Chapter 1: Introduction

India's strategic culture is deeply rooted in the idea of a morally superior India professing pacifism, non-violence, restraint and a pledge to provide the conflict-stricken world with universal peace and disarmament. These attributes are expected to help India to achieve value-based politics and gain international leverage. Since independence, India's goal has been to transform itself into a modern state politically, socially and militarily to realize its national interests. The British rule characterized by political subjugation and economic discrimination had left India impoverished, which was further aggravated by the partition of the country in 1947. The geographical division of a once unified nation left a profound impact on the strategic culture of the country. Research and Development (RAND) expert, George Tanham in his monograph, *Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay* has analyzed the influence of geography, history, culture and British rule on the strategic thinking of the country (Tanham 1996: 28-47).

India's pre-independence struggle was premised upon the principle of non-violence that deeply influenced India's strategic culture in post 1947 period. Independent India started life with the belief that international relations, like society, could be governed by ethics and morality rather than practical realism (Menon 2000: 23). In conformity with this belief, India during the Cold War era essentially characterized by two major camps, adopted the path of non-alignment and refrained from aligning with either of the superpowers. India's attitude was to renounce military alliances and adopt a policy that would foster cordial relations in the global environment.

However, in the post-Cold war era, the international scenario is distinguished by increasingly unstable situations and cross-cutting national interests that spell an uncertainty about the future by allies and adversaries alike. The world in the twenty-first century has become a dangerous place. The slew of small wars, secessionist movements, insurgencies and territorial disputes that have pockmarked international relations and unsettled countries at a fundamental level (Karnad 1994: 1-2) have now been further mounted by horrendous acts of terrorism and the increasing influence of
nuclear weapons. The uncertainty is further aggravated with the United Nations failing to play a more a dominant role in amicably resolving disputes amongst conflicting nation-states scrimmaging for making separate arrangement for their defence and strategic policies. There are talks of globalization of security (Hindustan Times 2001).

Against this backdrop, with increasing anarchy at the state and sub-state level, strategic culture of any country needs to be reviewed and reassessed in terms of the ‘nature of the strategic environment, the role of force in the environment, perceptions of threat and the framing of responses to perceived threats’ (Basrur 2006: 54). This phenomenon was evident in the perceptions of the Indian leaders who took over the reins of independent India and developed a new understanding about what constitutes national power and how best to exercise it, the nation’s military prowess, the use of force to fulfill national interests and the goals of a pragmatic foreign policy. While this lies in sharp contrast to the Gandhian principles of morality and his non-violent methods like civil disobedience and non-cooperation movement, it is more in conformity with the needs of the realist world. At the same time, this approach is not antithetical to the traditional Indian statecraft, which emphasized the use of force in diplomacy, scrutinized war in all its variety and assessed the various factors including morality that impinge on inter-State and inter-governmental relations.

**Traditional Indian Statecraft**

Ancient India’s politico-military thought is well compounded in the single most comprehensive treatise on statecraft, the *Arthashastra*. Written in 300 BC, this compendium on traditional Indian statecraft deals with the functioning of society and the problems of governance. It described the prevailing state of affairs as the ‘law of the fish’. The political environment was marred with the constant possibility of ‘the small fish [being] swallowed by the big fish’ (Rangarajan 1992: 108). This assertion is quite akin to the philosophical thoughts of Thomas Hobbes who described the state of nature in a perennial state of war. According to the Hobbesian philosophy, the society and the government of ancient India were based along ‘naturalistic lines’ that sought to solve the problems of the state with a view to attaining material benefits and preventing anarchy from seeping into the administrative system. The system had no
truck with such concepts as a community of nations and relations between states were determined only by the superiority of military power (Bozeman 1960: 121).

The concept of international morality was starkly absent in the India of the yore. Relationship with neighbouring states was determined on the basis of subjugation or integration. This concept has been propounded in the ancient book of Aitreya Brahmana that emphasizes on the continuous expansion of the regime to 'the very ends uninterrupted [so that it] constitute[s] one state and administration up to the seas' (Sircar 1962: 525-527). The concept of territorial expansion and other aggressive aggrandizement of the state have also been codified in the Manu Smriti. The mythical law-giver, Manu have justified aggressive territorial growth by unequivocally stating that the prime duty of the king is 'to wish for what he has not got, having it, to protect it carefully [and] to increase what has been protected' (Mukherjee 1967: 79-80). Codified in 400 B.C., the laws of Manu gave rise to a stream of thought that is akin to the realist theory of modern years.

The chief concern of the Manu Smriti was to bring about order in the society and to maximize the power of the ruler so that he attains the status of chakravartin1 – the universal hegemon. In addition, the four great books – Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda (compiled between 2000 B.C. to 500 B.C.) along with the fifth Veda (a compendium of stories, legends and myths pertaining to the Aryan period), Puranas (constituting epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata) have propounded politico-military strategies, tactics and codes of conduct that have deeply influenced the civilizational structure of South Asia even in the present times. With the passage of time, these codes and principles have evolved and reformed. But the change in emphasis on this or that aspect of policy and of instrument of state did not disrupt the basic framework and contours of the policy prescriptions, which places a premium on armed might and its considered use (Karnad 2005: 6).

Yuddhakandam, the war manual is yet another set of codified laws that emphasized the importance attached to military and non-military options. It expounded four main categories of diplomatic means that ranged from sama

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1 Chakravartin is a king who has driven his war chariot around the world without being stopped by any other ruler. He thus attains the position of the king of the entire world.
(reconciliation), dana (gift), bheda (creating dissension in the enemy quarters) and danda (punishment). These diplomatic methods have influenced the politico-military culture of South Asia to a great extent. For instance, the concept of sama deals with sandhi or peace treaty, which can be sub-divided into five categories:

- **swarna sandhi** which is equivalent to entente cordiale based on friendship and reciprocal goodwill;

- **adistra sandhi** that is achieved when a part of the territory is ceded in return for peace. (In 1963, Ayub Khan and Zhouenlai signed an accord by virtue of which Pakistan ceded a part of the Aksai Chin region in the Kashmir province to China for better bilateral relations);

- **karma sandhi** is effected when two nations agree to enter into a treaty for joint usage of the natural resources that lie common in their respective territories. (The Indus Water River Treaty of 1960 was signed between India and Pakistan for sharing the water resources);

- **aparanita sandhi**, is in the form of an open-ended peace agreement and;


The Sukraniti, a commentary on statecraft written a few centuries after the compilation of Arthashastra, by the great theorist Sukra, have focused on the types of war and their causes. According to this law, ‘there is no warfare which extirpates the powerful enemy so much so as the kutayuddha or war conducted by disregards of the state of morality’ (Kamad 2005: 164-168). But Sukraniti also justifies this covert form of war by declaring that, ‘the enemy has to be killed in wars whether conducted according to the rules of morality or against them’ (Kamad 2005: 166-168). Overt war was advised only when covert methods of war-fighting were exhausted and political imperatives demanded the escalation of conflict into a full blown phenomenon. But, the expectations of ‘righteous’ war fighting notwithstanding the bottom line still was the enemy’s defeat by fair or foul (Rosen 1996: 69-70).

In the final analysis, Yuddhakandam advocates that war should be resorted to only as last measure. Every effort should be made to settle disputes through progressive means and military option should be employed only when diplomatic tactics have failed. The military option should be contemplated only after a careful
assessment of the balance of forces and the existing circumstances. This aspect has also been discerned in the Puranas which advises the king to carefully consider the correlation of forces and his own strengths and weaknesses, before engaging in war (Mukherjee 1967: 123-124). The emphasis was clearly on settling disputes peacefully but if war was unavoidable then it should be resorted to only when it ensured the desired results - victory in terms of land, wealth and ally in return. The strategic posture clearly accented on military preparedness that required the instrument of danda - the army - was well trained and adequately equipped with efficient weapons to produce the desired results.

On the question of morality, ancient India regarded it merely as a virtue determined by the situation one finds himself in. In the great epic Mahabharata when Arjuna found it difficult to fight his enemies who were actually his friends and relatives, Lord Krishna exhorted him by saying, “when life is at danger......or, one’s property is at stake, truth becomes unutterable and so falsehood becomes truth and truth becomes falsehood. He who can distinguish between truth and falsehood in [this] situation can only know what is morality” (Mukherjee 1967: 72-73). He justifies kutayuddha by declaring that “when the number of one’s foes [become] great, their destruction should be effected by [all] contrivances and means” (Mukherjee 1967: 64). The concept of morality is thus invoked for reasons of partisan political reasons.

The Permanent Five (US, Russia, UK, France and China) first acquired nuclear weapons and then debated about their possible use and the morality of such acquisition whereas India exhausted all moral arguments and debates against such acquisition before the government hesitatingly embarked upon the weaponization track. India was gradually convinced with the belief that undue emphasis on the moral factor concerning the nuclear question would not earn them more than a few pats on the back at the cost of their security. The concept of morality finds application only to justify realist ambitions in the anarchic international system. In his Arthashastra, Kautilya did not scruple to advise bribery, fraud, assassination, fostering bheda (dissension) among the enemy ranks, inciting instability in the rival nations, and spreading misinformation amongst foes to neutralize a formidable adversary. The basic Kautilyan conviction was that where the interests of the country are involved, ethics are a burdensome irrelevance (Chakravarti 1990: p.vii). At this point, an
interesting aspect that cannot be ignored is that in *The Prince and the Discourses* written by Machiavelli years after *Arthashastra* was compiled has striking similarity in the conceptualization of the rights and duties of the sovereign and the measures required to preserve order and stability in the kingdom. The compendium of *Arthashastra* is thus for all purposes a practical work that has influenced the strategic culture of the present day to a great extent.

The *Arthashastra* is perhaps well renowned for its eloquent articulation of the *mandala* system that details out the concept of inter-State relations. The *mandala* system is conceived as concentric rings, sequentially of allies and enemies. The innermost ring comprise of the *vijigisu* (aspirant to conquest) and the potential *chakravartin* (universal hegemon). The next ring is composed of enemies and foes engulfed by another ring of friends and allies and so on. This concept has been elaborately explained by George Tanham that throws light on India’s security strategy (Tanham 1996: 47-48). The first circle depicts India; the second circle comprises of India’s smaller neighbours like Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and Maldives; the third circle denotes sub-continental states like Pakistan with whom India has fought four wars; China and former Soviet Union with whom India shared good neighbourly relations. The fourth ring comprises of the Indian Ocean which was perceived to be the source of international trade and commerce as well as external threats. The final circle includes the rest of the powers.

Delhi’s strategic community places the entire subcontinent in the first circle, believing that it constitutes a single strategic unit defined by geography and culture (Tanham 1996: 47-48). The writers of *nitishastras* elaborated on the doctrine of the *mandala* by conceiving of ‘natural’ allies, ‘natural’ enemies and ‘natural’ aspirations (Sircar 1962: 521). So when Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee talked about India and the United States as being ‘natural allies’, he was tapping into the concept with a deep grounding in the Indian ethos (Karnad 2005: 13). However, the *mandala* system was fraught with various shortcomings. It ensured fractiousness of the Indian society (Bozeman 1960: 104). The limitations of this model convinced the later Mauryan rulers to discard the Kautilyan approach and to enter into cooperative initiative with foreign powers. This is evident in the present day negotiation of the Indo-US nuclear
deal. The United States have off late abandoned its imperialist posture and is reaching out to nations like India, Pakistan and Afghanistan with substantial incentives.

The Indian paradigm shows that India has also reoriented its approach to its neighbouring countries like Burma (Myanmar) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). In 1948, the Burmese leader, U Nu, intimidated by the presence of the powerful Communist Chinese on his country’s border desired a defence pact with India. Brushing aside such proposal, Prime Minister Nehru responded bluntly, ‘Defence Pact! Defence against whom?’ (Karnad 1994: 26). A year later in 1949, the Burmese leader on a state visit to India broached up the matter again. However, he was curtly told that such a defence pact would needlessly provoke China and it was too occupied in its internal politics to adopt any expansionist designs. Over the years, things have changed. India now regards Myanmar and its other smaller neighbours scrupulously. Myanmar’s strategic position in the geopolitical environment necessitates that India develop a pragmatic approach in terms of a strategic policy towards its smaller neighbour.

**Concept of Force**

The Vedic philosophy quite alike the Hobbesian teachings regarded human beings as basically imperfect and perceived them in an unvarnished form. Human beings were in general corrupt, unscrupulous, greedy for power and wealth and ambitious. Likewise, the traditional Indian statecraft prescribed that as an absolute sovereign, the ruler is free to have his policies limited by strictures and tempered by ethical considerations and sentiment, but not if his intention is to serve the national interests (Karnad 2005: 14). There was inherently a nationalistic feeling that ruled supreme above everything. To that extent, the first Chapter of the *Rig Veda* enjoins to annihilate all irrespective of being friends or foes who are antagonistic to national interests. This was required to realize in *Rig Vedic* terms ‘the abode of truth’ by purging the society of all malevolent individuals culturally and even ethnically. This being the case, to speedily eliminate the adversaries extreme military measures were deemed necessary. In a world, ‘when war is conducted in an unfair, mean and deceitful manner’ (Oppert 1967: 32) the need to rely on weapons that can unleash maximum destruction was justified.
The resort to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) was determined and ordained by the severity of the circumstances that a nation found itself in. The more threatening the situation, the more justified was the need to use WMD to exterminate the enemies and ensure victory. The *Dhanur Veda* classified six types of WMDs which ‘are so powerful that nothing can frustrate or subdue them’ (Oppert 1967: 30-31). The usage of these weapons was restricted only for exceptional circumstances to neutralize an otherwise imperishable enemy, presumably the demon *Vrta* considered to be the most formidable foe of the early Aryans (Oppert 1967: 16). Among these weapons, *vajra-astra* was of average destructive power. According to the *Nitishastras*, the *vajra-astra* ‘shines brightly with the light of a krore of suns, and it resembles a fire which shone at the dissolution of the world [and] the night of destruction at the end of the world’ and its impact could be felt beyond a distance of ten miles.

The concept of WMDs, commonly known as *yantras* also found mention in the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*. In the *Ramayana*, reference has been made to firearms like the *agneya*, *shikhara*, *shataugani* (capable of killing hundreds), and *shahastragani* (one that can kill thousands). Mention is also made of the *agni-astra* or the *brahm-astra* that can be likened to the modern day thermonuclear weapons with megatonnage capacity. The *ashturvidya* weapon referred to chemical weapons that destroyed the enemies by enveloping them in different layers of suffocating smoke and poisonous gases (Bahadur 1979: 301-302).

Given the destructive capacity of these weapons, the traditional Hindu treatises advocate the use of these weapons only in desperate situations. Noteworthy enough, this military philosophy is reflected in the strategic culture of modern India and other nuclear weapon states. Being aware of the horrendous destructive capacity of nuclear weapons, their use has been strictly restricted only as a last measure for the purpose of safeguarding the security and sovereignty of the country. The elaboration of the massive destruction options along with a Hegelian view of the State combined with the holistic body of Vedic and Puranic thinking on statecraft, and the exposition of the *mandala* system of international relations, in effect, constitute the traditional
Indian *machpolitik* – a ‘statist military’ recipe to survive international anarchy (Booth and Trood 1999: 13).

The concept of fire weapons and weapons of mass destruction has also been referred to by the Greeks. Greek historians writing about Alexander the Great’s campaigns in India in 326 BC, reports the Macedonian King writing to his tutor Themistius on how his army had to face flashes of flame and fire while fighting the Indians. ‘The Brahmins [fought] at a distance with lightning and thunder’ (Karnad 2005: 18). With these descriptions as well as the accounts of various lethal weapons existing in the Vedic period, it would be fair enough to believe that ancient India advocated a defensive strategic culture, wherein the enemy was combated against with the most effective weaponry for the purpose of overcoming them.

However, the above descriptions are certainly not substantial enough to establish that ancient India possessed nuclear weapons literally, but what can be assumed is that the kings in the ancient India had developed and stockpiled inventories of terror weapons and weapons of mass destruction. What is also interesting to note is that the strategic culture of ancient India prescribed the usage of these weapons of terror and destruction only as a last resort to annihilate a powerful enemy. Violence has thus been justified in moral terms only when it becomes imperative to uphold national interests. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna urged Arjuna to take no pity on his cousins, mentors and other clan members and to do his ‘duty’ of annihilating the evil and wrong, which is *dharma*. This constitutes the basic pillar of India’s nuclear philosophy in the modern times where the application of force of the most lethal type is justified for the safeguard our vital national interests.

**Gandhi and the Use of Force**

Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy is based on the cardinal principles of *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satyagraha* (truth). The normative values advocated by him were meant to be a panacea for the violence-stricken world. At a personal level he believed in the ‘superiority of non-violence as the acme of both inner strength and physical courage’ (Bondurant 1988: 7). At a baser level, Gandhi believed that protection of our national interests from the British rule of subjugation was the need of the hour and for this
purpose, India must use the necessary means to fight against the unjust rule of the foreigners. Thus what he regarded as deplorable at a personal level was actually perceived by him to be unavoidable in the higher interests of nationalist cause in view of self-defence. Gandhi in the ultimate analysis was a practical politician. Whatever be the reason for him to propagate his personal beliefs of *ahimsa*, he would never have done so at the cost of putting the nation at peril. Non-violence in his scheme of things, it turns out, was less an absolute than a situation-dependent standard wielded by him only if it promised the desired results, in which sense it differed not a whit from the Vedic injunction suitably to use morality in statecraft or Nehru’s later campaign to endow international relations with an ethical compass (Karnad 2005: 31).

Gandhi interpreted traditional ideas in such a way that it ultimately served revolutionary needs of the existing situation. Thus in 1919, Gandhi’s method of employing non-violent resistance for political purpose in South Africa to protect the Indian community from discriminatory racial treatment was immensely successful. Enthused with his success of non-violent resistance against police coercion and oppressive laws, Gandhi sought to apply the same methods in India’s independence struggle. To this extent, his doctrine of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* obviously worked successfully. But with the increasing oppression of the British rulers, India became more and more restive to the indiscriminate policies and violent methods of the colonial rulers. In the face of such cumulating oppression, Gandhian principles of morality failed to stir the nationalist leaders who questioned whether the concept of non-violence was worth the blood of the innocent Indians that was being spilt indiscriminately. What was the logic behind the masses facing the bullets of the British police force all unprotected and unarmed during the Quit India Movement of 1942, especially when Gandhi himself faced no greater danger than solitary confinement in the Agha Khan Palace in Yeravada, Pune.

Indeed, leading Hindu reformer of the times, Swami Vivekananda while being critical of the Congress Party’s policies trenchantly declared: ‘beggar’s bowl has no place in……a world of machine, mammon and merchandise’ (Majumdar 1965: 119). Gandhi’s moral tactics were also challenged by the Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore who disapproved by stating that ‘to transpose moral force into force’ is wrong and apprehended that ‘martyrdom for the cause of truth [can] degenerate into
fanaticism for more verbal forms, descending into self-deception that hides behind sacred names' (Moon 1966: 280). Gandhi’s problems were further compounded when he realized that his moralistic ideas were gradually losing appeal within the Congress Party.

Gradually, it began to dawn on the Mahatma that a non-violent movement was not going to have an absolute foothold among the masses and even less in Indian politics. On coming to terms with the fact that advocating the concept of *ahimsa* as a force to overthrow the British is out of question, Gandhi decided to mobilize the masses to bring all activity in the country to a standstill as evident during the Civil Disobedience Movement. He realized that if a population of millions “stands idle the whole country stands idle” (Green 1986: 19). Thus Gandhi discovered the potential of the vast population as a politico-military weapon, which if aimed properly will render the adversary into submission.

It is obvious that Gandhi had not completely denounced the concept of “force” and his passive resistance was after all not so “passive” to be overshadowed by his previously advocated moral grandeur of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*. According to him, ethical behavior is characterized not by just the absence of violence but by the negation of cowardice. He believed that it was “better to commit violence than to sit helplessly out of cowardice in the name of non-violence”. Although, Gandhi at a baser level did abhor violence but when it came to national interest and survival of the nation he was willing to “risk violence a thousand times than risk the emasculation of a whole race”. He upheld violence that was resorted to in self-defence or in the defence of the helpless or in support of parties who were fighting for a just cause. Applying this yardstick, he supported India’s partnering the Allies in the Second World War (Puri 1987: 75).

Gandhi’s realist orientations can also be discerned from his views on the Indian Army. Speaking to his friend Reverend C.F. Andrews, Gandhi conceded that, “under *swaraj* (self-rule), I would not hesitate to advise those who would bear arms to do so and fight for the country” (Puri 1987: 67). He was candid enough to accept that *ahimsa* was essentially an “abstruse” concept (Puri 1987: 58-59). Later, when India’s first Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General K.M. Cariappa who found it difficult
to resolve the inherent contradictions in the concept of non-violence with military ethics (to subjugate the enemy forces in the higher interests of the country) and questioned Gandhi on the efficacy of *ahimsa*, the latter honestly replied, “you have asked me to tell you in tangible and concrete form, how you can put over to the troops the need for non-violence. I am still groping in the dark for the answer” (Anand 1998: 15-16).

These practical difficulties of the non-violent method made the Congress Working Committee to conclude in a meeting way back in 1939 that while non-violence had perhaps some predominance in the independence struggle, it expressed its inability ‘to extend it to the region of national defence’ (Mahadevan *et al.* 1967: 41). Gandhi while slowly realizing the futility of his doctrine of *ahimsa* began to appreciate the need of violent force for upholding the national interests of the country. Immediately after independence, in 1948, when Pakistan attempted to wrest Jammu and Kashmir by force, the Indian Army embarked with full force and vigour for the defence of the State. A proud Gandhi wrote to the then Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: “When the Kashmir operation began, I began to feel proud of [Indian Army] and every aeroplane that goes with materials and arms and ammunition and requirements of the Army, I feel proud” (Krishna 1995: 377). He was absolutely clear that no injustice to the territorial integrity and national interests of India will be tolerated by the Indians and any such nefarious designs shall result in condign punishment to the aggressor. He further reiterated forcefully, “......I would not see India degrading itself to feeling helpless” (Krishna 1995: 377).

Gandhi realized that in the post Second World War II era, all weak states were subjugated and left at the mercy of the more powerful countries. This was precisely because the former lagged in military technology (Puri 1987: 183-184). The possession of atomic power had equipped the Allies with a capability that had rendered them virtually invincible. Although, he was skeptical whether superior military technology can transform India into a major power, he also realized the necessity of evolving new strategy and means to fight British imperialism to ameliorate the lot of the oppressed in India. At the same time, he was concerned about the British dropping the atomic bomb on the agitating Indians. Concurrently, he was also aware that India was not in a position to develop atomic power at that point of
time. Thus he adopted a moralpolitik approach towards violence and nuclear weapons and conveyed to the masses that it is 'the most diabolical use of science [that can unleash] cataclysmic change' (Puri 1987: 158-159). Hence it should be avoided. Non-violence was thus just a way to ward off the danger of any possible use of the bomb by the British against the ‘atomic power incapable’ Indians. It is quite obvious that Gandhi never had an absolute commitment to non-violence. While he took an uncompromising position on issues of war and violence, he was aware of the practical problems involved in implementing his ideas (Basrur 2006: 60).

On one hand, he renounced nuclear weapons as immoral and unethical and identified non-violence as the only solution to the disastrous effect of the bomb. But, on the other hand, he also recognized the necessity of violent force for protecting the national interests. Thus given a choice between cowardice and violence, Gandhi would have advised the latter and encourage “India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than she should, in a cowardly manner, become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour”.² For Gandhi, non-violence was a middle path. What was more important for him was the sovereignty and security of India and he was ready to compromise his moral doctrinaire for them. Gandhi’s uncompromising morality in abrogating violence can be viewed as a strategic “situation-dependent standard wielded by him only if it promised results” (Kamad 2005: 32). Otherwise, Gandhi was in favour of repudiating the coercive use of force.

The advent of nuclear weapons since World War II has brought about dynamic changes within the global strategic thinking and India has been no exception to this rule. Historically, India’s need to weaponize has been justified on various grounds ranging from calling it a necessary insurance against possible nuclear blackmail, to describing it as a consequence of China’s nuclear weapons build-up or United States sabre-rattling during the 1971 India-Pakistan war to many such specific examples in support of this argument. On other occasions, the alleged nuclear threat posed by a hostile Pakistan or, more accurately, Pakistan’s nuclear weapons capability, has been offered as the rationale for building a case in favour of India’s nuclear deterrent. And

² This articulation is known as the ‘Doctrine of Sword’ of the Mahatma by which he believed and preached to the Indians that training in arms is necessary for upholding our national sovereignty rather than to yield unjustified demands of aggressors.
then, there is this proposition that the technologies underlying nuclear weapons can help make India a great scientific and "modern" power. Many proponents of this argument also believe that India is destined to become a great state, one that matches the historical and civilizational accomplishments of the Indian people and that acquisition of nuclear weapons will enhance India's chances to achieve great power status.

As experience shows, nuclear weapons, unlike other weapons, are not ordinary tools of national security: they are political objects of considerable importance in domestic debates and internal bureaucratic struggles and can also serve as international normative symbols of modernity, identity and power. In practice nuclear technology – and more specifically nuclear weapons - despite all efforts of disarmament, have thus come to constitute a new category of weapons, the acquisition of which is seen to enhance one's international standing and prestige and provide greater leverage in international affairs. They have also been seen as contributing to building economic and technical base that could transform a state from poverty and impoverishment to modernity and prosperity. In the case of India, this conviction about the relevance of nuclear technologies indeed predates both the Chinese and Pakistani nuclear programmes and is at the core of the scientific community's more recent arguments in favour of weaponization (Thomas and Gupta 2000: 34-36).

**Why States build Nuclear Weapons?**

A pertinent question that arises here is why does any state wish to build nuclear weapons? What purpose is served through the acquisition of these most lethal weapons of mass destruction? It is agreed by all that nuclear weapons have not eliminated the element of war from the dynamics of nation-politics. In the Indian case, the Kargil War of May 1999 clearly indicates that India's possession of nuclear weapons did not deter Pakistan from violating the Line of Control (LOC). But at the same time, Pakistan's nuclear weapons are believed to having prevented India from striking across the LOC. Nuclear weapons may have contributed to preventing major wars, yet these weapons do not prevent small wars or low intensity conflicts especially those that may rage within a nation supported by outside powers. It does not also prevent border disputes and do not help recapture lost territory. For example,
US was unable to coerce Iran into releasing its embassy staff held hostage in Teheran for over a year or defeat North Korea or Vietnam. The list of such examples can be exhaustive.

Indeed, the possession of nuclear weapons has partly subverted and distorted the traditional conduct of foreign policy and war. But at the same time, nuclear weapons have reinforced the great power status, especially of the five Permanent Members of the United Nations Security Council. Until recently, these powers have in effect sought to prevent the transfer of nuclear technology, even for peaceful purposes to non-nuclear weapon powers, thereby establishing a sort of nuclear cartel and providing credibility to the argument that the nuclear weapons represent "currency of power" in international relations. They have used their monopoly of nuclear weapons technology to bring political and economic pressures on non-nuclear weapon states, not just to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons, but also to achieve other political objectives vis a vis non-nuclear states. The possession of these weapons has given the great powers a new, additional, instrument, for retaining, reinforcing, their great power status, with adverse, implications for the non-nuclear weapons states thus promoting the thesis of "haves" versus "have-nots". This phenomenon of "nuclear apartheid" has created great attraction for possession of nuclear weapons as ultimate symbols of national power.

Scott D. Sagan has suggested three models about why states decide in favour of building nuclear weapons. These include: (a) "the security model", where states build nuclear weapons to increase national security against foreign threats, especially nuclear threats; (b) "the domestic politics model", which envisions nuclear weapons as political tools used to advance parochial domestic and bureaucratic interests; and (c) "the norms model", under which nuclear weapons decisions are made because weapons acquisition, or restraint in weapons development, provides an important normative symbol of a state's modernity and identity (Sagan 1996-1997: 55).

The Security Model explains how according to the neorealist theory in international relations, states exists in an anarchical international system and must therefore rely on self-help to protect their sovereignty and national security (Sagan 1996-1997: 57). Any state that seeks to maintain its national security must balance
against any rival state that develops nuclear weapons by gaining access to a nuclear
deterrent itself. This can produce two policies. First, strong states pursue a form of
internal balancing by adopting the expensive, but self-sufficient policy of developing
their own nuclear weapons. Second, weak states can join a balancing alliance with a
nuclear weapon power, obtaining an assurance of nuclear retaliation by that ally as a
means of extended deterrence. Britain and France developed their nuclear weapons
capability because of the growing Soviet military threat and the inherent reduction in
the credibility of the US nuclear guarantee to NATO allies once the Soviet Union was

China developed the bomb because Beijing was threatened with a possible
nuclear attack by the United States during the end of the Korean War in the early
1950s and later again during the Taiwan Straits crises in the mid 1950s. In the late
1950s, not only did Moscow prove to be an irresolute nuclear ally, but the increasing
hostility in Sino–Soviet relations in the early 1960s further goaded Beijing into
developing a robust and affordable nuclear deterrent, since the border clashes exposed
the limited value of China’s conventional deterrent (Goldstein 1992: 494).

However, by relating it to one’s imminent and visible security threats the
Security Model seeks to only slow down, not eliminate, the future spread of nuclear
weapons. Also, efforts to slow down the process may of course be useful, but they
will eventually be countered by two very strong structural forces that create an
inexorable momentum toward a world of numerous nuclear weapons states. And here,
first, the end of the Cold War creates a more uncertain multiplier world in which US
nuclear guarantees will be considered increasingly less reliable; second, each time one
state develops nuclear weapons, it will increase the strategic incentives for
neighbouring states to follow suit (Waltz 1993; Mearsheimer 1990: 44-79; 5-56).

The Domestic Politics Model links the validity of one’s pursuit for the bomb
to, whether or not the acquisition of nuclear weapons serves the national interest of a
state. This is likely to serve the parochial bureaucratic or political elite’s or at least
some individual actors within the state that may include: (a) the states nuclear energy
establishment (which includes officials in state run laboratories as well as civilian
reactor facilities); (b) important units within the professional military (often within the
air force though sometimes in navy bureaucracies interested in nuclear propulsion); and (c) politicians in states wherein individual parties or the mass public strongly favor nuclear weapons acquisition. When such actors form coalitions that are strong enough to control the government’s decision making process — either through their direct political power or indirectly through their control of information — nuclear weapons programs are likely to flourish.

Realists recognize that domestic political actors have parochial interests, but such interests have only a marginal influence on crucial national security issues. From the domestic politics perspective, nuclear weapons programmes are not obvious or inevitable solutions to international security problems; instead, nuclear weapons programmes are solutions looking for a problem to which to attach themselves so as to justify their existence. Potential threats to a state’s security certainly exist in the international system, but in the domestic politics model, international threats are seen as being more malleable and more subject to interpretation and can therefore produce a variety of responses from domestic actors. Security threats are therefore not the central cause of weapons decisions according to this model; they are merely windows of opportunity through which parochial interests can jump. From the domestic model’s perspective, the 1974 test and subsequent building of significantly greater nuclear weapons capabilities are not seen as proud symbols of the success of an Indian nation at security programme (Sagan 1996-1997: 69); instead they symbolize failure of the Indian civilian nuclear power industry, which was forced to form an alliance with the pro-bomb lobby to justify its existence and deflect focus from safety problems in its domestic nuclear energy programme (Abraham 1992: 231-235).

The Norms Model focuses on norms concerning weapons acquisition, seeing nuclear decisions as serving important symbolic functions both shaping and reflecting a state’s identity. According to this perspective, state behavior is determined not by the leaders’ cold calculations about the national security interests or their parochial bureaucratic interests, but rather by deeper norms and shared beliefs about what actions are legitimate and appropriate in international relations. Sociologists and political scientists have studied the development and influence of international norms concerning the acquisition of nuclear weapons (Nye 1986; Rostow 1995: 151-185). From this sociological perspective, military organizations and their weapons are
envisioned as serving functions similar to those of flags, airlines and Olympic teams: they are part of what modern states believe they have to possess to be legitimate modern states (Jervis 1989: 174-225).

This sociologist argument highlight the possibility that nuclear weapons programmes serve symbolic functions reflecting leaders perceptions of appropriate and modern behavior. The political science literature reminds us, however, that such symbols are often contested and that the resulting norms are spread by power and coercion, and not by the strength of ideas alone. Both insights illuminate the nuclear proliferation phenomenon. These norms shaped states' identities and expectations and they restrained the ambitions of dominating and powerful actors who had actually created these norms (Byers 1995: 108-180). The history of nuclear proliferation is particularly interesting in this regard because a major shift in nuclear norms has emerged as the result of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime, which has at the core of prevalent international norms with regard to nuclear weapons.

Although many individual case studies of nuclear weapons decisions emphasizes the belief that nuclear weapons acquisition will enhance the international prestige of the state, such prestige has been viewed simply as a reasonable, though diffused, means to increase the state's international influence. What is missing from these details is an analysis of why and how actions are granted symbolic meaning: why are some nuclear weapon acts considered prestigious, while others produce opprobrium, and how much do such beliefs evolve over time? Why, for example, was nuclear testing deemed prestigious and legitimate in the 1960s, but is today considered relatively illegitimate and irresponsible? An understanding of the NPT regime clearly indicates that there has been a shift in the norm concerning what acts grant prestige and legitimacy from the 1960s notion of joining "the nuclear club" to the 1990s concept of joining the club of nation's adhering to the NPT. However, the salience of the norms that were made explicit in the NPT treaty has itself shifted over time (Sagan 1996-1997: 96).

For policy makers, the existence of three different models explaining why states develop nuclear weapons seems to suggest that no single policy can redress all future proliferation problems. Fortunately, some of the policy recommendations
derived from the models are quite compatible. For example, many of the diplomatic tools suggested by the domestic politics model, which attempts to reduce the power of individuals’ parochial interests in favour of nuclear weapons, would not interfere with simultaneous effort to address states security concerns. Similarly, efforts to enhance the international status of some non-nuclear states need not either undercut deterrence or promote pro-nuclear advocates in those countries. But none of them seem to provide a complete remedy. And the result is that now states have continued their tryst with their nuclear destiny almost unabated.

India’s Leadership and its Strategic Culture

Nehru, unlike his mentor, had little faith in the strategy of non-violence for resolving inter-State issues, especially in the post-Second World War era. This is not to say that he was an unrealistic idealist. He was deeply influenced by Gandhi, but as political steward exhibited a much greater pragmatism even in his grand vision of universal disarmament (Kamath 2003: 372). However, Nehru found Gandhi’s moral precepts rather confusing and was candid enough to admit that he “did not give an absolute allegiance to the doctrine of non-violence or accept it forever” (Bondurant 1988: 127-128). Again, this does not imply that Nehru chose to disregard the concept of morality in international politics. Nehru’s brand of morality was primarily guided by realpolitik considerations. This is obvious from his decision to adopt the policy of non-alignment during the era of Cold War characterized by high-stake politics. Though, Nehru displayed moral rectitude in denouncing military alliances during the Cold War era and adopted the path of non-alignment, he was also pragmatic to spearhead the campaign for eliminating the European colonies and ending racialism in Asia and Africa.

At the base of all argument, Nehru was primary a practical man enthused with the vision of promoting India to scale new heights of industrial and technological advances that will help the nation to emerge as a modern and self-reliant nation. When India was born in 1947, its condition was very critical if not stillborn. Ravaged by oppressive colonial rule for two hundred long years, its fragile condition was further torn asunder with the virulent effects of the Partition. To add to its woes, India had also missed out on the benefits of the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century.
Thus at the time of independence, India was economically impoverished, industrially and technologically lagging, socially backward and politically debilitated. At this conjecture, Nehru’s main aim was to develop an industrial-technological model that would enable India to achieve self-reliance and modernity. His priority was to put India on the path of modernity and development in all aspects including security and defence issues. Nehru was also keenly aware of another problem that was deeply plaguing the Indian society – lack of scientific temperament. Nehru, being a modern man well conversant with western ideas and thoughts, realized that a scientific spirit can play a dynamic role in ushering revolutionary changes within the Indian political, economic, social and democratic system. Nehru thus decided to apply science and technology in the areas of social and political upliftment of the India. By this time, the power of atomic energy was already made known to the world. The twin bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki while demonstrating the destructive capability of atomic power, simultaneously churned thoughts about its vast potential for the developmental purposes of the country. Atomic energy was to play a role in bringing about rapid industrialization of the country by building dams and factories that would accelerate the economic development of the country.

As far as the military application of atomic energy was concerned, Nehru was deeply perturbed by the catastrophic effects of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His view of nuclear weapons was that they were immoral and should be abolished (Basrur 2006: 60). His conscience prevented him from accepting nuclear weapons as usable instruments of state policy, because “the use of these weapons amounts to genocide” (Mullick 1972: 161). But he was also aware that in the long run nuclear energy cannot be ignored especially when the whole world imbued with its limitless potential is trying to harness this capability for their benefits. Nehru was thus confronted with the difficult choice of destruction and development. But this was not for long.

It is an indisputable fact that like his mentor, Nehru abhorred violence and believed in the ‘peaceful coexistence’ of the sovereign nations. This concept was upheld by him in the Panchsheel Agreement of 1954 with China. Nehru was in favour of ‘peaceful coexistence’ in so much as it meant a substitute for war. But his articulation also denoted efforts to increase India’s power. Nehru preferred that
foreign policies be conducted in the light of diplomacy. The use of military force should be resorted to only as a last measure, particularly, if it was meant to alter discrimination and protect Indian interests. Nehru’s sentiments thus reflected that although he acknowledged the need for harnessing atomic power to set the nation on the path of growth and development, privately he was in favour of using nuclear power for defense purposes. Hence, he was not ready to commit India to abstain from developing them permanently. To this extent, while drawing inspirations from the Vedic age (the ancients Indians knew the art of killing....), as also being influenced by his mentor, Gandhi, Nehru believed that one should acquire ‘the ability to strike’ before renouncing such power (Karnad 2005: 47).

In 1955, in response to Bhabha’s suggestion that India should abandon the nuclear bomb, Nehru said, “they should discuss it again when India was ready to produce one” (Schmidt 1982: 185). It is true that Nehru was worried about the Cold War’s potential for catastrophe - “one accident, one irrational decision, or one wrong move might very well spell an end for everything” – yet he acknowledged the value of deterrence in preventing war between the United States and the Soviet Union (Ghatate 1988: 12). In contrast, his Defence Minister, V.K. Krishna Menon, was uncompromising in his rejection of nuclear weapons (Brecher 1968: 231-232). Thus Nehru maintained an ambivalent position. On one hand, he continually advocated global nuclear disarmament, and on the other, refused to cap the nuclear option for the future development of nuclear weapons. As early as 1946, on the occasion of laying the foundation of the Atomic Energy Research Committee under the chairmanship of Homi J. Bhabha, Nehru expressed hope that “Indian scientists will use the atomic force for constructive purposes,” but if the need arises then India would “try to defend herself by all means at her disposal” (Kapur 2001: 54).

By the late fifties and early sixties, the scientific community was endowed with more and more power and autonomy. In early January 1958, India had developed “the technical know–how for manufacturing the atom bomb” and was in a position to produce one “in the next three or four years” if adequate resources were siphoned in that direction (Mirchandani 1968: 231). These statements reaffirmed the duality in Nehru’s stance towards nuclear weapons policy. By 1962, the Atomic Energy Commission was further strengthened and endowed with powers to harness and
develop nuclear energy in the country. There was a growing consensus in the country for the development of the atomic energy. Till this point, the emphasis was primarily on the peaceful application of nuclear energy. However, the 1962 war with China and the consequent humiliating defeat of the Indians, raised concerns about our security and national interests.

The Sino-Indian war raised fresh speculations about a moralistic and idealistic approach towards intimidating nations in an increasingly anarchic world. Quite opposed to Gandhi’s moralpolitik policy professing the doctrines of ahimsa (non-violence) and satyagraha, the Indian debacle in the 1962 war made it imperative that a change in foreign policy commensurate with the realpolitik policies of the world is required. Prime Minister Nehru has been in general blamed for the humiliation suffered by India in the 1962 war. Nehru, while advocating the principle of peaceful co-existence, pegged the military expenditure at only 1.83 percent of GDP (Ministry of Defence 1961-1962). The meagre investment in defence allocation and the subsequent war results dawned upon the India political community that along with socio-economic development of the country it is also equally important to devote adequate attention to the defence forces. As justly argued by the father of the Indian strategic thought, K. Subrahmanyam, it is only prudent to defend that what we develop (Subrahmanyam 1973).\(^1\) Hence, the routing of the Indian army in the war while clearly exposing the vulnerabilities of our forces indicated the immediate need to modernize and develop a robust military strength. This conviction was further strengthened in 1963 when substantial reports indicated clandestine military dealings between China and Pakistan.

The leading political parties particularly Jana Sangh pointed out the necessity for a capable defence infrastructure, especially in the aftermath of a defeat that had severely jolted the morale of India. The Jana Sangh was further joined in by secular nationalists like Ram Manohar Lohia who favoured nuclear weapons. Their basic contention was that acquisition of nuclear weapons would demonstrate Indian civilizational superiority. However, in conformity with Indian culture and ethos, these

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\(^1\) In this essay, the author has emphasized on the importance of defending our value assets in further promoting our developmental goals.
parties upheld that these weapons shall be used only for purely strategic and defensive purposes. Thus the strategic culture of India – a country that has right from independence believed in peaceful coexistence - was undergoing a significant transformation under Nehru’s era. This transformation was primarily in the higher interests of safeguarding the defence and security of the nation, an intention which is later clearly laid out in the Government’s White Paper and all official statements of bomb. The emerging radical parties demanded for the development of nuclear weapons despite its horrendous destructive capacity in the larger interests of sovereignty and territorial integrity of India.

Despite such vociferous demands from leading political parties, the Indian Government remained firmly grounded on its policy of “no nuclear weapons”. Nehru once again demurred:

“One hand, we are asking the nuclear powers to give up their tests. How can we, without showing the utter insincerity of what we have always said go in for doing the very thing which we have repeatedly asked the other powers not to do?” (Mirchandani 1968: 23).

During this period, the official policy on nuclear weapons option remained unchanged although the nuclear establishment under the guidance of Bhabha was gradually tilting towards nuclear weapons capability. This is not to indicate that Nehru had foreclosed the nuclear weapons option himself. There is little to doubt Nehru’s immense knowledge in atomic energy know-how and nuclear weapons capabilities. On 18 January 1963, Nehru while addressing the Standing Committee of the National Development Council stated: ‘War is undoubtedly governed by [scientific advance]. It is not governed by Rajput chivalry; Rajput chivalry is very good; it gives spirit to the man but it is not real war. Real war is governed by scientific advance’ (Nehru 1963: 164). His atomic research and development planning was deeply connected to the idea that scientific and technological advancement was intrinsically linked to national growth and progress. Despite insistent demands by the leading political parties for a robust nuclear weapons posture, Nehru remained unmoved.

Nehru was opposed to nuclear weapons but this is not to say that he chose to foreclose the nuclear option. Nehru had great adulation for science particularly nuclear science. He wanted to apply nuclear science in transforming India from dung
power to nuclear power and create dams and power stations that were to emerge as temples of modern India. However, the 1962 debacle and the increasing military collaboration between Islamabad and Beijing in nuclear weapons technology forced Nehru to reorient his approach towards nuclear weapons policy. He felt the necessity for “practical” purposes to “have a very powerful deterrent” (Mirchandani 1968: 22). To quote him: “It is true that nobody will listen to you if you are weak” (Nehru 1963: 68). The point that is explicit in this statement is that Nehru realized military power must be qualified and quantified in terms of effective and efficient material strength to meet the defence requirements of the nation. Nehru played a crucial role in laying the foundation of India’s nuclear policy. In spite of his dual posture over the nuclear weapons issue, Nehru was absolutely certain over the fact that India needed a strong state of art defence structure that would not only protect the nation’s core assets but also increase India’s leverage in diplomatic relations.

Concurrently, the crucial role played by the scientific community in shifting the strategic thinking in favour of nuclear weapons policy cannot be ignored. Homi J. Bhabha, a dynamic physicist wanted to pursue research on nuclear physics in India and develop an establishment in India on nuclear science and technology that will revolutionize the scientific temper and spirit within the country. He was also keen on tapping nuclear energy for ensuring steady supply of electricity in the country. It was also his ambition to develop the nuclear weapons programme in the country and for this reason he convinced Nehru that nuclear energy will not only have civilian benefits but also military application. Besides, unlike Nehru, Bhabha mistrusted the efficacy of ‘disarmament as a strategy’ (Kapur 2001: 111). He had full faith in the political value of nuclear weapons. His pioneering work to create a modest and sophisticated atomic energy programme was based on this premise (Kapur 2001: 111).

By end 1945, Bhabha had set up the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) with generous help from a Parsi philanthropic Trust in Bombay and ere the interim Indian Government came into being a few months later, he had moved quickly to engage Nehru with his plans for atomic energy development in the country (Venkataraman 1994: 178). Fully convinced with Bhabha’s assurances, Nehru relied on him for the technological development and modernization of India. Having
suffered a Himalayan defeat against China for which Nehru accepted moral responsibility, he did not want India to further lag behind in military affairs.

Enthused with the dream of making India into a great state, Nehru reposed his faith in Bhabha for strategic and economic development of the nation. Both of them shared a common vision of transforming India into a technologically self-reliant nation and for this purpose whatever was required by Bhabha in terms of financial, material and other physical facilities as well as institutional arrangements were made available to him by Nehru. For instance, the Canadian offer of the NRX reactor (CIRUS) was made to Bhabha in the Geneva Conference in 1955. The Prime Minister’s acceptance of the deal was conveyed to Bhabha via a telegram, something that [P.K.] Iyengar says is unimaginable these days (Kamad 2005: 182). The practice moreover, of not leaving a ‘paper trail’, of having the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission seek only verbal approvals from the Prime Minister-cum-Minister of Atomic Energy of the day, for critical projects was also established early (Kamad 2005: 184).

The Atomic Energy Committee was also set up around this time under the chairmanship of Bhabha, which eventually became the Atomic Energy Commission in 1948. The Commission came under the purview of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) in 1954. Bhabha was made the Secretary to the Government in-charge of this Department while on his insistence Prime Minister Nehru became the Minister of Atomic Energy (Sundaram et al. 1998: 7-9). Bhabha with the help of Nehru ensured that only the Chairman of AEC and concurrently the DAE Secretary had exclusive powers of financial sanctions.

The motives behind all these institutional changes and moves were to maximize efficiency, keep the dead hand of bureaucratic functioning from affecting the work of nuclear establishment and as Bhabha put it in an April 1948 Note to the Government, to have no ‘intervening link’ whatsoever, between the Atomic Energy Commission and the Prime Minister as a means of institutionalizing direct access to the Prime Minister and the speeding up of decision-making (Karnad 2005: 182). In addition, the Atomic Energy Act of 1948, and the successor Act of 1962, centralized
decision-making authority in the AEC and sealed the already tight security-related procedures and mechanisms (Karnad 2005: 182-183).

An element of extreme secrecy was maintained around the nascent nuclear programme. The intention was to prevent the activities of the nuclear complex to attract the attention of external sources as well as to avoid it from generating inadvertent publicity that may arise from mechanisms of accountability to Parliament. The element of secrecy and non-existent ‘intervening link’ between the AEC and the Prime Minister’s Office established by Bhabha also served to keep the number of politicians and bureaucratic officials in the final decision-making process severely restricted. This ensured less intervention of contradictory opinions in order to maximize the efficiency and speed of the nuclear weapons programme. These arrangements only highlight that the civilian programme along with the military atom programme were concurrently part of India’s nuclear programme right from its inception.

In view of the emerging security concerns and the consequent urgency to conduct ‘high-grade contemporaneous research’ in order to develop nuclear weapons capability, Nehru extended unstinting support to Bhabha. Accordingly, on 24 July 1957, Nehru in response to the Lok Sabha debate on the issue of the DAE demands for more funds, stated, “Anxious as we are to economize and save money,” his Government has never, “refused any urgent demand of the Department or come in the way of its development for financial reasons” (Nehru 1963: 515). Bhabha in reciprocity assured Nehru, that with the given financial and institutional support, India will achieve self-sufficiency in nuclear power for both civilian and military purposes. The TIFR founded under the chairmanship of Bhabha was renamed as Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) and was headed by later scientists like Homi Sethna, Raja Ramanna, and P.K. Iyengar. They in turn were succeeded by A.N. Prasad, R. Chidambaram, A. Kakodkar and B. Bhattacharjee as directors of BARC. BARC has grown into one of the largest multidisciplinary research and development institutions in the world and continues to play a seminal role in India’s plans to use nuclear energy for national development (Srinivasan 2002: 31).
By 1959, speculations were on the rise about the possibility of China exploding a nuclear device. These rumours surfaced again when the US intelligence agencies estimated that the Chinese could explode a nuclear device by 1962. As the Chinese nuclear threat was gradually becoming more realistic, the strategic community debated the need for peaceful nuclear explosions that would serve the dual purposes of socio-economic and military benefits in the country. In September 1964, US reports once again confirmed that China was going to test a nuclear bomb. At this point, significant statements from the scientific community served to strengthen the raging nuclear debate in the country on the question of nuclear bomb. Just days before the Chinese exploded the bomb on 16 October 1964, Bhabha went on record to declare that “India could explode an atom bomb within eighteen months” (National Herald 1964: 1) of a decision to do so without any foreign assistance. Bhabha’s statements bore substantial implications for India’s nuclear debate. He was trying to garner domestic pressure for the nuclear weapons option to overcome the Gandhian inclinations of Nehru’s successor, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri.

The Chinese blast was perceived in India as a serious danger to the maintenance of world peace. India expressed deep concern at the deteriorating security environment, especially the nuclear environment. For the first time, India now had an overt nuclear weapon state on its borders; a state, which had resorted to armed aggression against India only two years earlier in 1962. The Chinese perception of the nuclear bomb was not merely a weapon of war but is essentially a currency of power, in line with Mao’s well known dictum that “power grows out of the barrel of a gun” (Litai 1993: 456). In the prevailing international environment when both USA and Russia are reducing their nuclear arsenals substantially, China does not consider it necessary to enter the disarmament process. Obviously, such a stance adopted by China generated an atmosphere of tension and distrust that created a situation of imbalance in the sub-continent.

In the aftermath of the Chinese nuclear explosion, the Indian political elite actively considered acquiring a nuclear deterrent of its own. The ruling Congress Party opined that they had been unable to prevent the army’s debacle in 1962 war and now by refusing to support the development of nuclear weapons, the party could acquire a reputation of being intrinsically unable to face up to the country’s security
needs (Bhatia 1979: 110). At the same time, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, a man deeply committed to Gandhian ideals of non-violence and a staunch advocate of global disarmament was unwilling to opt for the nuclear weapon option which is essentially characterized by violence and mass destruction. Hence, he sought international guarantees for an external deterrence. However, the dialogue initiated by India in 1966-67 with the US, UK, Soviet Union and France and did not bear any definitive results. The US made it clear that no nuclear assurance to India could be provided against China, which was a communist country not recognized by the United States. India was thus left to stand alone in matters of national security.

The nuclear option characterized by violence and mass destruction was abhorred by Shastri and yet the opinion that was gradually gaining ground was the only deterrent to a nuclear bomb is another nuclear bomb and nothing else. At this critical juncture, India faced grave provocation and extreme threat. The pressing need of the hour was a robust military potential for national security. Although Shastri, emphasized the development of nuclear explosives shall be restricted only for peaceful purposes, he had to face a lot of pressure from amongst the Indian elite for the development of a nuclear deterrent to protect India’s core values. Subsequently, Prime Minister Shastri relinquished his nuclear abstinence and launched a Subterranean Nuclear Explosion Project (SNEP) in 1965 to reduce the time needed to build nuclear weapons to six months (Singh 1991: 510).

During the Prime Ministership of Shastri, the nuclear weapons programme received a political setback. Much of the Shastri years were spent in holding deliberations and consultations on India’s nuclear debate. Obviously, that slowed the nuclear weapons development process. By 1965, the nuclear debate in India was once again triggered with renewed vigour. The 1965 Indo-Pakistani war had exacerbated India’s sense of insecurity and added a critical dimension to its strategic calculus. The seriousness of the situation was further multiplied with the Chinese detonating a thermonuclear device in May 1966. This was followed by the Chinese announcement that it had test-fired a missile mounted with a nuclear warhead in October the same year. Indian elites were alarmed at the newly acquired Chinese nuclear missile capability, which had the potential of hitting value targets deep inside India.
Indira Gandhi who succeeded Shastri followed the Gandhian-Nehruvian legacy of not developing nuclear weapons and advocated nuclear disarmament. Mrs. Gandhi was more inclined towards economic, political and social upliftment of India and establishing diplomatic relations with the external powers. Her expectation was that the nuclear weapon states would extend security guarantees to the non-nuclear states including India. This was evident from the mission undertaken by Dr. Vikram Sarabhai who succeeded Dr. Bhabha as the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and L.K. Jha the then Secretary to the Prime Minister, during the winter of 1966-67 (Subrahmanyam 1998a: 28). These officials travelled to Moscow, Paris, Washington and London with the hope that the nuclear weapon states would assure them of security guarantees. However, the nuclear weapon states divided as they were over the Cold War dynamics could not assure India a positive response. Thus the duress of the prevailing situation compelled Mrs. Gandhi to reinvigorate the nuclear debate in India.

Between 1967 and 1968, the primary focus was on the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as proposed by the US, Russia and UK to stop the spread of nuclear weapons to suit their own agenda. It was certainly in Washington’s interest to prevent the formation of a multilateral nuclear force of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members. No less was Russia’s interests fulfilled in the long run to prevent Germany and Japan from acquiring nuclear weapons capability. Hence, these powers sought to use the NPT as a license for augmenting their nuclear weapons capability while imposing a total ban on developing nuclear weapons by all other powers. Mrs. Gandhi expressed total resentment against such discriminatory policies of the nuclear powers and vehemently opposed this hegemonic treaty that sought to divide the world into haves and have-nots.

Besides, the NPT negotiations did little to address India’s concerns about China’s nuclear weapons programme repeatedly voiced by it during the proceedings. A similar line of protest was also voiced by Germany, Japan and Sweden. By then, a proposition had emerged that in view of an impending nuclear threat and a nuclear war, when one country (China) had nuclear weapons and the other (India) did not, the nuclear option cannot be left in the hands of one country only (Kapur 2001: 159). China had taken the initiative to upset India’s security in the Himalayan region,
whereas the latter lacked the strategic initiative to counter primarily because Indian diplomatic and military mechanisms were reactive in nature. Such an attitude was inbred in the Indian political and strategic culture (Tanham 1996: 24).

On the domestic front, during this period, the situation in India was made further acute due to the severe food crisis prevailing in the country. India was a heavy importer of food from the US and also depended on it for aid. India was also heavily dependent on the USSR for military hardware on concessional terms. Despite unanimous consensus in the country against the adoption of the NPT treaty, there prevailed a general dilemma in the country that would India be able to withstand the pressure of the US, UK and Russia for its vehement opposition to the NPT treaty. In spite of such uncertainties, Mrs. Gandhi refused to accede to the discriminatory treaty and she was supported by the Cabinet in her decision. At this stage, China while refusing to adopt the NPT, conducted atmospheric nuclear tests in collaboration with France and defied the international rules and norms under the Partial Test Ban Treaty that prohibits such tests.

Meanwhile, China was increasing its missile capability and in 1970, China launched its first long-range rocket carrying a satellite into orbit, which was perceived by the Indian strategists as ballistic missile capability with potential to annihilate value targets deep inside the Indian territory. Immediately, there was intense pressure from all quarters to develop a nuclear weapons capability. At this point, the AEC Chairman, Vikram Sarabhai, who was not in favour of exercising the nuclear option, stated that although India would not develop nuclear weapons, it would retain the option to conduct underground nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes. These statements from the scientific community were well indicative of the fact that the nation was pursuing a nuclear programme (camouflaged in the form of peaceful nuclear explosions) despite the apparent official reticence on the matter at the governmental level.

By 1971, the security dynamics in India had deteriorated drastically. The civil war in East Pakistan and the consequent mass exodus of ten million refugees into India forced Mrs. Gandhi to intervene in the state of affairs. The 1971 War, ultimately led to the dismemberment of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. While these
events were taking place, Dr. Henry Kissinger made a secret visit to China in July 1971 to initiate a détente between the US and China. Following his visit, Dr. Kissinger told the Indian Ambassador to US, L.K. Jha that in the event of an Indo-Pakistan War over Bangladesh, if the Chinese were to intervene on behalf of Pakistan, the US would not be in a position to extend any aid to India. This was undoubtedly a veiled threat and a clear attempt to intimidate India. It was a rude shock for the Indian government and it emphasized on the necessity of developing a robust deterrent structure to counter vulnerable situations. That compelled Mrs. Gandhi to enter into an agreement with Soviet Union in the form of Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed in August 1971 (Khanna 2000: 50). The treaty sought to provide Soviet deterrence to India against any possible Chinese intervention.

The treaty was not only successful in doing this but also provided deterrence against the US when it ‘sent its Task Force 74 headed by the nuclear aircraft carrier USS Enterprise on board of which nuclear weapons were then standard equipment’. Not only this, Dr. Henry Kissinger in his famous book, *The White House Years*, has vividly described how the US tried to pressurise China to intervene against India. China, however, refused to do so fearing Soviet reaction. This was outrightly an act of US nuclear intimidation against India which made Pakistan an extremely formidable enemy that could have been otherwise dealt with mere conventional weapons. President Nixon disclosed subsequently that he did contemplate the use of nuclear weapons at that stage (Subrahmanyam 1998a: 30-31).

After the Indo-Pak War of 1971, the case for India to develop nuclear weapons became stronger. India wanted to avoid any kind of nuclear blackmail in future, as was faced by New Delhi from the US in December 1971. As first indication of this official thinking, Indira Gandhi in her capacity as in-charge of Atomic Energy publicly stated that the Atomic Energy Commission was constantly reviewing the progress in the technology of underground nuclear explosions (Perkovich 2000: 170). This single act clearly reveals the influence of 1971 War in driving India’s nuclear weapons policy. This official stand reflected by Mrs. Gandhi’s policies eventually led to the India’s first nuclear test in May 1974 making it a threshold nuclear weapon state.
By 1971, the Canada-India reactor and the plutonium reprocessing plant at Trombay had become critical and these plants were successful in building up a stockpile of weapon grade plutonium. Using this plutonium, the BARC had designed the Purnima reactor and operation of this reactor enabled the scientists to gather all data necessary to design a nuclear explosive device (Subrahmanyam 1998a: 31). The scientific establishment enthused with the success of both the US and Russia's peaceful nuclear explosions wanted to conduct similar tests that posed immense benefits in the field of civil engineering purposes. In addition, the Indian scientists had presented papers in all international conferences on peaceful nuclear explosions, which were accepted worldwide. Two noteworthy aspects that deserve attention at this point are that (a) there was an emerging consensus among the scientific community that the technology involved in peaceful nuclear explosions was similar to the one used in the weapons and (b) peaceful nuclear explosions were in conformity with the NPT stipulations. Brewing with excitement, the scientific community pressed the Government for permission to conduct a subterranean nuclear explosion. Finally in 1972, increasing domestic pressure in the face of nuclear intimidation within the country and deteriorating security situation, Mrs. Gandhi gave the green signal to the Atomic Energy Department to go ahead with the peaceful nuclear explosion.

Pressure continued to mount from amongst the Indian elites for a more robust nuclear posture than what has been followed so far. Faced with this pressure, the Government emphasized that unlike before, the Atomic Energy Commission is studying the technology for conducting underground explosions for peaceful purposes (Perkovich 2000: 169-170). Subsequently, in May 1974 when Mrs. Gandhi was at the height of her popularity, the Atomic Energy Commission conducted a Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE) at Pokhran in the Rajasthan desert (Perkovich 2000: 170). The test boosted the morale of the people and thrilled the nation with a sense of power. The PNE sought to help admit India into the corridors of global power and enjoy the status of the dominant regional power. The bomb was expected to quicken the process of normalizing relations with China and compel the US to change its attitude of hostility or benign neglect (Sengupta 1983: 4). It is noteworthy to point out that at the time of conducting the PNE, Mrs. Gandhi and the military had no plans whatsoever for weapons application of the nuclear capability. The PNE was sought to
be projected as an instrument to enhance India's position in the international forum. It was obvious, that the new Prime Minister toeing on the line of Gandhian-Nehruvian legacy of not developing nuclear weapons displayed restraint and a penchant for global non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament.

In 1977, Indira Gandhi was voted out of power due to increasing domestic turmoil in the country. The political establishment was now headed by Morarji Desai under the Janata Party coalition government. A staunch Gandhian, Morarji Desai made no effort to hide his moral aversion to nuclear weapons. Expressing utter contempt for nuclear weapons he went on record for stating, “we can drive out any aggressor even without the bomb” (Wohlstetter 1978: 70). Immediately after assuming office, Prime Minister Morarji Desai stated, “cottage industry” was more useful to India than its nuclear weapons programme. Desai was convinced that nuclear weapons are an absolute evil and anybody advocating them earned his instant dislike. He was a complete no-no on the nuclear weapon issue. Desai remained oblivious to the prevailing security concerns. Pakistan had by then engaged in clandestine operations with China to procure missile technology. As for China, it set itself on a modernization drive of its nuclear weapons arsenal. Morarji turned a Nelson’s eye to the deteriorating nuclear environment. Quite expectedly, this led to a clash between Prime Minister Desai and the Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram who was greatly upset with the Prime Minister’s anti-nuclear policy in the face of emerging threats. Indeed Morarji’s absolutist views almost resulted in terminating India’s nuclear weapons option – an ultimately failed effort assisted, surprisingly, by his Minister for External Affairs, Atal Behari Vajpayee, representative in the coalition government of the Right-wing ‘nationalist’ Bharatiya Jana Sangh Party, which was sworn to acquire nuclear weapons for the country (Karnad 2005: 333).

Morarji Desai was succeeded by Charan Singh who remained in office for barely six months. In contrast to Morarji Desai, Charan Singh recognized the need to develop nuclear weapons, especially, in view of the imminent threats that were steadfastly emerging in the immediate neighbourhood. Two important developments that took place during his tenure are: first, in his Red Fort address on the eve of India’s independence in 1979, Prime Minister Charan Singh took cognizance of Pakistan’s nuclear developments and promised an appropriate Indian riposte; second,
during Charan Singh’s tenure his Defence Minister, C. Subramaniam addressed the National Defence College in November 1979, and for the first time as the Cabinet minister he made out a case why India should go nuclear (Subrahmanyam 1998a: 37).

Mrs. Indira Gandhi was voted back to power in January 1980 and in contrast to Morarji Desai’s policies, she took the Pakistani nuclear threat more seriously. The Prime Minister insisted, “We should not be caught napping” (Times of India 1980: 1). Upon assuming office, Mrs. Gandhi called for steady efforts to upgrade India’s nuclear weapons capability. In early 1982, India was close to conducting a second peaceful nuclear explosion. However, this possibility was repudiated within twenty-four hours of its announcement labeling it as a rumour spread by the Bharatiya Janata Party. At this stage, the experts were skeptical about the crippling cost a nuclear arms race would entail especially in view of the prevailing economic turmoil in the country. It is also believed that the possibility of consequent negative international political and economic ramifications of the test deterred Mrs. Gandhi to go ahead with the project. Though the Prime Minister categorically denied the possibility of an immediate nuclear test, the whole incident reflected the indecisiveness in India’s nuclear policy amidst growing India-Pakistan nuclear rivalry. While Pakistan embarked on expanding its nuclear weapons capability, the Sikh insurgency was gaining momentum in Punjab. The possibility of Pakistan extending necessary infrastructural and political support became a matter of grave concern in India. India reportedly had begun countering Pakistan by supporting dissident elements in the Southern Pakistani state of Sindh (Perkovich 2000: 252). Amidst these alarming developments, Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated in October 1984. Mrs. Gandhi’s tragic death shelved the prospects of a second PNE till more than a decade later.

When Rajiv Gandhi assumed power, Pakistan had almost achieved nuclear weapons capability. Like his mother, Rajiv maintained a policy of nuclear ambiguity. Though he never advocated the usage of nuclear weapons, he maintained technological enhancement of India’s nuclear option. His nuclear ambivalence becomes obvious from the fact that despite his differences with the atomic establishment on overt work on nuclear weapons, he did nothing to prevent the scientists from upgrading India’s nuclear weapons capability. At the same time, like Nehru, Rajiv was a technology buff. His curiosity about nuclear weapons was whetted
by visits to BARC when models of different weapons designs were shown and explained to him (Karnad 2005: 345). However, when in 1985, Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Commission (JIC) and Additional Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat, K. Subrahmanyam pressed for India exercising its nuclear option, Rajiv Gandhi was far from enthusiastic about it. He asked whether it was possible to devise an alternative to the essentially flawed NPT and directed the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) to formulate a different approach on the nuclear issue. Concurrently, Rajiv Gandhi in all his foreign policy speeches tried to draw the world attention to Pakistan’s nuclear weapons programme. At a bilateral level, he turned down the proposal of offering no first use policy to Pakistan lest it generates a belief that India’s stance is influenced by Pakistan’s growing nuclear capability. He also ruled out the necessity of educating the armed forces and the nation on nuclear security issues. However, at a later stage in December 1985, Rajiv Gandhi entered into an agreement with General Zia-ul-Haq on mutual non-attack of nuclear facilities. However, before normalcy could return to India-Pakistan relations, new tensions started surfacing. In mid-1987, India conducted the Brasstacks military operation near the Indo-Pakistan border. The Brasstacks crisis brought about a series of revelations about Islamabad’s nuclear programme that essentially confirmed Pakistan’s status as a nuclear weapon power.

At the same time, Rajiv Gandhi advocated global disarmament in all international forums. In 1988, he proposed his Rajiv Gandhi Plan for nuclear disarmament in the third UN Special Session on Disarmament that was meant for comprehensive phased programme of disarmament. Unfortunately, his proposal was not received positively by the five nuclear hegemonic powers and their followers.

The following year in 1989, Rajiv Gandhi lost power to V.P. Singh but he retained a “proprietorial” feeling towards India’s nuclear weapons programme. Both Singh and his successor Chandrashekhar supported the nuclear weapons programme. Immediately, after assuming power, there were speculations that Pakistan would blast a nuclear device in the Sindh desert as a warning to India to refrain it from acting against Pakistan with regard to the insurgency in Punjab and Kashmir. But unlike Rajiv Gandhi, Singh was more moderate in his approach and indicated his desire to hold dialogue with Pakistan. However, by 1990, Singh was disappointed with the escalation of violence in the Vale of Kashmir leading both the nations on the brink of
another war. Singh was forced to relinquish his policy of dialogue and reviewed its nuclear policy towards Pakistan. At the time of the first genuine ‘nuclear crisis’ that occurred in the region in May 1990, India had air-deliverable nuclear ordnance (Karnad 2005: 345). The crisis of 1990, dawned the realization that a conventional conflict can escalate into a nuclear crisis. By this time, it was fairly established that both the countries possessed nuclear weapons and the nuclear signaling that they resorted to during the 1990s increased the importance of developing a more realistic approach towards the nuclear question.

Although, Chandrashekhar was in general supportive of India’s nuclear strategy, he was confused over strategy and policy without defining either, saying that those involved in the weaponization process had a carte blanche in terms of deciding [presumably nuclear weapons] strategy, he as the Prime Minister would decide on the policy (Karnad 2005: 359). According to him, both policy and strategy should be kept exclusive of each other. Chandrashekar’s basic contention was that policy aspects should determine the strategy, but he remained vague on where policy ended and strategy began. There was general confusion on what actually his nuclear policy entailed but it was assumed to be a continuation of his predecessor’s policies.

During the tenure of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, India’s nuclear policy was essentially characterized by ambiguity. This as explained by strategists was ‘planned and deliberate’ and was pursued with the motive of ‘stringing the US along’ on vital issues like NPT and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as also to buy time for India to develop its nuclear capabilities by testing. Rao basically followed a policy of ‘straight-talking’ in his interactions with the Clinton Government. In 1992, he instructed his Foreign Secretary, J.N. Dixit to notify that India could be expected to test towards the end of 1993. The idea was by pre-notifying the US about the expected nuclear detonations, India was refraining from springing any surprise so that the Clinton Government do not impose hard hitting economic sanctions on the country. These proposed tests eventually got postponed in 1994 and then rescheduled for some time in 1995. However, these tests were ultimately not carried out as the nuclear establishment was not ready with the necessary preparations as explained by Prime Minister Rao. But these arguments were refuted by P.K. Iyengar who was heading the AEC until the end of January 1993. He
contends that the weapons cores, including for 'tritium boosted fission' weapons were ready for testing during his watch and 'integrating them into a weapon assembly was all that remained to be done and that this process takes very little time' (Karnad 2005: 363). According to Iyengar, Rao was deterred from testing primarily because of the fear of his economic reforms and the liberalization programme of 1992-93 becoming hostage to crippling US economic sanctions. Rao also believed that once sustained economic growth rates were achieved, India will be able to afford substantial expenditure on strategic weapons programme. Taking cue from the mistake done by his predecessor, Rajiv Gandhi, Rao did not want to get into a situation where the country's strategic ambitions outrace the country's ability to afford them. The ambiguous policy on the nuclear issue pursued by the Indian government nonetheless left the strategic and defence elites increasingly frustrated and impatient.

In May 1995, a significant development took place in the nuclear world. The NPT treaty was extended indefinitely. India criticized that the indefinite extension of the NPT and described it as essentially discriminatory that provides legitimacy only to the nuclear weapon states. India's abrogation of the NPT, left it more isolated in the international sphere. The early 1996 witnessed fresh debate on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The CTBT originally co-sponsored by India and the United States in 1993 aimed to ban nuclear tests. India's objection on the CTBT was primarily rooted on the issue of the Entry Into Force (EIF) clause and its discriminatory nature. Despite, the raging controversies faced by India, the official stand on nuclear weapons remained static; New Delhi refrained from exercising an overt nuclear policy.

In May 1996, with the BJP coming to power, there was a radical shift in India's nuclear policy. On assuming power, Prime Minster Atal Behari Vajpayee, who ardently advocated an overt nuclear weapons policy since the Janata government period, extended political support to the scientific establishment to go ahead with the tests. However, within twelve days of him assuming power his Government was voted out in a no-confidence motion and the political mantle was thereafter headed by Deve Gowda.
By then, the defence establishment and the nuclear science leadership was totally frustrated having missed out the opportunity to test for the third time since the tenure of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. The state of affairs was further exacerbated by Prime Minister Gowda’s policy of a complete refusal on an overt nuclear weapons posture. The clash between them was inevitable. Almost around the same time, the nuclear debate in the country was deeply influenced by the CTBT negotiations. International pressure was increasingly mounting on India to sign the treaty. Deve Gowda’s policies left many in the political and strategic establishments highly dissatisfied. He was voted out of power when the Congress Party withdrew its support from his coalition government and he was succeeded by Inder Kumar Gujral in April 1997.

Following this, the Chinese nuclear weapons programme was by then perceived with grave concern. China embarked on a spree of testing missiles and nuclear weapons concurrently with continuous technology upgrade. Obviously, on assuming power, Prime Minister Gujral was under severe pressure from all quarters to adopt a robust official nuclear policy. Gujral, however did not share the radical bent of mind of the BJP leadership. He was more moderate in his approach and pursued a policy of reciprocity with his neighbours. Premised on this policy, he sought to establish cordial relations with Pakistan and China and reiterated that India nursed no desire to develop nuclear weapons unless forced to do so. It can thus be presumed that though Gujral did not favour exercising the nuclear option by resorting to testing nuclear bombs, he nonetheless, kept the option open in the event of any potential threats to India’s security. This posture was also evident in Nehru’s nuclear weapon policies.

In 1998, the Bharatiya Janata Party was voted back to power under the leadership of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. On assuming office, the Vajpayee pledged to not only conduct nuclear tests but also effect a ‘re-evaluation’ of India’s nuclear policy as well as to expedite the ‘development of the Agni series of ballistic missiles with a view to increasing their range and accuracy’. The BJP’s Election Manifesto of 1998 also indicated concern about the inordinate delays over the nuclear submarine programme [ATV Project] implying that these issues will be accorded priority and speeded up (Bharatiya Janata Party Election Manifesto1998: 31). There was also a degree of personal interests involved behind this stance. Vajpayee’s
decision to resume nuclear testing also resulted from his personal ambition to prove that he was not a weak leader and he realized that there was no better way of doing this by approving a series of nuclear tests to show up his predecessors who had all succumbed to Western pressure and gave up on the decision to test. Vajpayee was a pro-weaponeer from the beginning. He also enjoyed the backing of the political, scientific as well as the defence communities towards exercising the nuclear option. What he required was a pretext to sanction the nuclear tests. This was eventually provided by Pakistan when in April 1998, it tested the Ghauri nuclear-capable missile, which had the capability to strike targets deep inside India. Vajpayee who was waiting for an opportune moment, utilized this strategic opportunity and gave the scientific establishment the required permission to conduct the nuclear tests.

Finally, India crossed the nuclear rubicon on 11 May 1998 by conducting the Shakti series of nuclear tests. Vajpayee ended all nuclear ambiguity that was prevailing for past twenty-four years, since the 1974 nuclear test and helped India to attain the status of a nuclear weapon power. Vajpayee’s nuclear policies and strategies played a monumental role in helping India reach the status that it has reached today. His nuclear policies have been upheld and adhered to by the present United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government. India’s nuclear policies under successive governments have helped it to attain the status of a responsible nuclear power and encouraged powers all over the world to establish diplomatic and strategic relations with it. The Indo-US nuclear deal of July 2005 is one such outcome. The US has also entered into a ten years Defence Framework programme with India for joint strategic cooperation. Besides, Russia has also expressed its willingness to enter into bilateral cooperation with India. India’s nuclear status has also opened the floodgates of technology to India. The recently concluded International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) project between India and the other partners - the European Union (represented by EURATOM), Japan, China, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the USA will enable India to develop environment friendly fuel. India has thus emerged as a strong nuclear weaponized country in the aftermath of the May 1998 tests.
Nuclear Weapons and Indian Politics

India's nuclear policy has been influenced to a great extent by its domestic politics. The internal dynamics within the country dominated the nuclear debate right from the Nehru era till May 1998. In the first place, nuclear weapons capability was perceived by the Delhi-centric elite as strengthening the power dynamics in New Delhi vis a vis the states. This kind of administrative structure was also evident during the Mauryan period. The Mauryan Empire, which covered almost all of India, had a vast and effective administrative structure that supported central authority and enhanced and encouraged loyalty to the Emperor, though not to the state (Tanham 1996: 35). The implication of this arrangement essentially meant that the centre is largely responsible for crucial projects that require vast expenditure and extreme secrecy. This necessarily called for centralization of greater resources in the centre's hands and a continuing claim on more resources for financing such projects in the interest of national security. The element of utmost secrecy also meant that the centre will be less accountable to the states for its pursued policies. This will give the New Delhi based strategic and political communities to pursue their policies with lesser hurdles that would ultimately expedite such undertaken project in the minimum possible time. Such an arrangement well suited the requirements of the Delhi based elites.

Second, nuclear weapons are inherently fraught with elements of risk, crisis and danger which necessitates that they be protected and controlled by a powerful political centre and will have exclusive command over their use. This is very appealing to once powerful regional elites, and the bomb lobby has a disproportionate number of high-caste Hindus, members of religious minorities and others who have been dispossessed from regional politics by the emergence of mass politics (Cohen 1998: 8). The bomb lobby is primarily dominated by Indians with a common understanding of the importance of maintaining the political primacy of New Delhi. A nuclearized Delhi would be marginally stronger in administrative and political matters and would thus be in a better position to absorb the pressures of incessant demands from the states for more revenue and less investment on defence (Cohen 1998: 8).

Third, the nuclear programme embarked upon by the politico-strategic elites is an important “symbolic project” undertaken by the centre inspired a strong sense of
Indian nationhood and identity. That nationhood when viewed through the prism of a nuclear weapon capability implied a scientifically advanced, multi-cultural people with the potential to achieving remarkable feats with limited resources. Originally these symbolic meanings were attached to the civilian nuclear programme, and its leadership often boasted of the way in which Indian talent and innovativeness thrived under the adverse conditions brought about by western economic sanctions and technology restraint regimes (Cohen 1998: 8). This was in the ultimate analysis a joint contribution from all sections and regions of the country, irrespective of being high-caste or low caste. In other words, this achievement cannot be made by any single Indian state as it requires the intensive collaboration from diverse people from a myriad of sections. India’s missile man, A.P.J. Kalam, emerged as the central figure in India’s nuclear programme not only as a result of his technological skills but because these skills were inherently developed within India. Although being a Muslim, ‘he has a strong interest in broader Indian philosophy and culture’. Hinduism also played a seminal role in Indian politics and infused a sense of radical nationalism in India. However, Nehru and most of the Congress leaders preferred a secular nationalism and a secular state (Tanham 1996: 35). Finally, because the [nuclear] programme is entirely civilian, it is a reminder to the military (and the Indian public) that Indian civilians still reign supreme (Tanham 1996: 35).

Fourth, the political decisions taken by various leaders starting from Nehru to Vajpayee is worth examination. These leaders have taken every decision related to India’s nuclear weapon decision with extreme rigidity and caution. This is not to say that the nuclear decision was not open to debate and discussion. In conformity, with the spirit of democracy, the nuclear question was intensely debated and discussed with all the political parties as well as the military and scientific establishments. However, Prime Ministers like – Nehru, Shastri, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi – heading the Congress Party Governments with a clear mandate were comparatively in a better and secured positions in terms of enjoying a clear majority. These leaders were therefore not susceptible to severe internal challenge as in the case of the Prime Ministers like V.P. Singh, Chandrashekhar, Deve Gowda and Inder K. Gujral. The former set of leaders could undertake nuclear decision without any consequent fear of defeat in the polls.
Further, these leaders except for Shastri were deeply attracted to technological advancements in all aspects of nation-building. They dreamt of transforming India not only into an economically and technologically self-reliant country but also a military well-equipped nation. The political establishment having suffered the embarrassment of a humiliating defeat in the 1962 War with China, extreme caution was exercised by the successive leaders to avoid such territorial mishap. Consequently, they held a close collaboration with the scientific establishment and patiently heard the inputs and suggestions put forward by them. Nehru was in close contact with Bhabha and provided him with valuable political and financial support for the development of India’s nuclear programme. Indira Gandhi also held a close rapport with Vikram Sarabhai and Raja Ramanna whose advice she always considered with utmost seriousness. Rajiv Gandhi was essentially a technology buff and was intrigued with nuclear science much like his grandfather. He was open to nuclear weapons technology information from scientists of his time like P.K. Iyengar and Chidambaram who played a seminal role in the May 1998 nuclear tests conducted by India.

Comparatively, leaders like Morarji Desai and Dewe Gowda who dismissed the idea of developing nuclear weapons capability outrightly clashed with the scientific community who had been working on the nuclear weapons project over decades. Hence, the pressure from the latter to go ahead with the testing was immense. With the advent of the BJP in power, a hawkish feeling increasingly generated on nuclear issues. It had the necessary political support, technological competence and foresight that nuclear capability will set the country on the path of development and modernization.

Yet another aspect of domestic politics that deeply influenced the nuclear decision-making process was the role played by the scientists and bureaucrats. An important aspect that should be taken note of is that scientists in India are not only competent in scientific aspects but also exhibit qualities of political strategists. During the Shastri-Gandhi years, there was an upsurge in the politicized involvement of scientists in India’s nuclear project. However, this linkage existed since the Nehru period when Bhabha for the first time enumerated the diplomatic – strategic uses of nuclear energy. Bhabha conceived India’s atomic programme under the ‘Atoms for
Peace’ concept, but his commitment to peaceful uses was limited (Kapur 2001: 159). He was oriented towards the military uses of atomic energy. Nehru of course, differed with Bhabha on this aspect. He was completely committed to the goal of disarmament although he spoke about peaceful uses of nuclear energy. However, a change was effected in the context of Indo-Canadian negotiations that led to the import of CANDU technology which ultimately laid the foundation for India’s atomic energy development and a possible deterrent use of Indian nuclear technology. Thereafter, Nehru stated: ‘Apart from building power stations and developing electricity, there is always a built-in advantage of defence use if the need should arise’ (Kapur 2001: 160). This was indeed a major shift in Nehru’s thinking and policy (Karanjia 1966: 161-162).

During the Shastri period, nuclear decision-making was primarily shared between Bhabha, Shastri and his Principal Secretary, L.K. Jha. While negotiating the Rajasthan Atomic Power Plant II (RAPP II), Bhabha wanted the Indo-Canadian agreement to be more flexible than what it was during RAPP I agreement. But as a result of the Glassboro Conference between the US and Soviet Union, the NPT discussions got seriously underway and the Canadian stance toward India stiffened. L.K. Jha, adhering to the US and Canadian views on the NPT pressured Bhabha to go to Canada to negotiate with Lome Gray (who headed the sales side of the Canadian atomic energy department) as also promised by Shastri (Kapur 2001: 160). Bhabha refused to act under pressure from Canada and L.K. Jha. His opposition won over L.K. Jha and in November 1965, Bhabha put forth a proposal for an SNEP project. In December, Shastri gave his approval to this project, wherein he sanctioned research up to the point where once the go-ahead signal was given, it would take only three months to conduct a nuclear explosion.

Dominant bureaucrats have also influenced India’s decision making power to a large extent. Civil servants like V.C. Trivedi played a historic role in the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Commission (ENDC) in 1965. His efforts along with T.N. Kaul to educate Mrs. Gandhi on the NPT during 1965-68 were highly commendable. During the tenure of Morarji Desai who turned a blind eye to the need for nuclear weapons in view of the deteriorating security in the country, K. Subrahmanyam in the capacity of Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Commission (JIC) was successful in
bringing pressure upon Prime Minister Desai to take heed of the emerging threat situation in the country on account of Pakistan clandestinely acquiring nuclear technology from China. In 1996, India’s Ambassador to the CTBT negotiations, Arundhuti Ghosh played a tremendous role in upholding India’s sovereign rights before the world forum in Geneva.

The domestic variables played an enormously significant role in influencing the nuclear weapons policy of India that ultimately led to the conduct of nuclear tests in May 1998.

While debating the nuclear weapons policy in India a central aspect of the discussions was centred on the costs involved. Several arguments were put forth during the tenure of every leader heading the country that supported as well as opposed the nuclear weapons policy in India. The same is the case with the technological capability of the country to undertake such a major project as the nuclear weapons policy. There were numerous speculations whether India will be able to come up with the necessary technological wherewithal in support of the nuclear weapons programme. However, modern military technology is beginning to shape India’s strategic policy. Political arguments and decisions are inextricably linked with technological and economic development. However, it is politics that ultimately determine the economic and technological variables and together they play a crucial role in the nuclear weaponization of the country. It is the political dynamics of the country that paves the way for the other two variables and that is what is primarily explored in the subsequent chapters.