

FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS: STRATEGIC CHOICE OF INDIA- ‘NO FIRST USE’

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ABSTRACT

Managing foreign relations need carefully considered plans of actions that are adapted to foreign interests and concerns of the government.ⁱ A No First Use Policy essentially constitutes a promise, backed by a survivable nuclear arsenal, to only use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack. India clearly advocates the use of No First Use Nuclear Policy for peaceful purposes but discourages its use for any activity that is detrimental to the growth and progress of the sovereign state. While it is prudent to revise policies as and when the political wind and needs of the country changes, a progressive policy like NFU must be encouraged in fickle times that we live in and not be in doubt of. India is proud for setting an example for other countries for showing restraint and deterrence, a virtue becoming increasingly rare. Yet, security has to be the priority of any nation and if push comes to shove, India must not back from presenting a strong front to maintain peace. Hence, adhering to NFU displays strong and meaningful commitment to nuclear disarmament is and will always be India’s stance for as long as possible without compromising its security. The paper will be discussing the principle and origin of the ‘No First Use Policy’, thereby critically analyzing India’s position vis a vis its neighbours. The diplomatic context and strategies of the policy will be offered in the paper and suggestions offered in the light of changing geopolitical dynamics.

Keywords- Foreign Policy Analysis, India, No First Use Policy, Strategic choice, *Way Forward*

INTRODUCTION

“India will not be the first to use nuclear weapons, but if it is attacked with such weapons, it would engage in nuclear retaliation which will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage on its adversary. The label on a nuclear weapon used for attacking India, strategic or tactical, is irrelevant from the Indian perspective.” Shyam Saranⁱⁱ

The statement of Shyam Saran summarizes the entire political doctrine of India's Nuclear Policy. India plays a very tactical role in the nuclear domain as on one side it advocates the use of Nuclear Policy for peaceful purposes and on the other side it discourages its use for any activity that is detrimental to the growth and progress of any sovereign state. The aim of this paper is to understand India's Nuclear Policy in the light of its “No First Use” doctrine.

Any state's foreign policy is fundamentally the result of a sober evaluation of its political, economic, and military prowess. The nuclear policy is a crucial component for facilitating a nation's security and integrity, which increased the power and status of that country. In today's world politics, the search for energy security serves as a new urgent need for the independent nation states.ⁱⁱⁱ

Jawaharlal Nehru in particular had a fairly conservative stance from India's early days of independence. He was against nuclear weapons in the open and with great vigor. However, modernist Nehru likewise felt that nuclear technology may aid in the growth of a country. He also believed, albeit to a lesser extent, that nuclear weapons technology has a part to play in ensuring national defense. These inconsistent threads are still present as they have been throughout a large portion of Indian nuclear policy's last six decades.

In spite of Nehru's conservative stance, after Independence, nuclear weapons and nuclear technology became the critical benchmark for India's leader and policymakers serving as powerful emblems of the country's independence, its technical proficiency and gradual modernization. Its nuclear programme pursued the dual-track policy of development and disarmament in which India's leader play a significant role. India's first Prime Minister and Defence Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, laid the foundation of India's nuclear programme whereas, Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, opened up the nuclear option in 1974, where India conducted its first peaceful nuclear test, near Pokhran in the Rajasthan desert and his grandson, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, helped to establish a nuclear-delivery capability in India's

nuclear policy through the 'Agni Intermediate-Range Ballistic-Missile' test in 1989. However, in the last part of the 20th century particularly in the year 1998, the countries like India proved herself as the nuclear state from the outstanding contribution of Atal Bihari Vajpayee who was waiting for to take it over the nuclear doorstep.

FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

Foreign policy analysis (FPA) is a branch of political science dealing with theory development and empirical study regarding the processes and outcomes of foreign policy.^{iv} Foreign policy analysis is the study of how a country develops its foreign policy. FPA includes international and national policy studies while analyzing the decision making process. FPA also provides research on diplomacy, war, coalitions and financial sanctions, all of which are ways states make policy in different countries. According to *foreignpolicyanalysis.org*, 'FPA as a subject is characterized by its focus on specific players. In the simplest terms, it is the comparative or specific contextual study of the processes, effects, causes or consequences of foreign decisions. The main and most implicit argument is that people acting or acting in groups create and cause change in international politics.'^v

Foreign policy development has several levels:

- Assessment of the international and political environment - Foreign policy is developed and implemented in the context of international and domestic policy ownership, which a country must understand to determine the best foreign policy. , a country will need to respond to international crises
- Summary of Purpose – A country has many external objectives. A country must decide which goals are affected by the international and political environment at any given time. Additionally, foreign policy goals may conflict, which may require significant domestic work.
- Analysis of policy options – Depending on the political environment, a state must determine what policies are in place to achieve one or more of the objectives. This will include assessing the country's ability to implement policy options and analyzing the consequences of each policy option.
- Jurisdiction – Foreign policy and thereby International relations are considered at some

levels of government. Foreign policy decisions are often made by government officials. The main institutions or organizations that make foreign policy decisions include: the head of state (such as the president) or the head of government (such as the prime minister), the political party or the leader.

- Execution of the chosen policy - Once the foreign policy has been chosen and legally determined, the policy should be implemented. Foreign policy is usually carried out by special foreign policy departments of the national bureaucracy, such as Foreign Affairs Ministry or the State Department. Other departments may also play a role in foreign affairs, for example: trade, defense and aid.

CHANGING FACE OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others. In international relations, as the Harvard academic Joseph Nye^{vi} reminds us, power can be exercised in three ways: by threatening or actually using military force, by offering economic incentives or imposing economic sanctions, or by building what Nye famously dubbed “soft power”. That is, the soft power of nations to persuade others based on the attractiveness of their technology, politics, culture, ideas or ideals.

With a series of events that came together in the state to alter calculations and spurred a shift in foreign policy that makes its goal of raising India to a major global actor and creating its distinctive impact on the world order. The foreign policy of the new India likely employs a nuanced combination of all three of Nye's instruments of international influence. India's Policy doctrine is to not to be defined by a new muscularity or machtpolitik (the wielding of the conventional stick). Instead, there is a renewed emphasis on using the carrots of economic levers and soft power. This suggests a thoughtful understanding of the importance of what Nye terms “smart power”: a clever combination of the tools of conventional hard, or military and economic, power and soft power. It is this integrated approach that will best serve India in a complex interdependent world, which is defined as much by conflict and competition as it is by cooperation and the need for greater coordination in confronting common global threats.

The incipient doctrine has five key elements. First, and most important, is the idea that a strong, self-reliant and self-confident India will pursue a foreign policy of “enlightened national interest”. National interest is a contested term; enlightened national interest even more so. Often national interest is defined as *raison d’etat*, or “reason of state”, and can be viewed as the selfish pursuit of national ambitions. But enlightened national interest also adds a moral prism to the policy. When Alexis de Tocqueville wrote his masterly *Democracy in America*^{vii}, in the early 19th century, he described enlightened self-interest as that which made the United States unique: the ability of its citizens to work for the common good because the pursuit of a better life for everyone serves the self-interest of all. In international diplomacy, enlightened national interest is arguably the recognition that the narrow pursuit of self-interest in an interdependent world can lead to sub-optimal policy outcomes. The concept opens up the possibilities of creating cooperative outcomes for many issues, even those traditionally seen as difficult, zero-sum conflicts by realists in the establishment.

India will help to build and strengthen a democratic, peaceful, stable and economically inter-linked world order. This, of course, is not particularly new thinking. In the past, the Gujral Doctrine was perhaps the strongest articulation of a policy of reaching out to the neighborhood, even through gestures that did not demand reciprocity. Whether or not the strong links in other parts of the world between mature democracies - and absence of conflict are mirrored, it is clear that the strengthening of democracy is the first step towards building what the political scientist, Karl Deutsch, described as a security community. That is, a region in which the large scale use of violence has become unthinkable. Meanwhile, however, enlightened national interest will demand India considers making unilateral gestures to serve longer-term self-interest.

That said, it must be recognized that only a strong and economically resurgent India can lead the process. For instance, India recognizes that there is much merit in the adage: carry a big stick, but speak with a soft voice. The United States places India "extremely high" on its list of allies who "can assist bring forward a global agenda," according to Jon Finer, the deputy national security adviser. India's Presidency of the G20 poses a great opportunity for India in its path of becoming a 'Vishwaguru.' In a message aimed at China blocking India's membership at the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on

June 7, 2022 said that India looks forward to joining the NSG, overcoming “political impediments”.

INDIA’S NUCLEAR POLICY

Historically, India has always adopted a peaceful and neutral stance in world politics. Just after Independence, India refused to join either of the power blocs in the cold war and instead initiated

the Non-Alignment movement. Hence, it makes the most sense that after we gained Nuclear power status, we announced the “No First Use Policy” and have strictly adhered to it all these years. But winds change and in the context of 21st century, where the majority of countries enjoy nuclear status and border concerns of India are escalating gradually, the question arises whether this resolve of no first use has become redundant today. A NFU policy certainly shows responsibility in the global arena and projects India as a country whose first priority is peace not arms. Noble as it is, with most of the nuclear states giving up this policy in favor of national concerns, the government of India has to defend its continuous usage. Recently, in 2019, the then Defence minister, Rajnath Singh, commented that, “India’s decision to adhere with NFU policy will truly be relied upon the upcoming situations which signaled the alteration of the policy.”^{viii}

Major decisions were made on January 3, 2004 by the government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee in finalizing the Country’s Nuclear Doctrine. The Cabinet Committee on Security clarified that:

1. Only the civilian political leadership, acting through the Nuclear Command Authority, has the authority to order nuclear retaliatory attacks. An Executive Council and a Political Council make up the Nuclear Command Authority. The Prime Minister serves as the Political Council's chair.
2. India would refrain from using nuclear weapons against nations without such weapons
- .3. India would continue to impose stringent restrictions on the sale of goods related to nuclear and missile technology, take part in negotiations for the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, and uphold the ban on nuclear tests.
4. India is still dedicated to achieving nuclear disarmament on a worldwide, verifiable, and equal basis.

The key highlights of India's Nuclear Policy are as follows: ^{ix}

- Building and maintaining a credible minimum deterrent;
- A posture of "No First Use" nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere;
- Nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage.
- Nuclear retaliatory attacks can only be authorised by the civilian political leadership through the Nuclear Command Authority.
- Non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states;
- However, in the event of a major attack against India, or Indian forces anywhere, by biological or chemical weapons, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons;
- A continuance of strict controls on export of nuclear and missile related materials and technologies, participation in the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty negotiations, and continued observance of the moratorium on nuclear tests.

THE STRATEGIC CHOICE

Following its conflict with China in the 1962 war, India paced off on its new trajectory of developing nuclear weapons, and China followed the trend by conducting nuclear tests in 1964 and the years that followed. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, India carried out Pokhran-I, labelled a "peaceful nuclear explosion," one of its first nuclear tests. India conducted another nuclear weapon test in May 1998, this time using a fission device, a low-yield device, and a thermonuclear device, despite more than 20 years of international pressure to stop India from pursuing nuclear weapons. India was able to incorporate nuclear warheads into its quickly evolving missile programme thanks to its effective execution.

A fortnight after the Pokhran-II tests, Pakistan also carried out similar tests, confirming progress with its nuclear weapons programme; since that time its nuclear arsenal has expanded rapidly. (Lakshman, 2019)^x

As an ideological and diplomatic rebuttal India characterized its policy of No First Use (NFU) of nuclear weapons. The Indian government sent Pakistan a non-paper in 1994 that included, among other things, a commitment to "no first use of nuclear capacity," and it is from that year that official assertions of that policy can be traced^{xi}. Numerous Indian authorities have underscored that the nation's explicit nuclear doctrine from January 2003 includes a no first use vow, but with limitations.

India's diplomats have advocated the country's commitment to not use nuclear weapons first as proof of the India being a "responsible" state and thereby a way to resist any pressures to sign any treaties that would affect its nuclear arsenal. It would seem then that the NFU is a core element of India's nuclear weapons policy.

NFU: A BROWNIE POINT IN DIPLOMACY

Any country's Nuclear Policy can't operate in isolation. Various factors like economic, social, regional geopolitics play primary role in deciding the Nuclear Policy. Talking in India's context, it is pivotal to maintain a balanced view towards the subject. Considering the volatile nature of Asia Pacific, it becomes imperative for India to act as a responsible state actor.

India's NFU policy exactly serves this purpose. It portrays India as a responsible state which helps it to fetch international support in wake of crisis. Initially, India's tests invited unwanted controversies and sanctions from America, thus, adversely affecting the country's economic interests. But the non-discriminatory goal of India's nuclear doctrine has always been to prevent nuclear proliferation. As a result, the NFU permits collaboration with nations like China towards a global no first use policy, despite the fact that India rejected the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons because of its discriminatory nature. By presenting India as a responsible state, the current nuclear doctrine has also won it waivers from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and approval from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) through the Indo-US Nuclear Deal of 2008. India participates in agreements like the Wassenaar Accord and the Missile Technology Group through its pragmatic foreign policy. In the future, a change to an aggressive strategy would be damaging to India's goals of achieving full membership in organisations like the NSG.^{xii}

CRITICISM TO THE POLICY

Cynics have questioned the NFU policy's effectiveness on the grounds that it is not a particularly effective strategy against Pakistan. The NFU policy lacks the necessary required legitimacy because it is primarily thought to be a merely declaratory policy. In Pakistan, the ideology is viewed with comparable mistrust, especially by the country's military establishment. The NFU stance of India is viewed by the Pakistan Army as a "paper policy" that cannot endure in high-risk crisis situations. The NFU concept is categorically rejected by Pakistan as a "unilateral decision" that can be reversed at any time. (Kumar, 2022)^{xiii} Pakistan contends that India's NFU doctrine will inevitably change into a first-use posture depending on how far a crisis escalates and whether it can be sustained.^{xiv}

High-ranking government officials as well as strategic specialists have questioned the sanctity of "no first use." Manohar Parrikar, who was India's defence minister at the time, cast doubt on the country's commitment to the "no first use" principle in 2016 by asserting that New Delhi cannot "tie itself" to the principle indefinitely. Retired government officials have been significantly more unequivocal, in contrast to political leaders who have attempted to introduce some ambivalence into India's nuclear doctrine.

CHALLENGES OF REVOKING 'NO FIRST USE POLICY'

Following Pokhran II, India remained committed to the "Credible Minimum" nuclear deterrence measures, another important nuclear strategy. This is a type of informal doctrine that emphasizes no first use (NFU) with a guaranteed capability for a second strike. In contrast to mutually assured destruction, the doctrine explicitly commits to deploying "strategic nuclear assets as a tool of redistribution in case deterrence fails."^{xv}

While the nuclear deterrence spectrum witnessed evolution and maturity, the NFU loophole continued to be exploited until the surgical strikes of September 2016 (following a terror attack at Uri army camp), which became not just a demonstration of the new political leadership's resolve to 'cross the border' as a perceptive redline and call Pakistan's 'nuclear bluff,' but also undertake military operations under a nuclear overhang without jettisoning the doctrinal underpinnings of the NFU. These political objectives were reinforced when the leadership

repeated the feat with greater intensity, through air strikes on a terror camp in Balakot in February 2019. More importantly, the aerial strikes were proof of India now taking over the escalation mantle and signalling its resolve to advance up the ladder (towards missile strikes) in the event of continuing terror attacks and if Pakistan were to seek military retribution to the Indian action, as seen after the Balakot event.

The past few years have produced considerable debate over India's nuclear strategy and posture. Much of it has revolved around the credibility of India's nuclear arsenal. This is an important question because it goes to the heart of India's capacity to deter its adversaries. Is the Indian deterrent properly organized? Are its capabilities enough? What makes a deterrent credible? The on-going debate has produced three broad positions: that India's nuclear weapons are inadequate for deterrence; that they are sufficient to meet the requirements of minimum deterrence; and that weapons development is reaching for excessive capabilities. Indian policy makers and strategists need to rethink the intellectual foundations of nuclear deterrence.

India must build adequate counterforce capabilities to eliminate room for retaliation in order to adopt a first-use policy. India would have to implement launch-on-warning and other hair-trigger technologies, which naturally raise the danger of unintentional launches and errors, in order to build this first-strike capacity. This implies that no leader would want to order a nuclear strike on the basis of a mere assumption of risk, in addition to the extremely rapid Indo-Pak and Indo-Sino response times that are available (due to close proximity between the countries). This reasoning is strengthened by several instances of nearly using weapons as a result of similar errors in judgement and erroneous assumptions.

Nuclear weapons must be in a de-alerted and de-mated posture as a consequence of implementing an NFU policy. This means that before using nuclear weapons, the weapon's various components, which are kept in storage by various organizations, must first be assembled. This greatly reduces the possibility of mishaps and unintentional launches, improving the security of our nuclear weapons.

Similarly, first use of nuclear weapons would require a massive increase in India's nuclear delivery capabilities. There is yet no evidence suggesting that India's missile production has increased dramatically in recent times. Moreover, India is yet to induct the Multiple Reentry

Vehicle (MRV) technology in its missiles, which is fundamental to eliminating hardened nuclear targets.

A number of critical points need to be contemplated with care. Serious consideration needs to be given to a more realistic doctrine. The construction of an optimal minimum deterrence doctrine should be based on extensive as well as a careful scrutiny of strategic history. The concept of “assured/secure second strike capability” has to be reconsidered. Its primary function is to encourage the open-ended expansion of nuclear arsenals, which may benefit the sectional interests of specific organizations, but not national security interests. Careful consideration needs to be given to the numbers and types of weapons systems desirable for effective deterrence. Excessive augmentation of capabilities wastes resources that would be better utilised for other needs. Above all, it is time for officials to obtain a better understanding of the requirements of nuclear deterrence. Nuclear weapons constitute a unique kind of instrument of force, one which has obliterated the gap between political decision makers and military practitioners of war. Political responsibility requires that policy makers come to grips with the complexities of the “nuclear revolution.”

WAY FORWARD

India should continue to adhere to its NFU policy because it has enabled India to benefit greatly on the global stage. India's nuclear restraint was the reason Japan just inked a nuclear agreement. India intends to implement such a policy, which will include planning and spending on advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems, complex command and control systems, and decisions about which targets to attack first. All doctrines require regular revisions, and India's situation is no different. It is crucial to think strategically about every issue given how quickly India's strategic environment is changing. However, if Indian authorities do feel the need to re-evaluate the country's nuclear doctrine, they should be aware of the associated implications. Only if the costs and advantages of a proposed policy change are thoroughly explored and contested can a sound policy discussion follow. Indian's nuclear doctrine is the most responsible doctrine which aims at providing the minimum credible deterrent. It is a consensus document and does not restrict the country from exercising its nuclear weapon options in any manner. It offers complete elasticity in deciding the number of nuclear weapons India should possess. Justice Mishra^{xvi} said “Indian civilization ethos was

“blessed with the power of assimilation of different streams of ideas and faiths, as we want to improve and not impose our culture upon others, which may amount to violation of human rights”.

India’s doctrine of nuclear policy is a manifestation of its past ideology that prohibits the use of

weapons of mass destruction, which only harm humanity. It has been reflected both in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata when the use of weapons of mass destruction was prohibited.

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security is a dynamic concept and all doctrines needs periodic reviews. Same is the case with India. If Indian policymakers feel a need to review the nation’s nuclear doctrine, they should be cognizant of the costs involved in doing so. Also, India must gradually revise its posture of active deterrence to some form of dissuasive deterrence or any equivalent tactic by building up its infrastructure along the border and improving the surveillance and warning capabilities among other things.

Like India, China too has a NFU policy so it provides an opportunity to work jointly towards a global no first use nuclear order. Our policy of No First Use has many upsides, not all of them related to nuclear conflict. Unlike countries such as China and the US, India does not regularly release publications detailing its nuclear doctrine, or shifts therein. This ambiguity has some advantages of its own, but some further clarity pertaining to this subject is desperately needed. The official doctrine today exists merely as a press release summarizing few points, with all other statements made offhand, with no great depth to them. Whether we have to turn to these different strategies, or simply make minor changes to our existing doctrine remains to be seen. A sound policy debate can only ensue if the costs and benefits of a purported policy shift are discussed and debated widely. To be concise, while it is prudent to revise policies as and when the political wind and needs of the country changes, a progressive policy like NFU must be encouraged in fickle times that we live in and not be in doubt of. India should be proud for setting an example for other countries for showing restraint and deterrence, a virtue becoming increasingly rare. Yet, security has to be the priority of any nation and if push comes to shove, India must not back from presenting a strong front to maintain peace. Hence, adhering to NFU displays strong and meaningful commitment to nuclear disarmament and must be India’s stance for as long as possible without compromising its security

CONCLUSION

Stating that “India is proof that democracies can deliver”, Mr. Jaishankar said the country’s neighborhood first policy is “clearly associated with a generous and non reciprocal approach to our immediate proximities”. India’s No First Use Doctrine as rightly pointed out by its critics is a defensive policy rather than being an assertive one. It has its down side; however, it is the most pragmatic policy that suits India’s interests from time to time. However, India’s defensive policy shouldn’t be taken for granted by its notorious neighbours. Hence, revision of nuclear policy according to the changing needs of the Country is vital. In doing so, India must keep its interests in other domains like economical, diplomacy in mind because globalization has increased the inter – dependence of various arenas.

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^{xv}"Second strike capability" is an assured capability of an armed force to respond to a nuclear attack with its own nuclear weapons

^{xvi} Dipak Misra (born 3 October 1953) is an Indian jurist who served as the 45th Chief *Justice* of India from 28 August 2017 till 2 October 2018.