

# News Media and Foreign Policy Narrative: Australian Identity and the sale of Uranium to China and India

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## Abstract:

On December 4, 2011, the Australian Labor Party's National Conference voted to permit the sale of uranium to India, an issue that has long been contentious within the party. The decision came at a time when Australian foreign policy, political debate and news media discourse were becoming increasingly concerned with the 'rise' of India and China, as twin regional superpowers whose prominence offers both opportunities for economic prosperity and threats to settled regional power balances. Using the issue of international uranium sales as a means to examine Australia's identity and perception of Self and Other in the international context, this paper examines the ways in which national identity is constructed through media coverage of foreign policy decisions. It undertakes a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of newspaper coverage of Labor's decision to resume exports of this controversial resource to India. A sample of ten national and metropolitan broadsheet and tabloid newspapers' coverage, in the week surrounding the decision, provides the basis for an analysis that explores news media coverage to discuss the narratives of Australian identity that were evoked to explain and account for the decision. The paper explores the construction of Australian identity in relation to China and India, and the ways in which the decision to sell uranium to India was reported in relation to China; and also considers the usefulness of an interdisciplinary approach (drawing on insights from media and communications) to international relations (IR) scholarship.

## Introduction

Our platform enables us to sell uranium to China, but not to India. Now, this is not an intellectually defensible proposition. – Prime Minister Julia Gillard<sup>1</sup>

It was not intellectually defensible or rational for Australia to export uranium to China but not India, the world's biggest democracy. – *The West Australian*<sup>2</sup>

Australia currently exports uranium to China, the world's largest military dictatorship – but will not export it to India, the world's largest democracy. – Paul Howes<sup>3</sup>

Prime Minister Julia Gillard's argument in support of her proposal that Australia overturn the ban on uranium sales to India was simple and concise. It was also an open construction that left space for media coverage, expert commentary, and long-held public beliefs and assumptions to fill in its blanks, imbuing Gillard's argument with a range of meanings and preconceptions. The Prime

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<sup>1</sup> Asia Pacific Focus, 'Gillard Turns on the Charm in India', *Asia Pacific Focus, Australia Network*, October 22, 2012, at [australianetwork.com/focus.s3615838.htm](http://australianetwork.com/focus.s3615838.htm), accessed 19 July, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> West Australian, 'Party politics wins out again at lacklustre ALP Conference', *West Australian*, 6 December 2011, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Howes, 'The really divisive question – ALP National Conference', *Sunday Telegraph*, 4 December 2011, p. 90.

Minister's explanation hinted at rationality, which *The West Australian* paraphrased, reminding its readers that India is 'the world's biggest democracy'. Paul Howes, ironically missing Gillard's nudge towards rationality, took this too far, mistakenly describing China as the 'world's largest military dictatorship'. This snapshot of language from the coverage of the ALP's 2011 debate about, and vote on, uranium sales to India at its National Conference highlights the value of this case as a window into the ways in which international political discourse is circulated throughout a society and the process of identity construction in media coverage of international decisions and events.

We undertake an analysis of Australian newspaper coverage of the ALP's decision to overturn the ban on uranium sales to India. Considering the coverage in the days leading up to and following the decision, it explores the vital role of news media discourse, which not only 'covers' foreign policy decisions but also is a key site through which ideas about 'our' national priorities, international relationships and strategic interests are imagined, developed and contested. The paper works from an exploratory perspective, serving as both as an analysis of this case study and as a preliminary step in considering the value of an interdisciplinary approach drawn from both IR and media and communications theory. We utilize a critical constructivist perspective which sees language as powerful, a key site of struggle where national identities, values and priorities are represented, challenged and developed, following from David Campbell's analytical method of examining the political causes and consequences of emphasizing 'one mode of representation over another' when defining international relationships.<sup>4</sup>

## International Relations Theory and Media Discourse

This paper works from the starting position that an actor's identity affects its foreign policy choices and that these identities are socially constructed rather than essential, meaning that there are multiple, ambivalent strands of any state identity present at any given time. This connection between identity, foreign policy and nationalist discourses has been widely discussed by constructivist scholars. A state holds multiple identities, often directly in opposition to one another, which function as discourses competing to define a state's identity. Australia can be conceived of as multicultural, English-speaking, western, Asian, democratic, traditional, conservative, neoliberal, socialist, rationalist, colonial, postcolonial, a creative middle-power, a US ally and an activist. Whichever is emphasised at any time shapes policy options - Australia's growing multicultural identity, for example, made its one-time commitment to the racially-exclusive 'White Australia' immigration policy unfeasible.

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<sup>4</sup> D. Campbell, *Writing Security: US Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester, 1992), p. 4.

Much constructivist work has tended to see IR as having fixed units of influence and limited, elite-centred, human agency.<sup>5</sup> However, it is an established position in a range of disciplines such as anthropology, cultural studies and media and communications to suggest that identities are not formed in a solely top-down manner. Rather identities flow ‘up’ and ‘down’ between ‘elite’ and ‘non-elite opinion’:<sup>6</sup> all are within the same intellectual and ideational society. If we are to assume that the international structure and its actors are ‘mutually constituted’ it follows that state-level structures and their agents (the non-elite) are likewise mutually constituted. The examination of non-elite discourse has primarily been the domain of feminist IR scholars who have considered the role of women in conflict and their treatment by the discipline as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Tickner suggests that there is a tendency in realist scholarship to portray women as victims rather than agents.<sup>8</sup> Del Zotto has argued that, as the media tends to view the world through political realist lenses, it is often guilty of perpetuating similar stereotypes of women in conflict as has been done realist scholarship, albeit in a much more public setting.<sup>9</sup>

Political elites operate in the same intellectual and ideational society as non-elites and are exposed to and speak the same identity discourse. Such discourses are formed, used and challenged within a society more broadly (outside of the elite context). Aside from this, politicians have to ‘sell’ their decisions, particularly in democratic countries, and are accountable for their actions. This means that leaders must negotiate between competing priorities: making decisions that they feel will be defensible and understandable to voters, while also maintaining a level of loyalty to personal and party values. In political communication this can be achieved by tapping into a pre-existing nationalist narrative as to how Australia is ‘acting’ on the international ‘stage’. In this context, when

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<sup>5</sup> This may be applied to ‘Wendtian’ or, ‘modern’ constructivism. See, for example, Alexander Wendt, ‘Anarchy is What State’s Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics’, *International Organization* 46 (1992), pp. 395-421. For a critique, see John Gerald Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity* (London 1998). See also Roxanne L. Doty, ‘Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines’, *International Studies Quarterly* (1993), 34, pp. 297-299; Christian Reus-Smit, ‘Constructivism’ in Scott Burchill *et. al.*, *Theories of International Relations*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 212-236; Christian Reus-Smit, ‘The Constitutional Structure of International Society and the Nature of Fundamental Institutions’, *International Organization*, 41, 4 (1997), pp. 564-566; Martha Finnemore, ‘Norms, Culture and World Politics: Insights from Sociology’s Institutionalism’, *International Organization*, 50, 2 (1996), pp. 325-347; Alexander Wendt, ‘Collective Identity Formation and the International State’, *The American Political Science Review*, 88, 2 (1994), p. 385. For a more critical approach to identity, which this study draws on, see Maja Zehfuss, ‘Constructivism and Identity: A Dangerous Liaison’, *European Journal of International Relations* 7, 3 (2001), pp. 315-348.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Mandaville, ‘Reading the state from elsewhere: towards an anthropology of the postnational’ *Review of International Studies*, 28 (2002), pp. 199-207.

<sup>7</sup> Jill Steans, *Gender and International Relations* (Oxford, 1998). Much feminist scholarship has been aimed at disrupting this stereotype. See, for example, J. Anne Tickner, ‘On the Frontlines or Sidelines of Knowledge and Power?’ *Feminist Practices of Responsible Scholarship*, *International Studies Review*, 8, 3 (2006), pp. 389-390 on Afghan women fighting their subjugation.

<sup>8</sup> Tickner, ‘Feminist Practices’.

<sup>9</sup> Augusta C. Del Zotto, ‘Weeping Women, Wringing Hands: How the Mainstream Media Stereotyped Women’s Experiences in Kosovo’, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 11, 2 (2002), pp. 141- 150.

foreign policy is an issue in electoral campaigns it is generally framed around domestic concerns rather than international affairs.<sup>10</sup> More broadly, every elite perception of a society is shaped by life experiences and interactions within that society. In foreign policy terms, the most direct and immediate manner in which elite and non-elite identity discourses interact is through press coverage of an event or a decision.<sup>11</sup> National news media are an important space in which elite and non-elite opinion are formed and negotiated. Our contention is that elite opinion is ultimately drawn from the same discursive choices as non-elite opinion and that it follows that each 'level' of discourse shapes the other. Furthermore, coverage of a foreign policy event reveals the discursive power of identity narratives and the central importance of processes of identity construction within a society. This is a continual historical process of identity formation, of which this paper only examines one comparatively brief time period. Thus, this paper is not concerned with the strategic value of the decision to sell uranium to India *per se*, rather the ideational and discursive space in which it became possible for Australia to sell uranium to India and how this change was represented by the Australian media as a part of a cohesive Australian foreign policy.

Media and communications research has touched upon issues also examined in IR. Studies have analysed the relationship between foreign policy, news coverage and public opinion; sought to uncover the ways that news media represents the links between foreign policy and national interest and evaluates the role played by national identity;<sup>12</sup> analysed news media reporting and influence on domestic and foreign policy agendas;<sup>13</sup> considered the impact of external events on media coverage of foreign policy;<sup>14</sup> and questioned the role of the news media in influencing broader public opinion

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<sup>10</sup> Stephanie Younane, "'A Generous, Open Hearted People": Political Leaders' Constructions of National Identity in Australian Federal Election Campaign Language', Unpublished PhD thesis (2009), University of Melbourne, Media and Communications Program.

<sup>11</sup> In media and communications research, mainstream media, such as the newspaper sources examined here have traditionally been considered spaces dominated by the social, cultural and political elite. Therefore qualifying them as 'elite'. However, for an IR scholar, as these are not policy makers or politicians, they would not be considered elite, as they do not directly influence decisions-making.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Hillel Nosssek 'Our News and Their News: The role of national identity in the coverage of foreign news', *Journalism*, 5, 3 (2004), pp. 343-368.

<sup>13</sup> Here, scholars have considered the agenda-setting role of the media in light of the influence of coverage of international news and events in the development of foreign policy and formation of foreign policy. Po-Lin Pan traces this research from Bernard Cohen's 1963 *The Press and Foreign Policy* to Maxwell McCombs' 2004 *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*: Po-Lin Pan, 'US News Coverage of New Leaders in China: An Investigation of Agenda-Setting Abilities of US Newspapers and Government' *China Media Research* 4,1 (2008), p.31. See also McCombs and Shaw's seminal study, 'The Agenda Setting Function of the Mass Media', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, 2 (1972), pp. 176-87.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Robyn S. Goodman, 'Prestige Press Coverage of US-China Policy During the Cold War's Collapse and Post-Cold War Years: Did a Deteriorating Cold War Paradigm Set the Stage for More Independent Press Coverage?', *International Communication Gazette*, 61 (1999)391 – 410; Jinghui Hou and Yujing Ma, 'China's national power and US news coverage', *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the NCA, 95<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention*, Chicago Hilton and Towers, Chicago IL, November 11, 2009; Xing Lu, 'From "Ideological Enemies" to "Strategic Partners": A Rhetorical Analysis of US-China Relations in Intercultural Contexts', *Howard Journal of Communications*, 22, 4(2011), pp. 336-357; Zengjun Peng, 'Representation of China: An Across Time Analysis of Coverage in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*', *Asian Journal of Communication* 14, 1, (2004), pp. 55.

and perceptions of international allegiances, relationships and tensions.<sup>15</sup> Goldsmith and Horibuichi, for example, explore ‘the frequency of news media coverage of an issue’ as a marker of issue salience, mapping news coverage as part of their multi-country study of foreign public opinion about the US and its foreign policy.<sup>16</sup> Zhang’s work draws on ‘soft power’ theory to consider the way that the media’s agenda-setting ability influences *both* the public and policy-makers, to argue that ‘there is much scope for the news media to play a role in the policy-making process’.<sup>17</sup> More recently, research has emerged that reconsiders central questions in light of the emergence of new media technologies and formats, notably considering the role of ‘soft news’<sup>18</sup> and re-conceptualising the ‘CNN effect’ as the ‘al Jazeera effect’.<sup>19</sup>

There are significant areas of resonance between the concerns of media and communications and IR. Van Belle has mapped research in US foreign relations research that has engaged with the media, identifying key strands such as the ‘CNN effect’, bureaucratic responsiveness to the media, agenda setting, indexing, public opinion, and the role of changing technologies.<sup>20</sup> He finds that media, public opinion and foreign policy have generally been mentioned in the same breath in the bulk of the work, which takes a positivist social-science approach in its attempts to prove whether the media shapes public opinion and sets the international agenda, or to quantify politicians’ ability to manipulate the media. Significantly Van Belle also examines (albeit briefly) the possibility that media sources may be used to examine construction of Self and Other in foreign relations. He finds that examinations of the media ‘(news) framing and constructivism appear to be estranged’.<sup>21</sup> This is perplexing because, as Van Belle points out, the centrality of the media in shaping a society’s understandings of Self and Other is also central to constructivist IR, as such it would be reasonable to expect a significant constructivist contribution to our understanding of the interplay between a state’s media, identity and foreign policy. This is a significant gap in constructivist understandings of international politics and media, which this paper begins to address.

This study will extend the insights of this research, opening up new space in its approach to the media not as shaping material events, or an instrument manipulated by governments to develop

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Benjamin Goldsmith and Yasuku Horuichi ‘In Search of Soft Power: Does Foreign Public Opinion Matter for US Foreign Policy?’ *World Politics* 64, 3 (2010), pp. 555-85.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 561.

<sup>17</sup> Li Zhang, ‘The Rise of China: media perception and implications for international politics’, *Journal of Contemporary China* 19, 64, (2010), p. 237.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew A. Baum, *Soft News Goes to War: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy in the New Media Age* (Princeton, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Phillip M. Seib *The al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media are Reshaping World Politics* (Washington DC, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Douglas A. Van Belle, ‘News Media’, in Steven W. Hook and Christopher. M. Jones, *Routledge Handbook of American Foreign Policy*, (Hoboken, 2012), p. 286.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

soft power, but as a set of ideational actors. We contend that the news media serves as a crucial public space in which identity discourses are constructed and circulated, playing a key role in explaining, accounting for and engaging with international affairs in a way that makes sense of foreign policy for citizens and works to make international politics relevant in a local context. It follows that understanding the role media discourses play in constructing national identity, is an important part of understanding the processes of identity construction at play in shaping a state's foreign policy.

## Research Design

This paper undertakes a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of news discourse, drawing on the insights of an initial content analysis of the sample before moving on to a deeper discursive analysis of the sample. It does so through a case study of domestic news coverage of a political party's debate over, and decision about, a foreign policy issue: whether the Australian Labor Party would overturn its long-standing ban on selling uranium to India. The sample is drawn from eleven daily newspapers, chosen to cover all Australian state capitals and the national capital; to include the two national daily newspapers; and to ensure a range of formats and owners were represented (Table One). A news database search was used to compile the sample (initially through *Factiva* and then again in *Lexis-Nexis* to ensure completeness). The dates 2 December – 8 December 2011 were chosen, to include a week of coverage around the date that the decision was made (4 December 2011) and to ensure that each day of the week is included once in the sample, accounting for the cyclical nature of newspaper coverage.<sup>22</sup> This approach allows an exploration of the narratives of Australian identity that were mobilised in newspaper coverage of the ALP's decision to end the ban on uranium sales to India which systematically maps news frames, genres and key themes across the sample and links this to a more detailed discursive analysis of media language.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For a detailed discussion of sampling procedures for newspaper content, see Daniel Riffe, Charles F. Aust and Stephen Lacy, 'The Effectiveness of Random, Consecutive Day and Constructed Week Sampling in Newspaper Content Analysis', *Journalism Quarterly* 70, 1 (1993), pp. 133-139.

<sup>23</sup> Alexandra Georgakopoulou and Dionysis Goutsos, *Discourse Analysis: An Introduction* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Edinburgh, 2004), p. 185.

**Table One: Newspapers Included in Sample**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Reach; Location</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Circulation<sup>i</sup></b>
<i>The Australian; The Weekend Australian</i>	National	News Limited	<i>Australian</i> 119,490; <i>Weekend</i> 264, 547
<i>The Australian Financial Review</i>	National	Fairfax	Monday-Friday 64, 861; Saturday 81,606
<i>Sydney Morning Herald; Sun Herald</i>	Metropolitan; Sydney, NSW	Fairfax	Monday-Friday 148,037; Saturday 253,240; Sunday 290,174
<i>Daily Telegraph; Sunday Telegraph</i>	Metropolitan; Sydney, NSW	News Limited	Monday-Friday 305,132; Saturday 304,254; Sunday 559,026
<i>The Age; The Sunday Age</i>	Metropolitan; Melbourne VIC	Fairfax	Monday-Friday 144,277; Saturday 219,696; Sunday 178,141
<i>Herald Sun; Sunday Herald Sun</i>	Metropolitan; Melbourne, VIC	News Limited	Monday-Friday 425,253; Saturday 433,365; Sunday 501,642
<i>The Canberra Times</i>	Metropolitan; Canberra, ACT	Fairfax	Monday-Friday 27,132; Saturday 42,797; Sunday 28,371
<i>The Courier Mail</i>	Metropolitan; Brisbane, QLD	News Limited	Monday-Friday 172,801; Saturday 228,650; Sunday 423,488
<i>The Adelaide Advertiser</i>	Metropolitan; Adelaide, SA	News Limited	Monday- Friday 160,842; Saturday 213,378; Sunday 251,444
<i>The Hobart Mercury</i>	Metropolitan; Hobart, TAS	News Limited	Monday – Friday 39,227; Saturday 53,762; Sunday 50,505
<i>The West Australian</i>	Metropolitan; Perth, WA	Seven West Media	Monday-Friday 176, 189; Saturday 302,250

<sup>i</sup> Circulation figures from Audit Bureau of Circulations data, May 2013, accessed at Knott, M. 2013 ‘Newspapers circling the drain as paywalls falter’, *Crikey* 10 May, [http://www.crikey.com.au/2013/05/10/newspapers-circling-the-drain-as-paywalls-falter/?wpmp\\_switcher=mobile](http://www.crikey.com.au/2013/05/10/newspapers-circling-the-drain-as-paywalls-falter/?wpmp_switcher=mobile) and *Ragtrader.com.au*, ‘ABC Circulation Results – May 2013’, <http://www.ragtrader.com.au/files/dmfile/ABC%5Fcirculation%5FMay%5F20131%2Epdf>.

An initial search was conducted for articles containing both the terms ‘uranium’ and ‘India’ in either the headline or full article (or both). This yielded an initial sample of 151 articles, including news, features, opinion columns, letters to the editor, vox-pops, quizzes, polls and editorials. These were coded first for relevance, and articles not related to Labor’s decision to sell uranium to India were removed. The sample was then coded for identifying markers (publication, date, article type, author), dominant news frames, and position on the decision (for, against, neutral). The unit of analysis was a single story or article; articles not coded as news (including

news feature and news analysis), opinion or editorial were then removed,<sup>24</sup> leaving 132 articles covering the ALP's National Conference decision to sell uranium to India. This sample was then subjected to a further search for those articles including relevant mentions of 'China'.<sup>25</sup> This left 33 articles which were then subjected to deeper discursive analysis, to examine narratives of Australian identity which are central to this paper.

## Results

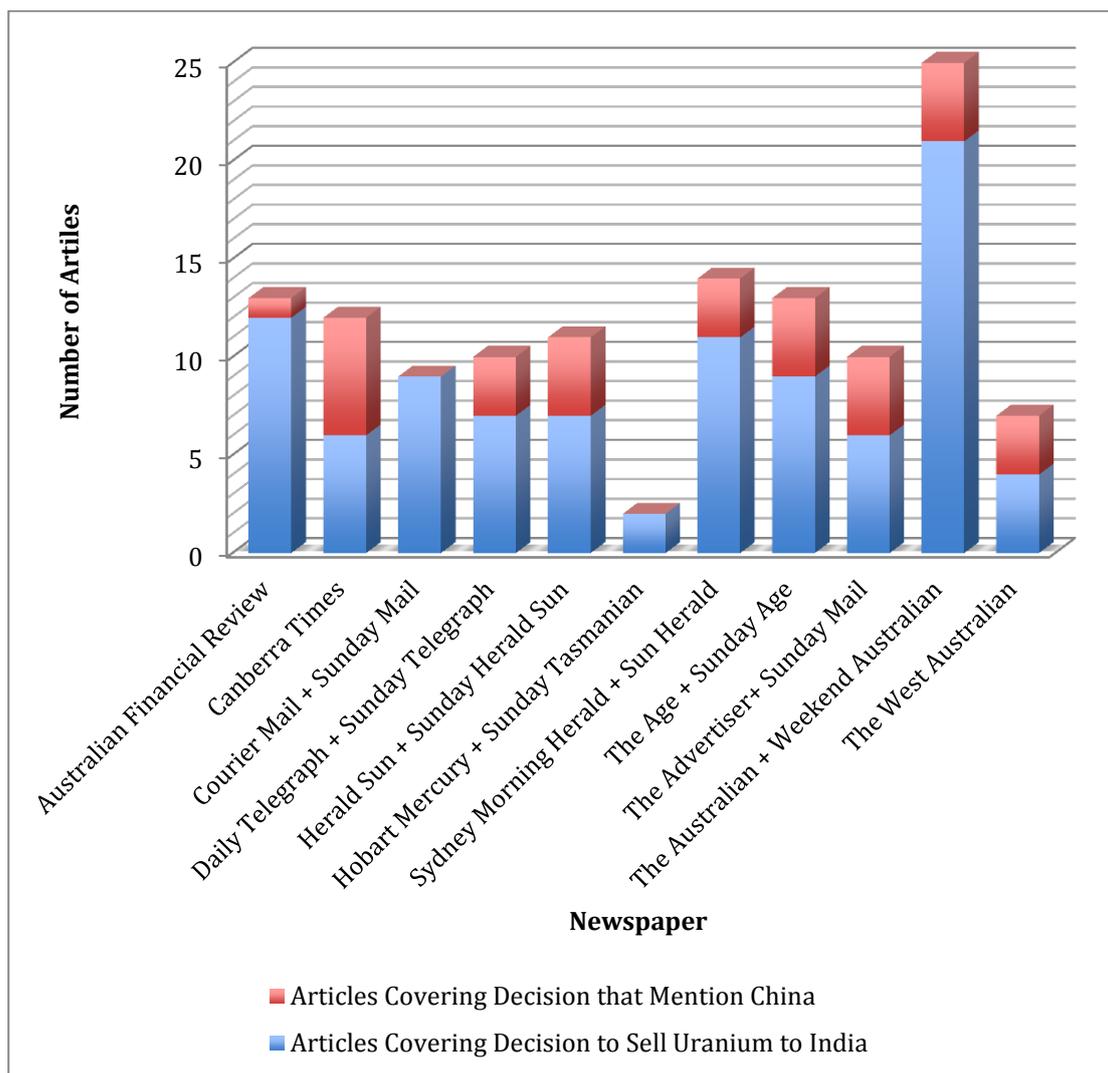
The search yielded a sample of 132 articles covering the ALP's overturning of the ban on uranium sales to India. *The Australian* and *Weekend Australian* had the most articles, with 25 articles across the week; while the *Hobart Mercury* and *Sunday Tasmanian* ran only two stories. Of the 132 articles in the broader sample, 25% mentioned China when reporting on the ALP's policy decision, distributed across the eleven publications in the sample (Figure One). The broader sample was dominated by news articles (67.5%), with opinion pieces (25.4%) and editorials (7.1%) making up the remainder. However, many of these opinion and editorial pieces mention China, and as a result the smaller sample features a more even distribution with 46.9% news articles, 37.5% opinion and 15.6% editorial.

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<sup>24</sup> This paper undertakes an analysis only of news articles, editorials and opinion pieces; excluding user-generated content such as letters to the editor, comments and vox-pops, which will be considered in future research.

<sup>25</sup> Articles were coded for mentions of China that in some way linked the ALP's decision to sell to uranium to India to China; those with either no mention of China or without relevant mentions of China were excluded.

**Figure One: News Articles Mentioning China as Part of All Articles Covering ALP’s Decision to Overturn Ban on Uranium Sales to India, 2-8 December 2011**



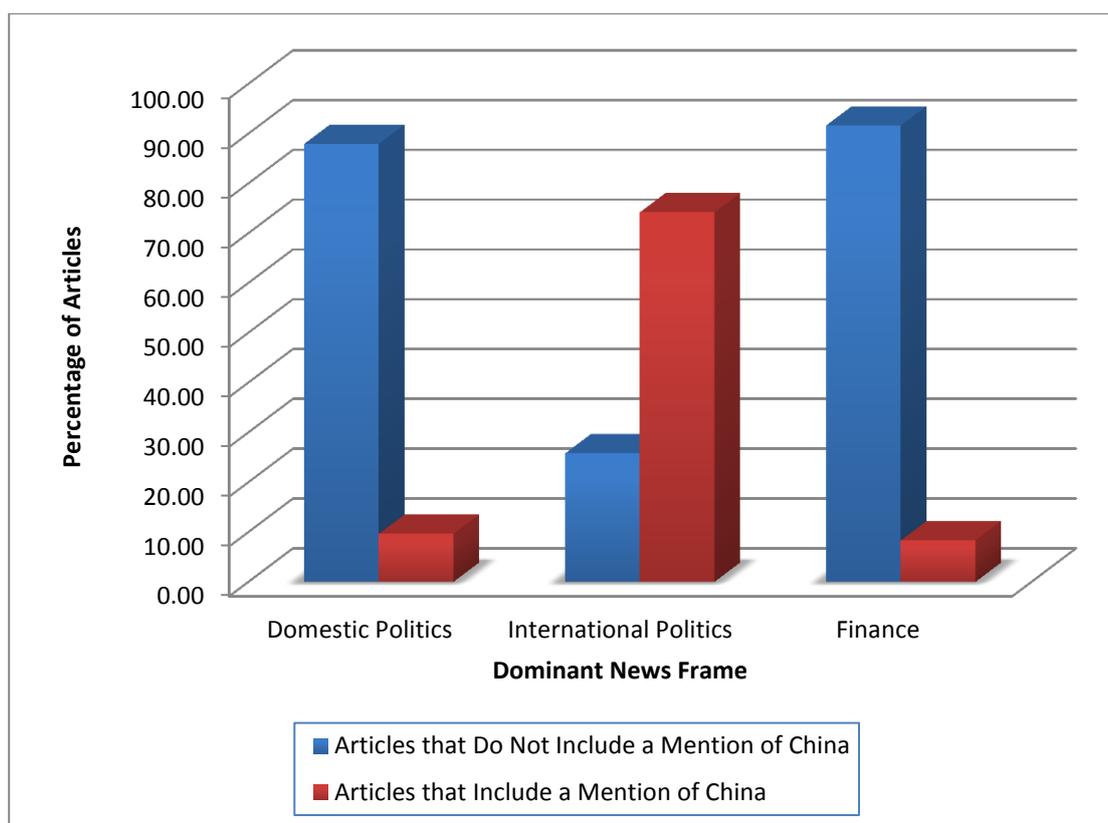
Notes: Totals by publication: *Australian Financial Review* 13; *Canberra Times* 12; *Courier Mail & Sunday Mail* 9; *Daily Telegraph & Sunday Telegraph* 10; *Herald Sun & Sunday Herald Sun* 11; *Hobart Mercury & Sunday Tasmanian* 2; *Sydney Morning Herald & Sun Herald* 14; *Age & Sunday Age* 13; *The Advertiser & Sunday Mail* 10; *The Australian & Weekend Australian* 25; *The West Australian* 7.

The tone of articles in the broader sample was overwhelmingly neutral, with 77.8% of articles coded as ‘neutral’ – however, in the articles that mention China, the same percentage of articles was ‘positive’ (in support of the ALP’s decision) as those that were ‘neutral’ (43.8%). In both the broader and smaller sample, a smaller percentage of ‘negative’ articles argued against or critiqued the ALP’s decision (4.8% and 12.5% respectively).

Overall, coverage of the ALP’s decision was characterised by news media framing of the issue as domestic rather than international news. Across the sample, 66% of articles framed this as a domestic politics story, focusing on the political arguments, strategy and outcomes of the ALP National Conference and emphasising what this decision (and the vote on the other controversial

issue, same-sex marriage) meant for Julia Gillard's leadership and Labor's chances at the next election. In stark contrast, those stories that made a significant mention of China were much more likely to be framed as 'international politics' or foreign news stories: 72% of the stories that link the ALP's decision to China were framed as 'international politics'. Of those framed as domestic politics in the sample, just under 9.6% mentioned China; while of those stories framed as international politics, 74.2% linked the decision to China (Figure Two).

**Figure Two: News Frames in Newspaper Coverage of ALP's Decision to Sell Uranium to India, 2-8 December 2011**



Notes: News Frame Coding – Domestic Politics n = 83; International Politics n = 31; Finance n = 12.

It is important to note here that a smaller portion of the sample (9.5%) framed the decision as a finance/economic news story, reporting on the impact of the decision on the mining industry (particularly in South Australia and Western Australia) and response from resource/mining company share prices.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Sarah-Jane Tasker, 'Capacity crucial as miners applaud uranium approval', *The Australian*, 6 December 2011, p.20; Gareth Hutchens, 'Buoyant market builds on earlier gains' *The Age*, 6 December 2011, p. 11.

## A 'Land of Contrasts': Orientalism and Stereotyping of India and China

There are several themes of Australian identity worthy of consideration in the sample, including a consistent expression of a desire for Australia to act both morally and rationally, and a consideration of Australia's positioning within the 'Asian century'. As this serves as a preliminary study, we will focus our discourse analysis on perceptions of India and China. The analysis follows from David Campbell's approach, in examining the necessary discursive attempt to '[render] the familiar in the terms of the unfamiliar'<sup>27</sup> as a state attempts to comprehend the 'rise' of Others in the international system. Within the sample, India and China are both discussed in language that bears the legacy of orientalist discourse, (implicitly and explicitly) implying that India and/or China are underhanded, irrational, or are particularly dangerous and likely to engage in military conflict with its neighbours (even though, as these are nuclear armed states, the consequences would be catastrophic). There is also a more subtle (for the most part) use of gendered language, which feminizes and stereotypes India as an attractive, 'seductive' actor(ess).

These themes play out clearly in Bruce Arnold's 'debate'-style opinion piece, which opens its attack on the decision to sell uranium to India with the phrase, 'India is a land of contrasts'.<sup>28</sup> This language relies on a common orientalist trope, which presents India as unknowable, conflicted and impossible to understand through Western rationality. While there is great wealth disparity in India, the same could be likewise said of Australia or particularly United States. More deeply, this positioning of India seems out of place in the context of international uranium trade; in this article, it works only to frame India as perplexing, irrational and dangerous from the outset. This article continued to define India as a risk in far more specific terms:

It has a history of military clashes with its neighbours, alongside a history of political assassinations and large-scale sectarian violence. Bombings of hotels, railways stations and other facilities are attributed to local terrorists, militants from across the border or *even India's police and security services*.<sup>29</sup>

The implication of clashes with its neighbours, *plural*, can be read as a reference to India's 1962 border war with China as well as the more obvious tensions with Pakistan (a common argument marshalled in the coverage in articles against selling uranium to India). India's instability is very strongly emphasised here as both internal and external, significantly with its *own* police and security positioned as part of a broader culture of violence.<sup>30</sup> This overblown discourse of threat constructs India as irrational and dangerous, inviting the reader to perceive India as unpredictable

<sup>27</sup> David Campbell, *Writing Security: US Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester, 1992), p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Bruce Arnold, 'Should we sell uranium to India?' *Sunday Herald Sun*, 4 December 2011, p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> It is important to note, here, that there is no evidence to suggest that India's police or security services have been responsible for bombings of any Indian institutions or infrastructure

and therefore a risk: in a time of crisis or threat, it is implied, they may well use their nuclear weapons against both Pakistan and China without concern for the consequences.

India's military clashes with its neighbours are emphasised in a number of articles, which quote 'expert' political and academic sources in support of this argument. For example, ALP politician Doug Cameron is quoted in the coverage to represent those in the party who vehemently opposed the sale of uranium to India:

The real argument here is are we going to export uranium to a country who has had three wars with its neighbours. A country who is developing rockets to send nuclear weapons into its neighbours.<sup>31</sup>

This particular quote, used in a number of articles in the sample, provides an insight into the rhetorical strategies employed at the Conference, and circulated through the news media, in opposition to the decision<sup>32</sup>. India has fought three wars with Pakistan and one with China, and so the total number is actually higher. Cameron is, presumably, however, referring to China as well, since India's Agni IV rocket has a range that would allow India to strike Beijing and India *already* had the ability to launch rockets anywhere into Pakistan prior to this development.<sup>33</sup> This being the case, Cameron is referring to India's border war with China in 1962, which occurred *before* either state had nuclear weapons. Despite this, Cameron is implying very strongly, in language that invites the audience to fill in the gaps, that India and China have a history of conflict and are therefore likely to fight one another again. While the coverage overwhelmingly constructs Australia as rational, much of the discourse on nuclear sales relies on the unsettling suggestion that India and China are *not* rational actors and are likely to engage in a war which would ultimately result in their own 'mutually assured destruction' – thus creating a clear contrast between 'our' rationality and 'their' irrational actions and motivations.

This language is echoed in a *Canberra Times* opinion piece, in which Andy Butfooy suggests that India does not have a perfect record on non-proliferation: 'under the guise of a civil nuclear program India had *gatecrashed* its way into the nuclear weapons club' (emphasis added).<sup>34</sup> This metaphor of India as a 'gatecrasher' constructs it as an aggressive power, unwilling to accept established liberal international 'norms'. The piece continues: 'Apart from refusing to sign the NPT

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<sup>31</sup> Doug Cameron, in Chris Johnson, 'India set to buy country's uranium', *Canberra Times*, 5 December 2011, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that Cameron may have clarified these comments, and that this quotation is partly a measure of how the media shaped his comments, not just Cameron's arguments themselves.

<sup>33</sup> This point is made in one of the sources in this sample: Ben Doherty, 'India to test new Missile Dubbed "the China killer"', *The Age*, 3 December 2011, p 13. See also, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-17738633>, date accessed 21 July, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Andy Butfooy, 'Dangerous fallout for arms control', *Canberra Times*, 3 December 2011.

in the 1970s, India duped its overseas suppliers of “civil nuclear technology”.<sup>35</sup> This construction is based on a common scepticism of India’s ‘peaceful nuclear explosion’ in 1974; however, it is problematic as it presents a misleading account of India’s intentions with this test. While it is not unreasonable to dispute the possibility of a nuclear explosion ever being completely peaceful, it certainly was not interpreted as such by Pakistan and the implications were certainly clear that India *could* develop weapons. However, India did *not* maintain a nuclear weapons arsenal afterwards, no military staff were engaged in the project and it was reported internally as a victory for Indian science as opposed to its military might.<sup>36</sup> This construction of India’s nuclear program misses crucial historical details in its construction of India as dangerous, underhanded and untrustworthy, even as he accuses those in favour of the sale as being ‘historically illiterate’.<sup>37</sup> This is deepened elsewhere in the coverage, with representations of India’s ‘rise’ as masked by the simultaneous rise of China: ‘while the world has been focused on the astronomic growth of China, India has been amassing money, power and influence’.<sup>38</sup> Here, there is an implication that India has been growing economically and militarily which the world’s attention has been on China, a construction which reflects clearly on the Australian preoccupation with the ‘rise of China’, particularly in the years following the global financial crisis. Again, here, it is important to note that while the discourse is characterised by arguments that Australia should strive to act as a politically rational state, India and China are consistently constructed as irrational actors in a particularly unstable region.

As so much of the work here strikes a strongly political realist tone with regard to Australian foreign policy, it is curious that there is no mention made whatsoever of nuclear deterrence in the sample. Numerous theorists have suggested that India and Pakistan’s relationship is actually stabilized by the relative parity between the two states in terms of nuclear arsenals, meaning small conflicts are unlikely to escalate.<sup>39</sup> There are, of course, important academic debates on the issue of nuclear deterrence theory, and this is particularly so with regards to the India-Pakistan relationship, often regarded as a perfect exemplar of the stability-instability paradox.<sup>40</sup> However, the suggestion that India would blithely go to war with Pakistan and/or China without concern for its own survival is ill-considered, particularly as we are not questioning more broadly that the US, the UK, France,

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Latha Varadarajan, ‘Constructivism, Identity and neoliberal (in)security’, *Review of International Studies* 30, 03 (2004), pp. 319-341 and Itty Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy and the Postcolonial State* (London, 1998) and Priya Chacko, ‘The Search for a Scientific Temper: Nuclear Technology and the Ambivalence of India’s Postcolonial Modernity’, *Review of International Studies*, 37 (2011), pp. 185-208.

<sup>37</sup> Butfoy, ‘Dangerous fallout’, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Katherine Fleming, ‘In between the giants: Massive market, despite poverty’, *West Australian*, 3 December 2011, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Sumit Ganguly, ‘Nuclear Stability in South Asia’, *International Security*, 33, 2 (2008), pp. 45-70.

<sup>40</sup> See Michael Krepon, ‘The Stability-Instability Paradox, Misperception, and Escalation-Control in South Asia’, in Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen, (eds) *Prospects for Peace in South Asia* (Stanford, 2005), pp. 261-280. See also S. Paul Kapur, ‘Ten Years of Instability in a Nuclear South Asia’, *International Security* 33, 2 (2008), pp. 71-94.

even Russia can be ‘trusted’ with our uranium. This is based on the assumption that *all* states are rational actors. However, in the source material used here, while tending to *wish* for a rational Australia, the coverage for the most part regards India and China with trepidation, as they *may not* act rationally or cannot be ‘trusted’ to follow what are seen as *our* (neoliberal, democratic) norms, or are less rational than Australia. In the case of India and China and the possibility of nuclear war, this constructs a rational Australian Self against irrational ‘Asian’ Others. Thus, when the Australian news media are talking about China and India, they are also always talking about how ‘we’ see these states, rather than the states themselves.

### **Building a ‘Serious Relationship’: Gendered Constructions of India**

Another, albeit less pronounced, Orientalist theme in the coverage is the use of gendered language to describe India’s rise and Australia’s desire to connect with India.<sup>41</sup> In particular, the use of ‘relationship’ metaphors to describe the motivations behind and implications of Australia selling uranium to India is striking, with language such as ‘Chief among India’s suitors is America’.<sup>42</sup> The construction of ‘suitors’ competing for India’s wealth positions this as a battle between Australia and other states trying to gain access to the economic opportunities offered by India’s growing markets. It is interesting to note here that India does not regard its relations with other states in this manner at all, having had a long policy of nonalignment, which is reimagined today in the form of allowing strategic alignment with everyone.<sup>43</sup>

The term ‘suitor’ also works, more deeply, to present a gendered construction of India as feminine, being pursued by masculine states who wish to use her resources. For example, Bruce Arnold refers to visions of nuclear power plants as providing clean electricity to India’s poor as ‘seductive’.<sup>44</sup> This has been examined and critiqued by feminist IR theorists, and can also be seen as tied to Australian and broader British Empire orientalist constructions of Indians as effeminate.<sup>45</sup> In a different context, when reporting on India’s military researching its Agni V missile, nicknamed as the China Killer, India’s actions are described through a masculine discourse as ‘muscle flexing’.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Postcolonial theory has been used by a small group of IR scholars. See, for example, Sankaran Krishna, ‘The Importance of Being Ironic: A Postcolonial View on Critical International Relations Theory’, *Alternatives, Global, Local, Political*, 18 (1993), pp. 385-417; Phillip Darby and Anthony J. Paolini, ‘Bridging Postcolonialism and International Relations’, *Alternatives: Global, Local and Political* 19, 3 (1994), pp. 371-295; Phillip Darby, ‘Introduction’, in Phillip Darby (ed.), *At the Edge of International Relations: Postcolonialism, Gender and Dependency* (London, 1997), pp. 1-10. L. H. M. Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations: Conquest and Desire between Asia and the West* (New York, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> Fleming, ‘In between the giants’, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Non-Alignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century, at [www.cprindia.org/sites/default/files/NonAlignment%202.0\\_1.pdf](http://www.cprindia.org/sites/default/files/NonAlignment%202.0_1.pdf), date accessed 30 July, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Arnold, ‘Should we sell uranium to India?’.

<sup>45</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali* (Manchester, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> Doherty, ‘India to Test New Missile’.

Here, the Indian state is presented as masculine when engaging with military power, tapping into a classic construction in IR of a state ‘acting masculine’ when it is militaristic. The ‘relationship’ metaphor is used more explicitly by Greg Sheridan, writing in *The Australian*, who canvassed the possibility that uranium sales might see sparks fly in Indo-Australian relations in ‘Gillard charms India with yellowcake’.<sup>47</sup> He concludes: ‘Though we are very rich, India is a much bigger nation than we are. If we want to get its attention and build a serious relationship, we need to take the initiative.’<sup>48</sup>

This imagery constructs Australia as a small, unattractive nation (despite its wealth), needing to make a ‘gesture’ to show its respect, trust and affection for India. In this construction, India can only pick from certain appropriate ‘suitors’ (Australia, the US, Canada, France, etc...) with whom she can engage. Thus, although ‘we’ have wealth and valuable resources, India is an attractive ‘catch’ that will require Australia to ‘punch above its weight’, a common theme of the Australia’s creative middle power discourse.<sup>49</sup> Sheridan’s relationship metaphor relies on gendered language that treats international politics as akin to speed dating, constructing India as an attractive, exotic woman encircled by powerful, rich, white men; with Australia struggling to gain her attention amongst the stronger, more masculine suitors. Might our vast uranium resources ‘charm her’?<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion: The Utility of a Constructivist-Media and Communications Approach

This paper takes a preliminary step in exploring an inter-disciplinary, critical constructivist approach to IR and media coverage, relevant in both the Australian context and the discipline as a whole. Extending the scope of research beyond what was possible here would provide broader insights into the complex and inter-dependent relationship between elite and non-elite foreign policy discourses. For example, further studies might move beyond the newspaper coverage examined in this paper to consider the ways that broadcast, social and digital media technologies combine with print media formats, in a media landscape that is characterised by the twin processes of convergence and fragmentation. Moreover, constructions of Australia as a ‘rational’ and ‘moral’

<sup>47</sup> Our emphasis. Greg Sheridan, ‘Gillard charms India with Yellowcake’, *The Australian*, 8 December 2011, p12.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> This is a common colloquial terminology and has often used in media discourse in relation to Australian foreign policy. See, for example, Mark Baker, ‘If we want to Punch above our Weight we need Bigger Gloves’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 January, 2013, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/if-we-want-to-punch-above-our-weight-we-need-bigger-gloves-20130118-2cymk.html>, date accessed, 30 July, 2013. For an academic discussion, see Mark Beeson, ‘Can Australia Save the World? The limits and possibilities of middle power diplomacy’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 65, 5 (2011), pp. 563-577.

<sup>50</sup> Sheridan, ‘Gillard charms India with Yellowcake’.

actor emerge in our sample and are worthy of deeper consideration, as these are also elements of orientalist discourse in perceptions of India and China. Additionally, a longer historical approach than was possible here would serve to deepen this paper's explorations of these narratives of Australian identity by placing them in the context of social, cultural, economic and political changes across Australian history. As an initial case, however, this paper reveals the usefulness of a constructivist-media communications approach to understanding the perception of the 'international' in Australian identity discourses, and re-considering the role of media discourses in shaping foreign policy. It extends the work of critical constructivist scholars by examining the dialogic social and media-based process through which identity discourses are developed and disseminated. There is also potential for a constructivist-political communications approach to be developed here, drawing in political speeches, press releases and other government communications to add to another level to identity-based understandings of international politics, not just in the Australian context but also as a state-level actor in international politics.

The majority of articles in the larger sample collected for this research framed the ALP's decision to overturn the ban on uranium sales to India as domestic political decision, suggesting that the key 'localising' role of news media that works to make the international relevant on a local level. The constructions of international politics here reveal the vital importance of a mediated space in which the values and priorities of a nation are made relevant to the lives of its citizens. At times, this manifests in a tendency to rely on 'orientalist' constructions or to simplify complex issues, as is revealed in the above analysis of Sheridan's metaphor where India is a 'mysterious', seductive woman needing to be charmed by Australia. This type of metaphor is increasingly rare in the highly regulated space of foreign policy documents and in formal political language, where these explicitly race or gender-based orientalist depictions of international politics are now uncommon. While these constructions are only hinted at the elite decision-making level, (to go further would be poor foreign policy), such language continues to appear in media discourses which bear the legacy of long-standing conceptions of Australian identity, threat and security. More deeply, however, the news articles examined here offered a space in which circulation, challenge and re-negotiation of established discourses of Australian identity are profoundly linked to the discussion and development of foreign policy. This reveals the central role of the media in negotiating constructions of state identity between elite and popular discourse, an insight which can add considerable new depth to the constructivist research agenda in IR.