Chapter – III

MANAGING THE NUCLEAR DIVIDE

One of the greatest obstacles in expanding strategic co-operation between India and the United States has been the American agenda of nuclear non-proliferation. India’s nuclear policy has been at odds with that of the United States in this regard. While, India has traditionally supported global nuclear disarmament, the United States supported limitation of nuclear weapons. The US wanted to prevent further proliferation of nuclear weapons. It proudly pointed to the reduction of its stockpile of nuclear weapons following the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) I and II. The figures, which it accepted in the negotiations as the optimum, were, however, always higher than possessed by any other nuclear power.

Indeed, the United States regards its nuclear weapons as essential for its security. As explained by a former US Under Secretary of Defence, Walter Slocombe:

A key conclusion of the administration’s national security is (that) the United States would retain access to strategic nuclear forces sufficient to deter any future hostile foreign leadership with access to strategic nuclear forces from action against our vital national interests and to convince, it that seeking nuclear advantage would be futile.¹

Indo-US differences over nuclear proliferation might not have occurred, had India decided to go nuclear in 1964, when China carried out nuclear tests. In that case, India might have received assistance from the United States. But once the US established friendship with China during the Nixon administration, it no longer needed India as a medium to contain China. The United States, therefore, strongly opposed India's first nuclear tests conducted at Pokhran-I in 1974 and subsequent missile programmes. Apart from the United States, certain Western powers along with Japan too started applying pressure on India, after its first nuclear test, to force it to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

But, India declined to join any treaty or regime, which would have restrained the development of its own nuclear or missile programmes for its national interest. As Indian public opinion strongly supports these programmes, it would have been extremely unpopular for any Indian Government to give the impression that these programmes were being jettisoned under external pressure. This issue, therefore, became a major bone of contention between India and the US, despite certain areas of understanding between the two democracies of the world.

---

President Clinton's Non-Proliferation Concerns

The Clinton administration was in a great hurry to bring India and Pakistan into non-proliferation net, owing to several factors and developments in the post Cold War period:

First, the acquisition of nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War world involved heavy economic and political costs. The US felt that in many cases they may deteriorate rather than promote security and therefore, the need for non-proliferation in the nuclear field was emphasised. For instance, on September 27, 1993, President Clinton delivered a speech at United Nations in which he promised to give top priority to non-proliferation in foreign and national security policy. He reviewed his administration’s accomplishments in non-proliferation during a foreign policy speech at the Nixon Center on March 1, 1995 stating that there was no other important task than to fight the spread of weapons of mass destruction.³

Second, the issue of nuclear non-proliferation did acquire a new momentum in the post Cold War era, particularly with China, France and

South Africa deciding to sign the NPT and Argentina and Brazil willing to open the nuclear facility to international inspections.

Third, while the world was moving towards non-proliferation, South Asia emerged as one of the regional flash points that could escalate into a nuclear war. The US was concerned about India’s rapid development in the nuclear and missile field for that had given the latter a degree of self sufficiency. India had crossed the important threshold and acquired a wide range of capabilities in nuclear technology. It had successfully developed indigenous sophisticated technology to sustain the critical nuclear chain such as: fuels of various kinds, sufficient heavy water reactors of varying degree of sophistication for both civilian and military use and capable of making weapon grade plutonium from spent fuel.  

On the other hand, ever since Pakistan’s defeat in the 1971 war with India and especially since India’s nuclear test of 1974, Pakistan was determined to acquire nuclear weapons. Islamabad began to use legal and clandestine methods to procure reprocessing and enrichment capabilities from foreign sources. Nawaz Shariff, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, declared, “If India dares to attack Azad Kashmir, it will have to

---

face the Pakistani atomic bomb. I declare that Pakistan is in possession of an atom bomb".\textsuperscript{5} India reacted by terming it as a threat from Islamabad to use nuclear weapon in settling bilateral dispute.

This strengthened American apprehensions about nuclear war in South Asia, as this region has witnessed three wars between India and Pakistan and it is the most likely area of the world to explode and wage a nuclear war, according to the US estimates. With this view, the Director of CIA, James Woolsey, in a testimony before the Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee on 24\textsuperscript{th} February 1993, stated, "The arms race between India and Pakistan poses perhaps the most probable prospect for future use of weapons of mass destruction including nuclear weapons. Both nations have nuclear weapons development programmes and could, on short notice, assemble nuclear weapons".\textsuperscript{6} The same sentiment was echoed by a senior official of the Clinton administration when he said: "South Asia ... is the most likely area in the world where a nuclear conflict might take place in the next five years".\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{5}"Nawaz Shariff’s Bombshell", \textit{India Today} (New Delhi), 15 September 1994, p.47.

\textsuperscript{6}US Senate, 103\textsuperscript{rd} Congress, First Session, Committee on Governmental Affairs, \textit{Hearings}, Testimony of James Woolsey, Director, CIA, 24 February 1993 (Washington, DC, GPO, 1993), p.14

\textsuperscript{7}\textit{The Statesman} (Calcutta), 22 February 1994, p.9.
Finally, when the NPT was to expire in 1995, the US wanted to extend this treaty for an unlimited period so that the threshold countries like India and Pakistan could be made to sign it by applying constant pressure or by some non-proliferation arrangement bilateral, regional or multilateral outside the NPT.

A noted US expert on South Asia, Professor Stephen P. Cohen, therefore, elucidates the US interest in non-proliferation in South Asia during the Clinton era as follows:

- The US intention was to block emerging regional powers from developing nuclear weapons capability to dominate the post-Cold War unipolar world and to meet the security threat posed by the emerging nuclear powers to the US and its allies.

- The Clinton team thought that South Asia might export nuclear and missile capability to Iran, Gulf and South-West Asian countries and to other Third World nations. This development could not only enhance the power of India and Pakistan, but also go against the key strategic interest of the US, i.e., the exclusive exploitation of oil resources of the region.

- The American policy since 1947 favoured the emergence of a stable and cooperative South Asian regional system based on Indo-Pakistan co-operation so that all regional states might better solve their
pressing economic and development problems through co-operative efforts.\(^8\)

Whatever might have been the reason for America’s non-proliferation concerns, it is certain, as discussed earlier, that Washington’s non-proliferation agenda clashed with New Delhi’s insistence on disarmament, which the former dismissed as non-practical. This was evident during the NPT Review Conference in 1995.

**The NPT Review Conference (1995)**

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Conference was held in New York during April–May 1995, which decided to extend the Treaty indefinitely, with the US playing a lead role in that direction despite serious reservations about the Treaty expressed by a number of Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) of the Third World, especially India on several grounds:

First, the Treaty made a distinction between the nuclear haves and nuclear have-nots and failed to bring about proportional obligations to the parties involved. Second, while the NNWS had to submit itself to nuclear safeguards and verification requirement, there was no such obligation on the part of the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS). India looked

---

upon this as a subtle way of legitimatising the possession of nuclear weapons by some States while outlawing them for others. **Third**, the Treaty, was intended to prevent vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons. **Fourth**, India viewed NPT to be discriminatory for restricting access to nuclear weapons technology to only the five nuclear weapon States – the USA, China, France, Russia and Great Britain. **Fifth**, the Treaty prohibited peaceful nuclear explosions, which developing countries require badly for the sake of their speedy development. **Sixth**, the Treaty curbed the spread of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear States without providing adequate security guarantees. And **finally**, the Treaty failed to reduce or eliminate stockpiles of the Nuclear Weapon States and thus legitimatized them.⁹

During this review conference India insisted on a time-bound commitment from the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) on disarmament. But the NWS were not prepared to yield to such commitments. This resulted in extension of the NPT indefinitely without any obligations on the part of the NWS’s. The focus of NWS’s, therefore, now shifted to

---

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) that would stop the nuclear capable nations on their tracks.¹⁰

The CTBT Tangle

It is interesting to note that India was one of the co-sponsors of the United Nations resolutions in 1965 for a treaty to stop proliferation of nuclear weapons as India’s nuclear policy was characterised by clarity of purpose and actions during the period of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s Prime Ministership. India, under his leadership, was opposed to nuclear weapon and firmly committed to nuclear disarmament. India took a clear and unambiguous stand and declared India could not make the bomb.¹¹ It was this stand which made India advocate loudly the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which was proposed as a stand still agreement by the nuclear weapon states, banning all forms of nuclear testing.¹²

India under Nehru wrote repeated letters to the leaders of both the United States and former Soviet Union in 1950’s urging them to ban nuclear testing and take the world closer to nuclear disarmament. Even


¹¹Nehru’s Speeches in the Lok Sabha made on May 10th, 1954 and April 9, 1958, published in Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s Foreign Policy (New Delhi, Government of India, Publication Division, 1963), pp.192-93.

though, India was very firm on banning nuclear testing, it fully appreciated the usefulness of nuclear energy for peaceful and developmental purposes. India, at that point of time felt the production of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes was absolutely essential for the growth and development of the country. And therefore one could see no contradiction in India’s advocacy of nuclear disarmament and its own belief in nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.\(^{13}\)

Despite India’s advocacy of nuclear disarmament, the nuclear weapon States were in no mood to accept the proposal put forward by India, as both the super powers were immersed in their Cold War antagonism. It was only in 1963, after the successful resolution of the Cuban missile crisis peacefully, the NWS’s decided to ban the testing of nuclear weapon partially in the atmosphere, outer space and under water by signing Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) on 8\(^{th}\) August 1963.\(^{14}\)

India welcomed PTBT, as it was the first step in the long journey towards nuclear disarmament and signed this Treaty. But unfortunately, the Cold War was a major setback, which prevented the United States and the former Soviet Union from making nuclear disarmament a dream

\(^{13}\)Ibid, p.191.

\(^{14}\)The Text of the Treaty (PTBT) is reproduced in SIPRI, Arms Control: A Survey and Appraisal of Multilateral Agreements (London, 1978), pp.77-78.
to come true. The end of Cold War and the prospects of indefinite extension of NPT, however, revived the hopes for negotiations on Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty at Geneva in 1994 under the Clinton Presidency. But when the US proposed CTBT, India was the first country to oppose it.

There were several solid reasons for this volte-face on the part of India in this regard:

First, the CTBT was not linked to a time bound schedule for global nuclear disarmament, so it was not acceptable to India. India’s former foreign secretary, Salman Haidar, made a special appearance before the Conference of Disarmament (CD) in March 1996, at the height of the CTBT debate, where he observed:

We do not believe that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is essential for national security, and we have followed a conscious decision in this regard. We are also convinced that the existence of nuclear weapons diminishes international security. We, therefore, seek their complete elimination. These are fundamental percepts that have been an integral basis of India’s foreign and national security policy.\textsuperscript{15}

Second, the CTBT was decisively flawed and rendered effectively worthless at least for the US and perhaps France and possibly for Britain, China and Russia. This is because the treaty allowed subcritical testing, and it was not designed to prevent advances in computer simulation techniques that would set up a 'virtual testing regime' or 'informational test ground'. India, therefore argued that the treaty as visualised by the US, was not a step towards disarmament, but only a means of perpetuating nuclear hegemony.

Third, India opposed some provisions of the CTBT, most notably Article XIV on Entry into force, as New Delhi felt that a sovereign country cannot be forced to enter in to any treaty. Arundhati Ghose said, "We do not accept any language in the treaty that would affect our sovereign right to decide whether we should or should not accept the treaty".

---


Domestic Consensus

As the CTBT was being negotiated, there was a change of Government in India with the coming to power of the 13-party coalition Government headed by Deve Gowda as the Prime Minister and I.K.Gujral, an experienced veteran in foreign affairs, as the External Affairs Minister. There were fears expressed in certain quarters that a weak Government such as this would give in to Western pressure and sign the CTBT. But the Government could successfully withstand American pressure due to solid domestic consensus against CTBT.

Some analysts, like Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik argued that in view of its long term commitment to Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and Nuclear Disarmament, India should sign the CTBT. But most of the intellectuals and leaders were against this treaty. A noted Indian journalist, Brahma Chellaney, for example, forcefully argued against India signing the CTBT and said that if India allowed a monster to be born in Geneva, it would be repeating the mistake of the 1960’s when NPT was permitted to emerge. Chelleney further added that India had to employ its veto to ensure that it gets a CTBT compatible with its

---


19 Ibid.
interests.\textsuperscript{20} A.P.Venkateswaran, a former Foreign Secretary, also wrote saying that it made no sense for India to permit a spurious CTBT to be finalized. Even more self-defeating for India would be, wrote Venkateswaran, “To allow such a CTBT to be concluded, not become a signatory and not test”.\textsuperscript{21}

Former Chief of the Army, General Sundarji, went on to analyse the options before India and concluded that the best option for India would be to opt out of the discussions in Geneva and not sign the CTBT, but do nothing to hinder adoption. This of course, he argued, “might be the best from a point of view that takes into account the moral and ethical urges, national security compulsions and political stability”.\textsuperscript{22}

J.N.Dixit, another former Foreign Secretary, took the typical bureaucratic line and argued that the solution seems to be to participate in the comprehensive test ban process, safeguarding to the maximum extent possible India’s nuclear and missile security capabilities. He said: “It is a difficult exercise of tight-rope walking no doubt, but has to be

\textsuperscript{20}Brahma Chellaney, “Should India Block or Stay out of a Flawed CTBT”, Pioneer (New Delhi), 28 February 1996.

\textsuperscript{21}A.P.Venkateswaran, “India Must Block Treaty”, Indian Express (New Delhi), 3 May 1996.

\textsuperscript{22}K.Sunderji, “Options for India”, Ibid., 6 April 1996.
undertaken because it is relevant to national security which is beyond the issue of signing the CTBT".  

K. Subramanyam, India's noted defence analyst, after weighing the various options before India and the possible consequences of them, wrote:

In reality, the test ban issue is a bogus one at this stage. The non-nuclear weapon powers—nearly 170 have all surrendered their nuclear option and the treaty is of no relevance to them. The five nuclear weapon powers have all reached a moratorium on testing and are not going to resume them. Therefore, no other country will consider it worth while to face the negative consequences outlined above if India can unleash if only to resist coercion.

In essence, Subrahmanyam was for India resisting the CTBT. Elsewhere, he argued time and again that India could declare itself as nuclear power based on its 1974 explosion and sign both NPT and CTBT.

Jasjit Singh, the then Director of the Delhi-based Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, said that, "India simply cannot and should not be a party to a treaty that in our judgement does not serve the cause of international peace and security in a fundamental way and/or address the narrow national security interests". He was also, not in

---


favour of India blocking the treaty. He finally advised the Government of India that: "We should be able to convey our inability to be a party to the CTBT in its present form and that will be consistent with our principles and interests."  

When the Government of India pronounced its final statement in the Conference on Disarmament, it refused to be a party to the CTBT, both on the grounds principles and national security interests. India often perceived the CTBT as an extension of NPT in as much; both treaties were only non-proliferation measures and not meant to bring about nuclear disarmament. The final Indian statement is worth quoting at least in part to drive home this point more forcefully. Arundathighoshsaid:

The CTBT that we see emerging appears to be shaped more by the technological preference of the nuclear weapon States rather than the imperative of nuclear disarmament. This was not the CTBT that India envisaged in 1954. This cannot be the CTBT that India can be expected to accept. We cannot accept that it is legitimate for some countries to rely on nuclear weapons for their security, while denying this right to others.

Ghosh went on to elaborate:

Similarly, India expressed our dismay at the indefinite extension of the NPT because, in our view, it sought to legitimise the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by five countries. Today, the right to continue development and refinement of their arsenals

---


is being sought to be legitimised through another flawed and eternal treaty. Such a treaty is not conceived as a measure towards universal nuclear disarmament and is not in India’s national security interest. India, therefore, cannot subscribe to it in its present form.\textsuperscript{27}

In India, the CTBT, an otherwise largely symbolic treaty, thus became more an icon of nationalism and sovereignty than a question of arms control and national security. Western countries led by the US, on the other hand, bitterly criticised India’s refusal to accept the CTBT and their media portrayed Indian refusal as reneging on its decades-old commitment to nuclear disarmament.\textsuperscript{28}

India immediately sought to block the treaty or be exempted from its purview. Stormy sessions at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva followed. The US felt India had negotiated in bad faith all along. India and the United States thus drastically differed on the issue of CTBT during the Clinton era.

\textbf{Pokharan-II}

Indo-US relations reached its nadir during the Clinton Presidency when India conducted a series of nuclear tests named as Pokharan-II in May 1998 to cap the growing US pressure on India for signing the

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid, p.1158.

\textsuperscript{28}For a representative article on western criticisms of India’s opposition to the CTBT, see, John D.Holum, “The CTBT and Nuclear Disarmament The US View”, \textit{Journal of International Affairs} (New York), April-June 1997.
CTBT. Two events took place: (a) India carried out nuclear tests establishing the continuity and growth of capability over the years; and (b) India declared herself a Nuclear Weapon State (NWS) with far-reaching implications.²⁹

Even-though, there were criticisms of India going nuclear in a big way, there were certain compelling reasons for India to go nuclear against the international trend:

First, it was China’s growing assertion of power in South and South- East Asia³⁰. Added to that China was considered a potential security threat ever since the aggression against India in October 1962. Moreover, China developed its own blue water navy and was keen to develop naval and submarine bases along with facilities of electronics and surveillance in the Coco-Island of Myanmar, which threatened Andaman Nicobar Islands that came within the range of Chinese sweep. Further, the then Defence Minister of China publicly asserted in 1994 that, “Indian Ocean is not an India’s Ocean”³¹ in response to a press correspondent’s query on Chinese naval facility in the Indian Ocean.


Second, Pakistan was also considered a perennial threat to India since it had launched war thrice against India over Kashmir. And Pakistan was keen to take revenge for its defeat in 1971. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was preparing to push Pakistan towards the achievement of such an objective. In fact, Pakistan moved in search of nuclear weapon status and was ready to acquire the Islamic bomb. By 1984 Pakistan had acquired nuclear weapon capability which was India specific. The best illustration of Pakistani objective of developing of nuclear weapons was its stand namely: "If India signs the NPT, Pakistan will also sign"; or "If India signs the CTBT, Pakistan too was willing to sign".

Third, China Pakistan collusion and collaborations was aimed at India. Pakistan was aided by China in its pursuit of nuclear capability on the principle that an enemy’s enemy is a friend. Further it was well a confirmed fact that China supplied M-11 missiles to Pakistan, which was capable of carrying nuclear weapons. Similarly the Chinese also aided Plutonium production reactor at Khushab, which was inaugurated in November 1998.


33 Times of India, 13 November 1998.
Fourth, the United States acting as a global policeman was keen to rope in Pakistan and China into NPT, CTBT and FMCT.34

Fifth, the US nuclear weapons in Indian Ocean base in Diego Garcia was also considered a serious threat to Indian Security, since America had stationed its nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers which was really threatening India35.

Lastly, the US had been trying to prevent India from acquiring nuclear capability at different points of time36.

Whatever might have been the compelling reasons and the justification for 1998 nuclear tests, the US and its allies were shocked over the sudden Indian testing. The State Department spokesman, James Rubin, accused India of lying and conducting a “campaign of duplicity” during nearly 20 high level meetings between the US and India on their nuclear intentions.37

34Discussion with Michael Krepon, the Founder President of Henry L Stimson Centre, Washington D.C. in Chennai on 16 September 2003.


36"CTBT Aimed at Capping India’s Nuclear Programme", Times of India, 13 November 1995.

India’s declaration as a nuclear weapon State was seen by the Western powers as an effort on its part to emerge as a major power. The US President, Bill Clinton, said that with India’s democratic traditions, the nuclear path is not a way to “greatness”\(^{38}\). He personally led the western reactions against India’s temerity to defy the hegemony of nuclear powers, as he found the Indian act as an affront to the US efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation\(^{39}\). Similarly, the US Secretary of State, Madeline Albright also pointed out, “Nuclear weapons will not help a country to enhance its nuclear strength and status”\(^{40}\).

The American experts on strategic affairs also attacked the tests as “the gateway of proliferation”\(^{41}\). On the whole, what angered the Americans most was the decision by India to conduct surprise tests rather than the notified ones\(^{42}\).

Since the Clinton administration was not willing to accept India’s gate crashing into the privileged nuclear club with the claim of a nuclear

\(^{38}\) *Times of India*, 14 May 1998.

\(^{39}\) *Cable News Network (CNN), Internet Website*, 18 June 1998.


\(^{42}\) *Economic Times*, 17 June 1998.
weapon status, it imposed sanctions against India under the mandatory Glenn Amendment of the 1994 Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Act on May 13, 1998. These sanctions included:

(i) termination of assistance, except humanitarian food assistance, to India under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961;

(ii) termination of sales of defence articles, or design and constructions services as well as all foreign military financing under the Arms Export Control Act;

(iii) denial of any credit, credit guarantees, or other financial assistance;

(iv) American objection to the extension of any loan by any international financial institution;

(v) prohibition of American banks from making any loan for purchasing food.

(vi) prohibition of exports of specific goods and technology to India.

and

---


(vii) economic sanctions were also imposed on India withholding $143 million aid\textsuperscript{45}.

The Clinton administration also initiated several other measures against India, which showed imbalance in search of a stick to punish her without itself getting hurt in the process. One such way was the blacklisting of 200-odd Indian institutions and corporate bodies such as the Tata Memorial Centre, India’s pre-eminent cancer treatment hospital; the Gas Turbine Research Establishment, Bangalore; the Institute for Systems Studies and Analysis, New Delhi; the Agricultural Research Establishment, Bangalore; the Directorate of Estate Management, Mumbai; the Agriculture Research Unit, Almora; and all major R&D institutions. Along with these came the denial of visas to eminent scientists like the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) Chairman, Dr.R.Chidambaram, the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR) Director, Dr.Placid Rodqiguez, and the special materials scientist, Dr.Baldev Raj, in a farcical bid to isolate them from the community of world scientists. The United States also attempted to use international fora to slap further restrictions.\textsuperscript{46}


Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT)

Another major problem that plagued Indo-US ties during the Clinton administration was the issue of FMCT. The FMCT is an arms control and non-proliferation measure, intended to be global and non-discriminating in the sense that its seeks to stop all further production of fissile material (plutonium and enriched uranium) for weapon purposes, or outside of international safeguards, all over the world. This treaty would make nuclear weapon states, non-nuclear weapon states and threshold states to renounce further production of plutonium and enriching uranium to weapon grade.

FMCT is legally binding and effectively verifiable. The idea of fissile material ban is not new although it has come to the centre stage recently. In fact in 1954, India had proposed a universal non-discriminatory convention to end the production of fissile materials. This proposal made by India had a lot of sense in the context of stopping the arms race during that time. There were no surplus stocks nor were there any other countries producing such fissile materials. This proposal was not taken very seriously in the beginning but the idea was revived by India in 1982 when it called for a "capital freeze" on nuclear weapon

---

47Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India, called for a "Stand still Agreement" in April 1954. The proposal was repeated at the UN General Assembly by Krishnamenon, in October 1954.
states asking them to stop production of nuclear weapons accompanied by a cut-off in the production of fissile material for weapons purposes.48

When, however, the US began to champion the FMCT, India although considered it to be a non-discriminatory disarmament measure, global in its reach and universal in its application, but it was not satisfied with this. For, in real terms, it was not designed to change the status quo or to reduce the gap between the nuclear haves and the have-nots. As a disarmament measure, it could, in effect, disarm the threshold states – the other NWS have huge stocks of weapons grade fissile materials, which would be available to them for decades to come even if they dismantle their nuclear weapons under the START-I and START-II Treaties.

There were, thus, several complexities involved in FMCT. For example, the inclusion of the existing stocks in FMCT was insisted upon by Pakistan so that India could no longer pose a security threat with its large stock of fissile material. Moreover, the US favoured more transparency to nuclear facilities not only within NWS, but also within the non-signatory states operating unsafe guarded facilities. Thus, certain

48 United Nations General Assembly, 37th Session, Resolution 37/100A.
inadequacies of existing approaches on FMCT might complicate the disarmament process. ⁴⁹

The BJP led Government, however, expressed its willingness to join FMCT negotiations on August 11, 1998 at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. The Government was interested to arrive at a nondiscriminatory treaty that would end the future production of fissile material for weapons purposes in accordance with the 1993 consensus resolutions of UNGA. ⁵⁰ The very offer by the Indian Government to negotiate FMCT suggests that it was confident of maintaining the minimum nuclear deterrent under world wide ban on further production of material. ⁵¹ On the issue of FMCT, the Indian position was thus not very different from that of the US, which argued that FMCT should apply only to future stockpiles of fissile material and should not involve efforts at creating any transparency over the past stockpiles owned by various nuclear powers. ⁵²

---


⁵⁰ See the text of Prime Minister’s Statement in Parliament on “Bilateral Talks with the United States”, on 15 December, 1998 as reported in *Strategic Digest*, vol.24, no.1, January 1999, pp.3-6.


Missile Proliferation

Another major issue that affected Indo-US relations during the Clinton administration was the problem of missile proliferation in South Asia particularly involving India and Pakistan. Checking missile proliferation in South Asia had been one of the major goals of the Clinton administration. This could be seen when pressure was exerted on New Delhi on a number of occasions, both directly and indirectly, against such programmes. For example, the US began to pressurise Russia not to transfer those critical technologies to India such as Cryogenic engines needed for missile development programmes.53 Similarly, the US imposed sanctions against the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to slow down India’s space programmes. Eventhough it retarded the pace of India’s space and missile programme, it could not be grinded to a halt.54

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US continued to pressure its successor state Russia, not to transfer missile technology to India. Consequently, President Boris Yelstin had to reverse his commitment to the sale, which he had expressed during his New Delhi


54 Jha, n.4, p.1040.
visit in January 1993. One could thus find that there were a lot of efforts to prevent the proliferation of missiles in South Asia during the Clinton administration, which accorded top priority to this objective.

The Clinton administration did not focus on getting India to eliminate its missile development programme altogether, but rather encouraged it to terminate the development, testing and production of new missiles after the current programmes were concluded. In effect, the administration sought to limit the possibility of an open ended missile development programme in South Asia, where newer and more lethal missiles have been continuously developed not out of strategic necessity, but rather out of bureaucratic momentum. The US, thus, was concerned about missile proliferation and the gravity of its concerns, which compelled it to secure a better understanding about the limits of India’s missile ambition.

New Delhi was however, not willing to commit openly, nor give any assurance with regard to its future missile development

---

55 Jha, n.4, pp.1040-42.

56 This problem was further complicated by the fact that it was unclear which of India’s many missile programs were real and which were merely notional. For a survey describing the breadth of India’s missile programs, see Anupam Srivastava, “India’s Growing Missile Ambitions: Assessing the Technical and Strategic Dimensions”, Asian Survey, vol.40, no.2, 2000. See also, Ashley, J.Tellis, “The Strategic Implications of a Nuclear India”, Orbis (Connecticut, London, Greenwitch: Jaipress), Winter 2002, p.35.
programmes. In fact, India had shown strong determination to develop a whole range of technologies from integrated circuits to rocket fuels. India had demonstrated such capabilities through the launching of Augmented Satellite Launched Vehicle (ASLV) 1992, the Polar Satellite Launched Vehicle (PSLV) programme in 1993 and Prithivi test in 1994 after Rao's return from Washington. These clearly underlined Indian resolve in this regard. Washington's pressure on India thus proved to be unrewarding and unwise.

India, however, had been observing the provisions of MTCR by refusing to export missile or missile technology to third countries. For example, it rejected a very lucrative offer by Iraq to import Indian missile technology during the Gulf crisis of 1991. The Clinton administration also learned that it is very difficult to prevent India in developing these critical technologies and therefore they began to persuade India not to export such technologies to other countries.

Since New Delhi had a very impressive track record in this regard, this enabled it to manage its differences with Washington. This was

---

57 Ibid, pp.35-36.
58 Jha, n.4, p.1041.
59 Ibid.
reflected in the Joint Vision Statement declared on March 21, 2000, in New Delhi during President Clinton’s visit to India thus:

India and the United States share a commitment and prepared to work together to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and their means of delivery. We will pursue our security needs in a restrained and responsible manner, and will not engage in nuclear and missile arms race. We will seek to narrow our differences and increase mutual understanding on missile proliferation and security issues.60

The end of the Clinton visit saw further removal of the sanctions and now the ban on sanctions have been completely lifted. It is therefore, pertinent to discuss why and how India and the US could bridge their nuclear divide to a considerable extent after Pokharan-II acrimony.

Towards a New Realism

Whatever may be said and done, Pokhran-II provided historical opportunity to resolve certain long standing crucial issues between India and the US on the basis of realism, as post Pokharan-II developments demonstrated the imperative of greater maturity and pragmatism in managing Indo-US divide on the nuclear issue. In this connection one may discern several factors that motivated the Clinton administration to mellow down its tone and temper while opposing India’s nuclear tests:

First, as against Washington’s expectations, the attempt to keep Indian scientists out of international scientific community proved a farce since it was found unworkable, and was repudiated by America’s own scientists.

Second, while imposing sanctions, the US officials forgot that they were dealing with India of the 1990s and not that of the 1960s. In that dark decade of 1960s, India was critically dependent on the US food aid for the very survival of its teeming millions that enabled Washington to force this country to change some of its cherished policies, both domestic as well as foreign. The liberalization and globalization of the Indian economy since the 1990’s, the Indian market, consisting of its vast population of middle class consumers, attracted the US business class. American businessmen interested in India, therefore, lobbied the administration for a pragmatic interpretation of American law concerning sanctions to enable them to continue business with this country.

Third, Washington failed to carry the European Union and others in imposing tough sanctions against India. Three major powers, namely, Britain, France and Russia, opposed imposition of economic sanctions on India. This offered a big opportunity to India to woo the businesses in

---

61Nalini Kant Jha, *Domestic Imperatives in India’s Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 2002), pp.72-104.
62Jha, n.43, pp.192-193.
these countries for investment in India's infrastructural sector. This strengthened the desire of the US business community to do business with India.

Fourth, when Pakistan conducted its own series of nuclear tests in May – a couple of weeks after Pokhran-II – that event suddenly took the heat off India. The United States was under legal obligation to impose sanctions against Pakistan as well. And once sanctions were imposed on Pakistan, the strong Pakistan lobby within the US too became active against these sanctions.

Last but not the least, the Americans of Indian origin, who have formed a caucus to influence the US decision-making bodies concerning the country of their origin, too joined the American business lobbies in their efforts towards bridging the Indo-US nuclear divide. The Democratic Congressman from New Jersey, Mr. Frank Pallone, who earlier co-chaired the India Caucus, for instance, wrote to the US President asking him to lift the World Bank sanctions against India. He

---

argued that the sanctions imposed on India have had the unhelpful and unproductive effect of curtailing US-India business ties.\textsuperscript{64}

President Clinton could not be oblivious of these growing demands for realism in the United States' South Asia policy. He had to acknowledge, "The sanctions can be useful, particularly when applied by the international community as a whole". He added, "We are in a danger of looking like we want to sanction everybody who disagrees with us and not help anybody who agrees with us".\textsuperscript{65}

The US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, went to the extent of admitting in public that the American sanctions against India miserably failed.\textsuperscript{66} Giving his testimony before the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Ambassador David L. Aaron, Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade, warned:

US companies' ability to pursue projects in India will be diminished without US Governments' financial support. Certainly, suppliers and investors in other countries whose Governments have not imposed comparable sanctions will benefit. The relative insularity of the Indian economy, combined with the United States being the only country to impose such extensive sanctions, make it

\textsuperscript{64}Sridhar Krishnaswami's despatch from Washington D.C. "Pallon Asks Clinton to Lift Sanctions", \textit{The Hindu}, 7 February 1999.


doubtful that the sanctions will cripple India's economy and economic development.67

The Commerce Secretary, William Daley, on the other hand, blamed his country's tendency to impose unilateral sanctions as counter productive.

Not surprisingly, the Clinton administration took initiatives for relaxing certain sanctions. First, to please the business and farm lobby groups, it got the Senate's unanimous approval for exempting credit and guarantees provided by the US authorities to support food and medicine exports from the Arms Exports Control Act. Explaining the rationale to this decision, President Clinton observed, "We need to make sure that our sanctions policy furthers our foreign policy goals without imposing undue burden on our farmers".68 Though this decision mainly helped Pakistan, as she is the third largest importer of American wheat, it also helped India to some extent.

Second, one day after the President signed the Bill exempting farm products from the purview of sanctions, the Senate decided to support a measure giving the US President the power to waive most of the sanctions under the Glenn Amendment. Undoubtedly, this decision

---


was intended to provide room for the administration in negotiating non-proliferation measures with India.\(^{69}\)

**A Quiet Diplomacy**

The relaxation of certain sanctions by the US paved the way for the opening up of diplomatic channel to discuss crucial issues between them. A sort of new quiet diplomacy began between the representatives of two countries, Jaswant Singh, Special Envoy of Indian Prime Minister, and later the Foreign Minister of India, and the US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, leading to eight rounds of talks on this subject held at various places. Further a ten member Congressional delegations headed by the democratic leader in the House of Representatives, Richard Gephardt visited India on 31\(^{st}\) March 1999, which brought about a lot of optimism in Indo-US relations.\(^{70}\) The delegations in true spirit appreciated the ongoing dialogue between Strobe Talbott and Jaswant Singh.

These diplomatic efforts gradually narrowed Indo-US differences over the nuclear issue. By the end of January 1999 both the countries were able to bring down the number of do’s and dont’s for India from 13 listed in the United Nations Security Council resolution and at other

---

\(^{69}\)See Krishnasami’s despatch from Washionton DC, *The Hindu*, 27 May 1999.

\(^{70}\) *The Hindu*, 1 April 1999.
forums to four. These four benchmarks included: (a) Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); (b) Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT); (c) Related Initiatives of Exports Controls; and (d) The Defence Posture of India. As regards CTBT, India was already informally observing the provisions of this treaty by announcing voluntary moratorium on underground nuclear tests. It must be noted in this context, that though there was a division of opinion about the signing of CTBT by India, all parties agreed on the moratorium on further nuclear tests.\(^7\)

With respect of FMCT, India expressed its willingness to join negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament at Geneva provided it was non-discriminatory in nature. So far as the issue of controlling the exports of nuclear material was concerned, as already explained, India has had an excellent track record in this regard. It is heartening to note the discussion in this area registered progress. An expert level meeting of officials from both sides was held in New Delhi on November 9-10, 1998. Both the sides described this meeting as helpful in furthering the prospects of Indo-US co-operation in this area\(^7\).

\(^{71}\)See the text of Indian Prime Minister’s Statement in Parliament on “Bilateral Talks with United States”, 15 December 1998 in Strategic Digest, vol.24, no.1, January 1999, pp.3-6.

Finally, India though categorically asserted, and legitimately so, its sovereign rights to define its defence requirements in accordance with its threat perceptions, it reiterated its commitment to peace and stability in the world in general and South Asia in particular. India formally announced a policy of no-first-use and non-use against non-nuclear weapon states. This policy of no-first use with the minimum nuclear deterrent implied deployment of assets in a manner that ensures survivability and capacity of an adequate response. At the same time, India continued to adhere to its goal of nuclear disarmament. At the UN General Assembly in 1998, New Delhi took the initiative for passing a resolution on “Reducing Nuclear Danger”\(^3\). This expression of India’s responsible defence postures contributed to a better understanding of Indian view in the US. The US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbot reported the United States’ appreciation of India’s nuclear pragmatism thus:

There is a high degree of bipartisan support for two propositions that the US must engage with India and Pakistan as constructively as possible, and also that we must strike a balance between our profound differences over the test and our equally profound desire to see them continue to develop as strong safe, prosperous democracies.\(^4\)

\(^3\)Ibid.

For many years nuclear issue has been crucial to both India and the US. Though, both the countries shared the common goal of nuclear disarmament, they disagreed over the means and priorities. While India insisted on time bound approach to disarmament, the US placed priority on nuclear non-proliferation. India disagreed with this priority since non-proliferation regime discriminates between nuclear and non-nuclear powers. This divergence between the two democracies widened during the Clinton administration due to a premium put on non-proliferation agenda.

Surprising though it may appear, India's forced gate-crashing into the nuclear club gradually blunted the edges of Indo-US nuclear divide by moving both the democracies towards greater pragmatism. Though Pokharan-II temporarily widened the gap between both the countries, they began to focus on practical measures to accommodate each other's concerns instead of merely talking about ideals and principles.

Several factors contributed towards this practical approach on both sides. These factors included: India's demonstration of its responsible defence postures and quiet diplomacy between the two countries. The disillusionment of Russia with American arrogance (displayed in Yugoslavia and Iraq, etc.) and the containing eastward expansion of NATO as well as strains in US-China relation also
contributed to inducing of a fresh thinking in Washington towards engaging, and not isolating India. The most critical factor in this regard was India’s growing clout in Washington. India’s capability to withstand sanctions, its attractiveness for the American business community, the need for Indian software professionals in America, the role played by the Indo-American community and sympathetic attitude of American scholars towards India were factors that pushed the Clinton administration towards accommodating India.\(^75\)

Since one of the most important sources of India’s growing clout in Washington was its economic liberalization programme contributing to the revival of its economy, we now propose to discuss economic dimensions of India-US relations during the Clinton administration in the next chapter.

\(^{75}\)For a fuller discussion of these factors see, Jha, n.72, pp.4-11.