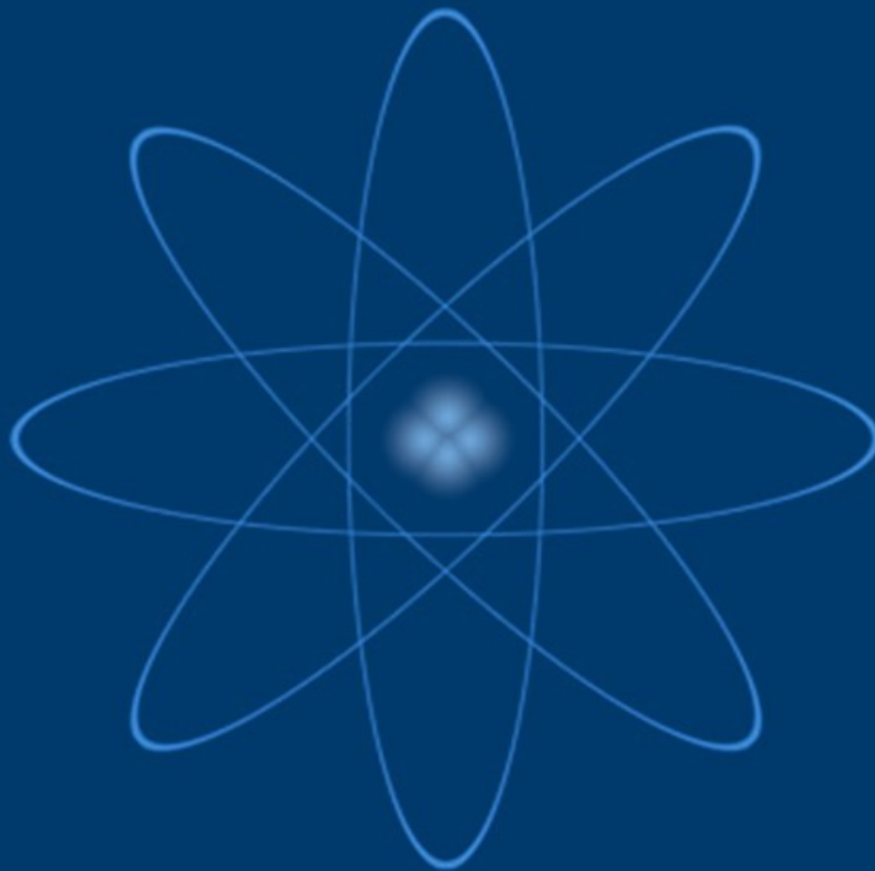


INDIA'S NUCLEAR DOCTRINE

An Alternative Blueprint



NUCLEAR SECURITY PROGRAMME

Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies

About the Task Force

This project aimed to review the India's nuclear doctrine (as officialised on 4 January 2003), and through a constructive critique, attempt an alternative blueprint to suit the new developments in the security and political environment within and outside India over the last decade. Towards achieving this, the Nuclear Security Programme (NSP) at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) constituted a task force of experts from the Indian strategic community - academia, bureaucracy, military and scientific.

The objectives set out by the task force were:

1. To assess the current Indian security environment and re-examine these in the context of India's present nuclear doctrine.
2. To examine the fundamental assumptions underlying the current Indian position on nuclear deterrence.
3. To explore doctrinal ideas to safeguard Indian interests in a changing security environment.
4. To assess the effects of the India-US nuclear deal on China and Pakistan and the effect of the growing China-Pakistan nuclear collusion on India.
5. To account for the role of non and sub-state actors in the escalation dynamic.
6. To revise the Indian nuclear doctrine and suggest an alternative.

The researchers of the Nuclear Security Programme (NSP) researched the push-pull pressures surrounding the creation of India's doctrinal statements in great detail. They also studied the doctrines of other states and the cause-effect relationship of the wordings in those documents. This process culminated in a draft document of what the team believed the doctrine should look like, given the new realities of India's internal and external security environment. The task force, constituted under the chairmanship of Prof PR Chari, refined the document into its current form over the course of five meetings. The alternative blueprint of India's nuclear doctrine was finalised in March 2012.

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Introduction

A doctrine, any doctrine, incorporates a set of beliefs or principles held by a body of persons. A national nuclear doctrine represents, therefore, the collective set of beliefs or principles held by the nation in regard to the utility of its nuclear weapons. Beliefs and principles are not immutable. Nations and their leaderships change with the efflux of time. And circumstances require their national doctrines to be revisited, reviewed and recast if deemed necessary. Change for the sake of change is not wise. But, stagnation of thought hardly serves the national interests.

Applying these nostrums to India's nuclear doctrine yields some revealing insights. It was promulgated in August 1999, a little over a year after the nuclear test series conducted by India in May 1998 that were reciprocated by Pakistan. It was believed at this juncture that the nuclear doctrine promulgated was a response to the international criticism being voiced that India had conducted its nuclear tests without any concept of what it wished to achieve with its deterrent. The nuclear doctrine had been finalized by the National Security Advisory Board, which comprised a heterogeneous group of former civil and military officials, and non-officials from several walks of life having different convictions. Consequently, the nuclear doctrine that emerged after several months of rigorous labour was an amalgam of different viewpoints, and it was hard to discern any overarching beliefs or guiding principles underlying its contentions. The document was criticized in the media until the NDA government, then in power, virtually disowned the doctrine as being just a draft that was only meant to stimulate public debate and elicit opinion. Nothing further was heard in this matter until the Cabinet Committee on Security adjudicated the issues raised in the 'draft' doctrine and announced its decisions in January 2003. Both the 'draft' doctrine and the CCS decision have been placed aside in the annexure.

Disconcertingly, the nuclear doctrine which emerged from this checkered history was never revisited, let alone reviewed; this parlous situation has inspired the current exercise to draw up a fresh nuclear doctrine for India based on the 'draft' nuclear doctrine promulgated in August 1999 and the CCS decision thereon in January 2003. The present exercise was undertaken by several members of the strategic community in New Delhi constituting a task force under the auspices of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. Not all the members could attend all the meetings of the task force, and they may or may not share all the views expressed in the fresh nuclear doctrine drawn up. I am confident, however, that, minor cavils apart, they would not have any serious objections to the conclusions reflected in this document.

We are hopeful that it would generate public interest since the issues involved vitally concerns civil society. In matters relating to nuclear weapons there are no distinctions between frontlines and safe rear areas. We look forward to answering questions and criticism of this effort.

P R Chari

Chairman, IPCS Task Force on India's Nuclear Doctrine

India's Nuclear Doctrine

An Alternative Blueprint

1. PREAMBLE

- 1.1 India seeks to achieve its economic, political, social, scientific and technological development within a peaceful and democratic framework. Autonomy in decision making is the inalienable right of the Indian people. India will safeguard this democratic right in a world where force is increasingly being used for political purposes, where the possession of nuclear weapons has been selectively legitimised, where the nuclear technological threshold is decreasing, and where international regimes have failed to check nuclear proliferation.
- 1.2 Global, verifiable and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament remains India's ultimate objective. Until universal and verifiable disarmament is achieved India will need to retain the credibility of its nuclear arsenal subject to minimality. In the ad interim period, India will continue to strengthen international non-proliferation regimes, and contribute to reforming their structures.
- 1.3 India lies in an unstable and tension-prone neighbourhood. The likelihood of nuclear weapons being provided to or developed by quasi-state actors for use/ threat of use against India remains significant.
- 1.4 Weapons of mass destruction constitute the gravest threat to peace and stability in the international system and to humanity. Nuclear weapons will remain an instrument of collective and/or national security until they are outlawed by international law.
- 1.5 This document seeks to synergise the efforts of the political leadership, armed forces, and scientific community in India with the support of the people to maximise the effectiveness of India's nuclear forces.

2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 Protecting the Indian state, from the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons by any state or entity, is the *raison d'être* of India's nuclear deterrent.
- 2.2 The Indian deterrent shall remain credible against all categories of weapons of mass destruction.
- 2.3 India will not resort to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against states that do not possess nuclear weapons, but such states shall be deemed nuclear weapons states if they ally with or assist nuclear armed states against India, and/or assist them during hostilities.

3. THE LEGAL BASIS OF THE DETERRENT

- 3.1 India's nuclear deterrent is a manifestation of its *right to self defence* as provided in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

3.2 India's nuclear doctrine derives from the Constitution of India. The executive powers of the Indian Union are vested in the Prime Minister, who is the designated launch authority.

3.3 The Prime Minister (and his designated successors) shall exercise command and control over India's nuclear forces.

4. THE DETERRENT

4.1 India shall maintain a credible minimal deterrent, where credibility comprises three specific components - leadership credibility, force credibility, and technological credibility.

4.2 The Strategic Forces Command (SFC) shall advise the Prime Minister on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of credible minimal deterrence, which shall have to be determined by him/her from time to time.

4.3 In adherence to a policy of no first use, India will not initiate a nuclear strike.

5. COMMAND AND CONTROL

5.1 Survival of the chain of command shall be ensured to provide leadership continuity in all eventualities.

5.2 Should the chain of command fail the SFC will carry out the last attack plan approved by the Prime Minister.

5.3 The SFC shall maintain viable, survivable, dispersed and sheltered communications with multiple redundancies.

5.4 All appropriate measures to ensure the safety and security of nuclear weapons will be taken.

5.5 The SFC shall periodically update its target list and maintain launch solutions.

5.6 India will continue research on developing both delivery systems and warheads in the light of global technological advancements.

6. INDIA AND INTERNATIONAL NUCLEAR REGIMES

6.1 India shall cooperate with other nations in strengthening the international non-proliferation regime, and work towards democratising their structures.

6.3 Strict controls shall be maintained on the export of nuclear and missile related equipment, materials and technologies, and these lists shall be revised from time to time.

7. REVIEW

7.1 India will be prepared to meet new challenges in ballistic missile defence, chemical, biological and radiological weapons that may have a bearing on its nuclear doctrine.

7.2 The nuclear doctrine shall be revisited every five years.

Explanations

Three suggestions made in this alternative document generated considerable debate and require clarification.

At the centre of the alternative is the absolute authority of the Prime Minister over nuclear weapons and their command and control structure (see Articles 3.2 and 3.3). Maintaining the dominant position of the head of government is essential to ensure 'leadership credibility', a critical component of the deterrent.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Art 2.2: The Indian deterrent shall remain credible against all categories of weapons of mass destruction.

The purpose of nuclear weapons is to protect the Indian state against WMD threats posed by states and non and sub-state actors.

Despite the lack of an agreed definition of the term WMD, this document has included chemical, biological and radiological attacks in that category.

This document also does not speculate on the complicity of states in the motives and actions of sub and non-state actors.

The Prime Minister has been given the choice to decide whether a WMD attack warrants a nuclear response.

NO FIRST USE

Art 4.3: In adherence to its policy of no first use, India will not initiate a nuclear strike.

'Initiation' covers the process leading up to the actual use of a nuclear weapon by an adversary. This would include mating component systems and deploying warheads with the intent. This will enable the Prime Minister to gain the flexibility to decide upon an appropriate response.

This formulation also avoids the constraints placed on the NFU policy in regard to using the nuclear deterrent against WMDs adopted in the 2003 CCS decision.

DIRECT CHAIN OF COMMAND FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE SFC

ART 5: COMMAND AND CONTROL

It was decided by the core group at the very outset that a decision to launch nuclear weapons would have to be the sole prerogative of the Prime Minister under the emergency reserve powers available to him by convention as *primus inter pares*. In case India was subjected to a nuclear attack, the survival of the mandated chain of command is doubtful. This simplifies the structure to reflect the ground situation that may arise in emergency situations, while still retaining the distinction between adjudicatory and operational roles.

SURVIVABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS VS THE THREE CREDIBILITIES

Art 4.1: India shall maintain a credible minimal deterrent, where credibility comprises three specific components - leadership credibility, force credibility, and technological credibility.

A line of criticism against the IPCS doctrine questions how 'credibility' has been defined; a permutation-combination of force, technology and leadership. However, these three factors refine the simplistic survivability-effectiveness formula. For example, force credibility includes its technological and operational aspects, while technological credibility underwrites the entire edifice of credibility. With technological capability in doubt, neither survivability nor effectiveness would be credible.

No level of 'survivability and effectiveness' can compensate for weak and irresolute leadership; hence leadership credibility has been stressed in the expectation that they would be educated on these concepts. Safety and survivability has apparently been achieved by separating the warheads from the delivery systems, but this would retard effectiveness unless it is ensured that their mating can be guaranteed at will. The concept of force credibility ensures that the confusion associated with dispersal, survivability and effectiveness, which may work at cross purposes, are integrated together into a synergistic whole.

'MINIMUM' VS 'MINIMAL'

Art 4.1: India shall maintain a credible minimal deterrent, where credibility comprises three specific components - leadership credibility, force credibility, and technological credibility.

'Minimal' was seen as a word better suited than 'minimum' to qualify India's deterrent, which is subject to numerical changes in response to its strategic environment. In conceptual terms, 'minimal' provides greater flexibility than 'minimum'. On the other hand, 'minimum' deterrence seals the lower limit of the arsenal, indicating that any number below this limit could endanger deterrence. The term 'minimal' therefore better conveys therefore the relationship between the credibility of the deterrent and its numerical flexibility. 'Minimum' is both an adjective and a noun. 'Minimal', on the other hand, can only be used as an adjective, which emphasizes its dependent usage.

MASSIVE RETALIATION

The IPCS has been unable to accept the assertion in the 2003 press statement that 'India's nuclear deterrence is based on launching massive punitive retaliation to (sic) a nuclear first strike and any talk of a graduated response would undermine its efficacy', but wishes to adhere to the wording in the 1999 draft doctrine which held that '(a) any threat of use of nuclear weapons against India shall invoke measures to counter the threat and (b) any nuclear attack on India and its forces shall result in punitive retaliation with nuclear weapons to inflict damage unacceptable to the aggressor'.

The following are our reasons:

Ethically, the punishing of a whole population for the decisions of its leadership is unsustainable. Moreover, executing massive retaliation would expose India to risking international isolation. There is also the operational consideration, that territories captured or in dispute will be destroyed and rendered uninhabitable for a long time. The suggested alternate wording provides flexibility, while a doctrine based on reflex massive response curtails India's options. The pursuit of diplomacy during a period of high tension will also erode the credibility of a massive response posture, since it signals a willingness to negotiate and only contemplates the maximalist option of massive retaliation as a last resort.

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