
India and Nuclear Disarmament

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Notwithstanding its acquisition of nuclear weapons capability, India has adhered to a long-standing commitment to universal nuclear disarmament. Its optimism over recent global initiatives is clouded by the concern that these may well be discriminatory and biased toward nonproliferation. Currently, India continues to pursue the capabilities it feels are consistent with minimum deterrence. The prerequisites for its participation in the disarmament process include deep cuts by the United States and Russia, multilateral steps toward a convention committing all states to universal disarmament and toward the adoption of the principle of No First Use, and the involvement of China and Pakistan in the process. A key to facilitating India's participation would be its full transition from an outsider to an insider vis-à-vis the nonproliferation regime.

India's voice has not appeared to be prominent in the growing chorus in favour of universal nuclear disarmament. This must seem surprising to those who have followed its long history as an advocate of a nuclear weapons-free world, but unsurprising to those who take that history with a pinch of salt and see India, moreover, as cocking a snook at the nuclear nonproliferation regime by walking out of test ban talks and conducting a series of nuclear tests in 1998. A closer look shows that India has not lost enthusiasm for disarmament, but is now just one amongst a myriad voices calling for the same end state. More pertinently, it has not clearly articulated its position on what it considers the prerequisites for its active role in the actual disarmament process. What exactly does India want? When will it begin to disarm? An attempt will be made to answer these questions below. The next section will trace the history of Indian interest in disarmament from its vanguard days in the post-colonial era to the more subdued tone of the present. The section that follows will examine its current position on disarmament and its response to recent initiatives around the world. The final portion of this essay will assess the extent to which India, as an emerging power, is likely to respond to forward movement in the disarmament process.¹

From Vanguard to Follower? A Brief History of India's Disarmament Policy

Indian leaders at the beginning of the nuclear era were deeply uneasy with the invention of the bomb. M. K. Gandhi, widely regarded as the architect of Indian independence, rejected nuclear weapons as morally unacceptable.²

¹ The author thanks his fellow-participants at the conference and an anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

² For a compendium of Gandhi's views, see Y. P. Anand, *What Mahatma Gandhi Said about the Bomb* (New Delhi: National Gandhi Museum, 1998).

India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was pragmatic enough to keep the possibility of nuclear weapons development open, but nevertheless opposed them because, as he put it, "we know that the use of these weapons amounts to genocide."³ It is hardly surprising then that India was in the forefront of calls for disarmament from early on.⁴ Its advocacy of universal nuclear disarmament goes back as far as 1948. In 1954, it proposed an end to nuclear testing. In 1965 it favoured a non-discriminatory treaty banning nuclear proliferation, but walked away from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) on the ground that it discriminated between nuclear haves and have-nots.

In 1974, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi appeared to have abandoned the Gandhi-Nehru legacy when she authorized a nuclear test. The claim that it was a "peaceful" explosion was met with scepticism and there was widespread disappointment that India had stepped down from its moral high ground. Yet, few came to appreciate the still more remarkable fact that, having tested the bomb, Mrs. Gandhi made no move to go ahead and build an arsenal, but returned to the rhetoric of disarmament. What explains this second reversal? One answer is to ascribe it to "an unsettled domestic political order plus an unwillingness to press the advantage over Pakistan."⁵ It could be argued that there was no real threat—the Soviet Union deterred China from attacking India. But there was no particular reason to believe that it would always do so. A more feasible explanation is that Mrs. Gandhi had accomplished her objective of asserting India's independence (vis-a-vis its apparent dependence on the Soviet Union) and could—with the confidence that basic nuclear capability had been achieved—afford to realign herself with a normative perspective that found nuclear weapons discomfiting at best.⁶ In short, the making of the bomb did not dislodge the sustained Indian interest in disarmament.

In 1978, India called for negotiations toward an international convention prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Its most comprehensive proposal came in the form of the Action Plan for complete and universal nuclear disarmament, which Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi presented to the United Nations General Assembly's Third Special Session on Disarmament in 1988. The comprehensive plan envisaged a time-bound agenda encompassing an end to testing, the non-use of nuclear weapons,

³ Cited in B. N. Mullick, *My Years with Nehru* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1972), p. 161.

⁴ For a brief review of India's initiatives on nuclear disarmament, see 'Statement on Nuclear Disarmament by Ambassador Jayant Prasad, Permanent Representative of India to the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, 13 February 2007', Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 13 February 2007, <<http://meaindia.nic.in/speech/2007/02/21ss01.htm>> [Accessed 6 July 2010].

⁵ Stephen P. Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), p. 170.

⁶ For a detailed review of Indian leaders' normative distaste for nuclear weapons, see Rajesh M. Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 49-79.

and phased reductions of weapons systems and fissile material to the point of total elimination. In 1996, along with other members of the 'Group of 21', India also supported a Programme of Action for complete elimination.

In the meantime, India had already produced the bomb covertly. That being the case, the 1996 proposal could be interpreted as shallow, even cynical. But there is nothing inherently contradictory in calling for disarmament and producing nuclear weapons at the same time. As Shyam Saran, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Special Envoy, later observed:

In a world populated by states producing and deploying nuclear weapons, India's strategic autonomy must be safeguarded. However, we must not forget that, despite being a nuclear weapon state, India remains convinced that its security would be enhanced, no diminished, if a world free of nuclear weapons were to be achieved.⁷

Nonetheless, it is true that India backed away somewhat from its commitment to disarmament in the mid-1990s. Shyam Saran's observation on strategic autonomy is pertinent here. By this time, the Indian government was under pressure from the Clinton Administration to cap and roll back its covert nuclear programme. The indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995 seemed to Indian eyes to have cast "nuclear apartheid" in stone. The negotiations on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) turned sour as the treaty appeared to shut the door on India's nuclear option without extracting any firm commitments on disarmament from the "recognised" nuclear weapons states.⁸ To break out of the tightening squeeze, India decided to test and, after some hesitation (Prime Minister Narasimha Rao retracted a testing order under US pressure in 1995), did so in 1998. Thereafter, Indian nuclear diplomacy focused on defending the decision, on tackling the international sanctions that followed, and on keeping the nuclear door firmly open.

The post-test period has seen a gradual shift in India's position from being an "outsider" vis-à-vis the NPT-centred structure of the nuclear nonproliferation regime to being acknowledged as a potential "insider". India drew close to the George W. Bush Administration and built a strategic partnership with the United States. This was leveraged, along with India's record as a successful democracy and as a "responsible nuclear power", to persuade sceptics in the United States and among the members of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) that an exception could be made to the regime's rules to permit trade in nuclear materials with it. The indirect but undeniable result was that India effectively gained legitimacy as a nuclear

⁷ Presentation by Special Envoy of the Prime Minister Shri Shyam Saran on 'India and the Nuclear Domain' at the India International Centre, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 18 February 2008, <<http://meaindia.nic.in/speech/2008/02/19ss01.htm>> [Accessed 26 July 2010].

⁸ Jyotika Saksena, 'Regime Design Matters: The CTBT and India's Nuclear Dilemma', *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 25, no. 3 (July 2006), pp. 209-29.

power since the arrangement involved a legal agreement by which India would separate its military and civilian nuclear facilities. Though this was a turning point of some significance, India has continued to be preoccupied with defending its strategic autonomy. Pressures to sign the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state have not ceased altogether; calls for India to sign the CTBT continue to be made from time to time; and, most significantly, American sanctions against some of its nuclear weapons- and space-related agencies are still in place at the time of writing (late July 2010). In short, India is still preoccupied with strengthening its position vis-à-vis the nonproliferation regime and, accordingly, has not appeared as enthusiastic about its traditional position on nuclear disarmament as before. That said, however, it would be inaccurate to say that its interest in the issue has faded.

Current Position and Response to Disarmament Initiatives

Indian interest in a world free of nuclear weapons has remained significant despite its acquisition of nuclear weapons. Immediately after the 1998 tests, India declared an indefinite moratorium on testing and reaffirmed its commitment to disarmament. Both points were incorporated in the press release that sketched Indian nuclear doctrine in January 2003.⁹ By this time, Indian concerns were underlined by the tide of terrorist activity that had engulfed not only the state of Jammu and Kashmir, but also areas well beyond, including a commando-style assault on the Indian parliament in December 2001. Threats to attack India's nuclear infrastructure appeared from time to time. Immediately after the September 11 attacks in the United States, Sheikh Jamilur Rehman of the Tehrik-ul-Mujahideen threatened to target Indian nuclear facilities.¹⁰ The exposure of the A. Q. Khan network, which had proliferated nuclear technology from Pakistan, was also a source of anxiety.¹¹ Though the network had proliferated, so far as is known, only to state entities, there was a very real fear that its activities might benefit terrorists groups as well. It bears recalling that Osama bin Laden had personally met at least two senior scientists who had been involved in Pakistan's nuclear programme.¹² These concerns remain alive in the minds of Indian policy makers today. They also believe that, in the long term, the threat of nuclear terrorism can only be eradicated by the elimination of nuclear weapons.¹³ At the same time, there is concern that "an excessive

⁹ 'The Cabinet Committee on Security Reviews Operationalization of India's Nuclear Doctrine', Press Release, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 4 January 2003, <<http://meadev.nic.in/news/official/20030104/official.htm>> [Accessed 19 February 2003].

¹⁰ Sharvani Pandit, 'Terrorists Vow to Hit Indian N-Sites', *Rediff.com*, 12 September 2001, <<http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/sep/12ter.htm>> [Accessed 27 July 2010].

¹¹ *Nuclear Black Markets: Pakistan, A. Q. Khan, and the Rise of Proliferation Networks* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2007).

¹² 'Pakistan Holds Nuclear Scientists', *BBC News*, 25 October 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/1619252.stm> [Accessed 27 July 2010].

¹³ Keynote Address by External Affairs Minister at the IDSA 10th Asian Security Conference, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 5 February 2008, <<http://meaindia.nic.in/speech/2008/02/05ss01.htm>> [Accessed 27 July 2010]; 'India Backs

focus on non-proliferation does a disservice to the essential principle of the mutually reinforcing linkage between disarmament and non-proliferation.”¹⁴

Given India’s continuing interest in disarmament, it is worth looking a little more closely at how it has responded to the changing global sentiment in favour of disarmament. If Indian interest *appears* to be subdued, that is easily explained. Earlier, India was one of the few voices calling for universal disarmament. Now that there are so many others making the same demand, India’s voice is just one of many. There is also a natural tendency to focus on those who were at the centre of Cold War nuclear confrontations. India is not one of them. But in fact India has continued to show initiative in this area. In 2006, it proposed the adoption of a Nuclear Weapons Convention. In March 2008, India’s Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament (CD), Hamid Ali Rao, presented a seven-point agenda for nuclear disarmament, which called for:

- Unequivocal commitment to the goal of total elimination of nuclear weapons;
- Reduction in the salience of nuclear weapons in security doctrines;
- A no first use agreement among all nuclear-armed states;
- An agreement not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-armed states;
- A convention prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons;
- A convention proscribing the development, production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons; and
- Verifiable and non-discriminatory elimination of all nuclear weapons.¹⁵

“Transparent” Global Nuclear Disarmament’, *Global Security Newswire*, 12 February 2010, <http://gsn.nti.org/gsn/nw_20100209_4297.php> [Accessed 12 February 2010].

¹⁴ Letter from Permanent Representative of India to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council Outlining India’s Approach and Perspectives Regarding the Security Council’s Summit Meeting on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Nuclear Disarmament, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 24 September 2009, <<http://meaindia.nic.in/speech/2009/09/24ss04.htm>> [Accessed 6 July 2010].

¹⁵ Pranab Dhal Samanta, ‘India for No-nuke World Order, Ready to Make No-first [sic] Use a Multilateral Pact’, *Indian Express*, 3 March 2008, <<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/india-for-nonuke-world-order-ready-to-make/279396/>> [Accessed 27 July 2010].

In June that year, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh hosted an international conference in New Delhi, where he reiterated his government's position on the points listed above.¹⁶

How have Indian officials and, more broadly, the strategic elite responded to the wave of interest in disarmament? The public advocacy of disarmament by the so-called “four horsemen”—George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn—aroused considerable interest.¹⁷ India's Defence Minister, A. K. Anthony, welcomed the “rethink” and hoped that it would lead to a universal commitment to disarmament.¹⁸ But some influential figures, while applauding the initiative, were also critical. Shyam Saran, former Foreign Secretary and later Special Envoy of India's Prime Minister, argued that the four horsemen did not go far enough: in contrast with their perception of disarmament as a very distant goal, “the need of the hour is to bring it down into plain sight.”¹⁹ He also warned that the disarmament drive had the potential to become a nonproliferation push targeting developing nations and denying them civilian technology. R. Rajaraman, a well-known pro-disarmament academic, who echoed this view, was critical of the four horsemen's claim that the new nuclear states may not be able to achieve the stability of the Cold War era by replicating mutually assured destruction. He noted further that their emphasis on nuclear terrorism as the main reason for disarmament “may not be universally shared” and that “some non-nuclear weapons states might view the existing state-owned arsenals as a bigger threat.”²⁰ On the whole, the Indian view is that the shift of the centre of gravity away from nuclear weapons as the pillars of security toward disarmament is a positive sign and one that is in keeping with Indian preferences. But this optimism is qualified by considerable doubt as to how balanced the shift will actually be over time and by the need to sustain India's deterrence capability until the prospect of actual disarmament becomes realistic. This is not markedly different from the four horsemen's position in a January 2010 opinion editorial that “as we work to reduce nuclear weaponry and to realize the vision of a world without nuclear

¹⁶ ‘India Prime Minister Pitches Global Nuclear Disarmament’, *Voice of America*, 9 June 2008, <<http://voanews.com/english/2008-06-09-voa13.cfm>> [Accessed 6 July 2010].

¹⁷ George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, ‘A World Free of Nuclear Weapons’, *Wall Street Journal*, 4 January 2007, <<http://www.hoover.org/publications/hoover-digest/article/6109>> [Accessed on 27 July 2010]; ‘Toward A Nuclear Free World’, *Wall Street Journal*, 15 January 2008, <http://www.nti.org/c_press/TOWARD_A_NUCLEAR_FREE_WORLD_OPED_011508.pdf> [Accessed on 27 July 2010].

¹⁸ Key Note Address by External Affairs Minister at the IDSA 10th Asian Security Conference, Ministry of External Affairs.

¹⁹ Shyam Saran, ‘Cold Warriors Do a Flip’, *Times of India*, 26 February 2008, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Opinion/LEADER_ARTICLE_Cold_Warriors_Do_A_Flip/articleshow/2814064.cms> [Accessed 26 February 2008].

²⁰ R. Rajaraman, ‘Get Rid of Nuclear Arms’, *Times of India*, 5 March 2008, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Opinion/LEADER_ARTICLE_Get_Rid_Of_Nuclear_Arms/articleshow/2838373.cms> [Accessed 5 March 2008].

weapons, we recognize the necessity to maintain the safety, security and reliability of our own weapons.”²¹

Other developments have attracted some interest, but, with the novelty of the four horsemen’s proposal ebbing, not as much excitement is visible. In April 2009, Hamid Ali Rao welcomed the new mood among scholars and statesmen.²² In March 2010, he noted again that there was a “new momentum for global disarmament” and that India “continues to attach the highest priority” to that goal.²³ On both occasions, he reaffirmed the essential points on disarmament put forward by India at the Conference on Disarmament in 2008. Following the 2008 US elections, initial indications were that President Barack Obama’s policies were likely to be more in tune with the agenda of the American nonproliferation lobby and that the new administration would pull back from its predecessor’s strong pro-India stance. As a result, Indian policy makers were uncertain about the value of supporting Obama’s initiatives. India’s interest in the April 2010 Nuclear Security Summit was not particularly strong till late in 2009. It was only in early December that Obama and Singh ironed out some of the wrinkles in the relationship, following which the latter despatched Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao to Tokyo for the first preparatory meeting at very short notice.²⁴ At the Summit, Singh praised the New START treaty and welcomed the US *Nuclear Posture Review*. Though he otherwise played a relatively low-key part, Singh did announce the creation of a Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership in India. The Centre aims to build collaborative projects through its four schools for Advanced Nuclear Energy System Studies, Nuclear Security, Radiation Safety, and the application of Radioisotopes and Radiation Technology in the areas of healthcare, agriculture and food.²⁵ On his return to India, the prime minister expressed

²¹ George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, ‘How to Protect Our Nuclear Deterrent’, *Wall Street Journal*, 19 January 2010, <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704152804574628344282735008.html>> [Accessed 27 July 2010].

²² Statement by H. E. Mr. Hamid Ali Rao, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of India to the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, at the 2009 Session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York, 15 April 2009, <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/dc/statements09/15April_India.pdf> [Accessed 27 July 2010].

²³ Statement by Ambassador Hamid Ali Rao, Permanent Representative of India to the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, at the 2010 Substantive Session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York, 30 March 2010, <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/dc/statements10/30March_India.pdf> [Accessed 27 July 2010].

²⁴ Shubhajit Roy, ‘Ahead of Nuclear Summit, Rao Heads to Japan’, *Indian Express*, 2 December 2009, <<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/ahead-of-nuclear-summit-rao-heads-to-japan/548775/>> [Accessed 2 December 2009].

²⁵ Statement by the Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh at the Nuclear Security Summit, Embassy of India, Washington, DC, 13 April 2010, <<http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail1501/statement-by-the-prime-minister-of-india-dr.-manmohan-singh-at-the-nuclear-security-summit->> [Accessed 28 July 2010].

his satisfaction with the summit, noting his “sense of vindication of India’s position” on the linkage between terrorism and nuclear proliferation.²⁶

However, the 2009 Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament (ICNND) was—and still is—viewed with some misgivings, though the criticism has appeared in the press rather than through official channels.²⁷ Unnamed “informed sources”—almost certainly official, since non-officials would not be chary of being quoted in the media—welcomed the report’s call to delegitimise nuclear weapons, but were critical of its recommendation that India, Pakistan and Israel be asked to assume nonproliferation obligations.²⁸ A part of the reason is that India simply dislikes being treated as an outsider with respect to any nonproliferation framework. The ICNND has not endeared itself to the Indian government by criticising the NSG’s clearance to nuclear trade with it and by asking that such trade be predicated upon a commitment not to carry out further tests. Former Indian National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra, a member of the Commission, has publicly dissociated himself from this demand.²⁹

Clearly, India has not lacked in interest with respect to disarmament. But it remains cautious, unsure of what it might get into in an environment which, in its view, is not yet fully committed to nuclear divestment and still prone to push a discriminatory nonproliferation agenda at the expense of a universal idea. The question, then, is what India views as a prerequisite for it to be more actively involved in the disarmament process.

Moving Forward: What Does India Want?

As it has regularly proposed, India would like to see a formal commitment to disarm. Though it has in the past repeatedly called for a “time-bound” commitment, that demand has become less insistent because it is not quite realistic. With respect to arms control, the Indian preference is oriented not toward the specifics of quantities and verification, but toward political understanding through confidence building. Beyond a point, of course, it will have to look at numbers and types of weapons, but to set a sustainable process in motion, it will pay more attention to commitment, communication

²⁶ Opening remarks by Prime Minister at the Press Conference after the Nuclear Security Summit, Embassy of India, Washington, DC, 13 April 2010, <<http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail1503/opening-remarks-by-prime-minister-at-the-press-conference-after-the-nuclear-security-summit>> [Accessed 28 July 2010].

²⁷ For the report, see *Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Nuclear Policy Makers* (Canberra/Tokyo: International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, November 2009).

²⁸ P. S. Suryanarayana, ‘Disarmament Panel Concerned at Exemption for India’, *Hindu*, 7 July 2010, <<http://www.thehindu.com/2010/07/07/stories/2010070755931500.htm>> [Accessed 7 July 2010].

²⁹ Sachin Parashar, ‘NSG’s “Clean Waiver” Questioned’, *Times of India*, 13 July 2010, <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/NSGs-clean-waiver-questioned-/articleshow/6159950.cms>> [Accessed 13 July 2010].

and transparency as a cumulative process that provides the political foundation for stability. This accounts for its emphasis on political areas of agreement such as a global commitment to disarm and on no first use (NFU) of nuclear weapons. In this connection, there is often a tendency to view NFU as having a practical bearing on nuclear postures. But that is not the way NFU is understood in India (other than by those trained in Cold War-type doctrinal thinking). One has only to appreciate that while India swears by NFU and Pakistan rejects it explicitly, both have adopted a minimalist non-deployed posture. In short, the Indian understanding of NFU is normative—as a political building block toward disarmament. The chief significance of US and Russian arms cuts is similarly political until they reach a sufficiently low level—say, down to a few hundred—to become pragmatically meaningful as a point at which India and other states can begin to plan for weapons cuts.

India would also like its primary adversaries to be involved in a multilateral consultative process. This will by no means happen easily. Pakistan, the more immediate threat, has built a nuclear arsenal because it fears India's conventional force advantage. With India experiencing rapid economic growth and pulling away to gain a substantial lead in conventional arms through a major military modernisation programme, Pakistan will become more dependent on its nuclear weapons to ensure its security. The one thing that can undermine this dependence is the transformation of the India-Pakistan relationship to one of peace. For the present, this seems unlikely to happen, but it bears recalling that the two countries were on the verge of a breakthrough in 2007. The recurrence of crises (1999, 2001-02, 2008) is certainly an incentive for both to prefer peacemaking and the widening gap between them surely invites Pakistan to rethink its capacity to alter the status quo on Kashmir.

China still fights shy of engaging India seriously on nuclear issues, apparently on the ground that to do so would effectively “recognise” India's status as a nuclear-armed power. That argument no longer holds water since China, as a member of the NSG, has permitted the alteration of the rules of nuclear trade to benefit India. The NSG's concession to India rests on the recognition that India has separated its military and civilian facilities, which amounts to an indirect acknowledgement that India legitimately possesses nuclear weapons. Ultimately, there is no getting away from the reality of a negotiating process that must involve all the nuclear-armed states, regardless of whether they are in some way considered legally ‘recognised’ or not.

A key point that is not sufficiently appreciated is that India's hesitations have much to do with its uncertain status vis-à-vis the “recognised” nuclear powers. Its position as an outsider, though not as difficult as that of a pariah or “rogue”, is nevertheless unacceptable to policy makers as well as the interested public. We can see the sensitivity of this issue through the lens of

history and that of political sociology. Prominent in the Indian national consciousness is a history of dominance by colonial powers, mainly but not only the British, who tailored the rules of economic and political life to suit the interests of the imperial centre. During the 1970s and 1980s, India championed the cause of the global South precisely in order to try and change the rules of engagement with the centre. That effort has been abandoned as futile and ideologically unsound, and indeed, India has cosied up to the capitalist centre it once rejected. But it remains for India to be accepted as an insider, one of those who make the rules in both security and economic matters. This explains India's significant role in opposing what it views as the imposition of unwelcome multilateral rules on trade and climate change.

In the critical area of security, the nonproliferation regime has been breached, but India is still on the defensive in many ways. What it wants is to be accommodated as a participant in the rule making process. Once it has attained that position, it is much more likely to play an enthusiastic part in the thrust for disarmament. It is worth recalling a comparable shift with respect to India's stand on the Antarctic Treaty regime.³⁰ Till the early 1980s, India was sharply critical of the Antarctic Treaty as representing a charmed circle of powerful players who had established themselves on the continent and framed rules without consulting the majority of states that had no bases there. But after 1983, when it became a party to the treaty, India reversed its position and became a faithful member of the cabal it had energetically rejected. It is in this connection that we may view the significance of India's repeated assurance to one and all that it is a "responsible" nuclear power. An India that is treated as an insider is likely to return to its old fervour for disarmament; one that remains an outsider is likely to be relatively formal and tepid in its advocacy in the way it is today.

An additional aspect is that of status. Awareness of the colonial past is embedded in the Indian argument that the NPT represents "nuclear apartheid" and every call for India to sign the treaty as a non-nuclear weapon state is effectively a call for it to dig in its heels even more. To expect a society that is in many ways tradition-bound and still characterised by rigid lines of social hierarchy (the caste system) to accept a lesser status in the community of states is to expect rather a lot. To take the argument further, enhancement of social group status has for centuries been, and remains today, a central dynamic of Indian society regardless of one's ethnic or religious affiliation.³¹ The quest for recognition as a responsible emerging power and for permanent membership of the Security Council and, more

³⁰ Ramesh Thakur and Hyam Gold, 'The Antarctic Treaty Regime: Exclusive Preserve or Common Heritage?', *Foreign Affairs Reports*, vol. 32, no. 11-12 (November-December 1983), pp. 169-86.

³¹ A fine introduction to the caste system is still M. N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961).

generally, for a seat at the table of major players in the international system, carries a powerful symbolism revolving around status. The first organised effort to bring India into the insiders' circle appears to be a response, conscious or otherwise, to this. In June 2010, the Working Group on an Expanded Nonproliferation System, established by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Nuclear Threat Initiative in Washington, urged the US and Indian Governments to work toward the inclusion of India in the broad nonproliferation regime.³² Specifically, the statement backed Indian membership of the four main pillars of the regime: the NSG, the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Wassenaar Arrangement (which deals with the arms trade); and the Australia Group (chemical weapons). Whether the call will be heard remains to be seen. But it seems a reasonable expectation that if it does, India will play a far more active role in the drive for disarmament than it does now.

How far will India go in making concessions on its nuclear policy in order to gain status? Not very far. Japan has insisted on India's formal commitment to eschew testing as a precondition to signing a civilian nuclear agreement with it. But India has held back, preferring to "agree to disagree" rather than give in.³³ Its position is likely to remain firm because it has long withstood coercive pressures to change its stand on the NPT and on testing, including intense pressures preceding the finalization of the India-US nuclear agreement of 2008. Also, its bargaining power has become stronger after that agreement as it has options other than Japan, notably South Korea.³⁴ A key point is that the demand that India accept constraints on testing is superfluous and serves only to raise Indian hackles. It makes little sense to demand restraint from a country which tested and did not produce a nuclear armoury for a decade and a half thereafter and which refrains from deploying its weapons despite having experienced repeated crises since the 1990s. Much more can be gained by making India an insider vis-a-vis the nonproliferation regime.

The extent of Indian involvement in the process of disarmament will be shaped by domestic politics. While there is a broad consensus that the elimination of nuclear weapons is undesirable, the terms of India's participation in the process will be scrutinised closely by political parties across the spectrum regardless of which is in power. Any perception of inequity or the perception that the process is driven by a nonproliferation

³² *India's Integration into an Expanded Nonproliferation System*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 30 June 2010, <<http://csis.org/press/press-release/indias-integration-expanded-nonproliferation-system>> [Accessed on 1 July 2010].

³³ P. S. Suryanarayana, 'Talks on Civil Nuclear Pact with India Will Continue,' *Hindu*, 19 October 2010, <<http://www.thehindu.com/2010/10/19/stories/2010101961770900.htm>> [accessed 19 October 2010].

³⁴ Indrani Bagchi, 'India-Japan N-Deal Likely to Be Delayed,' *Times of India*, 5 October 2010, <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-Japan-N-deal-likely-to-be-delayed-/articleshow/6685241.cms>> [accessed 5 October 2010].

agenda with India as the outsider will bring strong opposition in Parliament and tightly circumscribe the government's options. The Indian political system has over the years become a highly fragmented one, with governments since the 1990s being formed by multi-party coalitions. On contentious issues, coalitions have the potential to fall apart, as was evident in the case of the India-US nuclear agreement, which nearly caused the fall of the Manmohan Singh government in 2008.³⁵

Not everyone will agree that India is favourably inclined toward disarmament. There are two major arguments purporting to show why India will be a reluctant disarmer.³⁶ First, its nuclear weapons have given it the ultimate guarantee of security. From this perspective, a rising power that is likely to face threats on an expanding scale would be unwise to give up the most powerful arrows in its quiver. Second, why should an India which has gained entry into the prestigious nuclear club abandon the very instruments that have put it there? The first is a practical matter, resting on the security requirements of the Indian state. Arguably, while "a rational case for disarmament exists", India risks inviting pressure to disarm at a juncture when its deterrent forces are "as yet incomplete".³⁷ But this naturally raises the question: when is a nation's arsenal "complete"? One suspects that, for an advocate of assured destruction doctrine, the answer, if not "never", will almost certainly place adequacy at a very high level. On the other hand, if one goes by the history of deterrence worldwide, it actually takes very little to deter.³⁸ There is nothing inherently incongruous in espousing the long-term goal of disarmament while retaining the insurance of a minimalist nuclear weapons posture in the interim.

The second is a more powerful argument. Symbols carry considerable weight, as we know, and the search for prestige is in innumerable ways a significant motivation among men, women and states. But the case is as strong as the evidence that holds it together—and there is not much in the present context. Scholars have tried to build an argument for it;³⁹ but there is as much and more evidence to show the opposite. For instance, if Indian policy makers view nuclear weapons as sources of prestige, why do they not flaunt them in full view rather than keep them stored in unassembled

³⁵ Rajesh Basrur, 'Domestic Political Fragmentation and Constraints on Indian Security Policy', paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, 17-20 February 2010, <http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p416289_index.html>.

³⁶ Natasha Barnes, Tanya Ogilvie-White and Rodrigo Alvarez Valdés, 'The NPT Holdouts: Universality as an Elusive Goal', *Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 27, no. 1 (March 2010), pp. 95-113, see esp pp. 97-100.

³⁷ Kanwal Sibal, 'Let's Get Real', *Times of India*, 23 June 2008, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Opinion/Editorial/LEADER_ARTICLE_Lets_Get_Real/article_show/3154688.cms> [Accessed 23 June 2008].

³⁸ Rajesh M. Basrur, *South Asia's Cold War: Nuclear Weapons and Conflict in Comparative Perspective* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 13-35.

³⁹ See, for example Scott D. Sagan, 'Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb', *International Security*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 54-86.

condition? Again, why have Indian political leaders of every persuasion from left to right underemphasised the value of nuclear weapons in ensuring national security, said little about them in policy pronouncements or in electoral campaigns, and consistently pursued arms control initiatives with adversaries? Critics confuse one kind of prestige with another. What India wants is not the prestige of the bomb, but the prestige—and the status that goes with it—of membership of the major powers' club. That the bomb is not a necessary instrument for attaining the latter is evident from the secondary place it occupies in national security discourse and from India's consistent interest in arms control and disarmament.

Conclusion

Strategically, as we have seen, India is far from averse to the idea of disarmament. Tactically, it has adopted a quiet but not inactive position in response to the rising global interest in eliminating nuclear weapons. That movement is likely to remain a slow and prolonged one and Indian policy makers are in no hurry to push it along. As and when it does get down to serious multilateral engagement on specifics, India is likely to become an active participant in the process. So long as it finds the proposals emerging from the movement non-discriminatory, it will not set up road blocks. And to the extent that it achieves its larger goal of overcoming the obstacles it has faced from the nonproliferation regime, its involvement is likely to be more fervent.

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