



IPS INSIGHTS

Perspectives On the Issues Shaping Policy

Bhagwat's Political Signaling: Policy Recalibration or Political Space for the BJP?

Dr. Waleed Rasool¹

Mohan Bhagwat's recent statements on Pakistan represent an unprecedented discursive opening within the contemporary Sangh Parivar's discourse on India–Pakistan relations. They should not, however, be prematurely interpreted as a formal change in RSS policy. The more defensible argument is that Bhagwat has also introduced a soft political vocabulary—dialogue, people-to-people engagement, and a softening of the permanent-enmity narrative—without abandoning the ideological foundations of the RSS. His intervention is therefore better understood as a strategic discursive recalibration rather than an ideological or policy reversal. The significance of Bhagwat's August 6, 2026 remarks lies in their departure from his earlier security-centric treatment of Pakistan. In June, he defended RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale's call to keep the door of dialogue with Pakistan open, while clarifying that the reference was to the people of Pakistan rather than the Pakistani state. He simultaneously stated that the RSS would follow the Indian government's policy toward Pakistan. This qualification confirms that Bhagwat has not announced a new Pakistan policy. Yet the political signal is unmistakable: the RSS chief is creating rhetorical space for engagement with Pakistani society at a time when official India–Pakistan relations remain deeply constrained.

Why This Change Now?

The central question is not simply what Bhagwat said, but why he is saying it now.

- First, the BJP's Pakistan policy has encountered diminishing strategic returns. Repeated confrontation and the suspension of dialogue have not eliminated the Kashmir dispute or the structural India–Pakistan security dilemma. A Track-II initiative aimed at youth and people-to-people contact was placed on hold after the 2019 Pulwama crisis. Thus, a harder policy has produced security mobilization but not political resolution.
- Second, Pakistan's international profile has changed. Pakistan is increasingly being described as an emerging middle power, with growing diplomatic reach beyond its traditional role as a security-dependent state. Its facilitation of U.S.–Iran talks in Islamabad, balancing of relations with Washington and Beijing, and expanding strategic relationships with Saudi Arabia and Turkey have strengthened its diplomatic relevance. Pakistan is consequently moving from being a facilitator to becoming a negotiator and, increasingly, a regional security provider. For New Delhi, this alters the strategic environment.
- Third, there may be an internal recognition within the Sangh-BJP ecosystem that

¹ Senior IPS Associate

permanent confrontation has political costs. Article 370 has already been abrogated; the Uniform Civil Code remains an institutional objective, while Akhand Bharat is increasingly articulated as a civilizational rather than an immediately territorial project. The political challenge therefore shifts from mobilization to consolidation. Bhagwat's softer vocabulary may provide the BJP with political manoeuvring space without requiring ideological retreat.

- Fourth, the rise of Gen Z creates another pressure for recalibration. Bhagwat's recent emphasis on dialogue with younger Indians and his rejection of automatically labelling protesting youth as anti-national indicate awareness that the political language of confrontation may not adequately address a digitally connected generation.

Thus, Bhagwat may be testing the waters: not abandoning the established position, but assessing whether a less confrontational vocabulary can generate political and diplomatic room.

The Parallel: A Historical Question

There is also a historical question that deserves careful consideration. In 1947–48, India consolidated its military position in Jammu and Kashmir before taking the dispute to the United Nations. Nehru's own statements record that Indian forces had already been deployed and had pushed the fighting back before India formally referred the matter to the Security Council.

It would therefore be too speculative to claim that Bhagwat consciously seeks to reproduce Nehru's strategy. Nevertheless, the historical parallel raises an important analytical question: could the present softer discourse similarly be designed to consolidate a post-2019 position first, while subsequently creating international and diplomatic space from a position of greater strategic confidence? If so, dialogue would not necessarily represent a concession. It could instead become an instrument for consolidating gains, normalizing the post-5 August 2019 environment, and managing international pressure. This possibility

makes Bhagwat's statements more complex than a simple moderation.

Implications for Track-II Diplomacy

The greatest significance may therefore lie in Track-II diplomacy. Its space has been severely restricted since 2019, while the absence of sustained informal engagement has itself deepened the crisis of communication. Bhagwat's distinction between the Pakistani state and the Pakistani people potentially provides an ideological permission structure for renewed societal engagement. Academics, journalists, retired diplomats, civil society actors, business communities and peace practitioners could engage Pakistani counterparts without necessarily being portrayed as compromising Indian national interests. The possible sequence is:

Discursive opening → political legitimacy for engagement → greater space for Track-II → confidence-building → limited official communication.

But this should not be romanticized. Track-II cannot substitute for Track-I, nor can people-to-people contact resolve Kashmir or the post-2019 constitutional dispute. Pakistan's position remains that meaningful normalization requires resolving the Kashmir question instead of managing it, because Pakistan wants tangible outcomes now instead of sticking to the old mantra. The real test, therefore, is whether Bhagwat's rhetoric can move beyond dialogue without substantive conflict resolution.

Conclusion

policy, and potentially consequential for diplomacy. The RSS has not demonstrably abandoned its ideological position on Pakistan, Kashmir, or Akhand Bharat. What has changed is the vocabulary through which Pakistan is being conceptualized. The timing is particularly significant. A difficult BJP Pakistan policy, the limits of permanent confrontation, generational change, India's need for political consolidation, and Pakistan's emergence as a more consequential middle power may collectively be generating pressure for recalibration.

Bhagwat may therefore be creating political space for the BJP rather than changing RSS policy. His intervention allows the BJP to retain its hard-security credentials while opening a controlled discourse of engagement. The critical distinction is: Bhagwat has opened the rhetorical door; he has not yet opened the policy door. The ultimate question is whether this opening is intended merely to consolidate the post-5 August 2019 position through a softer vocabulary, or whether it

represents the beginning of genuine conflict resolution instead of conflict prevention. For India–Pakistan relations, that distinction is decisive. If the rhetoric produces institutional space for Track-II diplomacy, Bhagwat’s intervention could mark the beginning of renewed thinking. If not, it will remain what it presently appears to be: a sophisticated political signal—softening the vocabulary without necessarily changing the ideological destination.

