

Indian Nuclear Doctrine And Its Foreign Policy

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores India's foreign policy stance on nuclear weapons and disarmament. The main objective of the project is to examine India's commitment towards maintaining and upholding a reliable stand of deterrence and actively aiming towards worldwide disarmament. This investigation finds its relevance in the framework of the 'No First Use' (hereinafter referred to as 'NFU'), 'retaliation-only' approach, and the doctrine of 'Credible Minimum Deterrence' that India has stood by. These doctrines and approaches speak volumes about India's dedication to refraining from starting any nuclear hostilities whatsoever. This project lays heavy emphasis on India's strategy as far as nuclear weapons are concerned, and this goes beyond just comprehending India's internal nuclear doctrine, but also explaining how India keeps up its international relations on this issue. The research also digs deep into India's stand on international agreements, especially why it has refused to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (hereinafter referred to as 'NPT'), and why it has sought membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (hereinafter referred to as 'NSG'). From what can be witnessed and observed, India supports a gradual path towards disarmament, focussing on participation by all nuclear-armed nation-states. The research elucidates India's role in pushing for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (hereinafter referred to as 'FMCT') as well as its initiatives in bilateral agreements such as the famous USA-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, the objective of which is to safeguard the usage of nuclear weapons. Apart from this, the research will also explore the geographical aspects of disarmament dynamics, most notably by analysing the implications of India's stance on nuclear weapons and its impact on its nuclear neighbours, Pakistan and China. All in all, this research project seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of India's nuanced approach towards nuclear disarmament within the global and regional context. Through the examination of official government documents, policy pronouncements, and academic research, this project seeks to provide a thorough knowledge of India's nuclear weapons and disarmament foreign policy. It aims to lay down the complexities of India's foreign policy, analyse its repercussions on India's neighbours, and contribute to the broader discourse on nuclear weapon usage in the present geopolitical scenario.

KEYWORDS: No First Use, FMCT, Non-Proliferation, Credible Minimum Deterrence, Civil Nuclear Agreements, Smiling Buddha, Operation Shakti

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

For a better understanding of India's foreign policy stance on nuclear weapons and disarmament, let us first take a look at the history of Indian nuclear weapons development. It is marked by several key milestones, which include iconic nuclear tests and historical declarations.

India recognised the importance of nuclear technology around the time of its independence, and Homi J. Bhabha, who is regarded as the "*father of the Indian nuclear program*," played a significant role in initiating the peaceful usage of nuclear energy.¹ India established its first nuclear research organisation, the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in 1945² and Dr. Bhabha was the founding director of the institute. After that, the Indian Atomic Energy Commission was also set up in 1948 and Dr. Bhabha was made its first chairman.

The year 1954 was a significant year for India and its atomic capabilities. Firstly, the Atomic Energy Establishment, Trombay was founded by Dr. Bhabha in January 1954. In fact, after his death, the institution was renamed Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in his death.³ Secondly, the Department of Atomic Energy under the Government of India was formed in August 1954, with Jawaharlal Nehru as its first minister.

A drastic transition in the Indian foreign policy came after the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The reason for this war was the loss of territory that India faced when China claimed Aksai Chin and the Tawang area in Arunachal Pradesh. India lost its war with China and China tested nuclear bombs two years later, in 1964. The strategic association between China and Pakistan also played a huge role. This was a turning point in Indian history and the foreign policy of India was revised due to the increasing nuclear aggression by India's neighbours. National security was now given unprecedented priority and increasing efforts were made to make the Indian military arsenal stronger.

INDIA DEVELOPS ITS NUCLEAR ARSENAL

A milestone was achieved in the year 1974 when India conducted its first nuclear explosion test, also called the 'Peaceful Nuclear Explosive' test that India conducted in 1974 in Pokhran's Test Range, near the Thar Desert, Rajasthan.³ This test is famously known as 'Operation Smiling Buddha'. The device bore a striking resemblance to the American nuclear bomb known as the 'Fat Man', which had destroyed the Japanese city of Nagasaki three decades prior. It was only after this peaceful nuclear explosion test that India marked its entry into the nuclear stage at an international level.

Then began the weaponisation phase of Indian nuclear energy in the 1980s. The predominant reason for this was the growing regional security concerns, marked by the nuclear tests conducted by China and Pakistan. India, as an anticipatory deterrent measure, began to develop nuclear weapons. Indira Gandhi approved the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme in 1982, which aimed to create missiles capable of delivering a nuclear warhead if India developed one. However, at the same time, she also refused to allow the DRDO to develop active nuclear weapons.

However, the situation changed after 1987, following the Brasstacks crisis and the initiation of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. The Ministry of Defence was finally permitted in 1989 to construct a nuclear bomb. Then, in May 1998, India conducted multiple nuclear tests in Pokhran.

This operation was named 'Operation Shakti,' and with this, India proclaimed itself a nucleararmed state. The 2000s was the age of bilateral cooperation and in 2008, to further its diplomatic approach

¹ "Homi Jehangir Bhabha". Indian Academy of Sciences. Retrieved 4 August 2023.

² Raychaudhari, Oindrilla. "History of TIFR". Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, 23 September 2010. ³ "Milestones". Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, 7 February 2012.

³ "Smiling Buddha, 1974". *India's Nuclear Weapons Program*. Nuclear Weapon Archive.

towards the safe usage of nuclear energy, India signed a Civil Nuclear Agreement with the USA in 2008.⁴

GLOBAL NUCLEAR SCENARIO IN PRESENT TIMES

In the global landscape, the possession and usage of nuclear weapons have been attributed as a defining element of national security and foreign policy for several nations, including India. However, it would be erroneous to call India a nuclear superpower, but as a rising global power and a non-signatory to the NPT, India's stance on nuclear weapons and its nuclear doctrine has profound implications for regional and global security.

Before understanding the implication of Indian foreign policy on a global level, let us take a look at the current status of possession and usage of nuclear weapons. As of now, nine countries in the world have possession of the nuclear arsenal, some of them being the USA, Russia, the UK, Pakistan, India, etc. The global arsenal consists is approximately 13,000 nuclear weapons. Although this number is one-fifth of what the count used to be during the Cold War, it does not undermine the sheer threat that nuclear weapons pose to humanity.

As of today, Washington has around 5500 weapons and Moscow has 6000 and these two nationstates in themselves constitute 90% of the global weapon count. China has around 350 warheads, the UK has around 120, and France maintains 300 nuclear weapons, whereas North Korea has around 50 nuclear warheads.

INDIAN NUCLEAR DOCTRINE

As far as India is concerned, there are about 150 nuclear weapons that India has produced and which are operationally available. It has a series of land-based ballistic missiles such as the *Prithvi* and *Agni* series as well as sea-based ballistic missiles, like *Dhanush* and *Sagarika*. Now let us understand the chief features of India's nuclear approach. India adopts a mixed approach of an 'NFU' approach and a 'retaliation-only' approach. NFU has remained a fundamental aspect of India's nuclear doctrine, ever since its formal proclamation in the year 2003.⁵ Furthermore, after the Pokhran tests in 1998, the Indian government released a draft of its nuclear doctrine that mentioned that nuclear weapons that India has, should be put to use for the sole purpose of deterrence; meaning that India will strive to pursue a stance of "retaliation only".⁶

Apart from this, India also follows the doctrine of Credible Minimum Deterrence. Let us break the term down to gain more insights and clarity. The word "credible" is an inseparable part of India's nuclear doctrine. It implies that to assert dominance over enemies that may possess a nuclear arsenal and to better tackle the situation in case of any potential hostilities, India's nuclear arsenal must be sufficiently strong and capable. The efficacy of India's deterrent strategy depends on this credibility. The other word is "minimum". It implies India focuses on having a nuclear arsenal that is only as big as it has to be to prevent future enemies from utilising nuclear weapons against India.

⁴ Bajoria, Jayshree (November 5, 2010). "The U.S.-India Nuclear Deal". *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 29, 2010.

⁵ CCS reviews progress in operationalizing India's nuclear doctrine:

<https://archive.pib.gov.in/archive/releases98/1yr2003/rjan2003/04012003/r040120033.html>.

⁶ Mishra, Brajesh (17 August 1999). "Draft Report of National Security Advisory Board on Indian Nuclear Doctrine", 16 January 2000.

SIGNING NPT MUST FOR NSG'S MEMBERSHIP

NSG is a group of nuclear supplier nation-states that intend to contribute actively to the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. The main aim of NSG is to ensure the peaceful transaction of nuclear weapons between the countries who are part of the NSG. NSG came into existence as a response to the 1974 nuclear tests conducted by India, under 'Operation Smiling Buddha'. It currently has 48 countries as its members. India has been trying to get membership in NSG since as early as 2008. The same year, India also signed the Civil Nuclear Agreement with the USA because it received a 'clean waiver' from NSG, which meant that India can engage in nuclear trade.

The dispute stems from an NSG's existing provision which states that whosoever is not a signatory to NPT cannot become a part of NSG. India has refused to sign the NPT. Why India has refused to sign the NPT is because India has always held a strong stance that the international treaties that talk about non-proliferation are very flawed since they are selectively applicable to the non-nuclear powers and pave the way for monopoly of the five nuclear weapons powers, i.e., China, France, Russia, the UK and the USA. It remains to be seen how India's aspirations to join the NSG will coincide with the simultaneous refusal of India to sign the NPT.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this research study has examined the nuanced aspects of India's foreign policy position on nuclear weapons and disarmament, considering historical background, significant nuclear events, and the current state of nuclear affairs worldwide. From its early acknowledgment of nuclear technology to its development as a nuclear-armed state, India's path has been characterised by strategic pivots, especially in reaction to threats to regional security.

The three pillars of India's nuclear doctrine—"No First Use," "Retaliation-only," and "Credible Minimum Deterrence"—emphasize the country's dedication to upholding a defensive stance in the nuclear domain. This strategy is based on India's commitment to averting the start of nuclear wars and reducing the quantity of its nuclear weapons stockpile while maintaining its reputation as a formidable deterrent.

Furthermore, India emphasises a gradual path towards global disarmament, encouraging participation by all nuclear-armed nations. This is reflected in its positions on international agreements, such as its refusal to sign the NPT and its pursuit of membership in the NSG. The article also discusses India's diplomatic initiatives, such as the USA-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, which is intended to protect nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, as well as its participation in pushing for a FMCT.

Lastly, the research underscores the regional dynamics of India's nuclear stance and its implications on its nuclear neighbours, Pakistan and China. It has shown that India's nuclear policies have not only regional but also global significance, contributing to discussions on nuclear proliferation, disarmament, and international security.

To effectively address the persistent issues of nuclear proliferation, disarmament, and tensions in the area, it is imperative to comprehend India's complex stance on nuclear weapons and its aggressive involvement in influencing global discourse. India intends to contribute to a better and more secure world, as evidenced by its commitment to maintaining a credible but restricted nuclear posture. India's foreign policy approach, which is marked by a balance between deterrence and disarmament,

is an important issue that needs to be taken into account in the larger talks on nuclear weapon usage in the current geopolitical landscape in a world where the threat of nuclear conflict persists.