

India's Policy towards WMD Weapons: Status and Trends

Chandreyee Chakraborty

The author is a Master's student in the Political Science Department of Central European University, Budapest, specializing in International Political Economy / Comparative Political Economy and Quantitative Methods in Social Sciences.

Summary

India has always been a peace loving nation and have distant itself from unwanted wars. After the introduction of the weapons of mass destruction, India has followed an unique path to preserve its identity as a global power in the world arena. It has supported the convention on Chemical and Biological weapons.

Preventing the spread and buildup of nuclear weapons remains one of the highest priority international security challenges. Following the concerns over the spread of nuclear weapons, came the issue of chemical and biological weapons. These weapons of mass destruction have been an issue for a long time and still are one of the most talked about topics. This article gives an overview of India's policy towards nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

Over the last thirty years, India's position at the Review Conferences of CWC and BWC has evolved from that of a passive observer to an active negotiator. It was since the third Review Conference of BWC which coincided with the growth of the country's domestic biotechnology industry that India began to participate actively in the BWC. It has taken a proactive positions on many issues that posed possible challenges to the global biological disarmament regime.

On the nuclear front, India is, however, opposed to signing the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) for valid reasons. India's stand on CTBT was summed up former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran in his address at the Brookings Institution in March, 2009, where he said: "..... India will not sign the CTBT unless the world moved categorically towards nuclear disarmament in a credible time frame." India had campaigned for improving a ban on nuclear weapons testing for a long period. In 1954, India initiated a global call at the UN Disarmament Commission for an end to nuclear testing and a freeze on fissile material production. Likewise, in 1978 and 1982, at the Special Sessions on Disarmament, India proposed measures for banning nuclear testing and in 1988 it introduced the Rajiv

Gandhi Action Plan for the time-bound elimination of nuclear weapons. These proposals were shaped by the belief that banning nuclear testing would be an irreversible step toward the elimination of all nuclear weapons within a specific time-frame. However, after co-sponsoring a resolution for a test ban treaty in November 1993, India took a different course and tried to block the treaty text that was negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament (CD). India opposed the treaty on the ground that it is silent on destruction of existing nuclear stockpiles. The treaty also does not contain any time-bound programme for destruction of nuclear weapons, thereby leaving nuclear disarmament solely at the discretion of nuclear weapons states.

On the contrary, India has stressed on the need to strengthen the implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention in the wake of challenges to international peace and security emanating from the threat posed by terrorists and non-state actors seeking access to biological toxins. India underlined the importance of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological Weapons Convention as examples of non-discriminatory treaties in the field of disarmament for the total elimination of specific type of weapons of mass destruction. India reaffirms that disarmament is a primary goal of the Chemical Weapons Convention and should remain the priority till the complete destruction of all chemical weapons is achieved.

On CTBT, India pointed out various reasons for its non-acceptance of the treaty. For instance, C. Raja Mohan noted that CTBT is, 'designed to preserve the hegemony of the nuclear weapons powers', 'put a cap on India's nuclear capability', override 'India's disarmament and security concerns', and subject it to the 'worst form of political

blackmail¹. In 1996 India was almost alone in opposing the CTBT. The Indian objection centred around two issues: a) the proposed treaty was not linked to any time-bound frame, which makes it an instrument of nonproliferation but not of disarmament. b) It allowed laboratory type tests or sub-critical tests, which mean that the five critical powers would be free to continue building their arsenals. Specifically New Delhi felt that the CTBT was insufficient a commitment from the nuclear weapon states under declared deadlines. It saw this as a discriminatory replication of the imbalance inherent in the NPT regime, in which nuclear weapon states are weakly obligated to disarm and non-nuclear weapon states are strongly obligated to remain non-nuclear. The lack of commitments by the nuclear weapon states to eliminate their nuclear weapons under a declared time-frame also compelled India to oppose Article XIV of the NPT, which stipulates the CTBT's entry into force after 44 "Annex 2" countries sign and ratify it.

Another obvious crux of India's argument against the CTBT was the perceived deteriorating security conditions in South Asia. By signing the CTBT, India would have foregone the right to test any nuclear devices, yet its primary adversary would have retained the power to develop its arsenal through simulation. The other adversary that is Pakistan is a prime ally of China, it was feared that China can help Pakistan clandestine transfer of technologies that would enable Pakistan to test its devices through computer simulation. Pointing to these loopholes, India's representative informed the UN General Assembly in September 9, 1995: ".....nuclear weapon states have agreed to a CTBT only after acquiring the know how to develop and refine their arsenals without the need for tests.....Developing new warheads or refining

existing ones after [the] CTBT is in place, using innovative technologies, would be.....contrary to the spirit of [the] CTBT.²

Following the 1998 tests, the international community continues to pressurize India to sign the treaty. But from India's point of view the following point need to be highlighted:

- India has already declared a moratorium on further testing after the 1998 tests.
- 'No First Use' of nuclear weapons has also been affirmed.
- Undertaking not to export nuclear weapon or nuclear weapon related materials to any other countries has been reiterated, unlike another nuclear weapon country which says something and does something else.

The debate regarding CTBT was revived once again in 1998-1999. In one of the parliamentary debates on 27 May 1998, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee submitted a paper to the Indian Parliament entitled, "Evolution of India's Nuclear Policy", in which he elaborated India's future approach to the CTBT and nuclear testing as: "Subsequent to the tests [the] Government has already stated that India will now observe a voluntary moratorium and refrain from conducting underground nuclear test explosions. It has also indicated willingness to move towards a de-jure formalization of this declaration. The basic obligations[s] of the CTBT are thus met; to refrain from undertaking nuclear test explosions. This voluntary declaration is intended to convey to the international community the seriousness[s] of our intent for meaningful engagement. Subsequent decisions will be taken after assuring ourselves of the security needs of the country."³

During the second debate in the Parliament, on 15 December 1998, Vajpayee stated: "India is now engaged in discussions with our key interlocutors on a range of issues including the CTBT. We are prepared to bring these discussions to a successful conclusion so that the entry into force of the CTBT is not delayed beyond September, 1999. We expect that other countries . . . will also adhere to this Treaty without condition."⁴ At this time a possible deal was being finalized where India would sign the CTBT but won't ratify it. In exchange the United States would also acknowledge India's possession of a minimal nuclear deterrent. Also the sanctions on India would be removed. But the scenario dramatically changed when on 13 October 1999 the US Senate voted against ratification of the CTBT.

It, however, became apparent that United States was worried about the consequences of its ratification of the CTBT. The Ministry of External Affairs reiterated India's position on the CTBT as stated by Vajpayee in December 1998, adding that: "The situation regarding ratification of the CTBT, as well as the debate in the US Senate, clearly indicates that the CTBT is not a simple, uncomplicated issue. Among other things, it requires building a national consensus in the countries concerned, including India."⁵ Naturally, there came up a question, should India sign the CTBT when the US Administration itself was struggling to get it ratified.

The future of CTBT and NPT actually lays in the hand of United States and other nuclear weapons states. Unless the US ratifies the CTBT, the other nuclear weapon states, and especially China won't ratify it. If US President Barack Obama were to succeed in his stated objective of achieving ratification of the CTBT, then many observers believe

that China would follow suit. If that were to happen, then India's policy would come under renewed international pressure. It, however, appears unlikely as the US is moving is moving closer to next presidential election. Also developments in China and Pakistan will have an important bearing on the debate in India. There are no doubts that the Sino-Pakistan are one of the most determining factors in India's nuclear policy. India will watch closely for signs that these countries are continuing to modernize their arsenals and for evidence of technical collaboration in nuclear weapon-related fields.

Given such a scenario, it would be best for India not to commit itself to the CTBT at this juncture. India has unconditionally signed and ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention but is opposed to NPT due to its unequal nature. Until the world community itself sincerely follows the path of nuclear disarmament, it cannot expect India to submit itself unconditionally to the NPT regime. India is a developing economy with a high economic growth rate. Post 1998 it seemed that Indian position on NPT and CTBT had come to a full circle. And India became increasingly more confident about its position in the international community.

Endnotes:

- ¹ N. Ram, Riding the nuclear tiger, Left Word Books, 1999, p-92.
- ² Arundhati Ghose, Negotiating the CTBT: India's Security Concerns and Nuclear Disarmament, Published in the Journal of International Affairs, summer, 1997, 51, no. 1.0 @ The Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York. <http://www.fas.org/news/india/1997/ctbtghose.htm>
- ³ PAPER LAID ON THE TABLE OF THE HOUSE ON EVOLUTION OF INDIA'S NUCLEAR POLICY, http://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/32_ea_india.pdf?_=1316627913
- ⁴ Press Release on India's position on nuclear issues/CTBT, New Delhi October 14, 1999 <http://www.indianembassy.org/page.php?id=1294>
- ⁵ State of the CTBT ,Kalpana Chittaranjan, Research Officer, IDSA. <http://www.idsa-india.org/an-jun-300.html>