
India's Nuclear 'No First Use' Policy: Implications of Potential Revocation

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Regional Studies
Vol 42, Issue 1
pp.96-129
© Author(s)

<http://irs.org.pk>

P-ISSN: 0254-7988

E-ISSN: 2959-5459

Date of Acceptance: 15 April 2024

Published Online: 25 July 2024

Abstract

Since the inception of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in 2014, India has been exploring options to maintain the formality of the No First Use (NFU) policy while continuously preparing for first use capacity. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term, India may reconsider its NFU policy, which used to be the cornerstone of its nuclear doctrine. This likely intention of BJP and shift in nuclear strategy would have far reaching implications for the region and international community. The BJP's pursuit of a more aggressive nuclear posture is rooted in its ideology of a strong and assertive India. The policy shift in Indian nuclear doctrine would be shaped by its continuous efforts of upgrading its missile arsenal. The transition in the Indian nuclear posture towards developing more sophisticated nuclear weapons as the first strike would further question the credibility of the NFU doctrine. Doubts on the credibility of Indian nuclear policy would impact global non-proliferation efforts as it may be perceived as a departure from India's commitment to responsible nuclear stewardship. Indian aspiration for a pre-emptive counterforce strike would likely create deterrence instability in the region and may escalate tensions with Pakistan. If India were to abandon NFU, Pakistan may reassess its nuclear strategy, potentially leading to a nuclear arms race and security instability in the region.

Keywords: No First Use (NFU), Credible Minimum Deterrence, nuclear doctrine, non-proliferation, counter-force strike.

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Introduction

Since the Cold War, the devastating potential of nuclear capability coupled with the international opposition to the employment of these weapons has forced nuclear powers to keep their nuclear policies ambiguous and partially undeclared. It remains uncertain how these nuclear weapons states will behave and what their actual deterrent postures will be.¹ Moreover, it is important to understand that these nuclear doctrines are not fixed and could change depending upon the nature of evolving threats and technological achievements, which are often well thought-out and symbolic of a country's long-term ambitions.

India's nuclear doctrine is an important variable determining nuclear stability in South Asia, especially because the doctrine has been generally considered to be based on the policy of restraint, i.e., 'No First Use' (NFU) status. India's declaratory policy of NFU seems to be in transition since 2014. This indication of change was first seen when the BJP promised in its election manifesto to "revise and update" India's nuclear doctrine to "make it relevant to challenges of current time."² Besides numerous think tanks and ex-government officials, the same was firmly reiterated by the former Indian Defence Minister Mr Rajnath Singh at Pokhran in August 2019, when he stated that the "Indian nuclear doctrine is linked to evolving circumstances."

The statement was an indicator that the Indian nuclear policy is vulnerable to change. It seems that India is building the foundation for an eventual abandonment of NFU or change in its declared nuclear doctrine. At the very least, it is striving to provide policymakers with options beyond NFU, focusing on greater flexibility, and the ability to deny early use and escalation dominance to Pakistan. Sporadic public pronouncements by political and bureaucratic leaders in the recent past regarding the imperatives of doctrinal revision or shift have generated enormous anxieties in South Asian strategic discourse,

giving rise to varied interpretations of India's likely pathways to nuclear use.

The remarks of Indian senior policymakers and approaches in New Delhi, as observed by various analysts, signify that India has now moved towards a nuclear position that Pakistan can no longer consider minimal. There are numerous explanations to consider that Credible Minimum Deterrence may be New Delhi's declaratory doctrine, but the deterrence signalling of operational nuclear posture differs from India's official nuclear doctrine against Pakistan and China. A sufficient ambiguity exists in the nuclear doctrine because the Indian government has used broader terms like 'massive retaliation' and 'unacceptable damage' without elaborating on how these may be executed.

Emerging debates regarding India's NFU policy suggest that the current Indian government of BJP is considering revisiting its nuclear doctrine of NFU to preemptive First Use. This ambiguity and mixed deterrence are creating rough grounds for the credibility and firmness of the Indian strategic posture, which will continue to weaken in an environment where the triangular nuclear rivalry between China, India, and Pakistan exacerbates the security trilemma.

Evolution of Indian Nuclear Doctrine

Indian aspirations for a nuclear program can be traced back to Partition. The first institution of this kind, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), was formed on 19 December 1945, with Dr Homi Jehangir Bhabha as its first Director. After its independence, the government of India passed the Atomic Energy Act, on 15 April 1948, leading to the establishment of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC). At that time, Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru declared:³

"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. [...] 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."

India's earlier decision to develop the complete nuclear fuel cycle allowed it to easily acquire technical capability to build nuclear weapons. In November 1964, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri authorised theoretical work on the Subterranean Nuclear Explosion for Peaceful Purposes (SNEPP). India conducted its first nuclear test on 18 May 1974, described by the Indian government as a 'peaceful nuclear explosion'. India's aspiration to be a nuclear state lies in the latent desire for recognition as a world power.

India released its official nuclear doctrine in January 2003.⁴ Its details, however, are not fully known. The summary which was made public indicates the official doctrine is heavily anchored on the 17 August 1999 draft version, though it also has some significant differences. The doctrine espouses a normative posture and calls the weapons the gravest threat to humanity, peace, and stability. It is based on three main pillars: 'Credible Minimum Deterrence' having sufficient, survivable and operationally prepared nuclear forces, with a robust command and control system and effective intelligence with early warning capabilities; 'No-First Use Posture', massive nuclear retaliation only against a nuclear (and chemical and biological) attack on the Indian territory or on the Indian forces anywhere; and 'political control over nuclear weapons use'.⁵ Salient aspects of the doctrine are as follows:

- a peacetime posture aimed at convincing any potential aggressor that any; threat of use of nuclear weapons against India shall invoke measures to counter the threat;
- maintain a posture of No First Use;
- retaliation to first use against India will be massive to inflict unacceptable damage;

- In an event of major attack on India or Indian armed forces by biological/chemical weapons, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons, anywhere;
- Highly effective conventional capability shall be maintained, along with the nuclear, to maintain a high threshold;
- maintain a credible second-strike capability.

An NFU pledge refers to any authoritative statement by a nuclear capable state to never be the first in using these weapons in a conflict, reserving them strictly to retaliate in the aftermath of a nuclear attack against its territory or military personnel. These pledges are a component of nuclear declaratory policies, however, there can be no diplomatic arrangement to verify or enforce a declaratory NFU pledge and such pledges alone do not affect capabilities. States with such pledges would technically still be able to use nuclear weapons first in a conflict and their adversaries have generally not trusted NFU assurances.⁶ Cardinals of NFU generally include superiority in conventional forces over adversary, capacity to survive the adversary's first strike and retain sufficient capability to launch second strike in addition to provision of political and moral cover to keep enhancing one's conventional forces and weapon systems.

India adopted an NFU policy to project itself as a responsible nuclear state. However, policy statements of its political leadership on different occasions do not commensurate with the stated policy. India, by giving the nuclear doctrine in clear terms, has proven that nuclear weapons equilibrium is not only a question of technology and integration, but also perceptions and intent. Unspecified nuclear threat and target give India the leverage to keep 'Credible Minimum Deterrence' open-ended, with no limits on weapons stockpiles, delivery means, and research and development. Whether the Indian nuclear doctrine of 2003 is still operational or is subject to change is

doubtful since its declaration. At the time of its announcement, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's following contradictory statement made the NFU policy questionable right from its inception:

"If [Pakistan] thinks we are going to wait for it to launch the first bomb, it is wrong. If Pakistan wants to avoid a nuclear holocaust, it should accept our proposal for a mutual pact against nuclear aggression."

Since 2014, this trend has advanced in nuclear rhetoric. Empirical evidence and Indian policymakers' rounds of statements further undermine the credibility of the 2003 nuclear doctrine. There seems to be a growing convergence amongst Indian policymakers taking the view that India can explore a pre-emptive/preventive strike against Pakistan without changing its 2003 nuclear doctrine. Massive investments in space and cyber capabilities, operationalisation of the nuclear triad and testing of Anti-Satellite Weapons (ASAT) capabilities undermine the very declaratory aspect of NFU and allude towards acquisition of nuclear war fighting capabilities.

Contemporary Global and Regional Nuclear Environment

To put things into context in relation to India's nuclear doctrine vis-à-vis the overall global nuclear environment, there is a need to evaluate the prevalent contemporary doctrines as well as current nuclear dictates. Under the prevailing Global Nuclear Dictates, the international community is largely averse to a military conflict especially between nuclear states that have the potential to transcend into a full-fledged nuclear exchange. However, exceptions are in place, i.e., the United States dominates the global nuclear order, amply demonstrated by its unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and its termination of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Russia. Similarly, the signing of the Major Defence Partner Agreement between India and US has created much space for India to improve its strategic

capability. It is seriously altering the balance of power in India's favour and has the potential to disrupt the strategic stability in South Asia. The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), Zangger Committee, and other non-proliferation regimes have become a policy tool in the hands of the US and its allies to advance their interests. This may prove potentially destabilising for states not aligned with US interests. A positive shift in the world's view on Indian nuclear programs is largely attributed to the Indo-US nuclear deal and enhanced Indian global political-economic relevance. On the contrary, Pakistan's nuclear program is viewed with suspicion due to proliferation concerns.

India's endeavour under the garb of achieving strategic parity against China has complicated the Indo-Pak equation, generating an arms 'creep', if not an arms race, in South Asia. The Indo-Pak force differential, if it continues to grow, has the potential to stress the military strategy to respond, thereby strongly emphasising nuclear capability. India's growing nuclear capability supplemented by gigantic investment in conventional weaponry obliges Pakistan to adopt 'Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD)' within the ambit of 'Credible Minimum Deterrence'. On account of geographical contiguity, economic implications, and intrinsic technological limitations, the ambitious Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) program of India may not acquire its desired dividends. Nonetheless, Indian war hysteria following the 2019 Pulwama episode exposes possible shifts in Indian doctrine leading to a 'conflict spiral'.

Indo-Pak Deterrence and Strategic Stability in South Asia

Strategic stability in South Asia is a complex phenomenon due to ideological divergences, unresolved territorial disputes, and geographic contiguity between the two traditional rivals. The Indo-US and Pak-China strategic partnerships have direct impacts on South Asia's security environment. Though China is a factor in Indian military calculations, it is more about threat projection, as anti-China mantras

garner acceptability in the West. India has both skilfully manipulated the US containment policy of China, and has modernised and enhanced its conventional and strategic capability with a primary focus against Pakistan. The existing force differential has put Pakistan in a disadvantageous position. However, the introduction of nuclear weapons has brought a 'Stability-Instability paradox' to South Asia, liable to create more uncertainties and instabilities. The equation may impel both countries' leadership to formulate hasty decisions, which could irreparably jeopardise the entire strategic stability structure of South Asia.

India's nuclear aspirations overtly carry the threat to only two other nuclear nations in South Asia, i.e., Pakistan and China. Yet, given India's diplomatic and media influence in the region and the in-built flexibility of its nuclear policy, India retains an ability to label any state in South Asia as siding with China or Pakistan in any anti-state incident, and can use its nuclear potential to coerce the given nation. Nevertheless, the pursuit of an ambitious Indian nuclear program has greater implications on Pakistan, while China comprehensively dominates over India in every domain.

Indo-Pak Deterrence Objectives

Having deliberated on the threat potential of India's nuclear program, it is worth considering the deterrence objectives being employed towards the attainment of definite objectives both by Pakistan and India.⁷ India wants to deter Pakistan from using Sub Conventional Warfare (SCW) during conventional war, deter Pakistan from threatening or initiating nuclear use, and persuade Pakistan to accept the status quo in Kashmir. On the flip side, Pakistan asserts that there is 'no space for war' under nuclear overhang. Similarly, it aims to deter India from conventional military threat. The strategic face-off between Pakistan and India has varied from sub-conventional protracted conflict to a long-drawn-out stand-off, from war limited to

Kashmir to conventional war. Therefore, it can be inferred that the initially covert and subsequently overt nuclear capabilities succeeded in averting a full-scale conventional war.

Upgradation of Indian Deterrence Regime

To curtail Pakistan's freedom of action in the sub-conventional domain, offset the mobilisation differential in the conventional domain, and limit Pakistan's nuclear targeting options, the biggest Indian challenge is to maintain relevance of its conventional superiority under the nuclear environment. To address these challenges India is battling the course in numerous domains.

The Indian military's 'doctrinal shift' entails serious implications for South Asian security. It assumes that it can undertake a surgical strike owing to its strategic alliance with the US, and its geo-economic relevance. However, it ignores the fact that Pakistan's conventional capability will make it costly for India in case of any misadventure. The response to any surgical strike would be well-calibrated which may push India to escalate the conflict to avoid embarrassment and, ultimately, a limited war has potential to escalate into a full-scale one.

India is pursuing to capitalise on its potential in information operations, the cyber domain, Artificial Intelligence (AI), miniaturisation, military reconnaissance satellites, and precision-guided munition capabilities. In the military domain the use of these technologies is aimed to create an offensive military doctrine that could help in undermining Pakistan's deterrence.

Though India projects its ballistic missile program as defensive in nature, it is pursuing the development of 'active defence' measures, i.e., the introduction of theatre missile defence; an integral measure of offensive deterrence to conduct pre-emptive or preventive nuclear strikes with impunity of Pakistan's retaliatory nuclear strikes.⁸

In 2019, ASAT capability made India capable of compromising Pakistan's strategic intelligence, guidance, and communication

satellites, which are essentially required to accurately engage Indian counterforce or counter-value targets.⁹ The capability is being labelled as 'Space Deterrence', in order to counter Chinese Space superiority, as well as to gain dominance over Pakistan. This puts Pakistan's strategic force projection at risk of being detected in an earlier timeframe. The conventional force differential compels India to craft space for limited war or non-contact warfare with Pakistan. It also labels Pakistan's strategic capability as a 'bluff' to underplay the established deterrence in the region.

Pakistan's Nuclear Policy and Reinforcement of Deterrence Regime

Pakistan has not formally declared its nuclear doctrine. However, some aspects of nuclear doctrine can be gleaned from the statements of different government officials since overt nuclearisation in 1998. These include the embracing of 'Full Spectrum Deterrence' within the ambit of 'Credible Minimum Deterrence', following the 'First Use' policy for nuclear weapons, eschewing a strategic arms race with India, supporting non-discriminatory arms control regimes, and promoting stringent controls on the export of nuclear technology.

Given its relative conventional inferiority, reliance on comprehensive deterrence is exceedingly vital for Pakistan to achieve its deterrence objectives through maintaining full spectrum deterrence. This comprises a variety of strategic and low yield nuclear weapons on land, air, and sea, designed to comprehensively deter Indian aggression. Its future development is predicated on qualitative balancing of its conventional and strategic capabilities rather than a quantitative arms race pursuit and maintains ambiguity in thresholds and force quantum. Pakistan maintains a policy of a responsible nuclear weapons state, follows rational behaviour, and adopts all possible means, channels, and mechanisms to stabilise deterrence and avoid war.

Evaluating Reasons of Indian Re-consideration of NFU

India's temptation to alter its NFU policy has accentuated uncertainty and instability in an already tense environment in South Asia.¹⁰ While such a move may be appealing for India's far-right electorate and the country's politico-military establishment, it distances India from its commitment with the international community on its stature as a responsible nuclear state. Notwithstanding the domestic political reasons, India's rethinking of its NFU policy is attributable to certain other factors as well.

The concept of NFU has largely remained untapped by the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (P5 states), with the exception of China.¹¹ India's strategic community feels it to be an opportune time to capitalise on its bloated diplomatic and economic status, to progressively deviate from its declaratory NFU policy, and that such a deviation may potentially find acceptance amongst global powers.

India's NFU policy has been domestically questioned as a sign of weakness, particularly by right-wing nationalists. The argument goes that it ostensibly allows Pakistan to take initiative in the sub-conventional domain while restricting India's options militarily, placing India in a disadvantageous position. Therefore, in letting go of the NFU policy, India could deter and force Pakistan against its alleged use of proxies in India.

Unlike in 1998, India now has technological superiority and has invested in developing indigenous ballistic missile offensive deterrence and acquiring missile defence systems for defensive deterrence, which could, theoretically, be used to intercept any 'residual' strike that a first strike failed to destroy.¹² An overzealous ambition of occupying a place amongst global powers has emboldened the Indian oligarchy to *volte-face* its NFU policy. There is little reason to believe that fears about China are behind India's shift in

nuclear thinking about NFU.¹³ However, under the existing and growing conventional military asymmetry, India continues to invest in long-range delivery capability to deter China with its nuclear capability and projects that it cannot be dominated by the latter.¹⁴

Implications for Regional Strategic Stability

India's perceived abandonment of the NFU policy would have lasting repercussions on regional strategic stability. Pakistan's opaque nuclear strategy on one side and India's massive retaliation posture on the other side have effectively restrained the two rivals. Since overt nuclearisation, the adversarial relationship between India and Pakistan has escalated several rungs, but neither has invoked the nuclear option. However, with a nuclear first-use policy coupled with counterforce strategy, every future crisis risks a potential strategic nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan with sufficient room for strategic miscalculation from either side.¹⁵

Pakistan has never been convinced of India's moralistic abhorrence for nuclear weapons and self-imposed NFU. Thus, India's NFU is a unilateral decision that can be revoked any time. However, due to the enduring distrust between Indian and Pakistan, India's shift from NFU to a first-use or its adoption of an ambiguous posture would exacerbate Pakistan's security concerns and undermine South Asia's deterrence-based stability. The growing Indo-US cooperation, and the ambiguity shrouding the narrative would further reduce space for any dialogue or worthwhile Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) between Pakistan and India.

Revocation of the NFU policy by India would create a condition of 'reciprocal fear of surprise attack' as both India and Pakistan will be worried that the other might launch first. Demand and race for fielding robust surveillance technology and systems would also grow. The entire nuclear discourse would be dominated by the competition to win a nuclear war, rather than striving to deter it.

India, were it to abandon its NFU policy, would further stress deterrence stability in the region. It would put the existing strategic stability under serious stress by challenging all of its components: it would add to first-strike instability as each side fears a disarming first strike, accentuating the 'use or lose them' dilemma. This in turn will lead to crisis instability as both the belligerents might jump several rungs of the escalation ladder during a crisis situation, gravely implicating both Pakistan and India.

Implications for Pakistan

The Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal will enhance India's fissile material stockpile, as the US supply of fuel for the civilian nuclear program will free up fuel from domestic sources to be used in increasing nuclear weapons inventory. Thus, India's nuclear program will be significantly strengthened due to access and availability of sophisticated high-end nuclear technologies and will further increase the military differential between India and Pakistan.

Nuclear weapons are the ultimate resort for Pakistan to deter war, manifested through an ambiguous nuclear threshold.¹⁶ If India alters its nuclear policy to First Use, Pakistan's nuclear doctrine and arsenal will have to undergo proportionate changes to adapt to changing circumstances.

With India abandoning its NFU policy, Pakistan will have to enhance the survivability of its nuclear arsenal by increasing their mobility and discreetness. The sea-leg of the nuclear triad thus becomes indispensable for Pakistan to survive a first disarming attack and subsequently retaliate punitively.¹⁷

To respond to a first strike by India, Pakistan would have to adopt a capability of punitive retaliation. Operationalisation of such a response capability would require an excessive number of survivable warheads and credible delivery means that can survive the first strike. Pakistan's existing economic compulsions provide no room for such an

expansion in nuclear forces arsenal and doing so would also plunge Pakistan into an arms race trap. To counter Indian ballistic missiles, Pakistan would have to consider an advanced missile defence system. Notwithstanding the much-debated success of Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD), Pakistan neither has nor can afford to induct a BMD system. Therefore, an alternative in the form of Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs) would be operationalised at the earliest to counter India's defensive deterrence.

India's NFU policy has enabled both Pakistan and India to keep their nuclear arsenal in a de-mated or recessed deterrence posture rather than a ready deterrent posture which reduces the chances of accidental launch of nuclear weapons. A first strike policy by India would compel Pakistan to keep nuclear weapons and delivery systems in a mated form thus enhancing chances of strategic miscalculation.

Implications for India

Abandoning the NFU policy would globally damage India's projected image as a non-violent (Ahimsa), responsible nuclear state that follows a policy of restraint. Moreover, it may also shore up challenges for India attaining NSG membership. Deserting the NFU policy would require massive investment in nuclear weapons and delivery systems. If India does opt for first use, it would require a far bigger nuclear weapons inventory for counterforce targeting, as eliminating Pakistan's nuclear capabilities would require simultaneous employment of multiple warheads and delivery systems.

To manifest an offensive nuclear posture by adopting a counterforce targeting strategy, India would need highly effective Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities which would provide India the confidence of taking out its adversary's entire arsenal in first strike. However, given the dispersed and mobile attributes of Pakistan's nuclear forces, this is nearly an impossible task.

Abandoning the NFU policy would lower Pakistan's nuclear threshold and thus the perceived space for conventional war. Strategically, this is contrary to India's aspirations to carve space for war in the conventional realm. Thus, it would be a self-defeating notion in itself, and is divergent to Indian deterrence objectives.¹⁸

India's NFU policy or its revocation is not only implicating Pakistan but may also have reverberations for China, with the potential to spark changes in Chinese NFU policy. An Indian change in NFU policy may trigger cascading effects that would erode the existing global nuclear stability and substantially increase the possibility of strategic miscalculation. An overt first-strike policy coupled with BMD would lower Pakistan's nuclear threshold. Concurrently, it may increase the likelihood of nuclear conflict in future conflict while 'use or lose' pressure on both sides would accentuate unintended escalations.

Way Forward for Pakistan

It is imprudent to believe that despite substantive changes in the strategic environment and India's enhanced global stature due to its economic and diplomatic relevance, India's nuclear doctrine would remain frozen since its last official pronouncement in January 2003. Being cognizant of the environment and statements from strata of strategic community as well as political leadership point us towards potential changes in nuclear doctrine, in the temporal and cognitive domain. NFU or First Use may be seen now as formalities in Indian nuclear doctrine. Therefore, Pakistan should not be complacent and should remain prepared for all possible scenarios.

Besides maintaining sufficient conventional capability to respond to multi-faceted threats, Pakistan must ensure a robust nuclear capability primarily to deter aggression and ultimately, if needed, to inflict unacceptable damage to the adversary. 'Full Spectrum Deterrence' within the ambit of 'Credible Minimum

Deterrence' should be progressively strengthened with selective force development, modernisation, and absorption of latest technology to reiterate its own resolve through capability enhancement. Furthermore, the will to use the nuclear option against Indian aggression must be explicitly exhibited to reinforce its own deterrence regime.

Pakistan may continue to retain an ambiguous nuclear posture as it best serves its deterrence regime. Keeping India uncertain about Pakistan's nuclear options through strategic communication by formal and informal channels (think tanks, ex-government officials, seminars, etc.) may be deployed to address arising challenges. In response to India's acquisition and operationalisation of triad capability, Pakistan needs to redefine its current Nuclear Alert levels apropos to the threat from India, by reinforcing nuclear triad. Within the ambit of Triad, designated assets may be kept ready at all times under well-defined circumstances to forestall a pre-emptive strike, for maintaining a matching capability at each rung, to deter misadventure by the adversary.

Pakistan must pursue qualitative improvement while avoiding a race for quantitative parity. It must maintain conventional deterrence to reduce pressure from strategic deterrence. It will also benefit from the adoption of selective advancement in force development strategy to maintain technological and qualitative edge in key fields including robust second-strike capability and acquisition of disruptive and smart technologies. There is a requirement of keeping a fine balance between force development and modernisation, and negating the likelihood of falling prey to India's USA-USSR syndrome trap. A prudent whole-of-nation response, therefore, becomes imperative for ensuring security of the state while remaining economically viable. Nuclear capability singularly is not a panacea for all challenges, therefore, warranting an unequivocal sync response by all Elements of National Power (EoNP) for deterrence to be effective. Furthermore, it

will also allow our conventional and military strategy to operate more effectively and open response options with less stress on nuclear strategy. Pakistan must reinforce the perception that India's option of splendid first strike is ambitious as it would cause a serious reprisal by Pakistan. In such an eventuality, Pakistan might suffer significant damage, but India will also cease to exist.

Besides diversifying military and nuclear response options, Pakistan should focus on proactive diplomacy to refrain India from revoking NFU. Pakistan must pursue an upbeat foreign policy and undertake extensive Information Operations (IO) to project that preferential US behaviour towards India has created a strategic imbalance in South Asia and will lead to an unending arms race. Pakistan must highlight at all international forums and organisations the fallout of India's growing nuclear belligerence alongside its consequential effect, and project its own imperatives to safeguard sovereignty and national security.

Concerted efforts are required in consonance with China to be undertaken by exposing Indian nuclear proliferation history and the very cause of the creation of NSG, so as to block 'Only India's' NSG membership. Pakistan must highlight inconsistencies in Indian nuclear policy, linked to the irresponsible behaviour of the BJP-led Indian government, and lastly, Pakistan must maintain the status quo regarding The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (affects quality), Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (affects quantity) and Missile Technology Control Regime (restricts missile development) being preferential against Pakistan in order to safeguard its own interests.

Conclusion

As India and Pakistan are both *de facto* nuclear powers, they must realise the deadly arena that they have entered. A small slip, a misjudgement of events, a hasty decision based on erroneous information, or a display of temper could result in a situation where

there would be no winners, only losers. Not only would cities vanish altogether, and millions die in a matter of seconds, but generations to come would suffer the consequences of a nuclear holocaust. The BJP is still sitting pretty on the Indian throne and its ideological extremism could be devastating.

The NFU policy has served as a barrier to nuclear expansion in the region and contributed to regional stability for over two decades. Its revocation would be a dangerous and irresponsible move. Nonetheless, NFU of nuclear weapons alone will not prevent a war that could lead to a nuclear exchange between the two nations. Therefore, each country must adopt a responsible nuclear posture and uphold an environment that is safe for coming generations.

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