Chapter 2: The Political Will

Three decades after the end of Cold War, nuclear weapons continues to impose considerable influence on major strategic decisions of the world community. That the world political opinion is still tilted in favour of nuclear weapons can be discerned from one single fact. The argument that nuclear weapons were indispensable during the Cold War lost its justification after the disintegration of Soviet Union. But the nuclear weapons states instead of striving unambiguously towards the extermination of these lethal weapons, decided to preserve and upgrade them for future exigencies. Several peace movements were initiated in the Western World following nuclearization and yet they did not demand the elimination of nuclear weapons. When sections of the British Labour Party leadership proposed that Britain should unilaterally abandon its nuclear arsenal, the British electorate taught the Labour Party a lesson that they have never forgotten (Subrahmanyam 1998b: 12).

In the 21st century, nations have justified in various ways the legitimacy of nuclear weapons in terms of providing effective deterrence to the security threats faced by them. Perhaps the greatest legitimacy that was accorded to nuclear weapons was in 1995 when the international community comprising of 185 nations gathered in New York and extended indefinitely and unconditionally the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Included in this list is also Japan – the only country who has suffered the lethal effects of nuclear weapons and voted to legitimize nuclear weapons. Japan has also sought protection under the US nuclear umbrella to meet any future exigencies emerging from nuclear weapons attack. The United States and Japan are making constant efforts to constructively engage China towards preventing the world from becoming a nuclear flashpoint while retaining their nuclear weapons discretions. China on the other hand, has agreed to reduce its nuclear arsenal only if the United States and other Permanent Five members agree to cut their arsenal size equivalent to that of the Chinese nuclear forces.

The non-aligned nations have declared their abhorrence for nuclear weapons and yet they also have legitimized them through the indefinite and unconditional extension of the NPT. The present world opinion suggests that threat posed by nuclear
weapon can be averted in one of the two ways. Either, the nuclear weapons should be prohibited and eliminated as is being done for two other categories of weapons of mass destruction – the biological and chemical – or nations should develop a balance of mutual deterrence which will reduce the risks of temptations to the five most war prone powers who are the acknowledged professors of nuclear weapons today (Subrahmanyam 1998b: 12). India having failed to register even the slightest advance on nuclear disarmament felt compelled to opt for the second alternative (Subrahmanyam 1998b: 12).

The history of India’s quest for nuclear power generally indicates that there was little ambiguity in its pursuit for achieving nuclear power capability since its commencement. India’s approach to the nuclear question was formed before independence and it reveals a preoccupation with the relationship between Science, National Development and Power and international security (Kapur 2001: 9). To have a comprehensive understanding of the history of India’s nuclear policy and its consequences with respect to its policies, regional security imperatives and international relations, it is important to explain the origin and subsequent development of different facets of India’s nuclear behavior. The Webster’s College Dictionary defines ‘behavior’ as ‘the aggregate of responses to internal and external stimuli’; it also means ‘the action or reaction of any material under any given circumstances’ (Webster’s College Dictionary 2001: 32). According to Oxford Dictionary ‘behave’ means ‘to act in a certain way’ and such action must be conducted ‘properly’ (Oxford Dictionary Thesaurus and Wordpower Guide 2001: 101). In the Indian case nuclear behavior refers to the role played by the Indian Nuclear Science, the growth of Indian science and technology infrastructure, the acquisition and development of Indian nuclear weapons and missile capability and the forging of diplomatic and strategic policies, which facilitated engagement of the Indian armed forces in the external environment towards shaping India’s political attitude.

Much before India achieved independence, a spectrum of Indian political thought had emanated, which played a significant role in shaping India’s nuclear attitudes and policies. This spectrum revealed several contradictions among the different lines of Indian thinking and policy action. The stalwart of peace and non-
violence, Mahatma Gandhi supported non-violent activism in political and social matters. Gandhi’s policies continued to play a major role in Indian political thought after 1947. However, his policies slowly became of declining value in India’s diplomatic, military and nuclear issues after 1947. The security imperatives emerging from the external environment increasingly indicated the fallacy of non-violent approach in meeting the security threats emerging within the sub-continent. The second line of thought was represented by the first Prime Minister of India, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru who favoured anti-war, anti-military and nuclear disarmament policies. There was a distinct shift from Gandhian pacifism to Nehruvian peace diplomacy. This attitude formed the basis of India’s disarmament policy after 1947 and still constitutes the cardinal feature of India’s nuclear policy till present day.

A third group of political will was opiniated by a more radical group of Indian leaders who preferred a vigorous militarization of India’s defence machinery. During this period, we find a radical shift in Nehru’s foreign policy outlook. He provided the basis for the build-up of India’s dual-use nuclear infrastructure. This became the roadmap for the development of policy direction and technological capability in the post-1947 period with reference to the nuclear weapons programme. The pre-1947 political spectrum also featured extremist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak whose prime argument rested on the assumption that power was needed to settle disputes. In the post-1947, period this argument provided the main crux of the Indian debates and dilemmas that shaped the pros and cons of nuclear disarmament. In agreement with this view, Subhas Chandra Bose opined that armed struggle was indispensable for achieving Indian independence and hence, the country must be adequately equipped in its defence capabilities. This view has been reflected in our draft nuclear doctrine that calls for a credible nuclear deterrence to meet our security requirement (Cohen: 1971).

India’s nuclear question is inextricably linked with the development of science and technology infrastructure and organizations. Since the 1930s, there was a rising expectation that British colonial rule in India was coming to an end. An independent India was emerging wherein the relationship between scientists, state and society were to be redefined. After independence, India’s scientific establishment appeared as the largest group of scientists in world. However, the scientific community lacked the
qualities of a community in terms of a shared set of common interests and goals. Despite, or because of its large size, many members of the Indian science pool are marginalized, depoliticized, demoralized, and not fully interactive (Shiva and Bandyopadhyay 1980: 575-594). These scientists advocated the importance of science in Indian debates prior to India’s independence.\(^1\) The story is that politically conscious, nationalist Indian scientists in pre-independent India established coalitions with Indian politicians, especially J.L. Nehru, before 1947 (Anderson 1975). After independence, the dominant pre-1947 coalition took control of the state apparatus relating to Indian scientific affairs and formed an autonomous science empire. Prime Minister Nehru, the senior political member of the pre-1947 dominant coalition, became the minister in charge of atomic energy. Between the 1930s and the early 1950s, a pattern of ‘happy convergence’ and ‘ritualistic confrontation’ evolved around the political aims and the science strategy of the key players: Saha, Bhabha, Bhatnagar and Mahalanobis (the scientists); and Nehru and Bose, (the politicians) (Kapur 2001: 23).

A physicist by profession, Saha’s approach to India’s nuclear science policies and administration distinctly differed from Bhabha. He was a close political confidante of Bose who rejected the policies of Gandhi and Nehru and sought to achieve Indian independence through armed struggle. On the other hand, Bhabha who was close to Nehru advocated the use of science to secure power and self-reliance for India but his science strategy marked a radical shift from Saha’s approach. Bhatnagar’s agenda coincided with Bhabha and he enjoyed the confidence of Nehru. The struggle between the two camps became increasingly apparent. It came to an end in 1947 when India achieved independence with Bhabha and his allies emerging victorious. Bhabha and Bhatnagar formed the core scientific establishment in India that was henceforth to play a crucial role in determining ‘who among the Indian scientists would guide science policy in independent India, what method would help organize India’s scientific infrastructure, and what should the nature of India’s nuclear policy be’ (Kapur 2001: 24).

\(^{1}\) V. Shiva and J. Bandyopadhyay deal in detail about the problems in Indian science planning.
Nehru Years

In pre-independent India, the most powerful weapon used to break the colonial shackles was ahimsa or non-violence as preached by Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of peace. When Gandhi preached the principle of ahimsa, he made it clear that it was not act of cowardice or a weapon of the weak. Nehru believed that for Gandhi, ‘even in the conception of absence of the non-violent mental approach, self-discipline and control of anger and hatred, rather than physical abstention from violent action, when it became necessary and inevitable’ (Chengappa 2000: 62). In his struggle against the British rule, Gandhi’s call of action was basically two-fold: to free India from the foreign yoke and rescue it from the curse of many social evils. The modus operandi for this was peaceful but a non-submissive protest. Gandhi had no time for passive resolutions or speeches and yet he vehemently opposed terrorist activities. Nehru once observed: ‘Gandhi was an old kind of pacifist for he was an activist full of dynamic energy. There was no submission in him to fate or anything that he considered evil, he was full of resistance, though it was peaceful and courteous’ (Chengappa 2000: 64-65).

Gandhi’s philosophy played an important role in shaping India’s nuclear policy. Gandhi was a radical pacifist. Though, he was against violence of any sort yet his philosophy lays clear that he was not to submit to anything that is immoral and displayed total obstinacy towards such elements. It thus appears that the apostle of peace supported the idea of strong resistance to the shackles of bondage and weakness and encouraged to fight the evil forces of subjugation and containment. Incidentally, the premise for India to embark upon a nuclear weapons policy is the same. This is not to say that Gandhi supported the idea of India building nuclear weapons. His political ideology depicts him to be a pacifist whose basic approach was ahimsa. He had a deep hatred for violence and abhorred the idea of India adopting a nuclear weapons policy. Talking to an English journalist in 1946 he said, “I regard the employment of the atom bomb for the wholesale destruction of men, women and children as the most diabolical use of science” (Gandhi 1946: 31). Gandhi’s moral opposition to nuclear weapons was apparent and his philosophy guided India’s nuclear policy after independence.
After Gandhi’s death in 1948, there was a distinct change in independent India’s ideology. The mantle of leadership fell on Nehru, who although a devoted follower of Gandhi, adopted a different path. He had justified reasons for doing so. At a time when pre-independent India was perfecting a device that employed peace and non-violence to break the backbone of the British Empire over which the sun never sets down, the world was also developing the most lethal weapon – the atom bomb that spelled nothing but complete destruction. Independent India was thus born wherein it faced the option of adopting a weapon of peace and non-violence as propagated by Gandhi or a weapon of total annihilation. Nehru rejected the former. This is not to say that India’s first prime minister adopted the second option. He was not the propagator of evil and destruction. Toeing on the moral lines of his great master, Nehru told the UN General Assembly session held on 3 November 1948 in Paris that

“I am not afraid of the bigness of great powers, and their armies, their fleets and their atom bombs. That is the lesson which my Master taught me. We stood as unarmed people against a great country and a powerful empire” (Nehru 1962: 162).

At the same time, Nehru believed that Indian civilization had lost its rational spirit of inquiry and was increasingly blinded by narrow orthodoxy, taboos and idolatry. The India of the eight century was one in which science and creativity had reached its zenith and it boasted of great scholars like Aryabhatta, the mathematician, Charaka, the physician and Varahamihira, the astronomer. But at the dawn of independence, the same India had lost its scientific spirit and technological edge particularly in military affairs. The partition of the country gave birth to Pakistan and also to decades of animosity and abomination. It immediately caused death to five million people and subjected fifteen million to acute poverty.

Independent India was on the break of starvation and its nascent industry was technologically decades behind. Nehru expressed his keenness for an industrial-technological model that would put India on the path of self-reliance. His priority was to upgrade the living standard of the people and to strengthen its national security as well as carve out a role for India in the international sphere, commensurate with its size and eminence. Charting out a course along the lines of socialism, Nehru decided that the state must pave the way for economic development. The power centers of
modem India were to be the large dams and heavy industry to be run by the state. Nehru believed science and technology were the only factors that could accelerate the process. In 1937, he told scientists assembled at the Indian National Science Congress that: ‘It is science alone that could solve these problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of superstition and deadening customs and traditions, of vast resources running to waste, of a rich country inhabited by starving people’ (Chengappa 2000: 69-70).

On security related issues, Nehru exhibited a dual approach. On the one hand, he propagated the idea of world peace and disarmament and believed that India should strive towards convincing the world of relinquishing nuclear weapons. On the other hand, he knew that if the world community continues to adhere to the nuclear weapons option, India should not remain backward, even if it meant harnessing the power of the atom. Nehru was already deeply shocked by the US bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. He was further disappointed when the Baruch Plan to ban nuclear weapons proved to be a non-starter in the United Nations in June 1946. Bernard Baruch proposed before the UN: ‘We are here to make choice between the quick and the dead’. But the choice had already been made with Soviet Union under Stalinist leadership deciding to build the bomb. A deadly arms-race had already begun! Concurrently, Nehru was increasingly becoming convinced that the future belonged to those who produced atomic energy. Even as he battled for a nuclear – free world, he knew India would have to develop the capability to protect itself and exploit the immense potential of nuclear energy for both civilian and military purposes. From then on, Nehru relied on Homi J. Bhabha for India’s self-reliance in the areas of defence and development.

Traditionally, Indian foreign policy emphasized the importance of peace diplomacy where the central emphasis was on peace than on military options. Nehru’s bent of mind strongly reflected the above belief. Nehru’s thinking on nuclear matters reflected an intention to use nuclear technology and know-how for peaceful purpose.

“There was no guide on his nuclear policy as it originated from a mind imbued with high idealism, deep sense of history and a world view and always with a vision of a strong and modern India. Nehru’s nuclear decisions were not the outcome of any national debate but deeply rooted in his scientific temper, abhorrence of nuclear weapons and
Nuclear allergy after the supreme target at Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (Poulose 1978: 102).

Nehru being deeply influenced by Gandhi was hesitant in embracing the military usefulness of nuclear power; closer scrutiny, however, reveals that Nehru also accepted, albeit reticently and ambivalently, the potential military deterrent and international power embodied in nuclear weapon capability (Perkovich 1999: 14). It thus appears that a duality was reflected in Nehru’s thoughts and intention about atomic power. In a speech delivered in Bombay in 1946 he said:

‘As long as the world is constituted as it is, every country will have to devise and use the latest scientific devices for its protection. I have no doubt India will develop her scientific, research force for constructive purposes. But if India is threatened she will inevitably try to defend herself by all means at her disposal. I hope India in common with countries will prevent the use of atomic bombs’ (Newman 1965: 264).

On one hand, there was the moralist Nehru who hated the destructive power of nuclear weapons and considered them as anathema to the unique spirit of India. He disparaged massive nuclear arsenals and visualized a world wherein power wielded through moral suasion and political insight. At the same time, there existed the ambitious, realist leader who believed that nuclear weapons capability could enhance India’s status and position in the world. He also recognized the fact that nuclear technology would play a crucial role in promoting the upliftment of the poor masses and well being of the nation. He tried to synthesize the power emanating from the Western technical world and the moral wisdom of India to devise a scientific spirit that would pave the way towards state economic planning and heavy investment in large industrial enterprises including the nuclear establishment.

Nuclear science and technology thus assumed an important place in the overall strategy for the technological development and modernization of India. The primary necessity of the period was steady availability of cheap electrical power. At the same time, Nehru was skeptical about the horrendous effects of nuclear weapons. The twin bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki illustrated the catastrophic impact of the atomic bomb. He was faced with the dilemma of co-destruction and co-prosperity. Nehru wanted to apply nuclear energy to open the limitless possibilities for human development, prosperity and overabundance. But he was well aware that nuclear
confrontation could not be outlawed. In that case, as Nehru said in the 1946 speech in Bombay and intimated at other times, India must possess the option to wield the greatest of military technology (Perkovich 1999: 46).

Though, Nehru strongly advocated the principle of 'peaceful coexistence' as against the military approach to national security, he also rejected the Gandhian approach in defence and foreign affairs. For that matter, Gandhi was also not unequivocally against the use of force. Gandhi held that when the choice is between cowardice and violence, violence should be preferred (Levi 1971: 119, 124). Gandhi 'tolerated violent defence' to the extent that it produced 'just ends'. He was aware that 'a modern state could not resist external aggression by non-violent means'. Finally, Gandhi 'admired the bravery of the Indian army in Kashmir' (Kapur 2001: 65). For Nehru, growth and development was the prime necessity of the times and science and technology was to play a decisive role to this extent.

It was precisely with this aim of providing India with cheap cost-effective electricity, development and prestige and if necessary with nuclear weapons capability that the Atomic Energy Research Commission was established in 1946 (Bhatia 1979: 82). Subsequently in 1948, Atomic Energy Act was introduced before the Constituent Assembly. The act was designed on the Atomic Energy Act of Britain but prescribed greater secrecy than the atomic energy legislation of either Britain or the United States. The objective was to establish an Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) to provide a legal framework for its operation. In passing the Act, the Constituent Assembly reflected on an illuminating debate that provided a meaningful insight into the claim that India's nuclear programme began with no intention to weaponize. The debate centred on the element of secrecy within which the AEC was to function. Nehru was well aware that several questions would arise debating the efficacy of maintaining secrecy provisions that would only result in tightening state controls over the nuclear energy programme.

There will be various contestations over the fact that if the Indian nuclear energy programme was meant primarily for peaceful applications, then what was the need for excessive secrecy? Three parliamentarians in this context were notable who emphasized the importance of pursuing a peaceful nuclear programme. The first was
S.V. Krishnamurthy Rao who forcefully criticized the imposition of greater secrecy than the United States and Britain which were unlike India also building nuclear weapons (Constituent Assembly of India 1948: 3324). Rao pointed out, "The Central Government is taking very extraordinary powers and these powers will have very far reaching effect on the nuclear research in India" (Constituent Assembly of India 1948: 3323). He also questioned whether India had "the wherewithal for all this secrecy and research" and posited that the act did not allow for transparency as contained in the US Atomic Energy Act. He was particularly against the illiberal nature of the Bill. He asks why the public, industrialists, and the scientific community at large cannot be consulted, as in England, and why the provisions of the Bill cannot be tossed down to simply ban the export of strategic minerals – the only stated rationale for the need for secrecy (Constituent Assembly of India 1948: 3326). However, Rao was not in favour of dismissing the Bill. He wanted to build a negotiated consensus on atomic energy based on democratic, transparency and fewer state controls.

Nehru in his riposte, criticized Rao for being unaware of the larger context in which the matters of the state were discussed and ignored his challenge over secrecy. Unlike the colonial era, wherein India lost several historic opportunities for development and modernization, Nehru did not want to commit the same mistakes and put the nation on the path of regression. Not quite daunted by Nehru's hostile reaction Rao interrupted:

"May I know if secrecy is insisted upon even for research for peaceful purposes?"

NEHRU: Not theoretical research. Secrecy comes in when you think in terms of the production on use of atomic energy. That is the central effort to produce atomic energy.

RAO: In the Bill passed in the United Kingdom secrecy is restricted only for defence purposes.

NEHRU: I do not know how to distinguish between the two [peaceful and defence purposes] (Constituent Assembly of India 1948: 3328).

This heated exchange between the Prime Minister and Rao makes amply clear that Nehru was forced to acknowledge that secrecy cannot be separated from military atomic projects. Trying to displace the difference between theoretical and experimental research onto the difference between peaceful and defence-related ends of atomic energy research, he admits in the end that he cannot sustain this dichotomy
It can thus be discerned that the Indian nuclear energy programme had a military component from the moment of its inception and Nehru could not deny this.

Immediately, after this admission by Nehru, there was a remarkable shift in the tone and tenor of political debates. A new spate of political opinion voiced out a very different idea for the purpose of India's nuclear energy programme. These voices welcomed the need for state power in the international system and perceived nuclear energy as an appropriate tool to achieve that power. To that extent, Parliamentarian Shibban Lal Saksena adopting a hard-line realist logic stated,

‘If we have got the knowledge and the ability to use this power, there is no virtue in our saying that we shall not use it for destructive purposes and that other people should not so use it... Besides, as a realist I must say that in today's world when the clouds of war hang all around us we cannot but prepare ourselves for our defence. It is also a fact that the respect that nation enjoys is directly proportional to its armed might. We might not engage in war and we might do our best to stop war but the effective way of stopping war is only when we have got the means or power to have our might felt all over the world. ... I think if India, which has been a slave country for the last two hundred years is to come unto her own she must very soon come in line with the great powers of the world; and for that we must develop our military potential ... We all know that atomic energy is today the most important scientific discovery. Unless, we spend upon it lavishly and unless we use all our resources, both in men and materials... Unless, we are in point of military strength a very big nation and unless we can have a say in world affairs, I do not think we can make the world pacific. Our national genius being pacific, I would then like to tell the world that we must ban the use of atomic energy for warfare and even outlaw war. But we cannot do it by preaching and good wishes alone. Until, we have the capacity to use atomic energy for destructive warfare it will have no meaning for us to say that we shall not use atomic energy for destructive purposes (Constituent Assembly of India 1948: 3332-3333).

Unlike his averse response to Krishnamurthy Rao, Nehru acknowledged Sakshena's depiction that the nuclear energy project in India was a potential source of military and economic strength. A closer examination reveals that there is discursive breakdown in Nehru's original position, which opposed any belligerent purpose of India's atomic energy and was meant for India's developmental needs. Having lost out on the benefits of the Industrial Revolution, Nehru did not want to deprive the country of the advantages of the atomic energy. It is only a matter of commonsense
that reactors, facilities and experts that build up a nuclear power centres can inherently serve dual-purpose. Hence, to insist that the nuclear establishments in India are intended only for peaceful purposes is specious. Intentions after all determine utility. Thus in terms of his intention, Nehru did not rule out military use.

‘There is just one aspect to which I should like again to draw the attention of the house. Somehow we cannot help associating atomic energy with war. That is the present context of our lives. Nevertheless, the important thing today is that atomic energy is a vast source of power that is coming to the world and it is something even more important than the coming in of wars and the like ... The point I should like the House to consider is this, that if we are to remain abreast in the world as a nation which keeps ahead of things, we must develop this atomic energy quite apart from war indeed I think we must develop it for the purpose of using it for peaceful purposes. It is in that hope that we should develop this. Of course, if we are compelled as a nation to use it for other purposes, possibly no pious sentiments of any of us will stop the nation from using it that way’ (Constituent Assembly of India 1948: 3333-3334).

The last statement of Nehru amply makes clear that his intentions did not confine atomic energy only for peaceful purposes. He recognized the military potential of nuclear energy and his intentions toward harnessing this capability were quite apparent.

Parliamentarian, Dr. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya of Madras was also very sure that atomic energy would be used to promote weapons of war. He argued that the elements of state monopoly and secrecy would be the eventual cause of the proliferation and use of nuclear weapons. Being a scientist, Sitaramayya had no ambiguity on the potential of peaceful uses for atomic energy. His criticism of the Atomic Energy Commission Bill centered around its structural concern that state monopolies might lead to a situation where nuclear weapons would be the ultimate outcome of atomic energy programme.

‘Perhaps if it had been left open to anybody to make research in this new domain it would have served to diminish the chances of war in the world much more than when it is kept a monopoly and secret. As things stand, each nation believes that it has a potent weapon it its hands which is far more destructive than the weapons known to its neighbours, and therefore I doubt very much whether, after all the monopoly and this element of secrecy ... is not destined to promote the war-spirit and the preparations for war, more than of peace’ (Constituent Assembly of India 1948: 3323).
It is clear that Sitaramayya was not opposed to the atomic energy programme. His basic objection was directed against the excessive state control in terms of secrecy imposed upon the proposed atomic energy programme. Nonetheless, he was sure that the Atomic Energy Commission as it was intended to function would definitely serve to develop nuclear weapons capability. Expressing a different line of thought, Parliamentarian delegate, K. Santhanam was absolutely sure that the state is the most appropriate owner of something as dangerous and mysterious as atomic energy (Abraham 1998: 52). Santhanam favoured state control precisely because he did want atomic energy to get into ‘unregulated, private reactionary hands’. His concern about meddlesome private interests was so acute that it overwhelms his doubts about the efficacy of nuclear energy.

‘At present it is still rather uncertain as to how far atomic energy will be useful for industrial purposes [...] It is only because I think that for the good of the country and of humanity it should not be allowed to be tampered with by extraneous hands – and not so much that there is a great possibility of our exploiting that power for industrial purpose in the near future – that I welcome this Bill’ (Constituent Assembly of India 1948: 3333).

Thus the supporter of the Bill was still quite unsure that nuclear energy could have peaceful applications. In short, atomic power could be used to develop weapons and hence Santhanam was in complete favour of it being under the control of the state.

Several other parliamentarians for a state monopolized Atomic Energy Commission uniformly applauded the Bill. Delegate Seth Govinddas supported the Bill. He said, ‘It would have been a matter of surprise had this Bill not been presented to this free legislative Assembly [soon] after the dawn of freedom’ (Constituent Assembly of India 1948: 3319). He was formally in favour of the atomic energy project. H.V. Kamath pointed out, ‘This Bill has not come a day too soon’ (Constituent Assembly of India 1948: 3322). K. Santhanam added: ‘I welcome this Bill and I hope in the years to come we shall endow the Atomic Board or Commission with more and more powers’ (Constituent Assembly of India 1948: 3319).

The various contestations reflected in the official debate around atomic energy led to it becoming firmly, legally and financially, positioned in the state machinery. There were various reasons supporting the atomic energy, which were often at
loggerheads with each other, yet the result was beneficial to the nuclear scientists. Consequently, the Atomic Energy Act was passed with minor amendments that led to the establishment of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission on 10 August 1948. It consisted of a three-member team headed by Homi J. Bhabha. The other two members were Dr. S.S. Bhatnagar and Dr. K.S. Krishnan. All three had been named to the Scientific Advisory Committee to the Ministry of Defence, which had been created earlier in July (Abraham 1998: 61). Nehru's proposed need for strongest secrecy and other restrictions were accepted, as it could not be credibly denied that the nuclear energy programme would aid and modernize India's defence requirements. The founders of Indian nuclear establishment recognized and welcomed from the beginning the options, its military dimension gave to India, notwithstanding Nehru's genuine hope that India could retain a purely peaceful mission (Perkovich 1999: 20). The politico-strategic community in 1948 clearly expressed their mandate in favour of an atomic energy establishment that recognized the military option for meeting the country's defence needs. India was slowly moving from its once lofty, idealistic standpoint and demanded the right to become a nuclear power nation.

From the very beginning, the Indian political community was zealously protective of the autonomy of its nascent nuclear programme. It expressed its resentment against the Baruch Plan of 1946 that proposed to establish international control over fissile materials and facilities for peaceful and defence purposes. Apprehending a strategy of Western colonial subjugation over its nascent nuclear programme, the Indian delegate to the UN discussion of the plan, Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, insisted that international ownership of fissile ores such as thorium would deprive the country of an important economic asset in the future (Bhatia 1979: 43). Two things can be discerned from this. First, India was fiercely guarding the sovereignty of its atomic energy establishment and resistant to any inequalities where only a select few countries will be entitled to control the power of the atom. Second, India's nuclear programme was still being propelled along the lines of peaceful utilities.

The political establishment was in favour of channeling nuclear energy for the economic development of the country to make it self-relevant and righteously averred efforts for a vigorous nuclear armament policy. Gradually, India's plans for
application of atomic energy for peaceful purposes began to take a ‘programmatic form’. India had signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with France in 1951 and in 1952 Nehru unveiled a four-year plan to begin developing India’s nuclear capability, starting with surveying for atomic materials and processing monazite to obtain thorium (Bhatia 1979: 40). In 1954, the government of India established the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) for prioritizing research and development of atomic energy. It was lead by Nehru and Bhabha as its first minister and secretary respectively. The DAE was authorized to execute policies formulated by the AEC. During a Lok Sabha debate on 24 July 1957 on the budgetary allocation for the DAE, Nehru remarked: ‘we realize the importance of this work in the present and in the future. This is really why it is usual in India and in some other countries for the Prime Minister to be in charge of it.

Not that the Prime Minister of India or any other Prime Minister is supposed to be peculiarly brilliant or especially suited for that purpose. The Prime Minister’s being in charge merely shows how much importance has been given to work on atomic energy’ (Morehouse 1992: 428). This signifies the importance, which the Indian Government attached to harnessing nuclear power and also indicated its commitment towards developing a self-reliant nuclear infrastructure in the country. Subsequently, the Atomic Energy Establishment, Trombay (AEET) was established in 1954 (which was renamed Bhabha Atomic Research Centre or BARC in 1967) to play a pivotal role in India’s nuclear development.

Nineteen fifty-four posed a disturbing development for India. US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’s May 1953 trip to India and Pakistan, reaffirmed Washington’s disdain for Indian leadership and highlighted a precedent – setting interaction between US and Pakistan. Expressing its contempt for communism and respect for US leadership, Pakistan was able to impress Washington hoping to win military and economic assistance required to shore it up against India’s relative strength. In the fall of 1953, Pakistan’s army chief, General Mohammed Ayub Khan visited Washington to seek an arms supply arrangement. US export of militarism to Pakistan was officially reported to Nehru in February 1954. This was an upsetting development for the newly independent country. Responding to the issue in March 1956 in a Lok Sabha defence budget debate Nehru urged the House to focus on how
India should strive towards strengthening itself. This is not to say that Nehru advocated nuclear weapons policy at this stage but he made a rubble reference to atomic energy whereby he reflected that in the field of atomic energy, “we are in the first half a dozen countries of the world or some what near that” (Nehru 1956: 41). It was here in atomic energy and industrial development that India should concentrate its efforts in order to strengthen its national defence.

Nehru, generally abhorred nuclear weapons and truly wished that India would not be driven to build nuclear weapons. His charisma and influence held sway over the common poor people whose adulation for Nehru, allowed him to speak for the nation ‘notwithstanding inevitable opposition carping’. Thus on 20 January 1957, Nehru declared, “whatever the circumstances, we shall never use this atomic energy for evil purposes. There is no condition attached” (Mirchandani 1968: 230). However, Nehru began this proclamation by stating that “No man can prophesy about the future” (Mirchandani 1968: 230). Six months later in July 1957, Nehru reiterated “that we are not interested in making atom bombs, even if we have the capacity to do so, and that in no event will we use atomic energy for destructive purposes” (Lok Sabha Debates 1957). Again, perhaps it would have been cynical to parse differences between the less categorical disavowal of “making atom bombs and the clear rejection of using them” (Perkovich 1999: 34).

What is noteworthy is that he closed his above speech by adding that “the fact remains that if one has these fissionable materials and if one had the resources, then one can make a bomb, unless the world would be wise enough to come to some decision to stop the production of such bombs” (Lok Sabha Debates 1957). Although, Nehru was unequivocally committed not to develop nuclear weapons, he and Bhabha both directly and indirectly invoked the capability and intention to build nuclear bombs. An early evocation of nuclear deterrence by India can be discerned from Nehru’s statement of 30 January 1958 when he reacted to the US military assistance to Pakistan and the speculated existence of nuclear weapons in China as:

“We have the technical know-how for manufacturing the atom bomb. We can do it in three or four years if we divert sufficient resources in that direction. But, we have given the world an assurance that we shall never do so, we shall never use our knowledge of nuclear science for purposes of war” (Mirchandani 1968: 231).
This statement of nuclear weapons technology know-how essentially indicates that Nehru added a warning to the “peaceful purposes only” label and once again reflected the duality in him. It portrays the realist Nehru who wanted to strengthen India not only economically but also militarily. This duality was also obvious in the Indian nuclear programme and remained as its theme from 1960 to 1962. In August 1960, Nehru declared in the Lok Sabha that the first power generating nuclear station at Tarapur was to be set up, in addition to the previously proposed plutonium separation plant at Trombay. However, there were growing concerns over the economic viability of nuclear power. The press posed counterarguments against Bhabha’s ambitious calls for investment in nuclear power. The Hindustan Times pointed out that “in the current stage of fuel science and technology, thermal power stations are a cheaper source of energy than nuclear power stations” (Hindustan Times 1961: 38). The Times of India editorialized that the AEC’s case for nuclear power “is by no means supported by the economics of nuclear power… [A]s experience elsewhere shows,… nuclear power is being left behind, giving way to conventional fuels primarily as a result of rapid technological achievement” in thermal power (The Times of India 1961).

However, Nehru and Bhabha were able to tide off the brewing crisis and went ahead with the plans and budgets for India’s nuclear programme. On 9 January 1961, Nehru announced to the National Development Council, “we are approaching a stage where it is possible for us… to make atomic weapons”. Only five days later, Nehru declared that India’s third research reactor had gone critical and pointed out that if New Delhi wished it could make nuclear weapons “within the next two or three years”, adding immediately, that India would not do so under any circumstances (Mirchandani 1968: 235). On February 2, Bhabha reaffirmed Nehru’s claims that India’s nuclear programme’s dual-use potential can develop nuclear weapons in “about two years” (Venkatasubbiah 1961: 1). Both Nehru and Bhabha made these statements at a time when the nuclear programme was under mild questioning. Logically, it thus appears that both the leaders were confident about buttressing for the nuclear programme or else they would not have made such invocations of nuclear weapons capability.
In September 1962, the Atomic Energy Commission was endowed with greater powers and autonomy and further strengthened. The passage of the Atomic Energy Bill by the Lok Sabha in 1962 tightened the control of the central government and the aspect of secrecy over all activities related to atomic energy. The Act provided for “the development, control and use of atomic energy for the welfare of the people of India and for other peaceful purposes and for matters connected therewith” (Pathak 1980: 30). The words “for matters connected therewith” clearly implied aspects relating to India’s intention to develop nuclear weapons capability. There was a distinct absence of the traditional focus on ‘peaceful uses’. Instead, the importance of nuclear power for national security was faulty being elevated (Abraham 1998: 114-120).

A closer examination into the passage of the Bill shows that it was presented in the Lok Sabha under atypical circumstances. The draft Bill was circulated only a few days before it was formally presented in the lower house and parliamentarians did not get the opportunity to scrutinize the details. The timing of the bill was changed at the last minute supplanting a debate on the Land Acquisition Bill, which made it practically impossible for a number of members to attend or debate on the draft bill. The bill was debated for only three hours, which after much pleading was extended by an hour. But even then, that was not sufficient to deal with the magnitude of a bill dealing with atomic power. Also unusual is the fact that although the bill was presented by the Prime Minister (the Minister in charge of atomic energy), it was the Law Minister, A.K. Sen – not a scientist by his own admission – answered all the questions that were raised during the debate. “Es Bill ko “pass” karne ki jaldi kya hai?” (‘What is the hurry to pass this Bill?’) (Lok Sabha Debates 1962: 2919). Mr. Baday, MP from Khargaon had raised the above question in the face of the above extraordinary circumstances.

Nehru’s opening statement answers Baday’s query. Nehru stated, ‘This Bill, broadly speaking, I should imagine, is hardly controversial, in fact it is not controversial at all time’ (Lok Sabha Debates 1962: 2864). It is obvious that the Prime Minister wanted to restrict debate and hurry through the passage of this legislation. The reason being, the proponents of the bill did not want the true character of the Indian atomic energy programme to be thrashed out by a parliamentary select
committee. Besides, the atomic energy programme was no longer at its stage of infancy as it was in 1948. A new atomic energy act was necessary to deal with the emerging developments. By 1962, one nuclear reactor had already been installed, others were being constructed and few others being negotiated. As explained by Minister Sen:

'It is necessary to inform this House the reason why this Act should be passed soon. The Government of India has decided to set up the second 200 MW electric [sic] generating station to generate power by nuclear energy at Pratapsagar near Kotah in Rajasthan... It is absolutely necessary that the Government should be equipped with all the necessary powers. These are heavy undertaking and without the powers which the Act purport to give to the Government, it will be impossible to carry out these undertakings efficiently. It is therefore urgent that the Bill should be passed without much delay' (Lok Sabha Debates 1962: 2930-2931).

Thus in the larger interests of the country it was considered necessary that the Atomic Energy bill under the complete control of the Central Government be passed immediately. Hence the urgency!

The year 1962, churned another significant event that manifested insecurity and unease in India with regard to our national interests. A series of events ranging over the Tibetan uprising of 1959 and China’s irredentist claims over Indian territories greatly deteriorated the security dynamics in India. Matters worsened, when on 20 October 1962, China launched an attack in Ladakh and the NEFA areas along the Sino-Indian borders. India’s ‘forward policy’ of moving forces into the gaps up to the border backfired. By November 1962, the Chinese forces completely routed the Indian troops and declared unilateral ceasefire.

For the Indian strategic community, the 1962 Sino-Indian war was significant for two reasons. First, it exposed the vulnerabilities of the Indian defence forces. The war was vital in revealing how ill equipped our military was in terms of both manpower and defence arsenal. Second, the war also exposed the futility of utopian and idealist notion of peaceful coexistence as the underlying principle of India’s foreign policy. Matters worsened further, when in February 1963, China and Pakistan signed a border agreement thereby signaling an ostentatious proximity is their bilateral relations. The underlying reason for such camaraderie precisely being
military assistance from China to Pakistan! In the face of humiliating debacle and dangerous Sino-Pakistan liaison, the Indian politico-strategic community was once again forced to consider the nuclear option. India’s demeaning in the Sino-Indian war made radical parties like Jana Sangh to demand for the most effective defence infrastructure for the safeguard of our national interests.

In December 1962, the Jana Sangh party made the first formal demand in Parliament for India in favour of nuclear weapons. Less than six weeks after the ceasefire in the 1962 armed conflict with China, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh demanded in a formal resolution the production of nuclear weapons by India as part of the country’s long-term defence effort against China (Mirchandani 1978: 55-56). The entire nation was demoralized in the aftermath of India’s defeat in the 1962 war. The press and media questioned the policy of the Prime Minister of India. Was India to forever eschew a nuclear deterrent potential? On 25 March 1963, during the Lok Sabha debate on the Department of Atomic Energy budget, Jana Sangh parliamentarian, Ramachandra Bade asked the government to reconsider its policy on nuclear weapons. ‘Only those who wish to see Russians or Chinese ruling India will oppose the development of nuclear weapons. I beg the Prime Minister to make full use of our research in atomic energy’ (Bhatia 1979: 108-109). What is notable is that this was the first time that a demand for nuclear weapons as a potential military might was made by a national political party. Despite, insistent demands by the leading political parties, Nehru remained indignant on the question of nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, Nehru did not completely dismiss the nuclear weapons option. He pursued an ambiguous policy of keeping the weapons option open for political and strategic reasons. That Nehru was in favour of a robust military strength for India is indicated from his speech: “To be practical”, he said, “unless you have a very powerful deterrent” you achieve little practical value with nuclear weapons. “[I]t is not good having something showy … It will not have the slightest effect on India as such, if the [the Chinese] have a test tomorrow … We are not going to make bombs, [although] we are in nuclear science more advanced than China” (Mirchandani 1968: 22). Nehru’s statement can be clearly interpreted to imply two things. First, the Prime Minister for all practical purposes indicates his willingness for a robust and powerful nuclear weapons capability to develop India’s strength militarily. Closely connected
to this is the second aspect which points to the fact that India’s nuclear programme had achieved a level of sophistication and advancement that was higher than China. In other words, India was ahead of China (Perkovich 1999: 45).

**Shastri Years**

The year 1964 provided a turning point in the nuclear history of India. Barely two years after the crushing defeat inflicted by the Chinese forces on India, Beijing shocked the world and its southern neighbour by conducting a nuclear test on 16 October 1964. The Chinese test that took place less than five months after Nehru’s death produced an unprecedented nuclear debate in India. The bomb-for-security lobby demanded that the government led by Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shashtri must reconsider its stand on the nuclear policy. As early as December 1959, the Parliamentary Consultative Committee on Atomic Energy got together to probe into the possibility of China’s acquisition of a nuclear device. By this time, Sino-Soviet relations with China had taken an adverse turn and Moscow cancelled its offer to provide Beijing with nuclear technology details for manufacturing atomic bombs. However, this was not known in India (Norris *et al.* 1994: 332). As against this, Bhabha claimed that India had advanced to a position where it could develop the bomb indigenously without relying on external help. It thus appears that India was quite persistently pursuing a nuclear weapons programme although the government policy did not adhere to any such agenda.

In March 1960, an Indian Rajya Sabha member triggered a false alarm that China would explode an atomic bomb on March 28 (Perkovich 1999: 44). Bhabha and others quickly refuted this wild speculation, but it prompted several editorials in the Indian press predicting China’s imminent acquisition of the bomb (Mirchandani 1968: 13). However, Nehru was quick in his response to reassure the people and warn external threat posing elements that India was “determined not to go in for making atomic bombs and the like. But we are equally determined not be left behind in this advance in the use of this new power” (Mirchandani 1968: 25). The duality in Nehru’s policy towards nuclear weapons gets reflected once again. Perhaps, it would not be too presumptuous to state that Nehru wanted to attain nuclear weapons capability as much as he abhorred it especially in view of the catastrophic effect of
these bombs unleashed on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This sounds paradoxical. But the interesting point is Nehru wanted to harness nuclear power to generate electricity and channelize it for the economic progress of the country. At the same time, Nehru also wanted to safeguard the national security interests of the nation. After the humiliating defeat of India in the 1962 war with China, Nehru did not want India to lag behind in the defence sector. Hence, he favoured the development of a “new power” to meet future exigencies.

The Chinese nuclear threat was gradually becoming more realistic. In October 1961, Field Marshal, Bernard Montgomery visited China and reported in the London Sunday Times that Chow En-Lai had told him that Beijing “had decided to proceeded with plans for developing nuclear weapons for the armed forces”, but that this was not a high Chinese priority given more urgent needs (Mirchandani 1968: 17). In 1961, US intelligence agencies estimated that China could detonate a nuclear device by 1962 (Perkovich 1999: 44). Amidst all these rumours, the Sino-Indian war of 1962 took place. The nuclear weapons policy was still not strictly adhered to. At the Eighteen Nations Disarmament Commission (ENDC) meeting in 1962, the Indian representative, Ambassador V.C. Trivedi was to point out that what is of prime importance is the intention of the country, which possesses nuclear technology. India’s intentions were peaceful. India accepted the view that peaceful nuclear explosions must be “adequately safeguarded” but what was important that “safeguards must apply equally to all nations” (Jain 1974: 192-193).

India favoured peaceful applications of nuclear energy but abrogated any discriminatory policies that endangered its security interests. On 29 September 1964, American Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, revealed that the United States expected China [to] conduct an atmospheric nuclear test in the near future (Rusk in US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency 1964: 440). This sparked off a debate in India that sought to reinforce the acquisition of nuclear weapons capability. Immediately, after this thunderous announcement, Bhabha while visiting London on 4 October 1964, declared that India could explode an atom bomb within eighteen months of a decision to do so but he quickly added, “I do not think such a decision will be taken” (National Herald: 1964). Just three weeks earlier, on 17 September 1964, Bhabha had told on IAEA meeting in Vienna that “India welcomed” the opportunity to conduct “atomic
explosions in civil engineering works ... so long as such explosions were subject to international supervision” (Bhabha 1974a: 157). It was obvious that Bhabha’s claims reinvigorated the nuclear debate in India in favour of nuclear weapons.

Exactly a month later, the Chinese exploded its first nuclear weapons device on 16 October 1964 at the Lop Nor test site in Xinjiang. Barely, India had recovered from the debacle of the 1962 war that the addition of nuclear weapons to the Chinese arsenal posed a grave strategic challenge to New Delhi (Cohen 2001: 160). The Chinese blast was seen in India as a danger to the maintenance of world peace. India expressed deep concern at the deteriorating security perspectives, especially the nuclear environment. For the first time, India now had an overt nuclear weapons state on its borders, a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962. Till 1964, India only thought of developing nuclear capability for peaceful purposes, which could be converted into a nuclear weapon option, if necessary. However, the Chinese nuclear explosion in 1964 proved to be an alarming development for India. The politico-strategic community was once more forced to seriously reconsider the acquisition of nuclear weapons capability.

The Indian political and defence establishments had reasons to worry in the post-1964 Chinese nuclear blast. The Chinese ideology of nuclear weapons capability was quite intimidating for a fledgling democratic country like India which sought no external alliance and was committed to the policy of non-alignment. Prime Minister Shastri declared the test as “a shock and danger to world peace”. Notwithstanding this, Shastri a staunch advocate of Gandhian ideals of non-violence was reluctant to revise the country’s peaceful nuclear policy. Despite his ‘no change’ stance there were demands from various political parties, media and influential public opinion makers demanding the production of nuclear weapons in the interest of national security. Only two days after the Chinese explosion, the leader of the Samayukta Socialist Party, Nath Pai announced at a press conference that India should actively consider acquiring nuclear weapons capability and urged that the government must undertake “corrective measures to enable the country [to] regain its lost prestige in the comity of nations” (Indian Express 1964). The major newspapers though sober and realistic in their response could not totally disregard the 1964 nuclear explosion. The Hindustan Times on October 19, for example, averred “China’s bomb is a grave

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provocation to India” (Bhatia 1979: 116). The government line was still against any nuclear weapons policy. An American Embassy cable to the State Department reported that in an October 20 conversation, the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs, V.C. Trivedi told an embassy official that India remained committed to restrict its nuclear programme to peaceful uses only (Perkovich 1999: 167). But Trivedi was equally skeptical about how long the government can hold back on the nuclear weapons policy. “On the other hand”, Trivedi acknowledged, according to the cable, “no one could at present gauge the degree of pressure that might be mounted on the government to alter its present policy” (Perkovich 1999: 167).

The demand for nuclear weapons was spearheaded by other political parties as well. On 25 October 1964, the President of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee, Mustaq Ahmed urged that ‘the only course for India is to produce her own atom bomb to defend herself’ (Times of India 1964a). The Hindu-nationalist Jana Sangh Party in its October 26 edition of its weekly magazine Organizer exhorted the government to build a strong nuclear weapons arsenal:

“The eunuch Government decided years ago in its ahimsic (non-violent) idiocy to spend crores on nuclear power but not to use the same crores on developing the nuclear bomb. We had the chance to do it before China did it and so we could tell that we meant business and that we were ahead of China. In our criminal folly we missed it” (Poulose 1978: 105).

The Jana Sangh at a working committee meeting on 4 December 1964 pointed out that it “considers it imperative that an all out effort be made to build up an independent nuclear deterrent […] and urges the government of India to revise its stand accordingly” (Bhatia 1979: 112).

A majority within the Congress also favoured the acquisition of a nuclear arsenal. 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 All Indian Congress Committee (AICC) meeting on 7 and 8 November 1964, the majority of the speakers came out ‘strongly and frankly’ in favour of India manufacturing atomic bombs (The Economic Weekly 1964). The Praja Socialist Party (PSP) asserted that the
government should immediately revise its nuclear policy especially in the aftermath of the Chinese nuclear explosion. On 13 December 1964, PSP leader wrote in the party’s mouthpiece, Janata:

‘The explosion of China in defiance of the treaty at Moscow, in defiance of world opinion, was not a freak, nor just the blowing of a cracker by an erratic child, it was the culmination of a certain process which she has laid down for herself. We have to think of, judge and evaluate it against the background of the Chinese overall strategy, long-term policy, long-term activities in the whole of Asia and in the world (Pai 1964: 3).

The Indian media with a few exceptions were also in favour of India’s manufacturing of nuclear bombs. The Indian Express editorialized the political implications of Chinese nuclear capability for India:

'[China’s] membership into the nuclear club of five world powers gives her a status of which the bomb is a symbol. [...] The question arises in purely psychological terms – can India afford to sit still while the Chinese continue to score an advantage over us’ (The Indian Express 1964).

Another leading daily Pioneer in an editorial on 19 October 1964 stressed that the Chinese test posed a ‘new menace’ to India which could be countered either by relying on a US nuclear guarantee (which was politically acceptable to the editor) or by reversing India’s primarily anti-nuclear weapons posture (The Pioneer 1964). The Economic Weekly noted critically that the alternative that was being suggested to India’s manufacture of nuclear weapons was alliance with the “west” but that such a move could jettison “the basic principles of our foreign policy or our national interest” which is nonalignment (The Economic Weekly 1964: 1). On October 28, the Indian Express published “a quick survey” of public opinion in India. It was found that the Indian elites accepted Bhabha’s claim that India could manufacture nuclear weapons within eighteen months from its decision to do so.

However, a sizeable section of the public opinion was also skeptical on the question of building nuclear weapons. They were more worried on the issue that manufacturing and stockpiling of nuclear weapons would have serious repercussions on the country, which was already reeling under a food shortage crisis. Earlier, Bhabha’s remark in an All India Radio, broadcast on 24 October 1964 on United Nations day that ‘atomic weapons give a state possessing them in adequate numbers a
deterrent power against attack from a much stronger state', had stirred the nuclear debate once more in the country (Jain, J.P. 1974: 159-160). Consequently, on October 29, American diplomats in New Delhi through a cable reported to Washington that 'there appears to be a considerable body of opinion both within and outside Congress Party which favours Indian construction of bomb regardless of cost and of prior GOI (Government of India) pledges to restrict itself to peaceful uses of nuclear power' (Perkovich 1999: 69).

However, bomb-for-security favouring intellectuals like Raj Krishna, imminent economist articulated the following rationales for acquiring nuclear weapons by India:

- India faced an expansionist Chinese regime;
- India should take necessary measures to counter China’s power in India to create an 'Asian balance of power';
- India needed a division of labour, with the West and Russia providing strategic and long-range deterrence guarantee, while it should develop the tactical, short-range capability;
- economic cost was not a real constraint in India’s nuclear policy, and one needed to view national security as a combination of defence and development and not just either defence or development;
- disarmament and proliferation were not necessarily mutually exclusive strategies, but rather India needed to pursue the goal of nuclear disarmament as a long-term prospect, utilizing nuclear arms acquisition as an intermediate strategy;
- it was not in India’s interest to sign a partial test ban treaty unless China had done the same;
- having made the mistake of signing the test ban, India had a case for withdrawal in view of China’s non-adherence to the treaty and;
- the 'only' short-range choice for India was to secure 'some' nuclear capability and 'some' guarantees from friendly nations (Krishna 1965: 119-137).
Such rationales were totally repudiated by intellectuals like M.J. Desai who argued that the financial cost of a nuclear weapons programme and its military implications would be unbearable for the country. 'The economic diversion of resources [...] will retard India's economic and social development programmes indefinitely [which will] not only weaken India internally but eliminate it as a political factor in Asia and Africa' (Desai 1965: 135-142).

At this stage, the nuclear debate in India centred around four basic issues: (a) the morality of India acquiring nuclear weapons, (b) whether the Chinese nuclear explosion constituted a political or military threat to India, (c) the economic cost of the nuclear weapons programme and a possible Sino-Indian nuclear arms race and, (d) whether Soviet Union or the United States will extend deterrence guarantees against Chinese aggression.

Moral issues were of prime importance in shaping the nuclear debate in India. Nuclear weapons were totally inconsistent with the Gandhian legacy of non-violence and Prime Minister Nehru's international diplomacy of nuclear disarmament. A robust nuclear weapons policy was also expected to bring down the ethical dimension of India in the world. But the bomb proponents argued that moral force alone cannot guarantee the safety and security of the nation. Hence, security must be given precedence over moral considerations. This group further argued that since India wanted nuclear weapons to deter its adversaries, acquisition of nuclear weapons could be reconciled with Gandhi's teachings (Singh 1971: 105).

The second aspect that featured in India's nuclear debate is whether China's nuclear test posed any military challenge to India. Bomb opponents argued that the Chinese explosion was directed more towards United States and Soviet Union than India. Hence, India's acquisition of the nuclear weapon was totally irrelevant and irrational. Bomb advocates, however, pointed out that national security affairs should be viewed more realistically and not risked under any circumstances. Given the uneasiness in the Sino-Indian relations, especially after the 1962 war, China posed military threat to India. The Chinese threat was not perceived from the point that Beijing might actually use nuclear weapons against New Delhi but that they could be employed to intimidate India as part of a blackmail or compliance strategy. A study
by the Indian Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses concluded that only an Indian nuclear arsenal could elevate India to a position of equality with China, and assure India that it would not be subject to nuclear blackmail and coercion by China (Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses 1968: 4).

Economic factor was another significant aspect of the nuclear debate. The major opposition to nuclear weapons was based on the ground that it would lead to the diversion of economic resources and hampers the growth and development of the country. India was already suffering from acute food shortage. Building and maintaining a nuclear force would be an extra burden on the economy. But the proponents of the bomb argued that national security should not the undermined. Defence and development are the cardinal pillars of any sovereign nation. The 1962 debacle suffered by India reinforced this argument. Hence, any price must be paid for security. Further, Bhabha's estimate of the costs to build nuclear weapons was considered modest enough to be accommodated within the government's current level of expenditures to safeguard the national interests of the country.

A final issue in the nuclear debate was whether external security guarantees from nuclear powers, enough to assure the security of India. Unlike the opponents, the bomb-for-security proponents argued that self-reliance should be adhered to in matters of defence. As facts relate, security assurances from external powers had a major credibility problem, which shall be discussed later in the chapter.

The nuclear debate in India was slowly but gradually gaining momentum with more and more proponents advocating for nuclear weapons. According to US intelligence sources, on October 29, an Indian Ministry of External Affairs official had told US Embassy personnel “pressures within GOI for India to develop its own bomb were building up” (Perkovich 1999: 70). Bhabha who was actively leading this group was all set to put India on the path of acquiring a new form of military power. Indeed, a six-hour discussion on nuclear policy had just occurred in a cabinet meeting, with Minister of External Affairs, Swaran Singh and Minister of Railways and Congress Party heavyweight, S.K. Patil joining Bhabha in advocating a nuclear weapon – building programme (Perkovich 1999: 70). Subsequently, the External Affairs Ministry declared “discussions had gone for enough for Shastri to authorize
Bhabha to come up with an estimate of what was involved in India’s attempting an underground explosion" (Perkovich 1999: 70).

By this time, the pressure was mounting for a robust nuclear weapon policy and ironically it was most obvious from a sizeable section of the ruling Congress Party. The nuclear option characterized by violence and mass destruction was abhorred by Shastri and yet the opinion that was gradually gaining ground was that the only deterrent to a nuclear bomb is another nuclear bomb and nothing else. In its first meeting on foreign affairs after Nehru death and Chinese explosion on 23 and 24 November 1964, the Lok Sabha was once again ‘warmed up’ to invigorate the nuclear debate in India. Parliamentarian, Hem Barua questioned Prime Minister Shastri during the session, “was the government’s decision of not manufacturing nuclear weapons based on expert policy notions or rather “pre-conceived notions of half-baked morality” (Perkovich 1999: 76).

The taunt was made unmistakably. When asked what would be the modus operandi of the government in the event of a nuclear attack by China on India, Shastri replied, “Our policy stands, but who can guarantee what will happen in the future?” (Hindustan Times 1964a). This far from reassuring statement made by the Prime Minister in Lok Sabha once again whetted the bomb-for-security lobby’s resolve to demand for the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Consequently, three alternative motions were proposed in the Lok Sabha: first, immediate development of the nuclear bomb; second, introducing ‘nuclear-based defence installations in the country and; last a reassessment of India’s foreign policy in the light of the Chinese nuclear explosion. It was but quite obvious that the demand for bomb was to be made vociferously in the course of the debate.

The 1962 humiliating defeat suffered at the hands of China had already raised doubts about the Gandhian legacy of non-violence. Coupled with this, Nehru’s policy of non-alignment seemed to offer little or no security. The Chinese nuclear explosion was done with impunity. M.R. Masani, the general secretary of the Swatantra Party argued that China’s acquisition of the bomb posed not a military threat but rather a psychological and political one (Lok Sabha Debates 1964: col. 1240). He asserted plausibly that Russian technological assistance lay behind the Chinese bomb (Lok
Sabha Debates 1964: col. 1242). He further argued that India’s policy of non-alignment was untenable and that New Delhi must seek alliance with the West. As against this, Defence Minister Y.B. Chawan argued that it was not necessary to abandon the policy of non-alignment. Any war involving nuclear weapons will certainly not remain a local conflict and will invariably involve the nuclear superpowers. Hence, India must shape its foreign policy accordingly, whereby it can achieve security guarantees from both the United States and Soviet Union if China threatened or actually used nuclear weapons against India. Yet no parliamentarian, during the course of this Lok Sabha debate was convinced enough to accept that India could passively depend on the United States or the Soviet Union for the safeguard of its security.

Proponents of the bomb, particularly the Congress Party believed that the realist world demand a robust military potential for national security. Nath Pai leader of the Praja Socialist Party criticized the government line by arguing:

‘Instead of making a very dispassionate and calm assessment of the Chinese possession of this dangerous, deadly weapon, we have been indulging once again in sentimental platitudes, confusing the whole issue and unnecessary dragging Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and, for good measures, Lord Buddha and Samrat Ashoka also’ (Lok Sabha Debates 1964: col. 1295).

Of the two most compelling issues debates in the November 1964 Lok Sabha debate viz., to seek a security guarantee under the nuclear umbrella from the West or to build our own nuclear bomb, Nath Pai supported the latter. He rejected the notion of seeking US help for security citing Washington’s refusal to supply F-104 fighters to New Delhi earlier in the year.

The PSP leader was joined by Bhagwat Jha Azad of the Congress Party who debated that Chinese intimidation called upon India to be prepared to “go all out to use nuclear power for the defence of the country” (Lok Sabha Debates 1964: col. 1280). Azad was joined by his fellow party member, Harish Chandra Mathur who passionately argued that India must take every step required in the direction of countering the threats posed by China. He observed: ‘there is no morality; one moral duty is the security of this country, the honour of this country and the safety of this
country. Everything else will have to be subjugated to that’ (Lok Sabha Debates 1964: col. 1309).

Other debaters who presented their views in the November 1964 Lok Sabha included independent MP, Frank Anthony who declared that China was developing short-range missiles and rockets targeted at India and detailed China’s military force of Russian supplied bombers and its deployment of a massive army on the border areas. He stated: “Our major confrontation, our only confrontation a confrontation which means life or death for this country is China” (Lok Sabha Debates 1964: col. 1320). However, he also pointed out that in the face of technical shortcomings, absence of adequate delivery systems and limited resources, it would be unwise for India to produce an atom bomb. But then what is the alternative? Anthony concluded, “[t]he immediate need today in my humble thinking is that we must pursue from today, from tomorrow, the development of nuclear technology and know-how” (Lok Sabha Debates 1964: col. 1318). Other parliamentarians, like U.M. Trivedi gave a realistic argument:

“In Asia there are two giants; one of them is India and the other is China. If one giant grows and the other remains a dwarf, certainly the dwarf will be killed and there will be no time for the dwarf to arm himself” (Lok Sabha Debates 1964: col. 1512).

He further asserted that “today the theory in the world is that each nation into itself” (Lok Sabha Debates 1964: col. 1513).

The two-day debate was closed with Prime Minister Shastri reiterating his earlier stand that India would adhere to only peaceful applications of nuclear energy. However, he added, “our general attitude is that we want to create necessary public opinion against the manufacture or use of atomic power for nuclear devices. I hope if the United Nations considers this matter, it will do so taking everything into consideration, especially the threat to India” (Lok Sabha Debates 1964: col. 1134). Such vague assurances were not enough to satisfy either the Opposition or the bomb proponents majority of whom belonged to the ruling Congress Party.

The ruling party basically appeared split into three groups. The first group advocated an independent nuclear arsenal to counter security threats; the second,
rejected the nuclear weapons option and third adopted a middle path whereby they did 
not undertake or relinquish the nuclear programme but sought to develop nuclear 
technological preparedness for future requirements. Shastri, at the closure of the 
debate realized that domestic inhibitions could not justify any compromise on security 
needs. Economic compulsions were not enough to justify an absolute rejection of 
nuclear weapons especially in the face of Chinese nuclear explosion. Shastri was 
increasingly becoming aware that politically and strategically a robust military policy 
was required. Hence, the Prime Minister subtly adjusted his position from a ‘no bomb 
ever’ stance to a ‘no bomb at present’ policy in conformity with the third group of the 
Congress Party. He observed:

“I cannot say that the present policy is deep-rooted that it cannot be set 
aside that it can never be changed. [A]n individual may have a certain 
static policy but in the political field we cannot do so. Here situations 
alter, changes take place and we have to mould our policies 
accordingly. If there is a need to amend what we have said today, then 
we will say – all right, let us go ahead and do so” (Mirchandani 1968: 
34).

This indicated a significant deviation in Shastri’s policy towards nuclear weapons. 
But his policy shift was not enough to assure his critics.

On 26 November 1964, the Executive Committee of the Congress 
Parliamentary Party met to debate on the nuclear issue further. The committee 
suggested that the government should augment the pace and expand the scope of 
nuclear science in India. The goal was to enhance technological preparedness to meet 
the country’s defence requirements. Party leader, K.C. Pant ‘urged that the nuclear 
establishment should increase its capacity to manufacture the bomb quickly if the 
need arose’ (Times of India 1964b: 1). S.N Mishra, leader of the Congress Socialist 
Forum, suggested the formation of a high-powered committee to examine the 
implication of the Chinese test (Times of India 1964b: 1). Subsequently, on 
November 27, the Jana Sangh introduced a motion in the Lok Sabha in favour of 
building nuclear weapons. Shastri secured to win a voice vote in the resolution. After 
assuring the Opposition and his critics that his moral policies would not endanger the 
country’s security, Shastri mentioned for the first time that India’s nuclear weapons 
programme would entail preparations for peaceful nuclear explosives.
This was a watershed in India's nuclear policy and paved the way to start work on the Subterranean Nuclear Explosion Project (SNEP), which was authorised by Shastri in November 1965 (Rammana 1991: 74). It was a pragmatic step adopted by the government. An explicit nuclear weapons programme was not considered feasible due to moral, economic, political and technological reasons at this stage. The atomic programme started from a peaceful nuclear explosives foundation that could always develop into a weapons option. The importance of SNEP laid in the fact that the political establishment marked the beginning of a new era in India's nuclear programme, which eventually culminated in the peaceful nuclear explosion of 1974.

Much of early 1965 passed holding deliberations and consultations on India's nuclear debate. Prime Minister Shastri, adhering to his traditional policy of no nuclear weapons sought international guarantees from the US and Russia. However, it appeared that Washington and Russia seemed far from risking nuclear war with China on behalf of India. At the same time, Bhabha and his team lined up with Shastri's policy and explorations into the peaceful nuclear explosive project began. A notable aspect of 1965 war was that in the later half of the year, India and Pakistan were both engaged militarily. Both the neighbours fought a short and intense war in August and September 1965 over Kashmir. During the war, both UK and US pressed for restraint from New Delhi and Islamabad. However, both the nuclear powers refrained from playing an active role to restore normalcy in the sub-continent. US President Lyndon and British Prime Minister Harold Wilson Johnson preferred to act through the United Nations reflecting decreasing interest in the region. Similarly, Moscow urged for UN diplomacy instead of exerting any dominant influence in bringing the conflict to an end. So much for external security guarantees! But the worse aspect about the 1965 war was China's diplomatic support to Pakistan and its threat to 'open a second front along India's Himalayan border'. China also warned of increasing troops along the border areas implying possibility of a military intervention by Peoples Republic of China. Matters took an alarming turn when on September 17 as the armed forces of both the countries remained entrenched, China threatened to broaden the conflict by giving India an ultimatum to remove construction works in Tibet or face "grave consequences" (Perkovich 1999: 109). Finally, on September 20, India accepted the UN cease-fire call. Pakistan did so on September 22. According to Indian Defence
Minister Y.B. Chavan, India suffered 2,226 military fatalities and 7,870 wounded (Gupta 1967: 66-65). Pakistan’s losses were higher, especially in armour and aircraft.

The 1965 war with Pakistan fought only three years after India’s ignominious defeat with China provided a major lesson for the Indian military and polity. It symbolized the US interests waning in South Asia. Coupled with this, Pakistani use of US supplied weapons against India and Washington’s rescinding military and economic aid to New Delhi heightened distrust and anger. America’s casual attitude and China’s threatening posture persuaded the politico-strategic community to build an independent Indian nuclear weapon capability to avert a future Chinese blackmail and intimidation. In the aftermath of the 1965 war, the demand for nuclear weapons was once again triggered. The day before the cease-fire took effect, nearly one hundred members of Parliament from multiple parties, including Congress, issued a letter urging the Prime Minister to decide immediately to develop nuclear weapons (Gupta 1967: 66-65). The second war with Pakistan had completely changed the equation. The Chinese ultimatum to India during the war only enhanced the spectre for future bullying and blackmailing and signified increased collusion between Beijing and Islamabad to the detriment of New Delhi. What was more atrocious was dashing India’s expectations that in the event of any perceived Chinese threat, the United States and Soviet Union would come to their aid. India was left totally on its own. Referring to the bitter experience during the war, the MPs petitioned, “India’s survival both as nation and as a democracy, in the face of collusion between China and Pakistan, casts a clear and imperative duty on the Government to take an immediate decision to develop our nuclear weapons” (Mirchandani 1968: 38-39).

Throughout 1966, the debate over India’s nuclear policy persisted. The 1965 Indo-Pakistani war had exacerbated India’s sense of insecurity and added a critical dimension to its strategic calculus. The year 1966 was characterized by a change of political guard. Indira Gandhi succeeded Prime Minister Shastri who died in Tashkent immediately after formalizing the January 10 Tashkent Declaration. Upon assuming political charge of the nation, Mrs. Gandhi made it clear that India would not build nuclear weapons. Like her predecessor, she had a predilection for security guarantees from external powers. Disposing before a Lok Sabha debate on 1 March 1966, Mrs. Gandhi pointed out that Chinese nuclear explosion does not provide ‘sufficient reason
for us to change our policy in this matter” (Mirchandani 1968: 43). She also asserted that India refrained to “do anything which will precipitate the crisis and lead to the development of nuclear weapons in many more countries” (Mirchandani 1968: 43). The Prime Minister also averred that the pursuit of a nuclear weapons programme would evoke a similar response from Pakistan.

**Indira Gandhi Years**

In May 1966, Mrs. Gandhi was compelled to engage in the nuclear debate. The pretext being, China conducted a thermonuclear device test on May 9 and escalated security concerns once again. Instinctively, on May 10, a fresh spate of nuclear debate erupted in the Parliament. The Minister for External Affairs, Swaran Singh reassured the parliamentarians and argued that the thermonuclear test “does not vitiate the earlier conclusion”, although the “policy is kept under constant review” (Lok Sabha Debates 1966: 15712). But, this was not enough to calm the security concerns faced by the politico-strategic establishment. Parliamentarian A.V. Kamath, a leader of the Praja Socialist Party criticized the government for accepting “big-heartedly or stubbornly to the hackneyed declaration of its policy, which can be summed up briefly as ‘we can make the bomb, but we would not do it’ (Lok Sabha Debates 1966: 15713). The government was practically losing support in the House. Prime Minister Gandhi, at this point, entered the debate. Enumerating a robust government policy, she disposed, “we are building up our atomic power. Of course, we are using it for peaceful purposes; but in the meantime we are increasing our know-how and other competence” (Lok Sabha Debates 1966: 15716). At the same time, Mrs. Gandhi was doubtful as to how one or two bombs will help in addressing the security dilemma. But her contentions were refuted by Nath Pai who argued, “[I]t is only when you produce one that you can produce many”. Unable to counter this, the Prime Minister closed the debate by saying it was mistake to think that China could “attack any country with nuclear weapons with impunity” (Lok Sabha Debates 1966: 15716).

The prime ministerial utterances implied that the government nuclear weapons policy was slowly developing a potential military application. According to a report by the daily *Statesman*, “most MPs irrespective of party distinction said this evening (May 10) that they detected in the Prime Minister’s elucidation of her replies a subtle
change in emphasis from her past pronouncements. This change, according to numerous MPs… is, in fact, a continuation of the late Shastri’s statement that India’s self-abnegation in relation to nuclear weapons could not be considered a commitment for all times” (The Statesman 1966). On 11 May 1966, several executive members of the Congress Party Parliamentary Group demanded either a self-reliant defence policy featuring nuclear weapons potential or development of nuclear technology ‘to an extent where a switch over to arms production was possible in a short time’. The Prime Minister replied that the government could accelerate efforts to develop scientific and nuclear technological know-how. It is also important to note that the Prime Minister’s reference to “other competence” indicated that the government was exploring alternative utility of nuclear energy apart from peaceful purposes.

In October 1966, India’s strategic community was once again put to unease when China announced that it had test-fired a missile mounted with a nuclear warhead. Needless to say, the Chinese announcement triggered the nuclear debate. At this juncture, the government critically revised its policy by embarking on a nuclear weapons programme. A US State Department Study in 1966 had earlier concluded: ‘It is probable that, without a dramatic alternative, in a few years India will decide to become a nuclear power’ (Perkovich 1999: 117). The Prime Minister was still not completely detached from the values of Gandhian-Nehruvian legacy. Mrs. Gandhi refrained from embarking on a robust nuclear weapons policy primarily because of economic, political and diplomatic implications. Instead, she laid emphasis on research and development to build a certain level of nuclear technology preparedness. Her aim was to obtain security guarantees from external sources. Accordingly, she dispatched her Principal Secretary, Laxmi Kant Jha and the new Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Dr. Vikram Sarabha (who succeeded Bhabha in 1966) to London, Paris, Moscow and Washington in April 1967 to explore the possibility of nuclear assurance against Chinese nuclear intimidation.

However, the response of the nuclear powers was, as J.N. Dixit observed: ‘ambiguous bordering on the negative’ (Dixit 1998: 286). India’s attempt to obtain security assurances was described by K Subrahmanyam as: ‘this move demonstrated a certain amount of naiveté on the part of the Indian government… By 1965, India also had the experience of US assurances and their worth. When Pakistan used the
American arms in the Rann of Kutch, violating the assurance conveyed by President Eisenhower to India that the US would take action if Pakistan were to use the US-supplied arms against India, the US leadership sat back and did nothing. That being the case, Subrahmanyam asked: 'How could there have been expectations that the US would honour a commitment to provide nuclear security guarantee to India?' Moscow was even less encouraging: at least, the USSR was prepared to make a joint declaration under UN auspices not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states (Ganguly 1999: 157). Soon, the Prime Minister realized that a search for credible security assurances were futile. Subsequently, on 27 July 1967, Mrs. Gandhi announced in Parliament: 'In the final analysis the effectiveness of a nuclear guarantee will depend upon the vital interests of the givers and not upon the spirit in which the protected accepted it' (Alam 1992: 27). Thereupon, Mrs. Gandhi decisively moved toward devising a credible nuclear option policy for India.

Between 1967 and 1968 the nuclear question shifted from whether India should actually produce nuclear weapons to whether India should sign the Non Proliferation Treaty and relinquish the right to build nuclear weapons. By 1967, it was clear that no viable security assurances would be provided to India. In addition, India who at the initial stage ardently advocated the NPT primarily to prevent China from building a nuclear arsenal was disillusioned with subsequent Chinese nuclear developments. India’s repeated concerns about China’s nuclear weapons programme voiced during the NPT negotiations were not adequately addressed. On 27 March 1967, speaking at a Lok Sabha debate, the then External Affairs Minister, M.C. Chagla emphasized that as a non-aligned state, India was “not under anybody’s political or any other umbrella. Therefore, there is no military pact under which we can be protected, if we are attacked by a nuclear power” (Chagla 1967). He also stated that India “has got a great nuclear capability” and must not accept the NPT, which impeded the further development and use of nuclear energy (Chagla 1967). Parliamentarian, Shri Balraj Madhok demanded that India must “remain free to develop its own nuclear capabilities and nuclear weapons” to counter China (Jain B.M. 1974: 191). Acknowledging the threat from China, Chagla reaffirmed that India’s present policy does not include exploding the bomb. Both Chagla and the Prime Minister opposed the signing of the treaty as it was drafted.
The late sixties was also characterized by the US sponsored Plowshare Study on peaceful nuclear explosion which was much debated during this period. PNE was supposed to be a path breaking technology for construction of dams and bridges and to clear mountainous areas for building roads and tunnels. During the NPT negotiations, India repeatedly insisted on retaining the right to conduct ‘peaceful’ nuclear explosions. India’s representative at the UN, Ambassador V.C. Trivedi opposed a US led initiative to prevent non-nuclear weapons states from conducting peaceful nuclear explosions. He argued that this was nothing but denying ‘the benefits of science and technology to the developing nations of the world’ (Trivedi 1966: 181). At the ENDC meeting on 23 May 1967, Trivedi laid bare two very interesting aspects of peaceful nuclear explosives. The first point that the ambassador made was that “the civil nuclear powers can tolerate nuclear weapons apartheid, but not an atomic apartheid in their economic and peaceful development”.

This invocation had a connotation of racialism indicating that nuclear weapons were the sole manifestation of the western powers and the NPT represented an attempt to prevent developing nations from acquiring this capability. This line of thinking was reflected during the test ban treaty negotiations in 1996. The second point made justifiably by the Ambassador was “the technology involved in the production of a nuclear weapon is the same as the technology, which produces a peaceful nuclear explosive device” (Trivedi 1974: 192-193). The US objection to non-nuclear weapon states developing peaceful nuclear explosive was primarily based on this point. Their basic argument was if the non-nuclear weapon states were allowed to develop nuclear explosive devices the NPT would be rendered meaningless. At this conjecture, Trivedi opined,

“... technology in itself is not evil. Dynamite was originally meant for military use. Aeronautics, electronics, even steel fabrications – these are technologies, which can be used for weapons as well as for economic development. That does not mean, therefore that only the poor and developing nations should be denied all technology for fear that they may use it for military purposes... the solution of the problem must not be sought in the renunciation of the sovereign right of unrestricted development of [atomic] energy by some countries only...” (Trivedi 1974: 192-193).

The Ambassador thus pointed out that what is of prime importance is not the technology but the intention of the country which possess nuclear technology. India’s
intentions were peaceful. India accepted the view that peaceful nuclear explosions must be “adequately safeguarded” but what was important, is that “safeguards must apply equally to all nations” (Trivedi 1974: 192-193).

On 6 October 1967, the Defence Minister Swaran Singh, while rejecting the NPT stated that “while the Government of India continues to be in favour of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, it is equally strongly in favour of the proliferation of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, as an essential means by which the developing countries can benefit from the best advances of science and technology in this field” (Mirchandani 1968: 149). Thus the argument was both for and against nuclear weapons. But what was important for India was to ensure that it legally retained the possibility of conducting nuclear tests for future requirements. It is thus apparent that the Government’s insistence on retaining its right to conduct peaceful nuclear explosions was compatible with its nuclear policy and reflected the political will of the nation in favour of the nuclear option.

In 1968, while discussing the NPT in the Indian Parliament, Mrs. Gandhi stated, ‘we shall be guided entirely by our self-enlightenment and the consideration of national security’ (Khanna 2000: 47). Given the flaws and discriminatory nature of the treaty, the Parliament endorsed the government decision not to sign the NPT. The Government’s decision not to sign the treaty was supported by a majority of the Indian population, as indicated in a survey conducted in 1972 wherein 68.9 percent showed extremely strong and unqualified antipathy towards the NPT (Nandy 1972: 1539).

In the seventies, another alarming development occurred in the Indian neighbourhood that intensified the nuclear debate in the media and among the politico-strategic community. On 24 April 1970, China launched its first long-range rocket carrying a satellite into orbit. The Indian elites perceived this as a Chinese determination to build ballistic missile capability that could strike targets deep inside India. The Chinese space feat projected a growing threat perception about China’s nuclear and missile capabilities. Following China’s satellite space launch the Indian Parliamentary and Scientific Committee convened a seminar on the implications of Beijing’s increasing missile capability for India’s national security and defence. The
Seminars came to the conclusion that India had no other alternative but to go nuclear, which was 'scientifically feasible, politically highly desirable, strategically inescapable and economically not only sustainable but actually advantageous' (The Times of India 1970). Following suit, the Indian Council for World Affairs and the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses organized seminars to reassess India's nuclear policy in view of China's growing nuclear and missile powers. The participants at these seminars also strongly urged the Indian Government to embark on producing nuclear weapons immediately (Singh 1971: 102). The political elites did not lag behind. The most intense advocates came from Jana Sangh and the left wing of the Congress Party. They and others argued that India's prestige and national security depended on nuclear weapons (Perkovich 1999: 152).

Against the backdrop, the IAEC Chairman, Vikram Sarabhai declared two important decisions that had wide implications for India's nuclear policy. The first was that India would not produce nuclear weapons, but would retain the option of conducting underground nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes (Seshagiri 1975: ix). This meant that the government had revived the SNEP, which was shelved by Indira Gandhi immediately after assuming power. The second initiative concerned the adoption of a ten-year nuclear and space programme by the Indian Government (Atomic Energy Commission 1970). On 25 May 1970, Sarabhai announced what came to be recognized as 'Sarabhai Profile' that envisaged a self-reliant nuclear technological base and an advanced space programme.

It is quite clear that Sarabhai was still skeptical of building nuclear weapons. However, the IAEC Chairman's opinion did not find favour with other defence elites who advocated for a robust nuclear policy. The Director of the Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory in Chandigarh, Sampooran Singh argued that, "the government's opposition to nuclear weapons programme has in recent years been largely, if not solely on economic grounds. There has been very little discussion of the political and strategic role of nuclear weapons in the country" (Singh 1971: 94). Singh believed that the Chinese nuclear explosion has greatly enhanced its power prestige and influence in the global sphere. He thus urged:

"So long as nuclear power and political power are correlated elements in world politics it is necessary that India take a close look at its
defence postures on a long term basis and view nuclear power as an integral part of its defence and deterrence systems” (Singh 1971: 132).

The Director of Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, K. Subrahmanyam advocated for a robust nuclear policy. Contrary to the government’s position, he insisted that China posed a threat that must be countered through a systematic strategy of developing a survivable nuclear deterrent (Subrahmanyam 1970: 117). Subrahmanyam presumed quite correctly that the Chinese threat was not alarming in terms of Beijing using ballistic missiles to annihilate Indian cities. According to him, the threat was more general. An editorial in Hindu dated 2 June 1970 stated, few “informed people in India perceive a real Chinese nuclear threat but the very proximity and enormity of Chinese power leaves no alternative for India except to go in for an adequate nuclear deterrent of its own” (Poulose 1978: 107). A nuclear-armed China close on the borders was perceived as alarming. China would exert its influence to intimidate India on the disputed border issue. By countering these threats India would be able to stabilize the confrontation and ensure peace. Guided by the realist philosophy, Subrahmanyam decried that nuclear weapons will play a cardinal role in serving India’s moral purpose of ensuring peace and security through deterrence. “Once the obsession about the terrible damage caused by the use of nuclear weapons is shed and the weapons are looked in terms of political power and the capability to deter, the arguments will fall into appropriate perspective” (Subrahmanyam 1970: 117). However, Subrahmanyam cautiously inveighed any crash bomb-making programme. He approved Sarabhai’s ten-year plan and advocated that India must wait for another decade to go nuclear when it would be adequately equipped with greater resources and be strong enough to withstand international criticism and backlash.

Towards the end of 1971, the government inclination towards a peaceful nuclear explosion was becoming increasingly apparent. Almost at the same time, a major development took place in the sub-continent. In December 1971, India and Pakistan was engaged in a bitter military exchange that initially begun as a civil war, in East Pakistan and eventually resulted with India’s military intervention resulting in the dismemberment of Pakistan and creation of a newly independent country of Bangladesh. In terms of India’s nuclear policy, the 1971 war left significant strategic and security implications for the country.
Since November 1971, internal politics in East Pakistan was taking an adverse turn. Consequently, there was a mass exodus of refugees into India threatening the demographic stability of the country. In late November, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered the Indian forces to launch counter attack against the Pakistani forces. Kissinger took this as reaffirmation that India was the aggressor determined to escalate the conflict in a strategy to disintegrate West Pakistan (Kissinger 1979: 885-889). Kissinger declared that India was primarily responsible for the war and along with President Nixon insisted that the US must support Pakistan in this war. Subsequently on 10 December 1971, the White House ordered the US Task Force 74 (Seventh Fleet) headed by the nuclear aircraft carrier, the USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal. The reason behind deploying the enterprise was never made public. However in his memoirs, Kissinger explained that the carrier group was deployed ‘ostensibly for the evacuation of Americans, but in reality to give emphasis to our warnings against an attack on West Pakistan’ (Kissinger 1979: 905). Kissinger further revealed that he also wanted to have forces in place in case the Soviet Union pressured China (Kissinger 1979: 905). The presence of US forces in the Bay of Bengal generated substantial pressure on India at a crucial stage of the war. The war finally came to an end on December 17 with India proposing an unconditional cease-fire in the west, which Pakistan accepted. Bangladesh emerged an independent nation.

In terms of India’s nuclear policy, the war had indicated several implications. The nuclear weapons option could not be ignored any longer. The ominous international development of the war was the US attempt to intimidate India through gunboat diplomacy. The incident reignited Indian sensitivity of nuclear intimidation and created a feeling that even superpowers could pose a nuclear threat to India (Misra 1986: 252). The US intimidation was further intensified when Kissinger told the Indian ambassador to US, L.K. Jha that in the event of a war between India and Pakistan, over the issue of East Pakistan, and if China intervened on behalf of Pakistan, US would not be able to extend support to India. The US attitude indicated two things. First, it undoubtedly implied a veiled threat and a clear attempt to blackmail India to leave matters as laissez faire in the sub-continent. Second, the distinct tilt towards Pakistan implied a possible strategic partnership of the two countries. Added to this was the frightening probability of a US-Pakistan-China strategic alliance to the detriment of India’s security. Anticipating such a possibility,
India and the Soviet Union concluded the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation earlier in July 1971. The treaty, signed despite India's commitment to non-alignment, ‘provided deterrence against the US [and China] when the Enterprise mission was sent (Subrahmanyam 1998a: 50-51). The 1971 war further rejuvenated India’s decision to pursue a more robust nuclear policy.

The nuclear debate resurfaced vigorously in the Indian polity in 1972. In a Lok Sabha debate on 17 March 1972, the government was asked in writing whether the war with Pakistan made it necessary for India to develop more modern weapons and, if so, “whether Government propose to embark upon the manufacture of nuclear bombs” (Lok Sabha debates 1972: cols. 130-131). The Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram, responded that defence modernization was an ongoing process and that the “Government’s policy with regard to production of nuclear weapons... is to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes only. Government believes that the defence of our borders can be best ensured by adequate military preparedness based on conventional weapons. In their view, the possession of nuclear weapons is no substitute for such military preparedness” (Lok Sabha debates 1972: cols. 130-131).

The pressure continued to intensify within the Parliament for a more robust nuclear posture. In two days of debate over the Ministry of Defence budget in May, speakers from all parties except the two communist parties called for developing nuclear weapons, or at least greater preparation of relevant elements of nuclear explosives (Perkovich 1999: 169). Dismissing arguments that building nuclear weapons would be costly, Madhu Dandwate, a liberal socialist MP, stated that much of the cost was already being absorbed in the production of atomic energy. In a switch from the Swatantra Party's earlier opposition to nuclear weapons, its spokesman, H.M. Patel argued that the bomb would deter enemies from undertaking misadventures against India (Lok Sabha debates 1972: cols. 130-131). Faced with this pressure, Defence Minister Ram emphasized that the “Atomic Energy Commission is studying the technology for conducting underground explosions for peaceful purposes” (Perkovich 1999: 169-170).

The nuclear debate once again stimulated in November 1972. The Lok Sabha enquired about the progress and feasibility for the experimental nuclear explosion for peaceful purposes. Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi responded, in writing, in her capacity
as Minister of Atomic Energy, that “[t]he Atomic Energy Commission is constantly reviewing the progress in the technology of underground nuclear explosions both from the theoretical and experimental angles and also taking into account their potential economic benefits and possible environmental hazards” (Lok Sabha debates 1972: col. 49). The Prime Minister’s statement subtly indicated the government’s support in principle for conducting peaceful nuclear explosions and suggested that more time was needed to reach a final decision. The final decision was reached on 18 May 1974 when India conducted a peaceful nuclear explosion codenamed “Buddha Smiled” at the Pokhran test site in Rajasthan. The PNE of 1974 was bitterly criticized by the Western countries as expected. However, the immediate reaction following the test was euphoric. The PNE provided a tumultuous political lift to Indira Gandhi who was facing turmoil in domestic politics. She was exalted from all quarters. The Jana Sangh party saluted the Indian scientists on their feat. Commending the government, the leader of the Opposition, L.K. Advani stated, “Its one of the most heartening bits of news in recent years” (Weinraub 1974: 1; 6). A majority of the Indian population supported the idea of developing nuclear capability for India’s security interests in the aftermath of the 1974 explosion. A nation-wide survey found that 59 per cent of the respondents supported such an idea (Mishra and Gandhi 1975: 351). There were sour notes too. Morarji Desai who strongly opposed nuclear weapons expressed doubt over the necessity of PNE. He also suggested the conduct of PNE would make the purely peaceful intentions of India’s nuclear programme less credible.

Following the explosion, New Delhi was quick to indicate that the PNE had no military implications. But this claim was not entirely convincing. The Indian Government was already aware that there was no fundamental difference between peaceful and military nuclear explosions. In other words, a PNE could be used for military purposes. Speculations about the peaceful character also arose from the fact that the Indians never gave an adequate explanation about the scientific or industrial use of the PNE. Nor is there any evidence that India seriously used the results of this PNE for its socio-economic or industrial development in subsequent years (Lavoy 1997: 236-237). Significantly, years later in an interview in 1994, while denying reports of radioactivity releases from the 1974 test explosion, the DAE Chairman, R. Chidambaram triumphantly asserted, “that how good our bomb was”. This was the first time a high official within the DAE had publicly called the “peaceful nuclear
explosion” what it was – a bomb (Ramana 1998). The former Director of India’s nuclear programme, Raja Ramanna seconded Chidambaram’s opinion. Speaking to the Press Trust of India on 10 October 1997, Ramanna said,

“The Pokhran test was a bomb, I can tell you now... An explosion is an explosion, a gun is a gun, whether you shoot at someone or you shoot at the ground... I just want to make clear that the test was not at all that peaceful” (Smiling Buddha 1998).

A lot of controversy was generated as to why India conducted a nuclear explosion in 1974 and why it conducted the explosion at the time it did. Dhirendra Sharma has rightly pointed out that it was the ‘backroom boys’ spirit of the scientists that pushed Mrs. Gandhi to eventually authorize the explosion (Sharma 1983: 5). The Pokhran explosion stemmed from internal dynamics viz. the scientific community’s zeal for a nuclear capability and Indira Gandhi’s motivation to acquire domestic political gains. But the most important reason for the 1974 PNE was that it culminated India’s quest for a robust nuclear policy to counter a growing nuclear security dilemma precipitated by the Chinese nuclear weapons programme. India’s decision to conduct the 1974 nuclear explosion was thus a politico-strategic one. When Mrs. Gandhi took the decision to conduct the PNE, she was at the height of her popularity following India’s victory in the 1971 war. Thus the political and strategic components constituted important components in India’s decision to conduct a nuclear explosion in 1974. Nonetheless, the peaceful nuclear explosion strengthened the viability of the weapons option by retaining the independent capability to initiate a nuclear weapons programme.

Having declared its nuclear weapons status, India maintained a policy of calibrated restraint for the next twenty-four years. However to say, that nothing happened on the nuclear front for twenty-four years would be undermining the newly acquired nuclear feat. In the aftermath of the Pokhran I explosion, the US began to express alarm over growing nuclear weapons proliferation in South Asia. Consequently, Washington tightened the non-proliferation controls on India. The Nuclear Suppliers Group became an effective mechanism for imposing stringent controls over an extensive list of items necessary for the manufacture of fissile material for developing nuclear weapons. The US move was perceived as “intellectual colonialism” of the West. As for its nuclear policy, India pursued a policy of
ambiguity. Though the programme was slowed, the development of nuclear weapons and missile delivery related technologies was never abandoned.

Meanwhile within the country, domestic politics was in turmoil. In June 1975, Mrs. Gandhi declared Emergency in the country. Since 1974, the railway worker's strike and the growing Jay Prakash movement were worsening. Her own Congress party faction and cabinet began to split urging their leaders to negotiate with Jayprakash Narayan on means to redress unemployment and corruption. Added to this was the Allahabad High Court's ruling of 12 June 1975 against the prime minister premised on corrupt election campaign during 1971. The conviction invalidated the 1971 election to the Lok Sabha and declared her as ineligible to hold any elective post for the next six years. The Prime Minister's powers and authority was eroding fast. On 15 June 1975, Mrs. Gandhi directed President Fakruddin Ali Ahmed to proclaim a national emergency, which suspended fundamental rights and the authority of the state governments. The press was gagged and twenty-six political organizations were banned. This state of affairs continued till March 1977. During this period of internal preoccupation, few developments occurred to restart the nuclear debate in India. However, reports began to indicate Pakistan's steady progress in the development of its nuclear weapons programme. The Indian nuclear explosions had already created insecurity amongst the Pakistani strategic community and they were gearing up to meet that threat perspective.

On the Indian front, preoccupied with Emergency period, Indira Gandhi evinced no further interest in developing the nation's nuclear weapons capability. In an interview in 1996, Raja Ramanna said, "Once [Pokhran] was done, Mrs. Gandhi said, 'No more, that's it". Homi Sethna confirmed: "We said to Mrs. Gandhi, 'Do you want another one? She said, 'I'll let you know.' She never let us know, so we stopped" (Perkovich 1999: 192). Nuclear issues were not central to political debates during this period. The general public also expressed less interest on nuclear weapons. The pressing problems of the hour were economic underdevelopment, rampant corruption and growing unemployment. The only notable event that took place was the termination of Canada's nuclear cooperation with India in May 1976. This was severe blow considering the CANDU technology played a major role in the development of India's nuclear programme.
Morarji Desai Years

In March 1977 general elections, Indira Gandhi lost power to the Janata Party. The newly elected Prime Minister, Morarji Desai had little regard for nuclear weapons. He disparaged calls for India to develop nuclear weapons and asserted that both Sethna and Ramanna have misguided Mrs. Gandhi on the nuclear policy. In his first press conference as prime minister, on March 24, he stated that the government did not believe in nuclear weapons and that he doubted the necessity of peaceful nuclear explosions (Sharma 1983: 201). In April 1977, he said, "I will give... in writing that we [India] will not manufacture nuclear weapons. Even if the whole world arms itself with the bombs we will not do so" (Mirchandani 1978: 65-66). Desai’s early statements caused much consternation among the strategic and scientific communities. Defence and foreign policy experts expressed anxiety over the government policy, especially in view of two crucial factors. First, the prime minister’s anti-nuclear stance proved untenable in the face of China’s modernization of its nuclear force and Pakistan increasing nuclear weapons capability. Matters worsened when reports indicated that Pakistan was engaged in a clandestine endeavour to acquire nuclear weapons capability. Pakistan’s quest for nuclear weapons was reprimanded by the US when it invoked the Symington Amendment on 6 April 1979, suspending aid to Pakistan. The US suspension of aid only vindicated the fact that Pakistan was steadily acquiring nuclear weapons capability. Pakistan, which had already fought three wars with India, was aware about India’s conventional weapons superiority. Hence, they wanted to build up a robust nuclear weapons programme to maintain an edge with India. Obviously, Pakistan’s war-mongering attitude could not be taken lightly by the Indian defence and foreign policy experts and the demands for reviving the nuclear weapons policy were thus justified. The Janata Government was facing mounting pressure to counter the Pakistani nuclear threat with a similar Indian nuclear programme.

The second factor that increased further pressure on the government to revise its nuclear weapons policy was Morarji Desai’s failed efforts of winning back US and American nuclear cooperation. President Jimmy Carter’s stringent anti-proliferation

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2 In 1976, US Congress adopted the Symington Amendments which prohibited US economic and military assistance to any country, delivery or receiving nuclear material or technology not safeguarded the IAEA.
laws coupled with the newly adopted Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act (NNPA) in 1978 made Indo-US rapprochement dim. Desai's attempt to resume nuclear cooperation with Canada also proved futile. Desai's nuclear policy was thus increasingly losing ground.

In July 1979, there was a change of political guard. Prime Minister Desai was succeeded by Charan Singh who was in favour of keeping the nuclear weapons option open. Expressing concern about the ongoing signs of Islamabad's nuclear weapons programme, the Prime Minister in his address to the nation on 15 August 1979 declared that India had not wanted to use nuclear energy for military purposes "but we might reconsider our earlier decision if Pakistan goes ahead with the atom bomb" (The Statesman 1979: 1). The Pakistan factor was increasingly becoming a matter of concern. The Defence Minister, C. Subramaniam observed in October 1979 that as countries like Israel, South Africa and Pakistan had acquired nuclear weapons capabilities, India would have to take some difficult decisions in regard to nuclear weapons (The Hindu 1979).

In a major development, the Soviet troops crossed the Afghanistan border on 25 December 1979 to purge the country of the communists and other factions that had unleashed terror in Kabul since April 1978. This war had a significant lesson for India. The traditional belief that India held so far was that Washington would play a major role in preventing Pakistan from developing nuclear weapons. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan revived the moribund US-Pakistan relationship, which had become cold after Washington suspended all economic and military aid to Islamabad under the Symington Amendment. The US sought to make Pakistan as a base and conduit from where it can mobilize its forces against the Soviets. Thereafter, the US instead of curtailing Pakistan's nuclear activities appeared likely to strengthen its conventional military strength. Pakistan became a frontline state and an essential line of defence and indispensable element of any strategy that sought to punish the Soviets for their action (Thompson 1982: 969). The US began to show an increasingly lax attitude towards Pakistan's policy of nuclear weapons acquisition. Needless to say, the Afghan war exacerbated India's strategic concerns and intensified the nuclear security dilemma in the sub-continent.
Indira Gandhi’s Return

As the Pakistani nuclear threat was assuming alarming proportion, Indira Gandhi came back to power in January 1980. The Pakistani factor had made a deep impact upon the politico-strategic group. At the first meeting of the post-election Congress (I) Working Committee (CWC), the Prime Minister was asked: ‘If Pakistan can produce enriched uranium in two years starting from scratch, why can’t our scientists do the same for Tarapur?’ (Jaywant 1980: 65). Mrs. Gandhi was quick to reverse her predecessor’s nuclear weapons policy. In February 1980, she asserted that India did not believe in making nuclear weapons, but should have the right to carry out experiments if it was considered necessary. In March 1980, in the Rajya Sabha, she “ended the confusion about India’s stand on peaceful nuclear tests, saying there would be no hesitation in conducting these in the national interest” (Times of India 1980: 1).

From 1975 to 1980, following the Pokhran I explosion, India maintained a policy of self-restraint. It did not conduct any follow up tests and the development of nuclear weapons was temporarily halted. Probably, the enormous political problems facing the country were one important reason to exhibit a restrained nuclear policy. However, by 1980, India’s patience was being increasingly taxed and the subsequent massive US military aid to Pakistan forced India to reconsider its nuclear policy. The growing nuclear threat from Pakistan and the clandestine deals between China and Islamabad left India with no option but to opt for a robust nuclear weapons policy.

From 1980 to 1984, there was a steady effort to upgrade India’s nuclear weapons potential. Since February 1981, drilling shafts were being built for a possible nuclear test at the Pokhran site. Pakistan intending to equalize with India, also reinforced its nuclear weapons programme. The AEC Chairman, Homi Sethna speculated that Pakistan was gearing up for a nuclear explosion in 1981 or 1982. Almost at the same time, there were growing concerns for countering Pakistan’s looming nuclear capability. The most ardent advocate of nuclear weapons K. Subrahmanyanam writing in the Times of India on April 26 expressed anxiety over the fact that India neither backed a nuclear arsenal nor did the country seriously plan for a nuclear strategy. He warned, “there is no evidence of the Indian armed forces having a doctrine for the use of nuclear weapons” (Times of India 1980: 1). Positing that “a
nuclear weapon can be deterred only by a nuclear weapons, he argued that the only way” in which India can keep its option open is to exercise the nuclear option”. Making his political and strategic arguments favouring nuclear weapons in a country deeply influenced by Gandhian principles, Subrahmanyam reminded that Gandhiji advised the nation not be weak but to be always conscious of her strength and power. There was no doubt that Gandhiji abhorred nuclear weapons, yet he emphasized the importance of nuclear weapons by once stating, ‘those nations who have atom bombs are feared even by their friends’ (Thayer 1995: 463-519). Against such a backdrop, the Indian Institute of Public Opinion conducted a nation wide survey on India’s nuclear policy in July 1981 that found that nearly 70 percent of survey respondents wanted India to manufacture a nuclear bomb (Indian Institute of Public Opinion 1981: 8). The Indian politico-strategic establishment was getting desperate to exercise the nuclear option in the in the interest of national security. Further, the US decision to provide Pakistan with sophisticated weaponry seems to have convinced a large segment of the Indian people that exercising India’s nuclear option alone would enable it to meet the challenge posed by the perceived change in the strategic balance (Indian Institute of Public Opinion 1981: 7). The Indian Army also began to indicate the growing need for nuclear weapons. They generally concluded that India would need nuclear weapons in an environment where China and Pakistan possessed such weapons (Sundarji 1981). The Indian army’s perception was a significant evidence of the growing intensification of the nuclear security threat in the region.

Amidst all this, two important developments took place in 1982, which had substantial impact on India’s nuclear policy. In early 1982, Indira Gandhi reportedly authorized preparations for a second peaceful nuclear explosion (Karnad 1982). However, within twenty-four hours of this announcement, Mrs. Gandhi denied any intention to conduct such test. She suggested that the rumour was being spread by the Bharatiya Janata Party. However, just before the spread of such rumours in May 1982, in a seminar conducted at the Centre for Policy Research, a number of foreign and security policy experts concluded that if Pakistan “went nuclear… no party and no government in India would be able to resist the demand that India must go nuclear too” (Chopra 1982: 6).
Another intriguing incident that occurred immediately after was an Indian design to launch a preemptive air attack against Pakistan’s uranium enrichment plant at Kahuta and the small reprocessing plant at PINSTECH in Rawalpindi. A front-page *Washington Post* story alleged that military advisers had proposed such a preemptive attack to Indira Gandhi “nine months ago” – March 1982 – but that Mrs. Gandhi had rejected it (*Washington Post* 1982: 1). The Indian Government repudiated these charges as “absolute rubbish” (*India News* 1982: 1). Although, no adventurous military strike was launched by India, the existence of an adversarial developing nuclear power was rapidly becoming a growing concern for the Indians.

Notwithstanding, the decision to forego a second nuclear test explosion, the Indian officials did not ignore the expanding military strength of Pakistan. On 19 April 1983, in a speech to army commanders, Defence Minister R. Venkataraman expressed concern about increased foreign military assistance to Pakistan and acknowledged that Pakistan was continuing to acquire military nuclear capability (Perkovich 1999: 244). He assured that necessary steps would be taken to adequately equip our defence forces through indigenous military capability. In July 1983, Indira Gandhi launched the Integrated Guided Missile Development Plan (IGMDP) under the aegis of Defence Research and Development Organization to produce ballistic missiles. Indian policy planners felt that without proper delivery systems, India’s nuclear option would not be credible (Srivastava 2000: 311-341).

By the end of 1983, the ongoing signs of Pakistan’s increasing nuclear capability were taking an ominous turn. This was coupled by the fear of Pakistan’s support to the Sikh insurgents in Punjab. Indo-Pakistan relations further worsened when Pakistan’s top nuclear scientist, A.Q. Khan in an interview to the Urdu-daily on 10 February 1984 claimed that Pakistan has mastered the capability to produce weapons-grade enriched uranium. Khan in his interview boasted that, “by the grace of God we have left India behind by many years in uranium enrichment... and [lifted] Pakistan to an eminent status at the international level in such a short time” (Sreedhar 1988: 57). Referring to India’s Pokhara blast, Khan stated, “ten years ago India has done this job, though other countries had helped it. Now [Pakistan] have the capability of doing it” (Sreedhar 1988: 69). Obviously, this declaration was taken seriously within the Indian political and military circles. Prominent journalist, K.C.
Khanna observed that India should respond by declaring openly its nuclear weapons capabilities and matching Pakistan step-by-step (Bajpai 1995: 143). On 30 March 1984, Minister of External Affairs Narasimha Rao addressed a parliamentary request that government respond to reports of “nuclear collaboration between Pakistan and China” (Perkovich 1999: 254). Matters worsened, when the Pakistani development coincided with press reports that the US President Ronald Reagan sought a promise from his counterpart Zia-ul-Haq that Pakistan would not enrich uranium beyond five per cent in return for an assurance of atomic umbrella like the type provided to the NATO countries. India’s fears were compounded when on 10 October 1984, US Ambassador to Pakistan, Deane Hinton told questioners following a speech in Lahore that the United States would be “responsive” if India attacked Pakistan (Perkovich 1999: 258). Rao referred to the Khan interview and to recent reports from the US that China had transferred nuclear weapon design information to Pakistan (Lok Sabha Debates 1984: 74).

Rajiv Gandhi Years

These developments set off the alarm bells in India. There was urgency within the strategic forum in India to match up to the imminent threat scenarios. Indian nuclear scientists under the nod of the political establishment were keeping ahead of all aspects of research and development associated with uranium enrichment. On 31 October 1984, in a tragic incident, Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated and was succeeded by her son, Rajiv Gandhi. 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.

When Rajiv Gandhi assumed political charge of the country, Pakistan was nearing the capability of building nuclear weapons. In early March 1985, American television broadcast an hour-long documentary on Pakistan’s clandestine effort to procure bomb components, prompting additional Indian press commentary and debate on the Pakistani threat (Badhwar 1985: 74). Thereafter, a West German court
convicted a German businessman for smuggling to Pakistan an entire chemical plant for producing uranium hexafluoride — the gaseous material used in uranium enrichment between 1997 and 1980 (Spector 1990: 91). Nuclear insecurity further deepened when on 14 March 1985 in a provocative interview to the Urdu daily, *Hurmat*, A.Q. Khan insisted that Pakistan could carry out "an atomic explosion in a very short time if required, without conducting any test" (Sreedhar 1988: 80; 86).

By May 1985, the demand for a more robust nuclear programme was intensifying among the pro-bomb lobby. They were getting increasingly alarmed at Pakistan’s growing nuclear capability and the ominous nuclear technology nexus between China and Pakistan. Former, Janata Government Finance Minister, H.M. Patel, in a Lok Sabha debate, urged that India must now go nuclear (Reddy 1985). The BJP echoed similar calls for developing the bomb. The Congress Party was also becoming agitated by the new developments and they also demanded nuclear weapons to be inducted within our defence unit. Sensing the growing concerns among the parliamentarians, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who generally abhorred nuclear weapons, in a major AICC meeting held on 4 May 1985 said, “we feel that they [Pakistan] are developing nuclear weapons... [and] we are looking into various aspects of this question to see what action we should take” (Perkovich 1999: 205). He also made a reference to the United States indicating that it has done nothing to prevent Pakistan from pursing a belligerent nuclear weapons policy.

Even as the pressure was building up on the Rajiv Gandhi Government to pursue an overt nuclear weapons policy, Pakistan inched forward towards achieving nuclear weapons capability. On 11 July 1985, America’s ABC television show *Good Morning America* reported that Pakistan successfully had tested the non-nuclear triggering package for a nuclear weapon (Spector 1990: 232). At this critical juncture, the political opinion of the country (except the communists) strongly favoured the building of nuclear weapons to augment our defence capabilities. Reacting strongly, to the Pakistani detonation, a *Hindustan Times* editorial opined that the Indian policy makers must adopt effective countermeasures to balance the Pakistani nuclear threat. It further observed: ‘Rajiv Gandhi may be right when he says that India does not want to have nuclear weapons, but what other options does he have to prevent Pakistan from using nuclear blackmail in the foreseeable future’ (Hindustan Times 1985a).
The government responded to the growing pressure in two ways. Rhetorically, Raja Ramanna told the Madras Press Club that India now had the capability to develop a nuclear delivery system and that “if anyone tries to twist our hand we could flex our muscles too”. On 7 August 1985, Minister of State for External Affairs, Khurshid Alam Khan said in the Rajya Sabha that India should keep the nuclear weapons option open, and vowed that if Pakistan went nuclear, ‘we will reply … stone by stone’ (Times of India 1985).

In spite of growing uranium enrichment capability and the occasional bombastic claims of A.Q. Khan about Pakistan’s nuclear potential, the Government refused to pursue a more robust nuclear weapons policy. In November 1985, Rajiv Gandhi while on a trip to Japan explained India’s nuclear position as “we lived with Chinese weapon for long. But our relation with Pakistan is more turbulent” (Hindustan Times 1985b). He further stated, “we would like not to develop a weapon and we are not developing a weapon” (Hindustan Times 1985b). He reiterated that India has indeed increased its nuclear capability but that it is entirely for peaceful purposes. Rajiv sought de-escalation of nuclear tension in the region. This itself indicated that nuclear tension between the neighbours was increasingly becoming intense. The Prime Minister had affirmed that although in principle, India is opposed to the idea of becoming a nuclear power, yet if national interests so demanded, New Delhi can become a nuclear power within a few months. By the end of 1985, reports confirmed that Islamabad has enough weapons-grade uranium for three to five atomic bombs (Hagerty 1998: 73). In order to normalize the tensed situation, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and President Zia-ul-Haq signed an agreement in December 1985 at New Delhi whereby they pledged not to attack each other’s nuclear installations. But before the situation could normalize, new tension began to emerge towards the end of 1986.

The first crisis in Indo-Pakistan’s nuclear era erupted on December 1986 and January 1987. In 1986, there was a major outbreak of a political conflict between India and Pakistan with both sides accusing each other for mobilizing ethnic insurgencies on the other’s territory. Islamabad accused New Delhi of fomenting ethnic violence in the Pakistani province of Sindh. The Sikh insurgency cast a shadow over the already volatile relations between India and Pakistan.
In mid-1987, India conducted its largest peacetime military exercise code-named Brasstacks (Bajpai 1995). Its goal was to induct new mechanized formations into the Army and test their effectiveness. It was also designed to intimidate Pakistan because of the latter's unrelenting support to the Sikh insurgents. During this period, when the exercise was in operation, Pakistan was also conducting its military exercise Saf-e-Shikan and Flying Horse. As Exercise Brasstacks went into operation, Indian intelligence sources picked up evidence of Pakistani troops moving into the sensitive region of Pakistani Punjab near the Indo-Pakistan border from where the Pakistani military could easily target Indian city of Amritsar. This gave rise to serious concerns among the Indians. During the Brasstacks crisis, A.Q. Khan in a vivid interview to the eminent Indian journalist, Kuldip Nayar stated:

"what the CIA has been saying about our possessing the bomb is correct and so is the speculation of some foreign newspapers. [...] They told us that Pakistan could never produce the bomb and they doubted my capabilities, but they now know we have done it [...] Nobody can undo Pakistan or take us for granted. We are there to stay and let it be clear that we shall use the bomb if our existence is threatened" (Nayar 1987).

Immediately after the interview, there was diplomatic backlash from the Western countries against Pakistan, following which, Khan denied having given any such interview. However, Nayar remained firm that he took Khan’s interview and that appointment was pre-fixed. He added: ‘For 70 minutes we spoke of the bomb and nothing else’ (Bobb and Singh 1987: 73). The editor of the Muslim Mushahid Hussain, who accompanied Nayar during the interview, supported the Indian journalist’s claims in an editorial on March 3: “The message given by Dr. A.Q. Khan… is directed against all those detractors of Pakistan’s ‘Islamic Bomb’. To the Indians, it is a “hands-off Pakistan” message at a time when New Delhi has been carrying out massive warlike exercises all long our eastern border (Bobb and Singh 1987: 73).

The basic objective of Khan’s interview was clearly meant to signal its audience in New Delhi that Islamabad possesses nuclear weapons and will not hesitate to use them in the event of an Indian attack on it. Although, Khan later denied giving this interview, it can be debated whether his statement was intended to indicate a nuclear threat. Probably, Khan may have meant to publicly confirm Pakistan’s
nuclear programme. All the same, it can be clearly discerned that Khan could not have given this interview without the prior knowledge or consent of the Pakistani military establishment. Consequently, in the aftermath of the Brasstacks, the nuclear debate in India once again escalated pressurizing the government to move closer to weaponizing its nuclear capability. The press, parliamentarians and strategic analysts were keen on the nuclear challenge since long before. In late January 1987, BJP President, L.K. Advani stated, “India must produce the nuclear bomb as there is no alternative” (Times of India 1987: 16). In the Rajya Sabha, in the late February 1987, the opposition as well as Congress (I) Party members had demanded a review of defence policy in light of Pakistan’s nuclear programme (Perkovich 1999: 282). The demand increased after Khan’s boastful revelations to Kuldip Nayar. Cabinet Secretary, B.G. Deshmukh recalls that around this time General Sundarji, “spiritedly advocated going nuclear”, in a briefing to Rajiv Gandhi (Deshmukh 1994: 62). Towards the end of March, the Prime Minister called for a more robust nuclear stance, by stating, “we intend meeting President Zia’s threat. We will give an adequate response” (Perkovich 1999: 284). Throughout April, there was a growing demand among the parliamentarians urging the government to reconsider its nuclear policy. Finally, on April 27, Defence Minister K.C. Pant told the Lok Sabha “the emerging nuclear threat to us from Pakistan is forcing us to review our options … I assure the House that our response will be adequate to our perception of the threat” (Perkovich 1999: 284). To be sure, the nuclear debate was fuelled to new heights gradually a distinct detachment was emerging from the late 1986 statements evincing an overt nuclear weapon building policy. An India Today survey in the aftermath of the Brasstacks crisis revealed that 69 per cent of the survey respondents believed that Pakistan had nuclear weapons and 68 per cent ‘felt India should take a similar path’ (Bobb and Singh 1987: 73).

Meanwhile, India was building up a nuclear arsenal. K Subrahmanyam in his personal recollection noted that India had achieved a nuclear deterrent by 1990 (Subrahmanyam 1998a: 44). Between 1988 and 1990, he claimed India readied at least two-dozen nuclear weapons for quick assembly and potential dispersal to airbases for delivery by aircraft for retaliatory attacks against Pakistan (Subrahmanyam 1998c: 10). Around 1988, Rajiv Gandhi acknowledged the requirement of adequate measures for building a nuclear deterrent capability.
At the same time, Rajiv Gandhi also sought to strive towards a nuclear weapons-free world. In May 1988, the Prime Minister adopted a three-stage plan to eliminate nuclear weapons by 2010. Popularly known as the “Action Plan”, Rajiv presented the above proposal before the UN General Assembly Special Session on Disarmament. The action plan among many other measures, urged the non-nuclear weapon states including India not to cross the threshold of acquiring nuclear weapons. This indicates that the government policy on nuclear weapons reflected abhorrence for these weapons and propagated their extermination. Rajiv's repugnance to nuclear weapons is also apparent from the fact that he proposed a scheme for eliminating nuclear weapons specifically from Asia in May 1988. Under this plan, Asian states also would commit not to develop or acquire nuclear weapons, in return for guarantees that they would not be threatened with the use of such weapons (Cheema 1992: 60).

On the domestic front, corruption and lawlessness was becoming the rule of the day. The public distrust in the government became more and more apparent and subsequently, in the elections held in November 1989, the popular mandate was laid out clearly. Rajiv Gandhi lost power and V.P. Singh headed the new coalition government. On assuming power, Singh deputed Ramanna as the Defence Minister, a portfolio that he had himself held signaling that the new government would take strategic defence seriously. Just after Singh took over charge there were speculations that Pakistan is going to detonate a nuclear device in the Sindh desert to deter India from acting against Pakistan in response to the insurgency in Punjab and Kashmir. Though, V.P. Singh actually believed that Pakistan would not use nuclear weapons against India, he wanted to analyze all possible scenarios in this regard. Accordingly, Defence Minister, V.S. Arunachalam, representing the strategic enclave, briefed the Prime Minister that India was ready to conduct a nuclear test and in an event of any nuclear attack from Pakistani, India possessed the means for a nuclear riposte. Singh was however, more keen on holding a dialogue with Pakistan, an option that his predecessor had rejected as pointless. However, by February 1990, he reverted to the standard Indian stance on nuclear policy: “India will have to review its peaceful nuclear policy, if Pakistan manufactures nuclear weapons” (Perkovich 1999: 304).
In the spring of 1990s, the Vale of Kashmir descended into violent turbulence, leading both India and Pakistan nearly into a fourth war. The crisis developed in the wake of an intensifying anti-Indian insurgency movement in Indian administered Kashmir (Ganguly 1996: 76-107). Pakistan played an active role in spreading violence in the state. Unofficially, groups like Jamaat-i-Islami as well as Inter- Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Pakistani Army also played an active role in support of the Kashmiri militants.

As the conflict intensified, the opposition parties in Pakistan insisted Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to take a stronger stand in support of the Kashmiri militants. Unable to resist pressure from the conservative elements, Bhutto proclaimed the Kashmiri’s right to self-determination. In February 1990, the opposition parties urged the government to pursue a jihad (holy war) in Kashmir. Not satisfied with this, the leader of the Jamaat-i-Islami urged the government to build nuclear weapons in order to challenge India. The aggressive attitude of the Pakistani government put enormous pressure on the V.P. Singh government whose mishandling of the local situation in Kashmir prompted the crisis. In early April 1990, the BJP passed a resolution for the government to take adequate steps to “knock out the training camps and transit routes of terrorists” (Hagerty 1995: 99). Rajiv Gandhi who was staging a comeback to power, urged strong measures be taken to resolve the crisis in Kashmir. Thus, under pressure the Prime Minister on April 10 warned Pakistan, “you cannot get away with taking Kashmir without a war” (Hagerty 1995: 99). Keeping in mind, Pakistan’s decade long development in acquiring nuclear weapons, Singh declared that if Pakistan exercises the nuclear option, “India will have to take a second look at our policy. I think we will have no option but to match. Our scientists have the capability to match it” (Hagerty 1995: 99). By mid-April 1990, both the countries deployed troops on either side of the border. Matters were about to take a serious turn when the US Deputy National Security Advisor, Robert Gates intervened and convinced both India and Pakistan that it would be to neither side’s advantage to go to war (Perkovich 1990: 310). Noted American journalist, Seymour Hersh, in his sensational article of March 1993, “On the Nuclear Edge” wrote that “General Beg had authorized the technicians at Kahuta to put together nuclear weapons” (Hersh 1993: 64). Hersh’s account was supported by Pervaiz Hoodbhoy who confirmed that during the 1990
crisis, Pakistan assembled the different components (of a bomb) it had and developed a crude nuclear device (Hoodbhoy 1993).

The crisis of 1990 brought about a major shift in the perception of both India and Pakistan. Now, both the countries possessed nuclear capabilities and it had an impact on their strategic and political decisions. The Kashmir crisis heralded a new era in Indo-Pakistani nuclear relations. The 1990 Indo-Pakistan crisis established a significant fact that nuclear deterrence played an important role in preventing war. The existence of mutual nuclear weapon capabilities deterred both India and Pakistan from going into war. Both sides recognized the possibility that conventional conflict could escalate into a nuclear exchange. In October 1990, the Bush government declared Pakistan as a de facto nuclear weapon power and invoked the Pressler Amendment thereby suspending military and economic aid to Islamabad. The Indians welcomed the move. The US certification that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear explosive device helped keep the Indians hawks at bay, even if India had reason to doubt that certification (Perkovich 1999: 312). The Pressler sanctions changed that position. India now had all the reason to acquire the status of a nuclear power in view of the existing nuclear threat on its borders.

In the face of Pakistan's undeniable nuclear capability the Indian government decided to form a small soviet group in September 1990 for ensuring that in the event of a nuclear attack on India, the political authority will be able to function and be in a position to deliver a nuclear retaliation. Headed by the scientific adviser to the Defence Minister, V.S. Arunachalam, this group was approved by V.P. Singh. The group, which did not include active service chiefs, concluded that India need not be able to deliver an immediate nuclear riposte to an attacker but instead could affect deterrence through retaliation in a matter of days or weeks (Perkovich 1999: 312). The group recommended designation air force units to receive nuclear warheads and deliver them in accordance with direction, pre-emptively prepared that base commanders would possess under seal, to be implemented on orders of surviving political power centers. In addition, to its primary duty of formulating contingency plans the group was also to recommend a draft nuclear doctrine which postulated that India should not resort to first use of nuclear weapons; military policy and plans should be under civilian control; no arms race should be initiated by India and the
nuclear policy should not be under the command and control of any single sector viz. the political leaders, bureaucrats, scientists or the defence establishment. The formation of this secret group by the government by itself indicates that the nuclear threat was becoming increasingly imminent and in face of this reality, it was but only pragmatic for India to be prepared for such an eventuality.

Throughout the 1990s, Pakistan periodically brandished its nuclear weapons. The Indian strategic group was once again agitated when in 1991, A.Q. Khan boasted that Pakistan was a nuclear power and six thousand engineers and scientists were now engaged in manufacturing 350 million dollars worth of missiles and mines for the country (Dawn 1991). Shortly after Khan’s claims, Arunachalam estimated that Pakistan was capable of producing ten nuclear bombs (Perkovich 1999: 324). These developments naturally stirred the Indian politico-defence core group to renew the debate for manufacturing nuclear weapons in India.

**Narasimha Rao Years**

The year 1992 was significant in terms of the fact that the domestic political-economic situation in India was gradually improving under Narasimha Rao government. It thus allowed for resumed interest in nuclear matters. On January 1, India and Pakistan exchanged lists of each other’s nuclear installations and reached an agreement not to launch any attack on them. However, this happy state of affairs was not to last for long. In February 1992, Islamabad made its first official admission that it maintains unofficial nuclear weapons when the Foreign Secretary, Shahryar Khan told the *Washington Post* “capability is there” (Hagerty 1998: 173). The reaction among the Indians was an expectedly sharp. BJP President, Murli Manohar Joshi declared that India “must waste no time to go nuclear” (Perkovich 1999: 326). Thereafter, the Rao Government assured the nation through an All India Radio broadcast, “India is fully prepared to meet any threat from Pakistan” (Perkovich 1999: 326). This was further supplemented with a warning from the Defence Minister, Sharad Pawar that if Pakistan were thinking in terms of a nuclear threat, “India’s reaction would be to make Islamabad bear the burden of suffering for generations” (Perkovich 1999: 326). This clearly indicated a reference to nuclear retaliation from India. However, Rao and Pawar in consonant with the Nehruvian legacy was quick to
add that India did not want to go nuclear and was firm in its resolve not to build nuclear weapons. It is important to note that both the leaders were well aware by now that under the DRDO and AEC, India had accumulated the capability to quickly assemble nuclear weapons and launch them from air-based platform. But they were not in favour of crossing the rubicon to declare their capability overtly.

It was precisely this ambiguous policy of the Indian government that made defence elites like K. Subrahmanyam increasingly impatient. In a long newspaper piece, Subramanyam, used the reduction in defense budgets to urge open construction of "a minimum deterrent arsenal" (Perkovich 1999: 238). Subramanyam’s argument assumed credibility especially in view of the fact that in April 1992, China tested a huge, one-megaton nuclear weapon when President R. Venkataraman was still conducting the first Indian presidential visit to China. This haughty move by China only served to affirm the Indian apprehensions that Beijing will shape any bilateral relations on its own term.

Between 1993 and 1994, three specific events occurred that renewed further interest in the nuclear debate in India. A leaked American intelligence report in 1993 concluded that China had supplied M-11 missiles or components of this delivery system to Pakistan (Chellany 1993: 253). This information leakage rang alarm bells in India. There was uncertainty and insecurity prevailing in the atmosphere. India’s anxiety over China’s intentions in the subcontinent and the Sino-Pakistan military nexus was aggravated immensely.

India’s apprehensions had barely died down that its anxiety was further accentuated when on 24 August 1994, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif made announcement of using nuclear weapons against any Indian attempt to seize the Pakistani occupied Kashmir. This marked a new stage in the Indo-Pakistani nuclear competition. India’s security concerns were again aggravated when in October 1994, Washington decided to lift the sanctions levied upon Pakistan in 1993 in the wake of the revelation that China had supplied Islamabad with M-11 missile related components and technology. Not only was this considered an act of partiality by Washington but the Indian officials perceived that the US gesture would enhance
onsite technology transfer from China to Pakistan. In no way was India going to accept such negotiations.

By mid 1994, India’s nuclear policy was significant, albeit ambiguous. The Director of BARC stated confidently, “other countries must realize that our nuclear capability is way ahead of Pakistan” (Gupta 1994: 54). Former AEC Chairman, M.R. Srinivasan declared that “[t]here are responsible persons who know we have the nuclear weapons capability … There are no doubts is my mind about it” (Indian Express 1994: 1). Raja Ramanna stated that India had “more than enough” plutonium for its defence requirements (Ramanna 1994: 33). Thus India’s nuclear capability was becoming increasingly significant although the political authority still refrained from conducting any test explosion.

On 11 May 1995, at the NPT Review and Extension Conference, the treaty was extended indefinitely. India refrained from participating in the Conference and criticized that the ‘indefinite extension of the NPT perpetuates the discriminatory aspects and provides legitimacy to the nuclear arsenals of the nuclear weapon states’. (Foreign Affairs Record 1995: 148) India’s defiance in the NPT extension Conference left it more isolated than ever in the international sphere. Extreme pressure was imposed on India to either sign the treaty or at least agree to international inspection of its own nuclear facilities. However, India remained firmly committed to its stance that the NPT was primarily discriminatory and its own security imperatives forced New Delhi to stay out of it till other nuclear powers pledged to relinquish their stockpile.

India’s political-security calculus was further complicated when China conducted a nuclear test just four days after the NPT extension. This was shocking to the attentive Indians who had earlier in March conducted confidence-building measures with China. However, the Chinese test and subsequent revelations that China had shipped at least thirty M-11 missiles to Pakistan, heightened Indian securities (Kumar 1995: 7). Making matters worse, the Clinton Administration implemented the Brown Amendment that augmented further strategic pressure on India. The Amendment sought to provide economic and military assistance to Pakistan. The fluid regional environment in India was complicated further with the
US assurance of $368 million military aid to Pakistan. The Rao government expressed fear that such assistance would upgrade Pakistan’s conventional capabilities and trigger an arms race in the region. The External Affairs Ministry reacting sharply to the Brown Amendment observed that the US military aid to Pakistan would legitimize Islamabad’s clandestine acquisition of nuclear weapons even while receiving enormous military and economic assistance.

By December 1995, India was ready to test a nuclear device. On 15 December 1995, Tim Weiner of the New York Times reported that the US intelligence satellites had detected stepped-up activity at the Pokhran test-site indicating India might be preparing to conduct a nuclear weapon test (Perkovich 1999: 368). The Indian Government was quick to deny that it was preparing for a possible test. Meanwhile, the US Ambassador to India, Frank Wisner showed satellite imagery of wiring for underground tests in L-shaped tunnels in the Pokhran desert. Wisner did not suggest to the Prime Minister that India should abstain from conducting any tests precisely because it is a sovereign nation and has a right to make its decision independent of any external influence. However, he was quick to remind the consequences that will follow if India decides to go ahead with any nuclear test. India was thus forced to abort the tests which were due in less than seventy-two hours. During his tenure, Rao did everything to cross the nuclear rubicon. However, two factors played uppermost in his mind that ultimately altered his decision; first, involved the question of economic costs. The Finance Ministry predicted that economic sanctions in the aftermath of the tests would undermine the country’s economic development. Though, the Foreign Office was initially divided on this point, but eventually, it tended the view of the Finance Ministry. Another factor that prevented Rao from going ahead with the nuclear tests was the prospect of Pakistan following India and testing its own nuclear weapons. Would it provide explicit nuclear parity to Pakistan, internationalize the Kashmir dispute and put India at a disadvantage? (Mohan 2003: 6). It was definitely an important question put forth by the pro-nuclear tests lobby who advocated that since Pakistan had already developed nuclear weapons, New Delhi and Islamabad had little to lose by bringing them out of the closet.

The early 1996 witnessed intense negotiations in Geneva on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The CTBT was co-sponsored by India and
the United States in 1993 aimed at eliminating nuclear tests. Yet India refused to ratify the treaty and blocked it from becoming operational because of its Entry Into Force (EIF) clause. According to this clause, the treaty required the signature and ratification of all the forty-four countries that had nuclear weapons capability. Nonetheless, the test ban treaty raised several vital issues. Brahma Chellany argued that if India wanted a credible deterrent it must conduct tests “to perfect technical capabilities and convey a political message to other nuclear-armed states” before a test ban was implemented, which would render further conduct of any tests politically very difficult (Chellany 1996: 8). Defence analyst, P.R. Chari argued that it was already, “too late for India to conduct the required series [of tests] before CTBT is negotiated ... [A] test series thereafter in the teeth of international opposition would become infinitely more difficult” (Chari 1996). The Indian Government on its part declared in the Conference of Disarmament that it did “not believe that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is essential for national security” (Haider 1996: 98). That was the official stand of India in March 1996.

**A.B. Vajpayee Interlude and Deve Gowda Years**

In May 1996, once the BJP came to power, there was a drastic change in the official stand on nuclear policy. Immediately, after assuming power, the Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee gave the Director General of DRDO, Dr. A.P.J. Kalam and the AEC Chairman, R. Chidambaram the green signal to proceed with nuclear weapon tests. However, the newly constituted government lost power on May 28, just twelve days after assuming office. Thereafter, the political establishment was presided over by Deve Gowda and his coalition team and backed by Congress from outside. On assuming power, Prime Minister Gowda faced an already frustrated defence and nuclear energy scientific leadership. Earlier, the three top leaders of the strategic enclave – Kalam, Chidambaram and Santhanam – had reacted angrily to being told that political propriety required putting off tests until the BJP’s confidence vote (Perkovich 1999: 376). Ultimately, Prime Minister Gowda refused to give clearance for demonstrating India’s nuclear capability. It appeared that the economic situation was a major constraint behind Gowda’s decision. Obviously, the Prime Minister’s decision did not find favour among the scientific community.
Through the summer of 1996, the Indian nuclear debate revolved around CTBT negotiations. Apart from criticizing the treaty for being discriminatory, the India pointed out that the treaty lacked a time bound framework for nuclear disarmament. Indian officials also objected to the treaty’s allowance of so-called sub critical tests that do not have an explosive yield (Perkovich 1999: 380). India’s objection to the treaty can be also surmised from India’s Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament, Arundhuti Ghose’s important speech on 20 June 1996, “India had expressed its dismay at the indefinite extension of the NPT because [the treaty] sought to legitimize indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by five countries. Today the right to continue development and refinement of their [United States] arsenals is being sought to be legitimized through another flawed and eternal treaty” (Ghosh 1999: 139). Remarkably, Ghose also advocated that India’s national security considerations will be a primary factor in our decision making process. Ghose’s invocation was welcomed by the AEC Chairman, Chidambaram who opined that India’s option to conduct nuclear tests should be justified in terms of its national security requirements. Having, twice come so close to getting their wish to test, the weaponeers would resist any move by political leaders now to sign the CTBT (Perkovich 1999: 380).

As the international pressure was mounting on India to sign the CTBT, the domestic pressure also increased on the politico-security calculus from signing the flawed treaty. India was under enormous pressure. When such was the prevailing state of affairs, China conducted its forty-fourth nuclear weapon test on June 7, only days after it agreed to give up its demand for peaceful nuclear explosions under a test ban treaty. The Chinese tests rekindled Indian strategists’ criticisms of the government’s moralistic view of global disarmament. C. Raja Mohan stated, “India is obsessed with unrealizable goals of nuclear disarmament” (Mohan 1996). It also indicated the fact that China had reached such level of nuclear technology that it can opt to relinquish further physical nuclear testing. The CTBT thus failed to address two main strategic concerns of India viz. the nuclear arsenal of China and Pakistan. Indian permanent representative to the UN observed: ‘Countries around us [China and Pakistan] continue their nuclear programmes either openly on in a clandestine manner. In such an environment, we cannot permit our option or be constrained or eroded in any manner (Shah 1998). Despite India’s opposition, the UN General Assembly adopted
the CTBT on 10 September 1996 with an overwhelming majority. India was left isolated and it was gradually becoming difficult to sustain an ambiguous stance on its nuclear policy.

**Inder Kumar Gujral Years**

Prime Minister Gowda's policies left many in the coalition government particularly the Congress party highly dissatisfied. The Congress leaders resented Gowda's handling of ongoing investigations into the corruption charges against the Congress officials including the party president, Sitaram Kesri. On 30 March 1997, the Congress party withdrew support from the United Front coalition government. Subsequently, Deve Gowda was replaced by Inder Kumar Gujral as the Prime Minister in April 1997. Immediately after coming to power, Gujral was under severe pressure to adopt a tough nuclear policy. The annual reports of Ministry of Defence expressed concern over China's vigorous modernization of its nuclear arsenal and missile capabilities. China's logistical improvement along the border was also a cause of worry among the strategic defence calculus. Added to this, was China's position in the South-China Sea and its defence cooperation with Myanmar. There was a growing indication that Beijing wanted to emerge as an absolute hegemonic power in South Asia and South East Asia. There was an intense demand from the scientific establishment for authorization to conduct nuclear weapon tests. The Defence Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav claimed that the scientists were prepared to conduct testing of nuclear weapon devices in October 1997 and were only short of receiving approval from the government.

However, Prime Minister Gujral was trying to pursue a strategy that would alleviate security concerns. He believed that if dialogue with Pakistan could normalize bilateral relations as the case was with China, then India's regional security and global status would improve. In a November 13 address to the National Defence College, he said that India had no desire to manufacture nuclear weapons unless it was forced to do so (Hindu 1997). Domestic tumult became visible again in November 1997, which led to the downfall of the Gujral government.
A.B. Vajpayee Years

On 4 December 1997, President K.R. Narayan dissolved the Lok Sabha and called for a new Parliament to be constituted by March 15. The President stated, “The people of India need a reprieve from political instability” (Katyal 1997: 1). In March 1998, the Bharatiya Janata Party came into power under the leadership of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. The BJP government right from the beginning had been pro-weaponeers. Their election manifesto highlighted the nuclear policy as a distinguishing issue. In mid-January, BJP foreign policy spokesman while referring to China’s nuclear and missile assistance to Pakistan stated, “[G]iven the security environment, we have no option but to go nuclear” (Vyas 1998: 13). He also insinuated that China was trying to stabilize the border imbroglio with India without actually resolving the matter. This was not enough for the BJP (Vyas 1998: 13).

Prime Minister Vajpayee in his earliest statements after assuming office adopted a moderate approach on the weaponization question. On asked when the government would consider it appropriate to induct nuclear weapons into its arsenal, the Prime Minister said, “There is no time frame. We are keeping the option open, and if need be, that option will be exercised” (Burns 1998a). Vajpayee thus tried to soften the position on “going nuclear”. The Defence Minister, George Fernandes reiterated that India would not rush into an overt nuclear position. He further said, “I don’t think we need to test [nuclear weapons] at this point of time. We did a good job in Pokhran in 1974… The world knows India has the capacity and the capability. We don’t need to perform for others” (Times of India 1998: 1). What is important to note here is that the defence minister did not know what he was talking about primarily because he was not informed on the nuclear policy by the Prime Minister. It appeared that no one but Vajpayee, Jaswant Singh, Brajesh Mishra, perhaps L.K. Advani, and certainly Kalam, Chidambaram and a handful of other top scientists knew what “the government” actually was intending to do (Perkovich 1999: 409). Another reason for such secrecy was that the Vajpayee Government did not want to reveal its actual status of the nuclear weapons issue to the opposition and other coalition partners before the pending confidence vote.
On 6 April 1998, Pakistan tested the Ghauri missile which had the putative capability to deliver a nuclear warhead to major value targets in India. The tests shocked and alarmed the politico-strategic calculus in India. The Ghauri missile test had serious implications for India. First, the test left prominent Indian cities vulnerable to a Pakistani nuclear onslaught. Second, the test also proved that Pakistan’s scientific-technological knowledge base was gradually becoming challenging for India. It also indicated that the existing clandestine nexus between China and Pakistan for nuclear material and technology transfer was thriving immensely. Though, the United States officials suggested that it was missile technology, the Indians merely perceived it as a US ploy to shift the blame from China. Pakistan’s increasing military capability was becoming a growing concern. Both the political and military establishments in India felt the need to undertake appropriate measures to meet the impending challenges. In keeping with this line of thinking, on April 10, the Prime Minister constituted a three-member Task Force to prepare recommendations for the formation of a National Security Council (NSC). The function of the NSC was to undertake India’s first ever strategic defence review for analyzing the political, military and economic threats facing the country. The immediate need of the hour was a strategic deterrent to counter the emerging nuclear and missile challenges.

On 11 May 1998, India detonated three nuclear weapon devices at Pokhran, followed by two more tests, on May 13. India conducted the Shakti-98 nuclear tests after twenty-four years, since the PNE test at Pokhran in 1974. Immediately after the test, India called for the development of a credible, minimum deterrent and a moratorium on any further testing. India’s decision to go nuclear was based on its security considerations. India was surrounded by two nuclear powers on either side of its borders that are always in connivance with each other against India. Moreover, Pakistan’s belligerent attitude, its meddling in India’s internal politics and abetting cross-border terrorism across the border, forced New Delhi to shed its nuclear restraint and ambiguity and demonstrate to the world and particularly to its next door neighbours that it will not be black-mailed into any situation. India refuses to bow down to any kind of coercion. It cannot be pushed around anymore. India is recognized as an important nation in the international community. After all, strength respect strength and India is in possession of that strength.
On 28 May 1998, Pakistan as expected exploded six nuclear devices in the Chagai Hills in Baluchistan. Indo-Pakistani relations, once again reached its lowest ebb, since the Bangladesh war of 1971. Pakistan started mudslinging against India for having raised the level of arms race in the sub-continent. India, on the other hand, displayed considerable diplomatic skill by offering a No-First-Use Agreement. Pakistan rejected the proposal and offered a Non-Aggression Pact, which India considers irrelevant because of the existence of the Shimla Agreement. Pakistan's incessant refusal to accept India's proposal only confirms the suspicion that Islamabad considers nuclear weapons as not merely weapons of deterrence but as weapons of war, which it would not hesitate to use if the need arose.

A pertinent question that arises here is that why did India go nuclear after maintaining reticence regarding nuclear weapons for twenty-four years? India finally decided to cross the nuclear rubicon in May 1998 to assert its position as a nuclear power. However, India's decision to go nuclear in May 1998 evoked strong reactions from all over the world which initiated the fifth debate regarding India's nuclear future. The threat of sanctions loomed large. Money was being pulled from Indian stocks and economic growth was on the verge of impairment. The BJP Government was accused by the Opposition for bringing the country on the brink of economic disaster. Prominent Communist leader, Indrajit Gupta declared, "the nuclear tests are a great achievement for India, no doubt, but we can't even supply ordinary drinking water and electrical power to the people of this country". P. Chidambaram, former finance minister accused the government of "inventing a security threat to just the tests". The Congress Party leader, Natwar Singh declared that not a "single incident" had occurred in recent months to suggest deterioration in the security environment, ignoring the Ghauri test. Former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar said "bombs were no substitute for economic strength - it was easy to make a bomb but difficult for the nation now to face its consequences".

The Indian leadership was, however, aware of the repercussions that would follow in the event of sanctions being imposed by the international community. Eventually, the BJP leadership and other government supporters rose to the debate. Their main argument was that regional security environment justified the tests. Consequently, three key tests of the official policy explanation for Pokhran II were
issued from Vajpayee. The first is his letter of 11 May 1998 to the US President Clinton. The second is his *suo motu* statement of 27 May 1998 in Parliament and the nine-page paper titled ‘Evolution of India’s Nuclear Policy’ that goes with it. The third is his nine-page ‘Statement Re: Bilateral Talks with United States’ made in the Rajya Sabha on 15 December 1998 (Ram 1999: 53). Together they comprised the BJP government’s authoritative case for Pokhran II and nuclear weaponization. In the 11 May 1998, letter addressed to the US President Clinton, Prime Minister Vajpayee iterated China’s ambitious intentions of strategic encirclement of India. He also cites Pakistan, the ‘bitter neighbour’, as the other leading element in the deteriorating security environment faced by India for the past few decades.

In the 27 May 1998 statement in Parliament, Vajpayee, categorically specified that the May 1998 nuclear explosions are a continuation of the policies that put India on the path of self-reliance and independence of thought and action. The increasing nuclear and missile proliferation measures perpetuated by the nuclear weapon states while denying the same to the non-nuclear countries and the extension of the unequal and discriminatory regime of the NPT made India face a difficult situation. In his Parliamentary statement, Vajpayee further stated that India’s nuclear weapons are ‘weapons of self-defence’, which will ensure that the country is not subjected to nuclear threats or coercion (Vajpayee 1998a). It thus follows that the government decision to assert its nuclear status at the global level was premised upon India's national security requirements and not to engage in an arms race.

In the 15 December 1998 nine-page statement in Rajya Sabha, Vajpayee claimed that India’s concerns relating to disarmament and non-proliferation go beyond the South Asian region, and involve a wider perspective (Ram 1999: 53). India’s nuclear policy comprises of twin components - the refusal to surrender nuclear sovereignty and self-imposed and conditional restraint. “Ours will be a minimum credible deterrent, which will safeguard India's security - the security of one-sixth of humanity, now and into the future” (Vajpayee 1998b). In addition, the Prime Minister stated India’s commitment to convert our voluntary moratorium into a *de jure* obligation. India also expressed its willingness to hold discussions on a range of issues, including the CTBT to a successful conclusion so that the entry into force clause is not delayed beyond September 1999. India is prepared to join the FMCT
negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, on the understanding that the treaty will be non-discriminatory. India reiterated provisions to make its export control laws relating to ‘sensitive technologies’ more stringent. As an added measure, the Prime Minister emphasized upon India’s nuclear doctrine as comprising a policy of ‘no-first-use’ and ‘non-use against non-nuclear weapons states’.

India’s nuclear weaponization invited diverse comments from different sections of the political leadership within India as well. Among the political parties, the sharpest reaction came from the Left that condemned the tests and drew attention to the dangers if nuclear weaponization were to proceed. In report cited in The Hindu on 27 October 1998, the Congress (I) attacked the Vajpayee government’s nuclear policy for providing the opportunity for ‘everybody outside India to talk about our internal problems, including Kashmir, for mishandling relations in the region and for deploying a wrong sense of priorities’. However, explaining the Pokhran II tests, Vajpayee stated the tests were indispensable for technological and operational reasons, the objective being to lay the foundations for India to develop a deployable deterrent capacity against potential threats.

Within the international community, while the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) chose to “strongly deplore” the nuclear testing, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) expressed solidarity with India on its nuclear armament issue. The bloc’s profound concern was that its security is inextricably linked to peace and stability in its immediate neighbourhood - the north-eastern and southern parts of Asia and India, as a nuclear power, can gradually serve as a check, against China in Southeast Asia (Suryanarayana 1998: 1). India reciprocated the ASEAN goodwill by endorsing the South East Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone and the protocol attached to it. Again in the series of dialogue, starting from June 1998, held between the US acting Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott and the then Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and later Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, Washington expressed its concern to restore normalcy in the Indo-US relations. “I think he (Mr. Jaswant Singh) and I have begun a genuine strategic dialogue with a small ‘s’ and a small ‘d’. Whether we can return to the strategic dialogue with a capital ‘S’ and a capital ‘D’ depends on how much we do over the coming months” (Hindu 1998: 12).
India is now a nuclear weapon state. This category of a Nuclear Weapon State is not in actuality, a conferment; nor is it a status for others to grant, it is an objective reality (Singh 1998: 47). It was in conformity with this objective reality that India weaponized its nuclear research programme in order to achieve a deterrent capacity against belligerent states. In an attempt to achieve this objective, India faced strong criticism from various quarters, which briefly clouded India’s political will for going nuclear. The most serious of these criticisms was the threat of impending sanctions which would have an adverse affect on our economy. The Indian leadership, however, was aware of the repercussions that would follow in the event of sanctions being imposed by the international community. Former Foreign Secretary, J.N. Dixit opined, “India’s basic national and human resources and the inherent strength of the Indian economy would be able to withstand the pressure of these sanctions”. The impact of the sanctions was bound to be minimized if India remained politically stable and unified and that economic liberation programme was not allowed to be diluted.

Indo-Pakistan relations remained cold after their mutual testing. Both the countries felt the need to talk to each other at sufficient high level but the two could not agree on the modalities for talks. However, a thaw set in the rivalry between the two states when Prime Minister Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif met in New York in September 1998 during the UN General Assembly (Kumar 2000: 228). It was agreed that the foreign secretaries of both the countries would meet in Islamabad from 15 October 1998 to focus on Kashmir and peace and security including confidence-building measures. The October meeting however, did not achieve anything. Thereafter, another meeting was held in New Delhi in November, which also ended in failure. However, a landmark development in Indo-Pakistan relationship took place with Prime Minister Vajpayee’s visit to Lahore on 20-21 February 1999, on the inaugural run of the Delhi-Lahore bus service (Kumar 2000: 228). The Lahore summit also led to the signing of Lahore Declaration and the issuing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) by the Foreign Secretaries of both the countries.

Indo-Pakistan relations were once again dampened by the Kargil War of May 1999. Pakistan Army infiltrated into 5000 km of Indian territory across the Line of Control. The Kargil episode which was downright a foolish adventure on the part of Pakistan served to enlarge the conflict in Kashmir and bring to the focus of the world
community, the danger of another Indo-Pak war, one which could have escalated into a nuclear war. The Kargil War was significant as two nuclear-armed adversaries fought it. It was also important in terms of the fact that in August 1990, information was received from a sensitive intelligence source that in any future confrontation, Pakistan might use nuclear weapons as a first resort (The Kargil Review Committee Report 2000: 240). A vivid recollection of this report was made later by V.P. Singh and I.K. Gujral.

The Kargil misadventure prevents India to relax its nuclear deterrent against Islamabad. India cannot seek to jeopardize its core strategic values. In order to protect itself from belligerent countries like Pakistan, India is compelled to develop and sustain a credible nuclear deterrent. The Agra Summit held in July 2001, between Vajpayee and General Musharraf ended in a deadlock with both sides accusing and counter-accusing each other on various issues, particularly Kashmir. In a recent interview to a German newspaper Der Spiegel, as quoted in an Indian daily, General Musharraf stated that if the pressure from India was too much then "as a last resort, the (use of) atom bomb is also possible"; the threat of use of nuclear weapons would cause "consternation in New Delhi" and increase "military tensions" in the region (Suroor 2002: 1). Belligerent statements like the above only serves to make relations far from cordial and compelled India to keep its forces including nuclear capability always on red alert. It makes India suspicious of Pakistani moves and generates an atmosphere of hostility, tension and constant vigilance. Pakistan's newly appointed Ambassador to the United Nations, Munir Akram, recently said that it reserves the right to use nuclear weapons against India even in a conventional war (Hindustan Times 2002: 1). While rejecting India's offer of a no-first-use policy on going nuclear, Pakistan has stated that it would rely on means it possessed to deter Indian aggression and would not neutralize that deterrence by any doctrine of no-first-use. Pakistan's intractable attitude embitters bilateral relations and leaves little room for mutual trust and harmony. It also leads to a vicious cycle of arms race in the sub-continent.

Despite the grave security concerns, India does not view nuclear weapons as instruments of warfighting. This is in sharp contrast to nuclear doctrines of the nuclear weapon states (NWS), which project a military role for nuclear weapons. India views
nuclear weapons primarily as instruments of politics for the purpose of effecting a deterrence relationship *vis a vis* its potential adversaries. Besides, India does not want to build elaborate nuclear arsenal at the cost of crunching its national economy. As compared to the nuclear doctrines of the US and former Soviet Union, India's nuclear doctrine does not subscribe to the outmoded warfighting doctrine like massive retaliation. In addition, as compared to the doctrines upheld by these nuclear states, Indian nuclear weapons are meant solely for a minimum nuclear deterrence.

Indian security environment continues to be highly sensitive despite the sincere efforts made by New Delhi on a continuing basis for achieving peace and amity with its neighbours. Pakistan refuses to soften its belligerent attitude while China will always remain an adverse economic competitor. Besides, China's nuclear nexus with Pakistan shall always be a grave concern for India. In addition, the foreign bases in the Indian Ocean region leaves the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Chandipur test site area under the constant surveillance of external powers.

For India, nuclear weapons are instruments of self-defence, to ensure that it is not subjected to nuclear coercion. India's nuclear tests have infused it with a sense of confidence and self-reliance to go down the lonely path alone in its interests which is the ultimate test of its will and strength to survive and defend its strategic independence and territorial integrity.

In the ultimate analysis, threats are based upon intentions. In the case of Pakistan intentions are known but capabilities are unknown. With China, intentions are not known but capabilities are known. Moreover, there is no probability that threat is zero. There is no scale to gauge such a situation. At the same time, in an attempt to protect our value targets, how much escalation shall we allow becomes an important question. After all, the adversary determines escalation. Such a situation warrants India to remain in a state of full preparedness and national vigilance. All this, however, remains premised on whether India can successfully put in place a credible minimum nuclear deterrent to meet its security challenges.