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**SHOPPING AS DETERRENCE?
INDIA'S MILITARY ACQUISITION POLICY, BETWEEN IMPROVISATION AND THE
PURSUIT OF PRESTIGE**

Silviu PETRE

National School of Political Science and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romani

Abstract: *As technological achievements, weapons are pursued by states not only for security reasons but as a way of enhancing prestige. On a wider philosophical frame, arms acquisition is seen by developing and third world countries as a vector of modernity. In this respect, India's postIndependence elites envisaged building up a modern military, both on conventional and nuclear terms, albeit the way to achieve such goal was not always clear. As today's most avid weapons purchaser in the world, India security policy is ambiguous. Far from showing financial prowess, Indian political and military establishment seems caught in what Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta label – "arming without aiming syndrome." Following their work, this present article will try to show that Indian military acquisition policy is fashioned by a blurry and incoherent bureaucracy and also that such martial shopping spree will channel funds from civil needs and probably create a spiral of fear in the South Asian subcontinent.*

Keywords: *India, militarization, modernization, Veblen effect, prestige, deterrence*

For the last few years India has been one of the most avid buyers of weaponry on the international market. In 2011 New Delhi has topped everyone else to become world's largest arms buyer, according to SIPRI. Between 2007-2011, Indian military equipment purchase was worth \$12.7 billion, while China's only \$6.3 billion, roughly a half of its southern neighbour and rival (Kumar: 2012). It is tempting to fall for the first impression and consider India as an emerging (regional) superpower on the same level with Russia, the United States, China or European Union taken as a whole. However, India cupidity may not be the sign of a healthy development but actually the incandescent

symptom of bureaucratic chaos and lack of a grand strategy.

In this article we will try to argue that New Delhi's preferences towards military purchases do not necessarily stem from actual fear of China or Pakistan but as a consequence of a self narrative emphasising India's crave to take its rightful place among other systemic big players. Therefore its defense behavior is molded by a heterogeneous mix of motives.

Militarisation as modernisation

The security behavioral patterns of third world political elites after decolonization inspired a whole literature within International Relations.

Replacing former colonial empires after 1960s, a whole inflation of new states emerged across all over we have used to term the Third World. 'Inflation' has not been used in a shallow way, as those new sovereign political entities were not fully mature to manage their internal affairs as one would have expected. Inheriting some shreds of Western injected modernity, decolonised embarked on a process of full fledged modernity (understood in the same Western manner). Thus military purchases had become the tool of choice for the new thiermondist elites in their effort to guarantee a monopoly of violence over their own realms, protect against neighbours and accelerate or simulate modernity.

Early XX century Thorstein Veblen had explained the consuming behavior of lower classes bent on emulating the aristocrats. Thus each class tries to imitate its better placed peers and engages in conspicuous consumption- a shopping spree necessary to boost self esteem and prestige more than factual necessities. Observing the arms race prior to WWI, Thorstein reflect on patriotism as: *..as a sense of partisan solidarity in respect of prestige.*" (Veblen, 1945: 19). Patriotism is incultacted by elites and institution to the general public: *It is also evident from the run of the facts as exemplified in these modern wars that while any breach of the peace takes place only on the initiative and at the discretion of the government, or State, it is always requisite in furtherance of such warlike enterprise to cherish and eventually to mobilise popular sentiment in support of any warlike move. Due fomentation of a warlike animus is indispensable to the procuring and maintenance of a suitable equipment with which eventually to break the peace, as well as to ensure a diligent prosecution of such enterprise when once it has been undertaken.*" (Veblen, 1945: 11)

Building upon Veblen's work, Lilach Gilady applies conspicuous consumption to the international arena. Gilady replaces prestige with power and explains how governments channeled resources to impress allies and foes alike or project an aura around public actions. Gilady's research focuses on 'Big Science Projects' (ex: Human Genome; space travels

etc.) during Cold War when US-Soviet competition pitted two ideological arrangements one against each other. (Gilady, 2007:26) On the same avenue Barry O'Neill explains nuclear programs using the prestige factor. O'Neill believes that instead of perpetuating the scholarly obsessions with hard power and material portfolio we should look upon states as we do individuals- driven by imponderable desires and crave for respect. (O'Neill, 2006)

Having said that, we have only sketched a general pattern of post WWII decolonized international system but we did not adressed peculiar behaviors which single on country from the others. Whereas Kenneth Waltz's saw a convergence towards industrialization all over the system, the proponents of strategic culture emphasize nuances and differences in each nation.

For authors such as Colin Gray and Alistair Iain Johnston reason cannot be considered an universal set of assumption and more of a cultural product. What seems right in one place acquires an opposite meaning in another. (Klare in Eidee and Thee, 1980:37) To quote Nietzsche: "Morality is one across the Pirinei and other across the Alps."

As notion, strategic culture was first introduced by Jack L.Snyder who defined it as: *"sum total of ideals, conditional emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of the national strategic community have acquired though instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy."* (Snyder, 1977 in Johnston, 1995: 34-36)

Alistair Iain Johnston sums up the meaning of strategic culture as an integrated *"system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors) which acts to establish pervasive and long- lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions*

with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious." Beyond such definition Johnston draws attention to the methodological pitfalls which arise from not being aware of the full weight of words



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implied. Otherwise put, strategic culture should be a falsifiable notion or it will end up as catchword which explains everything. The real problem is correlating strategic culture to real behavior. Here one should balance historical heritage, national narratives, organizational establishment, international pressure or public opinion and see which element has more importance in the final decision. To do justice to all these above mentioned actors Johnston reads strategic culture as a "system of symbols" made up of two parts: the first consists of basic assumptions about the orderliness of the strategic environment and the nature of the adversary; and the second consists of assumptions at a more operational level about what strategic options are the most efficacious for dealing with the threat environment, continues Johnston. First part corresponds to the imponderable while the second speaks about institutions crafted to translate philosophy into practice (Johnston, 1995: 46) A more Clausewitzian and simpler formulation is to be found in Kanti Bajpai: *"Strategic culture consists of two parts. The first is the central strategic paradigm — the basic assumptions about orderliness in the world. Included here are assumptions about the role of war in human affairs, about the nature of the adversary, and about the efficacy of the use of force. The second part is grand strategy, or the secondary assumptions about operational policy that follow."* (Bagchi, 2012)

India and the avatars of its grand strategy

Talking about India's strategic culture and grand strategy submits a spectrum of divergent opinions ranging from those who deny the existence of a coherent strategic culture or a grand strategy to those who assert that New Delhi displays several strategic traditions. For

Rahul Sagar envisages four kind of ideological philosophies, with a certain behavioral trademark towards the international scene: moralists, Hindu nationalists, strategists or realpolitikers and liberals.

1. Moralism or Nehruvianism is the first and perhaps the most comprehensive (albeit not the most practical or coherent) modern Indian school of diplomacy. Tributary to Gandhi, Nehru took from the former an ethical Weltanschauung translated into a refusal for imperialism, spheres of influence and arms race. Non-alignment became Nehru's diplomatic enterprise to syndicalise a decolonised world against Northern superpowers (we include here USA, Western developed countries as well as the Soviet Union). Nonetheless India's first prime-minister parted with Gandhian idealism and injected a certain dose of realism in his diet: India should pursue moral aims but also she should be ready to defend its integrity as any other country on earth: *"It is true that nobody will listen to you if you are weak, but, as you develop your strength to negotiate, unfortunately the other party also goes on developing its strength."*

2. The Hindu nationalists were the first and the foremost critiques of Gandhi-Nehru principles. For them India was, is and must always remain a product of Hindu civilization in all aspects of life. Anything short of that means betrayal. Confined to the margins of parliamentary struggle until the 1980s, the Hindu ultras thrived from the fall of the Congress and peaked to power. Similar to American Jacksonians they strove for a proud and stronger India not ashamed to use hard power, to end nuclear apartheid and gain respect from other major powers. During his tenure, the BJP government of Atal Biharee Vajpae

performed five nuclear tests in May 1998 and declared India a full fledged nuclear power.

3. Strategists share with Hindu nationalist a belief in nuclear weapons driven status, although the former may not embrace a religion and ethnic based citizenship.

Last but not least, the liberals are a younger brand to find a place after the advent of post-1991 economic reforms. They tend to stress the benefits of globalization and economic interdependence. Instead of Non-Alignment their geopolitics seems poised to a poly-alignment with as many countries as possible. (Sagar, 2012: 64-72)

By no means monolithic, for Rodney Jones, India's strategic predisposition is anchored in certain religious and geographical tenets flexible to different situation but solid enough to spell perennial goals: "*India's omniscient-patrician type of strategic culture is a complex mosaic of sacred myths and legends and memories of ancient states and civilizations, with the subcontinent as a geographical frame of reference, and with a modern overlay of nationalism supporting a vision of Indian greatness and expectations that India be treated with unmitigated respect. With leadership strata that traditionally prized knowledge as a source both of natural understanding and practical power, the elite carriers of strategic culture adapted modern science and technology to their own purposes in building and fortifying an independent nation*". (Jones, 2006:27) Jones summarizes Indian political thought under the self-narrative moniker: *omniscient patrician* – expression inspired by the Sanskrit formula: "*bharat jagat guru*" or "India: the World's Teacher". Appropriate to such label is a hierarchical view of the world. Material realm is anchored in a higher spiritual cusp whereas force as a regulator of human affairs is not entirely forbidden, only tolerated in certain circumstances. (Jones, 2006:4)

Defence bureaucracy- a goddess with too many hands?

Strategic culture is only half of the matter without the institutional fabric which allows blueprints to become reality. In India's case bureaucracy has been and continues to be one of the most important obstacle to economic

growth and efficiency. Indians themselves know their regulation system is one of the most overweighed and corrupt in the world and often use expressions such as : 'License Raj' and 'red tape', usually blaming colonial heritage for the present situation. An explanation which is partially true and highly comfortable from a nationalistic view but inaccurate. Research done by William Gould and L. Shanthakumar show that corruption within the Southasian state apparatus has been recorded since ancient times. In his masterpiece Arthashastra, Kautilya spoke about the greed of government official and urged different remedies to cure the ill. (Gould, 2011; Sunder, 2011: xxiii-xxiv)

A corollary effect of a bloated bureaucracy is its pluralistic character: the same task is assigned to different departments poised to do identical work. Results are easy to foresee: rivalry and interference.

With regard to the defense bureaucracy this one is in good measure the result of a certain way of organising civil-military relations after the Independence. It's ironic that the very conditions that kept functional Indian democracy hamper today the defense acquisitions. Whereas in other third world countries civil institutions fell to praetorian pressure or military coup d'états, Bhāratīya Sāsāstra Sēnāēn (Indian Armed Forces) were kept under a very tight civil control and allowed to enjoy only the freedom of the leash. Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta explain the overcivilianisation of armed forces as a consequence of India's political philosophy of restraint. In their already classical work, *Arming without aiming*, Cohen and Dasgupta show in thorough detail how military decisionmaking black box is actually a blockbox:

-first of all is the often unadvised interference of political factors in military affairs. This holds true especially for the procurement policies. 1987 was the legendary year of the Bofors scandal. A bid for equipping India terrestrial forces with modern artillery ended up in a bribery conundrum where both Swedish businessmen and Indian officials teamed-up. The scandal, initially discovered by Swedish media and then afterwards taken by an Indian journalist from *The Hindu*



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brought down Rajiv Ghandi's government in the 1991 elections. Because of its heavily tarnished reputation the Congress party could only make its come back fifteen years later, in 2004.

- the second flaw is the lack of a civil-military interface, namely a coherent group/forum of defense experts who may advise the political elite. Although there are think-tanks such as IDSA (Institute for Defense and Strategic Analysis- established after 1962) their work is not seriously taken into consideration. According to one IDSA researcher the analysts may write controversial materials without fear because no one from the upper echelons other to read them, anyway.

-the third major flow it the fragmentation of military command. For example India does not posses a Joint Chief of Staff after the American model. Inter-branch communication is weak. There is no coordination between the three branches of the armed forces with the Ministry of Defense. *Jointness is noticeable by its absence* conclude Cohen and Dasgupta. Of the seventeen commands of the Indian armed forces, with the exception of the Andaman and Nicobar Command and the Joint Strategic Forces, none are in the same location. (Cohen and Dasgupta, 2010: 44)

There is overall security doctrine and no synchronization between R&D, external purchases and military needs.

-DRDO- Defence and Research Development Organization is India's highest military-technological forum. The saga of DRDO can be studied as a case in itself. Created in late 1940s the organisation has expanded to tens of laboratories and it's involved in a thousand different project, ranging from genetic engineering to nutrition and smart guided missiles. Impressive as it may seem at the first glance, DRDO hasn't bee able to produce any

single major product in five decades of existence. With the exception of a sonar in the 1980s, all its achievements where returned by the brass. An anthological example is the Arjun tank. Blueprinted in 1970, Arjun's task was to offer an armored backbone to the national ground forces and replace the aging T-72 Soviet made tanks. After numerous trials and modifications Arjun got the approval to become a line equipment in the summer 2010. However the enthusiasm belonged only to the scientist and some media pundits whereas military personnel has been more reluctant to hail the new piece. For example one of the problems of the Arjun is its tremendous weight- if the seminal design hovered around 40 tones the final version increased to 59 tones. With India's lack of infrastructure such an armored column crossing fragile bridges and roads would be a curse more than a tactical blessing.

Another shameful example concerns the rifle INSAS- Indian Small Arms System. Commissioned in late 1980s by the Army it was designed by Armament Research and Development Establishment (ARDE), a branch of DRDO. After innumerable laboratory trials and changes INSAS was delivered to the infantry in late 1990s. Its first large scale combat test was the Kargil pitch in 1999 and the record was not satisfactory at all. Soldiers have complained about rifle jamming, poor calibration or cracking of the polymers parts in the weapon. Nepali soldiers, also equipped with the Indian made product voiced similar complains. In 2012 the Army decided to scrap around 500 thousand pieces of its old rifles and replace them with something new. As officers do not want to wait anymore for DRDO labels coming into production, a bid to foreign investors like Beretta, Colt, Sig Sauer

and IWI is running its course. (Bipindra: 2012; Katoch: 2013; Joseph,: 2013)

- It is hard to imagine today's international defense procurement without offset. Offsets in defense trade are industrial compensation required by a foreign government as a condition of purchase of defense articles and services. This mandatory compensation can take many forms; it can be directly related to the purchased weapon system and related services, or it can involve activities or goods unrelated to the weapon system. The compensation can be further classified as a Subcontract, Purchase, Co-production, Technology Transfer, Licensed Production, Credit Transfer, Overseas Investment, or Training. (U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Industry and Security: 2005) Offset policies have grown to be something common as defense agencies regard a certain deal to be the starting point of a longer collaboration and not only as an ad-hoc deal. (Russin, 1994: 106) Another subsequent reason behind offsets regards the fact that defense industry does not operate in a vacuum and it is closely linked with other branches of production. Intimate joint ventures between military output and civilian manufacturers assure the spillover effect from the former to the latter. At least in theory. The story does not end here if one adds disadvantages to the good news. Offsets are intricate operations and do not yield optimum results always. To channel this process into their benefit, governments have enacted laws to closely regulate offsets in defense business. Especially the United States refrain from offsets as they fear about losing technological edge. (Wessner: 1999) However developing countries tend to hold offsets arrangements in higher regards as they hope to gain latest technology through military transfer from Western more accomplished defense industries.

PostIndependence India had some shreds of defense industrial capabilities left from the British: Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), which is today India's largest defense public sector undertaking (DPSU), Mazagon Docks Limited (MDL), the largest shipyard in the nation and half of dozen of other factories. The Chinese inflicted defeat from 1962 border war determined India to enmesh in close links

with the Soviet supplier. Cheap, decently reliable Soviet products fed Indian laziness and hampered a coherent development of a national defense industrial base. Nonetheless Indian learned to produce MIG-21 jets under license. The real challenge came with diversification. Unfortunately New Delhi did not have an offset legislation for many years until 2005 when the first ever Defense Procurement Procedure (DPP) was established. DPP 2005 introduced a 30 per cent offset in contracts valued above Rs 3 billion under "buy" and "buy and make" categories.

DPP 2006 was added to further fill the blanks of the first regulation and made possible joint ventures (JV) between foreign vendors and Indian firms. It also established Defence Offset Facilitation Agency (DOFA) comprising of representatives of all stakeholders, the Services, DRDO etc.

A third DPP came in 2008 to build on the experience garnered in the previous years. DPP 2008 further liberalizes the procedures for private sectors to become part of defense deal within JVs and created the possibility of FDI (foreign direct investments) for the external vendors.

There are some critics who say that the 30% cap will not encourage international companies to come in India and invest. Feeling their freedom being restrained by Indian regulation they might choose other markets where mergers and acquisition and other kinds of corporate operations are permitted. (Matthew: 2009) Out of the sixteen offset contracts concluded between 2007 and 2011 five of them did not comply with the terms of the offset policy as set out in the relevant DPP. Those five were large international firms capable of generating significant technological output. (Kumar: 2013; Spear: 2013)

On January 06, 2011 the Ministry of Defense (MoD) released the Defense Procurement Procedure 2011 (DPP-2011), which formally implements past experience and feed-backs. Although private sector participation and offset flexibility is higher than in previous years. DPP-2011 remains a peculiar middle-way compromise between old and new, says Laxman Kumar Behera from IDSA. Behera's criticism aims especially at procurement



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procedures which are said to be even more complicated from now and at the regulations bringing together private and public sector. Instead of pitting one against the other in a fair competition according to the rules of the market, DPP-2011 juxtaposes private defense contractors monopoly with private ventures in such a manner that private defense players cannot really have a saying. (Behera: 2011)

Final reflections

Latest defense scam unfolded early 2013 when AugustaWestland's deal to supplement Indian Air Forces was dropped amidst rumors of bribery. In February, Italian police arrested Giuseppe Orsi former head of Finmeccanica for onerous payments to Indian officials. As AugustaWestland is one of Finmeccanica's subsidiaries New Delhi authorities put everything on hold. Shortly afterwards Defense Ministry K.Anthony announced a new defense procurement policy garnered to emphasise "*aggressive indigenisation*" as the only feasible solution to "*the scourge of corruption.*" (India Post: 2013)

Indigenisation, buy abroad and than again indigenisation! The saga of India's military modernisation seem to be unable to escape a loop of short-term plans, poor procedures and corrupt officials.

We have tried to argue in this article that India's security behavior is not all different from other new nation which gained their sovereignty after World War Two. For those cases especially armed forces served as nation-builders. Martial affairs were not channeled only towards practical needs but devised to instill a sense of collective pride and seldom legitimise a ruling elite. What is peculiar and ironic all the same to India is that the very qualities which renders the flavor of its ancient civilisation and keeps alive its democracy are a

plague to the defense bureaucracy. In strategic matters pluralism fosters wrong decisions, unpreparedness and waste of resources. 1962 proved it. One may argue that against Pakistan India can have the certainty of victory but there are two extra worries: 1) Pakistan is not alone amongst India's rivals. An alliance with China or with a smaller neighbours might force New Delhi to fight on two fronts and surprises may occur; 2) even if India outmatches one or several of its potential enemies in South Asia it still matters the quantity of people and resources sacrifice to assure that victory. A Pyrrhic triumph speaks more about luck and superior quantity than about quality. In a postmodern environment where society itself becomes the battlefield, accuracy means more than raw fire power. Mumbai 26/11 2008 proved that to the fullest. (Roggio:2008; Patel 2009)

To do justice to the title we can ask ourselves if India's defense procurement spree has not achieved its purposes, with all the flaws deriving from here? Sometimes the possession of a huge arsenal serves as a deterrent alone, in spite of any existing inefficiency. Lakhshar-e-Taiba's terrorist attack over Mumbai in 2008 can be given as an unfortunate example supporting the fact that Pakistan did not dare fight its southern rival in an open battle and preferred indirect methods.

On the other hand defense shopping accomplished deterrence on the internal front and in an unwanted way → If India's economy had been weaker the civil-military decision-makers would have been forced to take their time and ponder more profoundly to the real security needs of their nation and perhaps made better choice. In this second meaning, speed was a deterrent against wisdom.

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