

## Shaping Nuclear Identity: The Role of National Branding in India and Pakistan's Diplomatic Narratives

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**ABSTRACT:** Over the past several years, India and Pakistan have made it a point of State policy to increasingly tie nuclear capability to their foreign identities and civilian discussions. After conducting their first nuclear tests in 1998, the state policies of both countries have increasingly embedded the use of the nuclear capability as integral to their foreign identity and political discourse. Nuclear identity is not a military one but rather one of nation branding used as a strategic tool that manifests in international legitimacy, regional status, and foreign policy goals. In this paper, I analyze how both State A and the State B create and present different nuclear identities in the world political system through the use of diplomatic discourse. It draws particular official statements of policy, strategic statements and doctrines, speeches, and scholarly publications into a qualitative research analysis. The analysis suggests that the image of a responsible nuclear power that is dedicated to strategic restraint and international control comes from India, while Pakistan has its vision of nuclear capability as a credible deterrence and a stabilizing force within the immediate region. Overall, the study understandably finds that the national branding has a significant impact on international opinion regarding specific countries as well as on their diplomatic relationship and strategic engagements in the broader context of security as related to their respective South Asian cases.

**KEYWORDS:** Nuclear Identity, National Branding, Nuclear Diplomacy, India, Pakistan, Diplomatic Narratives, Strategic Communication

### Introduction

In the past, it was believed that weapons were used to deter attacks or defend a country. However, today, in international relations, establishing a country's reputation or identity is synonymous with the development of nuclear arms. As nuclear states, each would want not only to bolster their strategic security but to influence the international powers' perception of them as well. It is related to national values, national branding, national interest and foreign policy, diplomacy and the practice of politicians (Anholt, 2007). In these nation-states with nuclear weapons, the concept of promotion doesn't seem to just apply to the economic or cultural side of things but rather the dissemination of accounts for responsible stewardship, strategic stability and regional influence. The case of India and Pakistan is an interesting one in which we study the interplay of these national branding and nuclear identity. Both countries had their scheduled tests in May 1998, hoping each would get international approval as they worked to address the region's security concerns. Although similar in surrounding security environments, the two states have

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developed conflicting political stories about their nuclearizable power capabilities. Indian foreign policy often methodically convinced the world that India was a responsible democracy with a commitment to minimum credible deterrence, a No First Use (NFU) policy and a policy of governance in the world with nuclear weapons (Tellis, 2001). This narrative-based report reflects India's vision of being thrust into a new role as a key player in international security institutions and a responsible stakeholder in global matters. Conversely, Pakistan's defence strategy is geared towards countering India's conventional military weakness, with emphasis on the role of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. An effective minimum deterrence policy orientation for South Asia (Krepon & Dalton, 2015) that balances strategic and conflict functions. The nuclear campaign of Pakistan is not for glory but to keep the country alive, safeguard its sovereignty and maintain its regional deterrence. Whatever is going on and how it will change in the future is important to grasp, especially in terms of how these other opposing stories are playing out, all the more in the context of diplomatic discourse, and how they will influence the other competing perceptions of the legitimacy, the responsibility, and the strategic reliability of the other nation towards the coming years. The bilateral relationship, domain of international institutions, as well as political partnerships are driven by nuclear identity. This study, therefore, tries to find out how India is shaping its nuclear image in the eyes of the world and how it affects the relations and security in the region through branding; and the impact of Pakistan's national story on India's national brand image. Alongside the traditional approach of deterrence, the study examines in detail the sources and contents of official documents and literature produced by scholars in the field of strategic communication, all to gain a better picture of the role of strategic communication in contemporary international politics.

## Literature Review

### Nuclear Identity and International Relations

Just as nuclear identity has been growing more prominent in constructivist international relations, it has become a significant object of investigation in comparative state studies. Nuclear identity has become more prominent among constructivist international relations, and it has been a source of interest and study among comparative state studies. Constructivist scholars, who view state behaviour differently from realist scholars, argue that identities, norms, and shared understandings are important in shaping state behaviour, rather than material military capabilities (Wendt, 1999). Nuclear weapons are thus not only regarded as strategic weapons but also as emblematic of political legitimacy, political status and national pride. They produce a storyline about their nuclear programme which is not only aligned with their domestic political values but also helps shape the perception of other countries. Sagan (1996) contends that security concerns are not the only motives driving nuclear acquisition, citing arguments for nuclear acquisition from security and domestic politics or normative ascriptions. Likewise, Hymans (2006) argues that national identity has a strong impact on decision-making on nuclear issues in the context of leaders' understanding of prestige, vulnerability and international recognition. The theoretical underpinnings imply that there is more to nuclear identity than military necessity, as it is socially produced. In the context of South Asia, identity construction gains on its own importance since India and Pakistan are mired in an ongoing security rivalry. The individual stories of their respective nuclei have sounded different in the context of the changing geopolitical and diplomatic scene. Both countries see their nuclear weapons as a deterrence tool, but that strategic "others awareness of self" message brings different messages to their national and global communities.

### National Branding as Diplomatic Strategy

National branding is a strategy to shape the country's international image by synchronously managing political, economic, and cultural communication (Anholt, 2007). The term is more recently used in the context of promoting tourism and economic competitiveness and was extended to foreign policy, security and international diplomacy.

Tourism branding has become a common phenomenon in the works of governments to manipulate foreign opinions, to entice investment, to build diplomatic ties, and to legitimize politically. National branding is not similar to public diplomacy as it is normally defined, but rather incorporates multiple aspects of an intrinsic state identity into a unified image for the world, states Fan (2010). In cases of countries with nuclear weapons, their image operates by communicating responsibility, restraint and observance of international norms, although they have very destructive military capacities. Branding plays a number of strategic roles in nuclear diplomacy. It demonstrates international responsibility towards nuclear proliferation by limiting the concerns of the international community. For one, it curbs the apprehensions of the international community about nuclear proliferation by showing responsible administration of nuclear weapons. Secondly, it adds to the diplomatic integrity of the company in negotiations on arms control and regional security. Third, it enhances the arguments for engaging in international institutions and global governance processes. Researchers today have begun to understand that security stories are integral elements of national branding. Several governments focus on the elements of defence policy beyond merely being a tool for coercion or security, but recognise that it should be part of a larger story of peace and stability and responsibilities. Thus, nuclear identity emerges as a core element of diplomatic communication as it is no longer solely an alias of military doctrine.

### India's Nuclear Identity

Since it first tested in 1974 and declared itself a nuclear weapons state in 1998, India's nuclear identity has come a very long way. The Indian Government always describes its nuclear capability as consistent with democratic government, strategic restraint and responsible international behaviour. The No First Use policy and the concept of credible minimum deterrence have been a feature of India's official nuclear doctrine and have maintained the country's image as a restrained nuclear power (Government of India, 2003).

Tellis (2001) says that India's nuclear efforts are an effort to establish greater power status, not just as a fulfillment of the "military balancing" principle. The development of the technology to own and use nuclear arms is meant as an indicator of technological progress, of being strategic, and of civilizational success. The themes often end up being used in official speeches by Indian leaders at international platforms, where, despite India's exclusion from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, India's nuclear policy is coupled with responsible global leadership and adherence to principles of non-proliferation.

This international image was further boosted by India's success in aptly negotiating the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear deal in 2008. The pact reflected a gradual acceptance of India's nuclear dossier by its international peers and bolstered diplomacy efforts that were marketing India as a credible nuclear player. The creation of this development was said to have added significantly to India's national brand as a responsible stakeholder in the international nuclear order, even when it was kept outside the NPT regime (Tellis, 2008).

### Pakistan's Nuclear Identity

Security concerns towards India have driven the concept of Pakistan's nuclear identity most prominently. Since India tested their nuclear weapon after their conventional military dominance, Pakistan has always maintained its nuclear strength as an essential and around the world only, national survival and regional stability: In contrast to India, which recognizes its quite important role in the world and its technology, Pakistan sees the development of its nuclear arsenal as a defensive measure which is based on Pakistan's strategic balance and of course deterrent policy (Krepon & Dalton, 2015).

The approach of credible minimum deterrence is the official doctrine of Pakistan, while it has developed into full-spectrum deterrence in response to various conventional and sub-conventional threats. Pakistan's military has

consistently maintained that the possession of nuclear weapons is for defence so it can ensure peace in South Asia and prevent attacks by others. There is a repeated emphasis in official statements on the country's nuclear policy of defence and the fact that it has avoided major interstate wars since 1998 (Narang, 2014).

A key part of Pakistan's foreign policy branding is its attempts to project a responsible attitude towards the use of the atom bomb. Nuclear command and control system enhancements, export control laws and implementation of international nuclear security standards are emphasised by successive governments. The formation of the National Command Authority and the Strategic Plans Division is cited as signaling strong institutional management and safe use of the nuclear assets at home and abroad. The felt need for these initiatives is to address the external apprehensions over nuclear security and give a boost to Pakistan's position as a responsible nuclear state without being a part of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) (Khan, 2012).

Pakistan's foreign policy is also based on strategic stability discussed through dialogue, confidence-building measures, and arms control initiatives towards India. These efforts have many times been hindered by politics, but they represent Pakistan's attempt at balancing nuclear deterrence and diplomacy. As such, Pakistan is branded not just for its army but also for its commitment to ensure security, responsibility and regional stability.

### Diplomatic Narratives and International Perceptions

Diplomatic narratives are an important component of states' efforts to project identity outward to international audiences. These are delivered in the form of foreign policy statements, strategic documents, addressing multilateral forums, and in interaction with international institutions. However, in the nuclear realm, these stories shape the perception of other countries of what one is trying to do, one's credibility, and one's legitimacy.

In view of the regional security concerns both countries have, they have sailed through separate branding paths, barring each other. India's story is one of democratic governance, responsible restraint, and a quest for world leadership. These themes have led to the strengthening of international partnerships, such as strategic cooperation with the United States, France, Japan, and Australia. India's emergence on the global stage in diplomacy-driven export-control bodies also demonstrates the success of India's diplomatic branding policy (Pant, 2020).

The story Pakistan is telling revolves around security, balancing, strategic and regional equilibrium through Deterrence. In some instances, international concepts have been influenced by fears of the possibility of terrorist use of nukes and security threats within Pakistan, yet Pakistan remains dedicated to responsible possession of the atom and positive membership in world nuclear security initiatives. The contribution of Pakistan in Nuclear Security Summits and partnership with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has enhanced the country's responsible nuclear management image (IAEA, 2022).

These diplomatic narratives shape perceptions, which construct an international legitimacy space beyond the domain of just some military power but is subject to social construction (constructivist scholars), and for that reason, diplomacy should be read as an analysis of foreign policy. Constructivist scholars argue that these diplomatic narratives shape international legitimacy – and perceptions are not just the result of military capabilities, but subject to social construction as well – which is why diplomacy should be read as an analysis of foreign policy. Therefore, national branding through national institutions and national diplomacy relies on consistency in national political discourse, national diplomatic action and institutional credibility.

### Research Gap

The study of nuclear deterrence, strategic stability and security in South Asia has been widely explored. There are numerous studies that go into the military doctrines, nuclear command structures, and bilateral crises of India and

Pakistan. Likewise, national branding literature is more focused on national tourism, national competitiveness, and national soft power.

The literature looking into nuclear policy usually focuses on its security aspects but neglects the symbolic and communicative aspects in which states forge international legitimacy. Studies based on comparative perspectives on Indian and Pakistani branding approaches are scarce.

To remedy this, this study takes an approach of integrated analysis of constructivist international relations theory and literature on national branding, particularly in examining the two countries' respective approaches to national image construction through diplomatic narratives as a way of creating different nuclear images for both countries. For this reason, this research uses an integrated approach between constructivist international relations theory and national branding literature to analyze the use of diplomatic narrative by both countries as a way to create different images related to the nuclear issue for both countries. The research aims to enhance the understanding of the role of strategic communication in influencing international perceptions, foreign policy decisions and regional security actors and processes beyond the effect of military deterrence.

## Methodology

The design of this study is qualitative, expressing the examination of the process of Indian and Pakistani nation-branding and diplomatic storytelling of nuclear identities. A qualitative approach is suitable because, rather than establishing numerical relationships, it will seek to interpret meanings, narratives and strategic communication is the aim of the research. The source of the data for this research is the documents through document analysis.

The sources are secondary sources written by official government policy documents, nuclear doctrine documents, speeches made by political leaders, publications released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reports by domestic and international organisations and peer-reviewed academic publications. To offer insights from the experts on South Asian nuclear diplomacy, additional documents by think-tanks like the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Stimson Center have been incorporated.

Thematic analysis is used to analyse the collected documents. These comprise issues of responsible nuclear action, deterrence, strategic stability, regional security, internationality and prestige, amongst others, which are rooted in a pattern of nuclear behaviour. Comparing the themes of Indian and Pakistani diplomatic narratives, the similarities and differences in their approach and strategies to national branding have been identified.

The study uses multiple scholarly and official sources to ensure credibility and triangulates information. This method can interpret the construction of the nuclear identity by providing dialogues with different narratives, not losing academic rigor, and minimizing researcher bias.

## Discussion

The study highlights how nuclear diplomacy is progressively being advanced by the national branding process in South Asia. Both India and Pakistan cultivate narratives to affect the world's perceptions of their nuclear behaviour alongside the use of military capabilities to achieve credibility. Narratives that position the daily to influence strategic capability, and thus impact nuclear identity; these are part of broader foreign policy goals.

Throughout its history, India has maintained its own image as a responsible democratic power that has been striving to develop India through strategic restraint, technological development, and global governance. Throughout history, the narrative India projects itself as is the image of India as a responsible democratic state trying to develop the country through strategic restraint and technological development and to govern the globe. The branding is

connected to India's move in general to become an important actor in the international sphere. Commitment to responsible nuclear stewardship has helped in building sound strategic dialogues with key countries and enhanced India's role in international nuclear governance. By focusing on democratic institutions, civilian control of nuclear assets and responsible practices, India strengthens its commitment to being a trustworthy nuclear state even though it is not enjoying the benefits of the NPT.

Compared to the branding approach of Pakistan, it is very different in terms of emphasis, as it focuses on deterrence and national security. For Pakistan, nuclear technology is also a means to guarantee peace and stability in the region that the conventional military imbalance could not be compensated for. Pakistan's nuclear program is not based upon pride of possession; it is based on strategic requirement, credible deterrence and building institutions to ensure nuclear security. This story aims to put the world at ease with a responsible nuclear program and at the same time fortify Pakistan's deterrence.

The comparative analysis also reveals that although each country's strategic message is unique, the same type of branding strategies have been identified. It is the duty of everyone – stress responsibility, peace, stability and institutional control. Both desire to 'legitimise' themselves globally so they can gain the attention and trust of their listeners as rational actors and show that they are genuinely concerned with preventing conflict. But how they view the central role of nuclear power varies. The nuclear plurality in India is a sign of future leadership on the world stage, and Pakistan relies on its nuclear capability as a balancing act in its neighbourhood.

The findings shown here confirm that, in addition to material factors, the presence of identity influences foreign policy behaviour as well, since the constructivist approach emphasizes the importance of material factors and motivations for foreign policy action above all that of identity. The foreign view in the diplomatic narratives influences strategic partnerships, foreign investment, and participation in the international system of institutions. So, the approach of national branding cannot be perceived only as public relations or marketing, but as a current aspect of nuclear diplomacy.

## Results and Findings

The analysis sets forth the clear differences between the strategies adopted by India and Pakistan for the self-making and projection of their nuclear identity. India is an observer in every sense that it is a responsible nuclear power, with policy ethics based on democratic principles, strategic sanity and international stability. Official diplomatic narratives focus on technology, minimum deterrence, and responsible involvement in international nuclear governance. These themes build India's international image and help in its efforts to secure more international presence in international institutions.

The main issue on the agenda of Pakistan's diplomacy is the issue of security, deterrence and strategic balance in the region. Pitching nuclear capability against the use of conventional force is depicted as a defensive measure against conventional asymmetry, while reinforcing that nuclear arms are not used to foment war, but to preserve peace. Pakistan also emphasizes the development of command and control mechanisms and adherence to international nuclear security standards as a step to firm up its reputation as a responsible nuclear nation.

The thematic analysis also suggests that the policy of national branding is also used as a diplomatic tool for influencing the international perception in both countries. While their objectives are different, both governments aim at gaining the authority to govern through the focus on responsibility, stability, and peacefulness. These branding efforts come into play and impact bilateral ties, regional diplomacy, and relations with international institutions.

In conclusion, these results indicate that the concept of nuclear identity is broader than the concept of nuclear military power, and it will be built more and more by diplomatic communication. Therefore, national branding is significant to influence international credibility, enhance foreign policy goals, and shape the changing strategic environment in South Asia.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this research study was to reveal the process of nation building in India and Pakistan and the brand building of the two nations' nuclear identity through diplomatic discourses of them. According to the analysis, nuclear capacity can not only be used as a military deterrence but is of paramount importance and useful in terms of image building and communication in foreign policy. While Pakistan has been based on credible deterrence, strategic stability, and its national security, India's outlook has been based on taking a responsible approach towards nuclear stewardship, democratic governance and aspirations of global power. The main difference lies in the emphasis, but in both countries it is hugely important to strive for international legitimacy, and both governments are presented as responsible nuclear actors, and equally dedicated to the stability and peace of the region.

These findings indicate that national branding is an important contributor to the global interpretation as well as to foreign relations and participation in the global governance of nuclear weapons. Hence, diplomatic discourses supplement nuclear states' mutual deterrence and influence the international system of nuclear states.

Future policy and decision-makers need to do more to enhance confidence and communication between the region and transparency and end mistrust. India and Pakistan both should enter into bilateral dialogue with one another, vigorously continue nuclear risk reduction efforts, and disseminate cooperation between the institutions in international fora. The potential for interviews with diplomats, state-makers and security experts or comparative study of other nuclear-armed countries can be applied in future research to give better reflections of the relationship between national branding, the nuclear identity and international diplomacy.

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