistan would not only be better equipped to tackle its internal challenges but also more capable of managing external threats, including potential military misadventures from neighbouring regions. Prioritising inflation management and enhancing efforts to attract foreign investment are essential steps toward ensuring economic stability.

f) Military Preparedness

Given that the intensity of future Indian military actions may be severe, military preparedness should be Pakistan's top-most priority. Border security, in particular, needs to be strengthened to avoid incidents orchestrated by the Indian side that may later be used as a pretext for aggression.

In the potential scenario where airpower is employed, the role of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) would become critically significant. Therefore, the PAF must remain vigilant and ensure its effectiveness and readiness to counter any possible misadventures from the Indian side. This requires ongoing upgrades to its arsenal with the latest avionics and weaponry, enhanced surveillance systems, improved electronic warfare capabilities, and rigorous training. Moreover, the deployment of technologies such as UAVs and counter-UAV systems is becoming increasingly imperative. The continuous use of these technologies in modern warfare, as observed in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, underscores their importance. Hence, the adoption of newer technologies will be crucial in the future. Additionally, should any misadventure occur,

it will be imperative for domestic intelligence agencies to support diplomatic efforts by sharing intelligence with the diplomatic wing. This collaboration can enhance the effectiveness of diplomatic responses and contribute to more informed decision-making. Concurrently, maintaining readiness through military exercises can ensure a comprehensive stance that supports diplomatic initiatives, providing a balanced approach to national security.

Conclusion

This research underscores that the BJP leadership has consistently derived electoral benefits from adopting an anti-Pakistan narrative, a confrontational stance, and aggressive postures. Historical successes suggest that Indian leadership is likely to continue leveraging these strategies in future elections. It is reasonable to predict that Pakistan will remain a central theme in Indian electoral politics, potentially exacerbating tensions between the two nations.

The strategy of sabre-rattling, particularly around election times, is notably perilous as it risks escalating into military confrontations. Possible scenarios include increased military hostility in the Jammu and Kashmir region, limited air strikes, military build-ups along the border, and the deployment of emerging technologies. Such tactics not only fuel existing animosity but also pose significant risks of sparking actual military conflicts.

Given these potential outcomes, it is imperative for Pakistan to maintain high levels of military preparedness and ensure political and economic stability to withstand pressures. Public awareness must be heightened to understand the dynamics at play. Additionally, Pakistan needs to effectively utilise its diplomatic channels, think tank community, and global diaspora to steer through and mitigate these challenges. This multifaceted approach is essential for maintaining regional stability and safeguarding national interests in the face of heightened electoral sabre-rattling by India.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Shaza Arif serves as a Research Associate at the Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS) in Islamabad. She is also pursuing an MPhil in Public Management at Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, after having graduated with distinction in BSc (Hons) Defence and Diplomatic Studies from the same university.

Ms Arif's expertise spans National Security & Strategy, Defence Modernisation, Nuclear Security, and Artificial Intelligence. She has made her mark by participating in various international conferences and workshops, including those at Durban University of Technology in South Africa, Tsinghua University in China, and the Royal Scientific Society in Jordan. Furthermore, she has collaborated with the British American Security Information Council (BASIC) on the Nuclear Responsibilities Project and currently serves as a Board Member for BASIC's Emerging Voices Network (EVN). Her insights are frequently featured in both domestic and international newspapers and journals, underlining her contributions to her fields of study.

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