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# INDIA'S THIRD-TIER NUCLEAR STATE DILEMMA

*N Plus 20?*

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Amit Gupta

What political and security advantages can a third-tier nuclear state derive in the current international system? This article argues that nuclearization has left India with a third-tier nuclear force that will be difficult to use to acquire international power and prestige. Instead, it will have to use nuclearization as an instrument for pursuing broader foreign policy goals that have a universalistic application. This is because nuclearization did not lead to a discernible shift in India's power and international status. Instead, India has emerged as a low-level nuclear power and thus been unable to obtain the advantages that first- and second-tier nuclear powers possess. As the subtitle suggests, the situation is one of N plus 20—one of several states to have gone nuclear and thus diminished the status and value that comes from acquiring nuclear weapons.

## Background

In 1998 India moved away from its policy of nuclear ambiguity or opacity to overly develop its nuclear weapons force. To discuss India's goals, it is necessary to understand that Indian nuclear ambiguity was different from that of other states practicing this policy—Israel, Pakistan, and South Africa. The latter three countries saw nuclear weapons as providing security from their adversaries. Greater emphasis was placed on developing a credible nuclear capability. Little was said, however, by any of these countries on the political advantages of possessing nuclear weapons. India has been different from

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other de facto nuclear states in that its policy makers and analysts have always recognized the central role of nuclear weapons in shaping the international political environment.

In contrast, India tested its first nuclear device in 1974 and then tried to project itself as an exceptional state by suggesting that it was abjuring from producing and further testing of other nuclear weapons. Unlike other nations, through the 1980s, India sought to promote global nuclear disarmament. At the same time, some Indian analysts have suggested that the country now had a special place in international arms control affairs because of the advantages conferred to it by its new technological prowess.

In this special issue, Deepa Ollapally's article shows that there has been a time lag between the development of strategic thought in India and the actual development of nuclear weapons and associated delivery systems. Thus, India undertook its nuclear tests without a clearly defined doctrine on its usage. W. P. S. Sidhu has argued that this was the path taken by every state that had weaponized in the past.<sup>1</sup> But India faces the same problems that late-developing states faced in the move toward development. Its nuclearization took place in an environment where other states not only had highly developed nuclear forces but also had created coherent plans for their usage.

To develop nuclear weapons in such an international setting without a clear doctrine for deployment and usage was problematic. It created confusion among established nuclear states and the international community about what India's motives were, who the proposed force was directed against, and what type of force structure was likely to emerge? Without an explicit definition of these goals and a declared commitment to building a comprehensive force structure it became difficult to take India seriously as a new nuclear power. On the other hand, Indian policy makers seemed to be suggesting that simply testing a set of nuclear devices, reportedly including a thermonuclear one, would automatically catapult India into the league of advanced nuclear states. India thus expected that a second round of testing would fulfill both military and political objectives. Militarily, it would work as a deterrent against both Pakistan and China. Politically, it would provide prestige and greater status in the international system. On both counts India's expectations were unfulfilled.

Overt nuclearization did not automatically make India into a major power. Instead, sanctions were imposed on the country and its tacit claims to being a declared nuclear weapons state were rejected. It was this realization that led to the demand by some Indian analysts for a diversified nuclear force struc-

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1. W. P. S. Sidhu, "India's Nuclear Use Doctrine," in *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons*, eds. Peter R. Lavoy, Scott D. Sagan, and James J. Wirtz (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 127.

ture with global reach. These analysts have demanded the creation of a full-scale nuclear force that would provide a second strike capability and eventually include intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)—thus giving the country the ability to target any nation in the world. The logic was that with a theater-based nuclear force India would not be taken seriously in international circles. The public espousal of a draft nuclear doctrine provided enough leeway for a future Indian government to develop such a force structure.

## The Draft Nuclear Doctrine

In late 1998, the Indian government set up a National Security Council. It also established a National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), initially headed by Brajesh Mishra. The NSAB also counted among its members such prominent Indian strategic analysts as K. Subrahmanyam, Bharat Karnad, and Brahma Chellany.

The NSAB issued a report that contained a draft nuclear doctrine for India. According to the report, “India’s strategic interests require effective, credible nuclear deterrence and adequate retaliatory capability should deterrence fail.” The report goes on to state that India will not engage in first use of nuclear weapons. It will neither use nor threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states. To pursue a credible minimum deterrent the country will develop forces that are “sufficient, survivable, and operationally prepared.” It will also develop a robust command and control system. The force itself will be “based on a triad of aircraft, mobile land-based missile and sea-based assets.” Survivability will be enhanced by a combination of “multiple redundant systems, mobility, dispersion, and deception.” Space-based and other assets shall be created to “provide early warning, communications, damage/detonation assessment.” Finally the Indian government will take steps to ensure both the security and safety of nuclear weapons and that “unauthorized or inadvertent activation/use of nuclear weapons does not take place and risks of accidents are avoided.”<sup>2</sup> The draft doctrine also repeats India’s desire for universal disarmament and global arms control and states that the country will continue working to achieve these goals.

The major objectives of the doctrine, therefore, are to establish a force that is survivable, will not be used first, and will be under civilian control. To make this force operational Indian analysts have drawn up plans for a nuclear

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2. The Draft Report of India’s National Security Advisory Board on Indian Nuclear Doctrine is available at the home page of the Embassy of India in the U.S. at <[http://www.indianembassy.org/policy/CTBT/nuclear\\_doctrine\\_aug\\_17\\_1999.html](http://www.indianembassy.org/policy/CTBT/nuclear_doctrine_aug_17_1999.html)>.

force that comprises from 100 to over 400 nuclear warheads.<sup>3</sup> Bharat Karnad, one of the original members of the committee that wrote the draft nuclear doctrine, wants India to have a 300–400 thermonuclear weapons with an ICBM capability.<sup>4</sup> An ICBM force would move India into the same league as the big five nuclear powers by giving it the capacity to strike targets around the world. This would not only provide it with a true deterrent capability but would also allow it, in theory, to be a key player when it comes to discussing and formulating new arms control regimes.

India also seeks to develop a naval second-strike force against both Pakistan and China. A Pakistani first strike would provide India with a warning time of seven to ten minutes, inadequate for protecting most of the latter's land-based nuclear assets. Against China, the naval deterrent comes from the fact that India's current generation of land-based missiles lacks the ability to strike the major cities along China's eastern seaboard. Similarly, its strike fighter force lacks both the range and the standoff missile capability to attack these cities.

The naval deterrent will eventually include a nuclear submarine—the Advanced Technology Vehicle (ATV)—that may be able to carry submarine launched ballistic missiles. For the time being, considerable confusion exists about the extent of the ATV project. It is not clear whether the submarine will carry ballistic or cruise missiles. In the meantime, the Indian government has leased what is believed to be an Akula-class hunter-killer submarine that can launch cruise missiles. Present capabilities, however, would permit using a sea-based version of the Prithvi short-range ballistic missile (SRBM; renamed Dhanush) aboard Indian surface vessels and the deployment of an indigenously produced submarine-launched cruise missile named Sagarika.

The air-based leg of the triad will consist of Jaguar, Sukhoi-30, and Mirage 2000 strike fighters. India is also acquiring the Tu-22M Backfire intermediate range bomber from Russia. Armed with a standoff cruise missile, which India's Defense Research Development Organization is seeking to develop, the aircraft could target cities that China values the most. In the near future India is also expected to test an ICBM (the Surya) that would give it the capability to strike China's eastern seaboard.

The nuclear doctrine as it stands eventually allows for several possibilities in force development. One is a high counterforce capability that would permit the targeting of military installations in both Pakistan and China. The second is a low counterforce capability that would permit attacking military

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3. In the 1980s Indian defense analysts were calling for forces that were in the 150-warhead range based on a triad. Since the tests the number has been around 400. See, for example, Subramaniam Swamy, "India's Defense Needs," *Hindustan Times*, July 12, 1998.

4. Bharat Karnad, "A Thermonuclear Deterrent" in *India's Nuclear Deterrent: Pokhran II and Beyond*, ed. Amitabh Mattoo (New Delhi: HarAnand, 1998), pp. 128, 139.

targets in Pakistan and a second strike capability against China. The third would be a high countervalue capability where India would have the ability to destroy cities in both Pakistan and China and through an assured second-strike capability. Finally, there could be a low counterforce capability that would be aimed primarily at Pakistan with perhaps a limited ability to target China (by striking at Chinese forces along the Sino-Indian border). In this volume, Dinshaw Mistry's article describes the developments in India's space program and suggests that these could give India both a greater strategic reach as well as a counterforce capability against Pakistan. Certainly, the delivery systems that could emerge from the space program would make this possible, but one needs to consider the technological, political, and economic constraints that would impact on the development of any of these force structures.

### Constraints on Force Development

While the draft doctrine calls for a diversified force with advanced reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities, political, technological, and economic constraints are likely to lead to a far more modest arsenal being built. There is also the issue of how serious the Indian government is about developing such a force structure.

One of the political reasons for going overtly nuclear was that India would be recognized as a declared nuclear weapons state and thus be offered a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. Additionally, it was believed that nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them were international currencies of power. The problem with making the currency of international power argument is that in order to be taken seriously you have to be able to display just how much currency you actually have. The Indian defense analyst Sisir Gupta referred to this problem in the 1960s when he argued that nuclearization would only make India the seventh, 10th, or even the 20th nuclear state in an international system where the established nuclear powers would have a major advantage. India would thus be the "N plus 20 nuclear state."<sup>5</sup>

The same problem still remains. As a third-tier nuclear power India does not command the same respect that a first-tier nuclear power like the U.S. or Russia does. Therefore, India would not be able to accrue the political and diplomatic advantages it seeks through nuclearization—unless, as discussed below, the major powers decide to grant such a status to it. So far that recognition has not been forthcoming.

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5. Sisir Gupta, "The Indian Dilemma" in *A World of Nuclear Powers*, ed. Alastair Buchan (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 67.

Nuclearization was viewed by some as providing the opportunity to create an anti-China axis between the U.S. and India.<sup>6</sup> India's government believed itself to have been sidelined by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of China in Asia. Hence, nuclearization provided a unique opportunity to forge a strategic alliance with the remaining superpower. It would also elevate India to major power status. The international community, particularly the U.S., rejected both aspirations. The West made it clear that nuclearization would not be rewarded with permanent membership on the U.N. Security Council.<sup>7</sup> Nor has the U.S. moved into the next Cold War with China. Consequently, New Delhi does not present an attractive alternative to Beijing. The political rationale for building a large nuclear force, therefore, does not presently exist.

### Limitations on Counterforce

Given these political constraints the most ambitious force structure would be one with a high counterforce capability. To base one's nuclear strategy on such a force would require that not only must the Indian armed forces and government be certain of this capability, but so too must India's opponents. The Indian achievement of a counterforce capability rests, however, on far too many technological and economic uncertainties. Technological questions would emerge about the amount of fissile material available, the ability to build a sufficient number of delivery systems in a limited time frame, the accuracy of the delivery systems, and the command and control mechanisms available to carry out such a strategy.

Given the past record of the Indian arms industry, the production levels required to create a counterforce capability are unlikely to be met. Past Indian arms production efforts have been marked by considerable delays, even after a particular system has been put into licensed production. Delays in domestic production of the Vijayanta tank, the Ajeet fighter, and the Kiran trainer all attest to this trend.<sup>8</sup>

India has also had a troubled track record on the production of nuclear delivery systems. The Agni missile, for example, underwent growing pains in its development and further improvements will have to be carried out in order to get a missile force that can credibly target China's eastern seaboard (the minimum requirement for India to have a credible deterrent against China). After the first Agni-II test, its range was revealed to be approximately 2,000 kilometers, not enough to target cities on China's eastern sea-

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6. Aijaz Ahmed, "The Hindutva Weapon," *Frontline*, June 5, 1998.

7. Strobe Talbott, "Dealing with the Bomb in South Asia," *Foreign Affairs* 78:2 (March/April 1999), pp. 116-17.

8. Amit Gupta, "The Indian Arms Industry: A Lumbering Giant," *Asian Survey* 30:9 (September 1990), pp. 846-61.

board. There have been reports that the country would test a 5,000-kilometer missile, Surya, in the future. But the time taken to develop the first two versions of the Agni, and the international pressure on not testing them, give some idea of just how difficult it will be for India to develop a credible deterrent against China in the near future.

The ATV project, which is needed for a second-strike capability, has made slow progress and optimistic estimates place the first vessel as being operational by 2015. It is also not clear whether the vessel will be capable of launching submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) or a cruise missile-firing nuclear submarine. India is said to have obtained the cruise missile technology from Russia, but it would require major technological innovations to develop the ability to launch SLBMs from a submerged vessel. As a consequence of these technological obstacles, India has chosen to lease an Akula-class nuclear submarine from Russia.

The lack of fissile material would also be a serious shortcoming in the attempt to develop such a targeting strategy. K. Subrahmanyam, another one of the authors of the nuclear doctrine, has written that:

The whole world knows that there are very severe constraints on the availability of fissile materials for India. Even those who advocate for India an arsenal of medium power size—there are not many such advocates—talk of building it over decades. Those who talk about an arms race evidently do not pay much attention to these constraints and appear to assume that India could replicate what other nuclear powers did.<sup>9</sup>

Subrahmanyam is basically stating what may be the key factor in India's force development—that technological constraints will slow down the growth of the nuclear force. India could therefore be building delivery systems without sufficient fissile material to provide warheads for them.

An additional technological concern comes from the actual capabilities of these systems. The accuracy level of the Agni missile is not known and statements by the Indian defense establishment testifying to the missile's accuracy are not credible without evidence to support it. Similarly, a question mark remains on the type of nuclear weapons India has developed and their yield. Indian claims about having a thermonuclear capability have been contested, as have claims about the purported yield of the entire nuclear arsenal. Without conclusive evidence that Indian weapons do in fact produce the requisite yield, it not only makes a counterforce strategy militarily unfeasible, but such a strategy also lacks credibility in the eyes of the opponents that India seeks to deter. For instance, Bharat Karnad has argued that there remain serious doubts both in India as well as in international circles that India successfully

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9. K. Subrahmanyam, "A Credible Deterrent: Logic of the Nuclear Deterrent," *Times of India*, October 4, 1999.

tested a thermonuclear device in 1998. According to Bharat Karnad, the common belief is that the bomb “fizzled.”<sup>10</sup> He therefore has called for a series of tests to lend credibility to the Indian deterrent and satisfy the Indian armed forces that they have an effective and deployable weapons system.

Pakistan lacks the scientific and economic resources to match the Indian development of a counterforce capability (whatever the actual credibility of this threat was), but it could effect fairly simple countermeasures against it. The India-Pakistan border remains one of the most porous in the world and Pakistan could smuggle nuclear weapons across it, thus negating Indian warfighting capability. The other real possibility is for Pakistan to invest heavily on a chemical and biological warfare capability to add an intermediate tier of unconventional weapons into India’s calculations. If either were to happen it would degrade the Indian deterrent, render the warfighting capability useless, and possibly precipitate a first strike by Pakistan—if the latter felt that the nuclear balance could not be restored.

With respect to China, any signs of the proposed development of this capability against it would be seen as unduly provocative. It could also lead Beijing to easily adopt countermeasures that would raise the risks for India. Increasing the number of weapons based in the former regions of Tibet and providing more advanced technologies to improve the Pakistani nuclear capability would be some of the easier steps to adopt.

Currently, China has missiles deployed in the provinces of Delingha (ten to 20 DF4s with a range of 4,750 kilometers), Jianshui (eight DF3 missiles with a 3,000 kilometer range and eight 1,800 kilometer range DF21 missiles), Kunming (eight DF3), Xiao Qaidam (ten to 20 DF-21s), Da Qaidam (ten DF4s), and Chuxiong (DF21s).<sup>11</sup> A bomber force augments this large missile force. India would have to invest significantly to match this Chinese force structure. It would also have to improve its production rate of missiles. Further, given that a counterforce capability against China would take decades to bring to fruition the wisdom of developing such an option must be questioned.

For similar reasons a countervalue strategy against China is problematic. It would be comparatively much easier for China to increase its force levels than for India to build a range of new systems to have a credible deterrent. India lacks the delivery systems or the ability to quickly develop such a capability. Its nuclear submarine is decades away from entering service and the survivability of Indian conventional submarines against Chinese antisubmarine measures is questionable. Similarly, India’s airborne strike force of six

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10. Bharat Karnad, “A Sucker’s Payoff,” *Seminar*, no 485 (January 2000).

11. Data on Chinese defense capabilities is available at the home page of the Federation of American Scientists at <<http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/index.html>>.

leased Backfire bombers is likely to provide a standoff capability against Chinese cities, but it would be easily offset by a Chinese theater-based countervalue capability (by simply increasing the number of weapons along the Sino-Indian border).

Indian analyses on this subject also tacitly assume that China will not escalate its own military development or will, hopefully, be engaged in a military rivalry with the U.S. and therefore not worry about the Indian nuclear buildup. There is some historical basis for this thinking. Back in the 1960s, Indian analysts argued that the country did not have to build up a nuclear force that mirrored that of the big five nuclear powers. Instead some argued it should follow what the Indian economist Raj Krishna called the “division of labor in deterrence.”<sup>12</sup> Given China’s revolutionary role in the 1960s and the fact that it already had to contend with a U.S. nuclear force, Indian analysts felt that a small nuclear force would add to China’s strategic uncertainties and therefore provide the basis for deterrence. But to base present day policy on a possible future break in the U.S.-China relationship is being overly optimistic.

Economic constraints also have to be calculated in the creation of any force structure. In Subramanian Swamy’s optimistic analysis, the cost of a 400-missile strong intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM) force with an associated command control communications and intelligence (C3I) capability would be approximately \$2.5 billion.<sup>13</sup> Since Indian pricing on defense production tends to be deflated—and hides expenditures under civilian and military headings—one must assume that the cost of each warhead and missile would be significantly higher. Other sources, such as Jayati Ghosh, taking a more conservative approach by incorporating the need for imports, estimate the actual cost to be as high as \$40 billion.<sup>14</sup> In terms of military expenditure, therefore, developing such a force would put severe constraints on the domestic economy.

Another constraint may come when India has to face the costs of its rhetoric on force structure and nuclear doctrine. In the aftermath of the tests, many Indian analysts engaged in nationalistic and exaggerated rhetoric about the proposed nuclear force to the extent of proposing an ICBM force that could even target the developed world. Reality is considerably different from Indian rhetoric. India’s resources and threat perceptions do not require the development of a first- or even a second-tier nuclear force. Instead, India will construct a third-tier nuclear force. But the problem is that other countries, most notably China, will start to take Indian rhetoric—that calls for an

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12. Raj Krishna, “India and the Bomb,” *India Quarterly* 21:2 (April–June 1965), p. 128.

13. Subramaniam Swamy, “India’s Defense Needs,” *Hindustan Times*, July 12, 1988.

14. Jayati Ghosh, “The Bomb and the Economy,” *Frontline*, May 8–21, 1999.

advanced Triad—seriously and this would further worsen India’s security dilemma. A similar situation occurred when India’s naval buildup in the late 1980s caused concern in Southeast Asia and Australia.<sup>15</sup> What India may have to do, therefore, is explicitly state that it is building a modest nuclear force aimed at its principal adversary.

In security terms, India’s principal threat remains Pakistan, not China. If Pakistan is India’s principal threat, then a modest nuclear force that is subject to arms control makes sense. Destroying Pakistan does not require the type of varied and large nuclear force that the U.S. and the Soviet Union had in the Cold War. It does not even require the 300–400 nuclear weapons that the Israelis are estimated to have. To have a credible deterrent, India should be able to destroy Pakistan’s three principal cities—Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi. Pakistan would face unacceptable damage and find it difficult to survive as a nation state. The loss of its three major cities would certainly lead to the disintegration of the country, as its law enforcement capability, financial stability, and administrative system would collapse.

A nuclear force of less than 100 bombs would be sufficient for such a deterrent strategy. It would allow the Indian government to practice arms control in the region. Both civil and ballistic missile defense are difficult against a force of such size and neither India nor Pakistan has the economic resources to create a system that would counter a nuclear attack. Mutually assured destruction, therefore, would become an existing condition in South Asia. Based on this strategy, both governments could establish an agenda to implement arms control and direct the growth of nuclear weaponry in the region.

In light of these constraints, what kind of nuclear force is India to develop? I think that we are likely to see the development of a rudimentary triad consisting of land-based mobile SRBMs and IRBMs. That would include land-based Prithvi missiles (currently over 120 have been produced) and an Agni force. The development of the Agni force, though, is based on the assumption that the country will produce 10 to 12 Agni-II missiles every year.<sup>16</sup> Designated aircraft would act as delivery systems. The Indian air force conducted flight trials for the delivery of nuclear weapons in 1990 and “efforts to adapt the delivery system to the weapon commenced even earlier.”<sup>17</sup>

A limited naval deterrent capability may also emerge by basing the Dhanush missile aboard surface vessels. Additionally, India has jointly developed with Russia a supersonic cruise missile, the PJ-10, that will be used aboard naval vessels and potentially could be armed with nuclear warheads

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15. See Amit Gupta, “India’s Military Buildup: To What Purpose?” *Armed Forces Journal International*, October 1989, pp. 58–60.

16. “India Begins Series Production of Agni IRBM,” *Economic Times*, July 25, 2001.

17. “The Kargil Committee Report,” *IndiaTimes News*, February 25, 2000, p. 14.

(the PJ-10 has a range of 300 kilometers and a payload of 200 kilograms). India has already made the Prithvi SRBM operational and will be inducting the Agni-II missile into service. Just how many Agni-II missiles are inducted and how quickly is a matter for conjecture. One report suggests that 20 missiles would be inducted by 2001 at a cost of \$150 million.<sup>18</sup> That production level has not been met. India's limited space-based capability will allow some degree of targeting, especially if the goal is to have a second strike that visits unacceptable damage on Pakistani cities.

It is also important to remember that the nuclear doctrine is a draft document. The Indian government has been at pains to make the point that it is a dynamic doctrine that would be adjusted to suit the needs of the government of the day and the prevailing regional and international environment. This in effect means that the various programs could be slowed down if political or other considerations warranted it. India, therefore, is likely to emerge as a third-tier nuclear state.

The force is a third-tier one because it will comprise theater nuclear forces that cannot be deployed or used to project power beyond the immediate South Asian region. In that sense, it is different from second-tier nuclear forces like those of China, the U.K., and France that have an extraregional capability. This imposes major constraints on India's ability to be treated as a serious nuclear power within the international system.

### Limitations of a Third-Tier Nuclear Force

The limited capacity of the Indian nuclear arsenal means that India is merely a regional nuclear force. It will have a force structure that, when compared to those of the major nuclear powers, will be seen as being a theater one in its dimensions. The word "theater" is used here not only in the sense that these are small-yield nuclear weapons that will be used within a certain sector of military operations, but also because possession and usage of this force does not lead to a shift in the power balance between the major competitors in the international system. It is precisely this lack of effect that hurts India's chances to be taken seriously as a nuclear power.

In that sense the Indian dilemma becomes the same as that faced by other lesser nuclear powers in a bipolar world. Britain's nuclear capability, for example, did not give it the ability to deter the Soviet Union. The British nuclear force became valuable, however, once London tied it to the U.S.'s security aspirations. It then served to strengthen the Atlantic Alliance and gave Britain greater influence in Washington. Similarly, China's emergence as a major power of the new millennium comes less from the existence of a second-tier nuclear force and more from the market reforms that have enticed

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18. "India Building Missile with 5000 Kilometer Range," *Deccan Herald*, October 24, 1999.

foreign capital into that country. The West, particularly the U.S., is now increasingly dependent on China for the profit margins in its various retail industries. That, coupled with China's growing nuclear potential, makes it a major international actor.

As a third-tier nuclear state India is both unable to pose a systemic challenge or portray itself as an attractive strategic partner to other nations. Indian foreign policy precludes the emergence of a special relationship between the U.S. and India in the form that the Atlantic Alliance or the U.S.-Israel relationship has taken. Nor has India developed the type of economic interdependence that China has with the West. While making important strides toward liberalization and global integration, the Indian economy cannot as yet compete with China's in attracting external investment. India's information technology (IT) sector is viewed as having the potential to transform the country into an IT superpower, thus creating intellectual interdependence with the technologically advanced nations. However, India's IT sector holds too small a share of the global IT market to make this an optimistic prediction. India's share of the world market for software products is only 1%. Industry projections show that software exports are expected to grow to about \$50 billion by 2008, up from \$4 billion in 1999–2000.<sup>19</sup> The estimates are based on a sustained growth with a lack of foreign competition. How then does India use its nuclear status to enhance its foreign policy and security goals in the international system?

## Policy Options

India's nuclear force exists with the following international and national limitations placed on it. It cannot become a first-tier nuclear force for economic, political, and technological reasons. Even advancing to a second-tier status would cause concern in the international community and lead to both military and economic reprisals. Second, international pressure will continue to be applied on India to keep its nuclear forces at the lowest possible levels. Third, in the near future, the country is unlikely to emerge as a haven for economic investment that rivals China.

Given these constraints, India's future nuclear policy lies in pursuing a two-fold strategy: creating a minimum deterrent against its principal rival, Pakistan, and in emerging as a status quo power in the international system. The minimum deterrent against Pakistan will be achieved with the current plans for force deployment. Emerging as a status quo power then becomes a critical issue. Acquiring this status lies not in creating a large nuclear force

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19. Murali Patibandla, Deepak Kapur, and Bent Petersen, "Import Substitution with Free Trade: Case of India's Software Industry," *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 8, 2000, p. 1263.

but in taking a set of international initiatives that make the major powers grant an enhanced status to India. India's record in the international system has been one of restraint and upholding the status quo.

Unlike some other states that have sought nuclear weapons in the post-Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) world, India has sought to portray itself as a responsible state in the international system. It has been a proponent of international law and has joined key international organizations such as the Antarctic Treaty (as a member, India is one of the consultative parties on scientific and other activities in the Antarctic). India has also had a pioneer investor status in the Law of the Seas convention. It has been a long-term supporter and participant in many U.N. peacekeeping missions. It has exercised restraint in the transfer of weapons to other parts of the world. In the 1980s, it turned down a Libyan offer to invest in Indian weapons programs and a proposal to cooperate with Iraq in the development of ballistic missiles.<sup>20</sup>

In the nuclear field, India has exercised restraint on the transfer of nuclear materials and nuclear technology. Unlike North Korea and Pakistan, it has not sought to use its new nuclear status for regime maintenance. Since 1998, the Indian government has attempted to emphasize the stability of the regime, the safety precautions taken to prevent nuclear accidents and unauthorized launches, and the fact that India is a voice of moderation in the nuclear field. Nor have there been any attempts to suggest that a broader strategic alliance could emerge on civilizational or cultural grounds between India and other nations.

Furthermore, India's greatest achievements in the area of nuclear weapons have not been in the construction of nuclear devices, but in the proposal of policies to mitigate the effects of the nuclear rivalry between the major powers. India's foreign and security policy, therefore, makes it a status quo state that shares common security interests with the major powers. In particular this means shaping a common security vision with the U.S. The Indian government has started to recognize the need for such a convergence of interests.

### The India-U.S. Relationship

Since the end of the Cold War, Indian foreign policy has been faced with a major dilemma. The U.S. is the remaining power in the international system and, despite Indian policy makers' hopes, no alternative power or alliance has emerged to counter it. Russia, as the successor state to the Soviet Union, no longer has the global reach or capacity to challenge the U.S. Japan remains mired in its own economic crisis and continues to remain under the U.S.'s

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20. Amit Gupta, *Building an Arsenal: The Evolution of Regional Power Force Structures* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), p. 68.

defense umbrella. As for the European Union, in my view it displayed ineptitude in resolving the crisis in Bosnia and Kosovo and American leadership and commitment of military power was necessary in both cases to bring about their resolution.

In this U.S.-dominated international system, India's ambition of being counted as a major power has not been achieved. The U.S. and other Western powers have not named India as a declared nuclear weapons state. Nor have they made a decision to admit India as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council. Finally, Pakistan has not been reduced to the level of international insignificance that Indian policy makers would like. India therefore needs to recognize that for it to build a new relationship with the U.S. its policy has to be based on sharing a strategic view of the new millennium. By doing this, India could make a significant contribution to establishing a more secure international order. It would also enhance its own security and prestige.

The key is to understand U.S. concerns about nonproliferation. In the next decade, proliferation will continue to be a central concern of U.S. foreign policy. There are several reasons for this. The old regimes like the NPT and the Missile Technology Control Regime are only partially valid for the changed realities of the international system. The U.S. is going to have to face the problem of what to do with friendly states that seek to proliferate. Taiwan, for example, may choose to take the nuclear path because of its desire—at least of the present administration—to establish state-to-state relations with China. Israel, similarly, is unlikely to give up its nuclear arsenal. But any significant arms control negotiations with Syria would have to involve some degree of transparency of the Israeli nuclear arsenal. In either case, the U.S. will be unable to continue with its past nonproliferation policy.

Furthermore, it is likely that potential regional powers such as Iran will seek nuclear weapons because it is easier to develop such weaponry rather than advanced conventional weaponry. There is the genuine fear of American cities being targeted by long-range ballistic missiles. As the events of September 11, 2001, showed, the U.S. is also vulnerable to terrorist attacks. To prevent such attacks, the U.S. is particularly concerned about illegal transfers of weapons technology. To partially address this concern, there is the push for national and theater missile defense programs. Such an interest coincides with those of India because Indian governments have not contemplated the transfer of weapons of mass destruction systems to other states.

On the other hand, there is a genuine concern that Pakistan might transfer such technologies in what has been termed the Islamic Bomb scenario. Both Pakistani policy makers and defense scientists have denied that such technology transfers would take place. India could therefore unilaterally announce that it would not transfer sensitive technologies to other states. Not only

would this be in keeping with Indian policy, but it would show that the country shares a strategic vision of the millennium and is behaving like a mature and status quo state.

The nationalistic rhetoric that followed the 1998 nuclear tests offers some mixed evidence of this maturity. Two sets of tests conducted on May 11 and May 13, 1998, amounted to five different nuclear devices. On May 11, India tested a fission device with a yield of about 12 kilotons, a thermonuclear device with a yield of 43 kilotons (a potential hydrogen bomb), and a sub-kiloton device. Two more tests of subkiloton devices were conducted on May 13. After the tests, there were calls for numerically large nuclear forces with one prominent analyst, Bharat Karnad, calling for ICBM and thermonuclear capability.

Coupled with this approach on weaponization is the Indian approach to arms control. Prominent security analysts, like K. Subrahmanyam, have for long argued that arms control is meaningless unless made part of a plan for overall disarmament. Thus, they have suggested that India only go in for disarmament when the other nuclear powers reach force levels that are comparable to India's. Such a policy lacks credibility at the international level and, in fact, may be harmful to India's plans for nuclear weaponization.

The policy lacks credibility because it suggests that Western nations would be willing to give up their power differential and reach force levels that are comparable to those of third-tier nuclear states. That is unlikely to happen as all the major nuclear powers still view the possession of such weapons as providing security in the new international system. The U.S.'s security dilemma has been mentioned above, but one needs to remember that even in second-tier nuclear states such as France and Britain there has been discussion about reconfiguring nuclear forces to target rogue states in the non-Western world. Indian analysts have to move away from the nationalistic rhetoric that followed Pokhran-II. Instead they should state that the country will have a modest nuclear force.

It is also important to remember that these countries have only conditionally accepted the nuclearization of South Asia. A full-scale development of the Indian nuclear forces without a corresponding policy of arms control would only serve to antagonize the international community and potentially lead to the reimposition of sanctions. Going in for arms control would not only serve to reassure the international community but it would also provide the necessary breathing space to allow India to systematically develop a credible nuclear deterrent. To elaborate on this argument, if New Delhi were to suggest a series of arms control measures to Pakistan it could direct the course of its nuclear buildup.

The lesson to be learnt here is from both versions of the Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty (SALT). Neither SALT I (1972) or SALT II (1979)

sought to disarm the U.S. and the Soviet Union. These two treaties were not arms control agreements because they enabled the buildup of both countries' nuclear forces both quantitatively and qualitatively. Instead, the process was one of directed growth. Both sides agreed upon the extent to which their nuclear forces and delivery systems would grow. This removed uncertainty about the other side's intentions and actually helped cut back on the nuclear arms race. Therefore, India would not be sacrificing its force structure and legitimate security interests to Western pressure.

India should espouse preventive arms control. There is an entire range of weapons technologies that India could seek to avoid in the near future. India could suggest not installing multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles on South Asian ballistic missile forces. To go into this area of weapons development is unnecessary given India's current threat environment; by forestalling it, the country would be preventing a potentially expensive avenue of the arms race from opening up.

Coupled with the movement on nuclear issues there is the need to engage the U.S. in a set of ongoing negotiations on a range of lesser security issues. Indo-U.S. cooperation and potential bilateral arrangements should be created in the following areas that are of concern to both countries. Formalized means should be adopted to combat the spread of drugs, to pass information on suspected terrorist activity, to check the spread of international crime, and to ensure the security of computer networks. None of these issues compromise Indian foreign policy concerns and would actually work to enhance India's own security interests. Most importantly, it would help cement the relationship with the U.S. and potentially lead to a broad-based security relationship.

## A Nuclear Agreement with Pakistan

The central concern for Indian security policy remains how to deal with Pakistan. A regional arms control agreement with Islamabad would be one step in the direction of stabilizing this relationship. A regional arms control could also serve as a model for future arms control treaties in other conflict zones. Some steps are being taken in this direction. For instance, in February 1999 India and Pakistan initiated measures to formalize nuclear restraint at the Lahore Summit. These included a set of confidence-building measures (CBMs). Both countries agreed to exchange information about their nuclear arsenals and provide advance notice of ballistic missile tests.

The diplomatic advances of the Lahore Agreement of 1999 were derailed by the Pakistani incursion into Kargil. Nevertheless, it can still serve as the basis for future talks. One positive result of the agreement was that both nations agreed to provide advance notice of ballistic missile tests. The other clauses of the agreement can still be worked on. Specifically, both sides

agreed to engage in bilateral consultations “on security concepts and nuclear doctrines, with a view to developing measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional fields.”<sup>21</sup> India has in part addressed this issue by giving Pakistan an indication of what its nuclear doctrine is and what type of force structure it could conceivably build.

An additional step in this direction would be for both countries to agree to the recessed deterrence of their nuclear weapons. Such an agreement would formalize the practice that already exists in both countries. In both India and Pakistan, command and control of nuclear weapons remains a problem. It is also difficult to convince the international community that safeguards exist. In such circumstances, a policy of recessed deterrence makes sense because it calls for separately basing warheads from missiles and then mating them only in the event of a crisis. This not only provides more adequate safeguards but in the case of a crisis conveys a clear signal to the other side that the situation has escalated to a point of war.

### International Measures

Being a status quo power at the international level requires creating ways to enhance international order. It would also hopefully lead to India’s own security and foreign policy objectives being accepted by the international community of nations. At the international level, the success of such measures will rest in the ability of the international community to accept the changed reality of the global system and reshape existing regimes or create new ones to stabilize South Asia’s nuclear rivalry.

What policies are likely to lead to significant arms control measures? The U.S.’s objective is to get both India and Pakistan to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and future Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT).<sup>22</sup> Washington is also concerned about the potential for transfers to third parties of nuclear and missile technology. Such transfers are less likely to happen because of a state policy that prescribes technology transfers than because of some inadvertent act (on a state’s part) such as theft or terrorist actions. In attempting to get both countries to the bargaining table, the U.S. has used direct talks with India and Pakistan as a tool to understand what they want to achieve. Following Indian and Pakistani cooperation with the U.S. after the September 2001 terrorist attacks, the sanctions imposed in May 1998 have been lifted. But some of the more significant measures such as transferring

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21. Kenneth J. Cooper, “India, Pakistan Agree to Work to Ease Strains,” *Washington Post*, February 22, 1999.

22. The FMCT bans production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices.

permissive action links (locking devices that prohibit the unauthorized use of nuclear weapons) and C3I technologies remain nonstarters.

For India several factors make it difficult to meet all the stated objectives of the international community. India refrained from the CTBT because it saw the treaty as both discriminatory and constraining on its need for further tests to confirm bomb designs and yields. The tests should have taken care of the latter concern and thus permitted the signing of the CTBT. As mentioned above, doubts remain about the yield of the various nuclear devices detonated by India that year.

It is also unlikely that any Indian government would sign the CTBT without some reciprocal political concessions. In the past even politically formidable Indian governments, i.e., those with large majorities in Parliament, have then found it difficult to make concessions on security issues. The border dispute with China, for example, has not been resolved in part because of the fear of successive governments that they would be accused of betraying the national interest. The CTBT has now fallen into the category of vital national interests and therefore any government signing it would face a barrage of criticism unless significant concessions could be obtained from the international community.

The present international situation is one where there is a reluctance to change or modify existing international regimes. At the same time, neither India nor Pakistan is going to move toward joining the NPT as a non-nuclear state or sign the CTBT (which would lead to the ban of further nuclear testing by India) and FMCT without any significant and face-saving concessions. In the light of these facts, certain steps can still be taken to bring about arms control and CBMs that include the two South Asian states.

One step that can be easily taken is to create a new set of formal arrangements that achieve the goals of the NPT without going through the tricky process of getting either side to sign the treaty. The most important objective is to prevent intentional or unintentional transfers of nuclear and delivery technologies to other states. The international community can call for a treaty where both countries commit themselves to the non-transfer of sensitive technologies. Such a treaty would neither compromise the security agendas of either state nor would it require a shift in foreign policy behavior.

Another possibility may be to create an auxiliary treaty that removes one of the legal fictions of the international system—that there are only five nuclear powers. Since the NPT was negotiated, three nations (Israel, India, and Pakistan) have crossed the nuclear threshold but the existing regime maintained the legal fiction that these are not nuclear states. After the May tests the major powers refused to call the two South Asian nations declared weapons states because of jeopardizing the NPT. However, a new treaty that includes the two South Asian states and Israel should be considered. Because

of the close relationship between the U.S. and Israel, the Israeli nuclear weapons program has not received the international attention it deserves. Without the inclusion of Israel, any new NPT treaty would have limited value.

### Future Challenges for the International Nuclear Regime and De Facto Nuclear States

In the context of future nonproliferation, there are two lingering issues that need to be addressed. The first issue is the question of how to bring new nuclear states into an international regime given that stated nonproliferation policy for the past three decades has been one of preventing the emergence of another nuclear state. The other issue concerns the type of privileges and obligations that the de facto nuclear states would have in a new treaty.

There is a fear that once a new state is allowed to enter the nuclear club, a number of other nations will test devices with the expectation of being granted membership. One way around this dilemma may be to suggest that new membership be based on adherence to a particular code of international behavior. The Clinton administration laid out the criteria whereby certain nations were labeled as rogue states. One could formulate a different set of criteria to allow de facto nuclear states into a new international regime. Specifically, membership into a new regime could be based on fulfilling certain criteria that are exhibited by responsible states in the international system.

The criteria for determining responsible nuclear states could include having democratic forms of government, a commitment to support and participate in international organizations, a willingness to participate in multinational peacekeeping efforts, and specifically an adherence to the goals and objectives of nonproliferation. A country would have to display a long-term pattern of such behavior in order to be admitted. Such a distinction, therefore, would keep nations that were not committed to maintaining order in the international system and were antidemocratic in their internal structure out of the new regime. Being rejected from membership would mean that a state not only would be denied the benefits of inclusion but also face any sanctions that the international community could impose. Such a policy would have the advantage of bringing de facto nuclear states into the club and working to uphold the rules of membership—preventing proliferation and maintaining order. Not allowing such states in, however, might force them to form their own club with looser rules of membership and thus lead to the proliferation of weapons and consequent escalation of regional rivalries.

The second pending issue concerns what privileges and obligations would the de facto states have in a new treaty? One advantage for such states is that the treaty would legitimize their nuclear weapons programs and remove the fear of future sanctions. This would be a major concession to both India and

Pakistan and allow them to continue indigenous economic and technological development. In addition, given the mixed international response to the May 1998 tests, it would be a fairly accurate reflection of the international community's differing views on the usefulness of sanctions in this particular case. Legitimization would also permit these states to contribute to disarmament and arms control efforts in a way that being kept out of the club would not. It would indeed provide the incentive for these nations to help build stronger regimes and more effective enforcement measures.

A new treaty would not, however, automatically include permanent membership of the U.N. Security Council. Any expansion of the council would have to be made in a broader context and reflect the changed power differentials in the international system. If initial membership of the U.N. Security Council was based on a pre-Cold War conception of what constituted power in the international system—and which countries qualified—a post-Cold War permanent membership cannot be based on a cold war conception that nuclear weapons are the primary basis of international power. Obviously, economic and other criteria that make countries like Germany and Japan global powers in the post-Cold War international system would have to be used. The *de facto* states would have to fulfill a set of obligations as part of this arrangement. They would have to commit themselves to not transferring technologies to other countries. They would also have to seek assistance to make their own nuclear forces safer from both accidental use and threats and acts of terrorism. Further, the *de facto* states would have to commit themselves to participation in the construction of new arms control regimes and disarmament initiatives.

India's nuclear force structure is meant to counter concrete regional threats, but it will provide the country with few advantages in dealing with political-military issues at a systemic level. Indian nuclear policy, therefore, needs to use the diplomatic value of being a nuclear weapons state to further the country's strategic objectives.