

roots political mobilization.¹⁴ Any benefits that may eventually be gleaned from this development, however, may well be years in the future. In the interim, governance by opportunity is likely to remain the norm. It is perhaps ironic that decades of this type of governance served to keep the question of "weaponizing" India's nuclear capability in the shadows; it was only when a relatively stable and well-supported party came to power in 1998 that Delhi finally elected to indulge in an overt display of that capability.

India's decision to conduct its nuclear test programme in 1998 was to a large extent an effort to bolster a sagging coalition by appealing to Hindu nationalism. The programme had not been introduced earlier because an ambiguous posture was less likely to lead to Pakistani weaponization, was not as certain to bring down international opprobrium on India, and was lacking as much public support as it was later to garner. In addition, other factors were present. The Hindu nationalist government was less liable to suffer from serious criticism of weaponization than those which preceded it. The rise in nationalism and anti-Pakistani sentiment, as well as the heating up again of the Kashmir issue, made weaponization more valuable politically than in the past. And on the military front, India's maturing launch capability meant that nuclear MRBM and ICBM capability were becoming viable. Finally, Indian relative self-sufficiency in technology meant that sanctions would have a lesser impact. None of these reasons would have been sufficient in and of themselves to push forward the decision on the nuclear option. Instead, it was the political conditions that had come into play, and especially the rise of Hindu nationalism and Indian national pride reflected in the election of a Hindu nationalist government, which contributed most to the programme.

As a result of its decision, India exchanged a condition of nuclear ambiguity tempered by conventional superiority (in numbers, if not necessarily in quality) for a situation where Pakistan is both more capable of deploying and more likely to deploy nuclear weapons; strategic warning time is likely to be reduced; relations with China are likely to be damaged; and the groundwork for an unwinnable nuclear arms race with Beijing may have been laid.¹⁵ If nothing else, the decision to test in 1998 demonstrates unequivocally the role of India's internal political mechanisms in further complicating the strategic calculus.

In addition to internal politics, the health of India's social fabric is a driving factor. India is a study in contradictions, possessing world-class technological and industrial concerns manned by people who often live in poverty. That said, the Indian middle class is already the largest in the world, and is growing. Power generation is a major concern as literally hundreds of millions of people acquire the means to purchase increasingly available electrical appliances. Lacking significant reserves of fossil fuels, India has for the past thirty years been working to meet its power needs through nuclear means. From the perspective of the developed world, this is a double-edged

¹⁴ Sumit Ganguly, book review "Democracy, Security and Development in India", *Studies in Comparative International Development* 33(2) (Summer 1998), pp. 125-26.

¹⁵ Spurgeon M. Keeny Jr., "South Asia's Nuclear Wake-Up Call", *Arms Control Today* (May 1998), p. 2.