

Symbols of statehood: military industrialization and public discourse in India

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Abstract. This article examines the forces driving the pursuit of military production capacity in India, including those behind the Indian nuclear and space programmes. We are mainly interested in whether symbolic motivations regularly find expression in the public discourse. We review all articles on the subject of weapons development and production appearing in *India Today* from May 1977 to April 1999. There are three closely interrelated yet distinguishable concerns in the public discourse that we consider symbolic: that military industrialization is a means of asserting India's autonomy in international affairs, that it is a means of establishing India's international status and prestige, and that it serves to enhance India's self-image. We contend that the symbolic motivations are a prominent force behind the military industrialization process in India. The precise form that symbolic motivations take vary—some statements seem to have more symbolic content than others—but, as a whole, such references are not rare or isolated. Our findings suggest that symbolism can be an important component of the quest for an indigenous arms-production capacity, and perhaps other elements of statebuilding as well.

The Bharatiya Janata Party proclaimed 16 May 1998 a 'day of prestige'. India had tested five nuclear devices that week and the ruling party had cause for celebration. In justifying the tests, India's national security received frequent mention, but more conspicuous was the symbolism embodied by the detonations. Raja Ramanna, former head of India's Atomic Energy Commission, stated that 'we no longer need to quote our ancient literature to feel proud', while another Indian commentator referred to the blasts as an 'explosion of self-esteem'. Bal Thackeray, leader of one of the BJP's coalition partners, went so far as to say that 'we have to prove that we are not eunuchs'. Another boost to Indian self-esteem occurred one year later when the Indian Space Research Organisation successfully test-launched the Agni-II intermediate-range missile. At that time Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee described the Agni as 'a symbol of resurgent India', and reassured the nation that 'Yes, we will stand on our own feet'.¹

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¹ The quotes are from, respectively, 'We Should Feel Proud', *The Times of India*, 16 May 1998; Sabyasachi Mitra, 'Newspapers and People Are Ecstatic Over Tests', *India-West*, 15 May 1998; and 'Over 2,000 Km Range Agni-II Successfully Test-Fired', *The Times of India*, 12 April 1999. Symbolism was also an element in Pakistan's follow-on nuclear tests: *The Muslim*, a conservative Pakistani daily, congratulated its military for having 'defied the high priests of the New World Order'. See John Ward Anderson and Kamran Khan, 'Pakistan: "We Are a Nuclear Power"', *Washington Post*, 30 May 1998.

Symbols are an important feature of social interaction. Things we say, things we do, things we possess often have symbolic meaning for ourselves and for those with whom we come in contact. Similarly for states and international interaction: there are certain national characteristics and forms of state behaviour which seem to be infused with a good deal of symbolic significance. Possession of nuclear weapons capability is probably the best example. But also important to states is the possession of advanced conventional weapons, and even more so the capacity to manufacture them. In this article we want to document the perceived importance of India's conventional weapons programmes as a symbol of Indian statehood.

Symbols, particularly those that contribute to a state's status and prestige, are widely acknowledged to motivate state behaviour. India's nuclear tests, for example, were 'only ornamentations but necessary in the modern world'.² Unfortunately, reliable empirical indicators of symbolic motivating forces such as status and prestige do not seem to have captured the imagination of those engaged in rigorous qualitative or quantitative measurement and analysis. That is an exceedingly difficult enterprise in any event. We are, after all, alluding to matters of cognition, and abandonment of the state as unit of analysis—the unit favoured by realism and certain other approaches to international relations—is probably a minimum requirement for any empirical analysis that takes seriously the various theoretical disputes about the nature and importance of symbolic motivations in international relations.

It might be useful to scrutinize statements by policymakers for evidence of symbolic motivations for their actions. But this does not get us in the clear if it is military-related behaviour we want to explain. As Suchman and Eyre point out, 'military procurement reflects an essentially ritualistic belief in modern weaponry as a distinguishing emblem of modern nations; unfortunately, since rational military planning is another such emblem ..., these nonrational motives are unlikely to receive formal acknowledgment'.³ Suchman and Eyre are sceptical that policymakers will actually admit to being motivated by such things as status and prestige. Therefore, they suggest proceeding directly to an empirical examination of the state's participation in international organizations and other institutional forms, since these are the repositories of world-level cultural practices which purportedly constitute state preferences and identity.⁴

Although we are mindful of the potential bias against overt expression of symbolic, 'nonrational' motivations for military-related behaviour, we think it premature to disregard public discourse merely on the basis of these suspicions. Thus we have set a straightforward empirical task for ourselves in this article. We examine the rationales given for India's pursuit of an indigenous production capacity in conventional and nuclear weaponry. We are particularly interested in whether symbolic motivations, such as international status and prestige, regularly find expression in the public discourse, so we concentrate our discussion on these sorts of rationales. But other motivations—non-symbolic ones—are plainly evident in the materials we

² Raja Ramanna, quoted in Y. P. Rajesh, 'Top Nuke Scientist Drinks Wine to Celebrate Tests', *India-West*, 15 May 1998.

³ Mark C. Suchman and Dana P. Eyre, 'Military Procurement as Rational Myth: Notes on the Social Construction of Weapons Proliferation', *Sociological Forum*, 7 (1992), p. 151.

⁴ See also Dana P. Eyre and Mark C. Suchman, 'Status, Norms, and the Proliferation of Conventional Weapons: An Institutional Theory Approach', in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

examine, so we can also give some indication of the relative prominence of symbolic motivations.

To accomplish our task, we have systematically reviewed all articles on the subject of weapons development and production appearing in *India Today*, India's most popular news magazine, from May 1977 through to April 1999. We don't equate *India Today* with Indian public discourse; no single information source can be said to truly represent the many attitudes, ideologies, meanings, and styles of communication that comprise a public discourse, especially in a society as ethnically and culturally diverse as India. But we do believe that *India Today* is the best single source available for capturing the imagery of the burgeoning middle and upper-middle classes in India, and is superior to any other source for our purposes. That said, similar representations of Indian public discourse on military industrialization do emerge from less exhaustive analyses of another Indian news magazine, *Frontline*, and two daily newspapers, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Hindu*. We offer a comparison of these sources at the end of the article.

Military industrialization in India

Observers of military industrialization in the Third World typically highlight the 'rational' or 'instrumental' ends toward which indigenous arms production is directed. A state acquires arms in order to improve its immediate security *vis-à-vis* rival states or more generally to enhance its position in a regional security complex. Domestically produced arms have the added benefit of guarding against the manipulation of weapons supplies, including spare parts, which might otherwise be undertaken by foreign suppliers with their own policy objectives. Domestic arms production has also been given an explicitly economic rationale. States obviously need not purchase from abroad what they build themselves, so arms production is viewed as means of conserving foreign exchange. If there is sufficient demand for arms exports, domestic arms production can even generate foreign exchange. In addition, military industrialization is sometimes pursued for purposes of technological development and spin-off to the civilian sector of the economy.

In the case of India, the most obvious impetus behind weapons production is the country's immediate security environment, especially its strategic relationships with Pakistan and China. Territorial disputes over Kashmir with Pakistan and along the Himalayan border with China are complicated further by religious and ideological differences. Throughout the period of Indian independence these have generated high levels of hostility and several overt military conflicts. Even when relations with Pakistan and China are relatively quiescent, India has remained attentive to these states' arms acquisitions: what they import, what they produce, what they try to produce. Levels of regional hostility and levels of regional armament explain, in large part, why India has acquired advanced weaponry for its armed forces.

While India's immediate security needs have been interpreted as requiring well-armed defence forces, on strictly military grounds there should be no reason to prefer domestically produced weaponry over imports, assuming comparable performance characteristics. But there are reasons both to prefer and not to prefer domestic production on economic grounds. In his extensive and balanced study of

Indian security policy, Thomas has noted that a policy of indigenous weapons production 'would mean a substantial increase in the scientific and technological knowledge of the country with attendant benefits for the civilian sector as well'.⁵ To be sure, the pursuit of 'military-led industrialization' is recognized far more explicitly in the academic literature than it is acknowledged by Indian statesmen. Indigenous production of weaponry would seem to demand something other than an economic rationale, especially in a democracy like India. Still, many analysts do agree that part of what drives military industrialization in India and elsewhere in the Third World is the belief that arms production will promote development in adjacent sectors of the national economy. Of course, state leaders may be wrong—and much of the literature endeavours to show them the errors of their ways—but '[t]he skepticism of academics in industrialized countries notwithstanding, the belief remains widespread that such programs can provide tangible economic and technological benefits as well as enhanced military security'.⁶

Indigenous weapons production in India has also sometimes been justified as a means of conserving foreign exchange that would otherwise go to foreign purchases, but in almost all cases the policy of import substitution has failed to measure up to expectations. The problem is not unique to India. Scarce resources and the inability of Third World armed forces to absorb large quantities of domestically produced weapons makes for very high unit costs, in which case importing weapons of even superior quality can be the cheaper alternative. Thomas has found that licensed production has been increasingly favoured in India, especially by economic planners. They recognize 'the need to strike an optimum balance between the cost and quality of weaponry; this is best obtained in the long run through both external technological transfers and domestic production'.⁷ Here too there are costs, since licensing involves both the importation of parts and machinery as well as the payment of royalties. Still, the hope is that this paves a way for indigenization, a course that in the end may be less costly than an attempt to indigenize cold turkey.

There are other reasons why India builds weapons, not unrelated to its security environment or industrial development. According to Katz, '[t]he most important factor driving LDCs to produce arms can be summarized quite easily: autonomy, that is, freedom of action in the domestic and international spheres'.⁸ Actual or potential threats to national security are exacerbated when states find themselves dependent on others for defence. India, having experienced arms embargoes (for example, those imposed by the United States during the 1965 and 1971 conflicts with Pakistan), bristles at the thought of lasting arms dependence. As Indira Gandhi put it, 'We want

⁵ Raju G. C. Thomas, *Indian Security Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁶ Ken Conca, 'Third World Military Industrialization and the Evolving Security System', in Wayne Sandholtz et al. (eds.), *The Highest Stakes: The Economic Foundations of the Next Security System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 143. Thomas concludes that 'the growth of Indian military capabilities is, to a certain extent, unrelated to Indian threat perceptions and tends to be an autonomous trend based on civilian technological growth'. See Thomas, *Indian Security Policy*, p. 291.

⁷ See Thomas, *Indian Security Policy*, pp. 246–7, 251–2; also Chris Smith, *India's Ad Hoc Arsenal: Direction or Drift in Defence Policy?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Timothy D. Hoyt, 'Rising Regional Powers: New Perspectives on Indigenous Defense Industries and Military Capability in the Developing World', Ph.D. thesis, Johns Hopkins University (1997).

⁸ James Everett Katz, 'Understanding Arms Production in Developing Countries', in James Everett Katz (ed.), *Arms Production in Developing Countries: An Analysis of Decision Making* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1984), pp. 4–5.

India to be self-reliant and to strengthen its independence so that it cannot be pressurized by anybody'.⁹ Indian independence in defence policy is enhanced by an indigenous arms production capacity, particularly the capacity to initiate or expand production in a pinch, as well as the capacity to maintain existing systems.

According to the Ministry of Defence, 'Modernization of arms and equipment and a maximum degree of self-reliance and self-sufficiency in the shortest possible time have been the major objectives in our defence production effort. ... No free nation ... can afford to ignore the imperative need to maintain constant preparedness to defend [against] any threat to its borders'.¹⁰ Self-sufficiency in weapons procurement has taken on a degree of significance beyond diminishing the impact of arms embargoes during wartime; it has become an integral feature of India's stated policy of nonalignment. Principles of nonalignment have been adhered to more rigidly at some times and not others—Indira Gandhi's foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union falling into the latter category. But the desire to remain aloof from the Cold War competition which entangled so many other Third World states was the closest thing to an Indian strategic doctrine. With the Cold War over, the policy of nonalignment has less resonance, but self-sufficiency in arms production, and independence more generally, still have claims on the Indian imagination.

Beyond immediate security imperatives and industrial development, the possession of indigenous weapons production capacity has taken on symbolic importance for India. Foreign policy under Indira Gandhi has received much attention on this score, and the Pokhran nuclear test in 1974 epitomized India's quest for international recognition. In the opinion of one of Gandhi's biographers, Pokhran 'was no more than a gesture of independence and a bid for inexpensive prestige'.¹¹ William Brands, long-time observer of India's role in world affairs, detected the symbolic motivations behind India's nuclear programme well before the nuclear explosion occurred: 'With each of the first Chinese test explosions there was a new demand by some Indians that their country produce similar weapons. The demands often seemed as much concerned with Indian prestige as with security'. He adds that 'The call for an Indian nuclear force also reflected a mood that the country should depend more on itself and less on outsiders'.¹² Sisir Gupta, an Indian diplomat and academic, in 1965 referred to India as the 'sixth Power in a world where only five are recognized to be great' and suggested that India could 'either enter the club by defying the world and making a bomb or see to it that the bomb as a status symbol loses its significance because of effective progress towards disarmament'. He was sceptical regarding the latter option because 'military capability remains the most important source of a country's status, prestige and power'.¹³

⁹ Shashi Tharoor, *Reasons of State: Political Development and India's Foreign Policy under Indira Gandhi, 1966–1977* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1982), p. 88.

¹⁰ Quoted in Hoyt, 'Rising Regional Powers' (our italics), p. 69. See also V. K. R. V. Rao, *The Current Indian Crisis: Darkness Before Dawn* (Allahabad: Vohra, 1984).

¹¹ Surjit Mansingh, *India's Search for Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy, 1966–1982* (New Delhi: Sage, 1984), p. 59. See also Ramesh Thakur, *The Politics and Economics of India's Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), pp. 101, 106–7; Smith, *India's Ad Hoc Arsenal*, pp. 187, 189.

¹² H. W. Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace* (Boston: Twayne, 1990), pp. 220–1. Smith suggests that Nehru too 'recognized how much political power was commensurate with nuclear weapons', despite a great deal of ambivalence about India's pursuing a nuclear option. See Smith, *India's Ad Hoc Arsenal*, pp. 179–80.

¹³ Sisir Gupta, *India and the International System*, edited by M. S. Rajan and Shivaji Ganguly (New Delhi: Vikas, 1981), p. 243.

In addition to enhancing India in the eyes of the international community, domestic weapons production seems to have been partly motivated by the desire to enhance India in the eyes of Indians themselves. Again, this is a recurrent theme in defence policy under Indira Gandhi. One concern has been with the scientific and industrial community. In a 1968 interview, Gandhi lamented that 'our intellectuals, our industrialists and businessmen do not yet feel proud of being Indians'.¹⁴ She would later justify the Pokhran test by the need 'for our scientists to know what they are capable of'.¹⁵ In 1992, Prime Minister Rao referred to the successful test (after several failures) of the augmented Space Launch Vehicle (SLV) as 'a morale booster for the scientific community'.¹⁶ After Agni-II was tested in May 1999, Vajpayee heralded the Indian scientific community as 'second to none in the world', while insisting that 'all of us can truly say with pride: Jai Vigyan [Hail Science]'.¹⁷

The preoccupation with self-image has been extended to the whole of India as a nation. Without mentioning any specific weapons programmes, Gandhi once commented that 'while we must have arms to defend our country from any aggression, these arms, this military strength must be backed by conviction in our ideals and confidence in ourselves'.¹⁸ Commensurate with India's policy of nonalignment, she also wished for an Indian identity unmolested by Cold War politics: 'we wanted [India] to be able to grow in its own way—to choose its own direction, to choose its own personality'.¹⁹ There are nations, like India, that are 'sensitive, assertive and proud of their individual personalities. ... What is important is that we stand for ourselves'.²⁰

All of this suggests that there are multiple factors driving domestic weapons production in India, including the weapons-related nuclear and space programmes. India's immediate security environment, especially its enduring rivalry with Pakistan and its often hostile relations with China, is perhaps only the most obvious. India's defence programmes are also motivated by the hope that they will contribute to industrial development generally. And, most importantly for our purposes, military industrialization has symbolic meaning. It is perceived by Indian elites, and presumably by some non-elites, to enhance India's autonomy in foreign affairs, and ultimately its status and prestige in the international community. It is also seen to enhance the self-confidence of the scientific and technical community directly involved in weapons development and production, and even the self-image of the entire Indian nation. These themes resurface in our analysis of *India Today*. But first we turn to IR theory.

Symbols and international relations theory

Although there is little explicit in the realist literature regarding symbolic motivations behind the pursuit of indigenous arms production capacity, nuclear or non-

¹⁴ Nayantara Pandit Sahgal, *Indira Gandhi's Emergence and Style* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978), p. 40.

¹⁵ Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, p. 71.

¹⁶ Adish C. Aggarwala, *Prime Minister Narasimha Rao: Scholar Prime Minister* (New Delhi: Amish, 1995), p. 121.

¹⁷ 'India Wants Peace Everywhere: PM', *The Times of India*, 27 May 1999.

¹⁸ Indira Gandhi, *India: The Speeches and Reminiscences of Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India* (Calcutta: Rupa, 1975), pp. 140–1.

¹⁹ Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, p. 88.

²⁰ Pupul Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Pantheon, 1992), p. 255.

nuclear, there is nothing in realist theory that is inconsistent with such a characterization of Indian defence industrial policy. But a more serious lapse, something for which realism has been rightly criticized, is the failure to fully examine the source of those motivations (in a sense, preferences) and, more especially, the dynamic relationship between states as actors and the environment within which states interact.²¹ The question neglected by realists is not so much why states pursue the symbols of power in the form of, among other things, military industrialization. Waltz, in fact, has a perfectly good answer to that question: ‘The close juxtaposition of states promotes their sameness through the disadvantages that arise from a failure to conform to successful practices. . . . The socialization of nonconformist states proceeds at a pace that is set by the extent of their involvement in the system’.²² That is, states, at minimum, want to survive, and a process of social Darwinism tells them that possession of symbols of power will help them to do that. Rather, the more fundamental question neglected by realism is: beyond the utility of symbols for state behaviour, what do they say about the meaning of statehood itself?

Constructivists, borrowing from the ‘institutional’ approach in sociology, suggest that ‘security environments in which states are embedded are in important part cultural and institutional’. These environments ‘affect not only the incentives for different kinds of state behavior but also the basic character of states’—that is, state identity.²³ This latter claim sets constructivism apart not only from realism, but also liberalism which, while directing our attention to norms and institutions in international relations, has little to say about the construction of state identity. More important than taking a stand on the neoliberal–neorealist debate about the impact of institutions on state behaviour is the constructivist claim that social life, including international life, is ‘ideas all the way down’.²⁴ That is, whether power matters or whether institutions matter, the effects of both operate through their impact on the understandings, expectations, and knowledge shared by states. States not only behave (exert power, join institutions) in accordance with cues received from the structure of shared knowledge (or ‘global culture’) of which they are part, they are also defined or constituted by that structure.²⁵ Demonstrating the social construction of state identity, as opposed simply to state behaviour, represents a major challenge for empirically inclined scholars working within this tradition. It requires

²¹ See Alexander Wendt, ‘The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory’, *International Organization*, 41 (1987), pp. 335–70.

²² Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 128, 74–77. Actually, Waltz is referring to the process by which states learn balancing behaviour, as opposed to bandwagoning, but socialization is said to explain the learning of other forms of behaviour highlighted by realists. For a discussion of the impact on military doctrine, see Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

²³ Jepperson et al., ‘Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security’, p. 33. See also Martha Finnemore, ‘Norms, Culture, and World Politics: Insights from Sociology’s Institutionalism’, *International Organization*, 50 (1996), pp. 325–47, who details constructivism’s roots in institutionalist sociology.

²⁴ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 3. Constructivists, at least some, suggest that their approach should ultimately subsume both realism and liberalism in delineating the conditions under which state behaviour highlighted by these latter theories operate. See Jepperson et al., ‘Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security’, pp. 68–72.

²⁵ Wendt, ‘The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory’; Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

distinguishing between, on the one hand, states *behaving* in ways international society tells them to and, on the other hand, states just *being*.²⁶

The relevance of constructivist theory generally is the prominence given to symbolic motivations for state action—or the symbols of state identity. If state preferences are to be problematized and not taken as given, then constructivism seems more inclined than realism to entertain the possibility that symbolic motivations, and not just material interests, are significant forces behind military industrialization. Suchman and Eyre draw our attention to symbolic motivations in their examination of arms import patterns in the Third World. These patterns are puzzling because very high-end equipment acquisitions, common in the Third World, are not obviously the most appropriate from either a military or an economic viewpoint. Suchman and Eyre suggest we look to the ‘metonymical iconography of the global cultural order’, which teaches states to covet advanced weaponry not necessarily for its destructive efficiency, but for its ‘*symbolic* throw weight’. State preferences are shaped by ‘an essentially “ritualistic” . . . belief in militaries and modern weaponry as distinguishing emblems of the modern nation-state’.²⁷ Military procurement and force structuring exhibit ‘technologism’, or the ‘symbolic valuation of advanced over alternative technology’, which may be less than optimal in the Third World context.²⁸ The acquisition and, ultimately, the production of advanced weaponry becomes an important feature of state identity. According to Sagan, ‘military organizations and their weapons can therefore be envisioned as serving functions similar to those of flags, airlines, and Olympic teams: they are part of what modern states believe they have to possess to be legitimate, modern states’.²⁹

A similar claim has been advanced for some time by those who study the arms trade. Kaldor, for instance, maintains that ‘the possession of weapons systems allows for an ordering of international military relations, conferring political influence, merely through perceptions about military power’. Participation in this weapons *system* thus provides ‘a form of international legitimacy for Third World governments’.³⁰ Symbols are also central in certain postmodern accounts. Luke, for example, following Jean Baudrillard, contends that ‘the defence-industrial network produces strategic weapons objects as signs more than real engines of death’ and further that ‘a vital industrial capacity, strong R&D centers, growing technological

²⁶ On state identity (the ‘character of statehood’) and the degree to which we might be able to distinguish this empirically from state *behaviour*, which respects and reinforces existing norms of state sovereignty or practice, see Jepperson et al., ‘Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security’, pp. 35–6.

²⁷ See, respectively, Suchman and Eyre, ‘Military Procurement as Rational Myth’, pp. 149–50, 154, and Eyre and Suchman, ‘Status, Norms, and the Proliferation of Conventional Weapons’, p. 92.

²⁸ Alexander Wendt and Michael Barnett, ‘Dependent State Formation and Third World Militarization’, *Review of International Studies*, 19 (1993), p. 339. Luckham refers to ‘fetishism of the weapon’, Albrecht and Kaldor to ‘technology fetishism’. See Robin Luckham, ‘Armament Culture’, *Alternatives*, 10 (1984), pp. 1–44, and Ulrich Albrecht and Mary Kaldor, ‘Introduction’, in Mary Kaldor and Asbjørn Eide (eds.), *The World Military Order: The Impact of Military Technology on the Third World* (New York: Praeger, 1979). See also Michael Barnett and Alexander Wendt, ‘The Systemic Sources of Dependent Militarization’, in Brian L. Job (ed.), *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992) and Herbert Wulf, ‘Dependent Militarism in the Periphery and Possible Alternative Concepts’, in Stephanie G. Neuman and Robert E. Harkavy (eds.), *Arms Transfers in the Modern World* (New York: Praeger, 1979).

²⁹ Scott D. Sagan, ‘Why do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb’, *International Security*, 21 (1996/7), p. 74.

³⁰ Mary Kaldor, *The Baroque Arsenal* (New York, 1981), p. 144.

capabilities, increasing defence budgets, and constant improvements in the defence-industrial network are a sign-set that must appear in the display of superpower sign-exchange values'.³¹ Such observations apply to aspiring powers like India as well. Indeed, the advanced weaponry produced by Third World states—in effect, copies of the signs themselves—would seem to be a good example of Baudrillard's 'simulacra'.

If military industrialization is a socially constructed symbol of modern statehood, then the agents of socialization can be found in the training of Third World military elites, first by their colonial authorities and then, during the Cold War, by both sides in the East-West competition. The process also operates through the international arms trade itself, since '[t]he joint possession of weapons systems and appropriate organisation creates agreement about what constitutes military power'.³² More generally, according to this perspective, states like India adopt preferences for advanced weapons—and, we would add, the capacity to manufacture them—by virtue of being embedded in a particular global culture or 'world military order', through which 'symbols and meanings prevalent in advanced capitalist societies are imposed on other societies'.³³ Empirical researchers have sought to link the movement toward isomorphism in military procurement patterns to the extent of immersion in this global culture. Thus, Eyre and Suchman observe a correlation between the possession of symbolically significant weaponry, like supersonic aircraft, and the state's membership in international governmental organizations.³⁴

Rarely, perhaps never, have analysts adopting a sociological perspective taken the position that the forces driving Third World arms acquisitions or military industrialization are solely symbolic to the exclusion of more material or functional concerns. (Here is the distinction between weaponry and other more thoroughly symbolic objects like national flags.) The empirical task for social constructivism is therefore rather difficult in this context. It requires not only demonstrating that symbolic concerns do in fact motivate state behaviour (and inhere in state identity), but also overcoming a realist bias in security analysis which favours explanations resting upon the material interests of states.

At this stage, we are not prepared to weigh in with a position on which assortment of material and symbolic motivations provide the best causal explanation for India's indigenous arms-production programme. We emphasize symbolic factors in this article not because we have concluded that these are most important, but because we believe they warrant more attention than they currently receive in the security literature, especially on the topic of conventional arms procurement. If symbolic and material motivations predicted fundamentally different forms of behaviour, the task of assessing the causal significance of symbolic motivations would not be so hard. If, for example, regional security and domestic economic

³¹ Timothy Luke, 'What's Wrong With Deterrence? A Semiotic Interpretation of National Security Policy', in James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (eds.), *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington, MA, 1989), pp. 224, 225. See also Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).

³² Kaldor, *The Baroque Arsenal* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 144. See also A.F. Mullins, Jr., *Born Arming: Development and Military Power in New States* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), especially ch. 2, and Luckham, 'Armament Culture'.

³³ Luckham, 'Armament Culture', p. 32. The notion of a 'world military order' is broached by Albrecht and Kaldor in their introduction to *World Military Order*, and discussed at greater length in Kaldor, *The Baroque Arsenal*.

³⁴ Eyre and Suchman, 'Status, Norms, and the Proliferation of Conventional Weapons'.

considerations incline Indian leaders to purchase weaponry from abroad, while symbolic motivations propel them to make their own, the relative importance of these various factors might be readily apparent through an examination of Indian weapons procurement patterns. Indeed, some Indian critics of indigenization point to both the excessive costs and the lacklustre performance of some of India's weapons systems as evidence that military security and economics call for continued foreign purchases, arguing that national pride and international prestige alone provide the (misguided) rationale for domestic arms production. Nevertheless, it is clear from public discussion and debate that many Indians have found compelling reasons for indigenization in the country's economic and security environment, so that symbolic motivations would appear to exist alongside these as the driving forces behind military industrialization. These are predominantly complementary, not countervailing, forces.

There is another problem associated with trying to assess the causal import of symbolic and non-symbolic motivations for Indian arms production. In contrasting symbolic considerations with 'material', 'functional', or 'rational' ones, we do not mean to imply that international recognition or national pride are in fact inconsequential to Indian national security. Enhanced prestige has a real impact on the way the international community interacts with a state on security-related matters, which is why India and many other states covet it. A unified and confident self-image as a nation—the domestic side of international status and prestige—has consequences as well, especially in a democracy, because leaders are encouraged to be decisive in their international dealings. Thus, ascertaining whether real security implications follow from India's military-industrial efforts cannot serve as a basis upon which to judge the relative importance of symbolic and non-symbolic factors.

Weapons production and public discourse in India

Since symbolism can motivate the same behaviour as does 'rational' military calculation or industrial policy, we must look beyond that behaviour in order to judge competing explanations for what drives it. We cannot begin to do so until symbolic rationales for indigenous arms production are more adequately documented. For this reason our analysis is more descriptive than causal. Our findings, while they may lend themselves to explanations of military procurement that emphasize the role of symbolism, could figure in alternative theoretical accounts. In short, we are describing what we feel is a neglected variable in security analysis, but we are deferring to subsequent research a firm conclusion regarding the causal significance of symbols relative to other motivating forces. However, we will be able to comment on the relative prominence of symbolic imagery compared to other seemingly more functional rationales for military industrialization as reflected in India's public discourse.

Researchers have not devoted much attention to documenting evidence for the symbolic motivations driving state behaviour, especially patterns of weapons acquisition. Realists might be expected to forego the empirical analysis of symbols since they are assumed to play a minor role in the utility functions of states. Also, as we have pointed out and as we shall emphasize again later, much of the symbolic

imagery present in Indian discourse relates to the nation's image of itself. This preoccupation may have much to do with domestic culture and political history, and such internal characteristics of states receive scant attention in realist analysis, especially in structural realism. A full account of the role of symbols in motivating arms procurement or other forms of state behaviour invites a line of inquiry typically rejected as unproductive by realists.³⁵

Social constructivists, while in principle receptive to the documentation of symbolic motivations, have anticipated a bias in the empirical evidence. Suchman and Eyre worry that 'locating empirical evidence of nonrational decision making poses a significant methodological problem, particularly for investigators employing case-study techniques'. Since there is a 'rational myth' associated with military strategy and planning itself, an analysis of public justifications for weapons purchases and, by extension, indigenous weapons production 'is far more likely to find evidence of strategic, factional, or geopolitical logic than it is to uncover affirmations of ritual conformity'.³⁶ While we acknowledge this potential bias, we are not quite so pessimistic about observing symbolic, 'nonrational' motivations in the public discourse on weapons production. What we see may only be the tip of the iceberg, but what is observable provides a wealth of insight—enough, we believe, to justify continued exploration both above and below the surface.

We examine *India Today*, a weekly news magazine, in an effort to document the symbolic motivations behind the country's indigenous weapons programmes. We choose *India Today* because it is India's most popular weekly and thus provides a large window through which we can examine the public discourse on military industrialization. It is read by a large cross-section of Indian society and can be expected to capture the imagery of India's burgeoning middle classes. Its political outlook is very much mainstream, though its contributors are by no means neutral on the contentious issues that become subjects of public debate. *India Today* is sometimes critical, sometimes supportive of official Indian policy, but rarely extreme in its news reporting or opinions. As a tool for profiling the whole range of motivations for Indian arms production, there is probably no better single source of information. *India Today* is also a credible source. It is read and cited by South Asian specialists as a source of factual information and for insights into Indian public opinion and debate.

Some information encountered in *India Today* conveys official positions and policies of the Indian government simply because these are often the subject of news reporting or analysis. Statements pertaining to Indian arms production may be attributed to government officials, military leaders, or leading figures in the defence industry. Others represent statements of fact or opinion made by *India Today* reporters, and these presumably reflect in many instances the views of the magazine's editors. In any event, we are not terribly concerned with examining the official

³⁵ Some researchers have explored the domestic political and cultural bases of realpolitik behaviour by states. See, for example, Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991) and Alastair Iain Johnson, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). Locating the determinants of realpolitik (or at least some of them) within the state has been viewed by some as expanding the repertoire of realism, but such a focus is not consistent with typical realist analysis.

³⁶ Suchman and Eyre, 'Military Procurement as Rational Myth', p. 151.

pronouncements justifying Indian military industrialization. Indeed, we concur with Suchman and Eyre that *official* discourse is most likely to be biased by a rationalist myth.³⁷ What we want to examine is the *public* discourse. Public discourse, it seems to us, subsumes (non-secret) official discourse, and therefore paints a more complete and a less biased picture of the social forces motivating the development of arms production capacity.

We reviewed all issues of *India Today* from May 1977 to April 1999 and identified 136 articles devoted in whole or in part to the issue of indigenous weapons production that also contained one or more statements regarding the *motivations* for India's domestic arms production programmes. Our focus was conventional arms production, although India's nuclear and space programmes are often discussed in the same articles and are identified as being motivated by the same set of considerations. We have also reviewed online issues of three other Indian sources—a fortnightly news magazine, *Frontline*, and two dailies, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Hindu*—in an attempt to expose any obvious biases or omissions in *India Today* reporting. We found none. The online availability of these sources is limited to the more recent period, with no issues available before January 1996, but a similar profile emerges from each of them. The same types of rationales for weapons indigenization revealed by *India Today* can be found in these other publications, and each type occupies roughly the same level of prominence as in *India Today*. We summarize these results in the Appendix.

Although we were able to document several types of motivations for Indian arms production, our aim is to present a variety of statements representing symbolic motivations. We can, however, give some indication of the relative frequency with which the various types of motivations, material and symbolic, appear in the public discourse. Of the 136 articles containing justifications for indigenous weapons programmes, 91 mention India's enduring conflicts with Pakistan and/or China. These immediate security concerns are the most commonly expressed of all the motivations for domestic arms production, both in terms of the number of articles in which they appear and the frequency with which they are mentioned in these articles. Many of the same articles, plus some others—64 all together—refer to more general security concerns without specific mention of Pakistan or China, while 21 refer to India's dependence on foreign suppliers for weapons or spare parts and the implications for the country's warfighting capacity. In addition to these security-related motivations, other material considerations are mainly economic. The potential benefits of weapons indigenization for the civilian sector, including overall technological development, are mentioned in 31 articles, while 45 refer to either the expense of foreign arms imports or, more recently, the earning potential of Indian arms exports.

Symbolic motivations for military industrialization are frequently mentioned in *India Today*. Exactly half of the 136 articles we examined included such references, which we divide into three categories: India's autonomy in foreign affairs (35 articles), India's international status and prestige (39 articles), and India's self-image (34 articles). In the following sections we describe this symbolic imagery in somewhat more detail with the help of excerpts from *India Today*.

³⁷ For an analysis of the construction of the 'official' discourse of security policy and strategies for legitimating it through popular media, in this case films and video, see Michael J. Shapiro, 'Strategic Discourse/Discursive Strategy: The Representation of "Security Policy" in the Video Age', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34 (1990), pp. 327–40.

Exhibit A: on Indian autonomy

As we have suggested, rather than flatly categorizing military hardware or defence industrial policy as either of symbolic or functional import, it is probably better to appreciate that some mix of the two often motivates procurement. This mix is apparent in statements that link Indian accomplishments in weapons development to an increase in Indian autonomy (all italics are ours).

- [1] This approach of ‘capability matching’ rather than building strength to suit the nation’s long-term threat wastes money and gives India’s defence doctrine an undesirable defensive hue. Besides such armament decisions also make the country increasingly *dependent on foreign sources*. Says [defence analyst] Jaswant Singh: ‘You always *pay a political price for arms imports*. *Weapon supply is after all a lubricant of diplomacy today*’.³⁸
- [2] Though the speech played down Agni’s strategic importance, Rajiv personally added a line: ‘We must remember that *technological backwardness also leads to subjugation*’.³⁹

There is an explicit recognition on the part of Indian elites that the failure to produce advanced weaponry threatens to limit India’s manoeuvrability in the exercise of foreign policy, but only in the vaguest terms. Rajiv Gandhi’s reference to ‘subjugation’ is intended to highlight the dangers of becoming dependent on the superpowers in particular (excerpt [2]), as are other statements reported in *India Today*:

- [3] . . . The MiG-29 purchase also *symbolises the return to an era of dependency*, since it is just one item in an overflowing basket of weaponry that India has been buying from Moscow in the last two years, ranging from tanks to high reconnaissance spy planes to missiles and helicopters. . . . What is causing even greater concern is the fact that *dependence on the Soviets is now creeping into new areas that undermine India’s laborious attempts to become self-reliant in defence production*.⁴⁰
- [4] India, it would seem, has no alternative but to maintain a modern, mobile and efficient military machine. How this can be done in a realistic manner, without squandering national foreign exchange reserves and *becoming dependent on either or both of the superpowers* is a question that will increasingly bother India’s defence planners in the years to come.⁴¹

Aside from India’s more material interest in not squandering foreign exchange reserves, here again the concern seems to be with dependence *per se*, and not the implications for India’s overall military capacity, which is presumably enhanced by the acquisition of Russian weaponry. Clearly, short-term military capacity is not all that matters to Indian defence planners given their ‘laborious attempts’ to indigenize defence production (excerpt [3]).

Indigenization has indeed taken on symbolic significance in India, to the point of becoming an emblem of Indian nationalism:

- [5] Indian military aircraft designers have sat virtually idle for nearly 20 years since HAL’s HF-24 project folded up. ‘The aeronautical community has been treated brutally for 25

³⁸ Shekar Gupta, ‘The New Thrust’, *India Today*, 15 November 1985.

³⁹ Dilip Bobb, ‘Chariot of Fire’, *India Today*, 15 June 1989.

⁴⁰ Dilip Bobb, ‘Moscow’s New Offensive’, *India Today*, 31 August 1984.

⁴¹ Shekar Gupta, ‘The New Thrust’, *India Today*, 15 November 1985.

- years. We have lost two generations of aeronautical engineers. That's why *we are now on a swadeshi track*', explains Arunachalam [scientific advisor to the defence minister]. And the LCA team leader Harinarayana aptly *symbolises this swadeshi spirit*. 'I am a totally indigenous product', he proclaims proudly. 'I have never studied or worked abroad'.⁴²
- [6] On Pakistan's nuclear potential: Political analyst Hari Jaisingh says: '... The BJP's stand is crystal clear. *It wants a swadeshi bomb*'.⁴³
- [7] Each Arjun will cost Rs 7.5 crore to Rs 11 crore each, which ironically is close to the price of an imported tank. But then *indigenisation is the raison d'être of the MBT project*.⁴⁴

The term 'swadeshi' was popularized by Mahatma Gandhi in the context of his campaign to encourage Indians to spin their own cloth instead of relying on British imports, and thus the term has a clear nationalist ring. It is not surprising therefore that the intensely nationalistic Bharatiya Janata Party would call for a 'swadeshi bomb' (excerpt [6]). The notion is taken to a slightly comical extreme when the LCA team leader uses swadeshi to describe himself (excerpt [5]). The symbolism inherent in indigenization is amply demonstrated by the observation that, although the Arjun tank is no less expensive than an import, and possibly functionally inferior, to dwell on such material issues misses the point. Indigenization is an end in itself (excerpt [7]).

The symbolic significance of military industrialization is also illustrated by a desire not merely to establish and protect Indian autonomy, but also to demonstrate Indian accomplishments to the rest of the world, or at least to those states that might be impressed:

- [8] General B.C. Joshi, chief of army staff: 'And because [Prithvi] is indigenously produced, it is far more important. Self-sufficiency is critical in this area. *Now we are not beholden to any foreign power*. . . . Agni has tremendous potential as *it puts you in a totally different league*. And as a *technology demonstrator*, the missile's success is of great significance to the country'.⁴⁵
- [9] For years, the US had banned the sale of technology and material that could contribute to India's space and missile programme. While this helped delay its development, *India demonstrated that it could successfully indigenise sophisticated technology*.⁴⁶
- [10] On the airborne surveillance platform: So, could the purpose of flying the patently incomplete ASP be to show that we can 'thump' the Pakistanis, given the fact that Pakistan can lease the US-made system from Saudi Arabia in a time of crisis? Or is it simply *a message to [airborne early warning]-manufacturing nations*, saying: 'If you don't sell it to us, *we'll make it ourselves*'.⁴⁷

These statements suggest that it is important both to develop advanced weapons technology and to make the international community aware that it has been developed. Of the various types of statements linking military industrialization to the promotion and protection of Indian autonomy, these are perhaps most indicative of the importance of symbolism. Quite aside from whether India actually exercises its autonomy in foreign affairs, it is vitally important that the signs of

⁴² Ramindar Singh, 'Trouble Before Take-off', *India Today*, 31 January 1986.

⁴³ Dilip Bobb and Ramindar Singh, 'Pakistan's Nuclear Bombshell', *India Today*, 31 March 1987.

⁴⁴ Kanwar Sandhu, 'On Course, Finally', *India Today*, 15 July 1993.

⁴⁵ Raj Chengappa, 'The Missile Man', *India Today*, 15 April 1994.

⁴⁶ Raj Chengappa, 'Nuclear Blackmail', *India Today*, 30 April 1994.

⁴⁷ Avirook Sen, 'Ground Realities', *India Today*, 31 December 1996.

Indian autonomy be ‘demonstrated’ to the rest of the world (excerpts [8] and [9]). Indigenous weaponry, even when incomplete, sends ‘a message’ to other arms producing states content to withhold their advanced technology from the international arms market (excerpt [10]).

Exhibit B: on India’s international status and prestige

The purposes behind India’s quest for autonomy in military production are both functional and symbolic, and we have tried to identify statements that reflect on the latter dimension. The reference above to Agni’s potential for placing India in a ‘totally different league’ (excerpt [8]) is echoed in other statements, which reflect more explicitly India’s international aspirations:

- [11] The success of the SLV-3-(E)-02, a completely indigenous four-stage rocket... *put India into an exclusive club* with only five other members... ‘This is a great day for India and Indian science’, proclaimed Mrs Gandhi, echoing the popular view. . . .⁴⁸
- [12] Whether in the corridors of the Defence R&D department in Delhi, or in the Bangalore offices of the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA), the apex body which oversees the design and development of the LCA, there is an infectious enthusiasm that the LCA prototype will fly by 1989 and that *it will catapult India into the technological superleague of nations* who produce their own frontline fighter planes.⁴⁹
- [13] At exactly 7:17 am on May 22, Agni blossomed into a chariot of fire that *propelled India into an exclusive club* dominated by the world’s technological and military giants.⁵⁰
- [14] On the unsuccessful test of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle: . . . PSLV’s success *would have made India a major player* in the commercial space arena. As Professor Rao [chairman of the Space Research Organisation] says: ‘It is a quantum leap in space technology for us and it would have given us the muscle power to put anything into space’. What was left unstated was that if PSLV succeeded, *India could have also muscled into the exclusive club of countries* having Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) capability.⁵¹
- [15] Recently, a series of developments *have powered the nation into the rarefied strata* of strategic missile competence. Topping the list is the successful third launch of Agni, India’s Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM), on February 19.⁵²

All of these excerpts contain references to an elite group of nations that possess the capacity to produce one or another category of military hardware—the ‘superleague of nations’ producing fighters (excerpt [12]), the ‘exclusive club’ or ‘rarefied strata’ producing longer-range missiles (excerpts [11], [13–15])—as well as India’s acquisition or impending acquisition of elite status. The fact that indigenously produced weapons, such as the LCA, may be more expensive and possess mediocre performance characteristics appears, in many ways, to be of secondary importance. The utility of indigenous military hardware seems to be, at least partly, ‘symbolic’: they

⁴⁸ Suman Dubey, ‘Soaring Into the Space Age’, *India Today*, 15 August 1980.

⁴⁹ Ramindar Singh, ‘Trouble Before take-off’, *India Today*, 31 January 1986.

⁵⁰ Dilip Bobb, ‘Chariot of Fire’, *India Today*, 15 June 1989.

⁵¹ Raj Changappa, ‘PSLV’s Deviant Behaviour’, *India Today*, 15 October 1993.

⁵² Raj Chengappa, ‘The Missile Man’, *India Today*, 15 April 1994.

are indicators of status and prestige. Other statements are quite explicit on this score:

- [16] Interview with Air Chief Marshal Denis A. La Fontaine: 'If we do not indigenise, *how will we become a first class nation?*'⁵³
- [17] While the haggling goes on, the desperate need for the jet trainers is a grim reminder of the reality that the Indian policy makers seem to ignore in their *heady rush for 'mini-power status'*: that *no nation has ever become a real power* with its army firing mostly imported guns, its air force flying foreign aircraft and its navy riding submarines leased from another superpower.⁵⁴
- [18] A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, head of the defence research programme: '... India can now be *rated as a missile power* that can deliver a range of missiles any time, anywhere that we want. *Agni symbolises our technological capabilities*. Prithvi is a world class surface-to-surface missile. In the anti-tank class we want to be number one with Nag. Akash is heading for a unique second in its surface-to-air class.'⁵⁵
- [19] Says Muchkund Dubey [former foreign secretary]: '*The bomb option is a currency of power* that is critical to our survival as a strong nation'.⁵⁶

Here is the assertion that if India wants to become a 'first class nation', or even if India aspires to 'mini-power status', it cannot rely on imported weaponry because 'real power' requires something more (excerpts [16] and [17]). Again, it is indigenous arms production, especially production of 'world class' missiles like Agni and Prithvi, that will 'symbolise' India's technological capabilities (excerpt [18]). The option to use nuclear weapons, now that India has developed its own missile capacity, can be used as a 'currency of power' (excerpt [19]). Such are the elements of international status and prestige identified in Indian discourse.

Exhibit C: on India's self-image

We have noted that the writings and speeches of Indira Gandhi sometimes betray a certain concern about India's collective inferiority complex, especially the lack of pride among Indian scientists and engineers. They also express hope that military industrialization might play a role in enhancing Indian identity. Statements found in *India Today* suggest that Gandhi was not alone in either her concerns or her solutions:

- [20] On the launch of the SLV-3: 'With the team I have', said U.R. Rao who heads the Indian Space Research Organization's Satellite Centre (Isac) near Bangalore, '*I have enough confidence to build anything let alone satellites*'.⁵⁷
- [21] Says Dr A.P.J.A. Kalam, chief architect of Agni and the brain behind the success of the [Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme]: '*Agni gives us the confidence that we are capable of producing any kind of missile. We are now self-sufficient both in design and missile technology*'.⁵⁸

⁵³ Shekar Gupta, 'Design Gap', *India Today*, 15 November 1985.

⁵⁴ Shekar Gupta, 'A Sea Change', *India Today*, 31 December 1987.

⁵⁵ Raj Chengappa, 'The Missile Man', *India Today*, 15 April 1994.

⁵⁶ Raj Chengappa, 'Nuclear Blackmail', *India Today*, 30 April 1994.

⁵⁷ Suman Dubey, 'Soaring Into the Space Age', *India Today*, 15 August 1980.

⁵⁸ Dilip Bobb, 'Chariot of Fire', *India Today*, 15 June 1989.

That individuals in such high positions in India's space technology community would speak of such successes in terms of enhanced 'confidence' reveals something about their prior lack of it. Demonstrations of Indian technological prowess not only contribute to the country's international status and prestige, they also provide a needed boost to India's image of itself. Other statements employ telling metaphors:

- [22] Says a top-level defence scientist: 'Prithvi could be a really major achievement. *It signals our coming of age*'.⁵⁹
- [23] On the LCA project: Ever since the HF 24's partial success, negated largely by the lack of a good engine, the IAF has depended on licensed production or off-the-shelf purchases. The Jaguar, the Mirage 2000 and the MiG 29 have given the IAF plenty of punch but it has not led to any major transfer of technologies. Now, as a defence expert says: '*We are toddlers in the business. We are groping for help*'.⁶⁰
- [24] A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, head of the defence research programme: 'Let us imagine a situation where we don't have strategic missiles and nations around us have either developed or purchased them. We would then be dependent on another country to help us out. Today our missile programme is playing a role in *helping us stand on our legs*'.⁶¹

Various stages of physical development are alluded to here—standing, toddling, coming of age—but all of them suggest a degree of immaturity relative to other nation-states that India aspires to emulate. Such references, along with those applauding increased self-confidence (excerpts [20] and [21]), do seem infused with more humility than statements asserting Indian autonomy or its international status and prestige. The symbolism is no less significant, however. India is like a child maturing into adulthood. The process of military industrialization may be slow, but it is perfectly natural, indeed inevitable, for a country like India who wants to grow up to be a major power someday.

Conclusion

In December 1995, *India Today* polled residents in nine major Indian cities on matters of nuclear policy. Sixty-two per cent approved of nuclear testing for purposes of developing India's nuclear weapons capability. Of these, 95 per cent felt that the nuclear option was important in order to protect India against nuclear threats from China and Pakistan, and 85 per cent felt that it was important to improve India's international bargaining power generally. These, of course, are straightforward functional concerns. But 83 per cent also gave another reason for India's nuclear capability: 'enhancing our international status'.⁶² Indians recognized the symbolic import of nuclear weapons, and distinguished this from more functional motivations.

We reach a similar conclusion. Our systematic analysis of *India Today*, India's leading news magazine, suggests that India's material interests provide a central impetus for the policy of military industrialization. Most references to India's weapons production cite the country's enduring tensions with Pakistan and China.

⁵⁹ Shekar Gupta, 'Shooting Ahead', *India Today*, 31 March 1988.

⁶⁰ Raj Chengappa, 'A Testing Time', *India Today*, 31 August 1988.

⁶¹ Raj Chengappa, 'The Missile Man', *India Today*, 15 April 1994.

⁶² 'Opinion Poll: Yes to the Bomb', *India Today*, 31 December 1995.

Many other statements refer to the enhancement of India's warfighting capacity in more general terms, especially the dangers involved in remaining dependent on foreigners for weapons and spare parts during wartime. Economic issues are frequently mentioned as well, including the beneficial effects of military industrialization on the development of civilian industries and the foreign exchange to be saved with import substitution.

Other benefits accruing from military industrialization appear to be primarily symbolic in Indian eyes. There are three closely interrelated yet distinguishable concerns in the public discourse that we consider symbolic. The first is that military industrialization is a means of asserting India's autonomy in international affairs. Guarding one's autonomy is, to be sure, standard fare among sovereign states—perhaps more so among some Third World states, or 'quasi-states', that otherwise lack the institutional capacity to promote and protect the welfare of their citizenry.⁶³ India does not fall into this latter category, but autonomy has nonetheless become emblematic of Indian statehood in the public discourse. The symbolic dimension is well captured by references to the 'swadeshi' spirit among defence industry personnel, and to 'swadeshi' bombs. Now autonomy in weapons production is certainly of great functional value, especially to protect against leverage that might otherwise be exercised by arms suppliers, but we have also found that references of this sort are relatively easy to separate from references to Indian autonomy as a symbol of Indian statehood.

A second concern evident in the public discourse is India's international status and prestige. There is an apparent preoccupation with what it takes to become a member of the 'superleague', 'rarefied strata', or 'exclusive club' of nation-states. Whether India has achieved that ranking or, if not, what still remains to be accomplished in the area of defence industrialization, is the subject of some debate. That India is destined for such greatness is generally taken for granted. Moreover, prestige is not sought for particular instrumental purposes. Short-term goals do not attach to statements regarding India's international status, current or immanent, nor do the sorts of longer-term messianic goals we might expect from a leading state in the nonaligned movement. There is no doubt an understanding that international status and prestige will afford India a degree of influence over the international rules of the game, and thus a recognition that military industrialization may allow India to exercise structural or hegemonic power (or check it). But such intentions do not find much expression in the public discourse.⁶⁴ As a symbol of Indian statehood, international prestige looks to be primarily an end in itself.

India's self-image is the third symbolic theme we identify in the public discourse. Of course, technically, references to India's autonomy and to its international status and prestige are also part of India's self-image, but there is something unique about the sorts of statements we group in this third category. There is, shall we say, less posturing involved and more self-reflection. References to India as a 'toddler' or as 'coming of age', as well as to enhanced self-confidence, suggest that India still has a

⁶³ The notion of quasi-states and distinction between juridical and empirical statehood is discussed in Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁶⁴ On the different types of power—bargaining, structural, and hegemonic—potentially exercised by arms suppliers, see Keith Krause, 'Military Statecraft: Power and Influence in Soviet and American Arms Transfer Relationships', *International Studies Quarterly*, 35 (1991), pp. 313–36.

way to go before entering 'adulthood'—that is, membership in the superleague or rarefied strata of nations. Such sentiments surely reflect more humility on the part of particular contributors to the public discourse, but they also stand out as echoing a key dimension of Indian identity discernible in some of Indira Gandhi's public statements and reminiscences. Whether they reflect 'true' Indian identity or whether Gandhi was projecting some of her own psychological insecurities onto the nation as a whole, as some of her biographers have suggested, is not an issue we are presently able to address. It will suffice to say that there is in Indian public discourse a linkage between military industrialization and maturity and self-confidence, desired symbols of Indian statehood.

What do we conclude from this study? First, symbolic motivations for indigenous arms production in India are subject to systematic empirical observation. Our approach to measurement—identifying relevant excerpts in *India Today*—is a reasonable one, we believe, but it certainly invites refinement for purposes of rigorous empirical analysis. Second, the prominence of symbolic imagery in the Indian public discourse suggests that theoretical approaches like constructivism that focus on state identity formation might benefit from empirical research on the role of symbolism in state behaviour, since the particular themes we have identified each pertain to the meaning of Indian statehood. Although the results of our analysis suggest that symbolic motivations may constitute an important component of a full explanation for Indian military industrialization—a more important one than the realist approach allows—we have not provided a definitive test of this proposition. Because material and symbolic considerations both seem to be driving the same behaviour, subsequent empirical research must be designed to better evaluate their relative weightiness. We suspect that conclusions may vary depending on which indigenous arms programmes are scrutinized.

In describing the symbolic forces driving Indian military industrialization, we have paid less attention to the forces behind the symbolic imagery itself. In our discussion of relevant international relations theory, we did point out that realists and constructivists alike identify a socializing process in world politics. It could be that the preoccupation with symbols of statehood is most pronounced for relatively recent entrants into the society of states. After the first round of nuclear tests in May 1998, the Indian government announced that 'Succeeding generations of Indians would rest assured that contemporary technologies associated with nuclear options have been passed on to them this the 50th year of our independence'.⁶⁵ Not only was India now a member of an exclusive club, it was also a youthful member. Whether young states are more taken with symbolism than old states is a worthwhile question for further comparative research.

Sources of symbolic imagery might also be domestic, and this represents another important question for comparative research. References to self-confidence and the confidence-building effects of successful indigenization may be partly rooted in Indian history and domestic culture. Certainly there can be no doubt that military-industrial accomplishments are paraded for domestic as well as international

⁶⁵ Press Statement, 11 May 1998, <<http://www.indianembassy.org/pic/prmay1198.htm>> (30 May 1998). For a discussion of the debates and decisions that have shaped India's nuclear programme, see Sumit Ganguly, 'India's Pathway to Pokhran II: The Prospects and Sources of New Delhi's Nuclear Weapons Program', *International Security*, 23 (1999), pp. 148–77.

audiences. Where and how global and domestic culture interact to produce the symbolic imagery that drives arms production in India, or any other state, represents an interesting and challenging line of inquiry. We have tried to demonstrate that symbolic imagery is manifest in public discourse, and is measurable. Empirical observation is probably not a serious impediment to rigorous research on the role of symbolism in either state identity formation or state behaviour.

Appendix

In this article we have tried to identify the symbolic imagery present in Indian public discourse surrounding indigenous arms production, and we believe that there is no better source than *India Today* for our purposes. But aware of the dangers of relying on this single source, we have consulted the online editions of *Frontline*, *The Hindustan Times*, and *The Hindu* to see if a similar picture emerges from these publications. *Frontline* is a fortnightly news magazine with a general readership, though a somewhat smaller one than *India Today*'s. *The Hindustan Times* and *The Hindu* are independent daily newspapers, and are naturally more inclined to reach the lower-middle strata of Indian society than the news magazines. We were interested in (1) whether the same rationales for Indian military industrialization find expression in these sources, and (2) whether the frequency with which they appear is comparable to their relative prominence in *India Today*. For each news source, Table A shows the number of relevant articles in which each rationale appears and the number of articles as a percentage of all relevant articles.

Table A. Comparing *India Today* with other Indian news sources.

Rationale	<i>India Today</i> (May 77–Apr 99)		<i>Frontline</i> (Aug 97–Apr 99)		<i>Hindustan Times</i> (Nov 97–Apr 99)		<i>The Hindu</i> (Jan 96–Apr 99)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Symbolic	68	50	4	80	9	41	9	53
National Autonomy	35	26	2	40	5	23	3	18
International Status	39	29	2	40	3	14	3	18
Self-Image	34	25	1	20	2	9	3	18
Threat from Rival	91	66	2	40	7	32	6	35
Regional Security	64	47	1	20	5	23	3	18
Arms Dependence	21	15	0	0	6	27	3	18
Industrial Development	31	23	0	0	3	14	6	35
Foreign Exchange	45	33	1	20	2	9	2	12
<i>Total Articles</i>	136		5		22		17	

Note: For each source, the first column shows the number of articles in which a particular rationale for domestic arms production is mentioned at least once, while the second column shows the percentage of all relevant articles in which that rationale appears. Relevant articles are those devoted in full or in part to the topic of Indian arms production. The online editions of *Frontline*, *The Hindustan Times*, and *The Hindu* were analysed, and are located at the following web addresses: *Frontline*, www.the-hindu.com/flinel/; *The Hindustan Times*, www.hindustantimes.com/; *The Hindu*, www.the-hindu.com/.

Generally speaking, although the match is not exact, there is nothing in these results to suggest that *India Today* (or any of the other three sources) is providing a glimpse into Indian public discourse that is at odds with the others. The whole range of motivations we identify from *India Today* also appears in *Frontline*, *The Hindustan Times*, and *The Hindu*, and symbolic motivations feature as prominently as they do in *India Today*. Although the online editions span a much shorter period than our analysis of 22 years of *India Today*, we do not suspect that our conclusions would be any different if we were to conduct a more exhaustive examination.