

Political Construction of Atmanirbharta under Modi:

Challenges and Constraints

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Abstract

India is pursuing self-sufficiency in economic and military domains – an essential pre-requisite for leveraging its influence as a global power. The paper examines India's Atmanirbharta (self-sufficiency) policy, launched in 2020, and assesses how it has been framed as a core national value by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It explores the policy decisions, administrative reforms, and resource mobilization undertaken to ensure Atmanirbharta remains a top priority for the Modi administration. Through the lens of constructivism, this paper describes the ideological narratives and identity-based discourses that shape Atmanirbharta. This study addresses two key questions: How has Indian government constructed Atmanirbharta to advance its global ambitions? Why has Atmanirbharta emerged as a central policy instrument for enhancing India's military and economic capabilities? The study undertakes a qualitative methodological approach to analyze both primary and secondary data. The findings suggest that despite structural and institutional constraints, the governing leadership has actively sought to construct a policy ecosystem that promotes domestic production. In this endeavor, Atmanirbharta functions not only as an economic but also as an ideological framework driving New Delhi's aspiration for a great power status. This study highlights how ideological narratives increasingly shape economic and security policymaking in rising powers.

Keywords: Atmanirbharta, Hindutva, Constructivism, Akhand Bharat, Constructivism, Strategic Autonomy

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Introduction

Since independence, India has been pursuing great power ambition. Successive Prime Ministers from Jawaharlal Nehru to Narendra Modi have echoed New Delhi's civilizational exceptionalism and its moral right to transcend the legacy of colonialism.¹ Throughout history, India has largely focused on nonalignment, interest-based partnerships, and moral leadership in the Global South. However, the rise of Narendra Modi in 2014 and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has recalibrated its approach to becoming a global power.

This paper explains how Modi's pursuit of Atmanirbharta has emerged as a strategic pillar, fulfilling the ambition of a great power. Launched in 2020, Atmanirbharta aims to achieve self-sufficiency across all fields, especially by establishing a military-industrial complex for India.² Under this initiative, several policies and structural reforms have been undertaken to create a conducive environment. The study employs a constructivist framework to analyze how, through historical narrative, speeches, and ideology, Narendra Modi constructed the vision of Atmanirbharta. It investigates two key questions: How has Indian government constructed Atmanirbharta to advance its global ambitions? Why has Atmanirbharta emerged as a central policy instrument for enhancing India's military and economic capabilities? It hypothesizes that Modi's ambition of making India a great power, through self-sufficiency, faces structural and social challenges. This paper is divided into five sections; the first section describes the theoretical framework of constructivism, the second section analyses the construction of the ideology of Atmanirbharta, the third section explains Modi's vision of Atmanirbharta, the fourth section explores the Indian policies for achieving self-sufficiency, and the final section examines the challenges to Atmanirbharta. Research methodology utilized for this paper is qualitative, involving a content analysis of Modi's speeches, BJP manifesto, policy documents, books, and journal articles.

Theoretical Framework

The traditional model of knowledge assumes everything as a copy of the external world, where learning is passive. The object creates impressions upon the minds through ideas, and people perceive it without actively participating in the construction of ideas. However, constructivism

¹ Priya Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy: The Politics of Postcolonial Identity from 1947 to 2004* (London: Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203147733>.

² Ravi Kant and Vijay Mittal, "'Atmanirbharta' in Defence Manufacturing: We Are on Fast Track," *SP's Land Forces* accessed February 13, 2026, <https://www.spslandforces.com/story/?id=798&h=Atmanirbharta-in-Defence-Manufacturing-We-are-on-Fast-Track>.

argues that knowledge is actively constructed in the learner's mind rather than passively received.³ Constructivists posit that ideas are born through cognitive acts, social interactions, and experiences. One of the core components of construction is subject-object interaction, in which the subject creates meaning and imposes it on the object.

Jean Piaget's theory of intellectual development is fundamental to constructivism.⁴ According to the theory, knowledge is not a copy of reality. To know an object is not to simply observe and replicate it; it is to act on it, modify it, and transform it. Ultimately, to know an object is to understand the process of its transformation and, consequently, how it is constructed.⁵ Through these processes, cognitive structures evolve qualitatively and quantitatively, leading learners to a profound understanding. It highlights that learning is not a linear process but a dynamic one influenced by active engagement, exploration, and reflection.⁶

In the context of IR, constructivism offers a novel analysis that does not reject the role of material capabilities but identifies social variables that influence a state's behavior.⁷ An international reality is born out of the interaction at the international and domestic levels, which shape interests.⁸ To understand behavior, one needs to analyze identity, norms, discourse, and social interaction. Constructivists argue that agency and structure mutually shape each other, enabling change. For them, identities and interests are socially constructed and influence state actions. Social norms also play a key role in shaping appropriate behavior. Within constructivism, conventional theorists focus on causality and meanings to explain why certain actors behave or why a phenomenon occurs by identifying cause-and-effect relationships.⁹

The basis of constructivism is anti-foundationalism and anti-positivism. While foundationalism and positivism believe in objective reality and fixed human nature,

³ George M. Bodner, "(PDF) Constructivism: A Theory of Knowledge," *Journal of Chemical Education* 63, no. 10, (October 1986): 873-77, <https://doi.org/10.1021/ed063p873>.

⁴ "Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development: A Guide," Structural Learning, accessed February 13, 2026, <https://www.structural-learning.com/post/jean-piagets-theory-of-cognitive-development-and-active-classrooms>.

⁵ Jerome Proulx, "Constructivism: A Re-Equilibration and Clarification of the Concepts, and Some Potential Implications for Teaching and Pedagogy," *Radical Pedagogy* 8, no. 1 (2006), accessed February 13, 2026, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337544288_Constructivism_A_re-equilibration_and_clarification_of_the_concepts_and_some_potential_implications_for_teaching_and_pedagogy.

⁶ Andrew Allen, "An Introduction to Constructivism: Its Theoretical Roots and Impact on Contemporary Education," *Journal of Learning Design and Leadership* 1, no.1 (2022): 1-11.

⁷ Mark Olssen, "The Epistemology of Constructivism," *Access: Contemporary Issues in Education* 13, no. 2 (1995):82-94.

⁸ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35.

⁹ Olssen, "The Epistemology of Constructivism," 85.

constructivism emphasizes the role of values, norms, and identity.¹⁰ Through social interaction and language, meaning is assigned, and ideas are constructed. These meanings and ideas drive human action and behavior, which makes reality subjective. Unlike foundationalism and positivism, constructivism acknowledges the value of shared experiences and identities.¹¹ Therefore, constructivism prioritizes the subjective nature of reality, where knowledge and ideas are actively constructed through human interaction.

Constructivist scholar, Nicolas Onuf argues that language (promises, threat perception, declarations, etc.) creates rules.¹² States also participate in an international reality, where they accumulate power by spreading their version of rules to others. For instance, when a state declares that it would protect another, it is not merely a declaration, but an act that constructs a political reality. Another scholar, Alexander Wendt, describes the effect of varying social variables on interstate relations. Wendt illustrated this with the example that 500 British nuclear weapons pose less threat to the US than five North Korean ones, not due to material power but because of the meaning assigned to these relationships.¹³

In the context of this paper, theoretical lens of constructivism helps explain the formation of the concept of Atmanirbharta by India under the Modi regime. The roots of this reality lie in Hindutva's belief that they need to restore the glory of Hindus. The goal is to increase power and use this concept as a potent tool to mobilize and reinvent the Indian defense industry. A developed military-industrial complex would increase Indian weapons sales as part of a broader foreign policy framework, to gain leverage and prestige, with states interested in purchasing arms from it. Organizational changes, narrative construction, and resource allocation by the BJP government explain social interaction, identity, and norms. In the next section, the construction of Atmanirbharta is explained in detail.

The Construction of Atmanirbharta

According to Modi, he and his administration are guiding India out of twelve centuries of slavery.¹⁴ These were characterized by the humiliation at the hands of both Muslim rule and

¹⁰ Allen, "An Introduction to Constructivism," 5.

¹¹ Allen, "An Introduction to Constructivism," 5.

¹² Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*, (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), <http://archive.org/details/worldofourmaking00onuf>.

¹³ Sarina Theys, "Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *E-International Relations*, February 23, 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/23/introducing-constructivism-in-international-relations-theory/>.

¹⁴ "1,200 Years of Servitude: PM Modi Offers Food for Thought," *Firstpost*, June 13, 2014, <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/1200-years-of-servitude-pm-modi-offers-food-for-thought-1567805.html>.

colonial rule in the subcontinent. Rather, his administration believes in bringing a new period of Amrit kaal,¹⁵ a Vedic idea about the gates of pleasure opening to the world. It is important to understand Modi's vision and motives behind Atmanirbharta. Modi belongs to a nationalist party i.e., BJP having roots in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS originated as a shadowy cabal for the revival of Hindu pride after a long history of Muslim and colonial rule in India. Its early leaders openly drew inspiration from the nationalist and fascist parties of Europe in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁶ The religio-political values of RSS focus on tangible aspects and power dynamics, irrespective of moral rhetoric. Moreover, BJP under the ideological framework of RSS believes in a collectivist-majoritarian moral base, in which all are not included.

Modi constructed the vision of Atmanirbharta by amalgamating the historical narrative, evolving national identity, and the collective aspirations of its people. While celebrating Diwali with Indian troops, Modi said "when the jawans of India fight with the weapons made in the country, their faith will be at its peak, and their attacks will come with a surprise element for the enemy while crushing the enemy's morale."¹⁷ The example provides evidence on how Modi is linking indigenous arms production with national pride and trust for the soldiers, underscoring unity and psychological advantage over the enemy.

Constructivists argue that material capabilities and factors such as identity, culture, and historical memory shape a state's behavior. Modi's emphasis on indigenous arms manufacturing reflects this constructivist approach, as it seeks to reconstruct India's self-image as a powerful and self-sufficient nation. Inspiration was drawn from figures such as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, whose naval strategies symbolized maritime prowess of Hindus during the reign of Maratha dynasty.¹⁸ Further, for honoring former Hindu dynasties, the names of different Indian weapon systems have also been named after them, for instance, the Nilgiri frigate. Modi intertwines a historical consciousness with contemporary strategic imperatives.

¹⁵ India Today Web Desk, "What Is Amrit Kaal That Nirmala Sitharaman Repeatedly Mentioned in Budget Speech?" *India Today*, February 1, 2023, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/amrit-kaal-nirmala-sitharaman-budget-2023-narendra-modi-2329026-2023-02-01>.

¹⁶ Mujib Mashal and Hari Kumar, "From the Shadows to Power: How the Hindu Right Reshaped India," *The New York Times*, December 26, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/26/world/asia/india-hindu-right-rss-modi.html>.

¹⁷ I. N. Bureau, "Celebrating Diwali with Troops in Kargil, PM Modi Cites Military Doctrines for a New India," *Indianarrative*, October 25, 2022, <https://www.indianarrative.com/india-news/celebrating-diwali-with-troops-in-kargil-pm-modi-cites-military-doctrines-for-a-new-india-64244.html>.

¹⁸ Chanakya Policy & Research Foundation, "The Lion of the Seas: Shivaji's Enduring Naval Vision – Chanakya Policy & Research Foundation," accessed February 13, 2026, <https://chanakyapolicyresearch.com/the-lion-of-the-seas-shivajis-enduring-naval-vision/>.

For example, he linked INS Nilgiri, honoring the Chola dynasty, and INS Surat, reasserting Gujarat's historical trade links.¹⁹ The Doctrine of Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) further reinforces this reimagining of India's maritime and defense identity in the region, positioning India as a responsible stakeholder in Asia-Pacific security.²⁰ The prioritization of domestic defense production, 39 out of 40 naval vessels inducted into the Indian Navy are now built in India, demonstrates how national security is being framed not merely in terms of military strength but as a broader narrative of sovereignty and self-sufficiency.²¹ The symbolic shift in the Indian Navy's insignia to reflect Shivaji's legacy is a powerful example of constructivist logic, linking material changes (shipbuilding, military production) with ideational constructs (national pride, historical continuity).

Narendra Modi's Atmanirbharta reflects a constructivist approach to economic sovereignty, in which shared beliefs and national identity shape policy decisions. Rather than viewing economic autonomy in terms of material constraints, Modi's emphasis on reducing import dependence is rooted in the social construction of self-reliance as a core national value.²² Speaking at the Utkarsh Odisha (Make in Odisha Conclave 2025), he framed economic strength not merely as an outcome of industrial policy but as an expression of India's aspirational identity in the global order.²³ These policies are also for the consumption of domestic audience and strengthening the voter-base for the party. In a survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), 63% of respondents believe that India's global status has risen since Modi took office in 2014.²⁴ The same poll found that most Indians believed that the country's global influence has grown. Narendra Modi's ambition to construct a global identity as an influential power has appeal among the public.

¹⁹ The Samikhsya, "Three Naval Warships: PM Modi Dedicates to the Nation," *The Samikhsya*, January 15, 2025, <https://thesamikhsya.com/business/three-naval-warships-pm-modi-dedicates-to-the-nation>.

²⁰ Staff Writer, "DRDO: Pioneering India's Journey to Self-Reliance & Naval Supremacy On The Global Stage," *Indian Aerospace and Defence Bulletin*, November 2, 2024, <https://www.iadb.in/2024/11/02/drdo-pioneering-indias-journey-to-self-reliance-naval-supremacy-on-the-global-stage/>.

²¹ Abdul Moiz Khan and Usman Haider, "Indian Naval Modernization: From Buyers to Builders Navy and Implications for Indian Ocean Region Security," *Strategic Perspectives* 3, no. 1 (2025), <https://strategicperspectives.cissajk.org.pk/indian-naval-modernization-from-buyers-to-builders-navy-and-implications-for-indian-ocean-region-security/>.

²² "Reduce Import Dependence, up Manufacturing: Prime Minister Modi," *The Economic Times*, March 3, 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/make-in-india-is-need-of-the-hour-prime-minister-modi/articleshow/89963216.cms>.

²³ Express News Service, "Can't Accept Export of Raw Materials; Value Addition Must Happen in India: PM Modi at Odisha Conclave," *The New Indian Express*, January 28, 2025, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Jan/28/cant-accept-export-of-raw-materials-value-addition-must-happen-in-india-pm-modi-at-odisha-conclave>.

²⁴ "Public Opinion - #9YearsOfPMModi: NDTV-CSDS Survey," *NDTV*, accessed February 13, 2026, <https://www.ndtv.com/9YearsOfPMModi>.

Constructivist thought suggests that state behavior is influenced by ideational factors, such as historical narratives and collective perceptions, rather than just economic rationality. Modi's push for "Make in India (2014)" and "Vocal for Local (2020)"²⁵ reinforces a sense of national purpose, positioning domestic manufacturing as integral to India's self-image as a rising power. In his manifesto, he promised to achieve strength by combining product design and manufacturing in India.²⁶ By rejecting the traditional model of exporting raw materials and re-importing finished goods, he challenges the entrenched global economic hierarchies that have historically positioned India as a supplier rather than a producer of high-value goods.²⁷ Modi is trying to cultivate a new industrial culture through Production-Linked Incentives (PLI) and investment in strategic sectors such as defense, energy, and technology. This shift is not just about economic gain but also about redefining India's role in global supply chains through an identity-driven approach to policymaking.²⁸ Modi's narrative of self-reliance fosters a collective national consciousness that sees domestic production as a patriotic and strategic imperative. By mobilizing state-industry partnerships and advocating research-driven innovation, he envisions India as an architect of global economic norms rather than a passive participant.

Modi's Vision of Atmanirbharta

Kautliya's "Arthashastra" provides an enduring strategic foundation for India's contemporary efforts to emerge as an influential power. The Arthashastra is one of the most significant texts in Indian history and tradition. The concept of Atmanirbharta is reflected in the Arthashastra, where economic power is considered the foundation of state power.²⁹ Kautilya argued that a strong economy and indigenous production were essential for sustaining military strength and political independence. He explicitly warns against dependence on external powers.³⁰

²⁵ "Vocal for Local' Making India Emerge as Factory of World: PM Modi," *Business Standard*, March 1, 2025, https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/vocal-for-local-making-india-emerge-as-factory-of-world-pm-modi-125030100233_1.html.

²⁶ Bharatiya Janata Party, *Modi-Ki-Guarantee: Sankalp Patra 2024*, official party manifesto (New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party, 2024), accessed February 13, 2026, https://www.bjp.org/files/inline-documents/Modi-Ki-Guarantee-Sankalp-Patra-English_0.pdf.

²⁷ Express News Service, "Can't Accept Export of Raw Materials; Value Addition Must Happen in India: PM Modi at Odisha Conclave," *The New Indian Express*, January 28, 2025, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Jan/28/cant-accept-export-of-raw-materials-value-addition-must-happen-in-india-pm-modi-at-odisha-conclave>.

²⁸ *Economic Times*, "Reduce Import Dependence, up Manufacturing."

²⁹ Indranil Roy and Saurabh Pran Sharma, "From Arthashastra to Atmanirbhar and Viksit Bharat: A Continuum of Indian Economic Thought Towards Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals," *International Journal of Advance and Innovative Research* 12, no. 2 (2025): 484-89.

³⁰ Roy and Sharma, "From Arthshastra to Atmanirbhar and Viksit Bharat," 486.

Moreover, Atmanirbharta also finds its roots in Mahatma Gandhi's Swadeshi movement (1920s), which emphasized self-reliance as a moral, political, and economic principle.³¹ After its independence in 1947, India's commitment to Atmanirbharta weakened, particularly in sectors like defense. Driven by immediate security threats, limited industrial capability, and Cold War alignment, New Delhi relied on foreign suppliers for arms, aircraft, and military technology. The USSR became the top supplier of weapons to India, accounting for 70% of New Delhi's aircraft, tanks, and submarines.³² This dependency made New Delhi the second-largest importer of arms, created technological stagnation, foreign dependence, and fiscal burdens.³³ The contrast between Gandhian self-reliance and import dependency highlights a long-standing tension between economic autonomy and pragmatic security needs in New Delhi's strategic trajectory.

However, in recent years, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has redefined and reinvigorated the concept through the announcement of Atmanirbharta on May 12, 2020,³⁴ the project aims to make India a self-sufficient, self-confident, and globally competitive economy by promoting domestic industries, reducing reliance on imports, and fostering innovation. From agriculture, chemicals, machinery, electronics, medical devices, etc., New Delhi aims to build everything indigenously.

Modi views past policies as lacking assertiveness in India's interests and argues that it must approach the future with a mindset of fierce autonomy.³⁵ Through self-reliance, New Delhi not only wishes to attain its perceived rightful place but also to be an influential power.³⁶ While speaking at an event in 2025, PM Modi said, "The only enemy of India is dependence on other countries; we need to defeat this dependence on others. We must understand that the

³¹ Ramesh Kumar, "The Idea of Atmanirbhar Bharat: Mahatma to Modi," *Kalyan Bharati* 24, (2021).

³² Andrzej Korbonski and Francis Fukuyama, *The Soviet Union and the Third World: The Last Three Decades*, with Internet Archive (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), <http://archive.org/details/sovietunionthird0000korb>.

³³ "Tensions with China, Pak Driving India's Arms Imports, Shift towards Western Suppliers: SIPRI - The Tribune," accessed February 13, 2026, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/india/tensions-with-china-pak-driving-indias-arms-imports-shift-towards-western-suppliers-sipri/>.

³⁴ Kumar, "The Idea of Atmanirbhar Bharat."

³⁵ Ian Hall, "Interpretivism and the Analysis of India's Foreign Policy: Interpreting the Jaishankar Doctrine," *Studies in Indian Politics* 13, no. 1, (2025): 61-73, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385864854_Interpretivism_and_the_Analysis_of_India%27s_Foreign_Policy_Interpreting_the_Jaishankar_Doctrine.

³⁶ John D. Ciorciari, "What Kind of Great Power Will India Be?," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2009), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2269299>.

more dependent we are on others, the higher the failure rate is. Atmanirbharta is the only solution to all our problems.”³⁷

Indian Policies for Atmanirbharta

Sectors such as agriculture, mining, pharmaceuticals, and defense are included in the priority category, where public funding and private partnerships will be strengthened. A hefty dollar package was allocated to stimulate domestic production of goods. PM Modi conducts regular ministerial meetings to assess progress, address challenges, and drive improvements, ensuring that self-reliance remains a national priority.

▪ ***Industrial Indigenization***

According to Robert Gilpin, economic development makes a state capable of projecting power and influencing international relations.³⁸ In this regard, Narendra Modi’s foreign policy goals prioritize economic dividends to build India’s capacity and capability. When the BJP assumed power in 2014, New Delhi was the world’s tenth largest economy; today, it ranks 4th.³⁹ The ‘Make in India (2014)’ initiative is transforming it into the world’s second-largest mobile phone assembler, strengthening the manufacturing sector. Besides, initiatives such as Digital India, Smart Cities, Clean India, and Ease of Doing Business help realize India’s potential for economic power.⁴⁰

The initiative enhances research and development (R&D) and encourages self-sufficiency.⁴¹ A Research, Development, and Innovation Scheme (RDI) was launched to encourage the private sector to scale up research, development, and innovation in other sectors relevant for economic security, strategic purpose, and self-reliance.⁴² The Indian government paved the way for 74% foreign direct investment (FDI) in defense manufacturing, leading to

³⁷ “India’s Biggest Enemy Is Its Dependence on Other Nations; Self-Reliance Only Remedy: PM Modi,” *Daily Excelsior*, September 20, 2025, <https://www.dailyexcelsior.com/dependence-on-other-nations-indias-only-enemy-atmanirbharta-only-medicine-pm-modi/>.

³⁸ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), <https://www.rochelleterman.com/ir/sites/default/files/Gilpin1981.pdf>.

³⁹ “India’s Economic Growth Picks up on Rising Government, Consumer Spending | Reuters,” accessed February 13, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-economic-growth-picks-up-rising-government-consumer-spending-2025-02-28/>.

⁴⁰ “Economic Implication of PM Modi’s Foreign Policy.Pdf,” n.d., accessed February 13, 2026, <https://library.bjp.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/2713/1/Economic%20Implication%20of%20PM%20Modi%207s%20Foreign%20Policy.pdf>.

⁴¹ Kumar, *The Idea of Atmanirbhar Bharat: Mahatma to Modi*.

⁴² VisionIAS, “Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme,” Current Affairs | Vision IAS, August 19, 2025, <https://visionias.in/current-affairs/monthly-magazine/2025-08-19/economy/research-development-and-innovation-rdi-scheme>.

increased domestic production and reduced dependence on imports.⁴³ This reform, along with improvements in licensing, simplifications of the export process, and enhancements in regulations, has been significant in the defense sector. While addressing the inauguration of ammunition facilities in 2026, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said that Defense exports were just Rs 1,000 crore 10 years ago but have now increased to Rs 25,000 crore; the government's target is Rs 50,000 crore by 2029-30.⁴⁴ Moreover, India has enacted the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India Act 2025 (SHANTI Act), allowing private companies and foreign investors to enter the nuclear energy industry for the first time in more than sixty years. The new law limits overseas ownership in civilian nuclear projects to 49% and is designed to draw nearly \$214 billion in investment as the country works toward expanding nuclear power capacity to 100 GW by 2047.

▪ *Indigenizing the Defense Industry*

In a significant move towards indigenous defense production, the Indian government has banned the import of 101 defense items.⁴⁵ The motive is to produce them indigenously under the Atmanirbharta. Banned items include major armaments such as artillery guns, assault rifles, corvettes, sonar systems, transport aircraft, ammunition, radars, conventional diesel-electric submarines, communication satellites, and shipborne cruise missiles.⁴⁶ The belief is that these initiatives enhance national security while creating employment opportunities in the defense manufacturing sector.

India's foreign policy has played a crucial role in achieving military modernization through proactive engagement in defense diplomacy and strategic partnerships.⁴⁷ Defense cooperation, a vital component of this diplomacy, involves joint military efforts between nations to achieve shared security objectives. Indian foreign policy, as outlined by former

⁴³ "(PDF) Vision of 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' Role and Significance of MSME," *ResearchGate*, ahead of print, October 22, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.33516/maj.v55i12.44-47p>.

⁴⁴ "Wars Now Complex Due to New Dimensions, Says Rajnath Singh; Hails Private Sector Defence Production Role," *The Economic Times*, January 18, 2026, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/wars-now-complex-due-to-new-dimensions-says-rajnath-singh-hails-private-sector-defence-production-role/articleshow/126644241.cms>.

⁴⁵ "Govt Bans Import of 101 Defence Equipment Items," *The Indian Express*, August 10, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/govt-bans-import-of-101-defence-equipment-items-6548085/>.

⁴⁶ Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India Announces Ban on 101 Imported Arms. Who Benefits, and Who Loses Out?," *Defense News*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2020/08/13/india-announces-ban-on-101-imported-arms-who-benefits-and-who-loses-out/>.

⁴⁷ Arvind Dutta, *Role of India's Defence Cooperation Initiatives in Meeting the Foreign Policy Goals*, n.d.

foreign secretary Shivshankar Menon, prioritizes a peaceful periphery, strong ties with major powers, and addressing future challenges.⁴⁸

Between 2019 and 2024, India's defense exports to the US exceeded USD \$2.8 billion, accounting for half of its overall defense exports during that period but only a small share of US arms imports.⁴⁹ Another significant development in bilateral defense ties is the strategic semiconductor partnership between the US and India. To facilitate technology transfers, the US Space Force is partnering with the Indian startup 3rdiTech to manufacture semiconductors for national security applications in India. The government's decision to allocate a fund of Rs 34,000 crores for the National Critical Minerals Mission, including global exploration and acquisition of 24 critical commodities by 2030-31, demonstrates its intent to capitalize on the opportunities. This move positions New Delhi alongside global powers competing for secure access to vital resources essential for technology, renewable energy, and industrial growth.⁵⁰

The initiative also aims to enhance India's competitiveness in global supply chains. The government has emphasized that self-reliance is rooted in self-confidence, positioning New Delhi for tough competition in the global economy. The focus on innovation, digital transformation, and skill development is critical to ensuring that India remains competitive with leading economies.⁵¹ Despite the focus on self-reliance, New Delhi has not abandoned industrialization or globalization. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal has clarified that India remains committed to engaging with trusted global partners.⁵² The 'Make in India (2014)' and 'Make for the World (2020)' strategies emphasize that India will continue to be an integral player in global trade and supply chains.

⁴⁸ Dutta, *Role of India's Defence Cooperation Initiatives in Meeting the Foreign Policy Goals*.

⁴⁹ Anondeeta Chakraborty, "India's Rise in Global Defense Exports and the Way Forward," *South Asian Voices*, September 15, 2025, <https://southasianvoices.org/def-f-in-n-india-defense-exports-09-15-2025/>.

⁵⁰ Observer Research Foundation, "India's Critical Minerals Mission: From Ambition to Action," Orfonline.Org, accessed February 6, 2026, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-s-critical-minerals-mission-from-ambition-to-action>.

⁵¹ "Digital Transformation in India: A New Era of Innovation," Startup House, June 16, 2024, <https://startup-house.com/blog/digital-transformation-india>.

⁵² "Supply Chain: India Today Is Land of Opportunity, Trusted Partner in Global Supply Chains: Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal - The Economic Times," accessed February 13, 2026, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-today-is-land-of-opportunity-trusted-partner-in-global-supply-chains-commerce-minister-piyush-goyal/articleshow/96848087.cms?from=mdr>.

Institutionalizing Atmanirbharta in Defense

Modi's self-reliance has also facilitated structural and organizational changes within India's defense framework.⁵³ For example, the appointment of the Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) in 2019 and the establishment of the Department of Military Affairs marked a pivotal step in integrating the three branches of the armed forces, streamlining procurement, and accelerating indigenization efforts.⁵⁴ The Five-Year Defense Capital Acquisition Plan (DCAP) and the Two-Year roll-on Annual Acquisition Plans under the Integrated Capability Development Plan (ICDP) have further reinforced India's commitment to reducing import dependency and enhancing self-sufficiency in defense production.⁵⁵ To support defense startups and invest in domestic research and development (R&D), the Ministry of Defense has allocated over USD \$56 million over five years under the Innovations for Defense Excellence (iDEX) program.⁵⁶

The implementation of the Theatre Command System is another major reform under this vision, fostering seamless coordination between the Navy, Army, and Air Force. This system not only optimizes wartime preparedness but also streamlines resource procurement and allocation. Furthermore, as the role of R&D leads to innovation,⁵⁷ the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) has launched the Technological Development Fund 2014 (TDF), which provides funding for research. Consequently, new weapon systems, sensors, communications, AI, Robotics, etc., have been identified by the R&D to conduct research and drive innovation.⁵⁸

Atmanirbharta in the defense sector has become a catalyst for national pride and strategic will. According to the constructivist lens, New Delhi's pursuit of self-reliance in the defense industry is not merely an economic or strategic necessity but a transformation of national consciousness. For example, the establishment of Defence Industrial Corridors in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu by 2024-2025⁵⁹ exemplifies this ideological shift. These

⁵³ Staff Writer, "India's Defence Sector: Reforms That Perform," *Indian Aerospace and Defence Bulletin - News for Aerospace and Defence in India*, May 1, 2023, <https://www.iadb.in/2023/05/01/indias-defence-sector-reforms-that-perform/>.

⁵⁴ "Doc202110501.Pdf," n.d., accessed February 13, 2026, <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2021/oct/doc202110501.pdf>.

⁵⁵ "Enhancement of Capacity of Defense Forces," accessed February 13, 2026, <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1795536>.

⁵⁶ Chakraborty, "India's Rise in Global Defense Exports and the Way Forward."

⁵⁷ Edwin Mansfield, "R&D and Innovation: Some Empirical Findings," in *R&D, Patents, and Productivity* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), <https://www.nber.org/books-and-chapters/rd-patents-and-productivity/rd-and-innovation-some-empirical-findings>.

⁵⁸ Writer, "India's Defence Sector."

⁵⁹ Writer, "India's Defence Sector."

corridors are a tangible manifestation of Modi's Atmanirbharta doctrine, manufacturing arms for the Indian military. As highlighted in his address, the corridor aims to restore Bundelkhand's legacy of valor while enhancing India's strategic strength.⁶⁰ The Bundelkhand had been a land of resistance and defiance against the Mughals and the British colonials. With investments surpassing Rs. 3700 crores (446 million USD) at its inception and a total of 68 MoUs signed, the project has gained significant momentum.⁶¹ The presence of major defense manufacturers such as Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Bharat Electronics Limited, Bharat Dynamics Limited, and Brahmos Aerospace underlines the corridor's potential to reduce reliance on imports while fostering domestic innovation.⁶² The six nodes of the corridor – Agra, Aligarh, Chitrakoot, Jhansi, Kanpur, and Lucknow – facilitate seamless collaboration between start-ups and large-scale industries.⁶³ A crucial aspect of this change is the integration of advanced technology into indigenous defense manufacturing.

Role of the Private Sector

A key measure within the Indian government's self-reliance is the enhanced role of the private sector. Today, more than 300 private companies have been registered in India, of which 110 have begun producing defense items for the Indian military.⁶⁴ The government has announced a hefty Rs 100,000 crore for private-sector research and innovation in defense, indicating a strong commitment to fostering a robust defense industrial complex.⁶⁵ The measure has been taken to enhance the Indian defense sector's capacity to produce cutting-edge weapon systems at reasonable prices, thereby gaining the attention of countries in the global South that cannot afford expensive Western armaments. The idea is to sell high-end systems at lower prices to attract their attention, which is only possible by attracting a fair amount of private sector investment.

⁶⁰ Writer, "India's Defence Sector."

⁶¹ "Doc2021121410.Pdf," n.d., accessed February 13, 2026, <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2021/dec/doc2021121410.pdf>.

⁶² "Doc2021121410.Pdf."

⁶³ "Defence-Corridor-by-Lt-Gen-Dushyant-Singh-Retd-on-23-Jul-2020.Pdf," n.d., accessed February 13, 2026, <https://cenjows.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Defence-Corridor-by-Lt-Gen-Dushyant-Singh-Retd-on-23-Jul-2020.pdf>.

⁶⁴ "333 Private Companies into Defence Production in India: Centre," Ahmedabad Mirror, accessed February 13, 2026, <https://www.ahmedabadmirror.com/333-private-companies-into-defence-production-in-india-centre/81803946.html>.

⁶⁵ "Budget 2024: Budget 2024: Sitharaman Announces Rs 1 Lakh Crore Corpus for R&D Push in the Country - The Economic Times," accessed February 13, 2026, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/technology/budget-2024-rs-1-lakh-crore-corpus-for-rd-push-in-the-country/articleshow/107318016.cms?from=mdr>.

Private companies, such as TATA and Larsen & Toubro (L&T), are involved in manufacturing multiple weapon systems.⁶⁶ The TATA group is playing a significant role in manufacturing helicopters, transport aircraft, and fighters. Its facility in Vadodara is indigenously making C-295.⁶⁷ Additionally, TATA is involved in manufacturing semiconductors. L&T will also soon commence designing and production of advanced Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).⁶⁸ Besides, L&T is also producing indigenous equipment like self-propelled guns (K9-Vajra), missile launchers, and submarine hulls, significantly reducing reliance on imports. Zen technologies are also driving the production of UAV propulsion, autonomous robotics, and aerospace components.⁶⁹ Besides, fighter jet, submarine, helicopter, and armored vehicle manufacturing have been promoted.⁷⁰

Likewise, Adani Enterprises is advancing in manufacturing autonomous systems and aerial technologies for defense purposes.⁷¹ It is contributing to AI-enabled systems, sensors, and electronic warfare. For example, India's burgeoning drone industry has seen substantial growth under the "Make in India (2014)" Initiative. The Bharat Drone Shakti event in 2023, showcasing over 75 drone start-ups, signified India's ambition to become a global drone hub by 2030.⁷² Adani Defence and Aerospace's development of the Drishti 10 UAV, with 70% indigenous components, highlights India's progress in reducing foreign dependency.⁷³

Recently, India signed a deal with the US to start the joint manufacturing of MQ-9B drones in India.⁷⁴ Likewise, an Indian private company, Alpha Tocol, produced the first rear fuselage for the Light Combat Aircraft, which was later handed over to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.⁷⁵ Speaking at the event, Defense Minister Rajnath Singh emphasized the collaboration

⁶⁶ Manjeet Negi, "Tata Advanced Systems, Larsen and Toubro Deliver 100th Missile Launcher for IAF's Akash Project," *India Today*, June 22, 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/iaf-akash-100th-missile-launcher-tata-system-larsen-toubro-1965221-2022-06-21>.

⁶⁷ "Aerospace and Defence | Tata Group," accessed February 13, 2026, <https://www.tata.com/business/aerospace-defence>.

⁶⁸ "L&T Signs up with Start-up to Develop Submarine Launched UAVs," accessed February 13, 2026, <https://imrmedia.in/lt-signs-up-with-start-up-to-develop-submarine-launched-uavs-2/>.

⁶⁹ APDR, "India's Zen Technologies Expands Defence Portfolio," *APDR*, February 22, 2025, <https://asiapacificdefencereporter.com/indias-zen-technologies-expands-defence-portfolio/>.

⁷⁰ "18.02.008. 20240904.Pdf," accessed February 13, 2026, <https://ijsi.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/18.02.008.20240904.pdf>.

⁷¹ NDTV Profit Desk, "Adani Defence Systems to Obtain 85% Stake in Air Works India for Rs 400 Crore," *NDTV Profit*, December 23, 2024, <https://www.ndtvprofit.com/business/adani-defence-systems-to-obtain-85-stake-in-air-works-india-for-rs-400-crore>.

⁷² *India's Emerging Drone Industry A Point of View*, 2022.

⁷³ *India's Emerging Drone Industry A Point of View*, 2022.

⁷⁴ "MQ-9B Deal: A Capacity Upgrade for India-US Relations," *Orfonline.Org*, accessed February 13, 2026, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/mq-9b-deal-a-capacity-upgrade-for-india-us-relations>.

⁷⁵ Staff Writer, "India Soars Towards Aatmanirbharta: First Rear Fuselage for LCA Mk1A Handed Over To HAL By Indian Private Industry," *Indian Aerospace and Defence Bulletin - News for Aerospace and Defence in India*

between private and public enterprises to steer the country's drive for indigenous arms production.⁷⁶

Arms Export and Defense Diplomacy

Defense diplomacy establishes military-related diplomatic activities (joint exercises, military visits, peacekeeping, and defense cooperation agreements) that build trust and cooperation without coercion.⁷⁷ The Role of Defense Diplomacy in the Evolving International Stature of India argues that post-Cold War Indian foreign policy pivoted from non-alignment toward diversified defense engagement with multiple partners beyond traditional ties, reflecting broader security interests and status aspirations.⁷⁸ It should be noted that the development of a sound military industrial complex requires significant material resources and policy alignment.

From 2014 to 2024, India's defense investment ballooned from 4312 crores Indian rupees to 88,319 crores.⁷⁹ According to the defense minister, Rajnath Singh, India is moving fast towards arms exports. Besides, India's military-industrial complex is gaining global traction, with the Kalashnikov AK203 manufacturing facility in Uttar Pradesh now operational and attracting interest from African nations. Likewise, TATA Advanced Systems secured a contract to manufacture 150 wheeled armored Platform combat vehicles for the Moroccan military, marking the largest deal for Indian-made armored vehicles globally.⁸⁰

India's proactive defense exports extend beyond Africa. On April 19, 2024, India delivered the first batch of Brahmos missiles to the Philippines, followed by the delivery of the second batch on April 21, 2025, under a \$375 million deal. New Delhi is in negotiations with other Southeast Asian nations (Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia) as part of its extending strategic influence and Act East policy to counter China.⁸¹ Similarly, Armenia has emerged as a key partner, with India set to deliver its indigenously developed Akash-1S Air Defense system

(blog), March 10, 2025, <https://www.iadb.in/2025/03/10/india-soars-towards-aatmanirbharta-first-rear-fuselage-for-lca-mk1a-handed-over-to-hal-by-indian-private-industry/>.

⁷⁶ Writer, "India Soars Towards Aatmanirbharta."

⁷⁷ Dinesh Kumar Pandey, "The Role of Defence Diplomacy in the Evolving International Stature of India," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 18, no. 3/4 (2023): 229–44.

⁷⁸ Pandey, "The Role of Defence Diplomacy in the Evolving International Stature of India."

⁷⁹ "Why the World Wants Indian Weapons | India Today Global Exclusive," India Today, August 27, 2024, <https://www.indiatoday.in/global/story/why-the-world-wants-indian-weapons-india-today-global-exclusive-2588816-2024-08-27>.

⁸⁰ GatewayHouse, "Atmanirbhar in Africa," Africa, *Gateway House*, October 22, 2024, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/atmanirbhar-in-africa/>.

⁸¹ "India's Increased Defence and Security Engagement with Southeast Asia," *IISS*, accessed February 13, 2026, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2024/04/indias-increased-defence-and-security-engagement-with-southeast-asia/>.

and Pinaka multi-barrel rocket systems, artillery howitzers, anti-tank rockets, and Anti-drone systems.⁸² This deepening military cooperation signifies Armenia's strategic distance from Russian dependency while enabling India to expand its geopolitical footprint in the South Caucasus.

India is actively crafting a new global narrative through arms diplomacy, moving beyond traditional realist power equations to a constructivist approach that emphasizes identity, historical continuity, and strategic autonomy. PM Modi's *Atmanirbharta*, driven by an active foreign policy, seeks to position India as a civilizational powerhouse and a nation reclaiming its unique stature on the world stage. By leveraging its indigenous defense industry, diplomatic engagements, and strategic partnerships, India is reinforcing its role as a pivotal global actor, shaping alliances that reflect its long-term aspirations for leadership in a multipolar world.

Challenges to Atmanirbharta

Under Atmanirbharta, the Modi government is enhancing public-private partnerships, bringing in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and funding R&D to boost arms production. However, key challenges impede Modi's vision of making India a global arms supplier.

1. Structural and Historical Constraints

The colonial era under British rule systematically dismantled the subcontinent's indigenous arms production and industrial environment, notably seen in the suppression of advanced technologies like Tipu Sultan's iron-cased rockets.⁸³ This disruption left a lasting vacuum in domestic manufacturing capabilities and technological self-reliance that persisted into the post-independence era. Following independence, India's defense procurement infrastructure came to be dominated by state-run enterprises such as Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the Ordnance Factory Board, and the DRDO. While these institutions have laid foundational work, inefficiencies, bureaucratic delays, and underfunding have hindered productive capacity. For instance, in 2024, there were projects that DRDO declared successful even though they did not achieve key objectives. 'In 119 of 178 projects,' said the CAG report, the original time schedules could not be adhered to. In 49 cases, the additional time was in fact more than 100

⁸² "An Analytical Review of India's Defence Exports," November 12, 2024, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2024/november/12/An-Analytical-Review-of-India-s-Defence-Exports>.

⁸³ "Tipu's Mysorean Rocket: The Remarkable Tale Of The World's First Iron-Cased War Rockets That Changed Warfare Forever!," accessed February 13, 2026, <https://www.southtourism.in/blog/the-revolutionary-tipu-sultans-mysorean-rocket>.

percent of the original timeframe.’⁸⁴ Despite ten years in power of the Modi government, structural and historical lacuna remain that cannot be resolved in the short time.

2. R&D and Innovation Gaps

In the post-World War II era, massive public investment, particularly in the US, enabled breakthroughs in military technology. These investments not only addressed market failures by funding high-risk, high-cost innovations that private firms avoided but also cultivated academic excellence, which laid the base for modern military innovation.⁸⁵ According to the Economic Survey 2025, in India, the gross expenditure on R&D has increased from Rs 60,196 crore in FY-2011 to Rs 1,27,381 crore in FY-2021.⁸⁶ However, this is 0.64% of GDP, which is insufficient and lower than that of major arms-producing countries like the US, China, and Russia. Unlike India, the private sector in these countries contributes more than 70% to national R&D.⁸⁷ Likewise, a mutually reinforcing collaboration between government, industry, and academia has been pivotal in fostering innovation across various sectors, including defense.⁸⁸ This triple helix model highlights the significance of the three pillars in enhancing national capacity. Talking about India, a major issue is the persistent disconnect between industrial needs and academic research.⁸⁹ The universities often conduct basic or theoretical research, while industries require applied research and technological development for military use. Traditional academic approaches in India prioritize theoretical work over practical and real-world applications.

3. Technology Transfer Limit

Additionally, India’s major arms suppliers- Russia, the US, France, etc. offer varying levels of technological transfer, but few deliver across all four levels of technology transfer.⁹⁰ Moscow provides the broadest scope: it supports Technology 1 (operational skills) and Technology 2

⁸⁴ Northlines, “DRDO Biggest Hindrance to Atmanirbharta in Defence,” *Northlines*, March 26, 2024, <https://thenorthlines.com/drdo-biggest-hindrance-to-atmanirbharta-in-defence/>.

⁸⁵ “Chapter 29 - Military R&D and Innovation,” ResearchGate, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-7218\(10\)02013-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-7218(10)02013-7).

⁸⁶ Moneycontrol News, “Economic Survey 2025 Live: AI Impact on Labour Will Be Globally Felt but Problem Magnified for India, Warns Economic Survey,” Moneycontrol, January 31, 2025, <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/economic-survey-2025-live-updates-nirmala-sitharaman-india-economy-gdp-growth-cea-v-anantha-nageswaran-speech-liveblog-12924859.html>.

⁸⁷ News, “Economic Survey 2025 Live.”

⁸⁸ “(PDF) Driving Innovation in the Defense Sector: Unlocking the Power of Industry, Academia, and Government Collaboration,” *ResearchGate*, ahead of print, March 13, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.55927/fjmr.v4i2.48>.

⁸⁹ “(PDF) Driving Innovation in the Defense Sector.”

⁹⁰ Keith Krause, *Arms and the State: Patterns of Military Production and Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

(design transfer) through licensed production of Su-30MKI and T-90 tanks, and Technology 3 (adaptation) via joint ventures, such as Brahmos.⁹¹ However, full Technology 4, creating weapons independently, remains limited, as New Delhi still relies on imported subsystems and knowledge frameworks. Likewise, in 2012, the US signed an agreement, the Defense Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI), with India. It primarily provides Technology 1 (for C-17 transport aircraft, P-8I patrol aircraft). Joint ventures are involved in the manufacturing of electromagnetic aircraft launch systems (EMALS) and striker vehicles. However, high-end design and critical components, especially for stealth fighters or high-end avionics, remain more restricted, making full transfer of Technology 3 or Technology 4 rare.⁹²

4. Overreach and Political Economy

Modi's ambition to achieve self-reliance (Atmanirbharta) in all sectors points to a strategic overreach. Two examples highlight excessive hopes and political bias within Modi's vision. At Semicon India 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared, underlining India's ambitions in the semiconductor sector, that the day is not far away when India's smallest chip will drive the world's biggest change, describing semiconductors as the "digital diamonds" of the twenty first century, tiny yet immensely powerful components driving global innovation and economic growth.⁹³ It should be noted that this advanced technology requires a deep industrial base, for instance, sub -10nm nodes, that primarily exists in the USA, Taiwan, and South Korea. So far, New Delhi has spent \$11 billion on creating an ecosystem and the required capabilities.⁹⁴ Plants in Gujrat and Assam have been operating since 2021, which can produce 28nm to 110nm chips. The Modi government's support for the chip sector, while unprecedented for India, is still dwarfed by the \$48 billion committed by China and the \$53 billion provisioned under the US Chip Act.⁹⁵ Besides, it has been argued that the two major private firms involved in chip making

⁹¹ "(PDF) India-Russia Military-Technical Cooperation: Beyond Commercial Relations," ResearchGate, accessed July 22, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317740541_India-Russia_Military-Technical_Cooperation_Beyond_Commercial_Relations.

⁹² DFNC RU, "Russia, India Defence Cooperation - Destined to Grow!," *New Defence Order. Strategy*, March 16, 2020, <https://dfnc.ru/en/analytics/russia-india-defence-cooperation-destined-to-grow/>.

⁹³ "PM Modi's Fab Plan to Change the World and Boost India's Atmanirbharta," *The Economic Times*, September 2, 2025, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/electronics/pm-modi-semicon-india-2025-vikram-chip-fab-plan-india-atmanirbhar-bharat-semiconductors/articleshow/123651998.cms?from=mdr>.

⁹⁴ "Why India Shouldn't Obsess over Atmanirbharta in Chipmaking," *The Times of India*, n.d., accessed February 13, 2026, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/why-india-shouldnt-obsess-over-atmanirbharta-in-chipmaking/articleshow/113423003.cms>.

⁹⁵ Aggam Walia, "Can India Catch up with the US, Taiwan and China in the Global Chip Race?," *Al Jazeera*, accessed February 13, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2025/12/18/can-india-catch-up-with-the-us-taiwan-and-china-in-the-global-chip-race>.

project, the TATA group and the Murugappa group, contributed \$91 million and \$15 million to Modi's 2024 election campaign.⁹⁶

5. Credibility Issues

In November 2025, at the Dubai Air Show, a Tejas Light Combat Aircraft crashed, killing the pilot, raising concerns about its reliability and export potential.⁹⁷ Tejas is a national trophy in aerospace technology and a major pillar in Atmanirbharta.⁹⁸ To replace outdated Soviet-built MiG-21s, the last of which retired in 2025, New Delhi began the Tejas program in the 1980s. Due to late deliveries by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), New Delhi signed a 7 billion dollar deal with HAL for 97 LCA Tejas in September 2025.⁹⁹ For exporting Tejas, New Delhi has been targeting markets in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and HAL also opened an office in Malaysia in 2023.¹⁰⁰ However, the crash in front of global arm buyers undermined Tejas' export potential. According to one former HAL officer, the disaster in Dubai "rules out exports for now."¹⁰¹

Conclusion

India's pursuit of Atmanirbharta to construct a global identity as an arms exporter under Narendra Modi, marking a departure from its historical role as one of the world's largest arms importers. It describes the constructivist background of Modi's vision of Atmanirbharta, which is driving New Delhi's objectives for self-reliance and economic growth. Through historical narrative and ideational factors, Modi made a self-reliant India in defense manufacturing a core national value, which must be pursued to gain prestige and influence. The roots of this constructivist vision lie in the ideology of Hindutva, which resonates with India's aspiration to assert influence at the international level. Through various schemes (Index scheme, Technological Development Fund, etc.) and structural changes (role of private companies in

⁹⁶ Walia, "Can India Catch up with the US, Taiwan and China in the Global Chip Race?"

⁹⁷ "Tejas Crash in Dubai Raises Questions of Fighter Jet's Reliability," accessed February 13, 2026, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/12/tejas-crash-in-dubai-raises-questions-of-fighter-jets-reliability/>.

⁹⁸ "Tejas Crash in Dubai Raises Questions of Fighter Jet's Reliability."

⁹⁹ AFP NEWS, "LCA Tejas: India Signs \$7B Deal For 97 'Made In India' Mk-1A Fighter Jets That Will Replace MiG-21 Aircraft," *Eurasian Times*, September 25, 2025, <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/lca-tejas-india-signs-7-billion-contract-for-97-made-in-india-fighter-jets-that-will-replace-mig-21-aircraft/>.

¹⁰⁰ Shivam Patel and Tim Hephher, "Tejas Crash Dampens Export Hopes for Indian Fighter Jet," *Asia Pacific, Reuters*, November 23, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/tejas-crash-dampens-export-hopes-indian-fighter-jet-2025-11-23/>.

¹⁰¹ Patel and Hephher, "Tejas Crash Dampens Export Hopes for Indian Fighter Jet."

manufacturing indigenous arms, Defense Capital Acquisition Plan (DCAP), etc.), the Modi government has made significant strides towards self-reliance by local arms production.

New Delhi's impressive economic growth and technological advancements have necessitated the development of a robust local defense industry. Besides, India's strategic partnership with the US is beneficial in gaining access to cutting-edge military technologies. As India is moving towards self-reliance in defense manufacturing, its arms exports are rising. Consequently, New Delhi, by selling arms, will gain leverage and prestige, thereby extending its strategic influence well beyond South Asia. This strategic influence is one among many perks of having a strong military-industrial complex, which India is striving to achieve. However, as this study demonstrates, there remains essential challenges that must be met if New Delhi wishes to become a global arms exporter and advance the philosophy of *Atmanirbharta*.