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INDIAN NUCLEAR DOCTRINE: ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS ON SOUTH ASIA

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ABSTRACT

Each country is different when it comes to policies and regulations especially related to international negotiations and dealings. This is because the decisions are based on factors that are unique to each country. For example – While making a decision of whether import duty should be increased on a particular commodity, a country would look at the situation of its own market, competition and prices of related commodities, inflation rate and its relation with the other country. Hence, while dealing with a critical question of nuclear policy, each country takes its decisions by giving notability to a lot many factors. The ‘No first use’ policy of India, though predetermined, has made a significant impact over the neighbouring south Asian nations. The nuclear history of India, its immediate impacts and possible long-term effects all tend to make an innate level of distrust among the surrounding countries which can also be taken as triggering a pre-emptive attack than creating a level of deterrence.

INTRODUCTION

In a developing country like India, the primary motivation is economic growth and energy security considerations¹. Therefore, India’s nuclear modernization over the past 15 years has largely been framed in material terms: the rising numbers of warheads, the growing ranges of missiles, and the improving delivery systems². Forty years ago, on 18 May 1974, at a remote desert location in Pokhran, Rajasthan, India conducted its first test of a small, indeed miniaturized, nuclear explosive device in the inappropriately named Operation Smiling³. The test attracted a lot of international concerns and condemnations and as a result, India was isolated from the international nuclear community. Similarly, in the year 1998, Indian defence and nuclear scientists returned to the same location to conduct another five nuclear tests codenamed Operation Shakti (force, power)⁴.

The Nuclear doctrine that has been adopted by India is of ‘no first use’. This means that the country would only use its nuclear weapons in retaliation of a nuclear, biological, or chemical attack by another country. Also, it is predetermined that India would not use its nuclear weapons against a

¹ Daniel Poneman, *Nuclear Policies in Developing Countries*, 57 INT. AFF. 568, 568-584 (1981).

² Shashank Joshi, *India's Nuclear Anxieties: The Debate Over Doctrine*, 45 ACT 14, 14-19 (2015).

³ Ramesh Thakur, *The inconsequential gains and lasting insecurities of India's nuclear weaponization*, 90 INT. AFF. 1101, 1101-1124 (2014).

⁴ Ramesh Thakur, *The inconsequential gains and lasting insecurities of India's nuclear weaponization*, 90 INT. AFF. 1101, 1101-1124 (2014).

non- nuclear country strengthening its proposition of going to such an extent only in the cases of strong retaliation. Yes, India strongly believes in the principle of ‘Tit for Tat’. But this is only one side of the story as one with the growing emergence of establishing deterrence and a sense of hegemony in an area, the amount of maintenance that these weapons demand works as a drawback for countries with already existing economic, social and industrial structure.

OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of the paper include:

- (i) To determine the South- Asian countries’ response to the Indian Nuclear Doctrine
- (ii) To determine the chances of a nuclear war surrounding the South Asian region.
- (iii) Any long-term implications that may arise from the Indian Nuclear Policy

“For [some] critics, the fundamental purpose of diluting the no-first-use policy is to keep India's adversaries guessing about the nuclear threshold in the hope that the resultant ambiguity deters a greater range of threats.”

While there is an innumerable number of benefits in developing advanced nuclear weapons in today’s arena of rapid scientific development with political and industrial support. It can also be seen as a way of triggering a kind of pre-emptive attack over a country due to ordinary distrust that grows over such states⁵. Let us look at what all developments take place in the neighboring (South Asian region) after a country like India decides to “go nuclear”.

HISTORY AND THE INDIAN POLICY

The adaptation of the NPT raises a lot many questions. Let us try to answer one of them. The explosion that took place in the year 1974 has been described as a civil concern that acted as a driving force in perceiving that the country has tried to go through the path of accommodating and gradually spreading nuclear weapons along the South Asian coast. The USA imposed heavy sanctions over the country and additional international restraints that stopped other countries from the venture that our country took. Additional Acts have been introduced that have put

⁵ Daniel Poneman, *Nuclear Policies in Developing Countries*, 57 INT. AFF. 568, 568-584 (1981).

supplementing curb over the use of nuclear energy for military purposes⁶. The nuclear doctrine that has been adopted by India has till date been of ‘no first use’ and ‘minimal amount of credible deterrence’.⁷

INDIAN POSITION IN THE NUCLEAR SUPPLIERS GROUP

The Indian Nuclear deal with the US is a shift from the traditional international policies of the US government. The driving factor here was the inherent potential as well as the economic interests that the country on the other side possesses. It allowed India to develop a sense of hegemony as well as security against China creating a lot of opportunities for jobs and similar profits at the same time. In the year 2005, an agreement was signed between the US and the Indian president that formally accepted India as a Nuclear Weapons State in the absence of formal recognition of the same. Under the IEAE, our country was required to keep it's already made and those under construction nuclear reactors in the manner that has been provided by the IEAE. Besides, an additional protocol had been signed which provided an untimely and immediate inspection in the area by the agency.

THE SOUTH ASIAN RESPONSE

The policy of ‘no first use’ has created a special deterring effect since it has the tendency to affect a greater amount of uncertainty and would act as a budding source of provocations even which are non-nuclear in nature. The impact has ever been greater in especially in countries like Pakistan and China already dubious of the Indian Nuclear Policy. Pakistan in its response adopted a slightly different route to create its own technology. It developed a circuitous network of acquisition of these weapons in the advanced countries. The necessary need to take such quick and desperate measure was to equalize the military superiority that India had gained till the time. As for the

⁶ Onkar Marwah *India and Pakistan: Nuclear Rivals in South Asia*, 35 INT. ORGAN 165, 165-179 (1981).

⁷ Shashank Joshi, *India's Nuclear Anxieties: The Debate Over Doctrine*, 45 ACT 14, 14-19 (2015).

Chinese, our country had sought this nuclear regime substantially due to the fact that it needed to increase its security after the 1962 Indo-China war.

SUBSEQUENT NUCLEARIZATION IN SOUTH-ASIA

A system of mutual assurances took place and the countries decided to agree with some of the bilateral regulations applicable to each country. The methods included certain procedures related to the verification, inspection and regulations related to the consultation process⁸. Not only this, the countries decided to give guarantees related to no surprise attack over one another. The effort was to lessen the already existing anxieties of each country. One would agree here that the countries failed to see what subsequent technological advancements or intelligence could do without ascertaining the fact of these assurances.

ABSENCE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESTRAINTS

The presence of uncertainty and deadlock between the policy-making aroused a kind of alarm in the minds of countries especially having rivalry in that region. A simple gesture of pure intentions would not work in such cases as the situation demands something more than that. Due to the shortage of distance and a purposeful intent to provide harm to the other, the attack can be sudden with no alarm hence causing more destruction than what can be expected. Hence the position of South Asia is more likely to become unstable and the other non-participating states in such nuclear rife would tend to distance themselves from these countries⁹.

LONG TERM IMPLICATIONS

Due to a comparatively higher amount of international support, scientific advancement and recourse structure, India could fairly develop a higher number of weapons and disperse them

⁸ Onkar Marwah, *India and Pakistan: Nuclear Rivals in South Asia*, 35 INT. ORGAN 165, 165-179 (1981).

⁹ Ramesh Thakur, *The inconsequential gains and lasting insecurities of India's nuclear weaponization*, 90 INT. AFF 1101, 1101-1124 (2014).

through its territory and an already concerned country of Pakistan can fairly be expected to take recourse to strikes in retaliation. The main point here is that with the potential that India possesses, it can fairly be expected from the country to create a sense of distrust and a potential rift in the South Asian countries. This also creates a lasting question over the aim of universal nuclear disarmament in which the countries mutually decide to let go of the possession of their nuclear weapons since countries like India would come up to say that a huge amount of their security rests in the possession of the nuclear weapons. Any deliberation by the country over the risk of nuclear manifestation would tend to have disastrous consequences especially with countries like Pakistan in which nuclear control rests with the military.

LEVERAGE

Countries like India, yet to develop their position in the global world may take the option of strategically develop and use as a method of deterrence, their personally developed nuclear weapons so that the advanced military powers respect the international diplomacy and agreements. It can be seen that while adopting the nuclear policy, India kept in mind the USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 Bangladesh war¹⁰. It developed the roots of fear in the Indian nation of a strategically developed disastrous nuclear attack by the countries possessing nuclear arms and weapons especially the countries of South Asia which possessed the same kind of deterrence in that area.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

While the No-first use policy that has applied by the Indian government has temporarily stopped the wave of international concerns and possible questions over the Indian stand over the use of its nuclear weapons, the South Asian region has particularly been dubious of the fact and has appropriate right to question the future of nuclear disarmament. The situation that has been created over here should be looked at from two sides – Firstly, while seeing the perspective of the country, it cannot be questioned that its geopolitical locations and strategic cooperation among the two main

¹⁰ Ramesh Thakur, *The inconsequential gains and lasting insecurities of India's nuclear weaponization*, 90 INT. AFF 1101, 1101-1124 (2014).

countries equally fluctuating in their South Asian strategic behavior, it would indeed serve as a deterrence over any unseen harm that may be instilled upon it while considering the fact that both of them possess nuclear weapons. But this is not the whole part of the picture as since the country considerably weakened the ‘no first use’ policy when it said that the nuclear weapons could be used by the country in carrying out response over any biological or chemical weapons that can be used against it and hence carrying out a “major attack” over the country. Secondly, while looking at the situation from a global lens the adoption of the country’s nuclear policies can be seen as a way of expanding the already existing situation of distrust and instability in the South Asian region. This is because the Indian military itself enjoys a considerable amount of autonomy when it comes to the subject of security and necessity reasons. The biggest example of this has been the Pokhran Nuclear Test which was carried out as a secret operation with a light backing by the government. Also, this is also evident when we take the example of the AFSPA, which provides a lot of powers to the military in taking unilateral executive actions. Hence, the security largely depends upon CISF and DAE upon which the entire security should not rest when looking at it from a global perspective. In Pakistan, the same rests with the National Command Authority (NCA).

We see that in the absence of specially provided international regulations dealing with the sensitive region of South Asia. With the growing expansion of fiscal resources in both countries with ever-increasing disagreement in the military and political terms, a situation may arise when the international obligations may be surpassed to create “accidental nuclear war” in the region.

CONCLUSION

The growing emergence of technological, civil and military powers of the top countries leave the rest ones to reconsider their position in the defence arena as each time one country surpasses in its attacking mechanism, there becomes a need to neutralize that effect. India did the same in response to China’s nuclear superiority and Pakistan did same following India. It took 10 years after China conducted its tests, to carry out a peaceful nuclear attack in the Pokhran village. India justified the same by saying that going nuclear is only an act to create deterrence in the minds of countries possessing nuclear weapons.

The USA put heavy sanctions on India and as a result, India had to agree to the terms and conditions put forward by the US government. It compromised on the fact that India would not use its nuclear weapons against a non- nuclear country strengthening its proposition of going to such an extent only in the cases of strong retaliation. What India did can also be seen as a way of triggering a kind of pre-emptive attack over a country rather than necessarily establishing deterrence in the minds of other States. Under the IEAE, our country was required to keep it's already made and those under construction nuclear reactors in the manner that has been provided by the IEAE. Also, an additional protocol had been signed which was provided with an untimely and immediate inspection in the area by the agency. The impact has ever been greater in especially in countries like Pakistan and China already dubious of the Indian Nuclear Policy. The response was the adoption of mutual agreement of trust and operational actions.

It can be seen that in today's arena, the possibility of such an attack has relatively limited probability but there are chances since just like India reconstructed its policy to extend such an attack in the cases of civil and biological, new arenas may be developed by other countries of the South Asian region to establish what generally called ‘accidental nuclear war’