CHAPTER – II

Nuclear Issue and Indo-U.S. Relations
One of the major areas of U.S-Indian interaction, none perhaps remains as complex and problematic as the nuclear dimension. The Indo-US differences over the nuclear issues constituted the core-limiting factor in their efforts to establish long-term cooperation in defence and security matters. India, like the US, also champions the cause of non-proliferation as part of an overall goal of nuclear disarmament, but the United States espouses a doctrine of nuclear deterrence for itself and four other nuclear powers, simultaneously denying the same to the rest of the world. This fundamental difference in policy and attitude puts India and the United States on opposite sides on the issue of NPT and similarly on the issue of CTBT.

India’s nuclear strategy has been a policy of universal peace from the very beginning. It has persistently denounced the use of nuclear weapons ever since the holocaust at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The Indian nuclear programme in a sense predates India’s independence from the British Empire in 1947. India’s nuclear quest is tied to an accident of history - a confluence of two of the major striking personalities the world of science and political decision-making has seen. They were India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the great nuclear scientist and organizer, Dr. Homi J. Bhabha. Nehru’s strong attachment to science provided the political will, and Dr Bhabha’s scientific genius mapped out the path for India’s acquisition of nuclear capability. Dedicated primarily to atomic power generation and other peaceful applications such as agriculture and medical domain, India’s nuclear technology acquisition kept the weapon option open. However, these weapons have dominated Indian strategic planning and perceptions, which also takes into account the possibility of a nuclear misadventure by its adversaries. For both areas peaceful applications and the weapon option Bhabha had a strategic vision and priorities.
Publicly, Nehru opposed the development of nuclear weapons, a position that accorded with his deep-seated opposition to the use of force to resolve international disputes.¹ Most of Nehru’s speeches reflect his genuinely peaceful intention. For example, he told the lower house of Parliament, in 1957, “We have declared quite clearly that we are not interested in and we will not make the bombs, even if we have the capacity to do so.”² Nehru’s aversion to nuclear weapons also drew from his fundamental fear of the militarization of Indian society.³

Nehru’s version of moralpolitik, was made possible because of four interlinking factors: (i) the underwriting of India’s security by the UK and the United States, both of which were geared militarily to frustrate the ostensibly expansionist designs⁴ in Asia of the Communist bloc; (ii) this provided India the freedom to prioritise developmental expenditures, to enjoy strategic security as a free good, and the latitude to build-up the national power of the state and international political stature, in terms of an ‘independent’ national identity and policies; (iii) Nehru’s aim to increase India’s freedom of action and to gain for the country decisive politico-military capabilities; and (iv) Nehru’s rejection of Mahatma Gandhi’s Luddite tendencies and his abiding belief in science and technology, particularly in the cutting edge areas of nuclear energy and space, to pull India out of its state of under-development and to achieve military and energy security.⁴

However, Nehru’s realist antennae had not altogether shorted. He knew that to rely on outside powers for national security was only a temporary expedient. But the continuing high demands on the exchequer made by the developmental sector

combined with the complacency engendered by the Western security net for India, inclined Nehru, in step with the capabilities progressively acquired by the Indian nuclear programme, towards a low-risk calculus, in which politico-military potential of the atom seemed a far better bet to deter aggression than a vast, money-gobbling, conventional military force, which, as the experience of the first India-Pakistan War over Kashmir indicated to Nehru, was too timid and overcautious to be relied on to produce quick results.

Despite his public opposition to nuclear weapons, Nehru granted Bhabha a free hand in the development of India’s nuclear infrastructure. Nehru’s words and actions, and most important, his support of Bhabha’s actions, indicate an essential duality and ambiguity that characterized India’s nuclear program till 1997. Bhabha and Nehru took India to a unique position of restrained nuclear weapon capability with little regard for particular security concerns. They were determined to move ahead on the supposition that nuclear power would provide the nation with cost-effective electricity, development, prestige, and, if needed nuclear weapons capability. It is precisely the country’s bargaining power that Nehru hoped to beef up by acquiring competence in nuclear technology.

Future security for India is what Nehru was keen to obtain and crucial to achieving this aim was an Indian nuclear weapons capability. Nehru’s appreciation of the military value of nuclear weapons rests critically on the claim that he had a well-honed military intuition and common sense.

It is important to recognize that while the history of the Indian nuclear programme predates the country’s independence in 1947, the strategic environment India faced for most of its independent life did not demand any clear-cut decisions be made regarding its nuclear status. To be sure, the attitudes of India’s leadership
toward nuclear weaponry evolved gradually over the years, but these shifts were insufficient to motivate the national leadership to make a deliberate decision favoring the acquisition of nuclear arsenal or declaring India’s status to be that of a nuclear weapon state. This lack of movement in the direction of overt nuclearization ultimately stemmed from the perception that despite all the strategic challenges it faced, the security environment India had confronted for most of the post independence period has in general been benign. The political cover provided by American strength during the early part of the Cold War and by Soviet support during the later part of that epoch further buttressed New Delhi’s ambiguous attitude toward nuclear weaponry, as did India’s own advantages vis-à-vis Pakistan, China’s weakness as a regional adversary, and the relatively innocuous disposition of both superpowers toward India.  

India’s approach toward nuclear power during this period was in fact based on a highly moralistic brand of politics. The earliest of Indian articulation on the question of nuclear disarmament were more moralistic than realistic. India could have converted the know-how and ability to use the atoms for peace into the one for warring; yet it chose not to enter the mad hawk race because it believed that atomic weapons are no weapons of war; these are the instruments of wrecking havoc upon the sentient life on the globe. This uncompromising opposition to nuclear weapons and to nuclear weaponry per se as instruments of “high politics,” subtly muted during 1960s when India-having become conscious both of the Chinese threat and of China’s nuclear prowess following its defeat in the Sino-Indian border war of 1962- began to flirt with the possibility of extending civilian nuclear technology to defense.

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applications through its Subterranean Nuclear Explosion Project (SNEP).\textsuperscript{6} The Sino-Indian War of 1962 left a deep impact on India’s foreign and security policymakers and the scars have not healed still (and nor has the territory grabbed by China been resorted). The border war forced Nehru to reappraise his strategy and his most cherished ideals.

China’s test of nuclear weapon at Lop Nor on October 16, 1964, its burgeoning strategic relationship with Pakistan, and the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war over Kashmir weighed increasingly heavily on Indian minds. It was believed that during this period Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri authorized what became Delhi’s nuclear-weapons program. Shortly after China’s first test, in his speech in October 1964, Homi Bhabha had assured the Indian public that our scientist could explore an atomic device within eighteen months after a decision was taken. But such changes were not articulated at the policy level. In a letter to President Lyndon B. Johnson, Shastri’s successor, Indira Gandhi, hinted strongly that the Chinese program was driving a reluctant India toward a test of its own.\textsuperscript{7} China’s acquisition of nuclear weapons in the aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian border war dealt a further blow to India’s national security. Sisir Gupta, one of India’s ablest diplomats, spelled out the concerns of most Indian strategist: “... without using its nuclear weapons and without unleashing the kind of war which would be regarded in the West as the crossing of the provocation-threshold, China may subject a non-nuclear India to periodic blackmail, weaken its people’s spirit of resistant and self-confidence, and thus achieve without a war its major political and military objectives in Asia.\textsuperscript{8} Nehru however, remained

\textsuperscript{7} Strobe Talbott, “Dealing with the Bomb in South Asia”, \textit{Foreign Affairs}, Vol. 78, No. 2, March-April, 1999, p. 112.
publicly opposed to the development of nuclear weapons. Nine days after his death, in a television interview in New York on May 18, 1964, he stated, “We are determined not to use weapons for war purposes. We do not make atom bombs. I do not think we will.”

In the aftermath of the Chinese tests a number of Congress Party members of parliament favored dropping India’s rigid stance on questions of disarmament. They forcefully and repeatedly called for a reorientation of India’s foreign policy in the light of the new perceived threat from China. However, the Congress leadership refused to address their central demand - a fundamental shift in India’s nuclear policy - contending that the prohibitive costs of embarking on a nuclear weapons programme, India’s historic commitment to a nuclear-free world, its belief in Gandhian principles, and, misgivings about alienating the world opinion undermining the case for the acquisition of a nuclear weapons option.

The intensity of the Indian nuclear policy debate slackened somewhat in late 1964 as Bhabha lined up behind the prime minister’s policy and quiet exploration of a peaceful nuclear explosive initiative began. The focus shifted to the international milieu. In December 1964 at a press conference in London, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri revealed India’s efforts to obtain nuclear guarantee from the nuclear weapons states. Shastri launched a halfhearted, diffident, and ultimate futile search for security guarantee from the United States and the Soviet Union against possible nuclear threat from China.

Indian policy pronouncements in the post-Nehru period underwent a subtle shift best described as one from a categorical opposition to nuclear opposition to

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nuclear weapons, to a ‘No Bomb Now’ orientation. During this period, Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) became a landmark on the international landscape. This document might better be called the “No Further Proliferation Treaty,” since when it was signed in 1968, proliferation had already occurred. The Indian delegation to the UN had played a key role in drafting the central provisions of the text, which embodied two principles of special significance to India’s concerns. First, the draft treaty specified a balance of mutual responsibilities and obligations on the part of the nuclear and nonnuclear powers. It represented a bargaining: states that had not tested at the time of signature would promised never to develop or acquire nuclear weapons: in exchange, the parties agreed to share the benefits of peaceful nuclear explosions with one another. Second, the draft indicated that the attempts to promote nonproliferation would be merely a first step toward the ultimate goal of universal nuclear disarmament. As discussion on the proposed treaty progressed, India added another qualification: nonnuclear states should be able to carry out “peaceful nuclear explosions.”12 The United States firmly opposed this last proposal on the grounds that no meaningful distinction could be made between “peaceful” and “nonpeaceful” nuclear explosion. The final draft of the treaty watered down what India and other non-nuclear weapons states wanted, namely a better balance between the differential obligations of the nuclear weapons states and non-nuclear weapons states. Despite this watering down, the other non-nuclear weapons states went along the treaty, but India did not sign it when it was opened for signature in 1968.

The major reasons for India’s non-signature were China’s decision not to sign the NPT and India’s new reluctance to commit itself to complete or permanent future abstinence. Subsequently, however, India’s refusal to sign the NPT was invariably

and repeatedly stated in terms of ‘principled’ opposition to the ‘discriminatory’ character of the NPT, i.e. the very fact of it enshrined differential obligations for the nuclear weapons states and the non-nuclear weapons states. The NPT became an exemplar not just of an unequal global nuclear order, but also of unequal distribution of power in the world.\(^1^3\) Behind the curtain of criticism of NPT from the moral high ground, however, India intensified nuclear preparations at the ground level. Long at the forefront of the movement for universal nuclear disarmament, India had continually chastised the five nuclear powers (the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom) for not moving to eliminate their nuclear arsenals as called for by the 1970 nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

The attempt to exploit the civilian nuclear energy and research infrastructure for strategic purposes reached its peak in 1974, when India carried out its first atomic test within four years of the NPT coming into force. India is the only country whose first nuclear explosion was not an atmospheric but an underground test. India’s detonation of a nuclear device on May 18, 1974 marked the start of a continuing conflict with the United States over nuclear nonproliferation and nuclear arms control. In efforts to ward off Western pressures in the wake of this test, however, India affirmed its right to engage in “peaceful nuclear explosions” while simultaneously reiterating its opposition to nuclear weaponry.\(^1^4\) The repeated failure of the great powers to address India’s security concerns and the emergence of a different brand of political leadership within India caused important, if subtle, shifts in its nuclear policies.\(^1^5\) Furthermore, some Indian analysts argue that U.S. pressure on India during

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the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War also convinced Indira Gandhi of the signal importance of developing India’s military nuclear capabilities.\textsuperscript{16} Never before 1971 had the United States accused India of aggression with such vehemence and rancour. During the Indo-Pak war of 1971, United States took a clearly pro-Pakistani stand and charged India of interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan. The White House described the war “as a ruthless power play by which India, encouraged by the Soviets, used the ineptitude of the Pakistani government and the fragility of the Pakistani political structure to force a solution of the East Pakistan crisis by military means.”\textsuperscript{17} Tension in the subcontinent peaked when Nixon authorized Admiral Moorer to dispatch a task force of eight ships, including nuclear aircraft carrier enterprise from Vietnam to the Bay of Belígal.

The first Pokhran test was a protest against the arbitrary and unequal Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Pokhran explosion demonstrated India’s capability to produce nuclear weapons. India after 1974 formalized what had been unofficial previously: the “nuclear option” strategy.\textsuperscript{18} The “option” strategy satisfied twin objectives of retaining a moral high ground on disarmament while providing enough military potential to give adversaries pause.\textsuperscript{19}

The international reactions to Pokhran-I were diverse. Of the great powers, only France congratulated the Indians for their success. China’s response was muted, but critical. The United States, as the conductor of the global nuclear nonproliferation orchestra, took Pokhran-I as a challenge to the established nuclear order and began

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\textsuperscript{18} George Perkovich, \textit{India’s Nuclear Bomb} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 188-190.

\textsuperscript{19} China, like India, achieved the technology necessary to wield nuclear weapons before developing doctrine to guide potential use. See John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, \textit{China Builds the Bomb} (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988).
concerted efforts to reshape the nonproliferation regime and to tighten technology controls. In response to the 1974 Indian nuclear test, the Washington turned to technology export controls as a central instrument of policy. These controls, often coordinated with other countries, have been entirely nuclear or missile related. After 1974 the restrictions of the Zangger Committee and Nuclear Suppliers Group reduced and eventually halted the transfer of nuclear related technology not just to India but also to several other states of proliferation concern. In 1976 Congress introduced the Symington amendment to the foreign aid bill, there by cutting off certain forms of economic and military assistance to countries that received enrichment or reprocessing equipment, materials, or technology without full scope International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.\(^\text{20}\) The Pokhran blast increased U.S. and international pressure on India to conform to the nonproliferation regime.

The nuclear test conducted by India in 1974 did not end India's nuclear problem. It demonstrated the country's nuclear capability, but New Delhi remained unwilling to call itself a nuclear weapons power. Moreover, India confounded the whole world by calling the test a peaceful nuclear explosion and declaring that it had no intention of embarking on a nuclear weapons programme. The tension between India's moral rejection of nuclear weapons and the security imperative of acquiring them remained unresolved. The test signify the country's entry into the 'Selected' Group of 'Technologically Advanced Nations' or the 'Nuclear Club', yet India continued to strongly reject nuclear deterrence or grant any kind of legitimacy to nuclear weapons.

Despite the initial wave of domestic support following the test, further work on India's nuclear weapons capability was marked by little progress due to pressing

internal concern as well as adverse international reactions to India's nuclear test. A conscious policy of nuclear ambiguity was adopted by New Delhi. This consisted of both affirming and denying that India had/ could have [a] nuclear weapons/ capability. In effect, India became a Nuclear Threshold State.

In 1978, under the non-congress Prime Minister, Moraji Desai, the Indian government distanced itself from the 1974 PNE. Desai emphasized distrust of and opposition to nuclear weapons within a framework of ambiguity while expressing misgivings about the safety of nuclear power. The uncomfortable ambiguity that arose from India's demonstrated ability to make nuclear weapons, even as it persisted in its claims that it had no nuclear arsenal, continued throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s. It was the phenomenon of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 and even more important, Pakistan's willingness to accept the role of a "front-line state" in 1981 that produced a major negative impact on Indian security. In the case of Pakistan while President Carter imposed sanctions on Pakistan in 1979, the Soviet entry into Afghanistan enabled General Zia ul Haq to strike a bargain with US that he could go ahead with his weapons programme up to the point of acquiring nuclear explosive capability. Because the United States needed Pakistan as a front-line state in its efforts to dislodge the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, Washington turned a blind eye to Pakistan's nuclear activities and continued to supply it with sophisticated conventional weapons throughout the 1980s. The US also looked away as China transferred nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan. In pursuit of its national strategic objectives, the United States abandoned its non-proliferation objective in Pakistan after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The close US-Pak security cooperation, the US arms transfer policy towards Pakistan, indirect US assistance to Islamabad's

21 For an extensive account of this process see Seymour M. Hersh, "On a Nuclear Brink," The New Yorker, 29 March 1993.
drive towards acquiring a nuclear weapon capability have been constant negative factors in India-US relations and have helped India to pursue its nuclear weapons option.

Indira Gandhi considered conducting nuclear tests in the early 1980s, but word about the preparations got out, and they had to be cancelled. As the scale of Pakistani nuclear weapons programme began to be understood in New Delhi in the mid-1980s, Rajiv Gandhi tried to persuade the United States to stop the Pakistanis, but the gambit did not work. It will be instructive to recall that the threat of a Pakistani nuclear strike was taken seriously for the first time in 1987 during the Exercise Brass Tacks when Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad was served a nuclear threat. At that time, Pakistan was known to have 5-7 bombs of the 12-15 KT varieties. India’s Bomb-making capabilities also expanded during this period. Nonetheless, the government in this period did move to augment India’s long-term military strength. In 1983 India formally began a comprehensive effort to produce ballistic missiles by creating the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP). A space scientist, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam who had previously worked for the civilian Indian Space Research Organization, was shifted to the DRDO and placed in charge of the IGMDP. Under his leadership the DRDO developed and successfully test fired India’s first intermediate-range ballistic missile, the Agni on May 22, 1989, from the test range of Chandipore in the eastern coastal district of Orissa. Since then, the DRDO has developed a panoply of short- and medium-range ballistic missiles.

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25 Chris Smith, India’s Ad Hoc Arsenal, n. 24, pp. 199-203.
During Rajiv Gandhi’s leadership India pursued the contradictory policies on the question of nuclear weapons. His involvement in the Six-Nation-Three-Continent Initiative, wherein he talked of freezing the manufacture and deployment of nuclear weapons and the production of fissile material was, therefore, par for the course. The Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan of 1988 proposed a workable framework for global nuclear disarmament. But having to respond in 1987, to the evidence of Pakistan nuclear weapons, freed Rajiv from these constraints. It was under Rajiv Gandhi that India made the decision to acquire the missiles and other technology to form an effective nuclear deterrent.

The 1990 Indo-Pakistani Crisis

In the spring of 1990 the violent discontent that had been brewing in Kashmir for the past couple of years escalated in to a serious Indo- Pak confrontation. By some accounts, particularly, Seymour Hersh sensationalistic March 1993 in the New Yorker, “On the Nuclear Edge,” the two states verged on the nuclear war. During a crisis with India over the rapidly escalating insurgency in Kashmir, according to Hersh, Pakistan “openly deployed its nuclear weapons arsenal on alert.” As a result, “the Bush Administration became convinced that the world was on the edge of a nuclear exchange between Pakistan and India.” Although such a crisis existed between India and Pakistan, but Hersh misinterpreted the nuclear dimension of the crisis. A number of senior South Asian and the U.S officials have categorically denied Hersh’s report. India and Pakistan were deterred from war in 1990 by each side’s knowledge that the other was nuclear weapon capable, and therefore that any military hostilities could

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have escalated to the nuclear level. Nuclear deterrence first began operating on the subcontinent in the 1990 crisis and helped avert war.29

There are two kinds of debate over the consequences of proliferation extending back to the early 1960s. The exponents of the “logic of nonproliferation,” consider the spread of nuclear weapons to be extremely dangerous: more of them in more hands around the world increases the likelihood of nuclear explosions, either intended or unintended.30 The “logic of nuclear deterrence,” on the other hand, suggested that proliferation has stabilizing effects: nuclear weapons have deterred war between their possessors and will continue to do so.31 The major area of disagreement between the logic of nonproliferation and the logic of nuclear deterrence concerns the likelihood of preemptive escalation between new nuclear powers.3 The logic of nonproliferation’s main foundation is the belief that new nuclear nations will be especially prone to preemptive nuclear escalation, a condition Thomas C. Schelling dubbed “the reciprocal fear of surprise attack.”32 From this perspective, the low survivability of emerging proliferants’ second-strike forces, and their unsophisticated command, control, communications, and intelligence capabilities could breed miscalculation of an adversary actions or intentions, and lead to unnecessarily hasty decision-making.

The logic of nuclear deterrence downplays the likelihood of preemptive war between the new nuclear states. For Kenneth N. Waltz, preemption is viable "only if the would-be attacker knows that the intended victim's warheads are few in numbers, knows their exact number and locations, and knows that they will not be moved or fired before they are struck."33

Past practice indicates that in the area of crisis stability, the logic of nuclear deterrence is more robust than the logic of nonproliferation. Nuclear deterrence can operate in "opaque proliferation".34 This pattern of unconfessed proliferation has characterized every emerging nuclear weapon states since the mid-1960s, but its implications have only recently been appreciated. The prospects for preemptive nuclear attacks between the new proliferants are low3 and that opacity makes them even more remote. Under conditions of opacity, the role of existential deterrence is even more pronounced. Since each side in an opaque nuclear arms competition has only limited information about the other side's nuclear forces, any deterrence derived from nuclear capabilities will be logically be existential. In other words, mutual deterrent calculations rest not on relative capabilities and strategic doctrine, but on shared realization that each side is nuclear capable, and thus that any outbreak of conflict might lead to nuclear war.

The distinction between fission and fusion weapons is less meaningful on the Indian subcontinent, which has one of the world's highest population densities. Even small fission weapons would kill million of Indians and Pakistanis. In the event of a nuclear exchange, no South Asian leader can have any illusion that the use of atomic

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33 Kenneth N. Waltz, op. cit., n. 31, pp. 15-16.
weapons would result in an "acceptable" number of deaths. Other factors, too, suggest that atomic existential deterrence should exercise a powerful impact on nuclear decision-making. For five decades, the military use of nuclear weapons has been steadily delegitimised. Breaking the nuclear taboo would disrupt this positive trend, with potentially grave consequences for international security.

The possession of nuclear weapons has a deterrent value. If five nuclear weapon powers can agree to give up their rivalries, detarget their missiles and reduce their conventional forces, since they have come to the conclusion that a nuclear war is not fightable and winnable and mutual deterrence preserved peace among them, there is no reason why overt acquisition of nuclear weapons should not produce the same effect on the additional nuclear weapon powers.

It is pertinent to note that the subcontinent historically has not witnessed any conflicts brought about through inadvertence or misperception, at least in their pure form, and while conflicts rooted either in miscalculation or in catalytic causes have indeed occurred—often because of Pakistan’s desperate efforts at drawing international attention to its cherished cause, Kashmir— it is not unreasonable to expect that the acknowledged presence of nuclear weapons on all sides would inhibit any interactive consequences that could lead to serious forms of deterrent breakdown in the future.

The Kargil crisis has shown that nuclear deterrence does really exist in South Asia. In the ultimate analysis, India’s credible limited deterrent successfully deterred Pakistan from escalating the Kargil war in 1999. It was, no doubt, clear to Islamabad that on the path to a possible escalation, the air force would dominate its conventional air power and military capabilities while the army and navy were already placed in position to impose high costs militarily if it felt compelled to expand the war—as indeed it had done in 1947 and in 1967. But at the end of that escalatory ladder
Pakistan would have to face the prospect of losing major military-economic assets, forcing a situation where it would have to decide whether to reach for its nuclear button or not. At that stage, therefore, Islamabad would had to take into account Indian retaliation with nuclear weapons with the promised "unacceptable level of punishment". Prudence demanded that it was better not to escalate in the face of Indian nuclear weapons capability. Hence, Islamabad opted for diplomatic route, which required its own withdrawal, however grudgingly, and all the consequences that followed.

The end of the Cold war did not bring the expected peace dividend for India; instead it accentuated the Indian security problems. In addition, the end of the cold war removed one of the most important constraints against India's overt nuclearisation: the strength of Soviet Union, India's de facto military and politically ally since 1971, when two sides signed a treaty. With few reliable friends, the importance of self-help in managing its national security was coming to the fore with greater clarity.35

The end of the Cold War unfortunately demonstrated a negative trend and the withdrawal of the international community in general and the weapons states in particular from the commitment to global nuclear disarmament. Unfortunately, the traditional nuclear powers have paid little heed to the universal nuclear disarmament. Now, even though the Cold War is over they have sought to perpetuate their hegemony through discriminatory non-proliferation treaty. It is this hypocrisy and hegemony, which force India to rethink its nuclear policy recently.

We are living in a world in which the international community of 185 nations, gathering in New York in 1995, decided to legitimize nuclear weapons by extending

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indefinitely and unconditionally the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The five nuclear weapon powers accepted an obligation to negotiate, in good faith, effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date, and for nuclear disarmament. Nothing was done in the first 25 years before the NPT was extended indefinitely and unconditionally. The United States, one of the principal proponents of the NPT regime, sought an “unconditional and indefinite extension” of the treaty. India, which had chosen to stay out side the NPT regime, decided not to participate in the proceedings in New York during April-May 1995 and did not even seek observer status. The Indian hope was that the United States would fail to cobble together a coalition that would unconditionally and indefinitely extend the treaty. Such expectations and fears were belied, as able and relentless American diplomacy ensured the achievement of the U.S. goal. The 1995 extension conference instead, legitimized the nuclear apartheid. From the sidelines, India complained that the treaty was discriminatory because it protected the right of five countries—notably including China—to a monopoly on nuclear weapons while consigning the rest of the world to permanent inferiority. In their attacks on the NPT, Indian commentators and officials have argued that many of the non-nuclear weapons states were duped or pressured into joining a treaty regime that infringed on their sovereignty and security. For India, if a nuclear weapon-free world was not likely or feasible, the only other option to ensure its security was through acquisition of nuclear weapons.

The threat perception arising out of the deliberations of the 1995 Review Conference presumably led to the Indian government to discreetly order preparations for nuclear tests in December 1995. But it was discovered by the US and was given

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up, under pressure from Washington. It is therefore obvious that a Congress
government considered it necessary to conduct a test in 1995.

In 1993, India and the US co-sponsored a resolution in the UN calling for the
early completion of the CTBT on the Conference on Disarmament. Among the
handful of nuclear threshold states, India has been the only one, which had
demonstrated its capability to test a nuclear device before CTBT was open for
signature. As the negotiations for a CTBT, which India had pioneered, entered their
final phase, it became clear to India that the treaty was driven more by non-
proliferation concerns than those relating to disarmament. In 1995, it made its
signature of the CTBT conditional upon a commitment to disarmament within a
‘time-bound’ framework by the P-5. The negotiated draft of the CTBT as it emerged
in June 1996 not only violated the original mandate of the 1993 UN General
Assembly, but also failed to address India’s concerns. On June 20, 1996, India
therefore, indicated its unwillingness to sign the CTBT but made it clear that it would
not come in the way of the treaty coming into force.

There was a growing sense that the CTBT would forever close an Indian
option to test- whether India join the treaty or not. It also raised doubts about the long-
standing policy of keeping Indian nuclear option open or ambiguous. The test ban
talks raised vital national issues to the Government of India and the nuclear
cognoscenti. Brahma Chellaney defined the issue well. He argued that if India wanted
a credible deterrent, it must conduct tests “to perfect technical capabilities and convey
a political message to other nuclear-armed states” before a test ban went into effect
making tests much more politically difficult if not impossible. By waiting, “India

might have no choice ultimately but to cut it losses and surrender its long held ‘holy
cow.’ Indeed, “If India has no intention or need to test, then it should not be
cconcerned about a test ban.” Other knowledgeable analysts such as P. R. Chari argued
that it was already “too late for India to conduct the required series [of tests] before
CTBT is negotiated... [A] Test series thereafter in the teeth of international
opposition would become infinitely more difficult.”39

Two factors explain India’s rejection of the CTBT. First, the Indians were
acutely concerned about the “entry into force” clause and the likely effects of this
upon their nuclear weapons programme. Under Chinese pressure, and without any
prior discussion entry into force clause was added to the treaty- a clause which
stipulated that 44 countries including India would have to ratify it before it could
come into force. This inclusion of the force clause was a clear contravention of the
Vienna convention on the law of treaties, which stipulated that no treaty would be
binding on a nation not party to a treaty. According to the provision of this treaty if
the CTBT did not obtain the ratifications of 44 listed nations in three years, a new
conference of the treaty signatories would have to be convened to consider further
steps. The CTBT entry-into-force conference of 1999 and the NPT review conference
to be held in the year 2000 would have resulted in tremendous pressure on India to
close its nuclear option. The second concern was dealt with the Chinese nuclear
testing within days after the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation
Treaty (NPT) in May 1995 and continued testing in the midst of negotiations for the
test ban treaty at the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament.

When India refused to accept the CTBT with its so-called Effect into Force
(EIF) clause at the Conference on Disarmaments, the US and allies unleashed an even

more forceful non-proliferation campaign. The Western view has been perceptively presented in an article in the *Sipri Yearbook*. It said: "India's refusal to sign the CTBT could prevent the treaty from achieving its full legal force although the international norm against testing which it embodies is universally accepted."^{40}

The western nations, particularly the US, began to place India's refusal to sign the CTBT in this contest of the objection of global nuclear disarmament, which it had championed for long. Around the same time, in an article in *Journal of International Affairs*, John D. Holum wrote:

Although India has historically championed the objective of global nuclear disarmament, its efforts to obstruct the recent Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) have sent mixed signals to the international community... *just as the international community has begun to move in the direction India has advocated for decades, New Delhi appears to be unwilling to join in steps, such as the test ban, that are widely recognized as critical to the nuclear disarmament process* (emphasis added).

Holum also pointed out that unlike India, which is the leader of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a majority of NAM states "have chosen to work with international community to achieve practical progress on the disarmament agenda". India's proposal for a time-bound framework for eliminating nuclear weapons, he argued, "may sound attractive in the abstract" but "most states believed it to be unrealistic."^{41}

A careful examination of Holum's contentions would indicate that his analysis was one-sided. First, it was inappropriate to state that India's opposition to the draft CTBT at the Conference on Disarmament had undermined its "stance toward the

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elimination of nuclear weapons.” The fact is that it continues to support a time-bound framework for the establishment of a nuclear weapons free world. Second, India’s position on the CTBT should be understood in the light of certain new developments that affected the national interest of that country. It should be realized that the P-5 powers themselves support the CTBT because they are confident that their deterrence capability would remain intact. Finally, we should remember that NAM states had already signed the NPT and later the document extending its term indefinitely. Not signing the CTBT on the part of these NAM states would have no effect.

The CTBT resulted in the emergence of two schools of thought within the strategic community: one argued that India could live without testing and built a reasonable credible deterrent, and other suggested that India’s deterrent would not be credible without testing. The latter view was held particularly by the technical community; it insisted that to develop warheads for missiles as well as to create a significant database for future nuclear weapons research, it was necessary to conduct at least a limited number of tests. Confronted with this choice, all the Indian governments during the 1990s toyed with the idea of testing. However, publicity as well as fear of economic sanctions deterred India from testing. But a big shift had occurred at the ground level in India’s nuclear preparations and upgradation of its nuclear weapons option.

Pokhran II and Indo-U.S. Relations

In February-March 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP emerged as the largest single party within parliament and, with the support of a number of regional parties it assumed power. By 1997, it started getting insistent in asking for overt nuclearisation. The BJP’s campaign manifesto, issued on February 3, seemed to mark “a significant
easing of the party’s nuclear stand,” as Raja Mohan noted. The manifesto said the party, if voted to power, would ‘re-evaluate the country’s nuclear policy and exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons’.

Pakistan’s test of the Ghauri missile on April 6, 1998 acted as the immediate trigger for the Indian decision taken a few days later to undertake the overt testing of nuclear weapons in May 1998. Pakistan fired nuclear capable intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM), within days of the Vajpayee government’s taking office in New Delhi across its populated areas with the U.S., responding only with mild “regret” compared with strong pressures brought to bear on India by the G-7 to give up its indigenous missile programme. The Ghauri, built with either Chinese or North Korean technology, has a range of 1,500 kilometers and can carry a payload of 750 kilograms. Its range would enable Pakistan to target twenty-six cities in India. The Ghauri surprised Indian analysts with its putative capability to deliver a nuclear warhead to most major Indian cities. Speaking in the aftermath of Pakistan’s test of its new Ghauri IRBM, the chief of Staff of the Indian Army, formally reiterated the need for a ‘strategic deterrence’ capability to counter the emerging ‘nuclear and missile challenges’ to India’s security.

After demonstrating its own nuclear capacity in 1974, India had refrained from testing for more than two decades. Indian decision-makers had indicated that they would not carry out nuclear tests until they had completed a lengthy “strategic review” of security threats and how best to cope with them. The flash point in the Indian weapon program came in 1998 when on May 11 and 13, 1998, India conducted

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two sets of nuclear tests of varied strength at the Pokhran test site.\textsuperscript{45} The nuclear tests have transformed India from a nuclear threshold state to a nuclear weapon state or state with nuclear weapons. The tests included a fission device, a thermonuclear device and a low yield device. Two days later, New Delhi declared that it had conducted two more tests, both alleged to have sub-kiloton yields. A.P.J Abdul-Kalam, science advisor to the prime minister, claimed that these tests were critical for the authentication of India’s nuclear capability and its prospective modernization. He also said that the data from the tests could be used for ‘sub critical’ tests.\textsuperscript{46} India finally ended its long-standing nuclear ambiguity. By conducting nuclear tests, the BJP government finally resolved nearly five decades of nuclear debate in India in favour of an overt nuclear posture.

The most significant part of the 1998 tests, however, was the single thermonuclear explosion. The thermonuclear or fusion capability is the key to a nation becoming an effective nuclear weapon state. Fusion or thermonuclear warheads include a fission device to initiate the fusion chain. They are also, as scientists term them, elegant in concept and design. Thermonuclear warheads are much smaller and therefore lend themselves to miniaturization. These can be easily mounted on missiles. Smaller weight and size of fusion warheads permit longer missile ranges. The thermonuclear weapons are absolutely essential if the deterrent is to be based on submarines and inter-continental missiles.\textsuperscript{47} For India’s deterrent


\textsuperscript{46} The “Joint Statement by the Department of Atomic Energy and Development Organization” issued in New Delhi on May 17, 1998 noted that “the tests have provided critical data for the validation of our capability in the design of nuclear weapons of different yields for different applications and different deliver systems. These tests have significantly enhanced our capability in computer simulation of new designs and taken us to the stage of sub-critical experiments in the future.

capability to be taken seriously, the success of the thermonuclear test was a crucial necessity. The accessed volume of India's processed nuclear weapons-grade fuel can only sustain the needed arsenal through a thermonuclear capability.

The nuclear tests by India and Pakistan represented the most serious challenge to the prevailing global nuclear order symbolized and codified by the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). The NPT recognizes only five countries as being nuclear weapon states (NWS) by virtue of having demonstrated the nuclear mettle before 1970, and this is permanent discriminatory divide for all other states were deemed to be non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS). It is this hegemonic order of the NPT that has been “challenged directly” by the Indian nuclear tests.

The 1995 NPT extension conference legitimized this reality for eternity and barring India, Pakistan and Israel the global nuclear order was neatly divided into the NWS and NNWS. However, the May 1998 tests changed this carefully orchestrated order and another layer was added to the reality. The inconvenient reality for the global non-proliferation treaty led by the U.S. is that India and Pakistan may not be NWS as per the NPT, but they undeniably SNW or states with nuclear weapons, with different rationale for their May 1998 initiative.48

Not-surprisingly, the series of nuclear tests conducted by India in May 1998, known as Pokhran-II, suddenly punctuated New Delhi's burgeoning strategic and politico-economic ties with the sole surviving superpower, the United States of America.49 These tests, soon followed by Pakistani tests on May 28 and 30, rudely shook the strategic scheme of the US and challenged the monopoly of the privileged nuclear club led by that country. The Indian tests also highlighted that the US

permissiveness and tacit encouragement on selective proliferation is not acceptable to India. In the aftermath of the tests, there was an outcry over the intelligence community’s failure to detect the Indian test preparation. CIA Director, George J. Tenet, and the Congress leadership hauled up the intelligence community for its failure to detect and predict the Indian tests.50

The Indian decision led to a marked deterioration in Indian-American relations with mutual hostile rhetoric reaching levels not seen since the Nixon-Kissinger ‘tilt’ toward Pakistan during the Bangladesh crisis of 1971.51 The American President, Bill Clinton, himself 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. He stated that he was “deeply disturbed by the nuclear tests” and added that this action by India not only “threatened the stability of the region, but also directly challenged the firm international consensus to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.”52 Washington also sponsored the UN Security Council resolution 1172 of June 5, 1998. The Resolution called upon India and Pakistan, among other things, to immediately stop their nuclear weapons development programmes, to refrain from the production and deployment of nuclear weapons to cease development of ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons and any further production of fissile materials. America strongly condemned the Indian nuclear tests and rejected India’s claim to be treated as a de jure nuclear power. On 13 May itself President Clinton imposed a wide range of sanctions against India under the Glenn Amendment. The United States promptly suspended India’s

52 Karl F. Inderfurth, the US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, “Situation in India”, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s Sub-Committee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, May 13, 1998 (Washington D.C).
participation in its International Military Education and Training Programme and stopped issuing licenses under munitions list.

The economic and other sanctions imposed by the United States on India after the Pokhran nuclear tests in 1998 had deteriorated Indo-American relations. The United States remained the only country, which imposed economic sanctions on India under its own laws. U.S. imposition of economic sanctions on India triggered automatically by congressional legislation, and Washington's role in leading other G-8 countries to impose similar sanctions further damaged Indo-US relations.

Sanctions imposed by President Clinton on 13 May under section 102 of the Arms Export Control Act, also known as the Glenn Amendment, are of course, much more severe than sanctions of the past. They include:

- Termination of assistance under the Foreign Assistant Act of 1961, except for humanitarian assistance for food and other agricultural commodities.
- Termination of sales of defence articles, defence services, on design and construction services under the Arms Export Control Act, and revocation of licenses for the commercial sale of any items on the US Munitions List.
- Termination of all foreign military financing under the Arms Export Control Act.
- Denial of any credit, credit guarantees on any other financial assistance by any departmental agency, or instrumentality of the US Government.
- Opposition to the extension of any loan for financial or technical assistance by international financial institution.
- Prohibiting US banks from making any loan on providing any credit to the government of India, except for the purpose of purchasing food or other agricultural commodities.
- Prohibiting licensing by the Commerce Department export of specific goods and technology subject to export.53

Pursuant to the US Secretary of State’s determination under 2(b)(4) of the Export-Import act of 1945, the board of Directors of the Export-Import Bank may not give approval to guarantee, in sure, or extend credit, or participate in the extension of credit in support of US exports to India. Under the sanctions, the Clinton administration blacklisted 200 odd Indian institutions and corporate bodies in two phases.

Though it was a different story with economic sanctions and export blockade of all variety of equipment and components in the name of sensitive industrial uses, India could withstand US sanctions with much hardship. As a noted economist, Jagdish Bhagwati, observes, “the economic impact of US sanctions almost never work,” sanctions did not hurt India beyond a point. Sanctions are successful if conditions are conducive and the targeted country’s trade is exclusive dependent on the state imposing sanctions. The sanctions can be useful, particularly when applied by the international community as a whole. Much of the world did not join the United States in imposing economic sanctions.

It is difficult to claim that India accurately calculated US displeasure when it proceeded with nuclear tests. Four major sources of reassurance that the BJP-led government would successfully cope with the US reaction deserve special mention. First, India was well placed as a result of the economic liberalization programme initiated in 1991, to withstand the impact of sanction. Secondly, the gains of the Indo-US dialogue since mid-1980s were too valuable to be abandoned by either side. Third, major bilateral shifts in the strategic postures of Russia and China had opened up new

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54 Source: Testimony of Ambassador David L. Aaron, Under-Secretary of Commerce for International Trade, House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, hearing on India-Pakistan Nuclear Proliferation, 18 June 1998.
vistas for a multipolar or polycentric equilibrium that increased India’s option. Fourth, the Indian scientific and strategic communities had built up not only an inexorable momentum for nuclear and missile capability but also demonstrated that denial of outside assistance could delay but not prevent the achievement of their objectives. Sanctions originally devised as a tool to coerce India on nuclear issues have out lived whatever usefulness they might once have had. Perversely, they have not only alienated significant sections of the Indian strategic affairs community from the United States but also contributed to India’s increased self-reliance in critical military technologies. Ultimately, sanctions were not substantial enough to pressure New Delhi into making major concessions on proliferation issues, and Washington did not consider increasing the magnitude of sanctions to achieve its non-proliferation goals.⁵⁶

On 11 May 1998, India crossed the nuclear Rubicon by ending its longstanding nuclear ambiguity. After the Pokhran II nuclear tests the government said that “the nuclear environment in India’s neighborhood” had necessitated the tests to “provide reassurance to the people of India that their national security interests are paramount.” Vajpayee offered the first statement of the strategic rationale of the tests to the President of the United States on 11 May, the first day of the tests. In his letter Vajpayee stated that the threat from China motivated the tests: “We have an overt nuclear-weapon state on our borders...a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962.”⁵⁷ The statement located the tests’ rationale in the so-called threat from China and Pakistan, heightened by alleged Sino-Pakistani strategic-level nuclear and missile collaboration.

However, while Pakistan has been motivated to seek the nuclear weapons option largely to counter India, New Delhi wants its weapons option for much broader reasons. Militarily, India's nuclear option is primarily a response to the Chinese nuclear posture and politically it reflects a determination to achieve greater recognition in global forums.

Three factors drove India's decision to test its nuclear weapons in 1998. The first and the real reason for the tests was indeed fear of the long-term security threat posed by China and Pakistan, coupled with bureaucratic pressure emanating from within India's scientific-technological complex. The security challenges that India continues to face are amongst the most complex in the world. The growing perceptions of a security threat from China and Pakistan led Indian decision-makers toward overt weaponization and the abandonment of the country's long-held posture of nuclear ambiguity. China's security assistance to Pakistan during the 1990s, especially in the realms of nuclear weapons design and ballistic missile technology, made Pakistan a virtual strategic surrogate for China in South Asia, which India's security establishment took note of and sought to counter this emerging threat. China had transferred its 1966 test designs to Pakistan which is known to have been acquired a nuclear capability in 1987. According to a leading Pakistani analyst of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, during the Zia regime (1977-88):

China became a major supplier of nuclear know-how and hardware [to Pakistan] in a bid to counter India's military capabilities. Chinese assistance included the provision of weapons-grade uranium, technical information on uranium enrichment, and help in setting up the Kahuta ultracentrifuge uranium enrichment plant, which became operational in the mid-1980s.

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The same analyst goes on to maintain that 'U.S. intelligence reports [concluded] in 1983 and 1984 that China provided Pakistan the design for a low-yield [bomb].' New Delhi thus holds Pakistan's external patrons largely responsible for fuelling the arms race between the two neighbors. It also holds Pakistan's allies responsible for undermining the 'natural' balance of power in the subcontinent to such an extent that it emboldened Pakistan in the 1990s to actively plan and militarily support the insurgency in Kashmir, including infiltration of Pakistani-trained insurgents and foreign mercenaries into the valley.

In 1980, the Pakistanis linked their quest for nuclear weapons with their designs on Kashmir. Professor Stephen Cohen recorded in a paper presented to the Asian Studies Conference in March 1980, the Pakistani were of the view that their nuclear capability would "neutralize an assumed Indian nuclear force." Others point out, that it was meant to provide the umbrella under which Pakistan could re-open the Kashmir issue; a Pakistani nuclear capability paralyses not only the Indian nuclear decision, but also Indian conventional forces and a bold Pakistani strike to liberate Kashmir might go unchallenged if the Indian leadership was "weak or indecisive.

The second factor, which has driven India into a nuclear weapon state, was the nuclear hypocrisies of existing NWSs and their reluctance to move rapidly to full nuclear disarmament.

India's nuclear breakout essentially rests on a retrospective selection of Indian elite statements that purport to reflect perception of Indian security interest. The third factor was the shifting calculations of Indian leaders, who responded to a mix of ideology (initially a force for restraint), statecraft, and domestic pressures reflecting security concerns. The evolution of the nuclear program and the 1998 tests were the

product of a complex interaction among elected representatives, civilian strategists, key military officers, and the leaders of India’s strategic technological enclaves.

In addition, the end of the cold war removed one of the most important constraints against India’s overt nuclearisation: the strength of the Soviet Union, India’s de facto military and politically ally since 1971, when the two sides signed the treaty. The China factor had been a crucial determinant in the framing of the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, which came to be seen as the cornerstone of the relationship between Moscow and New Delhi. The treaty provided enough of a security assurance for India to avoid going fully down the nuclear road. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, left India without a reliable ally in the new world order dominated by one super power.

The US concern for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and missile delivery system in South Asia is well known. The US has been viewing this region as an area of concern and was trying, albeit unsuccessfully, to prevent both India and Pakistan from going nuclear. The accelerating development in the early 1990s of India and Pakistan’s nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities were viewed by the US as tangible growing threats to regional and international security and stability. In the past, various US administrations have insisted and sometimes pressurized India and Pakistan to sign Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty or to agree to some kind of arrangement - bilateral or regional or multilateral- outside the purview of the NPT. In November 1991 Bush administration put forward a proposal, based on Pakistan’s earlier proposal, to convene a five-power conference on nuclear-non-proliferation in South Asia. Attendees were to be India, Pakistan, the United States, China and Russia. Apprehensive about any proposal that would deny India weapons while China has

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them, New Delhi rejected this proposal. U.S. analysts and policymakers believed that the most salient security threats to South Asian countries are rooted in internal social and economic problems rather than external military enemies.\textsuperscript{61} The supporters of the nuclear non-proliferation argued that the acquisition of nuclear weapons involves major economic and political costs, which diminish rather than promote security. In pressing India and Pakistan to sign the NPT, the United States has presented its position by emphasizing its desire to help prevent a nuclear war in South Asia.

Nuclear issue was one of the greatest hurdles for greater Indo-US cooperation. The Clinton administration regarded non-proliferation as one of its top foreign policy priorities. Non-proliferation and prevention of further development or deployment of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles are major goals of Clinton administration's South Asia policy. Consistently attempts were made by Clinton administration to link Kashmir to non-proliferation, missile and arms control issue. For a time, even Kashmir was seriously perceived by Washington as a flash point for a possible nuclear conflict. There is a fear in the US that an Indo-Pak war over Kashmir might involve the use of nuclear weapons. That is why various U.S. officials visiting India since the Bush era have repeatedly prescribed nuclear restraint for India.

To be sure, US did not want India to be an overt nuclear power. In this respect, right up to the May 1998 tests, the US has behaved consistently. Indeed, it wanted at least to ‘cap’ the nuclear capabilities of India (and Pakistan), and at most to ‘roll back and eventually eliminate’ their existing capabilities. This India was never prepared to do, though in the early nineties New Delhi showed a willingness to discuss these matters with the US that it had never shown before. Between 1992 and 1994, there were four rounds of bilateral talks, which did not ultimately resolve mutual

\textsuperscript{61} Ramesh Thakur, "India and the United States A Triumph of Hope Over Experience?", \textit{Asian Survey}, Vol. XXXVI, No. 6, June 1996, p.582.
differences. From the very beginning India had contended that it will not give up its nuclear weapon option due to external threat perception and that it will constrain its nuclear program only within the framework of global, non-discriminatory agreements. India views that the US policy of allowing ownership of nuclear power to a "manageable number of countries including itself" is "an attempt to retain its dominant place in the international system and to shape the international order in a way which suited its interest."62

There are several reasons past examples of nuclear rollback have limited applicability to South Asia. The strategic, political, bureaucratic and nationalistic forces at work in South Asia make it extremely unlikely that India and Pakistan will agree to role back or cap their nuclear programme. What is more to the point, however, is that the Clinton administration wisely chose not to pursue such chimerical goals but focused its attention on securing a more limited objective-namely, the institutionalization of a nuclear restraint regime covering both India and Pakistan. This search for a restraint regime is essentially based on the fact that nuclear capabilities in South Asia are here to stay, and while their eradication may be a distant goal to which Washington still aspires under the logic of the NPT, slowing down the pace of research, development, testing, and deployment of regional nuclear forces is perhaps the best alternative that the United States can hope to attain in the policy-relevant future.

**Indo-US Strategic Dialogue**

After the tests and the early US surprise, anger and irritation, things have settled down. Washington has realized that the damage done to the nuclear non-proliferation regime needs to be repaired quickly in order to preserve the residual

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legitimacy and credibility of that regime. This can be done through a serious dialogue with India that would lead to the latter signing the CTBT and agreeing to accept (at least in *de facto* form) those provisions of the NPT essential to keep such a regime in place and strengthen its operation.

Within a month of the nuclear tests, there was a tentative contact between the US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Jaswant Singh. Mr. Jaswant Singh's discussions with the US officials on June 12, 1998 marked for all practical purpose the beginning of the strategic dialogue between India and the United States. This dialogue has been conducted on the basis of a set of comprehensive proposals, put forward by India, to the international community, soon after the May tests. These proposals comprise: a voluntary moratorium on underground nuclear test explosions; India's willingness to move towards a *de-jure* formalization of this commitment, a decision to join negotiations on a treaty for a ban on future production of fissile material for weapons purposes; and, its determination to make more stringent the existing system of export controls over sensitive materials and technology. The Indo-US strategic dialogue that was going on between Jaswant Singh and Strobe Talbott was the longest bilateral dialogue between the two great democracies of the world.63 These exchanges have been marked by a sense of responsibility, candour and a sincere attempt to understand each other's concerns and points of view. The Singh-Talbott talks on June 12, 1998 rededicated the Indian and American governments to improve ties. Both recognized that the tests had reinstated nuclear issues as the major obstacle that had to be negotiated before bilateral relations could move forward again.

Since June 1998, several rounds of talks have been held between Washington

and New Delhi. The first few rounds of talks were largely exploratory in nature but with gradual forward movement taking place in each successive session. As time passed both the sides reported progress and expressed satisfaction over the talks. There is no doubt, that the dialogue initiated by the Clinton administration in the aftermath of the May 1998 tests has resulted in the most intense and consistent conversion of national interests ever in the history of bilateral relations between the two countries. As a result of Jaswant-Talbott talks “there is now a clear understanding of each other's concerns and certain steps in the direction of addressing those concerns are contemplated”.64 In a speech on the world net before coming to India for the eighth round Talbott indicated what was being discussed. There are five issues: adherence to the CTBT, moratorium on further production of fissile material till a treaty was concluded at the talks in Geneva, unilateral strategic restraint by forgoing development and deployment of missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons, strict control over nuclear and missile technology, unilateral strategic restraint by forging development and deployment of missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons and lessening Indo-Pakistani tensions through dialogue.

The dialogue represented a desire on the part of both countries to end the diplomatic isolation that followed the Vajpayee government’s historic decision to exercise India’s long pursued nuclear option through the nuclear tests of May 11 and 13, 1998 and the declaration of India as a nuclear weapon state. Jaswant Singh suggested that he was not in talks with Talbott to finesse a compromise that would demean India; New Delhi was engaging Washington to make it appreciate India’s security concerns.

Washington sought legally binding restraints on India’s nuclear programme

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that would limit its size and sophistication. On weaponisation, India repeated that its decision to deploy nuclear weapons is non-negotiable. The US position continued to be that India as well as Pakistan must stop short of deployment. India proposed that it would join a test ban in some form or other in return for the lifting of all sanctions against India, including those technology restrictions imposed after the first nuclear test of May 1974, not just those that followed Pokhran-II.

In the immediate aftermath of the May 1998 tests, the Vajpayee government announced that India would be prepared to convert its self-imposed moratorium on nuclear testing into a formal commitment. India had indicated its acceptance of a "de jure formalization" of its test moratorium. This, India indicated, would meet the basic requirement of the CTBT, that is, to stop testing. The conditions required for such a commitment were not specified but were presumable to be hammered out in negotiations with the United States. Just prior to the fall of the BJP government in May 1999, the Indian state began the arduous process of securing a "national consensus" in support of formally signing the CTBT - a demand issued by the United States in order to preserve the successes achieved thus far in the realm of global nonproliferation and to limit the emerging Indian nuclear arsenals to the lowest qualitative levels possible. The Indian efforts at creating a national consensus in favour of signing the treaty, however, appear to have foundered on two counts: the failure to secure a complete withdrawal of the U.S. sanctions imposed after the May 1998 tests prior to any Indian signature, and the U.S. Senate's own refusal to ratify the treaty prior to the review conference that was supposed to be held in September 1999. Both of these issues were important to New Delhi for different reasons: the former holds out the hope of consolidating the momentum in the improvement of U.S-Indian relations, while the latter was critical by virtue of India's belief that the U.S. failure to
ratify the CTBT would allow China to renege on its own commitments to the treaty—
with all the consequent implications for Indian security.

India also insisted that its accession to the CTBT cannot take place in a
political vacuum and must involve reciprocal concessions from the great powers. The
US Senate's rejection of the CTBT removed the immediacy of the problem for India.
Pressure from the Clinton administration on India to sign the CTBT began to weaken.

In contrast to its diffidence over signing the CTBT and as part of the new
approach to global arms control, India has supported initiating the negotiations that
would lead up to the FMCT. The Government wants to do this to arrive at a non-
discriminatory treaty that will end the future production of fissile material for
weapons purposes, in accordance with the 1993 consensus resolution of the UN
General Assembly. However, India has rejected the US demand for a unilateral
moratorium on fissile material production.

As a result of the Indo-US strategic dialogue the United States has come to
accept the fact that the Indian decision to test nuclear weapons was driven primarily
by its multi-faceted concerns about China. On the all important issue of India's
defence posture, which is also one of the important issues in Indo-US strategic
dialogue it bears noting that the Government of India has not really given away
anything. It has rightly emphasized that these are the question of national sovereignty
on which we would not like to be dictated to by any one. The Indo-US strategic
dialogue was about how to reconcile India's security needs with the U.S. commitment
to limit nuclear proliferation. The Jaswant-Talbott talks helped to evolve over a
period of time the US acceptance of the Indian nuclear arsenal.

Similarly, the American negotiators recognize that the Indian concerns about

66 Jaswant Singh, "Against Nuclear Apartheid", Foreign Affairs, Vol. 77, No. 5, September-October,
the security implications of the CTBT for India are genuine and are tied especially to the issue of nuclear asymmetry between India and China. Consequently, they realize that these concerns need to be addressed in such a way as to permit India to sign CTBT without giving up its minimum nuclear deterrent capability.\(^{67}\)

Contrary to wide speculations, the Clinton’s visit to India did not lead to this country compromising its stand on the credible minimum nuclear deterrent. The US adopted a persuasive style in place of its old coercive and aggressive one. The change in the tone could be witnessed from Clinton’s address to the Indian Parliament where he said, “Only India can determine its own interest. Only India-only India can know if it truly is safer today than before the tests. Only India can determine if it will benefit from expanding its nuclear and missile capabilities, if its neighbours respond by doing the same. Only India knows if it can afford a sustained investment in both conventional and nuclear forces while meeting its goals for human development. These are questions others may ask, but only you can answer.”\(^{68}\)

In the Indian Parliament itself, after providing outlines of the American thinking on global proliferation in general and Indian nuclear proliferation in particular, he said, “Again I don’t presume to speak for you or to tell you what to decide. It is not my place. You are a great nation and you must decide. But I ask you to continue our dialogue into a genuine partnership against proliferation. If we progress in narrowing our differences, we will be both more secure, and our relationship can reach its full potential.”\(^{69}\)

The US President’s emphasis on the need for each other in the 21st century was clear signal that the Indian nuclear deterrent would not stand in the way of

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\(^{68}\) Jyoti Malhotra, “In Indo-US spring, FBI is coming to Delhi to set up Shop”, *Indian Express* (New Delhi) March 28, 2000; *Indian Express* (New Delhi) April 6, 2000.

\(^{69}\) Ibid.
improvement of Indo-US relations. Ironically, India’s decision to tests nuclear weapons in May 1998 and declare itself a nuclear weapon power provided a huge opportunities to resolve the two and a half decades of nuclear wrangling between New Delhi and Washington. The US does not consider India as an international proliferator or even a security threat to the US.

Two years after the Shakti tests India and US were able to sign a vision statement during the visit of the President Clinton to India. Being aware of its own culpability in conniving at China-Pakistan proliferation, the US Administration could not adopt a harsh line vis-à-vis the Indian nuclear weapons programme. The US also knows that since all other countries except Israel, Pakistan, India and Cuba have signed the NPT there is no further risk of proliferation, because of some other country emulating India since unlike India which did not violate any treaty obligations while conducting the nuclear tests any other country other than the above four would be guilty of violating a treaty obligation if it conducted nuclear tests. All the other non-nuclear weapon nations have been reconciled to the present nuclear global order.

Ironically, the violation of NPT was taking place in India’s neighbourhood when China, a member of the NPT since 1992, transferred nuclear weapon technology to Pakistan. The breaking down of the non-proliferation regime in India’s neighbourhood was one of the reasons of why India went nuclear. Though India is neither a party to the NPT nor a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). it remained committed to non-proliferation. This was reflected by it effective system of export controls on nuclear materials and related technologies. Prime Minister. A.B. Vajpayee, said that, “India’s conduct in this regard has been better than some

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countries party to the NPT". In the past, India has refrained from exporting nuclear technology despite obvious economic need and some market demand. On the other hand, the repeated claims made by the Pakistani state that it was a “responsible” nuclear power have been severely undermined by the recent confession of the country’s top nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan about the transfer of nuclear secrets from Pakistan to Iran, North Korea and Libya. Nuclear weapons secrets have been passed on (for cash, or, possibly, in return for missiles in the North Korean case).

Washington has recently shown its appreciation of India’s efforts to maintain a system of effective export controls. During the course of nuclear dialogue between India and the US that followed India’s nuclear tests, Washington appreciated India’s nuclear export control regime.

The actions initiated by a particular state usually evoke counteractions only by those states directly threatened by these actions and not others. In other words, whatever the other Asian states do, they will do it for their own reasons. and not because they are simply emulating what their South Asian siblings have done. With the nuclear status of India and Pakistan getting clarified it could be argued that possibilities of expansion of nuclear weapon states has come to an end except for Israel.

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72 For example, while negotiating a deal with Iran for the sale of a 10MW nuclear reactor in 1991, India insisted that it would have to satisfy IAEA regulations on safeguards it would take after the purchase and latter cancelled the deal because of safety concerns. S. Chandrasheker, “Export Controls and Proliferation: An Indian Perspective,” in Gary Bertsch, Richard T. Cupitt, and Steve Elliot-Gower (ed.), International Cooperation on Non Proliferation Export Controls: Prospects for the 1990s and Beyond (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1994). A similar request by Libya to build a nuclear device had been turned down by India earlier, See, David Fischer, Stopping the Spread of Nuclear Weapons: The Past and the Prospects (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 135.
74 Hindu, November 11, 1998.
The objective of India’s nuclear diplomacy has been radically transformed when India declared itself a nuclear weapon power. Since India has clearly demonstrated its nuclear weapons capability and seems to be set on the road to acquiring a credible IRBM capacity, it is no longer interested in giving the highest priority in its nuclear diplomacy to the objective of dismantling the discriminatory nuclear regime. From being a protestor against discrimination in the nuclear order, India transformed itself into a nation that was ready to support the existing order and calling for its incremental reform. While India has continued to emphasis nuclear disarmament even after the tests, New Delhi has begun to recognize that the pursuit of the goal of total nuclear disarmament cannot be realized in the near term, given the current global nuclear politics. The essence of the change in the Indian nuclear policy after Pokhran-II rested in the shift from the past emphasis on disarmament to a new one on pragmatic arms control.

India has now advertised its distinctive position by publishing its nuclear doctrine. Unlike Pakistan, supremacy of the civilian authority is the most indispensable feature of India’s nuclear command and control system. India’s nuclear doctrine released by Prime Minister Vajpayee in August 1999 is based on five principles, (i) credible minimum nuclear deterrent (ii) no first use (iii) no use against non-nuclear states (iv) no nuclear arms race, India is not seeking parity with other nuclear weapon states or their delivery system (v) survivability of India’s nuclear assets so that it can inflict unacceptable damage on the aggressor.75 The Indian Prime Minister in his statement to Lok Sabha on August 4, 1998 declared that India would never use nuclear weapons first. Both the doctrine and subsequent Indian statements have explicitly underscored that Indian decision makers view the nuclear arsenal as a

pure deterrent rather than as an instrument of war. The basic nuclear doctrine is that it does not seek any parity with any nuclear weapon states, but aims at building up and maintaining a minimum deterrent keeping in view India’s own security perception. The principal role of India’s nuclear force is to protect the nation from the prospect of nuclear blackmail and coercion at the China or Pakistan, and the country’s policymakers appear confident that a small nuclear force capable of surviving a first strike will do the job.

This decision to create a deterrent, however, did not imply that India would automatically develop an arsenal of the sort maintained by the established nuclear powers. Rather, its traditionally anguished relationship with nuclear weapons almost ensured that its new determination to formally create a strategic deterrent—far from closing the national debate about nuclearisation irrevocably—would only focus attention, once again, on the five choices that India had grappled with since independence in 1947: (1) Renounce the nuclear option; (2) Maintain a South Asian nuclear free zone; (3) Persist with simply maintaining the nuclear option; (4) Acquire a ‘recessed deterrent’; and, finally, (5) Develop a robust and ready arsenal immediately.76

While the first two alternatives in different forms were vigorously promoted by the international community in the aftermath of the May 1998 tests,77 the national debate within India focused mainly on the last three alternatives, thus signaling that denuclearisation was simply not viable given the new security environment facing the country. The Indian nuclear force will be configured neither as a recessed deterrent

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nor as a ready arsenal but as a force-in-being, that is, a deterrent consisting of available, but dispersed, components that are capable of being constituted into usable weapon system.

In the aftermath of the May 1998 nuclear tests conducted by India, the traditional nuclear posture of 'maintaining the option'-can not be a destination that New Delhi will return to in its search for a credible deterrent. This alternative simply requires that India maintain the status quo, as it existed prior to May 11, 1998, without any revision. This alternative implies that India would not create an arsenal of standardized, complete nuclear weapons; deploy dedicated nuclear delivery system; configure dual-use systems for nuclear delivery; or develop the supporting infrastructure necessary for pre-planned nuclear operation. Alternative IV- the 'recessed deterrent'- has been rejected as well, since its emphasis on readying supporting capabilities rather than nuclear weapons and delivery systems prevents the development of those critical components required by minimum deterrent.

Alternative V, in contrast- a 'robust and ready arsenal'- would carry the strategy of maintaining a 'minimum credible (nuclear) deterrent'. This alternative may in fact be summarized by the phrase "ready and operational nuclear force available now."\(^\text{78}\) Under this posture, India would in effect work toward acquiring the kinds of nuclear capabilities the declared nuclear powers possess and would create a sizeable inventory of nuclear weapons with varying yields ready for immediate use when sanctioned by the national command authority. But this posture being too expensive is likely to violate its desire for strict civilian control, and possibly being subversive of crisis stability that is too much extravagant for India's deterrence need.

The decision to acquire a nuclear deterrent configured as a force-in-being,

\(^{78}\) Ashley J. Tellis, *op. cit.*, n. 5, pp. 121-124.
rather than the robust and ready arsenal. It represents a compromise choice on the part of Indian policymakers that seek to service many external demands and internal constraints simultaneously. It provides India with strategic advantages insofar as the presence of nuclear weapons in some form suffices to prevent blatant blackmail by China and Pakistan. It bequeaths New Delhi with diplomatic benefits by exemplifying 'restraint', particularly in comparison with an overt arsenal, and – in so doing – hold the promise of attenuating US nonproliferation pressures on India.

The key idea encompassed by the notion of a force-in-being is that the entire 'arsenal' functions as a strategic reserve - neither fully visible nor operationally alerted – yet nonetheless present and available for employment – after some preparation – when strategic necessity dictates. The weapons and delivery systems are developed and produced, with key sub-components maintained under civilian custody, but these assets are sequestered and covertly maintained in distributed form, with different custodians exercising strict stewardship over the components entrusted to them for safekeeping.

Different entities within the Indian establishment have proposed various desirable response times ranging from hours to day, and while both the urgency and the extent of actual retaliation in war time may be conditioned more by adversary's actions than by New Delhi's preferences, Indian security managers today remain adamant that their reluctance to deploy a "ready arsenal" does not translate into a termination of nuclear weaponisation and missile development.79

India has though categorically asserted, and legitimately so, its sovereign right to define its defence requirements in accordance with its threat perception, she has at the same time reiterated its commitment to peace and stability in the world in general.

and South Asia in particular. While New Delhi has refused to accept any external restriction on the development of its R & D capabilities as such activity is an integral to any country’s defence preparedness; it has formally announced a policy of no first use and non-use against non-nuclear weapon states. This policy of no first use with a minimum nuclear deterrent implies deployment of assets in a manner that ensures survivability and capacity of an adequate response. The commitment to deterrence through the threat of punishment emphasizes India’s lack of interest in using nuclear weapons to pursue either territorial or political expansion and its intention to use them instead simply to give pause to any would-be attacker or blackmailer. The categorical and unambiguous committed to no-first-use of nuclear weapons in case of conflict determines the contours of India’s nuclear posture. This commitment is not just a verbal assurance; it has to be reflected in the structure, deployment, and state of readiness of Indian nuclear forces.

India being an effective nuclear weapon state is wholly different from its merely being a state possessing nuclear weapons. The danger in this state of ambivalence is that the adversary can draw his own conclusions about the credibility of India’s deterrence. Nuclear deterrence requires the adversary being left in no doubt about the quality and quantity of deterrence. From this point of view Indian deterrent appears no less opaque than it was before May 1998.

It is essential that India should demonstrate in a non-provocative manner its deterrent capability. A minimum deterrent should demonstrate its credibility through the command and control system and the overt and publicized involvement of the armed forces. India is no longer a covert nuclear weapon state but a declared one. The effectiveness of a minimum credible nuclear deterrent calls for an adequate understanding of the doctrine and its implications by our political class. A credible
minimum deterrence, however, it difficult to quantify; it will have take into account the evolving capabilities of possible adversaries.

An effective nuclear weapon state needs an effective deterrent, which, in turn, requires a nuclear weapon infrastructure. These include weaponised warheads, delivery systems, command and control structures, early warning facilities and an institutionalized working linkage between nuclear scientists and the military hierarchy. Space based assets will have to be created to provide communication and damage assessment. While the general consensus in India, both among civilian commentators and the armed services, seems to converge on the desirability of a 'minimum deterrent', it is not surprising to find that Indian 'defence experts...seem to be divided over...what constitutes a minimum deterrent'. At present India is divided between nuclear moderates and hardliners. The moderate supported a minimal and dealerted nuclear force in the low hundreds. Hardliners favour a maximalist posture: a triad nuclear force of 400 to 1000 warheads.

Since the notion of minimal deterrence did not (and could not) define any unique force size or structure, it was compatible with numerous nuclear architectures ranging from a few dozen warheads to perhaps even a few thousand weapons, all depending on the strength, resilience, and risk-taking propensities of the adversary. For purposes of both deterrence and stability, the number of nuclear weapons deemed to be sufficient are a complex function of the type, yield and reliability of the weapons themselves and the number of targets needed to be held at risk, this last variable being affected, in turn, by the number, types and reliability of the weapons possessed by the adversary and the nuclear strategy it was expected to pursue.

However, operational Indian nuclear forces are going to be very modest for

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several reasons. The purposes for which they would be developed exclude war fighting. Moreover, financial and technical constraints are major limiting factors. A modest deterrent-retaliatory capacity would acquire a command and control system radically different from that needed for a first strike capability or for nuclear fighting. A first strike posture would necessitate pre-delegation of nuclear release authority. No first use posture; however, facilitate tight civilian control. The dangers of unauthorized or accidental detonations are also reduced. An important challenge facing India's evolving arsenal, therefore, consists of ensuring its survivability against any first-strike temptations on the part of an adversary, and neutralizing such temptations successfully represents the first key to successful deterrence.

Meanwhile, after procrastination of more than four and a half years, the Centre on January 3, 2003 set up the Nuclear Command Authority and announced an eight point nuclear doctrine, which reiterated its commitment to "no first use". The formation of the long-awaited Strategic Forces Command (SFC) and the Nuclear Chain of Command-the Nuclear Command Authority was made to order and implement a retaliatory nuclear strike.

A two-layered structure in the Government called the Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) is now responsible for the management of nuclear weapons and the ultimate decision to use them. The NCA comprises Political Council and an Executive Council. The Political Council chaired by the Prime Minister is the sole body, which can authorize the use of nuclear weapons where in nuclear button remains with the Prime Minister. The National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, who provides inputs for decision-making by the NCA and executes the directives given to it by the Political Council, chairs the Executive Council.

According to the statement the Cabinet Committee on Security reviewed and approved arrangements for alternate chains of command for retaliation in "all

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eventuality”. While India consciously chosen not to use nuclear weapons first, it is warning its potential adversaries that nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage. Formalizing the country’s nuclear command and control structure, the government declared, for the first time, that India would retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons if attacked with chemical or biological weapons by even non-nuclear adversaries. At the same time the doctrine announced India’s commitment to the moratorium on further nuclear testing and reiterated India’s commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons through “global, verifiable and non-discriminatory disarmament”.

Both government of India and security elites within the country at large are agreed that India’s strategic policies with respect to matters affecting the size and quality of its future deterrent ought to have three components.

First, India should not foreclose any possibilities unless the payoffs from foreclosure incontrovertibly exceed the costs. In practical terms this implies that India will be quite loath to quickly sign and ratify the CTBT and assist the Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) negotiations to a speedy and successful conclusion, because surrendering the benefits embodied by such actions would occur only if there was some prospect of securing suitable political advantages as compensation.

Second, India should not make formal commitments to limit the upper bounds of strategic capability. In practical terms, this implies that Indian security managers will not provide any binding assurances to either the United States or the international community that their desired force-in-being will not exceed certain quantitative or qualitative threshold.

Third, India should not restrain its domestic research, development and production activities relating to nuclear weapons, fissile materials, and delivery

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83 “Nuclear Command set up, N-button in PM’s hand,” Times of India (New Delhi), January 5, 2003.
systems. In practical terms, this implies that India will continue to press ahead with its existing efforts in all three arenas, although these may be accelerated in some areas—like production of fissile materials, for example—while remaining more or less constant in others—such as the development of delivery system.

The Indo-US relationship has been transformed in recent years in such a manner that neither is India being seen in Washington as a key proliferation problem nor is the United States insistent on capping or rolling back the Indian nuclear-weapons programme. Rather the US (like Russia and France) is now prepared to accept the fait accompli of India’s nuclear status (but not to formally or legally endorse it). This acceptance has been most evident under the Bush administration, which is forging close military and strategic ties with India.

This is a big change from the concerns that were stirred by India’s 1998 nuclear tests. The tests were seen in the West as challenging the nuclear non-proliferation regime as well as the hierarchy of global power based on a five-nation nuclear monopoly. Those concerns have eased. While India certainly jolted the non-proliferation regime by gatecrashing the nuclear club, it has not sought to openly challenge the regime. In fact, it has offered to extend cooperation to the non-proliferation regime in consonance with its national interest.84

The aspect of importance in so far as India is concerned, is that there is, at least in some sections of the strategic community in the USA, an apperception that India has a significant role to play, not only on the sub-continent, but also in the region. And this perception does not emerge out of benevolence, but is in recognition of the fact that India’s acquisition of nuclear capability makes her a player of some significance.

India and US remained estranged democracies so long as Indians lived in an unreal world of their own. That came to an end with the Shakti tests. Thereafter, the contours of the Indo-U.S. nuclear accommodation have long been visible. At the heart of this is an American recognition of India’s nuclear security requirements and an Indian readiness to become a part of the global arms control regime. Once India exhibited its will to power by conducting the nuclear and missile tests and withstood the pressure of US and its followers in economic terms the US finds it necessary to engage and cultivate India. The US has now carried out a reassessment and has arrived at the conclusion that India is an independent factor to be reckoned with in international politics.

The India-US differences on the nuclear issue were an irritant but not a barrier in their mutual quest for a closer, more ‘strategic’ form of relationship. Although, there are differences between India and the U.S. on nuclear issues, yet both sides are now taking steps not to increase tensions over nuclear issues, while expanding areas of positive cooperation. In spite of India’s nuclear tests in May 1998, and the subsequent intentions of developing a ‘credible nuclear deterrence’ defined in its draft nuclear doctrine of August 1999, the pace of the Indo-US dialogues to date suggest that their relationship has acquired a greater convergence on a number of economic, political and military concerns which will form the agenda of long term co-operation between the two countries, and may even surmount the hurdles created by the Indian nuclear and missile programme.

The use of the term “Next Steps in Strategic Partnership” to describe the envisaged expansion of cooperation between India and the United States in several vital areas seems designed to create the impression that the two countries have
resolved differences that had blocked a more fruitful relationship. The two countries declared an intent to cooperate in the spheres of non-military nuclear activities and civilian space programmes, to resume trade in high technology products, and to initiate a dialogue on missile defence.

After India’s and Pakistan’s nuclear tests, U.S. involvement in South Asia has shifted its primary focus from getting India and Pakistan to sign nuclear arms control treaties to conflict management. A proper calibrated U.S. policy toward South Asia would continue to promote Indo-Pakistani dialogue on Kashmir and encourage the pursuit of confidence-building and arms-control measures.

India, even more than the United States has been committed to non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. At the same time there has been a substantive difference in approach to the very issue, especially towards nuclear weapons. This in the past has constituted a notable source of friction between the two countries. India has consistently maintained that a nuclear-weapon-free-world would enhance not only the security of India but also the security of all nations. Regrettably, the international community, particularly countries that have been based their security on nuclear weapons or a nuclear umbrella, have been reluctant to embrace this objective. Keeping the nuclear option open therefore, became a national security imperative three decades ago, an imperative equally valid for India in the post-Cold War period. The option that was exercised in May’98 was thus a continuation of a decision taken nearly 25 years earlier; during which period India had demonstrated an exemplary nuclear restraint, given the exceptional security related complexities in the region.

India’s security is adversely affected by the Chinese nuclear capability on the

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one side, and now, acquisition of nuclear weapons by Pakistan on the other. The situation of nuclear asymmetry in fact places Indian security interests in serious jeopardy. There appears to be no viable option left for India except to acquire nuclear weapons capability to remove this asymmetry and establish strategic stability.

Though both India and US share the common goal of nuclear disarmament, they differ over the means and priorities. While India insists on a time-bound approach to disarmament, the US regards this as impractical and instead put priorities over nuclear nonproliferation. India, however, disagrees with this priority, as she believes that non-proliferation regime discriminates between nuclear and non-nuclear powers.

Of late, however, the US has shown inclinations towards realism and flexibility in its dialogue with India. There are indications of narrowing of differences concerning the nuclear issue between the two countries. Both the countries have begun to focus on practical measures to accommodate each other’s concerns rather than to merely talk about principles. India’s views on the nuclear question including the CTBT, is now better appreciated in Washington than before. Several factors have of course, contributed to this flexibility in the American approach. These factors include India’s demonstration of its responsible defence postures and quiet diplomacy between the two countries. The most critical factor in this regard, however, is India’s growing clout in Washington. India’s capability to withstand sanction, its attractiveness for the American business community, America’s need of India’s software professions, the role played by the Indo-American community and American scholars having sympathetic attitude towards India, etc., are some of the indicators of India’s position in this regard.

India’s profile in the US has risen dramatically - partly because of its
relatively fast (if unbalanced) recent economic growth, and its emergence as a significant computer software exporter, but largely because of the meteoric success stories of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs of Indian origin and the growing prosperity and political clout of the 1.5 million-strong non-resident Indian-American community, the most affluent of US ethnic minorities. India is recognized as a big emerging market, which is being pried open for a range of American business. Since the liberalization and globalization of the Indian economy in this decade, the Indian market, consisting of its vast population of middle class consumers, has attracted US business class. As such India has gained certain economic clout that it can wield in its dialogue with the US.

The post-1998 tests introduced a new variable into non-proliferation policy: business groups and commercial lobbies. U.S. can hardly afford to ignore business lobbies adversely affected by their administration's South Asia policy. The U.S. business interests had a modifying influence on U.S. non-proliferation policies towards South Asia. Business and commercial lobbies were instrumental in bring about convergence of Indo-US relations on the nuclear issue.

An important sector of the American economy, where India has assumed a critical role, is the information technology industry. This is the largest sector of the US economy. One-fourth of the programmers are Indian. India's own Info Tech industry and the government know that the US demand for Indian programming has become massive. This explains the paradox that just when the American ire over the nuclear tests was being voiced, President Clinton decided to support an increase in the quota for Indians who wanted to immigrate in response to pressures from high technology companies and to a Department of Commerce report which estimated a shortage of over one million programmers, particularly in the light of the dangers
from the Y2K menace that could be disastrous.\textsuperscript{86}

In addition, the one million strong American community of Indian origin, known as Indo-American community, has also assumed certain political significance in favour of India. The Indian American community is rapidly emerging as a political force in the United States. They exercise the most political influence through their campaign contributions, and are actively involved in fund raising efforts for political candidates in the federal, state and local levels. More and more Indian-Americans have the courage, ambition and resources to pursue elections for public office.\textsuperscript{87} They have formed a caucus to influence US decision-making concerning their country of origin. Quite naturally, they too joined the American business lobbies in their efforts towards bridging the Indo-US nuclear divide. Some of the leading intellectuals belonging to the Indo-American community, too, urged for a more realistic approach. The makers of American foreign policy could not be oblivious of these growing demands for realism in the United States South Asia policy.

Indo-American relations cannot remain unaffected by the process of political assertiveness of the Indian community in the United States. As a result of these activities, together with the growing commercial interests in investment in India, the Indian caucus in the House of Representatives has risen to 112. Some of the American Congressmen are also actively lobbying for influencing US policies in India’s favour. The Democratic Congressman from New Jersey, Mr. Frank Pallone, who earlier co-chaired the Indian Caucus formed by this community, wrote to the then US President, Bill Clinton asking him to lift the World Bank sanctions against India imposed by the nuclear tests conducted by India in 1998. He argued that the sanctions imposed on

India have had the unhelpful and unproductive effect of curtailing US-India business ties. When the Senate Intelligence Committee moved in bill in Senate to restrict science and technology cooperation with "sensitive" countries, Pallone strongly opposed this potential piece of legislation, even though India was not specifically named in it. He appealed to the Senators that they must be careful before going on a "with hunt" against countries like India; which can prove to be a dependable partner for the US in its pursuit for a more stable and secure world. 88

The United States should pursue a differentiated rather than a universal nonproliferation policy, one that explicitly takes into account the particular security concerns of India and Pakistan. Thus far, U.S. policy has been based on the premise that nuclear proliferation is necessarily inimical to U.S. interests. The nuclear arsenals of India and Pakistan do not fundamentally threaten U.S. security interests, nor are they likely to.

Without much fanfare or the explicit abandonment of the goal of containing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, therefore, the United States should adopt a more nuanced nonproliferation agenda - one that distinguishes between proliferators that threaten U.S. interests and commitments and those states that seek nuclear weapons largely to assuage their own regional strategic insecurities.