

INDIA'S NUCLEAR POLICY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

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India's nuclear policy as initiated by late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru soon after independence, while aiming at attaining complete self-sufficiency and self-reliance in the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, precluded the development of nuclear weapons. At the same time it remained averse to signing the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), because of its discriminatory nature. This policy has continued to be followed for the last fifty years or so not only by the successive Congress governments but also by the non-Congress governments that made short appearances in between during the period. Even the nuclear explosion conducted by India in 1974 could hardly be termed as a deviation from this policy. With little or no follow-up action one is inclined to even doubt that the Pokharan test was conducted under any well thought out plan even for the utilisation of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, let alone believe that it to be a precursor of a weapon development programme. In retrospect it would appear that the whole drama was enacted to give a fillip to the tottering government of Mrs Indira Gandhi. The daringness with which Mrs Gandhi had the test conducted against the wishes of the Super Powers, certainly made a heroin of her and greatly refurbished her personal image at home, but coming at a stage when we are still so dependent on others for the supply of nuclear fuel, material and technology, the explosion did more harm than good to our national interests in this regard. With no intentions of proceeding further in this direction, we unnecessarily put the nuclear powers on the alert, who have since been straining every nerve to retard, if not halt, India's progress in the nuclear field. It was, perhaps, to retrieve lost ground that Mr Morarji Desai, who headed the Government soon after the Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE), surrendered India's further right to such PNE in its nuclear policy that was to be followed thenceforth. The present UF Government led by Mr Deve Gowda is also committed to the continuance of the nuclear policy of its predecessors, with its own little contribution of refusal to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Whatever little variations there may have been in India's nuclear policy over the years, it has consistently been guided by the country not envisaging, in the past and at present, any nuclear threat to its security. Even the CTBT is not being signed more on the ground that it is not linked with a comprehensive nuclear disarmament, than any concern for national security. The NPT has also not been signed because of its discriminatory nature and not because of India's intentions of becoming a nuclear power. One wonders what could be the basis for our complacency with regard to our national security, when we are faced with the twin nuclear threat from Pakistan and China. The threat is probably being realised but while the threat from Pakistan, is, perhaps, being considered too insignificant to be taken cognisance of that from China is being wished away due to the tremendous effort that would be required to meet it.

It has to be appreciated that India has a long standing dispute with China – not only over the border, (about which we are generally aware), but also over the (not too publicized), Chinese claim on large portions of Indian territory including the whole of Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Assam and Bengal, as their "lost territories" the regaining of which forms part of their foreign policy objectives. Interestingly these Indian territories continue to be shown as part of China on maps inherited by the present Chinese Government from Chiang Kai Shek regime. The matter was taken up by Nehru with Chou En Lai sometimes in the mid 1950s but the latter is known to have evaded the issue and the problem remains where it was till today. The Chinese claim may

look ridiculous today but so long as it remains on their agenda it must be treated as a threat to our security. Who in India has imagined that the Chinese refusal to accept the Mac Mahon Line at the Simla Conference in 1911 would one day become a cause for a war with India in 1962. It must be remembered that while it may not take time for the international political scenario to change for the worse, it takes time to develop military capability for meeting the needs security that the new situation may create. A nation's sagacity lies in foreseeing the threat to its security and then preparing for it accordingly.

Needless to say that any threat that comes from a country that possesses nuclear weapons must be perceived as a nuclear threat. So be it in the case of the threat from China. India has grown many-fold since those fateful days of 1962 and is likely to grow further, (even if reluctantly) because of force of circumstances. A stage may come when a confrontation with a conventionally powerful India, leads China, made arrogant by its nuclear power, to a state of impatience, and with no fear of retaliation, it is tempted to make short work of war by resorting to the use of nuclear weapons: just as the Allies were tempted during the Second World War. India cannot be found wanting in this respect then. For that eventuality India shall have to start planning and preparing today. It may be argued as a nuclear war-head would not be able to distinguish the 'bourgeoisie' and the 'reactionary' from the 'proletariat', China with its policy objective of fomenting world revolution would not be inclined to use strategic nuclear weapons of mass destruction for fear of tarnishing its professed image of the "liberators". But what can prevent China from using tactical nuclear weapons against the Indian Army. There was a time when it was universally accepted that any use of tactical nuclear weapons would invariably escalate into a large scale thermo-nuclear war. However with the advancement in the tactical nuclear weapons technology, which has made possible the development of "clean" tactical weapons of low yield, an increasing war fighting role for tactical nuclear weapons is now foreseen. The terrain over which China would have to fight with India is ideally suited for the use of such weapons. The area (Arunachal and Ladakh) is under-developed and sparsely populated affording opportunities for dealing with military targets in isolation and without giving cause to the rest of the world to protest. If we do not possess any retaliatory capability, what can prevent China from exploiting this advantage in war.

The utility of nuclear military power (like conventional military power) does not lie in its actual use alone. Its importance also lies in just possessing it and in threatening its use. During peace a country's interests are promoted through diplomacy. But for diplomacy to be successful its methods of persuasion and compromise must be backed by the threat of use of force. With the Chinese diplomacy backed by their nuclear military strength and our base purely on persuasion and compromise, we would be miserably exposed to the worst type of political black-mail during negotiations for the settlement of our dispute with China. Pakistan too seems to be trying to improve its prospects during any future negotiations with India by convincing India that it is in possession of the "bomb", through deliberate "leaks" by authoritative sources. What chances could we have of judicious settlement of our disputes with China and Pakistan if we are to impose on ourselves a permanent military inferiority through a voluntary ban on the development of nuclear weapons? It is no consolation that we have kept our options open. Options could act as the means to an end and not an end by themselves.