

# Continuity or Change?: DRDO's Influence on India's Nuclear Trajectory

A photograph of a rocket launch. The rocket is white with a black nose cone and a red band near the top. It is ascending vertically, leaving a large, bright orange and yellow plume of fire and white smoke. The launch is taking place outdoors, with green trees on the left and a building or structure in the background on the right. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

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*\*The presentation represents the author's views and not necessarily those of the organization.*

# Continuity or Change?

- **Research Question**

- Is DRDO likely to continue having an outsized influence on Indian nuclear policy and posture?

- **Main Takeaways**

- DRDO's bureaucratic skills suggest continuity in its influential position over the short term
- Development of nuclear institutions and oversight mechanisms suggest possible shift in DRDO's position over the longer term
- The external security environment is a wildcard w/muddled effects for DRDO



# DRDO and the “Strategic Enclave”

- The Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) is the lead agency responsible for India’s strategic missile program
- Part of India’s “strategic enclave”



# Models of Proliferation

## Standard Models

- The Security Model
  - States obtain nuclear weapons to achieve security
- The Domestic Politics Model
  - States obtain nuclear weapons to satisfy parochial interests
- The Norms Model
  - States obtain nuclear weapons (or exercise restraint) to meet identity needs

## Alternate Models

- The “Stakeholder” Approach
  - Identifies key stakeholders
  - Accounts for shifts in stakeholders’ respective influence
  - Avoids ahistoricity of standard models
- The “Model III” Approach
  - Emphasizes bureaucratic competition for political support, scarce resources, and institutional autonomy

# Stakeholders and Interests

## DRDO

- Access to the PMO
- Secure budgets
- Safeguard institutional autonomy

## The PMO

- Align nuclear policy w/strategic interests
- Protect apex decisionmaking position
- Ensure accountability of agents

## The Armed Services

- Procure best weapons systems
- Manage nuclear arsenal/operations (via SFC)
- Influence long-range nuclear planning (via SPS)

# Bureaucratic Competition

- To maintain influence vis-à-vis bureaucratic competitors, DRDO:
  - Briefs PMO directly
  - Hinders political/budgetary oversight
  - Makes policy statements about the strategic purposes of long-range missiles, MIRVs, and other weapons systems
  - Prioritizes strategic missile program over conventional successes
  - Excludes the armed services from project planning



# Signaling Dangers



“DRDO does not wait for the threat to become a reality before it starts the development.” – Avinash Chander

“Where I was using four missiles, I may use only one missile. So it becomes a force multiplier given the damage potential.” – V.K. Saraswat

# Indicators of Continuity and Change

- **Continuity Indicators**

- DRDO retains access to the PMO despite differences (political support)
- Defense R&D budget trending upward (scarce resources)
- Missiles, BMD countermeasures, and other technologies are being developed without political approval (institutional autonomy)

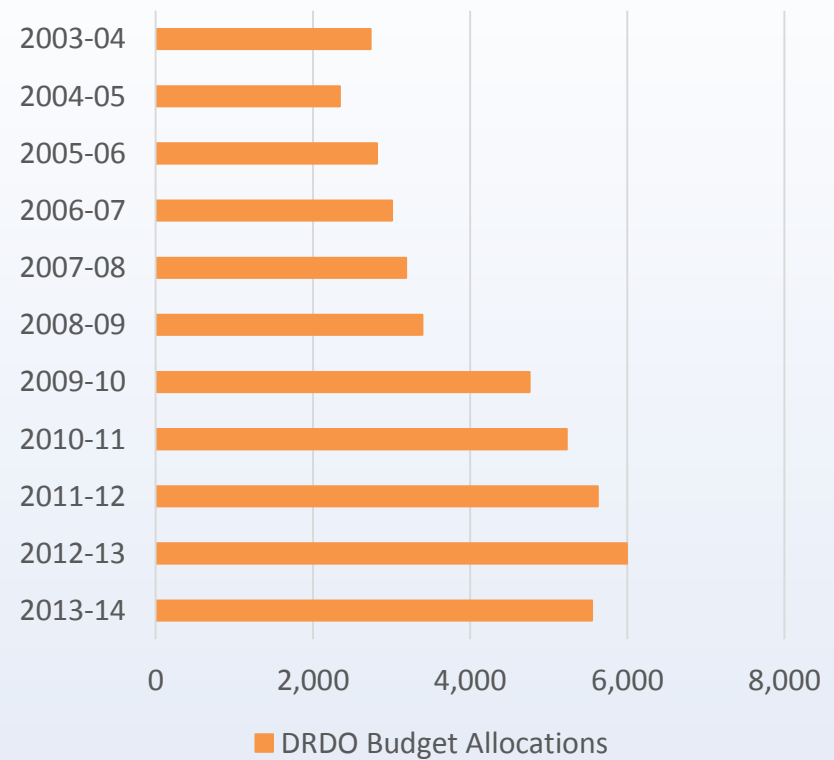
- **Change Indicators**

- Nuclear institution building (institutional autonomy)
- Civilian and armed services' exercising more stringent oversight vis-à-vis DRDO (institutional autonomy)

- **Wildcard**

- External security environment (i.e. China)

DRDO Budget Allocations, 2003-14 (in Indian crore rupees)





# Change Indicators

- India's post-1998 nuclear institutional framework has evolved to include:
  - National Command Authority (NCA)
  - Strategic Forces Command (SFC)
  - Strategic Planning Staff (SPS)
- SFC appears to be flexing its institutional muscles to raise concerns about:
  - Reliability of DRDO-built missiles
  - General nuclear management issues
  - DRDO's involvement in nuclear employment process



# Wildcard: China

- China's rise could affect DRDO in different ways:
  - Greater emphasis on long-range ballistic missiles may bolster DRDO's influence and prestige (continuity)
  - Perceived need for quick nuclear response plus deployment of SSBNs could put military in the driver seat (change)



# Additional Resources

- For more on models of proliferation and DRDO's influence on India's nuclear program, see:
  - Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security*, Winter 1996-97.
  - Vipin Narang, "Five Myths About India's Nuclear Posture," *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2013.
  - Gaurav Kampani, "Stakeholders in the Indian Strategic Missile Program," *The Nonproliferation Review*, September 2003.
  - Frank O'Donnell and Harsh V. Pant, "Evolution of India's Agni-V Missile," *Asian Survey*, June 2014.
  - Joshua T. White and Kyle Deming, "India's MIRV Program and Deterrence Stability in South Asia," in *Deterrence Instability and Nuclear Weapons in South Asia*, April 2015.