

6 CHAPTER

Issues Related to Nuclear Diplomacy

After reading the chapter, the reader will be able to develop an analytical understanding on the following:

- Nuclearisation of Asia
- Indian concept of disarmament
- Future nuclear strategy of India
- The objective of this chapter is to provide analytical insights into the issues confronting nuclear diplomacy of India and Asia at large.

THE NUCLEAR MATRIX AND THE NUCLEARISATION OF ASIA

Mahatma Gandhi once stated that those nations who have atom bombs are feared even by their friends. In 1998, India, after conducting a nuclear test, declared itself as a nuclear weapon state. Our first priority here is to analyse this contradiction—why did the land of Gandhi, which espoused the ideology of *ahimsa* for centuries, have to acquire nuclear weapons? Before we attempt our analysis, we need to understand that India has not acquired a nuclear weapon for enhancing its status or prestige in the world, which would rather be decided by how we solve our socio-economic problems and develop into a modern society, than by possession of nuclear weapons. In order to achieve our goals of human development, we need an environment that assures us of peace and stability.

The world actually witnessed the threat of nuclear confrontation for the first time during the period of the Cold War, when the world was ideologically divided, and nuclear weapons were used as instruments of political and military diplomacy. During the entire period of the Cold War, starting from 1946 onwards, the world witnessed more than 40 incidents where nuclear threats were exercised. A very detailed examination of the events and incidents (though beyond the purview of our analysis here) clearly prove that in all cases of nuclear threats, the country that exercised the threats played on asymmetry of the other nations. The country on which the nuclear threat was exercised either had no nuclear arsenal or was in an asymmetrical state with low capability to retaliate. For example, US conveyed a number of nuclear threats to China from 1950 to 1964 but when, in 1964, China acquired nuclear capability, the threats vanished.

The responses of the threatened parties were thus appropriately shaped based on the exercise of asymmetry. Out of the 40 plus incidents of nuclear threat, more than 30 were exercised upon Asian states. The threat against India got aggravated post 1960s when China began to acquire a nuclear arsenal, after the two nations fought a border war. The Chinese also clarified that they would continue to retain the nuclear arsenal for an indefinite period and thus, the existential threat to India would continue to emanate in the

future. The nuclear threat to India further increased in 1971 when the US sent the USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal to coerce India to follow the US line. Though the threat got mitigated by the Soviet navy tailing the USS Enterprise, it did expose our vulnerability. Thus, the core logic for India to possess nuclear weapons emerged from the changing geo-political and strategic concerns in our regional and global environment.

India's initial nuclear policy was driven by the Chinese factor; and the same factor shall continue to remain dominant in our policy discourse. As the Chinese economy grows in the 21st century and it uses its economic muscle to modernise its military, it will eventually alter the strategic balance of Asia. Though Sino-Indian relations have improved significantly in the post-Cold War period, India needs to be prepared for the future where there is any reversal of the relations back to pre-1962 times. If India continues to follow the spirit of non-alignment where it refrains from joining any military alliance with any state in the future, it will need its own insurance policy based on a principle of self-reliance. As China remains reluctant to give up its own nuclear weapons, the only way to have insurance is for India to have its own nuclear weapons. Since independence, India has pursued a nuclear policy where it has kept the option of a nuclear weapons open. However, India has exercised restraint, which was based upon the Indian civilisation value of following the middle path.

India still favours disarmament despite being a nuclear weapon state, but this is principally based on a global disarmament policy. Only a global nuclear disarmament will serve Indian national security interests. India has made it clear that it cannot be right that some countries have the ability to exercise the nuclear option while others don't. Either all nations in the world should have a right to have a nuclear weapon or all nations should go for complete disarmament. Despite possessing nuclear weapons, India is willing to go for disarmament if the world moves to achieve global disarmament. Since the end of the Cold War, there was a shift from disarmament to non-proliferation.

The non-proliferation order in the post-Cold War period revolves around the NPT. However, the indefinite extension of NPT in the 1995 Review Conference has only heightened Indian concerns. The inclination of nuclear weapon states since the end of the Cold War has been towards tightening the non-proliferation order to ensure that nuclear weapon states continue to maintain their hegemony. Even the CTBT and FMCT, instead of contributing to disarmament, have remained measures that propose and promote non-proliferation. By 1998, as the nuclear non-proliferation order tightened around it, India realised that if it does not exercise the open option to break out of it, then it would have been left with no options at all. Thus, India in 1998, after the nuclear test, broke out of the situation and emerged as a nuclear weapon state, thereby rectifies the asymmetry with nuclear weapons as an insurance against any arm-twisting or nuclear coercion by any power.



Indira Gandhi and 1974 Test

India had established a plutonium reprocessing facility at Trombay that had generated a huge stockpile of plutonium which was weapon grade in nature. The operation of the Purnima reactor designed by the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre had provided

Indian scientists the data needed for designing nuclear explosive devices. The scientists pressed the government to grant permission to conduct a nuclear explosion at the subterranean level for use in civil engineering purposes. The US and the USSR, during the Cold War period, conducted many Peaceful Nuclear Explosions. Indira Gandhi finally approved the Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE) for Indian scientists in October, 1972. One of the immediate factors that motivated Indira Gandhi to give a go-ahead for the PNE was the Bangladesh war. In the 1971 war, US had sent the nuclear-powered Enterprise Mission into the Bay of Bengal. After the visit of Henry Kissinger to China, he told the Indian Ambassador to Washington, L K Jha, that if there is an Indo-Pak war over East Pakistan and in case the Chinese intervene in the war to support Pakistan, the US would not be able to support India. Both these incidents were perceived by India as outright intimidation. Though no paper records exist for Indira Gandhi's decision to give a green signal for PNE, it is widely believed that this was one of the reasons that influenced her decision. Another reason was the continuous Chinese nuclear testing from 1964 onwards, which was certainly important in the security calculus of India. The core factors that influenced Indian decision-makers to make a decision in favour of the PNE in 1974 are explained in the diagram below.

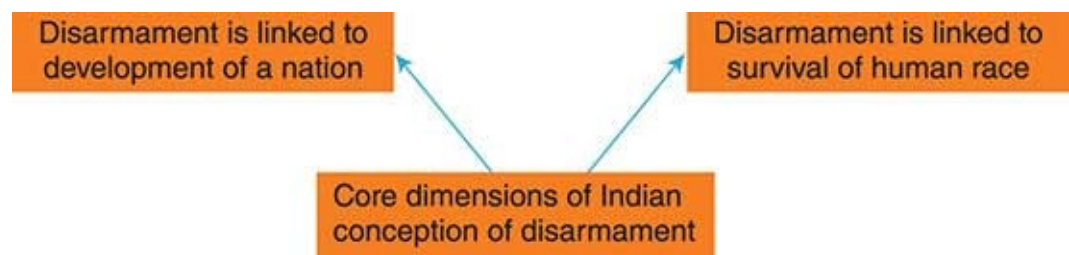


INDIAN CONCEPT OF DISARMAMENT

India tested the nuclear weapon in 1998 and proclaimed itself to be a nuclear weapon state. Does that mean that India has switched over from its goal of disarmament? In this section, we shall try to assert that even though India has decided to weaponise, it still remains committed to global disarmament including domestic disarmament if there is a global will. Even today a Nuclear Weapons Free World (NFWF) remains a cherished goal for India, which it intends to achieve. However, it is imperative for us here to make an assessment of the Indian conception and initiatives on Nuclear Disarmament.

India has long been a champion of nuclear disarmament. In 1940, even before our independence, Nehru, in a confidential note written at Wardha on 25th August, 1940, had advocated the need of complete disarmament. The initial leadership of modern India articulated its views against a nuclear weapon and favoured nuclear disarmament on both security and moral grounds, arguing that nuclear weapons are against the spirit of humanity. The Indian ideal of NFWF was based upon the requisite of survival of humanity and the human race. India tried to position the issue of a NFWF not just as an international problem but one that affected the very existence of mankind. No nation in the world except India has ever tried to link the concept of disarmament to the survival of the human race. India perceived disarmament not as an end in itself but as a means for ensuring global peace, security, progress and development. India has been an ardent supporter of a time bound framework to achieve disarmament, but unfortunately, on this

point, it has merely received cold support from nuclear weapon states. India is also the only nation in the world that has propounded a link between disarmament and development. India has been a firm believer that if a country undertakes disarmament and reduction in military expenditure, it would help a country to have access to extra resources which it can use for development.



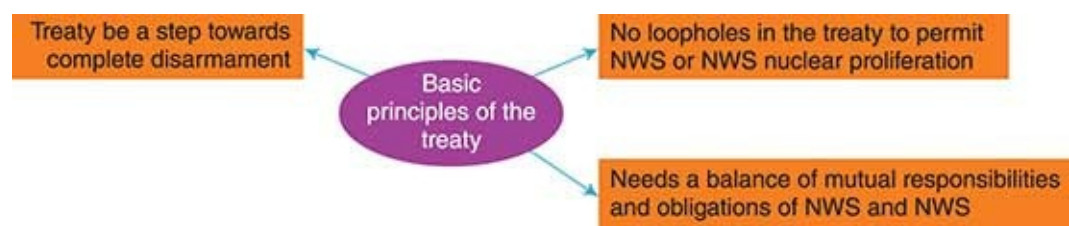
It is important to note that India has used every multilateral forum and opportunity available to pursue its objectives consensually.



In 1948, when the UN Atomic Energy Commission was established, India advocated a complete elimination of nuclear weapons and proposed that atomic energy be only used by nations for peaceful purposes. In 1950, India proposed the establishment of a UN Peace Fund to ensure that countries don’t indulge in arms race and use the amount spent on arms race for development through the Peace Fund. After the US tested its first hydrogen bomb in 1954 in Marshall Islands, Nehru, on 2nd April, 1954, in a speech in the Parliament suggested a standstill agreement on all explosions.



Despite India having raised the matter innumerable times at various multilateral fora in the 1950s and 1960s, the measures proposed did not receive much attention and horizontal and vertical nuclear proliferation continued. In 1964, India sowed the seeds to a future NPT by placing “Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons” on the UN agenda for discussion to adopt an international treaty.



India continuously raised the disarmament issue at the Special Sessions on Disarmament, the Six Nation Five Continent Peace Initiative (with Argentina, Greece,

Mexico, Sweden and Tanzania) and through the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan, but with the absence of political will amongst Nuclear weapon states, the success of disarmament in a time-bound framework remained a distant goal. Thus, after waiting for almost 50 years, India finally responded in 1998 by undertaking the Pokhran–II which became a game changer. Even after Pokhran–II, India clarified that it would support a NFWF if all countries in the world opt for complete disarmament. The failure to achieve global consensus for nuclear disarmament, coupled with deteriorating strategic environment), necessitated Indian acquisition of weapons but India remains committed to the goal of global disarmament and a NFWF.

FUTURE NUCLEAR STRATEGY FOR INDIA

As the thrust to disarmament has shifted towards prevention of proliferation, it is all the more important for India to press for disarmament. India needs to press for disarmament for moral and ethical reasons. India, in the post Pokhran-II period, has advocated that in order to achieve effective non-proliferation, total elimination of nuclear weapons should be aimed for. Since the end of the Cold War, India has become an ardent supporter of a multipolar world. A multipolar world is possible only if it is non-hegemonic, and by extension, non-nuclear. India has stated that possession of nuclear weapons is antithetical to the achievement of a non-hegemonic international order. Since the two states are non-compatible, the only logical step favours complete nuclear disarmament. A more equitable international order is possible only if the nuclear weapons are eliminated. India has tried to link democratisation of the International order as a core principle leading to the evolution of national domestic democracy. India has pitched for complete elimination of nuclear weapons by all states in the world as a pre-requisite for its own national security. India has stated that it will also waive the rights to have its own nuclear arsenal. India's message now is clear—that we should denuclearise in proportion to the denuclearisation of the Nuclear Weapon States.