Norms, Indian Foreign Policy and the 1998–2004 National Democratic Alliance

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ABSTRACT How do national and political identities impact on a state’s foreign policy? In turn, how does the analysis of different normative beliefs advance our understanding of India’s foreign policy during the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) period? This article utilises a norm-based approach to investigate the composite entrenched beliefs underpinning Indian foreign policy. Such an approach generates historically contingent understandings of foreign policy beliefs across different political generations and ideologies. By focusing on pre-1998 Indian government and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) foreign policy norms, and comparing them with the actions of the BJP-led NDA in government, the paper assesses whether differing ideological beliefs either constrain or influence (Indian) foreign policy. In particular, two elements of Indian foreign policy are analysed—dealing with Pakistan and going nuclear—in order to evaluate continuity and change in the formation and development of foreign policy in India. It is found that although the BJP-led NDA were frequently constrained by underlying norms present in Indian foreign policy, their own established policy beliefs often challenged these norms and influenced new foreign policy directions.

KEY WORDS: India, foreign policy, norms, Bharatiya Janata Party, identity, Hindu nationalism, Hindu Rashtra, Hindutva, Pakistan, Kashmir, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Jana Sangh, Akhand Bharat, Non-Aligned Movement, Shimla Agreement

Introduction

How do national and political identities impact on a state’s foreign policy? How does the analysis of different normative beliefs advance our understanding of India’s foreign policy during the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) period? This article utilises a norm-based approach to investigate the composite entrenched beliefs underpinning Indian foreign policy. As such, it compares the different norms present within Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ideology before 1998 and those within Indian foreign policy from independence until 1998. It then uses this comparison to assess the impact of these norms on the foreign policy undertaken by the BJP-led NDA from 1998 to 2004. Based on the BJP’s avowed traditional political basis of a
‘militarized vision of a unified, politicized Hinduism’ (Bacchetta, 2000, p. 255), the paper focuses on two specific issues—relations with Pakistan and nuclear weapons—in order to isolate change and continuity in Indian foreign policy between the Congress-dominated regimes up to 1998 and the NDA from 1998 to 2004. The article finds that although the BJP-led NDA were frequently constrained by underlying norms present in Indian foreign policy, their own established policy beliefs often challenged these norms and influenced new foreign policy directions.

The article is split into three major sections. The next section locates the concept of norms within international relations before highlighting their saliency for carrying out an analysis over time and across political ideologies. In particular, the role of norms in regulating and constituting behaviour is noted, along with theoretical links to strategic culture. A norm-based approach is then used to analyse NDA policy from 1998 to 2004 concerning Pakistan (in the third section) and nuclear issues (in the fourth section). In both sections, a comparison is carried out between the foreign policy actions of the NDA and the dominant norms existing pre-1998 within both BJP policy and previous Indian government policy. The paper then concludes with an evaluation of carrying out a norm-based analysis and its utility for the study of (Indian) foreign policy.

Unveiling India’s ‘Flexible Rigidities’

As a causal force independent of material structures, ‘norms constitute social identities and give national interests their content and meaning’ (Adler, 2002, p. 103). Norms thus represent particular beliefs and preferences instilled through ingrained interaction. Moreover, norm development is cyclical, maintaining old precedents and mixing them with new experiences, while being inter-generational and formed over time. In these ways and by structuring practice, behaviour and interests, ‘norms, like genes, are instructional units’ (Florini, 1996, p. 364). Often focused on an analysis of discourse (from speeches, manifestoes and policy documents), norms have received significant coverage in international relations over the last 15 years—resulting in a diverse body of empirical research. This work has included analysing non-intervention, women’s suffrage and the laws of war (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Herrman and Shannon, 2001), as well as the Council of Europe, apartheid and collective security (Klotz, 1995; Cortell and Davis, 1996; Checkel, 1999). Commonly, these studies have emphasised ‘historical particularity’ (Donnelly, 1999, p. 80) by focusing on specific time periods and circumstances.

Norms themselves have many functions and can be regulative (ordering and constraining behaviour), constitutive (defining identities), evaluative (assessing behaviour) and prescriptive (regulating behaviour) (see Axelrod, 1986; Hopf, 2002, p. 173; Ruggie, 1998). This paper is concerned with the former two types—regulative and constitutive—in order to pinpoint change and continuity in Indian foreign policy. Essential to these understandings is that norms must be considered, as Dore notes, as ‘flexible rigidities’ (quoted in Katzenstein, 1996, p. 3). As such, norms represent continuous entrenched variables that are simultaneously open to change versus competing norms and new interactions. This theoretical basis provides the foundations for analysing different norms in the context of Indian foreign policy. Based on different normative beliefs—right-wing *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalism)
versus being primarily secular, socialist and religiously inclusive—we would expect to see contending approaches between the practice of the BJP-led NDA and Congress-led governments (Graham, 1990; Vanaik, 1997).

Several scholars have carried out normative investigations concerning the analysis of Indian foreign policy, often comparing Congress and BJP security policy. While highlighting differences between governments, few analysts are explicit as to the basis of that comparison, despite noting change (Misra, 2001; Chiriyankandath, 2004) or robustness (Chaulia, 2002) between regimes. Domestically, analysts have noted the NDA as being constrained by the ‘compulsions of politics’ (Hansen and Jaffrelot, 2001) and minority rights (Jayal, 2004). Again, however, such accounts have not isolated why such constraint (or indeed change) has occurred. A norm-based account provides such an explanation through its specific analysis and comparison of (competing) political identities. A criterion used by other analysts to measure norms helps us to achieve these aims. Thus, Legro (2000) highlights three measurement factors—specificity (how the norm is codified), durability (how long it has been in effect) and concordance (how widely accepted it is). In turn, Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, pp. 895–896) refer to actors who help with norm diffusion as norm agents. In this article, these actors can be regarded as India’s foreign policy community—made up of politicians, bureaucrats, analysts, academics and journalists.

This norm-based approach also acknowledges the influence of studies that have analysed strategic culture in India—nominally defined as ‘enduring beliefs and attitudes’ (Latham, 1998, p. 129). These have included investigating weapons of mass destruction (Lantis, 2006), proliferation (Latham, 1998), and the influence of Kautilya (Uz Zaman, 2006). Rather than looking at these largely external or system-level norms, this paper differs by focusing on the internal norms derived from the political ideologies of the BJP and Congress as solidified over time. Historically contingent, focusing on norms in this way also isolates how domestic factors link to (Indian) foreign policy in international relations. Concerning policy towards Pakistan, carrying out this analysis principally involves a comparison between BJP policy norms of cultural nationalism, protecting the Hindu Rashtra (Hindu polity or country) and restoring Akhand Bharat (Greater India), and Congress-dominated policy norms of tolerance, secularism and anti-communalism. On the nuclear issue, the comparison is primarily between BJP policy norms of realism, making India a global power and being pro-nuclear weapons, and Congress-dominated policy norms of idealism, non-alignment and nuclear ambiguity.

Dealing with Pakistan

When Congress gained political control of the new India in 1947, they impressed their ‘liberal, secularist, anti-communal and anti-violence’ (Kundra, 1956, p. 59) ideology upon the new state. In particular, secularism was a response to the potential for conflict ‘within a society marked by deep attachments to cultural identities’ (Jayal, 2001, p. 2) and contrasted with the religious-based state in the new Pakistan. Concurrently, there was a separation of state and religion in India (Nandy, 1988; Brass, 1998). The widespread communal violence that accompanied Partition underscored this prerogative, and then became territorially manifested in India and Pakistan’s conflict over the status of Kashmir, leading to mutual animosity between
the two sides (Jaffrelot, 2002; Bose, 2003). After a war in 1947–48, Kashmir was split, with Pakistan gaining two-thirds of its territory and India the rest.

Repeated efforts were made to resolve the Kashmir issue peacefully. These multilateral and bilateral attempts included the 1951 Dixon Plan, the Graham efforts (1953–58) and negotiations in October 1954. In 1949, 1953, 1956 and 1959 (and 1968 and 1969) India also offered Pakistan a no-war declaration (Bajpai, 1998, p. 168). Nevertheless, in August 1965 Pakistan started an insurrection in an effort to seize Kashmir from India. After a short conflict (including Indian advances into Pakistan), a UN ceasefire was reached and Kashmir’s continued shared status was manifested in the January 1966 Tashkent Declaration with each side moving back to pre-conflict positions. Clashes occurred again in 1971, this time in response to East Pakistani calls for the establishment of an independent ‘Bangla Desh’, with India training Bengali freedom fighters and sending in her troops to liberate East Pakistan. The consequent 1972 Shimla Agreement established a de facto border in Kashmir via the Line of Control (LoC) along post-1947 war lines. In these ways, the specific norm of conflict with Pakistan over Kashmir became more durable and ingrained with each successive conflict within Indian foreign policy outlooks, as did Kashmir’s split internal status.

Kashmir remained contested by India and Pakistan throughout the 1970s and 1980s, remaining as ‘a test of Indian state sovereignty, its capacity to protect its citizens, keep order and justify its territorial ownership’ (Khilnani, 1997, p. 31). This contestation increased during the 1990s as Pakistan aided the Kashmir insurgency that had emerged in 1989 (Cohen, 2001). Pakistan also became implicated in various acts of domestic terrorism in India. Repeated efforts at negotiation and some agreements by various Prime Ministers (most notably Rajiv Gandhi and I. K. Gujral) continued, often following conflicts and crises (Chari et al., 2008). Overall however, there were few tangible results. When negotiations were successful, they floundered because of further conflict or disagreement. By 1998, Indian diplomacy was regarded as representing ‘a combination of force, negotiations and indirection’ (Bajpai, 1998, p. 169), compounded by their repeated frequency throughout India–Pakistan relations during this period. Concurrently, because of its ingrained status, the split territorial status of Kashmir was ‘more or less accepted’ (Vanaik, 2002, p. 337) by India’s foreign policy community.

While the norms underpinning dominant Indian government policy from 1947 to 1998 towards Pakistan were dictated by values of tolerance, secularism and anti-communalism, and a tacit acceptance of the LoC in Kashmir, the norms underpinning BJP policy developed along a different trajectory. Closely affiliated with ‘the severe Hindu nationalism of the RSS’ (Graham, 2005, p. 237), the BJP first emerged as the organisation’s political wing in 1951 as the Jana Sangh. Although ostensibly disconnected, the Jana Sangh was part of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s (RSS’s) wider Sangh Parivar (Family of Associations), which aimed to penetrate all levels of Indian society. These strong links remained when the Jana Sangh became the BJP in 1980 and the RSS continued to impact on its ideological content, decision-making, personnel and leadership (Andersen and Damle, 1987; Hansen and Jaffrelot, 2001). As a result, the Jana Sangh and the BJP saw Pakistan (and Muslims) as threatening the unity of Mother India, and wished to reunite India along pre-Partition lines. In turn, there was an insistence on Indianisation whereby
all outsiders had to give their ‘undivided allegiance to Bharat . . . and her great and ancient culture’ (1951 Manifesto, 2005, p. 284).

Reflecting an inherent distrust of outsiders, Partition for the Jana Sangh represented ‘the unholy conspiracy of the Muslim League and the British Rulers to vivisect India and to partition our Motherland’ (57.12 Problem of East Bengal, 2005, p. 181). In turn, and reflecting core Hindutva beliefs of restoring Akhand Bharat, Pakistani-occupied Kashmir was ‘historically, geographically and culturally’ (64.04 Kashmir Problem, 2005, p. 107) part of India. To this end, the Jana Sangh advocated repealing and then abrogating Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which gave Kashmir special constitutional privileges (57.18 Kashmir in UNO, 2005). As the core agent of Partition, the Jana Sangh laid ‘maximum emphasis on warning and preparing the country against the Pak danger’ (Vajpayee, 2005, p. ix). As India experienced ever more frequent conflicts with Pakistan, through their high frequency these policies became increasingly normalised into Hindutva discourse and policy. Indian Muslims were an internal ‘fifth column’ and the Jana Sangh declared in 1965 that ‘all separatist tendencies . . . betraying a pro-Pak bias must be curbed . . . the outlook of Indian Muslims must be nationalized’ (quoted in Graham, 2005, p. 254).

Restoring and protecting the Hindu Rashtra also remained central to the BJP’s foreign policy, whereby national integrity was dependent on territorial integrity (1996 Manifesto, 2005, p. 250). At their strongest concerning Kashmir and Pakistan, the BJP noted that ‘rabid communal and pro-Pakistan elements are spearheading a massive hate India campaign’ (1989 Manifesto, 2005, p. 364). The BJP in turn associated Pakistan with terrorism within India. The party continued to want to claim back Pakistani-occupied Kashmir and believed that ‘a hawkish attitude and international pressure will compel Pakistan to end such interference’ (Basrur, 2002, p. 185). As such, the party believed that only a strong, militaristic nationalism could rectify India’s territorial problems. Making peace with Pakistan was also seen as a possible policy to increase India’s international profile (Malik and Singh, 1994, p. 124). Indianisation policies additionally continued but now under the moniker of cultural nationalism, which insisted on the forging of ‘one nation, one people and one culture’ (1996 Manifesto, 2005, p. 248). By 1998, these beliefs had become, through their continued specificity and durability, key norms in BJP policy.

The BJP’s norm of aggressive belligerence towards Pakistan appeared to be in full effect with the May 1998 nuclear tests that the party initiated shortly after coming to power. As such, BJP rhetoric called for war with Pakistan and the return of Kashmir (Inderjit, 1998). Pakistan’s own nuclear tests a few weeks later added a greater sense of pragmatism and led to the Lahore talks of February 1999, which verified the BJP’s willingness to instigate a peace process (Bowers, 2004). Here we can see a balance between an assertive and confrontational nationalism, and an underlying desire ‘to map out a foreign policy which would at least neutralize Pakistan’.¹ These factors reflected the constraint typical of Indian policy norms pre-1998 and were also evident during the 1999 Kargil war, where despite renewed BJP bellicosity Prime Minister Vajpayee displayed restraint to persuade the international community that Pakistan was the aggressor (Tellis, 2001, p. 80). Such restraint appeared counterintuitive to BJP policy norms towards Pakistan, such as reclaiming Kashmir and restoring Akhand Bharat.
Relations between the two countries continued to oscillate wildly from conflict to peace initiatives and back again. This oscillation seemed to mimic the pre-1998 norm of conflict and negotiations but with more (rhetorical) coercion and engagement than indirection. Thus, India’s first-ever unilateral ceasefire in Kashmir was announced in November 2000—‘an unprecedented development’ (Bose, 2001, p. 43). In July 2001, the BJP again attempted peace talks with Pakistan, this time in Agra, marking ‘a significant shift in its [India’s] Pakistan policy’ (Baral, 2000, p. 290), although they again failed. A return to aggression and coercion came after Pakistan was implicated in the 13 December 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament House in New Delhi. Again BJP belligerence was shown as Vajpayee called for ‘a decisive battle’ (quoted in Sáez, 2003, p. 189) as Indian forces mobilised on the Pakistani border. Despite the rhetoric, the BJP again returned to the pre-1998 norms of restraint and despite continued terrorist attacks, communication and diplomatic ties were re-established in April 2003. Then Pakistan offered an unparalleled ceasefire along the LoC, which India reciprocated in November 2003. The ceasefire ended 13 years of enmity across the border.

By February 2004, India and Pakistan had come through the numerous crises, conflicts and acts of terrorism of the preceding six years to emerge into what was a tentative yet gradually normalising strategic dialogue. Backed up by extensive Track II diplomacy within a structured pattern of negotiation (the Composite Dialogue), the two sides had been able to achieve significant advances in their relationship. Through a policy of confrontation, the BJP had endeavoured to go beyond the myopia typical of Congress in the 1970s and 1980s (Chari, 1987; Wright, 2007). As such, the party had been able to use these traits to force assertively engagement with Pakistan. Overall, the pre-1998 norms had constrained desired BJP policy to regain Kashmir but, in turn, the BJP’s own pre-1998 norms of (rhetorical) confrontation concerning Pakistan had led to positive advances in their relationship. During the NDA, there was therefore evidence of competing norms as the BJP’s ideology (successfully) challenged existing foreign policy precepts.

Going Nuclear

India’s post-independence leaders strove to achieve and maintain India’s autonomy in international affairs through an emphasis on positive neutralism and *purna swaraj* (complete independence) from great power politics. This approach encompassed specific policies of non-alignment, *ahisma* (non-violence) and nuclear disarmament (Prasad, 1979; Dutt, 1984). In turn, India initiated the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), indicating underlying foreign policy norms based on idealism rather than superpower politics (Jaipal, 1983; Goya, 1986). Set against this pragmatism, there was a deep-seated belief that India was destined to achieve great power status, as India’s leaders believed that ‘fate has marked us for big things’ (Nehru, quoted in Gordon, 1995, p. 1). A nuclear capacity was part of this aim in terms of developing both independent capabilities and national self-worth (Nayar and Paul, 2003, p. 3). These competing tensions between non-violence and becoming a great power were the foundations of a norm of nuclear ambiguity in Indian foreign policy pre-1998.
Although only publicly emergent in May 1974 after her Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE), nuclear research had begun in India in 1944 and India’s Atomic Energy Commission was set up in 1948. From the beginning, India’s scientists and leaders knew that nuclear technology ‘would bring nuclear weapons’ (Jones, 2006, p. 16). This view coupled with tensions between a moral antagonism towards nuclear weapons (including demands for disarmament) and a desire to be a great power. As such, India’s leaders maintained the same policy, that ‘unless everyone closes the nuclear door, it is not in India’s interests to do so’ (Basrur, 2001, p. 195). Reflective of these tensions, India was the first state to call for a ban on nuclear testing, for a universal non-proliferation treaty (in 1965), for a treaty of non-use of nuclear weapons (in 1978) and for a phased programme to eliminate totally nuclear weapons (in 1988) (see Bajpai, 1998; Hagerty, 1998). International rebuffs towards Indian attempts at non-proliferation (as well as Chinese and Pakistani nuclear development), however, spurred Indian leaders towards nuclear (weapons) development (Menon, 2000).

As the 1990s began, India’s nuclear weapons programme appeared to face an existential crisis. Not only did India still contend with international sanctions, it also seemed that many international proliferation controls were India-specific (such as the Nuclear Suppliers’ Group set up as a response to India’s PNE) and intended to threaten her great power emergence. Thus, Indian analysts talked of a US–EU–Japan (and even US–China) concert against India (Pande, 1996, pp. 5–24; Walker, 1998). When the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty’s (CTBT’s) entry into force provisos (Article 14) opened up a final testing window from September 1996 to September 1999, such nuclear inequity appeared to be explicit (particularly after China and France tested nuclear devices in 1995). By 1998, India’s nuclear stance appeared as ambiguous recessed deterrence (Bajpai, 1998, p. 184), and she remained one of the main non-signatories of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) along with Pakistan and Israel. Overall, by 1998 a norm of nuclear ambiguity (pursuing nuclear disarmament and nuclear weapons) had become durable and entrenched in Indian foreign policy.

Typical of a core belief in re-establishing the past glories of the Hindu Rashtra, strength (cultural, territorial and military) characterised the Jana Sangh’s perceived role for India in the world. Envisaged as a way to overcome India’s historical subordination to outside (particularly Western) powers, this strength would enable India ‘to be accepted alongside the “great” nations of the world’ (McDonald, 2003, p. 1565; Hansen, 1999). Building on this rationale, developing nuclear weapons was described by Golwalkar (an RSS leader and originator of Hindutva) as an imperative (Golwalkar, 1966, p. 429). Thus, from 1962 the BJS demanded that nuclear tests be undertaken (Perkovich, 1999, p. 26) and were the only party to advocate such a position. The perceived violation of the Hindu Rashtra by China in 1962 and Pakistan in 1965 led to explicit policy promises for the ‘manufacture of nuclear weapons and missiles’ (1967 Manifesto, 2005, p. 177). Nuclear weapons would give also India greater international autonomy (68.14 Russian Attitude, 2005) and a permanent seat in the UN Security Council (1957 Manifesto, 2005, p. 267).

Through its continued high incidence in policy statements and manifestoes, under the BJP a norm resting on an explicitly pro-nuclear weapons stance emerged. Again, this reflected continued beliefs in a muscular foreign policy based on realism rather than idealism. India had to be responsive and assertive in its foreign policy
aims—and BJP policy indicated an appreciation of realpolitik whereby ‘diplomacy and defence are two sides of the same coin’ (1991 Manifesto, 2005, p. 352). Furthermore, India’s national interest had to be assertively protected, with a strong and secure state being a prerequisite for ‘transform(ing) India into a prosperous and powerful nation’ (1998 Manifesto, 2005, p. 201). Thus, the norm of nuclear weapons acquisition also reflected an underlying desire to ‘announce’ India’s international arrival as a great power—a connection shared with Congress accounts but in a more assertive and persistent manner.

By the 1990s, promises to ‘give our Defence Forces Nuclear Teeth’ (1991 Manifesto, 2005, p. 352) and to oppose the anti-sovereign NPT (Mishra, 1996, p. 114) continued and became regularised into party discourse. This policy also became directed towards Pakistan’s own developments during the 1980s. Despite these open promises to induct nuclear weapons if elected, the BJP also remained pro-nuclear disarmament, indicating a certain symbolic rationale behind wanting nuclear weapons. Overall, however, nuclear weapons were regarded as central to ending Congress’s ‘policy of drift and escapism’ (NE 19.07.85, 2005, p. 117) and ensuring India’s total autonomy in foreign policy. For the BJP, having nuclear weapons would help to build up a strong, proud and resurgent state and thus Vajpayee noted that ‘peace and strength are not incompatible’ (quoted in Cohen, 2001, p. 47). By 1998, the BJP’s pro-nuclear stance was a prominent norm in its foreign policy outlook, with the party’s Jaswant Singh (1998) calling for an end to the ‘nuclear apartheid’ against India.

When the BJP-led NDA gained power in March 1998, they inherited India’s advanced ‘scientific-military nuclear infrastructure’ (Ganguly, 1999, p. 173), which could be used to initiate tests within weeks. The BJP also learnt from previous governments who had tried to test but failed as a result of US pressure. As such, the 1998 tests were cloaked in secrecy and defied US officials (Joshi, 1998; Bhatia and Bhandari, 2008). When the tests were carried out, the norm of nuclear ambiguity present until 1998 was effectively replaced by the BJP’s explicitly pro-nuclear weapons norm. Concurrent with their ideology, the tests were perceived by the BJP to further the image of a strong, resurgent and vigorous India, and confronted the international community through their defiance of international non-proliferation measures. As Zakaria (2002) noted at the time, ‘India has believed that it does not get the respect and prominence it deserves … India feels out of place, forced to compete in a game it does not like, following rules made up by someone else’. Established norms within the BJP’s Hindutva ideology drove this defiance along with a political will that was not present under previous Congress governments (Vanaik, 2002, p. 325).

BJP assertions of independence, national potency and shakti also rested on a continued discourse of India’s ‘arrival’ as a great power (Banerjee, 2004, p. 226). This emergence on to the global stage was done independently without any technological reliance on another country. In equal measure, Vajpayee was hailed as ‘liberat(ing) India from the entrapment of Third Worldism and the Cold War mindset … he has made anti-imperialism, a legacy of the Left-liberal Congressism, redundant’ (Chawla, 2008, p. 58). Additionally, with the end of the Cold War in the 1990s and the declining importance of the NAM, India had remained an outlier state with limited international impact. The impact of BJP ideology was clear with the
1998 tests, as they ‘brought India into the global strategic mainstream, in Asia and in international diplomacy’ (Athwal, 2008, p. 66). In turn, analysts remarked how the tests helped India overcome her historical regional fixation (Jing-Dong, 2007, p. 135) and signalled the beginning of a strategic convergence with the United States (Das, 2005; Ganguly et al., 2006).

The 1998 nuclear tests represented ‘a long-term choice and a clear break from the past’ (Ahrari, 1999, p. 432). India publicly became a potential global player to be engaged with, which was assertive and transparent in its aims. For the BJP, this new status meant that India was no longer subordinate to the international system but was instead an expanding and vital ingredient of it—a public avowal of the BJP’s long-standing policy norm to achieve national success for India. Additionally, India’s pre-1998 norm of international idealism also appeared to have been replaced by norms of pragmatism and realpolitik. In many ways, however, and reflective of the continued advocacy of nuclear disarmament, underlying BJP policy remained constrained by pre-1998 norms. Accordingly, after the tests Jaswant Singh (1998, p. 47) remarked that ‘India has moved from being totally moralistic to being a little more realistic’. As such, the BJP’s nuclear tests removed the previous norm of nuclear ambiguity, but pronouncements on no-first-use and a moratorium on nuclear testing maintained the traditional balance between nuclear disarmament and nuclear weapons.

Conclusions

Different norms have impacted on the nature and delivery of Indian foreign policy. By focusing on pre-1998 Indian government and BJP norms, and comparing them with the actions of the BJP-led NDA in government, we have been able to see how differing ideological beliefs both constrain and influence (Indian) foreign policy. Therefore, the BJP’s pre-1998 policy norm of regaining Kashmir was constrained by existing norms of a cycle of restraint, conflict and negotiations with Pakistan and the accepted territorial split of Kashmir. In turn, although the BJP pushed India over the nuclear threshold in 1998, they remained tied to pre-1998 norms of dual nuclear disarmament and development. On the other hand, the BJP’s norm of protecting the Hindu Rashtra led to coercive engagement with Pakistan, which bore fruit in terms of (limited) ceasefires and normalisation. Concerning the nuclear issue, following through on their norm for nuclear weapon induction allowed the BJP to remove the pre-1998 norm of nuclear ambiguity and thrust India on to the world stage. On both issues, the BJP injected realism into Indian foreign policy that superseded more idealistic norms.

In these ways, the BJP ‘embraced a very different set of intellectual precepts to guide India’s foreign and defense policies’ (Ganguly, 2003) and which clearly impacted on the nature of Indian national security policy during the 1998–2004 NDA. Employing a theoretical structure based on norms allowed us to trace this impact by highlighting core differences between BJP foreign policy norms pre-1998, Indian foreign policy norms pre-1998 and their interplay during the 1998 to 2004 NDA. Such findings advance our understanding of the role of ideological difference and its impact on (Indian) foreign policy. A norm-based approach also allowed for the structuring of historically contingent understandings of foreign policy beliefs.
across different political generations. Such an approach also permitted the pinpointing of continuity and change between political parties and ideologies. Throughout, the analysis has shown how ‘norms become relevant and causally consequential during the process by which actors define and refine their collective identities and interests’ (Risse and Sikkink, 1999, p. 9).

In particular, these findings suggest not only the utility of a norm-based approach for studying foreign policy but also how previous interactions (as encapsulated by existing norms) constrain and limit the impact of (new) political ideologies (such as Hindutva) when in power. Furthermore, as norms themselves collectively compose identities, the demonstrated presence of foreign policy norms suggests the presence of some form of ‘identity’ within (Indian) foreign policy. As we have seen with the BJP-led NDA government, as much as their policy norms concerning Pakistan and nuclear weapons were able to influence this ‘identity’, its underlying essence remained intact. In this sense, the differing norms underpinning Indian foreign policy embody its creation, preservation and evolution; acting as its transmitting vehicle across political ideologies and through history. As a composite repository of her established international interaction, it is these norms that will continue to structure India’s future foreign policy behaviour.

Notes
1. Interview with Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) academic, Delhi, 6 May 2008.
2. Interview with former head of Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), Delhi, 2 May 2008.

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