

## EXPLAINING INDIA'S NUCLEARIZATION: ENGAGING REALISM AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM\*

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*This article presents an analytical hybrid of realism and critical social constructivism as its theoretical framework, and representations of (in)securities as an interpretation of politics, to explain India's nuclearization policies. Arguing that a linkage of political leaders' ideologies, articulation of statist identities, and (in)securities defines a state's security practices, I compare how the ideological perceptions of the post-colonial Indian state's leaders have articulated divergent notions of nationalisms, nationalist identities, and (in)securities and corresponding nuclear-policy choices. In charting this comparison, I explore how the political, economic, and developmental insecurities perceived by the Indian state under the Congress Party have become communal/cultural under the Bharatiya Janata Party, thereby facilitating the BJP's justification of India's nuclear-weapon tests. The article thus hopes to add to our understanding about the security problematiques of states and communities.*

**Key words:** India, East Asian security, nuclear weapons

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## Introduction

### *Weaknesses of Realist Explanations*

On May 11, 1998 the Indian state under its recent Hindu Right Government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)<sup>1</sup> exploded three nuclear devices, followed by two more explosions a couple of days later. Shortly afterwards, on May 28 and 30, the Pakistani government responded by exploding six nuclear weapons. These two events marked the emergence of India and Pakistan as declared nuclear-weapon states from their earlier, more ambivalent, positions as nuclear-capable states. What explains India's nuclear detonations? Among the contending arguments, the predominant one is based on realism—the assumption that in an anarchical world, recourse to self-help to protect national security is the most pragmatic strategy for a state to follow.<sup>2</sup> From this realist perspective, the regional milieu surrounding the Indian subcontinent—in particular, the animosity of India's neighbors, Pakistan and China—makes India's tests understandable. Yet, I consider this explanation limited because realism, guided by a “utilitarian [objective] calculus,” conceptualizes security largely within the parameters of an objective and empirical discourse, where insecurity is a given. Thus, realism has paid scant attention to the subjective ways in which insecurity may be constructed in international relations and how policy makers' ideologies may define states' identities, (in)securities, and security policies.

The Indian government has also made use of a nuclear-apartheid argument to justify India's nuclear detonation. Although relatively less recognized than the realist explanation, this argument points to the inequalities in the distribution of global nuclear resources that were institutionalized and legitimized through international arms control treaties such as the

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1. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the recent Hindu Right government of India that headed a coalition from May 1998 until April 2004.
  2. George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001); Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, eds., *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)—treaties that created an elite club of “nuclear-haves” with exclusive rights to maintain nuclear arsenals that were denied to the vast majority of the “nuclear have-nots.”<sup>3</sup> The nuclear-apartheid argument overcomes the objective biases of the realists and provides more normative explanations of India's nuclearization. Yet, this line of analysis ignores how nationalist identities and insecurities may also explain India's nuclear policies.

Recently scholars have also highlighted an identity-logic constitutive of India's identity as a post-colonial state in explaining India's 1998 detonation. This specific analysis needs to be taken at two levels: first, by paying attention to India's identity as a modern post-colonial state; and second, by explaining how the relation between modernity and nation-state evidenced through India's “monumental” state-building project has resulted in the “fetishization” of nuclear science by the country's policy makers.<sup>4</sup> The identity-logic argument has acquired considerable currency in the immediate aftermath of the 1998 nuclear tests, with the claim that the tests were emblematic of the jingoistic BJP's quest for a more virile and muscular Indian state. The latter position is not entirely bereft of merit because the BJP government did have a more militaristic outlook than previous non-BJP governments. Nevertheless, the argument is ahistorical to the extent that it ignores how subjective factors such as history, culture, and religion may be intertwined with *Realpolitik* to rearticulate India's nationalist identity and insecurities.

Finally, there is the bureaucratic-institutional argument, which claims that a bureaucratic-scientific-technological momentum culminated in the nuclear tests of 1998. It suggests that key members of India's Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) pursued a somewhat surreptitious path to the acquisition of nuclear weapons as a quest for technological mastery. There is some merit to this argument too. Nevertheless, it constitutes an incomplete explanation for India's nuclearization and the 1998 tests. This is

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3. M. Mohan, “India Goes Nuclear: Rationales, Benefits, Costs, and Implications,” *Contemporary South East Asia*, vol. 20, No. 2 (1998), pp. 191-215.

4. Itty Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy and the Post-Colonial State* (New York: Zed, 1999).

because even though members of the scientific community can proffer technological choices to the political leadership, the ultimate decision still rests in the hands of political authority. Going nuclear “demands an act of political will . . .”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, attributing India’s nuclear choices to a technological imperative overlooks the primacy of other subjective (including ideological) factors that may guide a country’s nuclear policies.

In this project, I follow an alternative line of inquiry—i.e., critical constructivism—to explain India’s nuclear detonations of 1998. Before proceeding with this explanation, it should be mentioned that the critical constructivists’ interpretation of security as a socially/culturally “constructed” reality still remains at the margins of international relations (IR) theory. What underlies the dismissal of this alternative approach is at heart a concern that unless one adopts the traditional conceptions of the state, its sovereignty, and the practices of security (that follow from it), scholars will be incapable of saying anything useful or practical about the world.<sup>6</sup> In other words, if realities like states and their insecurities are constructed entities, then from where should one begin the analysis of security? Likewise, there may also be legitimate concerns in certain realist sectors as to how an emerging interpretive/normative argument such as constructivism can explain India’s nuclear phenomenon better than the conventional realist approach has already explained it.

Cognizant of such claims and the existence of real politics in inter-state security relations, my aim in this article is not to argue that realism, as the mainstream explanation in IR theory, is incapable of explaining the 1998 detonation of India. On the contrary, I argue that it would be absurd for one to analyze the 1998 detonation devoid of the realist paradigm. Thus, following the premises of the critical constructivists, my analysis of Indian nuclearization will not challenge the primacy of the political realm, the Indian state and the threats to it, in redefining securi-

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5. Sumit Ganguly, “Explaining the Indian Nuclear Tests of 1998,” in Raju G. C. Thomas and Akhil Gupta, eds., *India’s Nuclear Security* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2000), p. 11.

6. Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, eds., *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

ty. Rather, accepting the material manifestations of the world of traditional realism, I seek to append realism with critical constructivism to gain an additional (or alternative) understanding of India's 1998 nuclear phenomenon, and also to address the intellectual and practical limitations of realist theory. Intellectually, a critical constructivist reading of India's nuclear security *problematique* enables me to incorporate a more interpretative analysis of (in)security along cultural lines—ignored by the conventional theorists—thereby initiating a theoretical conversation between international security scholars to explain the security *problematiques* of states and communities. In practical terms, a critical constructivist's challenge to redefine security enables researchers of South Asian security to delve into the black box called the state (in this case the Indian state) and examine the historical, ideological, religious, and strategic-cultural factors that influence the behavior of political leaders with regard to the state's securitization policies.

### *Critical Social Constructivism*

If conventional analyses in security studies begin with assumptions of pre-given dangers and ask how states can be secured, the critical constructivist approach begins by challenging this central claim. Taking the discourse of security as what David Campbell has called "representations of danger,"<sup>7</sup> the most basic premise unifying the critical constructivist scholars is that insecurities, rather than being accepted facts, are social and cultural productions.<sup>8</sup> Viewing culture as encompassing "a multiplicity of discourses or codes of intelligibility through which meaning [identity] is produced," critical constructivists interpret insecurities as "cultural in the sense that they are produced in and out of the contexts within which people give meanings to their actions and experiences and make sense of their lives."<sup>9</sup>

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7. David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 11.

8. Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson, and Raymond Duvall, eds., *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 10.

9. *Ibid.*

Operating within frameworks of meanings, assumptions, and distinctive social identities, the representation of the Other and what constitutes (in)securities are left open to the dynamics of interpretation, whereby relations of identity/Otherness may be produced, reinforced, and reified in a conflictual manner. Thus,

identities are considered threatening and dangerous not only by the action that they may take but also by the visibility of their modes of being as an Other, thereby making (in)security scapes and imaginaries a cultural production of danger.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the construction of identities influencing the security dynamics in IR theory may not simply be confined to rigid inter-state relationships but may be mediated by a complex network of social relations, cultural traditions, and political structures involving state elites, where the latter themselves may play crucial roles in the reproduction of danger. Thus critical constructivists claim that

insecurities are socially constructed . . . [and] certain groups or agents, usually . . . the state, play a privileged role in the . . . reproduction of these realities. By authoritatively defining what they perceive as the real, these statist representations of security remove from their analysis what are, in fact, interested constructions thus endowing their dominant representations of insecurity with common-sense and reality.<sup>11</sup>

It may be important to clarify what the critical constructivists mean in referring to insecurities as social/cultural constructions. For example, a critical constructivist's use of the phrase "the social construction of the Soviet Union" does not mean that the Soviet Union in the cold-war era was not a threat to the United States. A critical constructivist, like a conventional IR scholar, would agree that the Soviet Union's possession and potential for using nuclear weapons was threatening. However, a critical constructivist would be particularly interested in finding out how one draws from such real threat perceptions to arrive at certain widely-shared propositions that become commonly held views. Thus, a critical constructivist would be interested in finding out

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10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

why the United States is threatened by Russian but not by British nuclear weapons; or, more relevant to this article, why the Indian state under the BJP perceived Pakistan's nuclear potential to be more threatening to India than China's far more potent arsenal. It is this discursive constitution of threat that the critical constructivists refer to as "construction," which requires investigation of how "an established common-sense—made real in collective discourses—foregrounds some dangers while repressing or ignoring others."<sup>12</sup>

The application of social constructivism to understanding India's 1998 nuclear detonation raises a different set of subjective issues, i.e., how the "performative" nature of statist identities, which as Campbell argues are "never finished entities,"<sup>13</sup> has been discursively (i.e., rhetorically) re-articulated by the BJP along explicitly communal lines to reconstruct India's nationalism, statist identity, (in)security, and the 1998 nuclearization policy. In developing this line of analysis, I am aware that even the national government of India led by the Congress Party has engaged in nationalist boundary-making exercises (namely vis-à-vis Pakistan)—it characterized India as a "responsible, civilized, and a legitimate entity" versus a Pakistani/Other<sup>14</sup>—and in this sense has projected certain ideologically-driven notions of India's statist identities and (in)securities. Likewise, boundary-making exercises to interpolate (a Hindu) India as a threat to Pakistan have also been evidenced in the national-security discourses of the post-independent Pakistani political leaders.

Thus, I am not contending in this article that the BJP's manipulation of India's nationalist identity to serve its national/nuclear security policies constitutes an unusual or novel phenomenon in Indian politics. Rather, I explore here a more complex and subjective phenomenon: How the inter-subjective link between political leaders' ideologies, articulation of statist identities, and the nature of (in)securities perceived by the Indian state during the Congress Party years (which were mainly political, economic, and develop-

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12. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

13. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 11.

14. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, "Recovery, Rupture, and Resistance: Indian State and the Abduction of Women during Partition," *Economic and Political Weekly* (Women's Studies Review), April 1993, pp. 2-11.

mental in nature) have become communal/cultural under the BJP. In charting this transition, I particularly explore how the BJP, guided by the religious ideology of *Hindutva*, has re-articulated a geopolitical/territorial space called India to a perceived geocultural entity (called the Hindu nation/*rashtra*), and in doing so, has, in a sharp disjuncture from the past Congress years, drawn on a “culturally-situated” logic of (in)securities to define the Hindu *rashtra*’s nuclear (in)security/policy.

I therefore argue that India’s decision to detonate under the BJP points to a more complex (and somewhat shifting) relationship between the Indian state’s nationalist/communist identity and representations of (in)securities than in the earlier non-BJP years—a change that cannot be comprehended outside of a discursive reality. This line of analysis requires incorporating, yet broadening, realism and focusing on other subjective factors, such as the strategic culture of the Indian state, the ideology of its political leaders, their interpretation of histories, and nationalist/communist identities, and seeing these factors as an interaction in which the sources of (in)securities and the very object that it threatens (i.e., the Indian state) are themselves “culturally” reconstituted and rewritten to shape India’s nuclear trajectory. I undertake this shift in analysis through the lenses of critical constructivism.

### Representations of (In)security

David Campbell, in *Writing Security*, undertakes an analysis of how the boundaries of the United States’ identity (i.e., the Self) is made secure by manifestly linking American identity to a danger (be it the Amerindians, the communists, or immigrants to the United States). In this representation of danger, threat is not given. Rather, it emerges from certain “context-bound” judgments made by policy makers where a historical mode of representation, which assumes an imagination of the Self and the Other, is adopted to define danger. In this dynamic of projecting the Self/Other, identity becomes a significant marker. It (i.e., identity) is not fixed by nature but constituted in relation to difference. Difference is neither fixed by nature nor given but is constituted in relation to identity. As Campbell argues, “Whether we are talking of ‘the body’ or ‘the state’ . . . the identity of each is

performatively constituted.”<sup>15</sup> The constitution of a state’s identity is achieved through the construction of boundaries that demarcate an insider from an outsider, the self from the other, and the domestic from the alien. In this sense, a state, as a sovereign entity in world politics, has no a priori status; it is constituted by a discourse that is “tenuously constituted in time . . . through a stylized repetition of acts . . . that occurs through a regulated process of repetition.”<sup>16</sup> In this sense, “states are never finished entities; the tension between the demands of identity and practices that constitute [it] can never be fully resolved, because the performative nature of identity can never be fully revealed.”<sup>17</sup>

In this context, one may raise several questions. If there are no primary or stable identities then how can international relations speak about concepts like state, war, security, danger, and sovereignty? After all, is not security determined by the presence of a preexisting sovereign state and war conducted in its name against an identifiable danger? Indeed, much of the conventional literature on the nation and the state implies that the essence of the former precedes the reality of the latter—i.e., the identity of a people is the basis of legitimacy of the state, its identity, and its security practices. However, recent scholarship such as Benedict Anderson’s work has argued that the state more often than not precedes the nation: Nationalism is a construct of the state and its leaders in pursuit of legitimacy. Thus, Anderson argues that the nation should be understood as an “imagined community” that exists only insofar as it is a “cultural artifact” that is represented textually.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Charles Tilly has argued that any territorial entity, coordinated and hierarchically organized, should only be understood as national states. A few of these national states that have become nation-states represent a sovereign territorialization that are aligned with primary forms of identification such as religion, language, and culture

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15. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 8.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 11. This juxtaposing of the subject position of the state with its perceived objects of insecurities to maintain for itself a certain statist identity is what Campbell refers to as the “performative” nature of statist identities.

18. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

to achieve a “symbolic” sense of the self.<sup>19</sup>

The importance of these perspectives is that they allow us to understand national states or simply states as paradoxical entities that do not possess preexisting stable identities. As a consequence, all states are marked by an inherent tension as to how to adjust the “many axes of [their] identity” to represent an “imagined” political community.<sup>20</sup> Central to this process of constituting a state’s identity or its “imagined community” is the state’s foreign policy and its construction of danger—a process that further consolidates the state’s boundary. For if a state faces no dangers, this would imply an absence of movement, and the state would wither away. At that point, “all identities would have congealed, all challenges would have evaporated, and all need for disciplinary authorities . . . vanished.”<sup>21</sup> Ongoing dangers enable the state to continue to exist, and by inscribing certain “codes of dangers,” containing and reproducing the state’s boundaries, its identity is, ironically, guaranteed.

The constant articulation of danger facing the state projected through its foreign policy is thus not an obstacle to a state’s identity or existence; rather, it is a condition of possibility.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, the drive to fix a state’s identity from constant reproduction of danger(s) cannot finally or absolutely succeed. How the drive to fix the Indian state’s identity, by articulating dangers through the state’s national security policies, is discursively played out in the two competing ideological worldviews of the Congress Party and the BJP.

### **National Security and Strategic Culture: India**

Generally speaking, India’s national security reflects the country’s foreign policy, defense policy, strategic doctrine, and military force posture. Analyzing it requires understanding its conceptual integration at the formulating level and its imple-

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19. Charles Tilly, *Capital, Coercion, and European States: A.D. 990-1990* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990).

20. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 8.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

mentation at the national level.<sup>23</sup> India's national security did not emerge in a vacuum, but rather from the interplay of a number of factors: domestic and international; state and non-state; strategic and non-strategic. Geography, the external environment, the nature of political structure, and the role of nongovernmental agencies constitute the external determinants; history, culture and policy makers' ideological perceptions (which are also elements of India's strategic culture) constitute the internal determinants.<sup>24</sup>

Nations tend to be more concerned about states that are geographically proximate to their vital resources and lines of communication, reflecting the realist logic. Changes of government, coups, military exercises, internal conflict, instability, border disputes, nuclear explosions, and the like in nearby states will therefore be of concern to India. Although there is no unanimity as to which of these events most affects India's national-security formulations, their significance can hardly be underestimated.

An important determinant of India's (or of any country's) national security is its strategic culture. Strategic culture may be defined as "the socially constructed and transmitted assumptions, habits of mind, traditions, and preferred methods of operation—that is, behavior—that are more or less specific to a particular geographically-based security community."<sup>25</sup> The national security of a state, when seen through the strategic predispositions, or behaviors, of its leaders, may influence them to define their country's security discourse in terms of what they see as their country's strategic culture.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, strategic culture may influence the national-security parameters of a country as an interaction of several subjective or ideational factors such as its unique history, culture, norms, ideas, and values. Thus, strategic culture as a "symbolic strategy" serves a dual purpose in defining a country's national-security agenda—first, by reinforcing a sense of legitimacy in securitization as upheld by decision makers (for example, the way the Soviet Union's nuclear threat was used to legitimize

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23. Michael Louw, *National Security: A Modern Approach* (Pretoria: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1978).

24. Rajpal Budania, *India's National Security Dilemma* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 2001).

25. G. S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 28.

26. *Ibid.*

the U.S. “Star Wars” antimissile system); and second, to create and perpetuate a sense of “in-group” solidarity of a particular group’s strategic security discourse directed at “supposed” adversaries. To this effect, Johnston observes, “the net effect of . . . symbolic discourse has been the creation of an ideology which justifies the hegemony of security intellectuals, military policy makers, . . . and all those who accept a direct association between threats, weaponization, and security.”<sup>27</sup>

Following Gray’s definition of strategic culture, as above, one may say that India’s strategic culture is an amalgamation of its history and civilization, which has witnessed different groups of people representing various customs, languages, and religions settling down in the subcontinent. While analysts such as Rosen have identified India’s strategic culture as representing a Hindu “mind-set”<sup>28</sup> (which becomes important as we analyze the shift of India’s strategic culture under the BJP), this observation is incorrect. On the contrary, the very amorphous nature of India’s strategic culture has been the determinant of India’s security based on the Gandhian concept of *Ahimsa* (nonviolence). While an unintended consequence of all these influences has been an “emasculatation” of the concept of India’s state power,<sup>29</sup> one must also not forget that the many external invasions faced by India—particularly from the Mughals and the British—have also contributed to the culture of India in a realist/militarist sense. India’s foreign policies pursued by ancient rulers such as Samudragupta, Ashoka (who later surrendered the use of force), and Kautilya is a testimony to this trend. It is against this backdrop that the remainder of the article provides an interpretive analysis of how a rearticulation of India’s nationalist identity and post-colonial (in)securities—at the nexus of its strategic culture and *Realpolitik* under the Congress and the BJP—has shaped India’s nuclearization policies.

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27. Alastair I. Johnston, “Thinking about Strategic Culture,” *International Security*, vol. 19, No. 4 (1995), pp. 32-64.

28. Stephen Rosen, *Societies and Military Power: India and Its Armies* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

29. Arpit Rajain, *Nuclear Deterrence in Southern Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 201.

### **Nationalist Identity, Strategic Culture, and Narratives of (In)securities in Post-Colonial India**

The term “post-colonial (in)security” has been utilized by South Asian scholars such as Krishna to analyze what Campbell has called “representations of dangers” in the context of the security policies of post-colonial India. In doing so, they investigate how the ideology of India’s post-colonial leaders, driven by “cartographic anxieties” (i.e., anxieties about nationalist identity, modernity, and survival), has necessitated the construction and projection of certain (in)securities by these leaders to achieve their “desired” notions of nation building. This pursuit was accompanied and reinforced by three ideas: first, building a modern nation based on singular conceptions of political sovereignty and national identity; second, upholding the necessity of technological mastery to defend the nation as well as move toward modernity; and third, constructing anxieties—real or otherwise—that might constitute a threat to the nation’s “pulverized” and “uniform” sense of national identity.<sup>30</sup> I explore below how these dialectics in interaction with the post-colonial Indian leaders’ ideologies, their interpretation of strategic cultures, and real politics have defined the contours of India’s (in)securities and nuclear policies.

#### *Nuclear Energy and (In)security: The Nehru Years*

As noted by ManSingh, there is a link between India’s historical experiences of colonization, Jawaharlal Nehru’s ideological perception of colonization, and the formulation of India’s foreign and national-security policies during his prime ministership.<sup>31</sup> Realizing the need to establish the newly born Indian nation as a strong, unified, and a sovereign democratic state, India’s first prime minister based India’s foreign and national-security policies on the principles of idealist nationalism. A follower of Mahatma

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30. Sankaran Krishna, “Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India,” in Michael J. Shapiro and Hayward R. Alker, eds., *Challenging Boundaries* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 193-94.

31. S. ManSingh, “Nehru and Pakistan,” *Occasional Papers in History and Society, Second Series*, vol. 29 (1989), pp. 1-22.

Gandhi and a believer in the notion that India's strategic culture was rooted in nonviolence (*Ahimsa*), Nehru's initial but firm commitment to idealist nationalism is understandable. India's unflinching faith in international organizations, particularly the United Nations, policies of nonalignment, *Panchsheel* (peaceful coexistence), and decolonization were all reflections of such ideals.<sup>32</sup> Concomitant with his view of national security through peace was Nehru's benevolent perception of non-Hindus, especially India's Muslims, and his conviction that "it was for the Hindus to make the Muslims in India feel at home and not see themselves as second-class citizens."<sup>33</sup> This aspect of his perception symbolized the secular ideology of *sarvadharmā samābhava* (equal respect for all religions), which for Nehru (unlike the Hindu nationalist BJP) was not a value system in itself. Rather, for Nehru, secular tolerance constituted an attribute of the modern Indian state.

While India was forging a modern state in terms of its political sovereignty and territorial integrity, it also debated the uses and potential of atomic energy. As explained by Abraham, this pursuit of the atom should be seen in the context of India's emerging identity as a post-colonial nation. India's identity as a post-colonial nation was not simply constituted by its leaders as a state that was "a prior colony." Rather, post-colonialism became a "specific moment of a global condition of modernity." That is, modernity, which was secular and committed to the application of science for the betterment of human condition and the ordering of political affairs, became the goal of the post-colonial Indian state.<sup>34</sup> Evidenced through the constituent assembly debates, this goal was laid down through certain well-defined mythologies of rule: democracy, political nationalism, secularism, and parliamentarianism that established the contours of the post-colonial Indian state. India's quest for atomic energy became part of a "new" state ideology to epitomize this identity of India as a modern post-colonial state.<sup>35</sup>

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32. Jawaharlal Nehru, *India and Disarmament: An Anthology* (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1954).

33. G. Parthasarathy, "Jawaharlal Nehru and His Quest for a Secular Identity," *Occasional Papers in History and Society First Series*, vol. 42 (1989), pp. 1-9.

34. Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb*, p. 19.

35. *Ibid.*

Before going into that analysis, I must make a brief detour to address the geostrategic significance of China and Pakistan vis-à-vis India's quest for the atomic project. There are two reasons for doing so: first, to assess if China and Pakistan constituted a threat to the Indian state; and second, to show how a Pakistani danger was articulated in the national-security discourses of the Indian state. One finds that although India did have some political disputes with both China and Pakistan, neither of these assumed dimensions to warrant developing nuclear weapons as a defense against these states. Rather, Nehru took recourse to the principles of *Panchsheel* to settle differences with these states. The Sino-Indian border disputes of 1950, which Nehru saw as reflecting "inherently expansionist tendencies of the Chinese nation" over Tibet, were dealt with by recognizing Chinese control over Tibet.<sup>36</sup>

The disputes with Pakistan during the Nehru years were somewhat more crucial when placed in the historical context of Indo-Pakistan partition. These were over the Indus Canal waters; the disposal of evacuee property after partition; Pakistan's decision to join U.S.-sponsored alliances (such as the Mutual Defense Assistance Treaties of 1954 and 1959); and Kashmir. Despite such confrontations, India's response to Pakistan was mainly diplomatic. Reflecting the well-established idea that policy makers' perceptions define a country's foreign policy,<sup>37</sup> India's policy toward Pakistan under Nehru was based on two ideologically-informed perceptions: first, in the aftermath of partition, it was time for India and Pakistan to deal with each other on the basis of respect for the territorial status quo; and second, the common subcontinental history and culture should draw India and Pakistan together.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, peace and good neighborly relations with Pakistan, economic cooperation, and the enhancement of India's regional influence to promote national security were the pillars of India's Pakistan policy under Nehru.<sup>39</sup> His remonstra-

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36. D. R. Manekar, *The Guilty Man of 1968* (Bombay: Tulsi Shah Enterprises, 1968), p. 110.

37. See, for instance, James N. Rosenau, Kenneth Thompson, and Gavin Boyd, eds., *World Politics: An Introduction* (New York: Free Press, 1976).

38. Parthasarathy, "Jawaharlal Nehru and His Quest for a Secular Identity."

39. Raju G. C. Thomas, "Non-Alignment and National Security: Nehru's

tion to the Pakistani prime minister, Mohammad Ali Bogra, that *Panchsheel* assured mutual security and friendly relations also led India to offer Pakistan a No-War Agreement in December 1949. (Pakistan's later prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, rejected the proposal, linking it to the Kashmir problem.)

Thus, to a certain extent the historical legacy of India's relations with Pakistan did place Pakistan as an "Other" to India. Yet, such anxieties or insecurities had to do with reconfiguring India's territorial space—which was also its post-colonial sovereign Self—and did not evoke for Nehru a communal rewriting of Indo-Pakistan's history in order to formulate India's Pakistan policy. In his words:

India suffered from one major drawback . . . due to the partition which gave rise to bitterness of feeling between India and Pakistan. This was unfortunate, because it affected our policies in many ways. What was worse, it affected the feelings of our people as it affected the feelings of the people of Pakistan. But even this bitterness has no ancient roots. . . . Therefore, there was no reason why India should champion the animosities and past history which had bred quarrels.<sup>40</sup>

As evidenced from the above quote, Nehru viewed India's Pakistan policy as inherent in the past thinking of India, meaning the ancient Hindu philosophy of tolerance.

If the political disputes between India, Pakistan, and China were largely settled on the basis of idealist nationalism, then how can one situate the Indian state's identity, its perceived insecurity, and its pursuit of atomic power at the moment of independence? One may claim that the "shroud of post-colonial modernity [that] defined the ambitions and fears of [its] . . . political class trying to come to terms with a global condition" constituted the insecurity dilemma of the early Indian state.<sup>41</sup> Like any post-colonial moment, "post-colonial modern [India] was marked by a particular experience of time and practice of

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Rationale and Legacy," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 2, No. 2 (September, 1979), pp. 153-71.

40. Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy, Selected Speeches, September 1946-April 1961* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1961), p. 83.

41. Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb*, p. 19.

space," i.e., as a post-colonial time always "in-waiting" for catching up with the desired modernity yet always behind in terms of its own development.<sup>42</sup> Hence India's post-colonial anxiety about "catching up" was mainly of an economic and political nature. India's pursuit of the atom as a discourse of modernity and development can thus be located at the intersection of ideology, nationalist identity, and insecurity.

Nehru was not pro-nuclear—a conviction that stemmed from the Gandhian legacy of nonviolence and his apprehension that nuclear weapons might cause the militarization of the Indian society.<sup>43</sup> A developmentalist at heart, Nehru had a vision for India to become a self-reliant, modern, and peace-loving nation. Yet he did not foreclose the option of pursuing an atomic program for India's national development. In an address to the Indian Science Congress in 1947, Nehru spoke of the relationship of science to development as one of the major objectives of the post-colonial project. The value of science, he said, was that it could be harnessed for national development—specifically, to generate power for public consumption. Atomic energy, as it was modern, should be used for peaceful production.<sup>44</sup>

Shortly after India's independence, Nehru, on the recommendation of the chair of the board of Atomic Energy Research, sponsored the Atomic Energy Bill in the Constituent Assembly. An Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) was established in 1948 to control all activities relating to atomic energy. Nehru's rationale for sponsoring the bill was not based on national defense; rather it relied on a developmental trajectory—where the scientific object, the atom, represented a new era of human civilization. This developmental rationale is evidenced in Nehru's claim (on the eve of introducing the Atomic Energy Bill):

we are on the verge . . . of a tremendous development in some direction of the human race. Consider the past few hundred years

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42. Ibid.

43. Nehru expressed such concerns to his defense minister, Baldev Singh; see Constituent Assembly of India, *Legislative Debates, 2nd Session*, vol. 5 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1948), pp. 3328, 3334.

44. Nehru, *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1947), pp. 369-75.

of human history: the world developed a new source of power, the steam engine and the like. . . . India with all her many virtues did not develop that power. It became a backward country because of that. . . . Now we are facing the atomic age; we are on the verge of it. And this is something infinitely . . . powerful.<sup>45</sup>

Although the atomic policies made during these initial years of India's independence reflected the prime minister's persona, there was support from other prominent legislators for the atomic project.<sup>46</sup> In their understanding of science and nation, progress through science would represent India on a world scale—the progressive transformation of which depended on development and access to these new sources of energy. In this sense, supporters of science become “patriots” of the Indian nation, as opposed to “dissenters” of science (who included V. K. Krishna Menon, Nehru's closest advisor and confidant, who was anti-bomb). Despite some public opposition to nuclear weapons, Nehru granted Bhabha, the board chair of Atomic Energy Research, a free hand in the development of India's nuclear infrastructure and laid the necessary foundations, should a political decision to acquire nuclear weapons be made in the future. The 1-megawatt swimming-pool reactor Apsara started operating in 1956 and the AEC started thinking of building a working atomic reactor. All through the representation of this event, the atomic program symbolized an indigenous affair built with local expertise. “It represented national pride.”<sup>47</sup>

It is through this exegesis of the early post-colonial Indian state (represented through the towering personality of Nehru and the AEC) that one comprehends India's (in)securities of “catching-up” as a modern nation, and how coming to grip with it legitimized India's atomic quest. It was an (in)security that derived not so much from the identities of China or Pakistan as from an (in)security of the Self that was “located in direct confrontation with . . . a colonial history and the urgency of [creating] a post-colonial modern state.”<sup>48</sup> The nuclear program was

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45. Constituent Assembly of India, *Legislative Debates, 2nd Session*, vol. 5, p. 3334.

46. Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb*, pp. 28, 116-17.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

seen as a way to resolve this post-colonial anxiety; but only "superpatriots" like Nehru could undertake it, using their political authority to develop a sense of Indian nationhood and identity. In this projection of post-colonial identity and anxiety, real geostrategic threats were nominal; "real" (in)securities, however, amplified after 1962.

*(In)Security and Nuclear Options: The Post-Nehru Years*

If in the pre-1962 years anxieties and insecurities about establishing a modern post-colonial nationalist identity had guided India's atomic energy project, in the post-1962 years Indian leaders redefined nationalist identity and insecurity in a Hobbesian context. The focus of their analysis came to rest on the preservation of national security from "real" geostrategic threats. To Indian leaders the 1962 border war with China, in which the Indian troops were defeated by Chinese forces, provided such a moment. The norms of peaceful coexistence underlying India's foreign policy became unrealistic in responding to the anxieties facing the state. Following Campbell's assertion that "a state's foreign policy . . . by inscribing codes of danger helps containing . . . the boundaries of the state,"<sup>49</sup> one may also locate a discursive shift from a peaceful to a military option in the articulation of India's nationalist identity, insecurity, and its quest for nuclear power.

In 1962 the government's Atomic Energy Bill passed in the Indian parliament. An update of the Atomic Energy Act of 1948, this bill ordered that the Indian state develop a nuclear military option (its peaceful uses were relegated to a secondary status). India's atomic energy project was now placed firmly in the realm of national security.<sup>50</sup> However, the shift of elite opinion to develop atomic weapons against "enemies" did not come until October 1964, when China conducted its first nuclear-weapon test. Although China contended that its nuclear and defense modernization was dictated by the Soviet threat, and that India need not worry about the security implications of these weapons, India was not con-

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49. Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 11.

50. Government of India, *Lok Sabha Debates, Third Series, 2nd Session* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1962), p. 2864.

vinced. As one Congress Party member of parliament said, “If we develop atomic energy for our defense in order to keep us secure, what’s wrong with that, how can it be antithetical to peace?”<sup>51</sup>

India’s new prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, who succeeded Nehru in the post-China war period, had two options to provide nuclear weapons for India’s defense: either obtain nuclear protection from another state, or build an Indian bomb. Shastri, uncertain about the atomic energy program, opted to pursue the first option and seek help from the United States.<sup>52</sup> When this option failed, Shastri agreed to allow the AEC to begin studies on the feasibility of underground nuclear explosions. In September 1965, nearly a fifth of India’s members of parliament, representing all parties, urged Shastri to begin an open nuclear-weapon program.<sup>53</sup> Besides, Bhabha reassured everyone of India’s technological capability to make the bomb.<sup>54</sup> But the political leadership showed restraint in proceeding in that direction. Careful diplomatic statements were crafted to make the point that while India could, if it so chose, become a nuclear power, the country’s policy was not to take that step. Such statements also reflected India’s strategic culture, rooted in global peace and nonviolence. As stated in parliament by the foreign minister, Swaran Singh: “The government still feels that the interests of world peace and our own security are better achieved by giving all support to the efforts for world nuclear disarmament than by building our own nuclear weapons.”<sup>55</sup> Consequently, no Indian bomb followed. In January 1966, Shastri died, followed shortly after by Bhabha’s death.

In the post-1966 period, the path of India’s atomic energy complex changed under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who had

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51. *Ibid.*, p. 2914.

52. The United States agreed to give a formal guarantee to protect India in the event of a nuclear attack by China, in return for which India promised it would not begin its own nuclear-weapon program. This proposal, which implied curbing India’s nuclear sovereignty, was unacceptable to the AEC and failed to win India’s approval.

53. Sampooran Singh, *India and the Nuclear Bomb* (New Delhi: Harchand and Company, 1971), p. iii.

54. Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb*, pp. 125-26.

55. Jagdish P. Jain, *Nuclear India*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1974), p. 178.

a different ideological perception vis-à-vis India's nationalist identity, insecurity, and the bomb. She fitted the quest for the atom within India's nationalist discourses of threat and fear. This thinking was reinforced by Sarabhai, Sethna, and subsequently Ramanna—Bhabha's successors on the AEC—who asserted that the atomic energy project inevitably spilled over to India's nationalist-security frame.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, perceived dangers from regional and global levels were tailored to shape India's nationalist-insecurity discourse. The Indian leaders were at that point seeking international support for the policy of nuclear restraint by seeking agreement on nuclear disarmament. The 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty did not meet their expectations, however, and the Indian leadership refused to sign it. Supporting this rejection was also an articulation of India's nuclear sovereignty and "nuclear apartheid": India reserved the right to develop a bomb if the declared nuclear-weapon states continued to expand their arsenals while trying to keep others from entering their club.

Neither were China and Pakistan standing still. What bothered the Indian decision makers was that China was acquiring air-to-air, surface-to-surface, and air-to-surface missiles and developing intercontinental ballistic missiles and an anti-nuclear radar network that could be used against India.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, China conducted its second and third nuclear explosions, which raised additional concerns in India that China might either resort to nuclear blackmail one day or crush India's conventional military might to promote an armed confrontation between India and China. This perception was introduced following the visit of Henry Kissinger to Beijing in July 1971 and the announcement of President Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972. Additionally, the threat from Pakistan also took on a nuclear dimension in the post-1972 years. With the assistance of other coun-

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56. This reiteration was partly because the grand promises that the Indian atomic energy establishment had made in the previous decade to be a panacea for India's hydroelectricity production had dimmed by then, and the scientific establishment required a different rationale for nuclear energy. The insecurity scenario of India was thus tailored toward making a bomb as a defensive project.

57. K. N. Ramachandran, "Peking's Military Modernization: Implications for India," *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 2, No. 8 (1978), pp. 300-304.

tries, including China and the United States, Pakistan began to pursue a rearmament program under Prime Minister Zulfikar A. Bhutto. That Bhutto's decision to embark on a nuclear program was to counter India's nuclear weapons program is evidenced in his revelation:

India is acquiring nuclear weapons at very great cost and to intimidate and blackmail Pakistan . . . That has been the purpose . . . to brandish the nuclear sword at Pakistan . . . Pakistan cannot rule out the possibility that India will use the nuclear device if the war was there.<sup>58</sup>

Around this time, discussion about carrying out a peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) expanded among India's policy makers. Yet, in contrast to the "Indo-centric" rationale forwarded by Pakistan, India's proposal for a PNE was not Pakistan-centric. It was based on an economic rationale. As stated by Prime Minister Gandhi in 1972: "The Atomic Energy Commission is studying conditions under which peaceful nuclear explosions carried out underground could be of economic benefit to India."<sup>59</sup> India duly conducted an underground test on May 18, 1974.<sup>60</sup>

By 1981, India's insecurity concerns vis-à-vis China, Pakistan, and the United States had amplified. This occurred due to U.S. military cooperation with Pakistan in the 1980s, when the Afghan crisis following Soviet intervention made Pakistan a frontline state for Washington. In 1981, an aid package for Pakistan of \$3.2 billion was approved by the U.S. administration. Simultaneously, to assuage Pakistani fears of Indo-Soviet collusion (since India and the USSR had signed a Friendship Treaty in 1971), the United States agreed to sell Pakistan several squadrons of F-16 fighter planes. India vehemently lobbied against this sale but with little success. Indian security analysts argued that India's emerging insecurity stemmed primarily from the fact that the United States, having knowledge of Pakistan's nuclear ambitions, was neverthe-

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58. Government of Pakistan, *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates* (Lahore: Government of Pakistan, 1974), p. 301.

59. Jain, *Nuclear India*, p. 327.

60. A domestic-politics argument suggests that the PNE was ordered by Indira Gandhi to consolidate her political leadership to deflect an ongoing domestic crisis.

less supplying Pakistan with sophisticated weaponry and potentially nuclear-capable aircraft. Growing concern about Chinese involvement in assisting Pakistan to acquire nuclear weapons also fuelled India's concerns.<sup>61</sup>

Under these circumstances, the clamor for acquiring more nuclear weapons grew in India. This trend became manifest through reports surfacing in the Indian media that the country by 1983 had the ability to process plutonium to weapon-grade level.<sup>62</sup> Yet, what is noteworthy is that the insecurities that India perceived from Pakistan in justifying its nuclearization were political and military in nature, and not owing to religious or cultural factors. According to the Congress Party's election manifesto, India's national security and nuclear policies were to "protect India's vital security interests in the context of the threat posed by the introduction of large-scale sophisticated weaponry in Pakistan."<sup>63</sup>

Although the next prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, pursued contradictory policies on the nuclear question,<sup>64</sup> he also gave a boost to India's scientific-military establishment. As reported by various Indian defense experts on the AEC, Rajiv Gandhi decided to acquire an effective nuclear deterrent. Such a decision turned on the perception of an increasing nuclear threat from Pakistan—evidenced in an interview given in January 1987 by A. Q. Khan (widely known as the father of the Pakistani nuclear program) to the Indian journalist Kuldip Nayar, that Pakistan had succeeded in producing weapons-grade uranium.<sup>65</sup> Subsequently, in 1989

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61. Efforts to this end included the transfer of nuclear and missile technology to Pakistan, aiding Pakistan to acquire missile and fissile components, and providing it with M-9 and M-11 ballistic missiles.

62. Sumit Ganguly, "Explaining the Indian Nuclear Tests of 1998," in Raju G. C. Thomas and Akhil Gupta, eds., *India's Nuclear Security* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2000), pp. 37-38.

63. Indian National Congress, *Indian National Congress(I) Election Manifesto* (New Delhi: Indian National Congress Party Press, 1984), p. 22.

64. On the one hand, he proposed a comprehensive plan for the gradual elimination of nuclear weapons in South Asia (known as the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan); and, on the other, he gave a boost to India's scientific-military establishment.

65. M. Hussain, "The Strike of a True Believer: Pakistan Tests New Doctrine," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, December 2, 1989, pp. 2-4.

(and again in 1993), General Mirza Beg—the Pakistani chief of army staff—confirmed that Pakistan had acquired the ability to manufacture a bomb.<sup>66</sup> These developments were carefully noted by India, as also was the review and extension of the NPT in 1995 and the introduction of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Once again, on grounds of nuclear sovereignty and nuclear apartheid, India found these instruments deficient.<sup>67</sup>

The above developments, when seen against the backdrop of the demise of the Soviet Union (which had provided India with military and technological assistance and thus a counterweight against China and Pakistan) and China's testing of another nuclear device in 1993, explain why India under the next Congress prime minister, Narasimha Rao, made attempts in December 1995 to conduct a nuclear explosion.<sup>68</sup> Once again, the Congress Party's insecurities about Pakistan were based on realist factors, not religious or cultural factors. As stated in the party's 1996 election manifesto: "We are deeply concerned that Pakistan is developing nuclear weapons unabated. They have already inflicted four wars upon India. In case Pakistan persists in the development of nuclear weapons, India will be constrained to review her policy to meet the threat."<sup>69</sup>

By 1996, while perceived threats from China had receded considerably following the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement signed between India and China, concerns from other quarters involving China remained. China continued to supply nuclear technology to Pakistan with U.S. acquiescence.<sup>70</sup> The testing of the

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66. Ibid.

67. This is because clause XIV of the CTBT stipulated that India as a signatory of the treaty would be restricted from undertaking any further nuclear testing.

68. When the U.S. surveillance satellites picked up the evidence of these preparations, the U.S. ambassador to India, Frank G. Wisner, confronted Rao with these preparations and he called off the tests.

69. Indian National Congress, *Indian National Congress (I) Election Manifesto* (New Delhi: Indian National Congress Party Press, 1996), p. 32.

70. From 1995 onwards, the U.S. administration had evidence of Chinese shipments of M-11 missiles to Pakistan but ignored the fact to avoid triggering sanctions. This heightened paranoia within India that the U.S. nuclear and missile technology that went to China would find its way into Pakistan.

*Ghauri* missile by Pakistan in April 1998 amplified India's nuclear insecurity concerns and, if reports are to be believed, a decision to openly test a nuclear weapon in India was taken a few days later. A Congress Party activist commented on the eve of India's 1998 detonation:

The end of the Cold War has not resulted in the end of nuclear weapons as such, or of nuclear threats to nations. . . . Regionally, the problem of proliferation has got further aggravated. With Pakistan's nuclear programs, especially the testing of *Ghauri*, and the reality of China, India must address the question of its national security.<sup>71</sup>

The above quote is important especially for its reference to Pakistan's testing of *Ghauri* as posing a geostrategic threat to India. We will see in the next section how the same event was interpreted by the BJP, in a way that rewrote the narratives of India's insecurity about Pakistan.

Indeed, since 1962 India did face real political-military and nuclear threats from China and Pakistan, which according to Krishna represented "cartographic anxieties" for India—"anxieties centering around questions concerning one's nationalist identity and survival."<sup>72</sup> Such insecurities are justified because nation formation and nationalist identity in international politics requires the production of a particular configuration of space that is "territorially secure, mutually exclusive, and yet functionally similar like other sovereign states."<sup>73</sup> We have seen that in attempting to secure the territorial boundaries of something called India, leaders of the Congress Party articulated divergent notions of insecurity, moving from the economic/developmental realm after independence to the geopolitical-military after 1962. As a result, India conducted the PNE in 1974 (although the PNE was of a much lower yield than the subsequent 1998 detonation) and, under Rao, contemplated a nuclear test in 1995. Thus, from a realist point of view, India's evolving nuclear modernization did

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71. Ram Kumar, Secretary, All India Congress Committee (New Delhi), interview, December 8, 1998.

72. Krishna, "Cartographic Anxiety," pp. 193-94.

73. John G. Ruggie, "Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations," *International Organization*, vol. 47, No. 1 (1993), pp. 139-74.

reveal a transformation in the “strategic thinking” of India, a departure from the Gandhian brand of moralistic politics. It might therefore be argued that the BJP’s decision to detonate a nuclear weapon in 1998 was a culmination of the Congress leadership’s nuclear policies. I will not enter into the debate as to why India under the BJP detonated the bomb. Rather, I proceed to show how a different articulation of India’s nationalist identity under the BJP, guided by *Hindutva*, redefined the danger for India in securing the party’s nuclear-security project.

### ***Hindutva* and Nationalism/Communalism in India: The BJP Years**

Although communalism erupted as a major force in post-independent India after the 1980s, it reappeared under the BJP government in the 1990s as part of a struggle to lead the political reconstruction of a Hindu nationalist India. The party’s call for reinventing a pan-Indian identity, which it identifies with a Hindu *rashtra* (nation), is the logical outcome of this recent revival of Hindu nationalism. Communal sentiments echo in the writings and the campaigns of the BJP, which sees *Hindutva* as a unifying force that will create a national identity and social cohesion for India. The BJP claims that as a Hindu *rashtra* (nation), India’s identity is based on “one nation, one people, and one culture.”<sup>74</sup> However, the BJP also specifies that *Hindutva* in the context of building a Hindu *rashtra* is not identical with Hinduism because *Hindutva* is not exclusive to any religious group nor offensive to any religion; rather, it is an assimilative concept which includes all citizens of India. Nonetheless, a communal tone linking *Hindutva* to the BJP’s notion of *rashtra* is evidenced from the party’s assertion that “There is no difference between *Hindutva* and *bharateeyatta* [Indian-ness], since both . . . point to our Hindu national identity.”<sup>75</sup>

The BJP has sought to make *Hindutva* its ideological “mascot.”<sup>76</sup>

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74. BJP, *Election Manifesto 1996* (New Delhi: BJP Central Office, 1996), p. 6.

75. BJP, “Let Us Celebrate and Strengthen Our Indianness,” *BJP Today*, vol. 12, No. 2 (January 16-31, 2003), pp. 6-8.

76. Sunil Kumar, *Communalism and Secularism for Indian Politics: A Study of the BJP* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2001), p. 81.

Following the boundaries of *Hindutva*, as defined by the twentieth-century Hindu nationalist Savarkar, the BJP too defines *Hindutva* in a rather communal manner and further circumscribes its usage in defining the parameters of a modern India. *Pitrabhoomi* (fatherland), *jati* (bloodline), and *sanskriti* (culture) are identified by the BJP as the three principles of *Hindutva*. According to the BJP, *pitrabhoomi* implies that to be a Hindu one should be born within the territorial boundaries of India; the second, *jati*, claims that to be a Hindu one should establish lineage from natural as opposed to converted Hindu parents; and the third, *Sanskriti*, implies that only those whose sacred land (sacred to their religion) lies within the fatherland have the moral basis for claiming citizenship (thereby privileging a cultural-religious rather than a territorial concept of Indian citizenship).<sup>77</sup> Consequently, "Muslims, Christians, and Jews, whose ancestral land lay outside the territorial boundaries of *punyabhoomi* (the holy land of India) were by implication excluded from both *Hindutva* and from their citizenship of India."<sup>78</sup>

The BJP also finds a linkage between *Hindutva*, the Hindu *rashtra*, and a Hindu nationalism in India. The linkage becomes visible in the BJP's election manifesto, which in its introduction appealed to all "patriotic Indians" to assist the party in reconstructing a nationalist India representative of a composite culture.<sup>79</sup> However, that this call for a composite culture actually meant a Hindu culture was evidenced in the assertion of the party's former president that "despite the composite nature of Indian culture, Hinduism remains by far the most powerful and pervasive element in that culture. Those who lay great stress on the composite nature of Indian culture frequently minimize this basic fact."<sup>80</sup>

A seemingly harmless concept deemed essential for the

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77. Satish Deshpande, "Communalizing the Nation-Space: Notes on Spatial Strategies of Hindutva," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 30, No. 50 (1995), pp. 3220-27.

78. Geeta Chowdhry, "Communalism, Nationalism, and Gender: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Hindu Right in India," in Sita Ranchod-Nelson and Mary A. Tetreault, eds., *Feminist Approaches to Contemporary Debates* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 98-118.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

80. BJP, *President's Addresses: L. K. Advani, 1986-1990, 1993-1998* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party Office, 2000), pp. 153-54.

development of the nation, the “one nation, one people, one culture” concept of the BJP makes Hinduism the common denominator of India’s national identity and forces one to use the terms *Hindutva*, Hinduism, and the Hindu *rashtra* synonymously. This conflation is not only devoid of any religious meaning but is also ominous in obliterating the non-Hindus, especially Indian Muslims, from the category of Indians.<sup>81</sup> As claimed by a famous BJP ideologue, Rithambara: “Muslims, like a pinch of sugar, should sweeten a glass of milk; instead, like a lemon they sour it. What they do not realise is that a squeezed lemon is thrown away.” What Rithambara meant is that Indian Muslims have two choices: Either they assimilate like sugar in India’s majoritarian community or they will be discarded like a squeezed lemon.<sup>82</sup>

The above quote illustrates that for the BJP *Hindutva* acts as an exclusionary force in India, where Indian Muslims become “aliens” in the Hindu land. I show below how this exclusionary basis of *Hindutva* and the Hindu *rashtra* also rearticulates India’s (or the Hindu nation’s) national security culture.

### *The BJP and India’s National Security as a Strategic (Hindu) Culture*

A cursory look at the BJP’s nationalist security agenda shows that it, like the Congress Party, has “pledged to defend the unity and integrity of India . . . under all circumstances.”<sup>83</sup> However, unlike the Congress, whose concept of national integration was territorial and political, the BJP’s concept is underpinned by religion and culture. While affirming its ideal of national integrity, the party mentions that its notion of national security calls for a return to the ancient and glorified Hindu traditions of *Hindustan*. Their leaders never forget to mention that “*Hindutva* is a unifying principle which alone can preserve the unity and integrity of our nation and is also the antidote to the shameful efforts of any section [Indian Muslims] to benefit at the expense of others

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81. Chowdhry, *Communalism, Nationalism, and Gender*, p. 100.

82. Partha Banerjee, *In the Belly of the Beast: The Hindu Supremacist RSS and the BJP in India: An Insider’s Story* (New Delhi: Ajanta International, 1998), p. 163.

83. BJP, *Pamphlet 65* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party Central Office, n.d), pp. 10-12.

[Hindus]."<sup>84</sup> It is this effort to define India's national integrity and security in terms of *akhand bharat* (an undivided India) that underpins the BJP's strategic culture.

Jaswant Singh (ex-Minister of Foreign and External Affairs for India under the BJP) describes his visions of India's national security from the perspective of what he sees as India's strategic culture. According to Singh, to define India's strategic culture one has to "examine the very nature of India's nationhood; the very characteristics of its society; and the evolution of its strategic thought over the ages."<sup>85</sup> As he explains, the assumption that the "culture of strategy is . . . born solely in the crucible of the military . . . is a common error (although it does spill over to the military)." Rather, the evolution of strategic culture represents

an intermix of many influences: civilization, culture, evolution, and the functioning of a civil society, etc. It is a by-product of the political culture of a nation and its people; an extension of the functioning of a viable state [and] more particularly its understanding of the ways in which the power of a state can be used.<sup>86</sup>

Singh, however, further notes that the power of a state is not merely military; it can be diplomatic or economic; coercive or persuasive; it may also represent the power of thoughts and ideas. Furthermore, how these variations of power will be used by a state depends on its leaders' perceptions of the contexts for using power. However, that the uses of power by a state relate ultimately to the civilizational understanding of its strategic culture is also evident in Singh's comment that "this is where history and racial memories influence a nation's strategic thought, its culture, as does a sense of geography . . . though not in a sense of . . . mere . . . physical territory."<sup>87</sup>

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84. BJP, *Election Manifesto 1996*, p. 15. Another pamphlet of the party states: "The *Bharatmata* [Mother India] for which we say *Vande Mataram* [a song by a Sanskrit music composer] represents one organic unity . . . *akhand bharat* [undivided India]. The BJP stands committed to subordination of all petty loyalties, considerations of creed, caste, and religion in favor of the overriding ideal of India's unity and social cohesion of its people." BJP, *Pamphlet 65*, pp. 11-12.

85. Jaswant Singh, *Defending India* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 2.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*

Furthermore, representing Rosen's concept of "mind-set" as underlying a country's strategic culture,<sup>88</sup> Singh claims that it is the *Hindu* civilization that essentially constitutes India's strategic culture: "India is Hindu and Hindus think differently from non-Hindus . . . [and] it is this 'ism' [i.e., Hinduism] that has given birth to a culture from which we hope to extract the essence of its [India's] strategic thought."<sup>89</sup> Referring to Islam, but clearly with India in mind, he writes: "Professor Samuel Huntington is not wholly wrong in talking about the clash of civilizations. It has always been there in history."<sup>90</sup>

As these views reveal, the roots of India's strategic culture are associated by Singh with the "mind-set" of the Hindus, their history, and their cultural memories—which by implication link the logistics of the BJP's strategic culture to the ideological underpinnings of *Hindutva*.

If the BJP's rearticulation of India's nationalist identity is embedded in the perspectives of a Hindu strategic culture, can we claim that the underpinning of India's national-security agenda under the BJP was communal or Hindu in character? Or, can we assume that the BJP, guided by the communal focus of *Hindutva*, may rewrite India's nationalist identity and insecurity along communal lines (as identified with Pakistan) and justify its nuclear policies? The following section situates this debate concerning Indian nuclearization drawn from the perspectives of *Realpolitik* and a cultural production of danger.

### *Indian Nuclearization and the BJP: The (Cultural) Rewriting of Danger*

The BJP government's decision to test in 1998 was justified by the party as a result of international and regional geostrategic factors—an argument about insecurities largely shared by previous non-BJP leaders. First, in terms of the international scenario, the BJP pressed (and continues to press) for a free and fair global disarmament treaty, which the nuclear-weapon powers have not taken seriously. Furthermore, the CTBT, if accepted by the BJP,

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88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

90. *Ibid.* p. xiv.

would foreclose India's nuclear options.<sup>91</sup> In terms of the regional factors, the BJP has cited Pakistan and China as growing nuclear threats for India; the official explanation for the 1998 tests was the threats from these regional powers.<sup>92</sup> In fact, leading BJP politicians such as former president L. K. Advani have recognized China as the principal threat to India.<sup>93</sup> Even if they identified Pakistan as a threat to India (as was done by some of the prominent spokespersons of the party such as Arun Shourie, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, and Venkaiah Naidu), they made their case in the context of geostrategic insecurities.<sup>94</sup> As stated by Advani, "the BJP has consistently advocated India exercising the nuclear option . . . because we believe that neighbors and super-powers must never be in a position to intimidate us."<sup>95</sup> To this extent, the party holds that by conducting the May 1998 nuclear tests, "the BJP government has established India's parity with the till now exclusive club of nuclear powers known as P-5."<sup>96</sup> As announced by the BJP prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, immediately after the 1998 detonation: "92% of the Indians said that they were proud of the test; 64% thought that the Indian explosion was an issue of Indian pride; and 88% thought that it would make India stronger."<sup>97</sup>

Three broad generalizations may be discerned from the BJP's discourse on nuclear weapons. First, India's geopolitical reality is that it faces real threats regionally and globally, and thus having a nuclear deterrent is essential for India. Second, India's national security needs to be maintained for all Indians, since "92% of the

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91. BJP, *Election Manifesto 1998* (New Delhi: BJP Central Office, 1998), p. 29 and BJP, *President's Addresses: L. K. Advani*, pp. 153-54.

92. BJP, "India is Neither in the First, Second, or Third World," *BJP Today*, vol. 8, No. 10 (May 16-31, 1999), pp. 12-14; BJP, "Operation Shakti," *BJP Today*, vol. 9, No. 10 (June 1-15, 2000), pp. 13, 26; BJP, "Pakistan Guns Silence India's Missiles of Democracy," *BJP Today*, vol. 11, No. 20 (October 16-31, 2002), pp. 23-34.

93. BJP, "Pakistan-China's Nuclear Transactions Cause Concern to India," *Swastika*, December 4, 2000, p. 6.

94. BJP, "India is Neither in the First, Second, or Third World," pp. 12-14.

95. BJP, *President's Addresses: L. K. Advani*, pp. 153-54.

96. BJP, "Weak Nations Don't Make History," *BJP Today*, vol. 8, No. 8 (April 16-30, 1999), pp. 4-7.

97. BJP, "92% of Indians Rejoice at and Support the Indian Detonation," *Swastika*, June 1, 1998, p. 1.

Indians" supported the tests (thereby rendering invisible the contradictions of the party's nationalist-communalist agenda); third, China is as much an external danger to India as Pakistan. Such conclusions have indeed enabled the party to claim certain democratic entitlements for itself to justify India's nuclear-policy agenda. However, I argue here that the realist projection of insecurities that the BJP believes India faces from China and Pakistan, while accurate to a great extent, requires scrutiny in the context of *Hindutva*. *Hindutva* has served as the ideological foundation for the party to rewrite the Pakistani danger along more communal/religious lines. What seems to have occurred is that in the absence of any clear danger from Pakistan (no more than the threat Pakistan already posed to India prior to the May 1998 detonation), BJP policy makers rendered the Pakistani threat more "intelligible," and more serious than the China threat, through the ideological construction of an anti-Islamic/Pakistani sentiment in India.

A public opinion poll conducted among Indian elites found that the perceived threats to India from China, which had sometimes been officially named by the BJP policy makers as the "No. 1" justification for India's nuclearization, actually ranked well below their unofficial concerns about the Pakistani threat.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, the BJP government, embarrassed by its "rash" official pronouncement of a Chinese threat to India, quickly initiated diplomatic efforts to restore the perceived damage caused in Sino-Indian relations. The sentiment among most of the party members thus goes:

While a nuclear-armed People's Republic of China may be perceived as a . . . threat to the Indian security, the BJP believes that it is possible to reach an accommodation with China because of the past cultural relations between the two countries. China does not cause apprehension among the BJP leaders.<sup>99</sup>

While the BJP policy makers have attempted to attribute their official geostrategic perception about the Pakistani threat

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98. Samina Ahmed and David Cortright, eds., *Pakistan and the Bomb: Public Opinion and Nuclear Option* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).

99. Yogendra K. Malik and V. B. Singh, *Hindu Nationalists in India: The Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994), p. 119.

to India to the information made available to them, the question of how the BJP simultaneously draws from history, culture, and nationalist-communalist identities of the Self/Other to rewrite a newer form of Pakistani danger along communal lines requires exploration.

Based on the kinds of party documents already cited, as well as open-ended interviews, most of the BJP members identify the cultural history of Indo-Pakistan partition as a factor in India's nuclear concerns about Pakistan. Most of them, drawing from their communal calculations, rooted in the cultural biases of the two-nation theory, view the history of partition as a "living nostalgia." According to them partition, despite having occurred sixty years ago, still has the potential to affect India's national security. Recalling that India has had a "fractured past, which began with the Muslim invasion and the grinding down of the Hindu-Buddhist cultures" in India, these members consider Pakistan a cultural-religious threat.<sup>100</sup> A typical example of how such historical, cultural, and religious factors prominently define these party members' views of Pakistan may be seen in the following comment of Tathagatha Roy, once vice-president of the West Bengal BJP State Working Committee:

Threat perceptions have several dimensions—economic, political, cultural, and religious. Between India and Pakistan, the cultural and religious aspects of threat dimensions are severe because there are no cultural similarities between India and Pakistan . . . This was the basis of hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims and the emergence of India and Pakistan.<sup>101</sup>

In a similar vein, the BJP party newspaper *Swastika* cites illustrations of how Pakistan's "jehadi mentality . . . has maintained and will always maintain an anti-Indian/anti-Hindu frenzy."<sup>102</sup> The historical-cultural animosities between India and Pakistan, represented currently in the Kashmir issue as a "continuing lega-

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100. BJP, "Naipaul's Interview to Outlook," *BJP Today*, vol. 8, Nos. 21-22 (November 1-30, 1999), p. 34.

101. Tathagatha Roy, Vice-President, BJP State Working Committee (West Bengal), interview, July 12, 2002.

102. BJP, "U.S Nuclear Hegemony over India," *Swastika*, September 6, 1999, pp. 3, 5.

cy of the unfinished agenda of partition," are perceived by most BJP members as a factor that may cause Pakistan to resort to "nuclear blackmail" against India to settle this unfinished agenda (a view also expressed by Prime Minister Vajpayee at the 57th Session of the United Nations General Assembly).<sup>103</sup>

The Islamization of a Pakistani nuclear threat posed to India reached its height following Pakistan's test-firing of its medium-range ballistic missile, *Ghauri*, in 2001.<sup>104</sup> Interpreting this test-firing, the BJP's *Swastika* held that it represented Pakistan's desperate bid to acquire a deterrent against India.<sup>105</sup> As the article stated:

Since Pakistan's testing of *Ghauri* occurred within a few days of the BJP's coming to power, it signifies a spatial direction and qualitative connotation . . . Through its testing, Pakistan has tried symbolically to re-instate history, where the Hindu/Indian king Prithviraj Chauhan was defeated by the Islamic king Muhammad *Ghauri* to establish Muslim control over India. . . . Thus, one needs to read the potential impact of this act not simply in terms of its geo-strategic implication but also in the context of an Islamic vengeance rooted in what one may call a conquest fixation vis-à-vis India . . . It reminds us that such an Islamic conquest can occur again. We need to interpret this signal and prepare accordingly for our defense.<sup>106</sup>

While, from a realist perspective, the *Ghauri* did indeed pose a threat to India (as was also acknowledged by Congress Party members), what makes this otherwise acceptable assertion problematic and communal is the party's interweaving of history, culture, and religion to interpret the *Ghauri*. Interpreting Pakistan's nuclear-weapons development in the context of an "Islamic

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103. Ibid.

104. BJP, "Partition as an Unfinished Hindu-Muslim Communal Legacy," *Swastika*, June 17, 2002, p. 3.

105. BJP, "Testing Ghauri: A Signal from Pakistan That It Does Not Want Friendship with India," *Swastika*, May 11, 1998, p. 8.

106. Muhammad Ghauri was the first Islamic invader to attack Delhi in 1191. The Indian ruler, Prithviraj Chauhan, a Hindu, defeated him but spared his life. Ghauri returned a year later, defeated Prithviraj, and laid the foundation of the Muslim dynasty in India that lasted until the coming of the British in India in the late 17th century. See BJP, "We Totally Refuse to Let Terrorism Become a Tool for Blackmail," *BJP Today*, vol. 12, No. 20 (October 16-31, 2003), pp. 7-10.

vengeance" against a Hindu India not only suggests the influence of communal sentiment within the BJP but also the revision of nationalist identities and inter-state security in the context of *Hindutva*.

It may be important to note here that the BJP leaders do not explicitly reveal this anti-Pakistani sentiment by calling for a nuclear attack on Pakistan. Nor do they assert openly that India's nuclear policy is a Pakistan-centric agenda in defense of a Hindu *rashtra*. In fact, the high-ranking leaders of the BJP sometimes even refuse to identify Pakistan as an Islamic/cultural danger to India. For instance, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh stated that "our foreign [nuclear] policy has not been fixated on Pakistan."<sup>107</sup> Yet, the party simultaneously reminds the (Hindu) nation and its people of the impending nuclear danger that the nation faces from Pakistan, suggesting its implicit recognition of Pakistan as the "cultural" enemy of India. On the other hand, the party considers China a "key interlocuter" in India's diplomatic ventures—defined from the perspective of what it sees as India's "established [Hindu] culture."<sup>108</sup> Consequently, the party considers it meaningless to make conversation with the political leaders of Pakistan.<sup>109</sup> Rather, an "inescapable conclusion" of the party is that India needs a nuclear bomb—which the party's ex-General Secretary Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi terms "missiles of democracy."<sup>110</sup> Detesting this "ideological baggage" guiding the BJP's perceptions of Pakistan, a prominent spokesperson of the Congress Party claims: "The BJP's conception of cultural differences with Pakistan and vice versa an accommodation with China is a reflection of confused ideological postulations from which the party is suffering since inception. . . . This is a fundamental reason that obstructs a forward movement in Indo-Pakistan relations."<sup>111</sup>

Based on the above analysis, can we claim that there is an implicit connection between *Hindutva*, the BJP's rearticulation of

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107. BJP, "Kargil and Beyond," *BJP Today*, vol. 8, No. 17 (September 1-15, 1999), pp. 4-7.

108. BJP, "Operation Shakti," *BJP Today*, vol. 9, No. 10 (June 1-15, 2000), p. 13.

109. Times of India, "Saffron Bomb Shell," *Times of India*, June 23, 1999, p. 2.

110. BJP, "Pakistan Guns Silence India's Missiles of Democracy," *BJP Today*, vol. 11, No. 20 (October 16-31, 2002), p. 23.

111. Santosh Mukherjee, General Secretary, All India Pradesh Congress Committee (Calcutta), interview, August 16, 2002.

a Hindu *rashtra*, and the rewriting of certain notions of (cultural) insecurities to support this *rashtra*?

### Conclusion

As Samaddara argues, “We live in complex . . . post-colonial . . . times . . . it is within our post-colonial being, our agony, pessimism and strivings.”<sup>112</sup> In this sense, India’s post-colonial history is an incomplete one. It represents a breaking away from the past and simultaneously efforts to achieve successfully “the modern enterprise of nation-building.”<sup>113</sup> As the post-colonial Indian state has continued to grapple with this task of nation building, certain “cartographic anxieties” centering on questions of its identity and survival have subsumed the Indian state’s identity and enabled its leaders to use various configurations of nationalist-communalist identities and (in)securities to reconfigure its national securitization policies. To this extent, this article has used an analytical hybrid of realism and critical social constructivism as its theoretical framework, and representations of (in)securities as an interpretation of politics, to highlight an intersubjective linkage between the post-colonial Indian state’s nationalist-communalist identities, representations of (in)securities, and India’s nuclearization policies. I have particularly highlighted how acts undertaken by state leaders to establish, guard, and secure the state’s identity have enabled two ideologically-driven political parties in India to articulate divergent notions of nationalisms, nationalist identities, and (in)securities that have guided their choice of nuclear policy. I have further shown how the nature of (in)securities perceived by the Indian state under the Congress Party (which were political and developmental) have become communal and cultural under the BJP—thereby facilitating the party’s use of a culturally-situated logic of (in)securities to justify India’s 1998 nuclear tests.

Will the post-colonial task of nation building in pursuit of catching up with the West continue to impact the Indian state’s

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112. Ranabira Samaddara, *A Biography of the Indian Nation 1947-1997* (New Delhi: Sage, 2001), p. 31.

113. Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb*, p. 19.

nationalist-communalist identities, representations of (in)securities, and its nuclear policies? Furthermore, can the discourse and the policies of nuclear securitization as a consequence of the above intersubjective link continue to remain strategically oriented (as was the case under the Congress Party), or will they have a cultural foundation (as was evidenced under the BJP)? These questions, though speculative in nature, remain significant because although the BJP is not in power today, the cultural stronghold of *Hindutva* has a firm grip on many segments of the Indian population. The party, which constitutes the largest opposition in the Indian parliament, thus has the potential to regain power. Alternatively, if the BJP does not return to power, can one assume that the current national government of India led by the so-called secular Congress Party will move toward unilateral national disarmament for India or enter into a bilateral disarmament agreement with Pakistan (although the issue of nuclear apartheid would remain to be addressed)? Or again, with reference to the prospect of a nuclear deal between India and the United States that would foreclose international inspection of India's non-civilian nuclear sectors, will India be guided by the Congress Party's ongoing efforts to build a modern, technological India, or by the fear of a "cultural" enemy that the BJP emphasizes? Answering these questions would seem to require a theoretical conversation between the mainstream and alternative schools of security scholars about the lenses through which state leaders view and project danger.

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