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Title: Strategic Culture and State Behaviour: Ideational Factors in the Evolution of Indian Nuclear Policy

Abstract

This study seeks to understand the role of Ideational factors in the evolution of Indian Nuclear Policy and analyse the role of culture, ideas and norms in strategic decision-making. It tries to examine how Indian strategic culture has been an important variable in defining the interests and policies of the Indian state.

The core objective of this study is to understand the role of culture, ideas and norms in the strategic choices made by the Indian state and the way they have shaped its foreign and defence policy. While the effect of systemic and sub-systemic factors on Indian foreign policy has been studied in detail, there is scanty literature on the mediation of ideas, culture and norms as independent variables in shaping its interests and preferences.

The guiding hypothesis of this study remains that the making of nuclear policy is a product of deep cultural assumptions, ideas, norms and causal beliefs embedded in the Indian strategic thought and its history. The Indian engagement with the international system is guided by these deep assumptions and ideas.

The Indian nuclear programme and its overt weaponization in 1998 has been a matter of immense scholarly debate. Different theoretical schools have used different models explaining the nuclear decision-making in the cold war to understand the Indian nuclear programme. This has resulted in a distorted analysis of the underlying motives of the programme.

The research uses the theoretical framework of social constructivism to analyse how nuclear policy is endogenous to Indian state system, its culture and history. The research introduces a new model to understand the rationale of nuclear weaponization by states like India as the current theoretical explanations are highly inadequate to explain the complex nature of Indian nuclear programme. The study proposes a multivariate explanation (comprehensive

explanation) that focuses on multiple variables (multivariate) instead of the focus on a single explanatory variable (univariate) by most International Relations theories. The comprehensive explanation, constructed around a cultural understanding of the dynamics of India's nuclear decision-making, has important theoretical and policy implications.

A comprehensive explanation of the acquisition of nuclear weapons includes both material (structural, domestic) and non-material (normative) explanations. Conceptually, this entails an understanding of how the theory-driving variables in the three models prevalent in IR theory like security (structural-realist model), political and organizational interest (domestic model) and identity and culture (normative model) interact in a unique way to produce a certain strategic decision..

In this comprehensive model, culture interacts with changing relative capabilities in the approving domestic conditions to produce behaviour. This does not mean that decision makers are not prone to the effects generated by the change in the relative capabilities of others states. However, the argument is that identity and culture act as a prism through which changes in relative capabilities are interpreted. If this particular prism of interpretation is removed or replaced by another cultural prism, the change in relative capabilities should mean something different. In fact, both the structural model and the domestic model can be subsumed within the cultural model. This would mean that all the perceptions, interests and the behaviour of states are ideationally rooted. It is this ideational structure that gives meaning and content to the changes in relative capabilities and how to interpret them, what organizational interests to pursue and finally what means to be employed to achieve a particular strategic end. The security imperatives of a state interact with the domestic political scenario to force policymakers who are socialized in a particular strategic culture to decide how to respond to such a particular situation.

This study uses this model to explain the Indian acquisition of nuclear weapons by showing how all the three models fail to explain the Indian nuclear tests of 1974 and 1998 and how a comprehensive model offers a better explanation.